

The Bidirectional Relationship between European Identification & EU Support

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Introduction

Extensive research concurs that individuals' social identity is linked to their EU attitudes

In almost all work in this identity-based paradigm, European identity → EU support (Carey 2002; Herman and Brewer 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2005a, 2005b; McLaren 2007; Westle and Buchheim 2016)

The opposite relationship EU support → European identity may be possible, although it has been undertheorized and underanalyzed

RQ: Is there a bidirectional causal relationship between European identity and EU support? If so, is one direction of causality stronger than the opposite?

We use a panel survey on socio-political attitudes in Spain and cross-lagged models to answer these questions

The Identity Paradigm in EU support Research

Broad theoretical consensus that European identification & non-exclusive forms of national identification foster pro-EU attitudes (Bauer 2020)

Collective identification: Self-categorization + positive evaluations + affective attachment (Bergbauer 2018; Tafjel and Turner 1979)

Three variants:

- 'Prerequisite model': The EU political regime and policies are perceived as most legitimate when they reflect collective European identity (Fusch 2011; Habermas 2004; Hermann and Brewer 2004; Scharpf 1999)
- 'Threat model': Individuals with strong national attachment feel their nation-based resources and symbols threatened and thus adopt Eurosceptic positions (Carey 2002; McLaren 2007)
- 'Constructed model': Exclusive national identification only shapes EU attitude formation when it is activated by populist politicians (Hooghe and Marks 2008)

The Identity Paradigm in EU support Research

Extensive empirical research supports the model collective identity → EU support

- EU attachment is positively related to satisfaction with trust in EU (Clark and Rohrschneider 2019), considering EU membership good (Carey 2002; Wessless 2007; Citrin and Sides 2004) and supporting EU social programs (Eicheler 2026; Verhaegen 2018)
- Exclusive national attachment negatively related to considering EU membership good (Carey 2002; Citrin and Sides 2004) and general EU support (de Vries and van Kersbergen 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2005a, 2005b)

When Policy Attitudes Determine European identification

Few studies consider opposite model EU support → collective identity (e.g. Aiello 2019; Hooghe and Verhaegen 2017; Verhaegen et al. 2014)

These works and other ones provide mechanisms why EU support may also determine EU identification:

- Instrumental: Due to welfare-improving dispositions, individuals who perceive EU as beneficial are more likely to trust the EU and other EU institutions (Aiello 2019; Verhaegen et al. 2014)
- Self-esteem: People prefer to belong to groups that are positively evaluated (Hogg 2016). When individuals value EU-related institutions positively, they adopt a congruent collective identity to increase their self-esteem (Kleiner and Bückner 2017).
- Need for cognitive consistency: Individuals who become more pro-European (due to contextual or idiosyncratic reasons) increases the psychological appeal of the corresponding ingroup and European identification (Gawronski et al. 2008)

POLAT (Pannico et al. 2024)

- Design: Panel data
- Sample: 2K (Spanish population)
- Period: 2010-2020 (12 waves)
- Consistent collection of Identification variables*

Cross-lagged Dynamic Panel Models (Allison et al. 2017)

- Estimates within-individual effects net of:
 - 1 individual time-invariant characteristics
 - 2 the latent levels of the DV
- Replaces strict exogeneity with sequential exogeneity: allows past shocks in one variable to feed into the future values of the other.

Formal Model Specification (ID $\rightarrow$ Attitude)

$$\text{EUsupport}_{it} = \mu_t + \beta_1 \text{EUID}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \text{EUsupport}_{i,t-1} + \beta_3 W_{i,t-1} + \delta Z_i + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Component	What it estimates	Example
EUsupport_{it}	Dependent Variable at current wave	Current DV
μ_t	Intercept for each wave	Period effects
$\text{EUID}_{i,t-1}$	Lagged independent variable of interest	EUID (previous wave)
$\text{EUsupport}_{i,t-1}$	Predetermined feedback / Latent effect	Past DV into current views
$W_{i,t-1}$	Time-varying confounders	Shifts in income across waves
Z_i	Time-constant observed characteristics	Respondent's gender
α_i	Time-constant unobserved fixed effects	Stable personality traits
ε_{it}	Random time-varying disturbance	Personal shocks

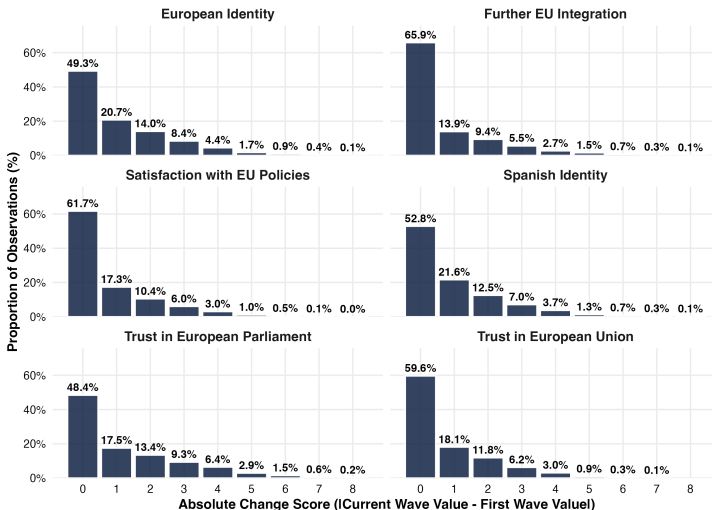
Formal Model Specification (Attitude $\rightarrow$ ID)

$$\text{EUID}_{it} = \mu_t + \beta_1 \text{EUsupport}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \text{EUID}_{i,t-1} + \beta_3 W_{i,t-1} + \delta Z_i + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_{it}$$

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Within-Individual Variability

Proportion of Absolute Within-Individual Change Since Wave 1



Reciprocal Effects

Table 3. Reciprocal Effects Between European Identity and EU Attitudes ($N = 2660$)

EU Attitude	ID → Attitude	SE	p-value	Model Fit	Attitude → ID	SE	p-value	Model Fit
Trust in EU	0.162***	0.038	<.001	CFI = 0.983 RMSEA = 0.019	0.163***	0.046	<.001	CFI = 0.995 RMSEA = 0.011
Support for Further Integration	0.067	0.038	.075	CFI = 1 RMSEA = 0	0.067	0.044	.131	CFI = 0.996 RMSEA = 0.01
Satisfaction with EU Policies	0.113**	0.036	.002	CFI = 0.98 RMSEA = 0.018	0.069**	0.043	.105	CFI = 0.995 RMSEA = 0.011
Trust in European Parliament	0.171***	0.028	<.001	CFI = 0.983 RMSEA = 0.011	0.158***	0.027	<.001	CFI = 0.975 RMSEA = 0.014

Note: All estimates come from fixed-effects dynamic panel models. "Identity → Attitude" refers to the effect of lagged European identity (*closeue*) on subsequent attitudes. "Attitude → Identity" refers to the reverse-lagged effect of attitudes on subsequent European identity. The models include specific controls for income, ideology, education, age, and gender.

Identity Difference Measure

- **The Moreno Logic:**

While the main variable measures supranational attachment in absolute terms, the difference score models identity as whether individuals "prioritize" Europe over the nation-state.

- **Controls for Acquiescence Bias:**

Subtracting national identity filters out baseline response biases (e.g., "neutral" or general institutional satisfaction). It ensures the effects are driven by specific European alignment rather than overall warmth.

- **Shifts the substantive interpretation:**

It tests whether positive EU support specifically trigger an increase from the national toward the supranational and vice versa.

EUID relative SPID (table)

Table 3.1 Reciprocal Effects Between European relative to National Identity and EU Attitudes (N = 2660)

EU Attitude	IDiff→ Attitude	SE	p-value	Model Fit	Attitude → IDiff	SE	p-value	Model Fit
Trust in EU	0.151**	0.055	.006	CFI = 0.989 RMSEA = 0.017	0.177***	0.056	.002	CFI = 0.997 RMSEA = 0.007
Support for Further Integration	0.023	0.055	.674	CFI = 1 RMSEA = 0	-0.022	0.054	.681	CFI = 0.992 RMSEA = 0.013
Satisfaction with EU Policies	0.098**	0.051	.056	CFI = 0.988 RMSEA = 0.015	0.103**	0.050	.038	CFI = 0.992 RMSEA = 0.013
Trust in European Parliament	0.137***	0.035	<.001	CFI = 0.99 RMSEA = 0.015	0.090***	0.030	.003	CFI = 0.985 RMSEA = 0.011

Note: All estimates come from fixed-effects dynamic panel models. "Identity (diff) → Attitude" refers to the effect of the change in European identity relative to Spanish identity on EU dispositions. "Attitude → Identity (diff)" refers to the reverse-lagged effect of attitudes on subsequent European identity relative to national identity. The models include specific controls for income, ideology, education, age, and gender.

Bidirectional relation between EUID and EU support within-individual: Sizable and highly significant reciprocal cross-lagged effects found. Plus, non-significant difference in the directionality of the effect.

- **Absolute & relative measures:**

- (i) Increases in EUID scale associate to increases in EU support and vice versa.
- (ii) Increases in EUID relative to national ID associate to increases in EU support and vice versa.

- **Generalizable pattern across Demographic Subgroups:** Both patterns of relation and reciprocal effects replicate across below and above the population average subsamples.

- **Falsification Checks:** Placebo tests (Life Satisfaction, Political Interest, L-R self placement) confidently yield null effects ($p > 0.05$), validating model specifications.

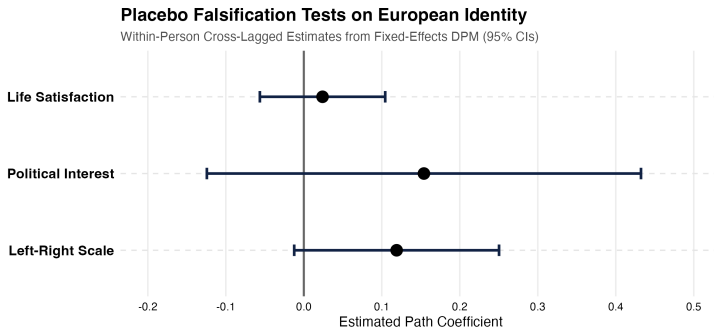
IMPLICATION. Further research needs to be done on the micro-foundations of attitudes towards the EU:

- (i) Conceptually, disentangle the relation among distinct constructs
- (ii) Empirically, test the actual direction and its determinants & Panel measurements

Thank you!

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Placebo Test (figure)

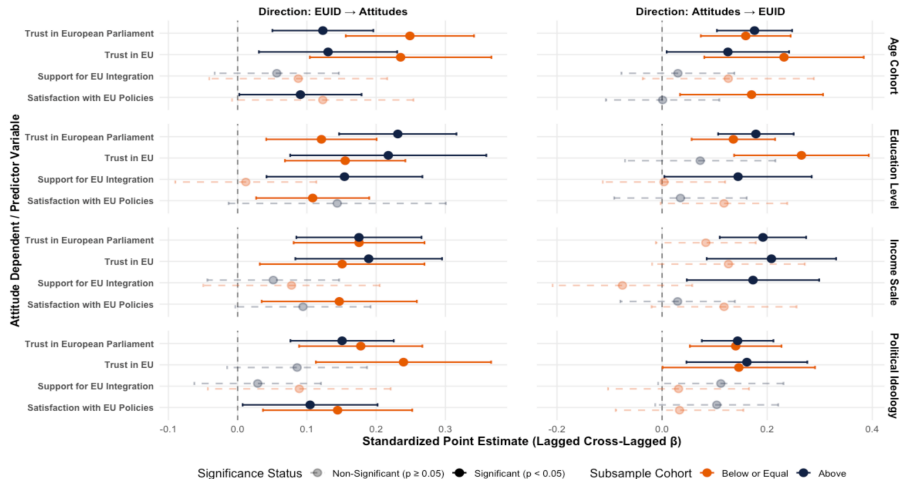


Note: All intervals cross the solid 0 line, confirming no statistically significant alternative time-varying effects ($p > 0.05$).

RObustness Demographic Subsamples

Reciprocal Cross-Lagged Dynamic Panel Coefficients by Subsample

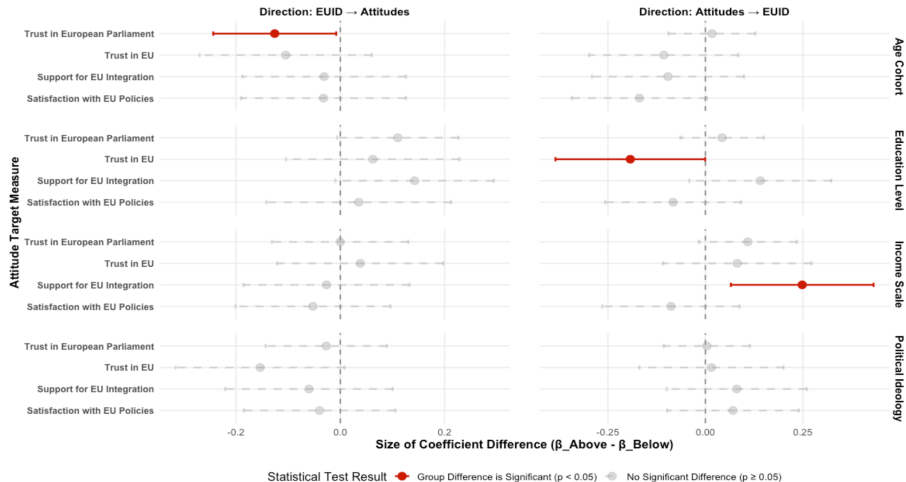
Comparing forward tracking (EUID driving attitudes) and reverse tracking (attitudes driving EUID).



Z-test Demographic Subsamples

Statistical Significance of Subsample Gaps (Above Mean vs. Below Mean)

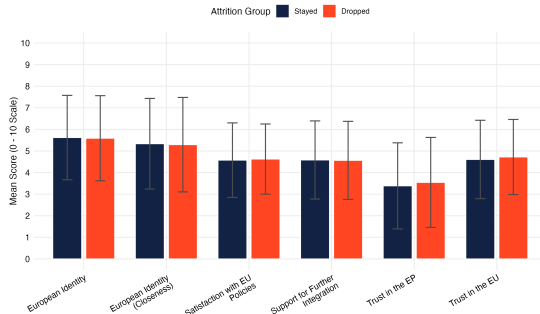
Points show the difference size ($\Delta\beta$). Solid red lines indicate the groups are statistically different from one another.



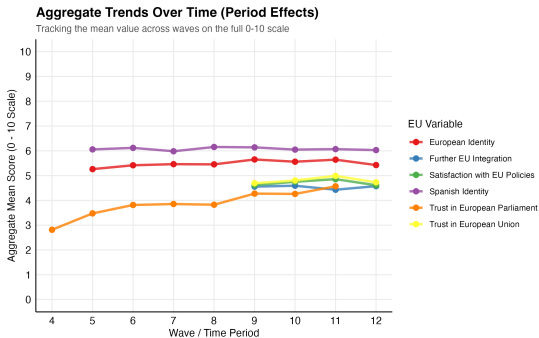
Attrition analysis

Attrition Analysis: Baseline Estimates Comparison

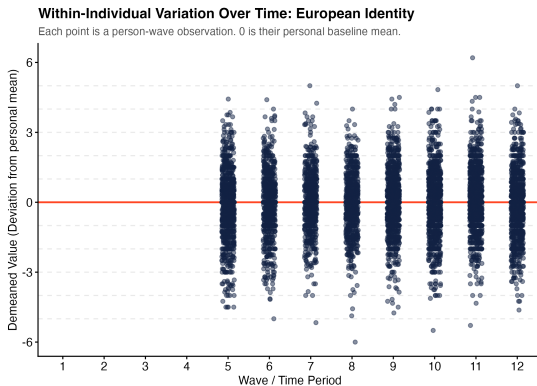
Comparing group baseline means (Bars) and Standard Deviations (Error Bars)



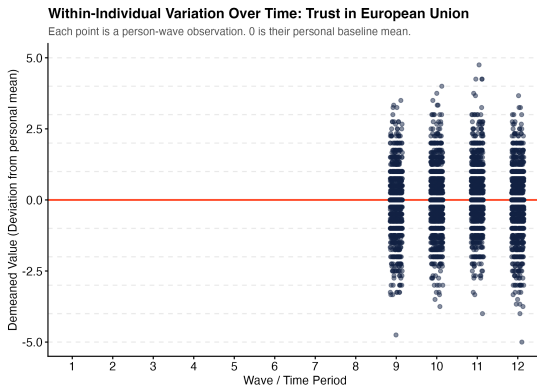
Period Effects?



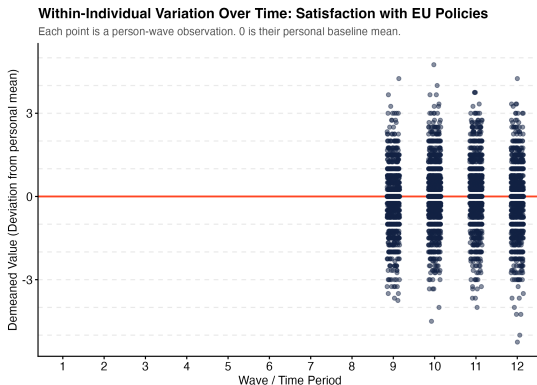
Within-Individual Variability (demeaned)



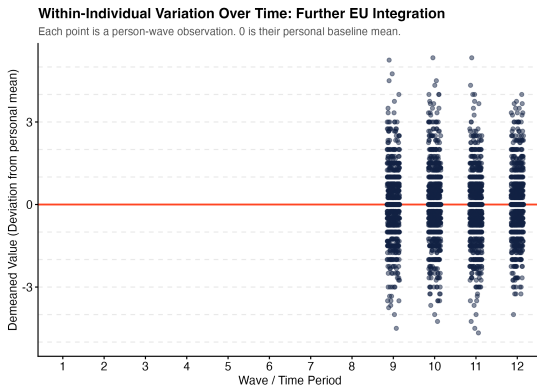
Within-Individual Variability (demeaned)



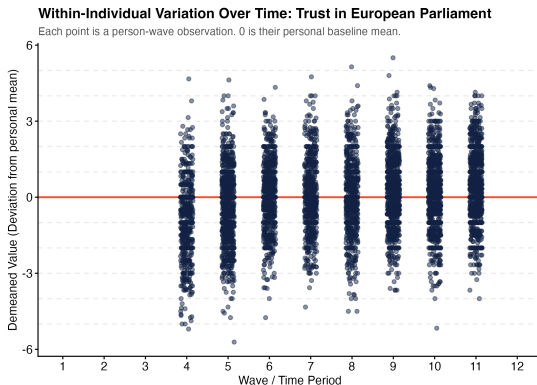
Within-Individual Variability (demeaned)



Within-Individual Variability (demeaned)



Within-Individual Variability (demeaned)



Data & Measurement of Variables

Variable	Measurement Scale
Identification with Europe	Continuous 0–10
Identification with Spain	Continuous 0–10
Trust in the EU	Continuous 0–10
Trust in the European Parliament (EP)	Continuous 0–10
Satisfaction with EU Policies	Continuous 0–10
Support for Further EU Integration	Continuous 0–10 (Reversed)
Political Ideology	0–10 Left-Right self-placement scale
Education	3 levels (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary)
Political Interest	4 levels
Age	5 age cohorts
Gender	Binary indicator
Income	12-level individual income scale

Note: $N \approx 2,000$ observations per wave.

Representative of Spanish population, excluding Catalonia and Basque Country.