

Regional Europeans

The Relationship between Social Identities and EU Support in Austria

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¹Politics in European countries is multi-level politics. Some decisions are made at the regional level, others at the national level and more and more policies have started to be negotiated at the European level. Whether each layer of the political system is rooted in the heart of its citizens has been subject to scholarly attention. A corresponding social identity is said to be an important prerequisite of public support for a given political level. When it comes to public support for the European Union, scholars have examined the potentially intervening effect of a strong national identity (Carey 2002; Hooghe/Marks 2005, 2004; Kuhn/Stoeckel 2014). These studies revealed that as long as feelings of attachment are not exclusive, a strong national identity does not necessarily preclude positive attitudes towards the European Union. Identity studies that stress the fact that identities are mutually inclusive further corroborated this finding (Marks 1997, 1999; Haesly 2001; Citrin/Sides 2004; Díez Medrano/Gutiérrez 2001).

Quite interestingly, however, these studies have largely neglected the relationship between a *regional* and a European identity (but see Chacha 2012). We know considerably less about people's attachment towards their region and its effect on their feelings towards the European Union. This comes as a surprise, since a regional identity is often equally as strong as a national identity and in some countries even exceeds national attachment (European Commission 2019). Furthermore, the European Union acknowledges the relevance of the regional level in its treaties and political structure. In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty anchored the principle of subsidiarity and established the European Committee of the Regions in the EU's institutional framework.

1 This research has been conducted under the auspices of the Austrian Democracy Lab (ADL, Danube University Krems and University of Graz). The ADL is part of the larger cluster democracy.research, a cooperation with Forum Morgen. Please visit www.austriandemocracylab.at for more information.

Thus, the present paper aims to shed light on the relationship between a regional and a European identity and its effect on public opinion towards the EU. To be more specific, my research question asks how a European identity that is coupled with a regional identity affects EU support.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: In the next section, I will elaborate on the theoretical framework. Based on the relevant literature, I expect to see that a European identity has a positive effect on EU support and that a coupled regional/European identity has an equally positive effect on EU support. Following the theoretical section, I present my case selection and data. The analyses will be based on the Austrian data of the European Values Study 2018 (Glavanovits et al. 2019; Kritzingner et al. 2019). The fourth section is devoted to the empirical analyses. The results show that a European identity favours EU support and that an additional regional identity does not hinder a positive attitude towards the EU. In the concluding section, I review this result against the background of current identity literature and its relevance to the ongoing debate about the future of the European Union.

Social Identities and Support for the European Union

Since the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and throughout the history of the European Union, scholarly interest in the factors underpinning public support for this unique political institution has been very high. While earlier studies focused on utilitarian explanations (Eichenberg/Dalton 1993; Gabel/Palmer 1995; Lubbers/Scheepers 2010; Hakhverdian et al. 2013; Vasilopoulou/Talving 2018), more recent studies have considered the connections between European and national social identities and attitudes towards European integration (Carey/Lebo 2001; Carey 2002; Kuhn/Stoeckel 2014). This development of the scholarly debate mirrors the development of the European Union. Since economic effects prevailed at first, scholars tested whether people with a higher socio-economic status who are able to profit from the unification process are supportive of European integration. At least since the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, the EU represents more than a single market. Scholars then began to include the concept of social identity and the effect of national and European identities in their models. Most commonly, these items were measured as self-reported perceptions of nationality, feelings of pride with respect to one's own country or feelings of attachment to different territorial levels. Both theories proved to be fruitful and helped to paint a better picture of public support towards the European Union (Hooghe/Marks 2004).

If we look at the studies explaining EU support based on European and national identities, there are two lessons that can be learned. First, European identity is a

strong predictor of EU support and second, social identities are mutually inclusive. I start by elaborating on the first claim, which will lead me to my first hypothesis.

The identity approach began with an investigation of national identity on EU support. The underlying rationale was that people grew up as nationals or, at least in a context of a strong nation state. The European Union, due to an ongoing integration process, especially since the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, was only present for most people at a later point in time. In order to understand public opinion towards the European Union, scholars saw it as important to understand the linkage between these established national identities and the unification process. It is interesting to note that the relevant studies focussed on a national identity that excluded an additional European one. The scholars reported that feelings of exclusive nationalism reduced support for the European Union (Carey 2002; Hooghe/Marks 2004, 2005; Luedtke 2005; but see Christin/Trechsel 2002). For example, Carey (2002, also see Carey/Lebo 2001) who was the first to promote the identity approach, measured national identity as a binary variable that distinguished between those who feel only as a member of their nation and all others. He even multiplied this survey item by the level of national pride. It does not come as a surprise that these strong and proud nationalists are less supportive of the European integration process.

However, whether someone supports the European Union should depend not only on national but also on *European* identity, i.e. whether someone feels an attachment towards Europe. Some studies did in fact already measure European identity, but the wording of the theoretical claims remained exclusively concerned with the national level. For example, although Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014) were interested in the effect of an exclusive national identity on EU support, they operationalised their independent variable based on a survey item on EU citizenship. Those who reported feeling 'not really' and 'definitely not' European citizens were classified as exclusive nationalists. The results then showed that these exclusive nationalists were less likely to support EU economic governance. If we stick to the original survey item, then it is equally plausible to conclude that people who do not identify with Europe are less likely to be in favour of the European Union.

Studies that measured citizens' identification with Europe and linked it to support for the European Union unanimously highlight the positive effect of identification on public opinion towards the EU. Carey (2002), for instance, ran a second model in addition to the one mentioned above and included an item on attachment to Europe. This coefficient remained positive and significant even when controlling for attachment towards other layers of the political system. The study by Hobolt (2014) presents another convincing and more recent example. She linked attachment towards Europe to public support for a deeper and wider European Union in the future. Again, attachment to Europe explained positive attitudes towards both versions of further integration.

In line with this literature on European identity and EU support, I claim that a strong European feeling should explain positive attitudes towards the European Union. Hence, the first hypothesis reads as follows:

H1. People with a European identity are more likely to support the European Union compared to people without a European identity.

The second lesson on social identities directly links to the previous discussion on national and European identities. The presence of a European identity should not only be relevant to understanding support for the EU, it is also plausible to *expect* a European identity regardless of the existence of strong national identities. To date we have ample empirical evidence that social identities are mutually inclusive. For example, Marks (1997: 35) refers to ‘nested identities’, where ‘multiple, coexisting identities with local, regional and supranational territorial communities [exist], alongside an identity with the nation’. He supported his claim a few years later with bivariate analyses that showed a positive relationship between national and EU attachment. Similarly, using factor analysis, Haesly (2001) showed that while British EU supporters would claim that their national identity is stronger than their European identity, they nonetheless have a supranational identity, and both of these feelings coexist within these people (in contrast to Eurosceptics who reject having an EU identity). Regardless of the analytical approach and the countries under scrutiny, the empirical studies on social identities conclude unanimously that identity is a mutually inclusive concept (also see Citrin/Sides 2004; Díez Medrano/Gutiérrez 2001; Risse 2010).

While the combination of different identities and the effect of a combined European and national identity on EU support are well established, much less is known about the combination of European and regional feelings on the one hand, and positive attitudes towards the European Union, on the other. A study by Chacha (2012: 222), however, reports that “[s]upport for European integration [...] also hinges on the level of inclusive regional attachment among EU citizens.”

Based on our knowledge of the effect of European and national identities on EU support and Chacha’s (2012) research, I distinguish between regional Europeans and Europeans. While the first group of people holds both a regional and a European identity, the second group are exclusively attached to Europe. If social identities are inclusive, and a European identity explains support of the EU integration process, then positive EU attitudes should equally prevail in both groups.

H2. People with a European identity AND a regional identity (regional Europeans) are equally likely to support the European Union as people with only a European identity.

The following section presents the data used to test the hypotheses.

Data: The European Values Study

In order to answer the research question and the hypotheses derived from it, I will rely on the European Values Study (EVS). The EVS is a cross-national survey of human values in areas such as family, politics and society. Since 1981, the EVS has conducted five waves of surveys in between 16 and 47 European countries/regions each time. In the present chapter, I examine the relationship between regional/European identity and EU support based on the Austrian data from the most recent EVS, which was carried out in 2018 (Glavanovits et al. 2019; Kritzinger et al. 2019).² The population consisted of people aged 18 or older who had their primary private residence in Austria. All interviews were face-to-face and conducted in spring 2018.

The survey provides adequate questions for both my dependent and independent variables. Recall that the dependent variable should reflect people's support for the European Union. I use the following EVS question to operationalise EU support:

Q38. Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all? – The European Union

A simple tabulation provides an overview of the descriptive results of the EVS Austria with respect to this question. The Austrian figures show that 7 percent have a lot of confidence in the European Union and 34 percent have quite a lot of confidence. The remaining have not very much (38 percent) and no confidence at all (19 percent) in the European Union (and 2 percent did not answer). These results are comparable to other data sources such as the Eurobarometer study (with the proviso that the questions are similar, but not identical). In the most recent Eurobarometer wave, Austrians were surveyed about their image of the European Union. Based on a five-point scale, 8 percent reported a 'very positive', 32 percent a 'fairly positive', 37 percent a 'neutral', 18 percent a 'fairly negative' and 4 percent a 'very negative' image (European Commission 2019).

In the multivariate models, I differentiate between people who have a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence in the EU and all other respondents. This binary construction of the variable helps to identify EU supporters and is a commonly used approach in the literature (e.g. Hakhverdian et al. 2013; Vasilopoulou/Talving 2018).

2 This sample includes all the respondents from the EVS study in Austria plus an additional sample on people with a migration background. In my multivariate analyses, I use the recommended data weights to guarantee representativeness.

My main independent variables are European and regional identities. I operationalise these variables based on the question on attachment towards the different geographical levels. Hence, in the following I will use the term identity and attachment interchangeably. The corresponding survey item taken from the EVS reads:

Q45. People have different views about themselves and how they relate to the world. Using this card, would you tell me how close do you feel to...?

... your region [v164]

... Europe [v167]

In answering this question, people could choose between 'very close', 'close', 'not very close' and 'not close at all'. Again, descriptive statistics provide a first impression of the survey results (see Table 1). When the Austrian participants were asked about their feelings of attachment towards Europe, 20 percent reported that they are 'very close' and 46 percent that they are 'close'. 'Not very' or 'not at all close' were the responses of 27 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

Unsurprisingly, Austrians hold higher levels of attachment towards their region than towards Europe. Almost all respondents feel 'very' (45 percent) or 'fairly' (43 percent) close to the regional level. Only a minority reported that they are 'not very close' (10 percent) or 'not close at all' (1 percent).

Table 1: Attachment towards different geographical levels (row, percent)

	Very close	Close	Not very close	Not close at all	Don't know	Did not answer
Europe	20	46	27	6	1	0
Nation state	46	46	6	1	0	0
Region	45	43	10	1	0	0
City/Town	47	41	11	1	0	0

Notes: Figures do not add up to 100 due to rounding. Source : European Values Study 2018 – Austria (Glavanovits et al. 2019; Kritzingner et al. 2019).

In order to compare these figures, Table 1 additionally includes the corresponding answers to both the national and the local level. We see that these results are quite similar to people's attachment to their region and well above those of the European level.

Again, I collapsed the relevant variables and generated the binary variables *European identity* and *Regional identity*. These variables differentiate between attachment (i.e. 'very close' and 'close') and a lack of attachment to each level (i.e. 'not very close' and 'not close at all'). Next, in order to test H2, I generated the variable

Nested identities. This variable distinguishes people that are solely attached to the regional level from people without any attachment to either level, from people with European attachment only and from those who have both regional and European attachment. If a European identity (and hence attachment) is compatible with a regional identity then I would expect to see equal levels of EU support among Europeans and regional Europeans.

My models will control for both the utilitarian (e.g. Gabel/Palmer 1995) and the cue-taking explanations of EU support (e.g. Hooghe et al. 2002). In line with previous literature, I use education to take the line of argumentation within the utilitarian approach into account. The variable *Education* is incorporated as a categorical variable in the models. In line with the cue-taking approach, I include the respondents' political position measured by a *Left/right self-placement* on a scale that ranges from zero (extreme left) to ten (extreme right). Finally, all models control for *Age* and *Gender* as these two variables are commonly used control variables that showed relevant effects in the past. Younger people are generally found to be supportive of the European idea (Inglehart 1970, Lubbers/Scheepers 2010, Kuhn 2012, but see Defelm/Pampel 1996 and Carey 2002 who found no age effect). The same goes for male compared to female respondents (Inglehart 1970, Lubbers/Scheepers 2010, Defelm/Pampel 1996, Nelsen/Guth 2000, Carey 2002).

Explaining Support for the European Union in Austria

How does a European identity affect support for the European Union? How does a European identity that is supplemented by a regional identity change EU attitudes? In order to provide an answer to these questions, I will first present binary inspections of the variables and then multivariate models that test whether these relationships hold under control of other relevant factors. I begin by comparing support of the European Union among people who feel attached towards Europe and others. The difference is quite remarkable. Among those who have a European identity, 11 percent are strong supporters of the European Union and 40 percent are supporters (38 percent have some support and 11 percent have no support). If we look at the group without a European identity, we see that only 5 percent are strong supporters of the European Union and 26 percent are supporters (44 percent with some and 26 percent with no support). This is a difference of 20 percentage points in EU support between people with and without a European identity and hence in line with the expectation of H1. Table 2 inspects this relationship further and presents a bivariate tabulation of the newly generated variable *Nested identities* and EU support. Recall that the variable *Nested identities* reflects a combination of the two survey items on attachment towards Europe and the regional level. The first group of people stated that they feel only attached to their region, the second group re-

ported that they feel neither attached to Europe nor to their region, the third group showed attachment towards Europe and finally, the fourth group revealed both attachment to Europe and to the regional level. Again, we see that European identity is closely linked to EU support. It is interesting to note that EU support is rather similar among Europeans and regional Europeans. Both groups show high figures of EU support. Among Europeans, 13 percent and 44 percent have a lot or quite a lot of confidence in the European Union. Among regional Europeans, 10 percent and 40 percent have a lot or quite a lot of confidence in the European Union. This is in line with H2, and the multivariate models will show whether there is no significant difference in EU support among Europeans and regional Europeans.

Table 2: Nested Identities and EU support (row percent)

	A great deal of confidence in the EU	Quite a lot of confidence in the EU	Not very much confidence in the EU	No confidence at all in the EU
Regional attachment only	6	29	44	21
No attachment	2	12	40	46
EU attachment only	13	44	27	16
EU and regional attachment	10	40	39	11

Source : European Values Study 2018 – Austria (Glavanovits et al. 2019; Kritzinger et al. 2019).

These multivariate models are binary logistic regression models. Recall that the dependent variable differentiates between people who have confidence in the European Union and all other respondents; i.e. EU supporters vs. EU critics. Model I presents the multivariate test of H1. The first hypothesis expects that a European identity will be shown to be positively linked with support for the European Union. Model II presents the multivariate test of H2. The second hypothesis holds that regional Europeans, i.e. people that identify with both the EU and their region, are just as likely to support the European Union as Europeans, i.e. people that identify only with the EU.

Table 3: Binary logistic models: Explaining EU support in Austria

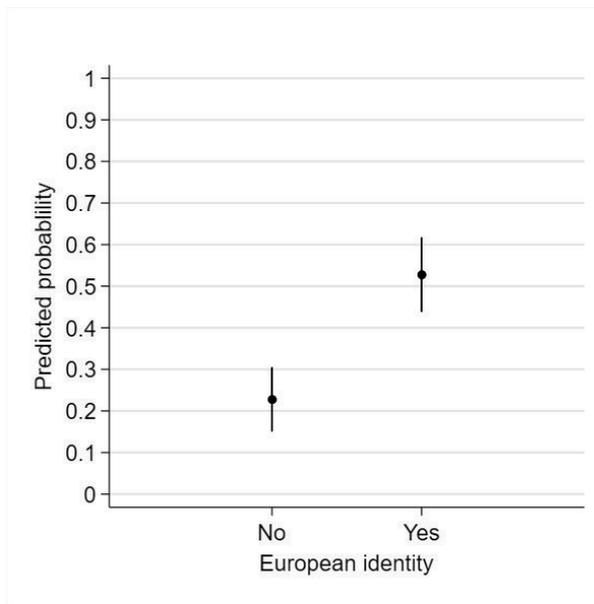
	Model I (H1)		Model II (H2)	
European identity	3.791 ^{***}	(7.54)		
Regional identity	1.150	(0.65)		
Nested Identities				
Regional identity only			0.267 ^{***}	(-3.92)
No identity			0.111 ^{***}	(-5.23)
European identity only			Reference category	
Regional and European identities			0.901	(-0.35)
Education				
Secondary education or Lower	Reference category		Reference category	
Apprenticeship or vocational middle school	0.783	(-1.15)	0.775	(-1.19)
Higher school certificate or advanced vocational training	1.119	(0.45)	1.102	(0.38)
University degree	1.712 [*]	(1.95)	1.682 [*]	(1.87)
Left/right self-placement	0.843 ^{***}	(-4.11)	0.843 ^{***}	(-4.02)
Age	0.992 [*]	(-1.72)	0.992 [*]	(-1.81)
Female	0.895	(-0.77)	0.881	(-0.88)
Pseudo R2	0.106		0.110	
N	1,685		1,683	

Note: Dependent variable: EU supporters (0/1); Exponentiated coefficients; t-statistics in parentheses; * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source : European Values Study 2018 – Austria (Glavanovits et al. 2019; Kritzinger et al. 2019).

The multivariate tests confirm hypothesis 1. There is a positive relationship between European identity and support for the European Union. The coefficient EU

identity in Model I is greater than one and highly significant. If people identify with the European Union, then they are more likely to support the EU as well. In order to interpret the magnitude of the effect, I predict the probabilities of EU support. If a person does identify with the European Union, then the probability that he or she supports the EU is 0.53. This figure drops to 0.23 if identification with the EU is absent. The predicted probabilities and their respective confidence intervals are plotted in Graph 1.

Figure 1.: Predicted Probabilities of EU support: European Identity

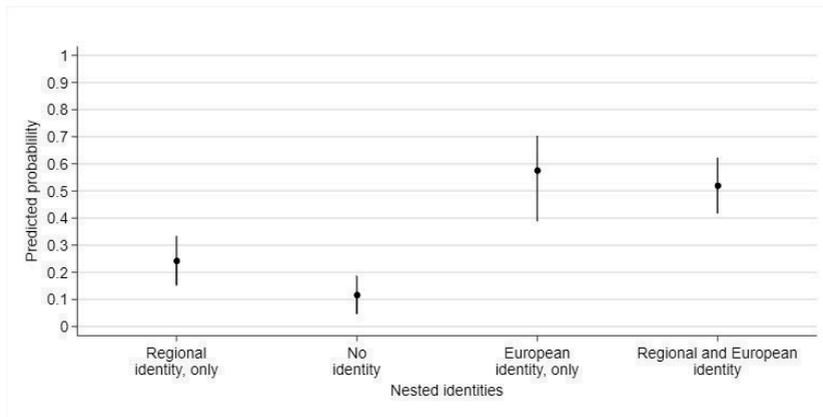


Note: Predictions are based on Model I in Table 3.

Furthermore, there is no significant difference between people with only a European identity and people with a European identity AND a regional identity. Both Europeans and regional Europeans are supporters of the European Union. This is in line with Hypothesis 2, which expected regional Europeans to be equally likely to support the European Union compared to people with only a European identity. In Model II, people with only a European attachment are taken as the reference category. Compared to this group, the coefficient Regional and European identities is not significant, and hence I conclude that there is no statistical difference between these groups. Note that both people who do not identify with either level or who are only attached to their region are less likely to support the European Union

compared to the reference category Europeans. These coefficients are significant and smaller than one. Again, I will look at expected probabilities of EU support to interpret the magnitude of the effects. Model II predicts Europeans to be supportive of the EU with a factor of 0.55 and regional Europeans by a factor of 0.52. In comparison to these two types, people with no attachment reach a predicted probability of EU support of 0.12 and people with an attachment only to their region of 0.24 (see Graph 2).

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of EU support: Nested Identities



Note: Predictions are based on Model II in Table 3.

In terms of the control variables, the models yield results that are in line with expectations and partly statistically significant. First, the significant coefficient Education re-confirms the explanatory power of the utilitarian approach (Gabel/Palmer 1995; as well as Lubbers/Scheepers 2010; Hakhverdian et al. 2013; Vasilopoulou/Talving 2018, for more recent studies). If people hold a university degree, then they are more favourable towards the European Union.

Second, the variable Left/right self-placement equally shows a relevant finding and corroborates the cue-taking approach. People that place themselves more towards the right of the political spectrum are more Eurosceptic compared to people that tend towards the left. In contrast to other recent studies (van Elsas/van der Brug 2015; König et al. 2017), there is no U-shaped relationship between ideological position and EU position. These authors have argued that both extremes of the political spectrum tend to oppose the EU integration process, albeit for different reasons. While left-wing parties fear a loss of their social security systems, right-wing actors are afraid of jeopardising their own national sovereignty (also see van Elsas et al. 2016; Lubbers/Scheepers 2010). This finding is not surprising for a coun-

try like Austria, in view of the country's party system. The most left-wing party, the Greens, is a pro-European party and its supporters share these positive attitudes towards the European Union. The most right-wing party, the Freedom Party of Austria, is the only Eurosceptic party in the spectrum and its supporters agree with its critical stance on integration. The lack of an extreme left wing party (at least in the national parliament) and hence the absence of Eurosceptic left-wing cues explains the linear relationship further. There is no evidence of support for European unification by the political right due to their support of free trade policies, as found in earlier studies such as Defelm and Pampel (1996).

With respect to Age, I find that younger people are more pro-European. This is in line with some previous studies (Inglehart 1970; Lubbers/Scheepers 2001; Kuhn 2012). However, others have reported no effect (Defelm/Pampel 1996; Carey 2002).

Finally, the coefficient Female shows no statistically significant results in either model. With respect to Female, I expected to see men as more favourable of the European Union than their female counterparts (Inglehart 1970; Lubbers/Scheepers 2010; Defelm/Pampel 1996; Nelsen/Guth 2000; Carey 2002). At least in the case of Austria 2018, the models do not support this conclusion.

Regional Europeans in Austria: Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the effect of identity on EU support among Austrian residents in 2018. My focus was to look at EU identity together with regional identity. Although the number of studies acknowledging the identity component in their explanations of public opinion towards the European Union has mushroomed in recent decades (Carey 2002; Hooghe/Marks 2005, 2004; Kuhn/Stoeckel 2014), they still largely overlooked the relevance of regional identity (but see Chacha 2012). While we know that people may feel themselves to be Europeans and nationals of their country at the same time, our knowledge of regional identities – i.e. whether strong ties at this level are equally inclusive – is still limited.

Based on the relevant literature, my hypotheses expected to see a positive relationship between an EU identity and a pro-European attitude as well as an equally positive attitude among Europeans and regional Europeans. While Europeans identify only with the European level, regional Europeans' hearts beat for both the EU and their region. The empirical analyses based on the Austrian data of the European Values Study 2018 corroborated the hypotheses. In addition, they showed that people with higher education are more pro-European (in line with the utilitarian approach, e.g. Gabel/Palmer 1995) and that a more right-wing political position favours Euroscepticism in Austria (in contrast to a U-shaped relationship in other countries, but still in line with the cue-taking approach, e.g. Hooghe et al. 2002).

These findings provide a positive outlook for future cooperation among the EU member states. Especially since regional attachment tends to be strong, the finding that a European and regional identity are inclusive is promising.

The present paper followed a classical approach to explain the role of identity on EU support. Already researchers like Hooghe and Marks (2004), however, have concluded that while the identity approach proves to be empirically powerful (maybe even more than the utilitarian approach) its theoretical underpinnings still fall short of the latter approach. Future research should tackle this issue in order to strengthen the theoretical reasoning behind the identity hypothesis as well as the operationalisation of the identity variables.

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