European Integration and Political Convergence since Maastricht:
The View from the Member States

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In the forty-two years since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, a manifold, far-reaching transformation of domestic politics within the member states has taken place. At least, this is the impression conveyed by the voluminous literature on postwar European integration. Steady and incremental for much of the postwar period, the pressures of integration on the member states increased dramatically with the relaunching of the Community in the 1980s. The one-two punch of the Single European Act (SEA) and Treaty on European Union (TEU) combined to reshape the European political landscape. Interests and identities have been recast, policy processes restructured, and national sovereignty diminished, pooled, or transferred. Important policy debates and decisions that once unfolded within purely national parameters have now been thoroughly Europeanized. For the nation-states that have embraced integration, the price of rescue was subsequent remodeling.[1]

Scholars have differed over the location, scope, and implications of these transformations, but few disagree about their basis in fact: Membership matters.[2] In this paper, I examine a key aspect of domestic politics where, it turns out paradoxically, European integration appears to have mattered in a limited but nonetheless significant manner: the institutions, procedures, and rules associated with parliamentary democracy and the political dynamics that flow from them. Employing a comparative framework based on Arend Lijphart's celebrated analysis of democratic regime characteristics, I find that many of the core national institutions of democracy have proven extremely resilient in the face of any erosive effects of integration. The content of politics may have changed in response to integration, but not the containers, it would seem. That said, one can point to tangible if not always striking shifts underneath (literally!) this picture of stability, in the form of a greater political salience of regionalism and extensive decentralization initiatives.

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[1] Alan Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
[2] Wayne Sandholtz, "Membership Matters: Limits of the Functional Approach to European Institutions," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 34(September 1996), 403-30.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Students of integration by no means have ignored the subject of democracy, but their focus has been overwhelmingly supranational. As European integration has progressed, its democratic credentials have been called into question with increasing frequency. Democracies are in charge of the European project, but their creation, critics argue, is far from democratic. Member governments have ceded or pooled sovereignty in key areas, yet decisionmaking structures and procedures erected at the supranational level have not been endowed with the same democratic safeguards as exist and operate, however imperfectly, back home. A weak European Parliament, opaque decisionmaking procedures in the European Commission and Council of Ministers, and the marginalized state of the national parliaments place severe constraints on the ability of the European *demos* -- parceled as it is among fifteen separate nation-states -- to exert anywhere near the level of control and to exact anywhere near the degree of accountability it can from its own national governments. Even if integration always results in a diminution of democracy from the vantage point of the nation-state,[3] European arrangements clearly have not been constructed with an eye toward minimizing that loss.

The origins of the EC/EU's democratic deficit are complex, but they can be traced to the desire of the member governments -- more precisely, of the national executives -- to remain as firmly in control of the integration process as possible. As such, those who seek to eliminate or reduce the democratic deficit face an uphill battle; their agenda, which typically includes a much strengthened European Parliament, is virtually indistinguishable from the agenda of those who seek to push the integration process in the direction of a federal outcome: a United States of Europe. Since the end point of integration has always been bitterly contested among the member states, a

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[3] Joseph Weiler, "After Maastricht: Community Legitimacy in Post-1992 Europe," in William James Adams, ed., *Singular Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 21.

situation that has intensified in the post-Maastricht period, it should come as no

surprise that progress on eliminating the democratic deficit has often fallen victim to

deadlock on these more fundamental debates about integration and national

sovereignty.

However democratic or undemocratic the outcome of integration, when one

considers its impact on national political systems, the scholarly terrain is somewhat less

defined.[4] The first order of business is to establish the basic parameters for the object of

study: democracy. After decades of debate, a consensus has emerged that democracy is

best studied as an empirical phenomenon: that is, as a set of procedures and institutions

rather than a set of normative goals or purposes.[5] Within this consensus, approaches

differ; some scholars are content with a streamlined Schumpeterian focus on routinized

competitive struggles for the people's vote, whereas others opt for more elaborate

conceptualizations.[6] What these approaches share is an emphasis on tangible, empirical

attributes of a political system, the presence or absence of which determines whether

the system is democratic. This is the approach adopted here; I am interested in assessing

the impact of integration not on how democracies ought to be structured and ought to

function, but on how they are structured in actuality and on how they function in

practice.

No two democratic polities are identical, but there exist broader patterns of

institutional construction that must be taken into account when evaluating the impact

of a supranational factor like regional integration. I adopt Arend Lijphart's basic

distinction between majoritarian and consensus democracy as an analytical vehicle for

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[4] Recent works include Michael Newman, *Democracy, Sovereignty, and the European Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), and my edited volume *Regional Integration and Democracy: Expanding on the European Experience* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

[5] Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 5-6.

[6] One example is Dahl, who lists eight institutional characteristics that must be present to guarantee the responsiveness of government to its citizens -- a fundamental characteristic of democracy. Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), chapter 1.

pursuing this important question.[7] Lijphart's ideal-types are so well known in the discipline as to obviate the need for a detailed review here; a summary of each democratic regime type's basic characteristics should suffice to refresh the memories of the reader.

Majoritarian democracy, according to Lijphart, rests on nine characteristics: a concentration of executive power (one-party and bare-majority characteristics); a fusion of legislative-executive power coupled with cabinet dominance; asymmetric bicameralism; two-party system; a one-dimensional party system; a plurality system of elections; unitary and centralized government; an unwritten constitution and parliamentary sovereignty; and an exclusive reliance on representative democracy. Consensus democracy, on the other hand, emerged to deal with the potential for political conflict generated by plural societies by placing restraints on majoritarian rule. It exhibits eight distinguishing properties: executive power-sharing (grand coalitions); informal and formal separation of powers; balanced bicameralism coupled with provisions for minority representation; a multiparty system; a multidimensional party system; electoral laws based on proportional representation (PR); federalism (territorial and/or nonterritorial) and decentralization; and a written constitution and minority veto.

EMPIRICAL MAPPING EXERCISE

Employing Lijphart's classification scheme of majoritarian and consensus democracies, I will attempt to map change and continuity in key institutional characteristics for selected member countries, and see to what extent the resulting patterns can be linked causally to deepening integration over the relevant periods of time. The approach is purely and unashamedly inductive.

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[7] Arend Lijphart, *Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

Regime Clusters, 1984

Based on a factor analysis of democratic regime characteristics, Lijphart arrives at

the following case clusters.[8] His classification summarizes the institutional-political

characteristics of twenty-two regimes over the period 1945-1980. The first dimension (I)

comprises five characteristics: minimal winning cabinets, executive dominance,

effective number of parties, number of issue dimensions, and the degree of electoral

disproportionality. The second dimension (II) embraces three variables: unicameralism,

centralization, and constitutional flexibility.[9] Those countries scoring highly on both

dimensions tend toward the majoritarian prototype, whereas those with strong negative

scores on both dimensions tend toward the consensual prototype. In between are

countries with mixed profiles, anchored by "majoritarian-federal" regimes in the upper

right and consensual-unitary regimes in the lower left.

Lijphart's Table 13.3: Nine Clusters of Democratic Regimes

		Dimension II		
		Majoritarian	Intermediate	Consensual
Dimension I	Majoritarian	New Zealand *United Kingdom*	*Ireland*	Australia *Austria* Canada *Germany* United States
	Intermediate	Iceland *Luxembourg*	*France V* Norway *Sweden*	*Italy* Japan
	Consensual	*Denmark* Israel	*Belgium* *Finland* France IV *Netherlands*	Switzerland

In *Democracies*, Lijphart expressly notes the stability of the regime characteristics

he measures and then compares; with the exception of France and Belgium, all of the

countries exhibited structural features that had remained more or less unchanged over

the 35-year period embraced by the study.[10] As such, his analysis provides an excellent

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[8] Lijphart, *Democracies*, 219.
[9] The referendum variable was totally unrelated to either dimension.
[10] Ibid., 221-22.

baseline for assessing the degree of change in EC/EU member countries since the early 1980s, an open-ended period that coincides with the launching of the single market initiative and subsequently the TEU. The EC/EU countries classified in Lijphart's analysis are highlighted in italics. In the following sections, I will examine a subset of current EU members, with an eye to establishing the pattern of change and continuity in the context of integration. As is clear from Table 13.3, Lijphart did not classify Greece, Spain, and Portugal in 1980, for the obvious reason that none were established democracies with an adequate data track record at the time he wrote his book. Although I plan to evaluate these cases in future drafts of his paper, I have chosen to omit them here. Three more countries – Austria, Finland, and Sweden – have been left out of the analysis since they have not been a formal part of an integrating Europe long enough to ascertain the effects of membership. Thus, I have chosen to examine the first nine members of the EC, with the exception of Luxembourg, which has been omitted due to the paucity of information on domestic political developments in the country since the publication of Lijphart's study.

Belgium

Belgium qualified as a near-consensual polity at the end of the 1970s. Along the first dimension, the country exhibited few majoritarian traits: the executive tended toward oversized coalitions, particularly in the 1970s, and did not enjoy the upper hand in relations with parliament; the party system displayed a larger number of effective parties (3.7) as well as issue dimensions (3.0); and the national electoral law approached proportionality. In terms of the second dimension, Belgium's ethnic-linguistic divisions manifested themselves in symmetrical (albeit weak) bicameralism, what Lijphart describes as "sociological" or "semi-federalism", and the constitutionally established minority veto.

Since 1980, the Belgian political system has remained more or less stable along the first dimension, but exhibits marked changes along the second. Reforms enacted in 1980, 1988, and 1993 have transformed the polity into an unusual federal system, combining both regional and (ethno-linguistic) community-based elements.[11] These constitutional changes also entailed reform of the upper house of parliament, which in turn has strengthened bicameralism by generating incongruence between the two houses of parliament. European integration was by no means the driving force in these reforms, but as elsewhere, it served to reinforce regionalist demands for greater autonomy. According to one source, "In state reform after state reform, most of the government leaders have elaborated an ideological linkage between the Belgian federalization process and the construction of Europe."[12] In the aftermath of the reforms, the need to improve coordination among the new regions/communities and the federal government on EU policy matters, particularly the structural funds, quickly led to the development of German-style "executive federal" concertation, further amplifying the consensual features of the polity.[13] By the end of the 1990s, Belgium had become a consensual policy proper.

Denmark

Denmark in 1980 was one of a handful of unusual hybrids -- a consensual-unitary polity. Its consensual features were concentrated within the first dimension. For

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[11] Bart Kerremans and Jan Beyers, "The Belgian Subnational Entities in the European Union: Second or Third Level Players?" *Regional and Federal Studies* 6(summer 1996): 41-55.

[12] Tanguy de Wilde d'Estmael and Christian Franck, "Belgium," in Dietrich Rometsch and Wolfgang Wessels, eds., *The European Union and Member States: Towards Institutional Fusion?* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 43.

[13] Bart Kerremans and Jan Beyers, "Belgium: The Dilemma between Cohesion and Autonomy," in Kenneth Hanf and Ben Soetendorp, eds., *Adapting to European Integration: Small States and the European Union* (New York: Longman, 1998), 21. On Belgian regionalism, see also Liesbet Hooghe, "Belgian Federalism and the European Community," in Barry Jones and Michael Keating, eds., *The European Union and the Regions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 135-66; Stefan De Rynck, "Europe and Cohesion Policy-Making in the Flemish Region," in Liesbet Hooghe, ed., *Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multi-Level Governance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 129-162; and Paulette Kurzer, "Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Italy: Does Market Integration Affect National Democratic Structures?" in Jeffrey Anderson, ed., *Regional Integration and Democracy: Expanding on the European Experience* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 193-222.

example, this small country was no model of executive dominance, putting together minimal winning cabinets just two-thirds of the time, which enjoyed an average life span of a little over 2.5 years. The party system was characterized by a large number of effective parliamentary parties (a mean of 4.3) and more than two issue dimensions (socioeconomic, urban-rural, and to a lesser extent foreign policy). A list PR law translated into a high level of electoral proportionality. It is along the second dimension that Denmark's regime schizophrenia becomes apparent; it exhibited strong majoritarian traits, specifically a unicameral legislature and a unitary constitutional order, offset somewhat by a national referendum requirement for constitutional amendments and judicial review.

Since 1980, Denmark exhibits few if any signs of change along either of Lijphart's two dimensions. Minority governments have been the order of the day, and the party system is still populated by a large number of competitive political parties, a situation buttressed by continued reliance on a PR electoral law. Regionalist movements and policies have not achieved the prominence here that they have in other EC/EU member states, although recent governments appear to be more committed to intergovernmental decentralization than in the past[14]; the constitution remains unitary and the legislature unicameral. The country that single-handedly almost derailed the Maastricht grand bargain in 1992 is, fittingly, an island of institutional stability in a European sea of subtle change.

France

France in 1980 exhibited mixed traits along both dimensions, leading Lijphart to place the country in the gray zone of Table 13.3. In terms of the first dimension, executive dominance characterized the period of observation, with a powerful president presiding over a legislative majority and cabinet with similar party credentials. At the

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[14] Herman Schwartz, "Small States in Big Trouble: State Reorganization in Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, and Sweden in the 1980s," *World Politics* 46(July 1994), 543.

same time, oversized cabinets were the order of the day -- a consensual trait. The French party system was populated by a significant number of effective parliamentary parties (mean 3.3), a large number of issue dimensions (3.5, comprising socioeconomic, religious, foreign policy, and to a lesser extent regime support issues), and a majority-plurality electoral law that contributed to electoral disproportionality. Along the second dimension, the Fifth Republic was at the time a weak, extremely asymmetrical, and incongruent bicameral system, a highly centralized, unitary polity, and a relatively inflexible constitution.

In the nearly two decades since 1980, France has avoided the upheavals that enveloped other large EC member governments – one searches in vain for French counterparts to the challenges posed by German unification, Thatcherite neoliberalism in the United Kingdom, or the existential political crisis that ultimately swallowed the Italian First Republic. Eminently stable if viewed in cross-national perspective, contemporary France nonetheless exhibits tangible signs of change when compared to its 1980 incarnation. From its place at the heart of Lijphart's classification table, the country has migrated in a consensual direction along both dimensions. Executive dominance is less evident, despite the strong hand of Mitterrand during the early part of the 1980s, in large part due to the emergence of divided government, or cohabitation, in the aftermath of national elections for the presidency and legislature held in 1986, 1993, and most recently 1997. The number of effective parliamentary parties has increased marginally since 1980; the most visible newcomers are the extremist right wing National Front, led until recently by Jean-Marie Le Pen, and the Greens. In terms of issue dimensions, French politics revolves around traditional themes, with the addition of some new ones: postmaterialism (environmentalism), immigration, and Europe.

Along the second dimension, major changes occurred under Socialist governments after 1981; specifically, the strengthening of French local authorities and

the creation in 1981 of a regional tier of government have effected a significant measure of decentralization in a country renowned for its strong central state. This, coupled with continued use of the national referendum, most recently over ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, lends the French political system a more consensual caste than that observed by Lijphart at the end of the 1970s.

It must be said that these changes occurred without a significant push from dynamics associated with European integration. To be sure, the EC/EU's increased emphasis on regional distributive policies after 1988 lent reinforcement to the constitutional reforms put in place by the Socialists seven years earlier,[15] and post-Maastricht politics, particularly conflicts over immigrant and sovereignty flows, feeds the ambitions of new forces on the domestic political scene, notably on the right. Still, in comparison to the changes observed in some other countries over this same period, the effects of Europe are decidedly modest.

Germany

According to Lijphart, the Federal Republic of Germany was a majoritarian-federal system in 1980. Its majoritarian characteristics were centered in a visible but not especially pronounced tendency toward minimal winning cabinets (78% of the cabinets between 1949 and 1980), the smaller number of effective parliamentary political parties in the system (2.6), and the limited number of issue dimensions in national politics (socioeconomic and religious, for a score of 2.0). Federalism coupled with an incongruent and slightly asymmetrical bicameralism constituted its consensual traits.

How has Germany's political profile changed since the early 1980s? At least two of its more majoritarian attributes – minimal winning cabinets of average to long duration – persist into the 1990s. Others, however, have weakened. The entrance of the Greens onto the national political stage in 1983, followed nine years later by the Party of

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[15] Richard Balme, "French Regionalization and European Integration: Territorial Adaptation and Change in a Unitary State," in Jones and Keating, eds., *The European Union and the Regions* , 166-88.

Democratic Socialism (PDS), has increased the number of effective parliamentary parties operating in the party system. The number of issue dimensions over which political parties compete has shown a net increase as well; while the salience of religion may have declined somewhat, postmaterialist issues (environmentalism) and territory (eastern Germany after 1990) have gained in importance. As for its consensual features, Germany remains a federal system, and although unification led to a temporary power/authority windfall for the national government,[16] by the mid-1990s key features of the country's federal framework had been strengthened. Indeed, one could argue that the combination of constitutional reform and divided government (i.e. the political opposition controlling the upper house, the Bundesrat) rendered Germany's incongruent bicameralism somewhat more symmetrical. In sum, Germany has become less majoritarian and more consensual during the past two decades.

How much of this can be laid at Europe's doorstep? Clearly, many of the changes – new political parties, new issue cleavages – have complex and often intertwined causal roots that in no way implicate the integration process. Others, however, do stem from supranational dynamics. For example, the re-equilibration of German federalism can be traced in part to European-level effects. The German states (Länder) have become far more active in Europe on a range on issues, particularly agricultural and regional policy; indeed, they were among the first regions to set up working "embassies" in Brussels to monitor and, where possible, influence the EC policy process.[17]

Länder activism spilled over into the constitutional sphere during the mid-1980s. Beginning with ratification of the Single European Act (SEA) in 1987, the Länder voiced

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[16] See my *German Unification and the Union of Europe: The Domestic Politics of Integration Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 40-42.

[17] Gary Marks, François Nielsen, Leonard Ray, and Jane Salk, "Competencies, Cracks, and Conflicts: Regional Mobilization in the European Union," in Gary Marks, Fritz Scharpf, Philippe Schmitter, and Wolfgang Streeck, eds., *Governance in the European Union* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996, 40-63.

growing concerns about EC encroachments on their sphere of competence, aided and abetted by the federal government.[18] In essence, the Länder argued that EC politics increasingly constituted not foreign affairs but "European domestic policy," and therefore they were entitled to territorial representation on EC legislation that impinged on their powers and competencies.[19] Their concerns crested in the aftermath of the Maastricht summit. Since formal ratification of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) required Bundesrat approval, Länder demands carried considerable weight in formal discussions with the federal government, which eventually resulted in substantial revisions to the Basic Law (Article 23).[20] Among other things, the article authorizes the federal government to transfer authority to the EU only after conducting elaborate and early consultations with the lower house of Parliament and, more stringently, obtaining the formal consent of the Bundesrat. Indeed, EU initiatives that fall mainly or exclusively within the sphere of authority of the Länder (as defined by other articles of the Basic Law) are subject to a Bundesrat veto, for all intents and purposes. Moreover, on domestic matters of exclusive Länder competence, as set out in other parts of the Basic Law, Article 23 stipulates that the right to represent the FRG's position in the Council of Ministers will be transferred to an official appointed by the Bundesrat.

Ireland

Ireland qualified in 1980 as a predominantly majoritarian system, particularly along the first dimension. A clear pattern of executive dominance was in evidence; a high proportion of cabinets were of the minimal winning variety (89 percent over the period of study) and highly durable, lasting on average 70 months in office. The country

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[18] Charlie Jeffery, "The Länder Strike Back: Structures and Procedures of European Integration Policy-making in the German Federal System," Discussion Papers in Federal Studies FS94/4, University of Leicester, September 1994, 4.

[19] Ibid., 13; Thomas Christiansen, "The Länder Between Bonn and Brussels: The Dilemma of German Federalism in the 1990s," *German Politics* 2 (August 1992), 239-263 at 245-246.

[20] George Ress, "The Constitution and the Maastricht Treaty: Between Cooperation and Conflict," *German Politics* (December 1994): 49.

lay somewhere between a two-party and multiparty system (2.8 effective parliamentary parties), but this was offset by the narrow range of issues embodied in the party system (effectively a single issue dimension, comprised of the moderate salience of socio- economic and foreign policy issue dimensions). Ireland employed the single transferable vote electoral law, which produced a low level of electoral disproportionality. In terms of the second dimension, Ireland had a what Lijphart characterizes as "insignificant bicameralism,"[21] generated by the congruence and extreme asymmetry that exists between the lower and upper legislative chambers. A written constitution, judicial review, and referendum requirement for constitutional amendments accounted for Ireland's departure from pure majoritarianism.

A look at Ireland in the 1990s reveals several significant changes to Lijphart's institutional attributes, which together add up to a subtle shift in the direction of consensualism along both dimensions. Since 1989, Ireland has been governed by coalition governments, with cabinets departing from minimum winning size far more frequently and exhibiting less durability than in the past.[22] This has lessened executive dominance somewhat.[23] Parliament's stature meanwhile has improved, and Europe has played a part; as happened in many EU member states, the intensification of integration since the mid-1980s resulted in successful attempts by parliament to augment its institutional capacity to track European-level policy developments.[24] The establishment of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs has contributed to "a marked shift in the [parliament's] treatment both of EU affairs and of broader foreign policy", a trend that appears "irreversible."[25]

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[21] Lijphart, *Democracies*, 99.

[22] Brian Farrell, "Ireland: Coalition Becoming the Norm," in Jean Blondel and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel, eds., *Cabinets in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 40-1,

[23] Alan Ward, *The Irish Constitutional Tradition: Responsible Government and Modern Ireland, 1782-1992* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 281.

[24] Brigid Laffan and Etain Tannam, "Ireland: The Rewards of Pragmatism," in Hanf and Soetendorp, eds., *Adapting to European Integration*, 73.

[25] Eunan O'Halpin, "Irish Parliamentary Culture and the European Union: Formalities to be Observed," in Philip Norton, ed., *National Parliaments and the European Union* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 134.

Along the second dimension, limited decentralization has occurred, but it is confined to the policy process directly associated with the EU structural funds; in 1993, the Irish government instituted a set of subregional review committees that now take part in the policy planning process. Holmes and Reese credit the EC/EU with generating a political perception of regionalism in Ireland, something that had previously been lacking; "at the very least, a regional debate has been created."[26] Laffan argues that EU monies have disturbed territorial politics in Ireland, forcing the central government to pay more attention to the demands of local and regional actors.[27] The greater salience of regionalism notwithstanding, institutionally the Republic of Ireland remains unitary; local government prerogatives in Ireland are still highly circumscribed, and a regional tier of government has yet to appear.

Italy

According to Lijphart, 1980 Italy was consensual along the second dimension, and occupied an intermediate position between consensualism and majoritarianism on the first dimension. Regarding the former, Italy possessed a weak, largely symmetrical bicameralism, was unitary in constitutional form, and was governed by a written constitution that allowed for judicial review and national referenda. On the first dimension, Italy was no model of executive dominance: cabinets tended to be oversized (65 percent) and fragile (17 months, on average); numerous political parties competed credibly for power (3.5 effective parliamentary parties); many issue dimensions shaped political conflict (socioeconomic and religious issues were highly salient; regime support and foreign policy were of moderate salience); and its PR law created a low level of electoral disproportionality.

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[26] Michael Holmes and Nicholas Reese, "Regions within a Region: The Paradox of the Republic of Ireland," in Jones and Keating, eds., *The European Union and the Regions*, 230.

[27] Brigid Laffan, "Ireland: A Region without Regions—The Odd Man Out?" in Hooghe, ed., *Cohesion Policy and European Integration*, 320.

In some ways, Italy's experience after 1980 is the mirror image of Germany's –

political-institutional upheaval within otherwise stable territorial boundaries. The

Christian Democratic Party (DC) and the Italian Communist Party, two fixtures of the

postwar political system with roots reaching well back into the 19th century,

disappeared from the political stage, their place taken by reformed and reconstituted

elements of the left, right, and center. Political elites also enacted far-reaching reforms of

the constitution, including a reallocation of power and responsibilities between central

and regional governments and a new electoral law. Regional secession, pushed above

all by Umberto Bossi's Northern League, became a salient political issue for elites and

masses. Italy in the late 1990s, although still recognizable, carries the trademark effects

of a sweeping "refolution."[28]

In terms of Lijphart's classification scheme, contemporary Italy has changed in

ways that have nudged the country closer to majoritarian-consensualism. Along the

first dimension, majoritarian accents are becoming audible; among other things, recent

cabinets appear to be marginally more durable, and, perhaps most important, the

national electoral law is now based predominantly on single member districts operating

on a first-past-the-post system.[29] Changes in institutional attributes belonging to the

second dimension, however, have tended toward the consensual. The use of national

referenda has increased since the late 1980s.[30] And, certainly of greater long-term

significance, reforms enacted in the early 1990s have augmented the taxation authority

and policymaking responsibilities of the regional governments in Italy; although falling

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[28] This term, an alloy of reform and revolution, was coined by British historian Timothy Garton Ash in 1989, with reference to the stunning political developments unfolding at the time in Poland and Hungary.
[29] At the same time, parliament is even more fragmented in the 1990s (i.e. contains more political parties). That said, both electoral and parliamentary politics entail competition between established party blocs of the left and right, which appears to lend greater stability and predictability to the system. The emergence of regional separatism as a political issue in the 1990s may also have increased the salience of "regime support" issues, another consensual-like movement.
[30] Stephen Hellman, "Part V: Italy," in Mark Kesselman et al., *European Politics in Transition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 361.

well short of federalism, the constitution now provides for a noticeably greater degree of political decentralization.

The demise of the Italian First Republic[31] reveals complex origins, some internal to the system (party corruption, political blockage) and others external (e.g. the end of the Cold War). Although European integration can in no way claim primary responsibility, its role in this transformation is fairly clear. Italian political elites seized on the SEA and then TEU as external sources of leverage to push through an economic policy agenda that would set the country's house in order, a goal that had eluded governments for decades.[32] Specifically, qualifying for and then staying in EMU entails not just drastic changes in economic policy, but also a commensurate level of political stability to see them through. The "European rationale" for institutional reform has been particularly evident in efforts, so far in vain, to abolish the remaining vestiges of proportional representation in Italian electoral law; supporters of an initiative to move to a UK-style first-past-the-post system have argued that such reforms are essential if Italy is to attain the requisite level of political stability to navigate successfully in a single-currency Europe.[33]

The rise of regionalism, both in terms of separatist movements like the Northern League and through more assertive and pro-active regional governments,[34] has also stemmed in part from a supportive opportunity structure created by Europe. In some instances, the support proffered by Europe is indirect and unintentional – even manufactured. For example, Bossi and his Northern League supporters have declared

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[31] See for example Carol Mershon and Gianfranco Pasquino, eds., *Italian Politics: Ending the First Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

[32] Alberta Sbragia, "Hard Currency and Hard Choices: Italy and EMU," paper prepared for the Conference on "The Impact of Increased Economic Integration on Italy and the Rest of Europe," Georgetown University, April 30-May 2, 1999, Washington, D.C.; Vincent Della Sala, "Hollowing Out and Hardening the State: European Integration and the Italian Economy," *West European Politics* 20(1): 14-33; P. Daniels, "Italy and the Maastricht Treaty," in Stephen Hellman and Gianfranco Pasquino, *Italian Politics: A Review, vol. 8* (London: Pinter, 1993), 178-91.

[33] James Blitz, "Italy to vote on poll reform," *Financial Times*, April 17-18, 1999, 3.

[34] Carlo Desideri and Vincenzo Santantonio, "Building a Third Level in Europe: Prospects and Difficulties in Italy," *Regional and Federal Studies* 6(summer 1996): 96-116.

numerous times that only an Italy shorn of its Southern albatross is capable of surviving and prospering in an ever-closer European Union. Here, Europe is employed as a political instrument. Elsewhere, EC/EU support is far more conscious and direct. As a case in point, the increasing policy salience of the Community structural funds prompted a variety of politico-administrative initiatives on the part of the Italian regional governments, which are now in a marginally better position to liaise with interlocutors in Brussels.[35] Despite the limited achievements of the regional governments in their campaign to win meaningful federalization of the Italian system, experts speak of modest "empowerment" of Italian regions, thanks in part to the European Union.[36]

Netherlands

The Dutch Republic circa 1980 was revealed to have strong consensual attributes along the first dimension, and somewhat weaker consensual characteristics along the second. Specifically, the Netherlands resorted to oversized cabinets some 73 percent of the time, and these cabinets lasted just under three years on average (34 months); both characteristics suggest a pattern of executive-legislative relations skewed in favor of the latter. The country's extreme level of multipartyism (4.9 effective parliamentary parties, highest of the EC members in 1980), high number of issue dimensions (3.0, comprised of highly salient socioeconomic, religious, and postmaterialist conflicts), and low level of electoral disproportionality stemming from a PR law, further cemented its consensual credentials on this dimension. On the second dimension, the Netherlands exhibited a weak symmetrical bicameralism, a unitary constitution that provided for a high degree of centralization, and somewhat inflexible constitution (minority veto).

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[35] See Carlo Desideri, "Italian Regions in the European Community," in Jones and Keating, eds., *The European Union and the Regions*, 65-87.

[36] Jürgen Grote, "Cohesion in Italy: A View on Non-Economic Disparities," in Hooghe, ed., *Cohesion Policy and European Integration*, 287.

In the 1990s, the Netherlands continues to post marked elements of consensualism along Lijphart's first dimension[37] and, at the same time, exhibits notably stronger consensual properties that feed into the second dimension. Starting in the 1980s, a debate over regional government – specifically, strengthening the Dutch provinces – broke out, and the terms of discussion were framed by the context of European integration, in particular the reform of the structural funds in the aftermath of the SEA.[38] The outcome was regional reform in 1994, which introduced a new regional politico-administrative level between municipalities and provinces. Although it is still too early to determine the long-range significance of these reforms, they do constitute a conscious act of decentralization on the part of the federal government, in part as a response to developments at the supranational level.

United Kingdom

The UK in 1980 qualified as a majoritarian polity on all counts; indeed, the Westminster model is Lijphart's empirical benchmark for the majoritarian prototype. The British system generated executive dominance, with an overwhelming tendency toward minimal winning cabinets (95 percent) that last (81 months, on average). The party system was for all intents and purposes built on two major competitors for power (2.1 effective parliamentary parties), and the number of issue dimensions was likewise restricted (1.5, with socioeconomic issues taking high salience and foreign policy of medium importance). The UK's "first-past-the-post" electoral law guaranteed a high level of electoral disproportionality. On the second dimension, the UK exhibited extremely asymmetrical, weak bicameralism, a unitary constitutional framework that

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[37] It should be noted that Lijphart records a slight move in the majoritarian dimension during the course of the 1980s, the result of a drop-off in the incidence of oversized cabinets. See Arend Lijphart, "From the Politics of Accommodation to Adversarial Politics in the Netherlands: A Reassessment," *West European Politics* 12(January 1989): 139-53.

[38] Frank Hendriks et al., "The Dutch Province as a European Region: National Impediments versus European Opportunities," in Jones and Keating, eds., *The European Union and the Regions* , 221; Bernard J. S. Hoetjes, "The Netherlands," in Rometsch and Wessels, eds., *The European Union and Member States*, 168; Ingeborg Tömmel, "Decentralization of Regional Development Policies in the Netherlands: A New Type of State Intervention?" *West European Politics* 15(April 1992): 107-25.

provided for a high level of centralization, and an unwritten constitution that allowed for maximum executive flexibility.

Since 1980, the vast majority of the UK's majoritarian traits have remained more or less intact. Executive dominance is still the order of the day. The number of effective parliamentary parties has remained constant, although the line-up has changed (the Liberal Party was joined by the Social Democratic Party in 1981, and then both merged to form the Liberal Democrats over the course of 1988-89); meanwhile, the number of issue dimensions has not changed appreciably, although regionalist issues (Scottish and Welsh autonomy) have increased in saliency and Britain's policy toward Europe has taken on added importance in foreign policy debates. Despite some flirtation on the left with PR electoral reform, British electoral law remains organized around single member districts, ensuring a high level of disproportionality for parties represented in the House of Commons. Whispering since 1997 under New Labour about a reform of the House of Lords to the contrary notwithstanding, the UK legislature remains an extremely asymmetrical, weak version of bicameralism. The constitution is still unwritten, and the overall institutional framework highly centralized. Labour's pledge to hold a national referendum as a condition for entering EMU is a one-off that will almost certainly have no long-term impact on the political flexibility accruing to the national government.

One feature of the political system that has changed significantly since 1980 resides within Lijphart's second dimension: the territorial distribution of power specified by the country's constitution. The UK's unitary credentials, the purity of which were always somewhat suspect owing to the special status of Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, have weakened appreciably under the Blair Government, which at the time of this writing has just implemented meaningful regional devolution for Scotland and Wales, built around elected regional assemblies formed on the basis of PR;

as well as limited budget and taxation authority and devolved policy responsibilities for the regional governments.[39]

The resurgence of Scottish and, on a more modest scale, Welsh nationalism in the 1980s traces its origins to widening economic disparities and to feelings of increased political powerlessness vis-à-vis London; European integration played a facilitative part in this process, offering these regions a supranational focus and outlet, particularly through a reformed structural funds, for subnational mobilization and influence.[40] Nationalists in both Scotland and Wales turned the process of European integration to their larger political advantage as well, arguing persuasively to fence-sitters at home that if vital powers and responsibilities of the central state were being transferred to the supranational level, then it would be worth forsaking representation in London for direct representation as a sovereign entity in Brussels.[41] The EU debate over subsidiarity also worked to the regions' advantage, bolstering their claims vis-à-vis London for devolution of policy responsibilities. Although comparable reforms for the English regions have been put on hold by the Labour Government, it is likely that political demands for devolution at the heart of the British unitary state will increase in volume as the political disparities between England and the other regions widen. Although perhaps not as persistent or successful as their Welsh and Scottish counterparts, English regions have also incorporated Europe into their case for greater autonomy from the center over the course of the 1980s and into the 1990s.

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[39] See Howard Elcock and Michael Keating, eds., *Remaking the Union: Devolution and British Politics in the 1990s, special issue of Regional & Federal Studies* 8(Spring 1998).

[40] See for example Michael Keating, "Nations, Regions, and Europe: The UK Experience," in Jones and Keating, eds., *The European Union and the Regions* , 89-114; Ian Bache, Stephen George, and R.A.W. Rhodes, "The European Union, Cohesion Policy, and Subnational Authorities in the United Kingdom," in Hooghe, ed., *Cohesion Policy and European Integration*, 294-319.

[41] Keating, "Nations, Regions, and Europe," 96.

ANALYSIS & CONCLUSIONS

Compiling the results of the separate country analyses, I arrive at the following update of Lijphart's 1980 classification exercise. Admittedly, this approach is not as rigorous as carrying out a factor analysis of the countries he studied based on data collected between 1980 and the late 1990s.[42] However impressionistic, though, the qualitative findings point in a consistent direction – namely, a general shift toward consensualism – and as such deserve to be taken seriously even in the absence of quantitative backing.

Lijphart's Table 13.3 circa 1999: Nine Clusters of Democratic Regimes (EU9 only)

| | | Dimension II | | |
		Majoritarian	Intermediate	Consensual
	Majoritarian	United Kingdom →	Ireland ↘	Germany ↓
Dimension I	Intermediate		France ↘	↑ ↓ Italy
	Consensual	Denmark	Belgium —————→ Netherlands →	

Of the five EU members in a position to shift in a more consensual direction along the first dimension (UK, Ireland, Germany, France, and Italy), only two did not. Of the six members poised to take on more consensual attributes along the second dimension (UK, Ireland, France, Denmark, Belgium, and the Netherlands), only one did not. Of the eight countries examined, only Denmark exhibits no tangible signs of change at all, and only Italy bucked the consensual trend by moving in a majoritarian direction, albeit on a single dimension.[43]

Confirmation of the magnitude of these shifts toward consensualism will have to await a formal analysis using comparable statistical techniques to those employed by Lijphart in *Democracies*. That these shifts have taken place since 1980, however, can

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[42] This is the direction in which I intend to take this study.

[43] Even here, in the case of Italy, one could argue that the moves toward majoritarianism along Dimension I were offset by a further strengthening of consensual features along Dimension II – specifically, the modest decentralization achieved through regional reform in the early 1990s.

hardly be in dispute. The question that should concern us here is not whether these changes have taken place, but rather to what they can be attributed, and specifically whether the intensification of European integration since the mid-1980s has had anything to do with the outcomes. In considering this question, it is helpful to proceed in a manner consistent with the preceding analysis – namely, to unpack Lijphart's regime characteristics into two dimensions, and address the issue of European influence separately and sequentially.

For the most part, change along Dimension I is difficult to tie to Europe in any consistent manner. The weakening of executive dominance in France and Ireland, or the expansion of the party system and national issue space that occurred in Germany, reveals little in the way of a direct or even indirect connection to integration. Ironically, only in Italy, where the trend was in the reverse direction, toward stronger majoritarian elements, can one find traces of Europe in the causal mix. Italian politicians have used Europe, at a minimum as rhetorical leverage, to strengthen their case for reforming institutional features of the Italian political system that have encouraged or perpetuated instability and capriciousness. According to reforming elites, the new Europe demands a level of political constancy that necessitates far-reaching change in Italy's constitution, particularly those impinging on executive control and influence. Although the results have been modest and, certainly to Italian champions of reform, disappointing to date, the Euro-logic is clear.

It should be pointed out that during the Maastricht Treaty ratification phase, which lasted from 1992 to 1993, many national parliaments sought successfully – indeed as the price for ratification – to enhance their ability to monitor and where possible influence the course of integration. National executives in Germany, France, and elsewhere are now obligated to bring their legislatures into the EU policy process earlier and accord them more say over policy lines and decisions. These legislative victories, however, have had little if any impact on the long-standing democratic deficit at the

EU-level and, restricted as they are to EU matters, have had no impact on the larger structure of executive-legislative relations in the member countries.

It is along Dimension II that the most effective case for European influence can be made. In countries as constitutionally diverse as Germany, Italy, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the intensification of regional integration commencing in the mid-1980s contributed, sometimes directly, to the emergence of a variety of regionalist initiatives whose proponents have wrapped themselves in the mantle of democratic self-determination. Even in countries lacking a strong history or tradition of regional politics, such as Ireland and the Netherlands, the EU has fed a debate over the territorial distribution of power and responsibility.

Is the EU, through its policies and in some ways its very presence, helping to forge a politico-institutional uniformity at the regional level within the member states? Based on the sheer variety of regionalist initiatives at play within the European Union, from the vituperative secessionist Northern League in Italy to the Spartan administrative bodies set up at the meso-level in Ireland, the answer would appear to be no. Although regionalism may draw on Europe rhetorically and materially to carve out more autonomy and influence from the national government, it must develop and then achieve its objectives within the confines of existing national political institutions, which shape these initiatives and establish their horizons in distinctive ways. Indeed, the EU establishes parameters, both explicit and implicit, for regionalist initiatives and movements, containing them within existing national boundaries and channeling their demands into established policy frameworks, notably the structural funds.[44] Put another way, integration does not appear to enhance the potential of regional actors to undermine the national state. That said, there does appear to be some evidence of

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[44] Kurzer, "Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Italy," 212-13.

convergence toward consensualism, however varied its manifestations are on the ground.

Before we conclude confidently that membership indeed matters to the institutional foundations of the democratic state in Europe, several deficiencies in the preceding analysis must be explored thoroughly. First, where EU influence is apparent – namely, regional decentralization – the magnitude of the effects is often small and the outcomes that can be attributed solely to the integration process are modest. Whatever convergence toward consensualism has taken place cannot be described as especially arresting, at least not yet. Moreover, the most dramatic instance of federalization came about not because of the European project, but because of long-standing societal conflicts between territorially based ethno-linguistic groups that prompted a far-reaching transformation of the Belgian constitution. The EU *may* have acted as accelerant, but by no means as cause. Second, by restricting the analysis to a subset of EU member states, we lose the capacity to test whether regional decentralization is a ubiquitous phenomenon in advanced industrial democracies – i.e. even among parliamentary democracies that are not currently members of the EU. Finally, to survey the institutional features of modern European democracies that have retained their basic form through fifteen years of integrative frenzy (i.e. Dimension I) is to behold the core of the democratic state in the twentieth century: parliament, cabinet, and political parties. Nibbling at the margins of the territorial constitutional order is one thing, but tearing at the heart of parliamentary democracy is quite another, and integration has been kind to the latter.

Assuming these problems are not fatal, we are left with an intriguing pattern of regime characteristics of EU member states as the decade draws to a close: continuity in Dimension I attributes coupled with some convergence toward consensualism in Dimension II attributes. To the extent that integration has played a part in bringing about the resulting pattern, its effects appear to be bifurcated. Clearly, important causal

dynamics of integration politics are system reinforcing at the national level, particularly where executive power is concerned – how else to explain the stability of executive-legislative relations, party systems, and so on? Other dynamics, deriving primarily from the EC/EU regional policies, amplify and in some cases generate subnational political processes that have resulted in a redrawing of relationships between center and periphery. Exploring these causal chains represents one of my next objectives in this research project.

In relation to the grand claims for relevance and impact often made by students of integration, the findings presented here may come as a surprise. On reflection, however, the results are not so puzzling after all. We know that institutional arrangements and the political dynamics they generate are extremely resistant to change, all the more so when the exogenous pressure – in this instance, European integration – exerts itself incrementally, and not in the form of massive, temporally concentrated shocks. The resilience of the institutional containers of politics at the domestic level suggests the presence of deep parameters or limits to integration, the long-range implications of which must be fully explored.