Foundations of Euroskepticism in the United Kingdom: Declining Support for the European Union

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Winston Churchill wrote in an American magazine in 1930, “The conception of a United States of Europe is right. Every step taken to that end…, which encourages nations to lay aside their precautionary panoply, is good in itself.” (Young 10) This statement predated any movement towards an institutionalized Europe by 20 years. Ironically enough, it also came from the leader of a member state that would later be skeptical to join Europe and currently is experiencing some calls to leave the European Union.

The United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community in 1973. Two years later the British government held a referendum concerning their membership in the institution. The country voted in favor by a nearly 2:1 vote. Since then, however, the support for the European Union within the United Kingdom consistently declined, and only 26% of the surveyed citizens think the European Union is a good thing (Eurobarometer). The Euroskepticism in the United Kingdom partially led to a proposed referendum in October 2011 from the Conservative Party to either renegotiate the United Kingdom’s terms of membership in the European Union, remain as is or consider leaving.

I will be attempting to answer two questions: why has support for an integrated Europe always been lower in the United Kingdom than other nations and why is support declining in the United Kingdom for European supranationalism. While support in other countries for the European Union has also been lower than the average of the EU27, my study focuses on the United Kingdom solely.
To answer my first question of why support has always been lower in the UK, I will look at theories that attempt to explain why individuals have varying levels of support for the European Union and other supranational institutions. I will take some of these theories and expand them to try and explain why some nations support the European Union more than others, and more specifically applying to the United Kingdom: cognitive ability, especially pertaining to education; economic welfare; materialism vs. post-materialism; partisanship; and factors involving the nation’s history. None of these theories fully explains the Euroskepticism in the United Kingdom, and even together it is difficult to provide a concrete explanation for why support for the EU in the United Kingdom dropped so much.

The United Kingdom has distinguished itself from the rest of the European Union in regard to support for membership. The United Kingdom, however, is not the only nation to exhibit a distrust and distaste for European integration. For example, Latvia currently has 25% of its citizens believing the EU is a good thing according to the Eurobarometer, similar to the United Kingdom’s 26%. However, no other country has initiated anything like the United Kingdom’s 2011 referendum. Possibly the best explanation is the experience of the United Kingdom in the 1940s, which no other European Union nation shared. The United Kingdom emerged from World War II not quite as demolished as the rest of Europe, as well as learned the lesson that they do not need to rely on the rest of Europe for security. This difference in experience could be what is setting them apart from the rest of the EU and distancing some citizens from the concept of
integration. I test this by comparing the differences between the United Kingdom and other European countries after World War II.

As for the second question of why is support for the European Union is declining, I argue that the European Union of today is not the institution the United Kingdom joined in 1973. The EEC was a much looser economic union, mainly concerning the common market. The European institutions of the 1950s primarily concerned development of the common European market and the political and social policies came later. With each additional treaty, the EEC evolved into an institution that the United Kingdom, as well as most of Europe, does not feel as favorably towards. The EU may be over reaching its original intentions and becoming an institution that many nations may not want to be a part of. I test this by looking at the changes in the European Union over the years and argue that these changes in the EU are the primary reason support is declining.

Decline in support for the European Union could make the future of Europe difficult to predict. While the union itself will likely stay together, the euro and European policies may change drastically. I do believe that it would take something major for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, but renegotiation of membership may not be far in the future.

My study begins with the referendum in 2011, then moves to contrast with the original referendum on membership in 1975. Along with the next section on the history of the United Kingdom and the European Union, this lays the
groundwork for examining the conditions in the United Kingdom that might have caused this decline in support. From there, I examine the decline in membership in not only the United Kingdom, but the EU27 average as well. This proves lower support in the United Kingdom as well as the decline in overall support for the European institutions over time. I then attempt to explain why the United Kingdom has always been lower in support for the European Union than other European countries using four theories on individual membership expanded to a country level. After those theories, I address the loss of empire and different experience the United Kingdom had in World War II. Finally, I look at the changes in the European Union from a loose economic union to an institution that also includes social policies and politics that may be making the United Kingdom decline in support over time.
Part I: Referendums on Membership

October 2011 Referendum

While the whole of Europe is experiencing a decline in support for the European Union and its institutions, the proposed referendum in October 2011 sets the United Kingdom apart from the rest of Europe. There had not been a referendum on this matter in the 36 years since the 1975 decision regarding the United Kingdom’s membership in the European Union. However, as shown in the previous chapter, the public opinion regarding the EU and its institutions has been radically changing. The United Kingdom and its population is not the same as it was in 1975. Also given the changing opinions clearly seen in the Eurobaromter polls, the same vote that happened in 1975 might not be the same vote as would be now. The Eurobarometer is a collection of surveys issued by the European Commission to gauge the citizens’ opinions of Europe. This is just the climate the Euroskeptics needed.

An increase in Euroskepticism coupled with a decline in support for the European Union laid the foundation for the referendum in 2011. Surprisingly enough, the proposal of a referendum on EU membership came out of the Conservative Party. Nuttall proposed a non-binding referendum in which the MPs vote on their opinions of British membership in the European Union. The purpose of this referendum would be to determine if future action was needed to reassess the United Kingdom’s relationship with Europe. Nuttall proposed three options for the outcome of the vote: to leave the EU; stay in the EU as is; or to renegotiate their terms of membership.
Prime Minister David Cameron was starkly against a referendum of this kind. He enraged many Eurosceptics claiming that the institution in Brussels is doing “useful work” on managing poverty and climate change. Cameron has also stated that a referendum is not in the Conservative Party’s manifesto, saying that referendums are used with matters of shifting powers to Brussels. (Ed Miliband…) Possibly the most undermining statement from the Prime Minister is that he considers the referendum in 1975 to have solved the issue. Laurence Mann, Cameron’s political private minister, controversially wrote, “We had a referendum in 1975, which produced a very clear result.” This statement ignores that every citizen under the age of 53, which includes Cameron himself, has not been given the chance to voice their opinions on the matter.

This has left much of the country infuriated. Leading Eurosceptic Douglas Carswell, also a member of the Conservative Party, counters Mann’s statement with, “By that logic we wouldn’t bother to have general elections. If you follow that argument, we should just scrap elections. What surprises me is that we just had a referendum on electoral reform despite the fact that it was not in our election manifesto. We had a referendum to satisfy the desires of one section of the political class but the government isn’t prepared to have one in response to the concern of millions of voters about our relationship with the EU.” This is a powerful statement on its own, but considering that Carswell is a member of Cameron’s own party it carries more weight.

Cameron is coming under fire from other members of his party as well; some have made it very clear that they would resign their positions if it meant
opposing the referendum. Stewart Jackson, parliamentary private secretary to Northern Ireland Secretary Owen Paterson, told the BBC: “This is a question of putting, I believe, country and constituency first and party second.” Conservative backbencher Mark Pritchard issued a similar statement: “This is about country first, party second and career last.” (Walker) Tim Montgomerie, the editor of ConservativeHome, a website for grassroots conservatives, writes, “It is both ridiculous and insulting for Cameron’s office to suggest the 1975 referendum means we don’t need a vote now… Just as importantly, the EU was then described as the Common Market or the EEC. Since then the Common Market has moved very substantially towards a political union.” (Shipman) Montgomerie is picking up on this change in the public’s opinion of the EU stemming from a change from the identity of the EU itself.

These dissenting members of the government face a three line whip from Cameron and the opposing members of the Conservative Party. In the United Kingdom, a three-line whip is a strict instruction to both attend and vote in a prescribed manner. Going against the whip in any case has the potential for severe consequences including termination of employment.

It is partially because of this that the referendum received so much media attention. The motion calling for the referendum was defeated in a vote in the Commons of 483 to 111. Though this was a definitive margin, 81 of the Tory MPs voted for the motion and another two adamantly abstain. Along with the 81 Tory MPs, 19 Labour and one Liberal Democrat MP also voted in support of the
referendum. This is the largest rebellion of the Conservative Party in any European Union member state. (Kirkup)

It will take years for the implications of this proposed referendum to take effect on British membership in the European Union. The importance of this debate is its potential fallout with voters in the future. (D’Arcy) It could be the beginning of a stronger movement to leave the European Union or it could be a fleeting initiative from only a few members of the Conservative Party. Countries naturally fluctuate in support of supranational institutions like the European Union. This stands in direct comparison to the initial referendum on membership in 1975. The October 2011 referendum is an interesting data point on the overall decline in support since the 1970s. In the 1975 referendum, 67.2% of those who participated voted in favor of membership in Europe, compared to the 26% currently thinking the EU is a good thing by the latest Eurobarometer reading.

The 1975 Referendum

This referendum is a starting point from which to examine the declining support for the European Union in the United Kingdom given that the European institutions are regarded very differently in 2011 than in 1975.

After accession to the EEC in 1973, an economic crisis drove Heath, the Conservative Prime Minister, out of office and reinstated Wilson, the leader of the Labour Party. Wilson was elected Prime Minister in 1974 partially on a platform to situate the United Kingdom in terms of EEC membership and subsequently hold a referendum, stating, “I welcome this Election - I welcome, more than
anything else, this opportunity for the British people to give their verdict upon the
last three years and eight months of Conservative Government. Let the people
vote; let us work together again.” (Wilson, Harold) Wilson knew of the split in
not only his cabinet but of the sensitivity of the issue and put the matter to a
referendum. (Young 280) With the country still badly divided over Europe in
1975, the British government held a referendum, proposed by Labour Tony Benn,
asking this simple question: Do you think the United Kingdom should stay in the
European Community (the common market)?

Along with the party on the whole, Wilson’s Labour cabinet was split in
support for membership in the EEC. The cabinet included both right-wing pro-
Europeans like Roy Jenkins and Shirley Williams, left-wing critics including
Michael Foot and Barbara Castle, and a new movement of radicals led by Tony
Benn. Given the mixed opinions, Wilson decided to suspend the Cabinet’s
collective responsibility, which requires all cabinet members to publicly support
all government decisions even if they privately disagree. This allowed the
members of the cabinet to campaign for which side they supported against each
other. The debate became divided into two camps: the “Yes” campaign, headed
by Prime Minister Wilson and 16 cabinet members, and the “No” campaign by
the other seven members of the cabinet.

The “Yes” campaign was officially endorsed by the government, given the
support of Wilson and the three most senior cabinet members. Joining was the
majority of the Conservative Party, including their recently elected party leader
Margaret Thatcher, stating at a news conference, “The majority of the
Conservative Party both in Parliament and in the country – the vast majority – is in favor of staying in Europe. The minority which is against it is getting smaller.” (Conservatives Favor…) The “No” campaign included the seven opposing cabinet members and other, smaller parties.

The vote on June 5, 1975 showed 67.2% of the total population was in favor of continued membership with a 65% turn out. The break down as to the individual countries is as follows (Cook):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th># Vote Yes</th>
<th>% Yes</th>
<th># Vote No</th>
<th>% No</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>14,918,009</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>6,812,052</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>869,135</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>472,071</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>1,332,186</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
<td>948,039</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>259,251</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>237,911</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total UK</strong></td>
<td><strong>17,378,581</strong></td>
<td><strong>67.2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,470,073</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>64.7%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The decision in this referendum secured the United Kingdom’s place in Europe politically and overall showed a majority in support for Europe. The 1975 and 2011 referendums are two valuable data points in beginning to examine what happened in the United Kingdom for such a change in support to happen. Using this information, I will look at the history of the United Kingdom in Europe to answer why support has always been lower.
Part II: History of the United Kingdom in Europe

Joining the EEC

Discerning why this change in support happened begins with looking into the more recent history of the United Kingdom and her evolving relationship with Europe. Such Euroskepticism exhibited by some of the elite as well as the general public today is not new. These feelings have existed in the United Kingdom for some time. In the aftermath of World War II, Europe was struggling to recover from the devastation of the war. It was in this setting in 1949 that Jean Monnet proposed an Anglo-French common market, which the United Kingdom turned down. After the war, British politicians saw the state of the rest of Europe and did not feel like a member of Europe. (Pugh 320) Instead, Monnet turned to Germany with his idea, excluding the United Kingdom from the initial wave of European Integration. The first initiative from this proposal was the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. Churchill saw no great importance in a closer relationship with France and Germany and rather wanted to focus on relations with the US and maintaining the closeness of the Commonwealth. (Young) This attitude carried over to a European defense community proposed in 1954.

The six founding states of European integration, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, once again invited the United Kingdom to join talks concerning further integration in 1955, which the Churchill and Eden governments both declined. They believed that such cooperation could
lead to political federalism in Europe, and consequently would threaten the sovereignty of each member state. (Pugh 320) The six states signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957 creating the European Economic Community (EEC) and once again the United Kingdom had missed an opportunity. (Pugh 320) In an attempt to counter this economic union, the United Kingdom established the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) along with Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Portugal. EFTA, however, proved to not be an adequate counter to the EEC both economically and politically. It could not compete with the growing economy of Europe.

In the early 1960s, the United Kingdom began to regret not joining in European integration when membership was offered. (Pugh 321) Former American Secretary of State Dean Acheson noticed that “Great Britain had lost an Empire and has not yet found a role.” The states of the EEC were reducing tariffs, unifying external duties, making central institutions and stimulating greater economic growth than the United Kingdom could achieve. In 1961, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made the nation’s first application for membership in the EEC. Macmillan was more in favor of Europe than either Churchill or Eden, yet he could not take too many risks with his own seriously divided Conservative Party. The statement from Acheson outraged many Conservatives, yet the party was divided over Europe. (Pugh 322) Macmillan started moving pro-Europeans such as Edward Heath, Christopher Soames and Duncan Sandys into more prominent positions in the government.
Negotiations concerning the United Kingdom’s membership began in September 1961, but were interrupted in 1963 by French President de Gaulle’s veto. Macmillan had been trying to re-establish a defense relationship with the US and de Gaulle did not want the US trying to usurp any influence in the EEC. It was also clear to de Gaulle that the United Kingdom changed its position more based on a fear of losing its traditional role rather than fervor for the European Community. (Pugh 322)

This might have stopped the British effort to join the EEC if not for the new government of Harold Wilson being elected in 1964. Wilson was very dedicated to modernizing British society, and much of his efforts were directed in the United States’ direction. When again this relationship did not benefit the United Kingdom, along with the promotion of more pro-Europe ministers, more politicians and citizens began to see the UK’s future in Europe. In this spirit Wilson applied for membership in the EEC in 1966. De Gaulle vetoed the application again in 1967 citing similar reasons from 1963.

In 1970, the United Kingdom elected a true Europe enthusiast as Prime Minister for the first time with Conservative Edward Heath. Support for membership in the EEC was never divided on party lines, and members of the Conservative and Labour Parties were hostile towards the notion of Europe. Also, the interests of France in the EEC had changed by this point; de Gaulle had resigned and France was experiencing a growing fear of the economic dominance of Germany. (Pugh 323) The United Kingdom’s participation in the EEC might counter Germany, making the idea more appealing to France.
Heath was realistic in his expectations for negotiating entry; he knew that the EEC was no longer a lofty idea but a proven success. (Pugh 324) In October 1971, the House of Commons approved ascension in a 356 to 244 vote, and Heath signed the treaty in 1972. The bill needed to be passed in the Parliament, and it was not until 1973 that the United Kingdom formally joined.

Further Distance From the EEC

After Wilson, economic hardships largely characterized James Callaghan’s time as Prime Minister. In 1979, Conservative Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, and British policy shifted from economic stability to foreign relations. Thatcher never had the enthusiasm Heath did for Europe, and also accused Heath of damaging the party. Thatcher in general took a more aggressive and abrasive approach to foreign policy than her predecessors, often times even being rude to foreigners. (Pugh 345) Thatcher and her followers did not believe the EEC was the capitalist organization some members of the Labour Party made it out to be, but rather feared that the new social and political policies introduced by reforms and treaties to the EEC threatened to bring socialism into the United Kingdom. (Pugh 352) The EEC at this point was beginning to include the social and political elements some nations feared. When the UK joined in 1973 the EEC was much more focused on the economy. Thatcher supported the common market of the EEC, but these new changes and expansion of policy extended the EEC past what Thatcher thought was necessary of European integration.
Like most of the other twentieth century Prime Ministers, Thatcher felt a need to boost the United Kingdom’s international standing. (Pugh 351) However, by 1990 the end of British sovereignty as traditionally perceived was in sight. Though her government regularly tried to block European legislation, such as initiatives to improve infrastructure and push rights to maternity leave up to “European” standards in the member states, this ultimately proved ineffective and exposed a rift between the actions of the government and the desires of the British people. (Pugh 354) The history of the United Kingdom and her relationship with the European Union helps to answer why the United Kingdom has always had lower support for the EU than other member states. Their refusal to join the EEC in the 1950s and then being turned down for membership twice laid a firm groundwork for skepticism of integrated Europe. Being skeptical of Europe is not anything new for the United Kingdom. Given this lower starting point, support for the EU has declined in the whole of the member states on average as well. The next section will discuss the decline in opinion for not only the United Kingdom, but with Europe on the whole.
Part III: Changing Membership Opinion

Changing Opinion

This section will be looking at the decline in support for the European Union in the United Kingdom in comparison to the whole EU. This shows the data background for the decline in support exhibited in the United Kingdom, as well as how support has always been lower than that of the EU27.

Since joining the EEC in 1973, the opinions of and support for the European supranational institutions have generally been in decline among those surveyed in the Eurobarometer. The Eurobarometer is a series of surveys given by the European Commission beginning in 1973 and held every so often from six months to a year. They cover topics such as purpose of the EU, benefits from the EU and trust in the EU, and whether the EU is a good or bad thing. The 1975 EEC membership referendum marked a starting point in which a solid majority of the British population was in favor of remaining in the EU. What the Eurobarometer has been measuring since the 1990s is a decline of nearly all positivity towards the EU and a marked increase in negativity.

On a basic level, the Eurobarometer addresses public opinion as to whether the EU is a good thing. (Figure 3.1) The average of good opinions changed -9% from September 1973 to May 2011 and opinions that it is a bad thing increased +7%. These numbers do indicate a decrease in positive opinion of the EU; it must be noted that the number concerning the positive feelings toward the European Union have been very dynamic since 1973, with a spike around
1991. The spikes could have been caused by incidental or one-time issues in one or more countries, such as economic declines, not continual trends in the EU27 on the whole. Since the 1990s, the “good thing” numbers have more or less been in decline while indecisive and negative feelings have grown slightly. This suggests that the decline in support for the European Union is not only an issue concerning the United Kingdom, but could be a European wide issue in the future if these trends continue. After the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992 creating the European Union out of the EEC, feelings that the European Union is a good thing across the EU27 dropped 19% from 1991 to 1996. This proposes that perhaps the signing of this Treaty that in effect brought a Constitution to the European Union over stepped the intentions of the member states, the United Kingdom included.
The opinion in the United Kingdom alone is much more erratic (Fig. 3.2).

Their starting positive opinion in 1973 was only at 31%, which presents a quandary when placed in comparison to the referendum the British government held concerning membership which received 67.2% of the voters in support of EEC membership. This could be due to a different group of people responding to the Eurobarometer survey or just more people not participating. As discussed above, membership in the European supranational institutions have always been a topic of debate for the British people, with citizens and parties alike not agreeing. Since 1973, the supporting opinion only changed -5% down to 26%, yet this support has fluctuated greatly over the years. As in the EU27, support rose through the 80s and 90s, then support dropped from 57% to 35% from 1991 to
1996, a total -22% change. This closely reflects the same numbers for the EU27, dropping similarly in the same years. Figure 3.3 compares the support for the European Union in the United Kingdom versus the EU27, and the correlation is evident. This again points to the change in the EU brought on by the Maastricht Treaty to be a cause for declining support, with both turning points after an increase in support through the 1980s being around the early 1990s.

On the aggregate, the opinion towards the EU on the whole from the EU 27 average has been stable and relatively positive. The average opinion of those who trust the EU has stayed fairly consistent around 40%, distrusting between 40% and 50%, with the percentage distrusting growing larger than the trusting in 2010. 2010 marks the year where certain member states’ economies started to decline and a financial crisis began to emerge in the Eurozone. Again as with the ECB, this may not be a direct causation, but it could have influenced it. Figure 3.4 shows that the support for the EU on the average, though it has dropped off in the past few years by a few percentage points, is fairly stable.

The opinion in the United Kingdom, however, is stable yet not as positive as the EU27. (Fig. 3.5) The EU27 percentage trusting the EU has never dropped
below 40%, while in the United Kingdom, the Eurobarometer polling starts at
20% in 2003 and in eight years never broke 36%.
In the past three years, the average had stabilized within 5 points fluctuating between 20%-25%. For the United Kingdom, the majority of the population either does not trust the European Union or does not know. Those without an opinion have been dropping since 2003, from 22.2% to 13%. The population has been making up their minds and a good amount of those people have definitively decided that they do not trust the EU. The tendency not to trust the European Union has increased from 57.5% to 63%, with a peak of 68% in June 2010.

Through this data, it becomes evident that support for the European Union in the United Kingdom has been in decline since their initial ascension in 1973. Support for Europe in the United Kingdom is varied across the nation, and a general distrust for the European Union on the whole is evident from the Eurobarometer in comparison to the rest of the EU. The institutions of the European Union are designed to be equal to every nation involved and provide each member state the opportunity to participate in the operation and decisions of the institution.
The 2010 Eurobarometer also measured in all the EU27 countries what the EU means to them personally. Citizens of each European Union country were asked what the significance of the EU is to them personally over a range of topics, from social to economic factors. These factors cover many of the areas of influence that the EU has been asserting over in the individual lives of its citizens. Figure 3.6 shows the results from this survey with the country with the highest and lowest percentage saying yes to each factor as well as the United Kingdom percentage and the EU average percentage on the whole.

For the factors that are positive things (travel/work, euro, peace, stronger say in politics, diversity, democracy, economic prosperity and social protection), the United Kingdom average fell well below the EU average, nowhere near the highest, and in a few cases is the country with the lowest percentage. For negative factors (waste of money, bureaucracy, unemployment, not enough border control, increased crime and loss of cultural identity), with the exception of unemployment and an increase in crime, the United Kingdom averages are higher than the EU27 average. This indicates that the perceived outcomes of the EU are wholly negative to the British public. They do not see many positive factors and
feel as if the EU has ushered in many negative effects on a personal level. It is this local level that hits most people the hardest. National policies tend to not have a drastic effect on the lives of the average citizen, and when these citizens perceive such negativity it exposes a deep level of concern for their status in the EU.

A declining trust in the institutions of the EU by the United Kingdom should also be noted. The following graphs show this change in support for the European Parliament compared to the averages of the EU27. The European Parliament, the representative body of the European Union, has its membership based on percentage of the population of the member states. With the passage of the Treaty of Lisbon, the number of MEPs (members of the European Parliament) was reduced to 736, with the President serving as a non voting member. The United Kingdom has 72 votes, tied for second most with France, which represents about 13.5% of the voting power. The Parliament has three main roles: negotiating and passing laws, exercising democratic supervision over the other EU institutions, and sets the EU budget (Europa – EP).

Over the past 5 years, from Figure 3.7, the EU27 average of trust in the European Parliament has been steadily decreasing.
The Eurobarometer results for the EU27 begins with 54% of European citizens tending to trust the European Parliament in 1993. By the last reading in 2011, this number had dropped to 45%. In contrast, the same poll in the United Kingdom (figure 3.8) showed a similar, yet more drastic trend. Both the tendency to trust and the tendency not to trust the European Parliament have been decreasing and increasing, respectively, like in the EU on the whole. However, while the EU27 average changed -11%, the British average dropped from 48% in 1993 to 23% in 2011, a -25% change. The beginning British average of 48% is also only 3 percentage points higher than the EU27 average in 2011, showing a deeper distrust from the start.

Of all the other EU institutions, distrust of the European Parliament could be the most concerning. The Parliament, through recent treaties, has arguably become the most powerful and influential institution of the EU due to its representative nature. Every country receives the proportion of the vote it should have through its population. If an institution is supposed to reflect the best interests of the member states, the best chance it has is in a representative body. Through recent British history, the British Parliament has been the focus of their government, placing the highest national authority in this body. This shows a
deep rooted distrust of the European Union if the United Kingdom cannot even trust its supposed most representative body. Also in comparing the distrust for the

EP between the European Union and the United Kingdom, the purpose of the Lisbon Treaty to expand the democratic standards of the EU might not have been as successful as originally intended. The United Kingdom hovers around +10% in distrust more than the EU (Fig. 9). Since 2007 when the Treaty of Lisbon was signed, despite the attempt and to bring the EU closer to its citizens by increasing the main representative body of the EU, distrust continued to rise in both entities\(^1\).

\(^1\) Strangely enough, there is no barometer poll for the European Council. The Council includes all of the heads of state or government for the member states.
each serves a 5-year term. The European Parliament must approve all
appointments to the Commission as well as the President. The Commission is
charged with representing and upholding the interests of the EU overall. It
performs its duties by proposing new laws to the Parliament and Council, helps to
manage the EU budget and allocation of funds, enforces EU law, and represents
the EU internationally, negotiating treaties and agreements among other
responsibilities (Europa EC). In the European Union average, an initial decline in
trust and an increase in a tendency not to trust happened from 1993 to around
1999. Since then, the variables tested have been fluctuating within about 10
percentage points with a general inclination toward declining trust and inclining
distrust. (Fig. 10)

Trust in the European Commission from the United Kingdom has dropped -13%,
from 53% in 1993 to 40% in 2011 (figure 3.11). The tendency to distrust, as well,
has been steadily increasing in the EU27. Not surprisingly, the averages in the
United Kingdom are similarly oriented, but with larger gradients than the EU27.
The British trust in the European Commission has decreased from 49% in 1993 to
only 20% in May of 2011. The percentages of those distrusting and not being
sure as to their opinion have increased accordingly.
With the data from the Eurobarometer, beginning in 1973 and ending in 2011, it is clear that support for the European Union in the United Kingdom and the EU27 alike has been in decline. While many different variables happen at the same time, in the next section I will examine theories of support for European integration on the individual level and expand them to the national level. With these theories, I will attempt to explain why the United Kingdom as opposed to other nations in the EU have always had low support. The data above shows how the United Kingdom has usually been lower in support for the European Union institutions than the EU average. This is different than decline in support over time, which will be addressed later. The following section will look at different theories on support for integration that attempt to explain why the United Kingdom’s support has been lower than the average of the EU member states.
Part IV: Theories on Integration

Much research, empirical testing and analysis has been done in regard to individuals’ support for the European Union. Many hypotheses as to the varying levels of support for the European Union have been tested covering social, political and economic areas. Political scientists have tested a variety of theories including cognitive ability, economic welfare, the Silent Revolution theory and class partisanship. These theories were proposed and tested on an individual basis, attempting to discern which citizens of a country would support European Integration over others. I will be expanding these to a national level, treating the individual countries as the individual citizens. With these expanded theories I attempt to answer why the United Kingdom has always been lower in support for the European Union than other member states.

One theory tested on varying degrees of support for the EU is the levels of the citizen’s cognitive skills. Ronald Inglehart, who initially researched this theory, argues that a high level of cognitive ability, defined as a high level of political awareness and developed skills in political communication, gives the citizens of a member state the means to more closely identify with a supranational institution. From this, Inglehart argues that the higher an individual’s cognitive ability, the more likely the individual is to support European integration. From that, I argue that applying this theory to the country level becomes problematic when trying to explain why the United Kingdom supports the EU less than other nations. The theory relies on two assumptions: that information on the European Union has a high level of abstraction and that information on integration promotes
support (Inglehart, Ronald). Research on this theory by Inglehart and others using Eurobarometer surveys shows that as the cognitive ability of the citizen increases, the more likely he is to understand and feel more comfortable with the EU. From a first look, it follows that the United Kingdom’s support for the EU is lower given that their education statistics are lower than most of the EU.

Education plays directly into this idea of cognitive ability. Education can promote an understanding of the benefits of the European Union as well as how to capitalize on it for personal gain. As far as education goes in the European Union, the United Kingdom tends to be in the bottom for educational standards. Figure 1\(^2\) shows the percentage of 18 year olds in each member state still in the education system. The EU25 average is 77%, with the highest state being Sweden with 95.4% and the lowest Cyprus at 36.2% of 18 year olds still in school. The United Kingdom is the third lowest in the EU25 with only 51.1% of their 18 year olds in school. Along with this, the average age in school expectancy for

![Fig. 1 18-year olds in education, 2008](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/en/educ_esms.htm)

the United Kingdom is also lower than that of the European Union. Figure 2
shows these statistics. The EU average is 17.3 years, the highest is Finland (20.8
years) and the lowest Malta (13.5 years). The United Kingdom sits not too far
behind the EU25 average at 16.5 years. Given the theory proposed and tested by
Inglehart and these statistics, the United Kingdom’s reluctant approach to Europe
is logical. If education in the United Kingdom is lower than other nations of the
European Union, their distrust and distaste due to lack of knowledge is feasible.

Where this theory snags, however, is in looking back into educational
numbers from
when the United
Kingdom joined
in 1973 to the
present. This
theory is based
on the

3 School expectancy corresponds to the expected years of education over a lifetime and has been
calculated adding the single-year enrolment rates for all ages. Source: Eurostat (tps00052)
assumption, when applied to the United Kingdom, that the numbers of students in school and educational standards have not improved in the past forty years and that as the European Union expanded, education did not expand with it.

However, education needs to be looked at over time. Since 1938, the number of college students has been rapidly growing from less than 100,000 to over 500,000 and this number has only been growing from there. (Pugh 307) The United Kingdom has always been divided on the issue of EUrope. This has not changed. Educated college students are presumably the people that would be looking to benefit from the market of the European Union given their education. The number of these citizens with this level of education has been increasing, so it would follow, according to Inglehart, that support for the EU would be increasing as well. However, in this same time period, support for the European Union and its institutions is decreasing. This does not follow with the proposed theory on education.

Education on the whole, just not numbers of college students, has also been improving. The chart below shows the number of students that have been staying in school from 1950 to 2000 at the age of 16 as well as the improvement of test scores over the same time period. (Machin, Vignoles) Like the number of students in college, these number have all been increasing since
even before the United Kingdom joined the EEC. This goes directly against Inglehart’s theory. This may work on a citizen by citizen basis, but these numbers disprove the theory when applied to the United Kingdom. Removing these statistics from this context, it would follow with the increasing education, an increase in support for the EU would follow and that is not happening.

I believe this is a good assessment of the theory as it applies to the United Kingdom. Inglehart proposes that the lower an individual’s cognitive ability the less opportunity the individual would have to understand the benefits of the European Union and consequently feel more positively towards it. In expanding this to a country level with the UK, as well as adding the variable of support over time, does not adequately explain what is happening in the United Kingdom. This is an area where there are many statistics and changes are easily followed. Other theories discussed later do not have this statistical evidence available.

Along cognitive ability, the state of economic welfare in each of the member states of the European Union can affect their position on integration. Matthew Gabel and Harvey Palmer argue that citizens in differing socioeconomic situations all over the EU experience different benefits and hardships associated with their positions. (Gabel 336) They also discuss that their support for integrationist policy is positively correlated with the welfare gains from this integration. The integration of the EU has brought a liberalization of the EU labor market and this differentially affects nations differently depending on their level of education and occupational skills – sometimes referred to as human capital. This is different from the educational argument mentioned above in that it
pertains to functions and abilities in the job market rather than sheer mental capabilities.

Given that human capital can be a strong predictor of a country’s ability to adapt to the competition of a liberalized labor market, Gabel and Palmer (1995) propose that a country’s human capital and support for the European Union should have a positive correlation. I took this theory and applied it across the European Union member states looking at their GDP per capita, and almost treated the individual states like the individual citizens in Gabel and Palmer’s argument. The more wealth a nation as well as the nation’s citizens individually have, the more opportunity they have to exploit greater prospects in the more liberalized market (Frieden).

The wealth of the United Kingdom expressly in comparison to the European Union does somewhat follow with the United Kingdom’s support for the EU sliding in the past few decades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP Per Capita</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP Per Capita</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>113,533</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
<td>47,513</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Belgium</td>
<td>46,878</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>44,008</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>43,742</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>38,592</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>49,809</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>36,267</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>49,350</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>32,360</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of GDP per capita, the United Kingdom falls towards the end of the EU member nation, being number 22 out of 27. GDP per capita does not take into account cost of living for each country or exchange rate fluctuations so the numbers can vary greatly from year to year. The Gini index is a measure is statistical dispersion and can be applied to the wealth of nations. The higher the percentage, the more unevenly the wealth in a nation is distributed among its citizens. Since the late-1970s, the Gini index in the United Kingdom has been gradually increasing from 26.8% to 34.5% in the most recent reading in the late 2000s. (The World Bank) The figure below shows the changes in the Gini Index from 1979 to 2008. This indicates that the distribution of wealth in the UK has been becoming more polarized with the wealth being more concentrated in a smaller number of people. This means that there is a larger number of lower economic bracket citizens now than there were 40 years ago.

While the United Kingdom is a wealthy nation, also being the 6th most wealthy nation by GDP worldwide, the GDP per capita as well as their Gini index
suggest there could be a gap in wealth. Gabel and Palmer suggest that the greater the income of an individual, the more likely they are to be able to take advantage of the liberalized market of the EU. What can also be argued, however, is how that income is distributed among the population can account for varying levels of support throughout the citizens of the nation. The country on the whole could be very wealthy, but the wealth disparity could be very great creating different levels of support for integration among varying levels of wealth.

Comparatively, the Gini index for the United Kingdom is normal and within the range for these numbers in the European Union. While the number in the United Kingdom are slightly higher, they are right in the range of many of the European nations. While it is true that the Gini index has risen since the 1970s, for the last fifteen years the index number has not changed all that much. The other nations around this GDP are not experiencing the same negativity towards the European Union as the United Kingdom, so this could not be a factor differentiating the United Kingdom from the rest of Europe, given that it is also the third wealthiest nation in the European Union.

Similar to the data available on education, wealth and wealth distribution is easily expressed numerically. GDP per capita is a clear measure of individuals’
average wealth in the United Kingdom, as well as makes comparisons in wealth easy across many nations. As this applies to support for European integration, however, is less definitive. The correlation between this wealth and support, however, is difficult to prove given the ambiguous mature of social sciences and with the data readily available. Through interviews and surveys this could be better explored, but I cannot do it with the data I use. With more attention to the inclinations of individuals towards the European Union compared to their income, this could be more conclusive.

Another theory postulated is Inglehart’s Silent Revolution. (Gabel 1998) Inglehart proposes that support for European Integration is related to the economic and political values of each member state. These values then play into each nation’s sense of identity, which is not easily changed and can have a large impact on feelings toward integration. Values are broken up into two groups: materialists and post-materialists. Materialists are concerned with economic and physical values, while post-materialists care more about intellectual fulfillment and self-actualization. Earlier testing and research on this topic by Inglehart predicted that the materialist nations would be more attracted to the European Union given the tendency of the EU to push for more egalitarian over nationalistic reform. Gabel, however, reassessed this hypothesis by looking at the Eurobarometer results from 1975 to 1992 in which EU citizens were asked what their nation’s first priority goals should be. They were given the following options: “(a) maintaining order in the nation; (b) giving the people more say in important government decisions; (c) fighting rising prices; and (d) protecting
freedom of speech.” To be considered materialist, those responding answered (a) or (c); to be post-materialist, they would answer (b) or (d). What Gabel found through his research is it is the materialists that are more supportive than the post-materialists.

This relates to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Huitt). Materialistic countries are farther down on the pyramid, needing to develop their sense of political and economic safety, as illustrated in choices (a) and (c). These tend to be the newer countries so ascend to the EU. They have not had the time to stabilize within the European Union system both economically and politically given the standards for entry. The countries that are more stable both economically and politically, which tend to be among the first to enter the EU, have the capability to be more concerned with issues that are higher up on the pyramid given than they are more established in the fundamental needs. These are the post-materialist nations that can be concerned with issues higher up on the pyramid like choices (b) and (d).

The European Union tends to present more of an egalitarian society with less of a focus on the individual nation. The materialist nations favor the European Union more that the post-materialists because the EU can be the force for reform in their nations that the post-materialists do not need. (Inglehart,
Rabier, Reif) I believe the United Kingdom falls more into the post-materialist category. They do not have the economic and political adaptation struggles that many of the new member states to the European Union may have. Matthew Gabel writes that these conditions and values set in a population, including national identity, tend to persist over a citizen’s lifetime. (Gabel 1998)

Gabel associates education and income with a country’s utilitarian support for the European Union. In the previous two theories, the United Kingdom is behind the rest of the EU in education standards and while in the middle as it pertains to GDP per capita, it has a more unequal distribution of wealth than the rest of the EU. So while some of the country could be more post-materialistic in tendencies and political values, the deficiencies in education and wealth distribution could foster some of these materialist values more commonly held by the newer nations. With these factors being present, it could contribute to the decline in support for the EU.

Of all the theories examined, the Silent Revolution is the most uncertain. There is little to no statistical evidence that could classify a country either way or track changes in the nations over time. Karl Popper, a 20th century philosopher discounted many social theories as being unscientific due to their inability to be falsified. (Popper…) These kinds of social theories cannot be definitively proved true or false. This applies to the Silent Revolution. Nothing exists to decisively prove it true or false, so by an analytical standpoint, this could be true but no evidence proves it or disproves it. However, through data collecting methods
such as interviewing or surveys, the Silent Revolution and like theories could be more definitively expressed.

Aside from characteristics of the citizens and nations on the whole, individual partisanship can have an effect on support for integration independent of personal characteristics. (Gabel 1998) Speaking generally, citizens tend to follow the attitudes toward integration that their party has. Specifically, Inglehart, Rabier and Reif found partisan cuts in support for European integration. Using the Eurobarometer, they found that followers of leftist parties tend to be more skeptical of integration while followers of parties on the right were more inclined to favor integration.

Applying this to the situation in the United Kingdom presents an interesting quandary. First looking at the Conservative Party, Prime Minister and conservative David Cameron supports European integration and for a long time did everything he could to block the possibility of a referendum concerning the United Kingdom’s place in the European Union. What is interesting about this, then, is that the call for the referendum came from a conservative MP. When the vote for the referendum was held, 81 conservative MPs broke the three line whip given by Cameron along with 19 Labour MPs and one Liberal Democrat. Not only does this mark the greatest conservative rebellion over Europe, but it is a break from this theory pertaining to party affiliation. The Conservative Party in the United Kingdom is clearly split over this issue, and if leaders of the party cannot follow the determined party stance the rest of the party members do not have the united party front on the issue.
Partisanship could also be looked at in the sense that Eurosceptical parties could impart Eurosceptical views on the nation’s citizens. Individuals can take political cues from their parties. If leaders of both parties are skeptical of Europe, it would follow that members of the parties would reflect these views. While the Labour party has been more supportive of Europe since the 1970s, support for Europe is not a concrete positive or negative for either major party. This is likely a major contributor to the feelings of Euroskepticism in the country as well as these feelings not existing only within party lines.

The debate over membership in the European institutions was never a party issue in the sense that one party was for integration and one was against. The entire nation and its parties have been split since the original institutions formed. This theory does not help explain the case of the United Kingdom. The Conservative Party has always been split on the issue, from Wilson when the United Kingdom joined to now with Cameron, even the party in control has never been unified on this. Therefore, members of the Conservative Party currently do not get solid united opinion they could follow.

The Silent Revolution has the least certainty judging by the statistics available, political partisanship is the second. Members of parties can be counted and party platforms evaluated but with the example of the United Kingdom, the values of political parties are not the only view held by members in the party. On the whole, Britons that lean towards the Conservative Party tend to support the EU less, and members of the Labour Party tend to support it more but this is not definitive. It would be difficult to discern if the party has any definitive effect on
the members of the party. Testing for party cues on an individual level is more feasible, however I cannot test for this using the data that I do.

Aside from theories and characteristics of the United Kingdom, the nation’s history also sets it apart from the rest of the European Union in regard to integration. This history has firmly situated an inherent euroskepticism in the values of the British people. First off, the United Kingdom is an island nation, giving the nation a certain “island mentality”. Their geography has always set the country apart from the rest of the mainland European Union as well as serving as protection for centuries against invasion that so many other nations were susceptible to. This also gave the United Kingdom the feeling of being an outsider country, never fully as included in the European Union as others.

The United Kingdom also has a long and rich imperial history lasting as recently as 1922. The empire included colonies on every continent at one point, including the Thirteen Colonies, British Guiana, British Antarctica Territory, Egypt, Ireland, India and Australia. Joining the EEC and later on the European Union logically implies a loss of certain exclusive powers by the member states. Independence and strength in politics are part of the British tradition, giving reason to the nation’s reluctance to completely join the European communities and implicates euroscepticism as a cultural value. (Spiering)

Where this falls short is in considering the empires of other nations disassembled in the same era. During the 1950s and 1960s Macmillan successfully dismantled much of the British empire without much of the ill feelings experienced by other imperial nations. The bitterness France felt in
losing Algeria or Portugal with Mozambique and Angola did not have an equivalent in the United Kingdom. (Pugh 351) While some members of the Conservative Party resented the decline of the United Kingdom as a great imperial power, this does not provide an explanation for why the UK would be feeling differently towards European integration due to imperial history. What the United Kingdom does still have is the British Commonwealth, which still includes 54 nations. This could be a reminder of the “glory days” of the British Empire, or still color their opinion of integration as not needing to be a part of the integrated EU and that they have the ability to be independent.

Rather, the United Kingdom’s experience in the 1940s during World War II might provide a better historical distinction from the rest of the European Union. World War II was the most devastating loss of life the world has ever seen, not only in battle but also with the millions of lives lost in the Holocaust. This permanently changed the landscape and climate of Europe. The United Kingdom had a very different experience than any other member state of the European Union today did. The war had been a unifying experience for the country; where the war defeated some nations such as France, the United Kingdom was the major European ally power throughout the war. The United States and the Soviet Union may have had the greater armies and suffered the greatest loss of life, but the United Kingdom was unique in Europe.

The United Kingdom also emerged in a better financial situation than the rest of Europe. Their industrial capacity was higher in 1945 than before the war in 1939. In 1947 their exports were five times those of France and larger than
those of France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway and Denmark combined. Germany’s income was a third of what it was in 1938, France less than a half and the Franc virtually worthless, and Italian exports were at the level they were at in 1911. The United Kingdom truly emerged as the European giant after the war in an economic sense. With many of the nations in bankruptcy, the UK became the continent’s creditor.

Not only did the United Kingdom have more financial stability after the war, but they learned a different lesson than the rest of Europe. France fell to the Axis as did most of the rest of Europe. The United Kingdom was the major European power fighting against the Axis powers. From this, France learned that cooperation between European nations was necessary to promote peace and prevent war. Germany probably was trying to get back into Europe any way they could after the war. The United Kingdom learned something different. They learned that they did not need to rely on Europe. Half the continent had declared war against the Allies, France fell and the United Kingdom held on. Through this, they also established a strong relationship with the United States.

Taking this into consideration, it stands to reason that twenty years later when the EEC was being formed, the UK would lament the loss of this superiority it experienced. Hugo Young wrote of the UK in 1945, from “that exquisite sense of national selfhood, and the of vindication going with it – stemmed all the large decision of the British foreign policy for the next fifteen years.” It is this experience, not the loss of the empire thanks to Macmillan, that sets the United Kingdom apart from the rest of the European Union from a historical standpoint.
Some of the British population had a hard time losing their strength and high position in Europe. Twenty years after they were the superpower of Europe, they were being asked to join an institution with the countries whose combined exports the UK had once surpassed. To fall from having such power to losing to Europe could be the root of euroscepticism in the United Kingdom and could be why the United Kingdom and not other European nations tends to exhibit negative feelings toward the EU. (Pugh 351)

The theories of varying support for integration suggest an interesting marker in this shift of support in the United Kingdom, as well as display the interconnected and confusing nature of the theories. Socioeconomic factors such as education and income can affect which political party a citizen will follow given their own levels and the platforms and manifestos of the parties. In the case of the United Kingdom, the Labour Party led the United Kingdom to EU membership in 1975. The Labour Party developed in the early 19th century from trade union movements and socialist groups seeking to gain more representation on the national scene. Since then, the party has mainly drawn support from middle class working citizens that would not have the educational and economic opportunities of the upper classes. This may have led the middle class to have more materialistic values when it came to integration. With the Labour Party in control, this partially may attribute to the support for entering the EU in 1975.

Since then, however, the Conservative Party has gained more support and currently is the dominant party in British politics. The Conservative Party, like other conservative parties worldwide, supports the free market and the more
traditional views of certain citizens. In recent years, many British citizens have come out saying that the Tory Party is the party for the rich and well off, concerned primarily with their interests. (Grice) If this is the party for the wealthy, and the wealthy can usually afford higher education, so it might also be the party for the educated. With Gabel linking education and income with post-materialist values, this could explain why the request for a referendum on membership in the European Union came from the Conservative Party. Post-materialists, according to Gabel, do not have the levels of support for European integration as the materialists do. The shift of control of government from the Labour Party in 1975 to the Conservatives now in power links all of these factors together to make a complex argument for why support in the United Kingdom has shifted. It is nearly impossible to isolate one of these factors with how interconnected they truly are.

This is also not to say, however, that the United Kingdom is the only nation exhibiting these tendencies. Larger, more productive nations, such as Germany and France, also have similarities to the United Kingdom concerning these theories of support. Where the difference comes in, however, is that the United Kingdom displays the opportunity for all of them at once while Germany and France only have a few. For example, Germany is a wealthy nation, like the UK, but has a lower Gini index percentage of 28.31%, suggesting more equal wealth distribution. Germany also falls 8th worldwide for average years of schooling with 10.2 years, in comparison to the UK’s 14th place and 9.4 years.
Looking at these hypotheses for why the United Kingdom rather than other EU nations is experiencing this decline in support for the European Union, not a one stands out as a definitive explanation. They all may apply, but there are other member states with similar conditions and none have the negativity toward the EU as the United Kingdom. The difficulty of the theories not being easily isolated adds to the discrediting of the theories on the individual. One may play into another, one may influence another and as with social and political sciences they are never definitive. It is clear that these theories cannot be properly expanded to explain support on a country by country basis, given the varying populations in each country, as well as the added variable of time in this case. Between adding time as a variable and the variance in population, the isolation of any theory beside that of history does not give a proper explanation.

The explanation that sets the UK the most apart from the rest of the EU is their experience in the 1940s. No other country had the experience of the United Kingdom both during and after World War II. They were the only major European country in the Ally effort, became the European creditor and power afterwards, and saw it all slip away less than thirty years after. It follows then that such a nation would not be eager to join the European supranational institutions and thus lose this power they so enjoyed in the post-war Europe. I believe this is the best answer for why the United Kingdom, and not other nations, are experiencing this drop in concern.

The previous section answers why the United Kingdom has always been lower in support than the rest of the EU. As a nation, they have a unique history
that colored their joining the EEC in 1973. This set them off in a manner less supportive than other countries. Yet since they joined, support has not only been lower but also been in decline like the rest of Europe. The second part of the question of the United Kingdom in Europe is why support has been in decline. In looking at the case of the United Kingdom in Europe, the first question to be answered is why support has always been lower, and second why has support been declining.
Part V: Evolution of the European Institution and Overall Decline in Support

Declining Support for the European Union

The EU was born out of a loose economic union of only six nations. The institutional component of the European Union began in 1951 with the establishment of the ECSC. The main goal of the ECSC was to integrate the production of materials used in warfare to prevent future conflict. From these more simple beginnings, with each additional enlargement round and the many treaties, the integrated Europe grew larger. The EEC began with establishing a common market, and since has expanded its reach into more and more areas of economics as well as social issues. The United Kingdom joined EFTA first to be a part of the trade union and stay away from the integration of the six founding members of the EEC, as discussed before.

The next treaty after the treaties of Rome that established the EEC and Euratom was the Merger Treaty signed in 1967 that brought the three separate communities together under a single institutional structure. A single Council and a single Commission replaced the three Councils of ministers of the three institutions and the Commissions of the EEC and Euratom and the High Authority of the ECSC respectively. The treaty also introduced a single budget. (Treaty Establishing…) This treaty can be considered the beginnings of the integrated institutions of the EU.

Further internal integration happened in 1986 with the Single European Act (SEA). Other than some institutional changes regarding the workings of the EEC, the SEA had the objective of creating an internal market over the time
period until December 31, 1992. The single market is defined as “an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty.” While certain social policies already existed in the EEC, but this act extends the reach of the EEC into labor conditions, management of labor relations, environmental protection and an article providing that the member states had to jointly create and execute a European foreign policy. (The Single European…) 10 years after joining the EEC and its minimal social intervention and simpler common market, the EEC had taken many steps toward pushing the European integration past economic and into the social realm.

The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 shaped the European Union more into how it functions today. The treaty created the three pillars of the European Union that covered political as well as economic areas. The pillars include the European Community pillar, the Common Foreign and Security Policy pillar, and the Justice and Home Affairs pillar. The European Community pillar established the EU’s supra-national institutions, the Commission, European Parliament and Court of Justice, and had the most power and influence of the pillars. The other two pillars have more of a committee structure composed of delegates from each of the member states.

Since the Maastricht Treaty, two smaller treaties, the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) and the Nice Treaty (2001) made refinements to the existing institution. A Constitutional Treaty was signed in 2004, but failed to be ratified in all the member states, the United Kingdom being one of them. The European Union had
grown to 27 members from the original six, and institutional reform and consolidation seemed necessary. The goal of the Constitution for Europe was to replace the founding treaties of the EU. Creating a concrete Constitution for Europe, though, was a step that man nations simply were not ready to take. After the Constitutional Treaty failed, a conference in Lisbon met to find an alternative to this. The Lisbon Treaty aimed to strengthen democracy in the EU by shifting more power to the European Parliament. In addition to increasing the power of the most representative and democratic institution of the EU, the treaty also simplified the legislative process and made the functioning of the EU more flexible.

It would follow that the United Kingdom would not support changes like this to the EU. They often felt throughout their relationship in Europe that they did not have a strong voice in the functioning of the EU, such as Thatcher not being able to successfully block European legislation in the early 1990s. However, an increase in the democratic elements of the EU did not satisfy the United Kingdom and support continued to drop.

**Future of the United Kingdom in Europe**

From 1973 when the United Kingdom joined the then EEC, the European supranational institution has grown a considerable about larger and now encompasses more than it ever did before. The institution the UK joined in 1973 is very difference from the institution it is a member of in 2012. The EEC of the 1973 was a supranational institution that the value and characteristics of the
United Kingdom could generate more support from than the institution of today. While I do argue that the euroskepticism in the United Kingdom is a historical issue, the referendum proposed in 2011 happened because of their decline after the 1940s. With the history of imperialism as well as the lesson learned after World War II, the United Kingdom would not be willing or enthusiastic to have the EU grow to also include political and social issues.

An added factor that makes why support for the European Union has been in decline is the recent economic troubles of Europe. Europe is currently in what an article in The Economist calls a “half-depression.” (Europe’s Half…) Unemployment rates have been steadily on the rise since 2008, rising from 10.0% a year ago to 10.8% in February. Greek unemployment reached 21.0% in December, Spanish unemployment rose a full three points in the past year to hit 23.6% in February, Italian rose a full point in the past year, and Portuguese from 12.3% as of February 2011 to 15.0% in February of 2012. Employment conditions also do not seem to be improving. The March Purchasing Managers’ Index shows production activity in the euro zone down hitting a three-month low. Spanish and French productivity appears to be slowing, and what is more
concerning is the slowing in the manufacturing of both the Netherlands and Germany.

It is hard to tell if the decreases in support are coming from the European Union becoming too encompassing or if they are a reaction to the economy slumping. As the economy continues to slow, richer countries like the United Kingdom, Germany and France, will need to pay into the European Union so the EU can pay out to the countries that may need it, like Portugal, Spain and Greece.

Considering the decline in support and the initiative for the referendum in 2011 another move for to leave the European Union is not totally out of reach. Also given the patterns in the Eurobarometer results, support and positivity towards the EU will probably continue to drop. I do not believe that the United Kingdom leaving the European Union is feasible in the near future. For the most part, any European Union country could not manage economically on their own outside the EU. The individual economies do not have the ability to compete with the integrated EU market.

The decline in support not only in the United Kingdom but also in the European Union on the whole for the European Union could be due to the economic trouble in the EU, the European Union entering too many aspects of European life or for a multitude of other reasons. The European Union has grown well past its original intentions and past the pretenses under which the UK joined. For why the support for the European Union has always been lower in the United Kingdom than other nations, their history sets them apart more than any of the theories discussed. They learned from the war that they do not need to rely on
Europe, and was therefore reluctant to join an institution that would take away from their sovereignty and place them in a position of close cooperation with Europe. While settled peacefully, the British Empire being dismantled must have still effected some members of the nation, and the country still has the Commonwealth. What sets the United Kingdom apart from the rest of the EU in regard to opinion is their willingness to put the matter to a referendum. The position of the United Kingdom in Europe is shaky. While I do not believe there is a current threat of them leaving, given their feelings of skepticism towards the EU as well as their standing opt outs, I do not believe they will be getting any closer to Europe. Moving forward, the issue of Europe may become more pressing for British leaders and they will need to tread carefully.


Summary of Capstone Project

In my Capstone, I examined two questions: why has support for the European Union always been lower in the United Kingdom and why is support for the European Union in decline?

I start by looking at a referendum proposed in 2011 to have a vote on the course of action the United Kingdom should take in regard to their relationship with Europe. While the vote was defeated and the vote never happened, this shows the existence of Euroskepticism (a skeptical attitude towards integrated Europe) in the UK and that it is gaining momentum. I then look at the first referendum on European membership the UK had in 1975, in which 67.2% of the population voted in favor of being in the EEC. The two provide a contrast in the opinion of the leaders and citizens in regards to membership in the EU.

I then go back and look at the history of the United Kingdom and its relationship in Europe. The history proves that Euroskepticism has roots in the reluctant manner in which the UK joined Europe. As a nation, Euroskepticism has always been present in some form or another. After that, I use the Eurobarometer to look at the statistics for the decline in support of membership in Europe. The Eurobarometer is a collection of surveys that ask the citizens of the EU their opinions on the EU, its policies, its purpose, etc.

To answer the first question, I looked at four theories of support for European integration as it applies to individuals. I then expanded these theories to the national level, treating the United Kingdom on the whole as an individual. I
examined the theories of cognitive ability, wealth per capita, the Silent Revolution and partisanship. Finally, I examine the history of the United Kingdom as it applies to setting the country apart from others in the European Union. For the second question, I look at the changing policies and practices of the European Union as well as the current economic crisis that could be contributing to this decline.

I found that these theories do not explicitly explain why the United Kingdom has always been lower in support. For education, the theory states that the higher educated an individual, the more they would be able to understand and capitalize on the EU, therefore support it more. As this applies to the United Kingdom, the education statistics since the nation joined in 1973 have only increased, with a greater number of college graduates and higher retention rates in schools. If education standards have been increasing, it would follow that support would increase as well, but it has not. The second theory examined is wealth per capita. The theory suggests that the more money an individual makes, the more they would be able to capitalize on the European common market. The United Kingdom has a very middle of the pack GDP per capita. By the theory this should put them in the middle of the EU27 (the 27 current member states of the EU) as far as support goes, but they are much lower than most.

The Silent Revolution theory deals with materialist vs. post-materialist values. Materialist nations are ones that are more concerned with political and economic stability, while post-materialist countries have more stability and can be concerned with issues such as having the individual’s voice heard in politics and
protecting the freedom of speech. Materialist countries tend to support the EU more than post-materialists because the EU pushes egalitarian policies that more benefit the materialist nations. The problem with this theory is that as with any other social science, it is very uncertain and the correlations and results are difficult to test for. The last of the theories is that of political partisanship. The theory argues that citizens will support and follow the views of the leaders of the political party they identify with. The parties in the UK are as divided as the population is concerning EU membership, so there is no single position to support. Also, there is Euroskepticism in the parties which could be imparted onto the citizens. The kind of data I examined for this could not provide a definitive answer.

Lastly for this question, I argue that the reason support for the EU in the United Kingdom has always been lower is a question of history. First, the United Kingdom had the largest empire the world has seen in recent history, and quickly going from a large empire to a member state in a supranational institution has a negative effect on their opinion of membership. More convincing than this, however, is the experience of the United Kingdom in World War II that sets it apart from the rest of the member states. The United Kingdom was the major ally nation in Europe, with France falling early on. Also, she came out of the war less demolished than the rest of Europe, and in a better financial state. Aside from this, the United Kingdom learned a different lesson in the war than the rest of Europe. France and Germany seemed to learn that cooperation was the only means to prevent future conflict and secure a solid future in Europe. The United
Kingdom learned that they did not need to rely on other nations for security, or for anything. This is what sets the nation apart as far as support goes. Of course the nation would be skeptical of joining the other European nations in an institution the UK did not feel it needed.

As for the second question, I look at the changes in the European institutions since their founding in the 1950s to the present. Europe began as a loose economic cooperative effort with a goal of a single common market. Since then, the EU has grown to also include social and political policies that are outside of its original intentions. I argue that this is a major deterrent for the United Kingdom from supporting the EU because the EU as it is now is not an institution that the nation would want to be a part of.

I end with looking at the future of the United Kingdom in Europe. As with the union on the whole, the future is difficult to predict given the current economic crisis and more and more countries disapproving of the EU. I do not believe that the United Kingdom would soon or ever leave the European Union because it could not compete with the union’s market. This work is significant because it gives a foundation for what is going on in the United Kingdom in regard to Europe and looks towards predicting the future of the UK’s membership.