

Tracing the development of nationalist attitudes in the EU

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journals.sagepub.com/home/eup**Nicholas Clark**

Department of Political Science, Susquehanna University,
Selinsgrove, USA

Robert Rohrschneider 

Department of Political Science, University of Kansas,
Lawrence, USA

Abstract

We discuss the relevance of national attachments for European integration, reviewing the existing literature and drawing connections across the articles in this issue. We also consider that the ageing European population might be a possible explanation for why nationalism is increasingly shaping EU support especially outside the ideological extremes. Taken together with the other contributions in this issue, it is quite possible that national identity will increasingly shape the views of individuals with ideologically moderate views who in the past have supported European integration.

Keywords

Ageing, EU support, identity, nationalism, political ideology

For decades now, scholars have been writing about the relationship between nationalism and support for the European Union (EU). The conventional wisdom suggests that strong national identities undermine support for the EU (Carey, 2002); a pattern that has become especially marked since the turn of the millennium (Clark and Rohrschneider, 2019; Fligstein et al., 2012; Polyakova and

Corresponding author:

Robert Rohrschneider, Department of Political Science, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA.

Email: roro@ku.edu

Fligstein, 2015). Clearly, as the EU created a common currency and increasingly transferred policy-making authority to the EU, identity-based considerations became slowly but steadily more relevant to citizens. This was reinforced when the EU expanded to include several countries from Central and Eastern Europe, raising questions about the EU's capacity to integrate an increasingly diverse set of nations. Against this backdrop, the sovereign debt crisis, the resulting austerity movement, and the growing influx of migrants and asylum-seekers stretched the EU's ability to deal with severe policy problems. The confluence of these dynamics increasingly strained support for the EU from 2007 onwards, although the EU has recently recovered some of the pre-crisis support. Still, Brexit illustrates the consequences when the strength of national attachments is used by skilled political elites to outmaneuver those who support the EU (de Vries and Hobolt, 2020; Hobolt, 2016). The situation we find today is one in which nationalism will likely continue to shape public perceptions of the EU in the years ahead. This Special Issue features contributions that seek to better understand the depth of nationalist impulses that currently exist and the effects they may have on the politics of European integration. Unlike other recent special issues (e.g. Kuhn and Nicoli, 2020), we primarily focus the contributions on an examination of the levels and sources of national attachments.

There are two central motivations for the focus of this Special Issue. First, even the most ardent supporter of the EU will agree that national attachments linger or, more often, plainly shape public debates. Therefore, we wanted to bring together a set of articles that help explain when citizens develop stronger national attachments and why national identity remains dominant. Given that the EU has contributed to Europe's prosperity and the peaceful coexistence of nations for decades, an Eastonian "output" model would predict a decline of national identity and a weakening influence of national attachments on EU evaluations because specific policy achievements tend to deepen public support for institutions over time (Easton, 1975). Instead, people's identification with the EU has remained much weaker than their attachment to nation states and, moreover, this balance has not changed much since the late 1980s (Figure 1). What makes national identity so sticky? Is it, as Fuchs and Klingemann (2002: 19) put it nearly two decades ago, that "in view of the cultural plurality and heterogeneity of European nation states, it is doubtful whether the constitution of a European demos with a tenable collective identity is possible at all"? This Special Issue illuminates several potential reasons for why national identities remain at the forefront of the minds of mass publics.

Second, from a practical perspective, no single journal issue or volume can fully examine all aspects of various identities, spanning regional, national, and supra-national identities, and their linkages with economic, institutional, political, factors as well as the influence of elites and current issues on mass views about integration. We therefore settled on six topics that examine key aspects that underlie national identities: the way that personality types shape preferences about national attachments (Curtis and Miller, 2021), how populist preferences drive a wedge between

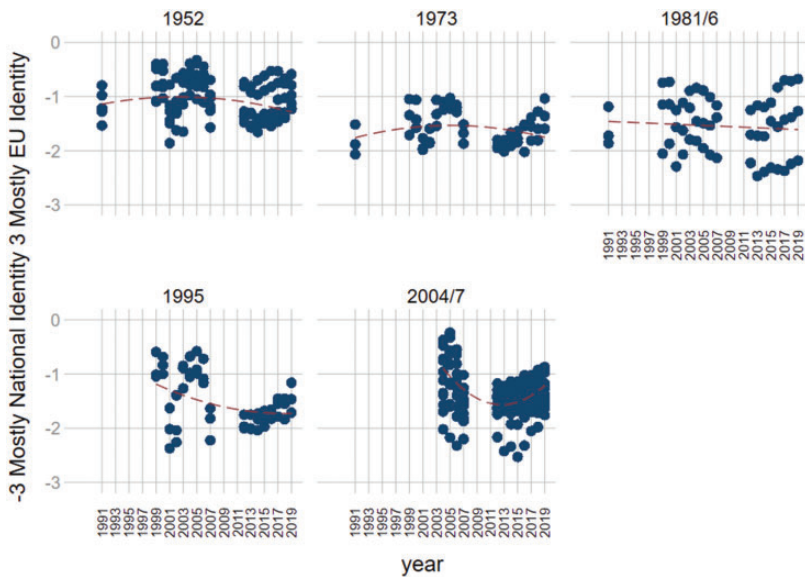


Figure 1. Net EU identity in Europe, 1991-2019, by year a country joined the EU.

Note: To construct the summary indicator, we used the regular Eurobarometer question, “[p]lease tell me how attached you feel to [...] (OUR COUNTRY) and [...] The European Union”. We subtracted individuals’ degree of attachment to the national community (coded 1 to 5 with higher values indicating stronger attachments and with missing values included as a middle category) from their degree of attachment to the EU (also coded 1 to 5). The net attachment indicator ranges from -4 denoting an exclusive identification with nations to 4 expressing an exclusive identification with the EU. Entries on the y-axis are mean scores for a country’s public. Countries are grouped by the year that a nation joined the EU.

nation states and the EU in the minds of publics (Rooduijn et al., 2021); what type of identity conceptions are actually compatible with EU support (Aichholzer et al., 2021), the way pressing economic (Foster and Frieden, 2021) and migration issues (Harteveld and van der Brug, 2021) affect national identities; and how party competition keeps national divisions alive even as international issues become more central in European parliamentary elections (Jackson and Jolly, 2021).

The cumulative message of these contributions is twofold. First, it shows that national identity is firmly grounded in the individual mind and will thus remain a potent force in European politics in the foreseeable future. Second, via implication, it turns the burden of proof over to arguments which suggest that EU identities can evolve alongside national identities in ways that assure their *equal* coexistence.

This introduction proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the role of nationalism within the domain of European politics, paying particular attention to the relationship between nationalism and declining support for the EU. Next, we examine the changing socio-demographic composition of the ideological center across Europe over the last decades, using data from the European Representation

Dataset, a longitudinal dataset of public opinion data from the Eurobarometer survey series. This discussion pays special attention to how demographic changes among ideologically moderate individuals may have weakened their support for European integration. We hypothesize that the changing demographics in the political center may explain why these individuals are increasingly divided over Europe's integration and thus weaken the "permissive consensus" which has long helped political elites to integrate Europe. Finally, we summarize the six articles that constitute this Special Issue and highlight the central lessons that can be extracted from them.

Nationalism, populism, and public support for European integration

The relevance of national identity and the recent rise of populist parties features prominently in the different contributions in this issue. This is not particularly surprising given the growing popularity of parties especially at the right-extreme that are typically supported by voters with conservative cultural attitudes (de Vries and Edwards, 2009; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Lubbers and Coenders, 2017; van Elsas et al., 2016; Werts et al., 2013). Based on the notion of ethno-cultural group membership, a central claim of many nationalist parties is that citizenship, and all the accompanying rights, should be enjoyed mostly by individuals with a legitimate claim to being part of a national community (Caramani and Manucci, 2019; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Otjes and Louwerse, 2015); a claim that individuals can base on their ancestry, language, race, religion, or birthplace (Brubaker, 1992; Wodak, 2016).

The recent rise of populism clearly reflects the growing opposition among mass publics to European integration based on their national identity. Populism has been described as an "appeal to the people against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of society. This [...] feature [...] dictates populism's [...] style and mood" (Canovan, 1999: 3). The juxtaposition of "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite" demands that policies should be an "expression of the [...] general will of the people" (Mudde, 2004: 543). As part of this anti-establishment message, populists generally define "the people" as a unified and homogenous group. While populism so defined can emerge at the right, center, and left end of the ideological spectrum, right-extreme populist parties often embed their populist appeal with very conservative stances about migration, gender equality, and personal lifestyles which, when combined with a direct appeal to the people, provides an electorally potent mix (Akkerman et al., 2017; van Hauwaert and van Kessel, 2018). For example, populist parties on the right often bemoan the vanishing influence of a previously dominant ethnic majority, usually the white native population (Caramani and Manucci, 2019; Wodak, 2016), especially in Central Eastern Europe (Enyedi and Whitefield, 2020).¹ Of course, not all populist parties on the right are equally extreme on all cultural issues.

Some position themselves as defenders of liberal democratic values as when they criticize illiberal gender norms of Islam (Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007; Sniderman and Haagendoorn, 2007).

On balance, however, populist parties on the right not only appeal to voters based on nationalism but they further complicate European integration by splitting mainstream parties, who often support integration, from their supporters. Proponents of integration thus face a dual obstacle in populism because (1) it often contains a strong nationalist dose; and (2) it characterizes pro-integration elites as “dishonest” and “incompetent” (de Vries and Hobolt, 2020: 145), thus introducing a rupture between pro-EU, mainstream elites and their constituents.

However, despite the forbidding portrait of national identity as a barrier to European integration, scholars have noted that some forms of national identifications may be compatible with accepting some levels of European integration. For example, a civic-based conceptualization of nationhood defines “group membership as a function of accepting certain political values and institutions” (Lindstam et al., 2021). This form of “constitutional patriotism” focuses on the “norms, the values and, more indirectly, the procedures of a liberal democratic constitution” (Müller, 2016: 1). People, in other words, are proud of the democratic achievements of a nation state; achievements that motivate their national identity rather than the ethnic traits that a native population presumably shares. This form of national identity not only exists as an abstract concept but emerges in analyses of the beliefs of publics in advanced democracies (Ariely, 2011; Bonikowski and DiMaggio, 2016; Kunovich, 2009). Given the logic of a civic conceptualization of nationhood, it may be more compatible with European integration than the ethno-cultural one which makes it much harder to tolerate open borders and to admit people from other EU countries to the national community (Aichholzer et al., 2021). In short, while national identity clearly presents an obstacle to Europe’s integration, especially the ethno-cultural version, it does not seem to be insurmountable if the EU manages to appeal to the preferences of “constitutional patriots”.

Why has national identity endured?

Nationalism and populism now feature prominently in explanations for the skepticism of many citizens. However, prior research especially before the turn of the millennium suggests that an individual’s economic position and the macro-economic context best explains the level of public support for the EU (Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007). The move away from relying mainly on economic explanations was no doubt prompted by the growing relevance of the political dimension of European integration. As Steenbergen et al. (2007: 15) wrote more than a decade before the economic crisis unfolded in 2008, “[t]he EU of the 1990s and of today is more relevant to the lives and interests of European citizens, as it increasingly affects their individual welfare and involves policies (notably the common currency, citizenship, immigration, the common

defense and foreign policy) that are both highly salient and highly controversial". Accordingly, scholars have observed that national identity increasingly stimulates opposition to the EU, and now often rivals or even exceeds that of economic factors (Carey, 2002; Christin and Trechsel, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Llamazares and Gramacho, 2007; McLaren, 2002; Polyakova and Fligstein, 2015).

Why has national identity remained so resilient? The research literature offers several possible explanations for when national identity becomes relevant but also when it recedes. These range from the influence of political elites and the media coverage of events (Bruter, 2009; de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006; de Vries, 2018; Marks et al., 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2016, 2019) and individuals' conceptions of civic and cultural identities (Bonikowski et al., 2019; McLaren, 2002). Analyses also point to the mobilizing influence of economic threats on identity (Fligstein et al., 2012; Foster and Frieden, 2017; Garry and Tilley, 2009) along with the galvanizing consequences of contemporary issues like the migration in 2015 (Downes and Loveless, 2018; Lindstam et al., 2021). From these perspectives, the ebb and flow of national identity results from issue dynamics that in the pre-Maastricht era favored economic themes but in the post-Maastricht years increasingly helped populist parties to frame European integration in ways that resonate with the national identities of European publics.

But these explanations, instructive as they are, only push the question back one further step: what explains the endurance of national identity on individuals' perception of the EU during times when issues appealing to identities are *not* salient? Why, in other words, does national identity come to the fore at times and retreat at others while never disappearing entirely as a potential force shaping attitudes about European integration? Here we enter the domain of social psychology which argues that individuals develop a strong psychological and emotional affinity with the national community in which they reside (Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010). Such collective identities are typically founded upon socially constructed rituals and symbols that allow members of a community to identify with one another (Eisenstadt and Gei-Sen, 1995). The same mechanism also helps to demarcate in-groups from out-groups – in the EU, other national communities (Brewer, 2001; Curtis, 2014). Yet, while the boundaries between groups provide a latent basis of political conflicts, by themselves, they often remain dormant (Brewer, 2001). However, when actual conflicts arise, as occurred during the 2008 and 2015 economic and migration crises, then group membership can turn into a powerful motivator for conflict, particularly when individuals perceive out-groups as competing for essential resources (Fowler and Kam, 2007; Monroe et al., 2000). In Europe, such conflict may come into sharp relief when nationalist and populist parties portray the EU as privileging the interests of out-groups (that is, other countries). From this perspective, national identity never disappears entirely even if economic factors seemingly dominate the formation of attitudes about the EU for certain time periods.

Recent evidence offers growing support for the claim that nationalism and EU attitudes connect in more subtle ways than is commonly acknowledged. Take for

example a puzzle that emerges in the research on whether national identity and EU evaluations remain connected. On one hand, support for the EU has clearly declined over the last two decades (Anderson and Hecht, 2018; Cramme and Hobolt, 2015; Hooghe and Marks, 2009) which would be consistent with the expectation that national identities dampen individuals' support for the EU (Fligstein et al., 2012). On the other hand, levels of nationalism have remained fairly constant over the last decade (Foster and Frieden, 2017). One must wonder then to what extent nationalism influences EU support if levels of nationalism remain constant over time. Clark and Rohrschneider (2019) reconcile these contrasting findings by demonstrating that, even while levels of nationalism remain steady over time, nationalist sentiments become increasingly connected to evaluations of the EU. The growing strength of the relationship, in turn, can be explained by the rising salience of individuals' identification with nation states when they evaluate the EU. All told, we interpret prior research to suggest that national identities are firmly anchored in individuals' psychological make-up and these considerations therefore never disappear entirely even when economic factors (or other conditions) significantly shape, perhaps even dominate over periods, the formation of EU attitudes.

Evidence for the endurance of national identities

To illustrate the empirical relevance of national attachments over time, Figure 1 documents the continuing importance of national identities to mass publics between 1991 and 2019 (the latest available time point). We use a dataset (constructed by the authors) that merges individual Eurobarometer surveys from this period: the Eurobarometer Representation Dataset (ERD), 1987-2019. The ERD combines nearly 400 indicators of political attitudes about both the domestic and European political systems across countries and years into a single dataset file, including perceptions of representation, trust in various national and EU institutions, and evaluations of the EU and national regime's performance. Moreover, the ERD includes several demographic measures, such as age, education, income, occupation, and ideological orientations.

The measure in Figure 1 uses the net attachment that respondents have to their nation state and the EU. We subtracted individuals' attachment to the nation from their attachment to the EU. The combined score varies between a minimum of -4 denoting an exclusive attachment to the nation and 4 representing exclusive EU attachments. Thus, negative values mean that mass publics are, to varying degrees, attached to their nation; positive values indicate a public mainly identifies with the EU. A score of 0 would denote that individuals feel equal attachment to nations and the EU.

We observe three noteworthy patterns over time. First, since 1991, when the measures were included for the first time in our data set, we see that *every* public in *every* year identifies more strongly with the nation state than with the EU. The

resilience of national attachments highlights the enormous hurdles the EU faces to overcome nationally grounded attachments.

Second, over time, we see a strengthening in national identity especially during the economic and migration crises. This pattern indicates that policy problems attributed in part to the EU can significantly lower the attachments citizens feel to the EU (see also Dalton (2021) in this issue). Overall, when viewed across the entire period since 1991, national attachments seem not to have changed by much since the EU moved towards greater political integration in the early 1990s—if anything, they became fortified over time.

Third, we observe marked differences across EU member states. Mass publics in founding member nations come closest to balancing national and EU attachments; although, even here, no public is more attached to the EU than the nation in any year. Other countries that joined the EU more recently are, on average, even more attached to the nation state than the EU, especially publics residing in nations that joined the EU in the 1973 group (including Britain) and those in the Central and Eastern Europe nations that became members in 2004/7.

On balance, individuals' predominant identifications with the nation, combined with the way political issues played out in the real world, helps explain why these identities progressively shape judgements of the EU. For example, when German finance minister Schäuble scolded the profligacy of EU debtor countries during the economic crisis, he directed the attention of mass publics to cross-national economic rivalries which likely activated in-group and out-group competition (Brewer, 2010; Huddy, 2004). Furthermore, opposition to immigration and the refugee crisis also stimulate competition among countries based on group conflicts which served to weaken public support for the EU (Harteveld and van der Brug, 2021). Several articles in this issue will further explore how publics evaluate the EU in light of their predispositions, economic conditions, migration patterns, and political parties in order to understand the persistence of nationally grounded perceptions of the EU: what is the nature and relevance of national identity for mass support for the EU? Do all types of identity aspects matter equally? Do personality traits, which are largely stable, augment the way national identity shapes EU evaluations? How does identity affect mass perceptions of economic issues that often remain treated in isolation from identity considerations? While prior scholarship has broadly examined the relationship between identity and EU support, we are now at a point to explore more nuances in the individual and contextual conditions that affect the persistence of individuals' national identities.

National attachments among ideologically moderate citizens

There is one final point we would like to address. While prior research clearly shows the growing relevance of national identities over time, it usually focuses on mass publics as a whole. However, the collective pattern may mask dynamics that occur at specific locations of the ideological spectrum. Does national identity become more important mostly to individuals with right-extreme ideological

views where voters may become ever more mobilized against the EU based on national attachments? Or do individuals who hold ideologically moderate views on the moderate left, center, or moderate right *also* rely in growing numbers on national identity when judging the EU?

The latter scenario would have far-reaching consequences as ideologically moderate parties and their supporters in the past provided the bulk of support for Europe's integration, what has been called the permissive consensus (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). During the earlier decades of Europe's integration, the neo-liberal goals of the single market, together with the marginal efforts to regulate capitalism at the EU level, generated support from most mainstream elites (Hooghe, 2003; Marks et al., 2002; van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004). Only small, extremist parties on the political left and the right opposed EU membership in the pre-Maastricht era (van Elsas and van der Brug, 2016). As a result, ideologically moderate voters largely lined up in support of the EU project. But something has changed over the last two decades. Ideologically moderate individuals have grown more skeptical of the EU. For instance, Clark and Rohrschneider (2019) find that the strength of nationalist identity influences support for the EU as much for centrist Europeans in 2019 as it did for far-right Europeans in 1993. This suggests that the increasing importance of nationalist sentiments for EU evaluations is related to changes not just at the ideological extremes but also occurs in the political center. How exactly did the political center change?

One possibility is that the widely noted changes in demographic composition of European societies has contributed to the way that European integration is viewed among ideologically moderate voters (Grundy and Murphy, 2017). Importantly, nearly all European societies have aged slowly but steadily over the last few decades. We also know that older people are more likely than younger cohorts to identify with their nation state in part because of stronger affective ties to national regimes (Down and Wilson, 2017; Ringlerova, 2019). To the degree that older individuals continue to identify with the nation state, an aging population, all else being equal, should stimulate the importance of national identity and thus work *against* the rise of broader public support for the EU. Second, however, we also know that European populations become more educated over time. And higher education typically increases EU support in part because more educated people often reap the benefit of integration but also because they tend to hold more cosmopolitan values (Hakhverdian et al., 2013). One possibility is that these two trends may lead to a growing polarization over integration among ideological moderates, away from an ambivalence which in the past has often characterized much of public support for the EU (de Vries, 2013).

Let us illustrate these possibilities. To begin with, Figure 2 clarifies that the size of ideological groups has remained stable in countries that joined the EU in 1952. The ideological self-placement indicator asks individuals to indicate their ideological orientation on a 10-point scale where "1" represents the extreme left and "10" the extreme right. We recoded these responses to reflect five groups: far left (1, 2), moderate left (3, 4), center (5, 6), moderate right (7, 8) and far right (9, 10). The size

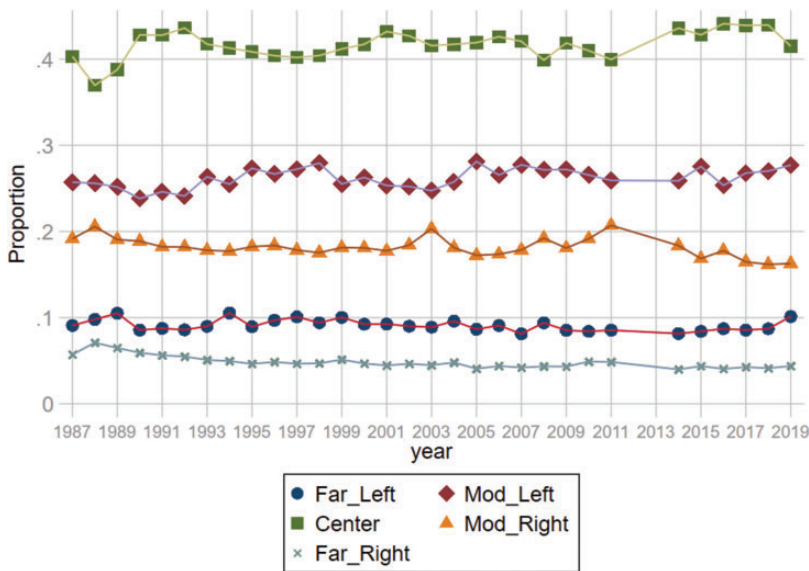


Figure 2. The size of five ideological groups among mass publics in 1952 member states.

Note: Entries are the proportions. Respondents were asked: “[i]n political matters people talk of ‘the left’ and ‘the right’. How would you place your views on this scale?” and shown a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (left) to 10 (right). Groups represent recodes into far left (1, 2), moderate left (3, 4), center (5, 6), moderate right (7, 8) and far right (9, 10).

of the extremes (both on the far left and the far right) is remarkably stable over time whereas the moderate right has declined slightly in size. In turn, the relative size of the moderate left and center remains largely stable as well. The patterns in countries that joined the EU in later years are comparable (see the Online appendix). The stability of these patterns is important because it suggests that the rising influence of national identity on EU evaluations for publics in the aggregate cannot be explained by significant shifts in the relative size of ideological groups. Rather, something else must have changed the orientations of ideologically moderate citizens (that is, moderate left, center, and moderate right individuals) to explain why nationalism has become more important to them.

Consider Figure 3 which depicts the ageing of the five ideological cohorts in the original EU member states (the 1952 member countries) over time. We calculated the average age of respondents within each ideological group at each survey year. Due to space limitations, we only present here the patterns for the 1952 cohort and include the other membership cohorts in the Online appendix. Note that we limit these estimates to all respondents aged 18 and older.

The figure clearly reflects the well-known ageing of Europe’s population. First, the average age among the far left and moderate left ideological groups is over 10 years higher by 2019 than it was in 1987. Note these changes do not represent

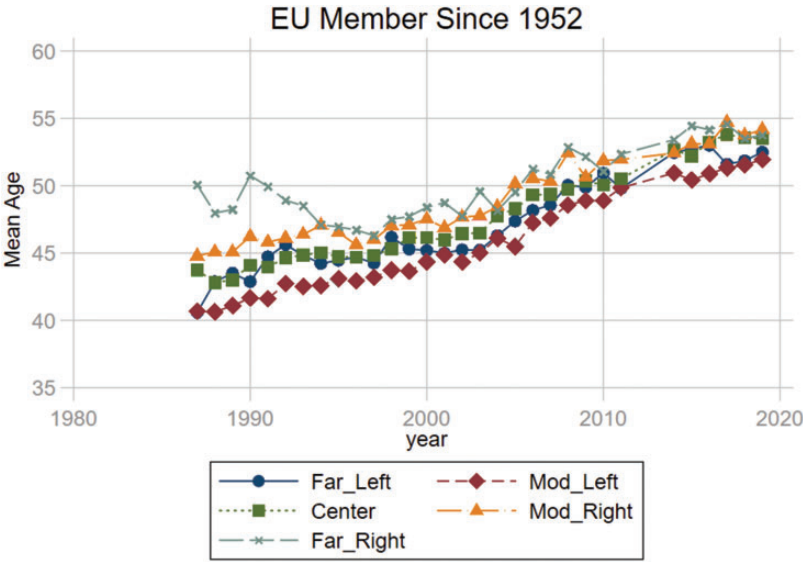


Figure 3. The aging of Europe’s population across ideological groups.
Note: Entries are the mean age of each ideological group at the time of the survey for respondents older than 17 years. Ideological groups are based on the previously described 10-point ideological self-placement question. Ideological groups represent recodes into far left (1, 2), moderate left (3, 4), center (5, 6), moderate right (7, 8) and far right (9, 10).

the aging of individuals within each cohort; they connote the average age of respondents within each ideological group at the time of the survey. We observe a similar change within the ideological center and the moderate right. The far-right has become, on average, 7-8 years older over time—less so than the other ideological groups. However, note that individuals with far-right ideological views were among the oldest to begin with in the late 1980s. Thus, as time moves forward, the average age of individuals in the ideological center and right looks more like the average age of far-right supporters in the late 1980s. The patterns in the other countries parallel those of the 1952 countries. In the 1973 countries (see the Online appendix), the extreme and moderate left groups started more on the younger side (in comparison with the left in the 1952 countries shown in Figure 3). The right and far-right have aged more such that the average cohort age now approximates 60 years. In the 1980/1986 countries, all ideological groupings are a bit younger in 2019 (with an average age between 50 and 55) compared to the average age of ideological groupings in the 1952 countries.

The most notable difference lies with Central and Eastern European member states, in which the far-left and moderate left are consistently much older than the other ideological groups; a pattern that clearly reflects the post-communist context where left voters socialized under the communist regime continue to be the primary

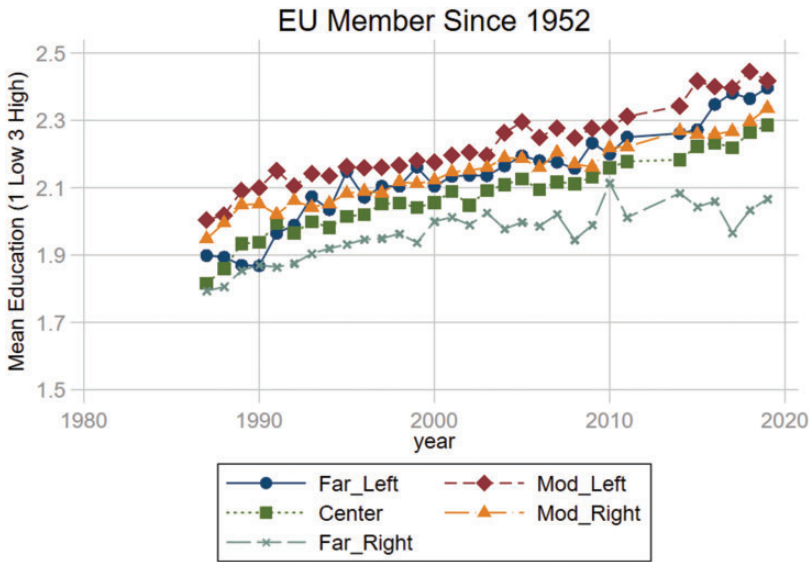


Figure 4. The growing educational achievement mass publics, by ideological cohort.

Note: Entries are the mean educational attainment of each ideological group at the time of the survey for respondents older than 17 years. The education variable is based on the age when a respondent left school. Those still studying were recoded to their age at the time of the survey. This variable was then recoded to low education (1 = left school by the age of 15), medium education (2 = left school between 16 and 19); and high education (3 = left school at age 20 and older). Ideological groups are based on the 10-point ideological self-placement question. Ideological groups represent recodes into far left (1, 2), moderate left (3, 4), center (5, 6), moderate right (7, 8) and far right (9, 10).

source of left ideological views. Despite these cross-regional nuances, however, we note that the ideological center has aged substantially everywhere. Meanwhile, additional analyses show that the overall relationship between national identity and age has if anything become stronger over time, indicating that older cohorts are somewhat more likely to identify with nations than younger citizens.² On balance, the aging of the population and the age-related causes of EU support may leave ideological moderates more susceptible to anti-EU appeals than used to be the case.

Can the rising educational profile of European countries potentially countervail the possibly negative impact of the aging population on support for integration? Perhaps. The education levels of all ideological groupings similarly increased across all membership cohorts over this same period (Figure 4). To illustrate this, we recoded the number of school years attended into three categories: those who were older than 20 when they stopped attending school; those who finished school when they were between 16 and 19; and those who were younger than 15 when they left school. Respondents still studying were coded into their age at the time of the survey.

In 1988, just under 17% of ideologically moderate individuals had attended school through at least the age of 20. That number increased gradually over time such that over 36% among ideological moderates had been in school for that long by 2019. Individuals who stopped their education between the ages of 16 and 19 make up roughly 42% outside the extremes in the late 1980s and roughly 48% in 2019. And respondents with the lowest educational achievements—those who stopped attending school before the age of 15—made up around 30% within the ideologically moderate group in the late 1980s and had declined to around 15% by 2019. Thus, ideologically moderate individuals are both considerably older *and* more educated, on average, than they were 30 years ago. (The Online appendix displays similar education patterns for countries that joined the EU later.)

These demographic dynamics reflect broader societal trends of an ageing, better-educated population. We found previously that ideologically moderate individuals are more likely to be influenced by nationalist sentiments when evaluating the EU today than they were 30 years ago (Clark and Rohrschneider, 2019). That change may well be informed by the shift to an older demographic for whom rhetoric about traditional ways of life within the national community have greater appeal nowadays than they used to. In contrast, those who are better educated are more likely to identify with and support the EU. As a consequence, the demographic changes may entail that the lines of differences outside the ideological extremes are more clearly demarcated between those who identify with the nation state and thus remain skeptical of the EU and those who identify increasingly with the EU and thus are more supportive of it. In turn, these partially countervailing trends mean that there is likely greater polarization within ideological moderates over integration which makes both camps more susceptible to appeals either from elites who clearly support the EU (e.g. mainstream elites) and those who undoubtedly oppose it (nationalist parties).

Developing a better understanding of national identity and EU support: The contributions of this Special Issue

Against these developments, the contributions to this Special Issue offer explanations that may shed light on why national identity is to be taken seriously as an obstacle in achieving an integrated European polity.

Curtis and Miller (2021) examine the psychological foundations of adopting a more cosmopolitan identity and thereby supporting the EU. They consider the extent to which certain personality traits might lead an individual to identify with the EU as opposed to identifying as exclusively nationalist. The results of their analyses suggest that a strong sense of duty promotes a stronger allegiance to the national community, but that no singular trait or combination of traits fosters a supranational identity. Thus, certain personality types make it more difficult to add EU attachments on top of their national identity. In addition, the findings also suggest that certain personalities may condition individuals' openness to

nationalist appeals that help trigger responses against the EU. This article also indicates how the shifting socio-demographic profile of the political center may have led to the increasing salience of nationalism for EU evaluations: if personality traits correspond with particular socio-demographic backgrounds (such as older voters being more likely to exhibit the consciousness personality trait), then an ageing political center may have become more receptive to nationalist appeals. Overall, this contribution demonstrates the value of considering psychological explanations together with other individual and contextual explanations for the persistent influence of nationalism.

Whereas most of the context-driven efforts focus on the economic environment, Hartevelde and van der Brug (2021) consider whether the number of asylum-seekers entering a country shape attitudes toward immigration and strengthen the exclusiveness of national identity with an expectation that the effect will vary across countries and ideological preferences. They find evidence that an increasing number of asylum applications hardens attitudes and national attachments across the ideological spectrum in Central and Eastern Europe and for right-leaning individuals in Western Europe. In addition to identifying another aspect of the broader context that shapes identity, this work suggests that political centrists in the West are less likely to be influenced by temporary increases in the number of asylum-seekers; implying that increasing nationalism amongst that ideological cohort in Western Europe may be due more to the rhetoric of nationalist elites than an accurate perception of migration rates. The center, however, does not appear to moderate such impulses in Central and Eastern Europe.

Rooduijn et al. (2021) consider more fully the relationship between populism and nationalism, analyzing the extent to which the former feeds into the latter. They theorize that the type of in-group/out-group thinking that characterizes populism (the public against the establishment) breeds additional group conflicts such as those connected with national identity. Their findings further expand our understanding of the influence of the political context on the development of national identity; in this case, the world view embedded in populism may cross-fertilize the types of group identification needed to activate national identities. While this article does not speak as directly to the plight of the political center, the implication of the finding is that a potent combination of populism and nationalism may exert more influence across the ideological board, including on ideological moderate individuals.

Most of the research on EU attitudes looks at the economic or the identity-based determinants of EU support. Foster and Frieden (2021) build on this work by investigating the extent to which economic conditions shape an individual's national identity. Of note, "professionals and the highly educated are less likely to identify exclusively with their nation state, while the unemployed and less educated more are likely". The key take-away is not that the center is comprised of a larger number of right-wing nationalists (which is not the case as Figure 2 illustrates for 1952 member countries), but rather that identity has greater importance

to those in the center and thus increasingly base their evaluations of the EU on their national attachments.

Taking these four articles together, one starts to develop a more comprehensive sense of how and why national identity may be activated in different ways across countries and ideology groups. If a preponderance of a particular personality type and/or socio-economic profile is exposed to a crisis event (such as the migrant crisis) in a political environment in which group conflict has already been activated, then one might imagine a much higher likelihood that individuals will reinforce or develop exclusive (or primarily) national identities. Thus, what all these analyses convey is a sense that the current circumstances could hardly be more difficult for the rise of predominant EU identities.

The final two contributions develop a more nuanced understanding of the various ways in which national identity influences EU support and shapes political behavior within Europe. Aichholzer et al. (2021) find that individuals with an ethnic or cultural-based conception of national identity are more likely to oppose the EU while those with a civic-based conception of national identity are more likely to favor the EU. This article suggests that national identity should not simply be viewed as antithetical to the EU and that we can better anticipate the likely effect on EU support by understanding the foundations of identity, especially in Western Europe where civic identities emerge with greater frequency than in Central Eastern Europe. When and where a cultural or ethnic-based conceptualization of identity emerges, nationalist and populist ideologies are more likely to promote a form of national identity that undermines EU support.

Finally, Jackson and Jolly (2021) offer an analysis of nationalism as a foundation for a new dimension of political competition across the EU member states. This dimension focuses on issues related to European integration, national sovereignty, and immigration and lies orthogonal to the long-standing left-right dimension. The relative importance of this dimension varies across countries but is better able to predict vote choices than the left-right dimension in some countries. This contribution offers a sense of how issues related to national identity increasingly structure mainstream political competition in Europe. Of note, this examination suggests that identity-related issues may have now assumed greater importance than the range of cultural issues that comprised the GAL-TAN (Green-Alternative-Libertarian and Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist) dimension originally identified by Marks et al. (2006). This article affirms the increasing salience of national identity as an issue that structures competition within entire party systems and not simply amongst fringe or niche parties.

Highlighting the central lessons from the Special Issue

This Special Issue examines several implications of national identity for European integration. The contributions not only identify several mechanisms that affect the importance of national identity, but also indicate that nationalism, populism, and

national identity will likely remain a potent force in European politics in the foreseeable future.

From a methodological perspective, we note that most articles in the Special Issue (and in the research literature) often use data that are quite limited in the way we study the legitimacy of the EU. For example, the contributions in this Special Issue demonstrate that personality matters, that conceptions of citizenship relate differentially to EU support, and that issues like migration and the economy shape support. But do these factors *always* shape EU evaluations similarly or does their relevance vary over time? How do they fare over time relative to other predictors of system support? No doubt one of the biggest obstacles to our accumulation of knowledge about the EU's legitimacy is the lack of systematic, longitudinal data where individuals are monitored based on identical indicators measuring various aspects of EU support. In the absence of this information, we must rely on imperfect longitudinal data—imperfect because of the restricted topics that feature in comparative survey projects where EU attitudes are usually measured by only a few indicators or, in case of the European parliamentary election studies, because the five year cycles are simply too long.

Contemporary issues, too, add a sense of urgency to develop a longitudinal data base. For example, while one hopes that the COVID-19 pandemic will turn into a manageable disease in the foreseeable future, it likely will not be the last one. And there is no telling whether the next one will be less or more harmful to humans than COVID-19. Does national identity stand in the way to coordinate Europe-wide measures to fight another pandemic that knows no national borders? Will the performance of the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic motivate citizens to abandon the EU and rely on their nation states to deal with transnational policy problems? We do not know the answers to these questions because we do not have systematic knowledge about the EU's legitimacy in the first place. The same questions arise in the context of other issues, like environmental protection, where the Commission has proposed an ambitious program, or migration patterns. We have accumulated a good deal of social science knowledge that points to all sorts of fragilities in the EU's support base, but we require more consistent and nuanced measures of that support over time.

From a theoretical perspective, this Special Issue addresses the potential sustainability of current nationalist movements. One of the larger unanswered questions is whether the last decade represents a deviation for advanced industrial democracies or whether populist and nationalist movements will continue to exert stronger influence on the political landscape. Such movements have long been a part of many democracies, but their influence on public opinion and vote choices has increased over the last decade. The contributions in this issue would collectively indicate that these movements will continue to flourish in the years ahead. While the salience of national identity may have been strengthened by singular events such as the migrant crisis (Harteveld and van der Brug, 2021) or recent trends such as rising populism (Rooduijn et al., 2021), the importance of identity appears to be due as much or perhaps even more to enduring factors, such

as personality (Curtis and Miller, 2021), economic preferences (Foster and Frieden, 2021), the foundations of identity (Aichholzer et al., 2021), and long-term changes to the demographic composition of the political center. Consequently, the structure of party competition in many European countries is increasingly influenced by a nationalist dimension that incorporates issue positions of high importance to populist and nationalist parties which, in turn, reinforces the importance of these issues among European publics. We thus expect that these issues will remain as important for national and European politics over the next decade as they have been in the prior one.

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ORCID iD

Robert Rohrschneider  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2485-9648>

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. On the left it usually focuses on social class (Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2017; Schedler, 1996; van Elsas et al., 2016).
2. We estimated a simple regression model with individuals' net identity as the dependent variable, and an interaction terms between year and respondents' age as a predictor. The goal is not to conduct a systematic cohort study but to illustrate that the bivariate link has changed little over time. For example, for publics who joined the EU in 1952, the coefficients for age in 1993 and 2019 are virtually identical ($b = -.005$ in 1992; $t = 7.04$; $b = -.004$ in 2019; $t = 4.73$ in 2019). Cohorts in other countries show if anything a modest strengthening of the link between age and identity (for the 1973, 1981/6, and 2004 cohort). Only for the 1995 group of countries did the relationship weaken somewhat.

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