



A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault?

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It is common wisdom in political communication research that the media matter for democratic processes and citizens' political attitudes. However, we have only limited knowledge about the role of the media in understanding support for European integration and virtually no knowledge about their role in relation to the emergence and consolidation of Euroscepticism. Drawing on experimental data and evidence from panel surveys in two countries, this article demonstrates how news media, by framing Euro-politics as an arena for strategically operating, self-serving politicians, *can* fuel public cynicism and scepticism. However, this effect is conditional upon the level of strategic news framing and in a situation with limited strategically framed news about the European Union, exposure to news reverses this process and reduces public cynicism. The article demonstrates that a spiral of media-driven Euroscepticism is neither true for all media nor for all individuals. *Acta Politica* (2007) 42, 271–286. doi:10.1057/palgrave.ap.5500186

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Introduction

The relevance of understanding public sentiments about European integration has become centre place on the 'Euro-politics' agenda. Turnout in European Parliamentary elections is decreasing, Eurosceptic parties are gaining support, and French and Dutch voters rejected the European Union (EU) Constitutional Treaty in 2005. The legitimacy of the integration project is at stake, but no coherent theoretical framework has foreseen and can fully explain the significant rise of Euroscepticism. Previous research on public support for European integration has treated support as a function of several contextual- and individual-level factors. Even though several studies stress that information cues provided by the media play a key role in legitimating and shaping public opinion about European integration (Hewstone, 1986; Meyer, 1999; Risse-Kappen *et al.*, 1999), there are only few empirical examples of the link between media content and public opinion (see e.g., De Vreese, 2004; De Vreese and Semetko 2004; Peter, 2004; De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005).

In this article, previous research is advanced in two ways to highlight the role of the media in shaping citizen's attitudes towards European integration. First,



it is shown how exposure to specific and different news media content leads to differential changes in attitudes for different individuals. Second, previous research that has mostly looked at support for European integration and the EU in diffuse terms is extended to specifically investigate the role of the news media in affecting public Euro-scepticism. The relationships are tested using experimental evidence and panel survey data combined with media content data.¹

EU Support and Euro-scepticism

Most research on public support for European integration has focused on diffuse support for a country's EU membership, diffuse support for further integration and/or expansion of the EU, and support for specific policies (such as asylum policies and the common currency) or advances in EU governance (e.g., Rohrschneider, 2002). Crudely summarized, variation in support has been explained as a function of social-demographic characteristics and political, ideological preferences (e.g., Gabel, 1998), and cognitive skills (e.g., Inglehart, 1970). Moreover, previous studies have established a relationship between support for European integration and utilitarian/economic consideration (e.g., Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Anderson and Reichert, 1996); a relationship between domestic, political considerations (such as government support) and EU support (Franklin *et al.*, 1994; Anderson, 1998); and negative relationships between EU support on the one hand and feelings of national identity (Marks and Hooghe, 2003), hostility towards other cultures (McLaren, 2002), and fear of immigration (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005) on the other.

There are good reasons, however, to look beyond 'traditional' explanations of support for integration and the EU. As popular discussions of 'Europe' and recent research bear witness to, Euro-scepticism is on the increase in a number of countries. The observed proliferation in Euro-scepticism follows a general decline in trust in government and political institutions (Nye *et al.*, 1997), and political entrepreneurs utilize this public political alienation and cynicism to mobilize Euro-scepticism (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004; Krouwel and Abts, 2007). Indeed, most existing explanations of reluctance towards European integration have failed in part to relate variance in levels of support by not including antecedents in the field of anti-establishment feelings, distrust, disengagement, discontent, and political cynicism.

Causes of Euro-scepticism: The Media?

In both common wisdom and the academic literature, 'the media' are often blamed for broader social developments (e.g., Putnam, 2000). News media may



affect public opinion and political attitudes in a range of ways and the literature is mixed with respect to the role of news media in democratic processes. Effects have been labelled 'virtuous' (Norris, 2000) in cases where news consumption has a positive impact on political knowledge, engagement, trust, and participation or 'vicious' (e.g., Cappella and Jamieson, 1997) in cases where a relationship has been established between news and, for example, cynicism and apathy.

In the US context, the media have received a significant share of the blame for contributing to declining interest in and enthusiasm about politics (Patterson, 1993, 2002), a view that is also supported by Fallows (1996), Lichter and Noyes (1996), and Farnsworth and Lichter (2003). The latter demonstrated that news about politics emphasizes horse race at the expense of policy issue stories, and they argue that this in turn has significant negative effects on attitudes towards politics and voter turnout.

However, this perspective is not supported in all studies. Some scholars have stressed that both processes take place simultaneously (Aarts and Semetko, 2003) and that the effects are contingent upon news content and contextual factors (De Vreese, 2005). Research on the 'virtuous' and 'vicious' contributions of media to democratic processes is not novel (Holtz-Bacha, 1990) and as Perloff (2003) rightly pointed out in a review article, there is evidence that the relationship between the media and citizens is less one-dimensional than some research suggests.

Theoretically, many media effects studies have concentrated on the media's agenda-setting role, but in recent years the notion of news *framing* has gained prominence. Following years of blind adherence to the 'limited media effects perspective' (Klapper, 1960), it is now widely assumed that the media, under certain circumstances, may not only influence what citizens think about (agenda-setting), but also how they think about these issues (framing). Indeed, news frames can affect, for example, cognitive responses (Price *et al.*, 1997), support for welfare plans (Iyengar, 1991), and free speech enforcement (Nelson *et al.*, 1997). Specifically, news frames can also affect diffuse support for EU-issues (Schuck and De Vreese, 2006).

In this article, we specifically consider the relationship between news media framing and public cynicism about European integration. We test expectations about a 'of Eurosepticism' based on the original 'spiral of cynicism-hypothesis' that states that *strategic* news about politics fuels public distrust in and cynicism about politics and politicians that in turn erodes civic engagement and depresses electoral participation (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Strategic news reporting is defined as news that focuses on winning and losing, is driven by 'war and games' language, emphasizes 'performers, critics and audiences', focuses on candidate style and perceptions, and gives weight to opinion polls (Jamieson, 1992).



Evidence in support of the link between exposure to strategic news and political cynicism comes in particular from a series of experimental studies in the US (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Valentino *et al.*, 2001a). These studies found that individuals exposed to strategic news displayed higher levels of political cynicism than individuals exposed to issue-driven news. Other studies have linked exposure to strategic news to both interpretations of election campaigns and to turnout, trust in government, and civic duty. Patterson (2002, 83) concluded that game news lead to mistrust that undermines the drive to vote, and Cappella and Jamieson (1997) speculated about the negative consequences of strategic news reporting on electoral participation. Rhee (1997), however, found strategic news to bolster participants' strategic interpretations of an election campaign, and Valentino *et al.* (2001b) found strategic news to reduce learning. Finally, Valentino *et al.* (2001a) also found that strategic news depressed turnout intention and alienated participants with short education. In a European political context, De Vreese and Semetko (2002) found that exposure to news media reporting strategically about the Danish 2000 referendum on the EMU indeed contributed to an increase in citizens' levels of cynicism, even when controlling for the initial level of cynicism in the campaign.

With the backdrop of emerging and perhaps consolidating Euro-scepticism, this article addresses the role played by the news media in shaping public opinion about European integration and in particular the relationship between strategy framing of Euro-politics on the one hand and Euro-scepticism and cynicism towards European integration on the other. The article tests the expectation, based on extant research, that exposure to strategically framed news about EU politics fuels Euro-cynicism. It is also expected that the effects of strategic news framing on Euro-cynicism (a) depends on the pervasiveness of the strategy news frame and (b) is moderated by political sophistication, so that (following Valentino *et al.*, 2001a) in particular politically less-sophisticated individuals are influenced by this news framing.

Goals and data

The first aim is to demonstrate (at the individual level) if strategic news coverage of European politics fuels Euro-scepticism. To assess this, we report the results of an experiment (Study 1). Experimentation is superior to demonstrate a causal effect of a key independent variable (Brown and Melamed, 1990; Kinder and Palfrey, 1993) and the method was supplemented with additional data (see below). The experiment focuses on television because television is repeatedly identified as the most important source of political information (Eurobarometer, 2002, 56; Chaffee and Kanihan, 1997). The experiment was conducted with a national news broadcaster. Inserted into an



experimental news bulletin was a news story about the 2007 enlargement of the EU, in one of the two versions.² One version of this story was framed in terms of strategy and the other was focused on substantive aspects of the issue. A sample of 83 respondents (60% males, age 15–67 ($M = 43.8$, $SD = 15.2$), with varying levels of education) participated. The respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions and filled in a background questionnaire, watched the experimental bulletin, and completed a posttest.

The focal point of the experimentally manipulated news story was a (simulated) publication of a report by the European Commission on the EU enlargement progress. An anchor introduced the item, and then the former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs provided a quote, which was scripted in advance. The news story then provided brief background information about the history of the EU. A second quote was then delivered by the Secretary of State before a closing statement about public support for the enlargement in other EU countries. With the exception of three sentences, the two stories were identical in each of the conditions. The experimental manipulation consisted of one sentence in the opening section of the story. The journalist's text here referred to a 'charm campaign' and a 'strategic plan' (strategy version) rather than 'concrete policies' (issue version). Second, the Secretary of State referred to a 'battle' (strategy) as opposed to a 'signal' (issue) in his quote. Finally, the closing sentence referred to mobilizing public support (strategy) *vs* focusing on policies (issue).³

In a second study (Study 2), we look at the *dynamics* of Euro-cynicism. We expect that exposure to strategic news leads to Euro-cynicism and we expect this relationship to be conditional upon the pervasiveness of strategic news so that cynicism is only affected when strategic news is readily present. We also expect political sophistication to moderate the relationship between exposure to strategic news and cynicism. As Zaller (1992, 1996) argues in more general terms, media effects tend to vary across individuals, in particular as a function of political sophistication and awareness. Valentino *et al.* (2001a, 350) specified this relationship and suggested that individuals who might be less resistant to strategy news framing, but are still exposed to it, 'may exhibit the largest and most negative attitude shift'. In other words, we expect a positive interaction between low political sophistication and exposure to strategically framed news on cynicism.

In testing the latter relationship, we control for a number of variables likely to influence the level and change in cynicism. Political efficacy, that is, citizens' beliefs that their involvement and opinions matter to political decision-making, is negatively related to cynicism (Mishler and Rose, 2001; Pinkleton and Austin, 2001). Evaluations of the incumbent government affect citizens' level of cynicism so that negative evaluations are related to higher levels of cynicism. As a third control, we include political sophistication, which is expected to be



positively related to cynicism. This expectation is based on findings from previous research that suggest that political knowledge is positively related to expressions of cynicism (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; De Vreese, 2004).

To test this dynamic, we rely on a study set in the context of the December 2002 European Council meeting in Copenhagen (see de Vreese, 2005). To ensure variation in the level and type of news media coverage, a media content analysis and panel survey data were collected in two contexts (Denmark and the Netherlands).⁴ The study involved two data sources: two-wave panel surveys with measures of exposure and attention to various media outlets were linked to a content analysis of print and television news that assessed the level of strategic news reporting in the period between our panel waves. The panel surveys include a pre- and post-Council meeting wave with representative samples of the Danish and Dutch adult population. The surveys were fielded about 3 weeks ahead of the summit and immediately after the summit.⁵ The design focuses on *change* in Euro-cynicism as a result of exposure to strategic news coverage.⁶

Measuring Euro-scepticism

The notion of Euro-scepticism is relatively new and not yet conceptually demarked. Many studies operationalize Euro-scepticism simply as lack of support for further EU integration. In this article, the focus is on a specific element of Euro-scepticism, namely political cynicism about European politics. This is done to more compellingly link the analysis of strategic news coverage to public reactions within a framework that has been tested in other political contexts. While political cynicism is also a contested concept in the literature, both in terms of its conceptualization and measurement, in this study cynicism is considered as a relevant indicator and more than a proxy of the absence of trust (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, 271).⁷

Cynicism may reflect negativism at the level of the quality of a political *debate* and political *leaders* (e.g., Citrin, 1974) or the absence of confidence at the level of *institutions* (see e.g., Miller (1974) and Erber and Lau (1990) for a discussion of this distinction). In this study, we are particularly interested in cynicism about political debates, including its main political protagonists. Cynicism at the level of the political debate and political elites may help to understand why citizens do not support or even reject specific policy proposals, such as those put forward in national referendums.

In the experimental study (Study 1), we use four items, derived from Cappella and Jamieson (1997), to tap perceptions of politicians' motivations, their character, and confidence in the substance of the debate about the EU enlargement:⁸ (a) politicians are too superficial when dealing with enlargement, (b) politicians are too concerned with public opinion about enlargement, (c) the



debate about enlargement is more about strategy than content, and (d) politicians are clear and honest in their arguments about enlargement. The responses were recoded and averaged to form a scale of political cynicism ranging from 1 to 5 ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.79$, $\alpha = 0.64$).

In the panel survey (Study 2), we again use a four-item index of Euro-cynicism at the level of the quality of the debate and the performance of political leaders as the dependent variable. Again, the items were based on the work of Cappella and Jamieson (1997) and were adjusted to the context of European politics.⁹ The answers were recoded when appropriate to form a scale with a higher score reflecting a higher level of cynicism (Denmark wave 1 $M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.64$, $\alpha = 0.68$, wave 2 $M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.65$, $\alpha = 0.66$; The Netherlands wave 1 $M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.53$, $\alpha = 0.59$, wave 2 $M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.56$, $\alpha = 0.60$).¹⁰

In Study 2, the key *independent variables* relate to media use. We use a combined measure of exposure to television news and newspapers and attention to 'news about the EU'.¹¹ A combined measure was used given the similarity between the media outlets in each of the countries, see below.¹² The index includes number of days watching television news (0–7) and reading a newspaper (0–7 in Denmark and 0–6 in the Netherlands) plus attention to EU affairs (ranging from 1 to 4). In all analyses, we control for gender (coded as female), age (in years), education,¹³ government evaluation, political sophistication, and the respondent's level of cynicism at time one (see Markus (1979) for discussion of the use of lagged specifications in panel data). This makes it possible to control for prior levels of cynicism and to examine *change*. The descriptives for all variables as well as the specific wording of all items can be found in the Appendix. The specified regression models are Ordinary Least Square models.

Strategic news framing of Euro-politics

To assess the strategic news framing of EU politics, a *content analysis* of television news and daily newspapers was carried out at the University of Amsterdam in the period between the two waves of the survey (see De Vreese (2005) for details about the content analysis).¹⁴ The sample consisted of the most widely watched public broadcasting news programmes and the most widely watched commercial television news programmes.¹⁵ A total of 1,477 news stories were coded from these four outlets.¹⁶ The newspaper sample included the front-page of the five most widely read dailies in Denmark and the Netherlands.¹⁷ A total of 1,797 newspaper articles were analysed.¹⁸ The sample of news outlets covers the most important sources of political information and includes broadsheet and tabloid newspapers as well as public service and private broadcast news programmes. In this study, we are interested in the



extent to which the news media framed European politics in terms of strategy. We draw on five indicators for strategic news coverage, such as, for example, 'the story mentions how, in which way, politicians handle and present an issue'.¹⁹

The content analysis of the news media showed, as expected, that there was much more news about EU politics in Denmark (where the EU summit took place) than in the Netherlands.²⁰ While news about European affairs was much more visible in Denmark, the level of strategic news framing was consistently higher in the Netherlands. Half of the news stories in the Netherlands, compared to about one-fourth in Denmark discussed how politicians were handling an issue, whether it was competently, successfully, and/or forcefully addressed. In about one-fifth of the news in both countries, there were references to politicians' actions as instrumental to either consolidating or improving their stance in public opinion. In about one-third of the news in the Netherlands, and about 10% in Denmark, the news focused on politicians either gaining or losing. Similarly, there were twice as many references to specific polls or public opinion in Dutch news as there were in Danish news. Finally, Dutch news utilized expressions from war and game situations in 39% of the stories, while this was 27% in Denmark.

Effects of strategic news framing on Euro-scepticism (Study 1)

The first expectation was that exposure to news about European politics framed in terms of strategy produces a higher level of cynicism compared to exposure to news without this strategic frame. Figure 1 displays the means of cynicism in the two conditions in the experimental posttest. The expectation is supported as participants in the strategy condition ($M = 4.11$) displayed a significantly higher level of political cynicism compared to participants in the other condition ($M = 3.67$) ($F(1, 82) = 6.89$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$, $P = 0.01$).

The dynamics of news and Euro-scepticism (Study 2)

The analysis of *change* in political cynicism as a function of exposure to strategically framed news yielded main effects of exposure to news in both contexts (Table 1). In one context exposure contributed to an *increase* in cynicism (the Netherlands), while in the other context news media exposure contributed to a *decrease* (Denmark). This differential effect can be explained in the findings from the content analysis that showed that in the context with a higher level of strategic news reporting, news media exposure contributed to cynicism, while in the context of less strategic reporting, news media exposure yielded a decrease in political cynicism.

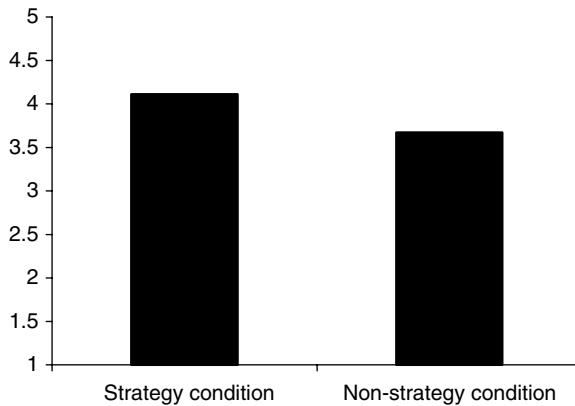


Figure 1 Political cynicism by experimental condition.

Note: Bars are mean scores of cynicism on a five-point scale. Between-condition means differ significantly ($P < 0.01$). The number of participants in the strategy condition is 42 and in the non-strategy condition 41. Standard deviations are 0.88 in the strategy condition and 0.60 in the non-strategy condition.

Table 1 Predicting change in Euro-cynicism

	<i>Denmark</i>		<i>The Netherlands</i>	
	<i>Beta coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>Beta coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Gender (female)	-0.04	0.03	-0.02	0.02
Age (in years)	-0.12***	0.00	-0.01	0.00
Education	-0.03	0.02	0.07***	0.02
Government evaluation	-0.15***	0.02	-0.09***	0.01
Political efficacy	-0.17***	0.03	-0.09***	0.02
Political sophistication	0.05	0.03	0.08**	0.02
Media exposure and attention to EU news	-0.10**	0.01	-0.09**	0.01
Low political sophistication*media exposure	0.06*	0.02	-0.02	0.03
Prior cynicism (t1)	0.53***	0.03	0.48***	0.02
Adjusted R^2	0.46		0.30	
N	1,140		2,040	

Note: Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regressions from De Vreese (2005). Entries are standardized beta coefficients and standard errors. *** $P < 0.001$, ** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$.

The interaction between low political sophistication and media exposure was a positive predictor of increase in cynicism in Denmark. In other words, general media exposure led to a decrease of cynicism in Denmark, but among the low political sophistication group, exposure to news media contributed to



an increase in cynicism. In both countries, the logged measure of cynicism was — rather unsurprisingly — the strongest predictor for the level of cynicism in the second wave suggesting a relative stability of this attitude (see Table 1). In the model, we found that in addition to news media coverage, political efficacy contributed to a decrease in cynicism. Positive evaluations of the incumbent government were related to lower levels of cynicism. Elderly respondents displayed a decrease, though this was significant only in Denmark. Finally, in the Netherlands, political sophistication was positively related to cynicism.

Discussion

Euro-scepticism is, at least partially, a function of the diet of information that citizens consume about European affairs. News media coverage of EU-issues and events, such as Council meetings, can cause changes in the level of cynicism about European integration. This was demonstrated using both experimental data and results from panel surveys and media content analyses. The effect of the media, however, is conditional upon two factors: the pervasiveness of strategically framed news reporting and individual level characteristics, such as the level of political sophistication. The studies thus corroborate recent data (e.g., de Vreese, 2004) and tie into an ongoing refinement in models of media effects on public opinion formation that are increasingly conceived as being moderated by contextual- and individual-level factors.

Moreover, it was found that in a situation where the news media did not report strategically about European affairs, exposure to news contributed to a *decrease* in cynicism. This finding adds an additional nuance to a general assumption in extant literature that the relationship between news and cynicism is generally so that news consumption causes and augments feelings of cynicism. In fact, it seems as if there is some good news for the EU: Cynicism can also be *countered* through news coverage.

In interpreting the outcome of the studies, we should consider the implications of cynicism, as the relevance of cynicism seems to lie in its consequences. However, the positive relationship between political sophistication and cynicism reported here (and in Cappella and Jamieson (1997) and De Vreese (2004)) suggests that citizens have the capacity to be both interested and knowledgeable about politics while at the same time critical and rather demeaning about politicians and their performance.

The studies reported in this article demonstrated that the media can play a double role in both fuelling and reducing Euro-scepticism. The impact of the media is a function of the actual content of the news stories. This has two important implications for future research. First, models of support for the EU or Euro-scepticism need to include measures of citizens' information and media



sources. Second, these measures must be complemented with media content analyses to make the relationship tangible.

For the trajectory of European integration, the findings of this article also have implications. While the integration project has been described as (and criticized for being) an elite project, it has become obvious in the past years that the gap between citizens and EU governance is wider than expected and cannot be ignored (Hooghe, 2003). The EU, and national political institutions for that matter, can in turn not afford to neglect the role of the media in conveying information to the public and shaping public perceptions of institutions and politicians and support for policies. Closing the communication gap between EU institutions and its citizens is a starting point for addressing legitimacy deficits. In this process, the EU is well advised to emphasize political conflicts over policy issues above communication that emphasizes consensus among a political elite, which is likely to generate strategically framed news coverage.

The argument put forward in this article has a number of limitations. While it is an advantage to rely on experimental data, panel surveys, and media content data, this comes at the price of looking at only a limited, though consciously selected, number of cases. Increasing the number of cases examined would generate more variation in both the news content and in the levels of Euro-scepticism which in turn can serve to further advance the hypotheses tested. Moreover, the conceptualization of Euro-scepticism in the form of cynicism as tested in this article, is arguably only touching a specific dimension of Euro-scepticism. The analyses performed were informed by extant research, but more work is needed to disentangle the potentially different dimensions of Euro-scepticism and how they related to different features of news media content. Finally, this article takes the news media coverage as a starting point and does not address the intricate relationship between political actors and the media in which the strategic news framing of Euro-politics emerges. These limitations notwithstanding, the article has demonstrated the importance of including the news media and their contents in our understanding of Euro-scepticism.

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Appendix

Overview of Independent Variables (Study 2)

Gender: Female = 1; male 0.

Age: in years.

Education: was recoded in four categories, comparable across the two countries, ranging from 1 (primary school), 2 (high school or equivalent (about 13 years of training)), 3 (BA or 3 years vocational training or equivalent (16 years)), and 4 (Masters or post-graduate training (19+ years)).

Government evaluation: Items ranging from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good) rating of the incumbent government (Denmark, $M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.99$; the Netherlands, $M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.93$).

Political sophistication: Items ranging from (1) no to (4) high political interest (Denmark, $M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.70$; the Netherlands, $M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.82$).

Media exposure (additive) and attention EU: number of days watching television news (0–7) and reading a newspaper (0–7 in Denmark and 0–6 in the Netherlands) plus attention for EU affairs (ranging from 1 to 4), additive index ranging from 1 to 17/18, Denmark ($M = 15.74$, $SD = 3.51$); the Netherlands ($M = 12.52$, $SD = 3.49$).

Efficacy: Six-item (Likert scale) index forming a scale of efficacy (Denmark, $M = 16.99$, $SD = 4.10$; Cronbach's α is = 0.72; the Netherlands, $M = 16.50$, $SD = 3.59$, $\alpha = 0.66$). (1) at times, politics can be so complex that people like me do not understand what is going on, (2) people like me do not have any say



in what the government does, (3) I think that I am better informed about politics than others, (4) MPs want to keep in touch with the people, (5) parties are only interested in people's vote, not their opinions, and (6) there are so many similar parties that it does not matter who is in government.

Notes

- 1 Parts of the results reported here have been published in Communication Science journals (De Vreese, 2004, 2005) with a specific focus on communication theory and with limited attention to the 'European' perspective and implications.
- 2 The design does not include a control group that would have to be treated to a 'frameless' news story, see Iyengar (1991) and Valentino *et al.* (2001a) for a similar procedure. As this study is designed to test the effects of strategic news, the other group (exposed to issue-driven news) may effectively be considered the functional equivalent of a control group (Brown and Melamed, 1990). For additional details about the experiment, see De Vreese (2004).
- 3 Two items in the posttest questionnaire confirmed that participants in the strategy condition felt they had learned more about strategies than issues, and participants in the other condition reported they had learned more about issues than strategies.
- 4 Denmark, the host country, was chosen because EU summits have the potential to generate less unfavourable news in the country that hosts the summit (see de Vreese, 2002). The Netherlands was chosen as the comparison because we know that the news volume and tone is affected by EU summits in this country (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). This reduces the chances that the findings are idiosyncratic to the Danish case.
- 5 The fieldwork dates were: Denmark, wave I 21–28 November 2002; wave II 14–18 December 2002 and the Netherlands, wave I 19–26 November 2002; wave II 17–21 December 2002.
- 6 The response rates were: Denmark 77.9% (wave I), 82.8% (wave 2), net sample of 1,288 respondents participating in both waves; The Netherlands 70.9% (wave I), 63.3% (wave II), net sample of 2,136 respondents participating in both waves (see De Vreese, 2005 for additional information about the sampling). In Denmark, the questionnaire was a postal self-administered paper and pencil questionnaire. In the Netherlands, the questionnaire was Web-administrated. These two modes of data collection enable a similar lay-out of the questionnaire and can thus better be compared (Dillman, 2000).
- 7 Cynicism has been defined as oppositional to political efficacy (e.g., Acock and Clarke, 1990; Craig *et al.*, 1990; Niemi *et al.*, 1991) and as inversely related to *trust* in different social, economic, and political institutions (Mishler and Rose, 2001).
- 8 The current study extends the work by Cappella and Jamieson (1997) and therefore utilizes the items used in their study worded slightly differently to apply to a policy debate rather than a specific election campaign.
- 9 The questions, measured on five-point agree–disagree statements, were: (1) the discussion about the EU enlargement is about what is best for Europe, (2) the politicians are too superficial in their argumentation about the enlargement, (3) the discussion about the enlargement gives me sufficient information to form an opinion, and (4) the discussion about the enlargement is more about political strategies than content.
- 10 In the Dutch case, the third item was dropped due to low inter-item correlation.
- 11 We include attention given the potential inaccuracy of relying solely on exposure measures (Chaffee and Schleuder, 1986). However, using the simple exposure measure (without the attention to EU news measure) does not substantively alter the findings.



- 12 A greater diversity in terms of the news media content on the relevant indicators favours using our detailed exposure measure to each of the different outlets, but given the similarity we use an additive index.
- 13 Respondents' reported level of completed education was recoded due to differences in the educational systems, see Appendix.
- 14 The content analysis was conducted from 25 November to 16 December 2002.
- 15 Public outlets: *DR TV-Avisen* (9 pm) in Denmark and *NOS Journaal* (8 pm) in the Netherlands. Commercial outlets: *TV2 Nyhederne* (7 pm) in Denmark and *RTL Nieuws* (7.30 pm) in the Netherlands. We acknowledge the dual funding of Danish TV2.
- 16 The entire news bulletin was coded. This included 554 stories from *TV-Avisen*, 458 stories from *TV2 Nyhederne*, 220 stories from *NOS Journaal*, and 245 stories from *RTL Nieuws*.
- 17 The papers were *Politiken*, *JyllandsPosten*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *BT*, and *EkstraBladet* in Denmark, all published Monday to Sunday and in the Netherlands *de Volkskrant*, *Telegraaf*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Algemeen Dagblad*, and *Trouw*, all published Monday to Saturday.
- 18 The entire front-page of each newspaper was coded. If stories commenced on the front-page and continued inside the newspaper, these stories were coded in full. A single headline (with no adjacent story) was not coded. Bullets (a headline and a few short, but full sentences) were included. The following number of articles were coded per newspaper: *Politiken* 260, *JyllandsPosten* 224, *Berlingske Tidende* 223, *EkstraBladet* 90, *BT* 89, *de Volkskrant* 214, *NRC* 231, *AD* 186, *Telegraaf* 135, and *Trouw* 145. The low number of articles in *EkstraBladet* and *BT* is due to the tabloid format of the newspaper and the layout of the front page with one or two stories per day.
- 19 The content analysis was completed by two native Dutch speakers and two native Danish speakers (all were MA students at the University of Amsterdam). Coders were trained and supervised frequently. The inter-coder reliability test conducted on a randomly selected sample of 50 news stories showed 94–100% inter-coder agreement for the measures relevant to this study. The inter-coder reliability test was performed in pairs of coders for each language. The reliability test was conducted on 25 Dutch and 25 Danish news stories, randomly selected from the news outlets included in the study.
- 20 Danish television aired 252 news stories about European affairs during the period of the study. Dutch television news aired 25 stories. Danish newspapers covered EU affairs in 84 front-page articles, whereas Dutch newspapers included 70 articles.