

## **The role of human values in explaining support for European Union membership**

Abstract:

In recent years, there has been greater scholarly enquiry into explaining variation in support for European Union membership. We theorise that one cause of such variation is likely to be non-political psychological predispositions, such as one's personal values. We test this proposition by applying Schwartz's theory of basic human values to predict voting intentions in hypothetical referendums on EU membership. We theorise that these values determine both voting intentions and more proximate explanatory variables of support for EU membership: attitudes to immigration and identifying as European. Using data on 13 countries from the European Social Survey ( $N=24,703$  citizens) and multigroup structural equation modelling, we demonstrate that this psychological framework effectively predicts voting intentions, notably in terms of the consistent cross-country evidence for indirect effects of values on support for membership *via* European identity and attitudes to immigration. We then discuss the implications of our findings, including differences in effects between countries.

Keywords: Human values, referendums on European integration, attitudes to immigration, European identity, Euroscepticism

## Introduction

The last decade has seen greater popular contestation over the future of the EU than at any time in the history of the organisation. The consequences of the Eurozone crisis, the dramatic increase in intra-EU migration following the 2004 enlargement and, latterly, the so-called “refugee crisis” removed any doubt amongst European publics about the importance of decisions made at the European level for their countries and their own lives (Zeitlin et al, 2019). The political consequences of this realisation—following decades of integration by elite-level treaty change—have included radical right Eurosceptic parties entering national governments in major EU member states and a UK vote against continued membership of the organisation altogether in a national referendum. In contrast, other Europeans across the Union have displayed support for on-going or even enhanced EU membership in the form of popular protests and the establishment of explicitly pro-European parties more than ever before (Chopin and Lequesne, 2020).

In response, academic enquiry into the causes of variation in attitudes toward the EU—an already established field—has continued to grow, accompanied by an increase in the scholarly explanations for such trends. Amongst explanations for both attitudes and behaviour, which we overview later in this paper, the role and predictive ability of ‘values’ has been regularly alluded to and discussed by academics (e.g. Arnorsson and Zoega, 2016; Dennison and Geddes, 2019; Evans and Menon, 2017; Ford and Goodwin, 2017; Goodwin and Heath, 2016; Kaufmann, 2016; Koch, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Data from the European Values Study have been applied to examine associations between different attitudes or sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, class and income) and identification with Europe (e.g., Barbulescu and Beaudonnet, 2014). However, in spite of much discussion, values have rarely been operationalised and, when they have, academics have typically used political attitudes regarding social issues, such as the death penalty or immigration, to measure authoritarianism or similar concepts. To the best of our knowledge, there has been no systematic use of an established psychological value theory to explain cross-country political attitudes and behaviour regarding European Union membership.

In this article we utilise basic human values, defined as general motivational life goals that guide behaviour (Schwartz, 1992), to explain voting intentions in a hypothetical referendum

on EU membership in samples of populations from 13 EU member states as part of the European Social Survey (ESS). More specifically, we analyse the direct effect of basic human values on attitudes towards immigration and European identity, two key proximal predictors of support for EU membership, and their effect, in turn, on voting intentions. As such, we examine the direct and indirect effects of human values on support for EU membership. We offer a novel cross-country contribution to the political psychology and sociology literature regarding political attitudes and behaviour.

### **Explanations for variation in support of membership of the European Union**

In this section, we overview previous work explaining attitudes to and electoral behaviour regarding European Union membership and integration. We suggest that two of the most powerful explanations of European integration support are European identity and attitudes to immigration. We then propose that the two may be reflective of deeper psychological value predispositions.

Early works explaining variation in support for European integration identified a number of trends that have been repeatedly validated since, with age, class, cognitive skills, income, occupation, partisanship, political values and support for the domestic government all consistently shown to have effects (see Gabel, 1998). In terms of causal mechanisms, Hobolt and de Vries (2016) classify three types of explanations for attitudes to European integration: the utilitarian, identity and cue-taking and benchmarking approaches (see also Hooghe and Marks, 2005). Theoretically, these explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. ‘Utilitarian’ factors have received mixed support (Garry and Tilley, 2015) while cue-taking and benchmarking approaches have been shown to be primarily effective in explaining variation *between* countries and, in the case of cue-taking, liable to reverse-causality (Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Steenbergen et al, 2007).

On the other hand, the identitarian approach, which includes identification with Europe and attitudes to immigration and minorities, has received consistent support. Hooghe and Marks (2005) conceptualise identity—the extent to which an individual sees a defined communal group, such as being European, as integral to themselves—from a ‘social identity theory’ perspective. They posit that the use of identities arose from evolution and results in a defensive and supportive posture towards the object of their identity, often in territorial terms. Hewstone (1986; see also Chrysochoou, 2000; Mummendey and Waldutz, 2004) also pointed

to identity as a key determinant of support for European integration in social psychological terms of social representations and stereotyping based on ‘us and them’ dichotomies. Carl et al. (2019) argue that a European identity should increase one’s support for their country’s membership of the European Union because: first, those who identify with Europe are more likely to view transfers of competences to European institutions as legitimate; second, they feel commonality with fellow EU citizens, both abroad and those in their own country; and third, those in net contributing countries are less likely to oppose redistribution across the Union. Identification with Europe—in general (rather than institutions arising from European integration) has been repeatedly shown to positively predict attitudes to and voting behaviour regarding the European Union, usually when contrasted with those who identify solely with their nation (Carey, 2002; Carl et al, 2019; Curtice, 2017: 21; Hooghe and Marks, 2005, 2009; McLaren, 2004).

Attitudes to immigration have also been shown to be effective predictors of support for EU membership. This has been theorised to partially be the result of the EU’s legal regime, which enshrines free movement of persons and citizens’ rights and has promoted the removal of national border infrastructure, as well as historically pursuing economic liberalisation that makes such movement more practicable and likely (De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005; McLaren, 2002, 2006; Sniderman et al., 2004). As such, EU membership is often considered to be the cause of higher migration rates and greater societal heterogeneity. We therefore expect that *(Hypothesis 1) identifying as European would increase one’s chance of supporting their country’s membership of the European Union with (Hypothesis 2) opposition to immigration decreasing that chance.*

Furthermore, we suggest that both of these predictors may be reflective of deeper psychological predispositions, as characterised by basic human values. Although political values, such as authoritarianism, have been used (Gabel, 1998; Tillman, 2013), as well as studies emanating from the European Values Study (e.g., Barbulescu and Beaudonnet, 2014), to the best of our knowledge, no study so far has used personal values—one’s broad motivational goals in life—to explain cross-country attitudes to the EU, variation in voting in referendums on the EU or variation in European identity. We therefore seek to complement previous social psychological studies, such as those by Hewstone (1986), by utilising the basic human values theory of Schwartz as a powerful framework to explain both European identity and support for membership of the EU.

Psychologists have repeatedly attempted to chart personal values, defined as ‘stable motivational constructs or beliefs about desirable end states that transcend specific situations and guide the selection or evaluation of behaviours and events’ (Brosch and Sander, 2013: 3). In each case, individuals are expected to vary significantly in the importance that they place on each value—leading to consistent difference in life choices—whereas variation across the life course is theorised as being relatively minor. The significance of one’s values for their attitudes and behaviour was summarised by Allport (1961: 543) who stated ‘personal values are the dominating force in life, and all of a person’s activity is directed toward the realization of his values.’ There are a significant number of theories of personal values, each with similar theoretical assumptions but varying in the specified values themselves (Murray, 1938; Rokeach, 1973; Feather and Peay, 1975; Maloney and Katz, 1976; Wicker et al., 1984; Cawley, Martin and Johnson, 2000; Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2012; Talevich et al., 2017).

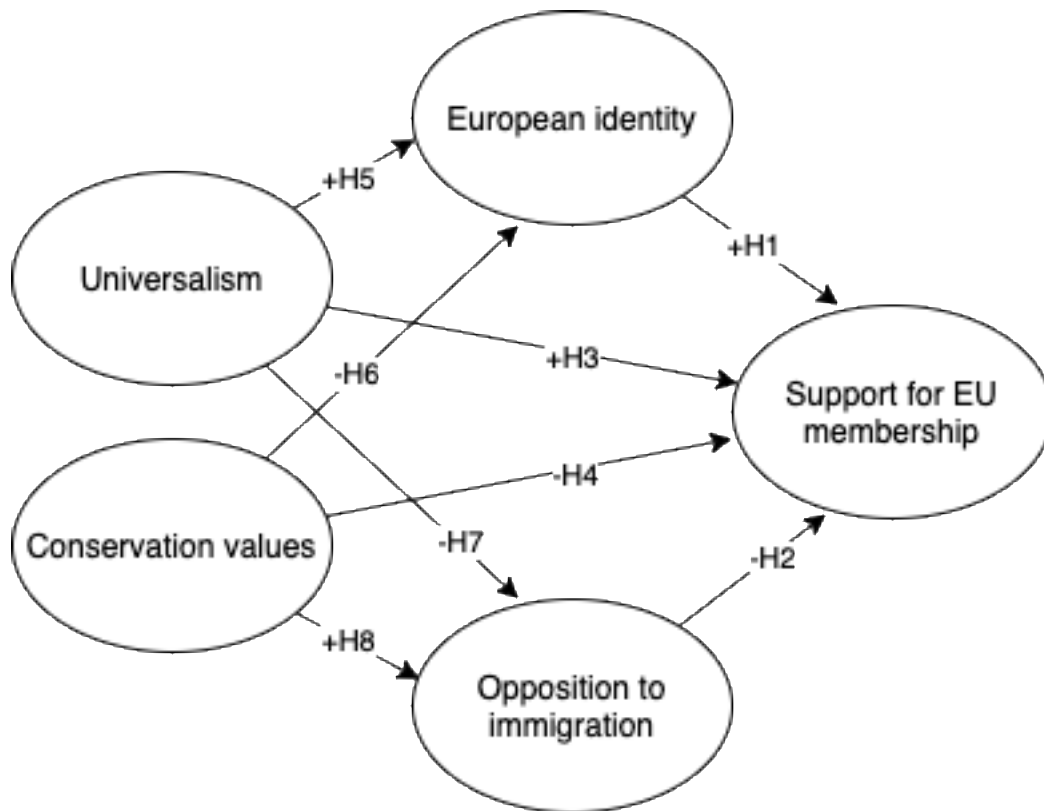
Universalism and conservation values—in Schwartz’s (1992) terms and also similar to analogous values found in other aforementioned values schema—may be particularly relevant for explaining support for EU membership, particularly *via* the formation of European identity and attitudes towards immigration. Values are generally thought to primarily affect behavioural intentions and behaviour *via* attitudinal formation. As Fishbein and Ajzen (Ajzen, 1993, 2005; Fishbein and Ajzen, 2015; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004) have shown, prediction of specific intentions and behaviours is most effectively done with attitudes that are equally specific. By definition, values are more general constructs; while values are limited in number, they may form a limitless number of attitudes and behaviours. The general mechanism for this relation suggests that objects or behaviour which promote the realisation of the motivations underlying specific values would be preferred by individuals if those values are prioritised by them (Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995). In the following we consider the decision to vote in favour of EU membership as particularly promotive of the realisation of Schwartz’s value of universalism and potentially a threat to the higher-order value of conservation, which comprises conformity, security and tradition.

### **Values, political attitudes and support for membership of the EU**

Those that value conservation are likely to be more wary about their country's membership of the European Union for a number of reasons. The member states of the European Union invariably predate their EU membership, in some cases by centuries, and in every case the relative novelty of the EU stands in stark contrast to older, relatively homogenous national traditions and customs, which, albeit to varying extents, remain to some extent the *raison d'être* of nation states. The European Union, by contrast, is relatively heterogenous. Moreover, the process of European integration encourages change while the Union's legal regime encourages the mixing of economies and peoples via the EU's four freedoms. Those most keen on traditionalism, social stability and whose focus is directed to their in-group rather than out-groups are likely to see their countries as having less to gain from EU membership. Furthermore, political integration into a larger bloc in which national interests can be outvoted could be seen as a threat to the security of the nation, except perhaps in cases in which the EU acts as a source of security *vis* other external threats (see Ireland and the UK, Cyprus and Turkey and the Baltic countries and Russia). By way of contrast, it may promote the interests of individuals who attribute high importance to universalism values, whose view goes beyond that of their own national group and who seek the promotion or welfare of all people, including those outside their nation, not only in identitarian terms but also because of its institutional capacity to ensure collective action amongst 27 member states for "the greater good". Consequently, we expect (*Hypothesis 3*) *universalism values to increase*, and (*Hypothesis 4*) *conservation values to decrease the individual support of country's membership in the EU*.

However, we also expect these values to be relevant for the formation of our more proximal predictors of support for EU membership: European identity and attitudes towards immigration. Given the above discussion on values, we should expect their effect on support for EU membership to be *primarily* via their effects on European identity and attitudes toward immigration. This relationship is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework of expected effects of European identity, opposition to immigration and basic human values on voting remain in the EU.



Notes: not shown is the vector of socio-demographic controls in our core model.

European identity represents a positive identification with or attachment to Europe as a whole, which the European Union proports to represent. Given the broader identity that feeling European represents and following the considerations listed above, we expect a similar mechanism for the relation between values and European identity. Thus, we assume that *(Hypothesis 5) universalism values would increase*, and *(Hypothesis 6) conservation values would decrease European identity*.

Individuals who strongly hold conservation values are also more likely to oppose immigration due to the introduction of foreign customs and traditions and the resultant change to society and, potentially, increased fractionalisation (Davidov et al., 2008; Beierlein, Kuntz, and Davidov, 2016; Davidov and Meuleman, 2012; Davidov et al., 2014, 2019; Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 2007). By contrast, those who value universalism, which includes the desire the help, protect and understand others, are more likely to have their values realised by immigration (e.g., Davidov et al., 2008; Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 2007). Therefore, we expect *(Hypothesis 7) universalism to decrease*, and *(Hypothesis 8) conservation values to increase opposition to immigration*. Thus, in this model values are expected to exert both a direct and an indirect effect on a hypothetical vote for EU membership. Considering the arguments of Ajzen and Fishbein stated above, we expect the

proximal effects to be stronger because values are more likely to influence behaviour or intention to perform a behaviour via attitudes.

Previous studies provide empirical support for the assumption that universalism-minded individuals are more positive and conservation-minded individuals more negative toward immigration (e.g., Davidov et al., 2008; Davidov and Meuleman, 2012; Davidov et al., 2014, 2019; Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995). Dennison et al. (2020) provides support for the effect of basic human values on European identity and the decision to leave the EU in the UK context. However, to the best of our knowledge, no study so far has used basic human values to explain cross-country attitudes to Europe, variation in voting referendums on Europe or in European identity from a cross-cultural perspective. In the following section, we test our hypotheses empirically.

### **Data, measures and methods**

Our data sources are the eighth and ninth rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS) (2016, 2018) collected between late 2016 and early 2017 and late 2018 and early 2019, respectively. For our analyses, however, we focused on the ninth round because the data are more current. Data from the eighth round were used to perform robustness checks. The ESS employs strict probability samples of the population aged 15 and over. We exclude those countries that are not European Union members, as well as the United Kingdom, the respondents from which were not asked about how they would vote in such a referendum and instead asked about how they voted in the 2016 referendum, subjecting responses to different, unique dynamics that have been studied elsewhere, including in terms of the effects of Schwartz's values (Dennison et al, 2020; Hanel and Wolf, 2019). Thus, this variable may not be comparable in the UK with the one measured in the other countries. Furthermore, the UK is no longer a member of the European Union. Overall, this gives us 13 countries in round 9. For robustness checks we used data for 12 of these countries from round 8. The data used in these analyses and further documentation on data collection are available at <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/>.

Our dependent variable—*intention to vote remain*—was measured in countries that were members of the European Union. Respondents in those countries were asked how they would vote in a hypothetical referendum on EU membership. Response categories were 'Remain a member of the European Union', 'Leave the European Union', 'Would submit a blank ballot paper', 'Would spoil the ballot paper', 'Would not vote' and 'Not eligible to



vote'. For our analyses, we created a dichotomous variable containing only those who would vote to remain or vote to leave.

The ESS uses the 21-item Portrait Values Questionnaire to measure the ten human values. Two items were used to measure each value, except universalism, which was measured by three items (Schwartz et al. 2001; Davidov et al. 2008). For each value the questionnaire gives a statement that respondents were asked to assess (see the ESS questionnaire; European Social Survey, 2018). The response categories ranged from 1 (very much like me) to 6 (not like me at all). We reverse coded all value items so that high numbers indicated a high perceived similarity. The three items that measure universalism ask respondents about the importance of equal treatment and opportunities for all, listening to and understanding different people and caring for nature. The six items that operationalise the higher-order value conservation measure the values tradition (importance of modesty and tradition), conformity (importance of following rules and behaving properly) and security (importance of living in secure surroundings and having a strong state which defends its citizens).

*European identity* was measured by a single question: 'how emotionally attached do you feel to Europe (Europe in general, not the European Union)?' Response categories ranged from 0 (not at all emotionally attached) to 10 (very emotionally attached). *Opposition to immigration* was measured by three questions: 'to what extent do you think [country] should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most [country]'s people to come and live here?'; 'How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people?'; and 'How about people from poorer countries outside Europe?' Response categories ranged from 1 (allow many) to 4 (allow none).

We used socio-demographic characteristics as control variables that reflect the most consistent findings from the literature (listed above, see Gabel, 1998). Though more socio-demographic variables could be included to account for the less regularly identified predictors of support for EU membership, we limited ourselves to five to retain some degree of parsimony (Achen, 2002). *Age* was measured in years. *Gender* was a dichotomous variable (0 = female, 1 = male). *Education* was measured according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) classification. The variable was dichotomised (0 = ISCED 5B or lower, 1 = ISCED 5A or higher) to differentiate between those who obtained higher education or not. *Perceived income* was measured by a single question asking about respondents' feelings about their current household income on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (living comfortably on present income) to 4 (finding it very difficult on present income).

*Residence* was measured by four dummy variables indicating whether they live in a big city, in the suburbs or outskirts of a big city, a small town or on the countryside. Previous studies have shown that older people living in rural areas with a lower level of education are more likely to oppose EU membership (for review of studies using the ‘utilitarian approach’ see Hobolt and de Vries, 2016).

We specified the theoretical constructs universalism, conservation and opposition to immigration as latent variables using confirmatory factor analysis (Brown, 2015). The items "Care for nature", "Follow rules", and "Be humble and modest" did not operate well in all countries and were thus omitted from further analysis. After deleting these items, the relevant value components (security, tradition, conformity, and universalism related to interpersonal aspects) were still part of the model. Moreover, the remaining measures did not operate well in Hungary and we decided to omit the country from all further analyses, limiting our study to 13 countries with ESS round 9 data. We tested for measurement invariance (Davidov et al., 2014) and found that the constructs were measured in the same way and had the same meaning to respondents across countries (see Appendix). The standardised factor loadings of the value items were acceptable and ranged between 0.417 and 0.763. The standardised factor loadings of the opposition to immigration items were highest and ranged between 0.602 and 0.982. Table 1 shows the constructs, items that measure them, response options and descriptive statistics. Table 2 contains the distribution of responses for the dependent variable.

Table 1. Variables and items included in the model, response categories, means and standard deviations (ESS round 9).

Construct	Item formulation	Response categories	Mean	SD
Intention to vote remain		0 (leave); 1 (remain)	0.86	0.35
Universalism	Equal opportunities	1 (not like me at all) – 6 (very much like me)	4.81	1.06
	Understand people		4.59	1.08
	Care for nature		4.98	1.01
Conservation	Be humble and modest		4.31	1.22
	Follow customs and traditions		4.37	1.33
	Follow rules		3.78	1.37
	Behave properly		4.34	1.21
	Live in secure surroundings		4.70	1.18
	Government ensures her safety		4.73	1.16
European identity	‘How emotionally attached do you feel to Europe (Europe in general, not the European	0 (not at all) – 10 (very)	6.07	2.47

	Union)?’			
Opposition to immigration	‘To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most [country]’s people to come and live here?’	1 (many) – 4 (none)	2.20	0.88
	‘How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people?’		2.57	0.92
	‘How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe?’		2.63	0.93
Age		<i>Continuous</i>	50.75	18.72
Gender		0 (female); 1 (male)	0.47	0.50
Education		0 (ISCED 5B or lower); 1 (ISCED 5A or higher)	0.23	0.42
Perceived income	‘Feeling about household’s income nowadays’	1 (living comfortably) – 4 (very difficult)	2.01	0.85
Residence	Big city	0 (no); 1 (yes)	0.21	0.40
	Suburbs or outskirts of big city	0 (no); 1 (yes)	0.10	0.30
	Town or small city	0 (no); 1 (yes)	0.30	0.46
	Country village or farm	0 (no); 1 (yes)	0.39	0.49

Table 2. Percentage of respondents who would vote “Remain” or “Leave” in a referendum on EU membership (ESS round 9).

Country	Country code	N	% Remain	% Leave
1. Austria	AT	2,138	82.79	17.21
2. Belgium	BE	1,696	91.39	8.61
3. Bulgaria	BG	1,454	86.11	13.89
4. Cyprus	CY	6,69	84.90	15.10
5. Czech Rep.	CZ	1,909	74.75	25.25
6. Germany	DE	2,203	91.06	8.94
7. Finland	FI	1,651	84.01	15.99
8. France	FR	1,753	81.40	18.60
9. Ireland	IE	2,039	93.87	6.13
10. Italy	IT	2,117	79.31	20.69
11. Netherlands	NL	1,532	88.97	11.03
12. Poland	PL	1,312	94.82	5.18
13. Slovenia	SI	1,173	87.38	12.62

## Results

To test the hypotheses presented above in Figure 1, we used multiple-group structural equation modelling (Bollen, 1989). With multiple-group analysis we investigated whether measurements and/or structural effects are essentially the same or different across groups (in this case, countries). In particular, we examined whether the effects of the two human values—universalism and conservation—on opposition to immigration, European identity, and intention to vote remain in a hypothetical referendum differ across countries. In the first model (m1), we examined whether universalism and conservation predicted the intention to vote remain without considering European identity and opposition to immigration as mediators. We also estimated separately bivariate models of each of Schwartz’s ten basic values predicting the intention to vote remain and found that indeed only universalism and conservation values were consistently associated with voting intention. In the second model (m2), we added European identity and opposition to immigration as partial mediators, to test whether values retain their direct effects on intention to vote after considering the proximal effects of values on the mediators. Before we estimated the multiple-group models we first estimated both models (m1 and m2) as single-group structural equation models to test whether our hypothesized expectations can be found “on average” across countries. In all models we controlled for the socio-demographic variables listed above and all variables were included simultaneously in the respective models. All models were analysed with the software package Mplus (Muthén and Muthén, 1998–2017) using a weighted least squares estimator (WLSMV; Muthén, 1984) because the dependent variable—voting intention—is binary. Since WLSMV estimation is based on pairwise deletion (limited information; Asparouhov and Muthén, 2010), we also used a maximum-likelihood estimator for binary responses (using full information and assuming data missing at random; Schafer and Graham, 2002) and found similar results. We report the results obtained using the former WLSMV method, because this method provides global fit measures that allow us to assess the fit of the models. We consider model fit acceptable when the comparative fit index (CFI) is close to or above 0.95 and the root mean error of approximation (RMSEA) is close to or below 0.06 (Hu and Bentler, 1999; West et al., 2012).

Results of the first model (m1) are given in Table 3. Model fit for the single-group structural equation model is acceptable:  $\chi^2 = 1556.031$  (df = 40); CFI = 0.934; RMSEA = 0.039). We found that across Europe, without considering country differences, people who prioritise the value universalism are more likely to state that they would vote in favour of membership in a hypothetical referendum. By way of contrast, as hypothesised, the effect of prioritising conservation values is to increase the chance that one reports that they would vote

against membership. The model fit for the multiple-group model is also acceptable:  $\chi^2 = 2736.067$  (df = 568); CFI = 0.913; RMSEA = 0.045. Across most countries—Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland—the effect of prioritising the value universalism is to increase the probability that an individual reports that they would vote in favour of membership. Interestingly, in Cyprus the effect is negative. We found no statistically significant effect in Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, and Slovenia. Again, prioritising conservation values, in most countries, increases the probability that one would vote against membership of the EU. Again, in Cyprus, the effect was reversed and is now positive on voting to remain. We found no statistically significant effect in Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Slovenia. These results are similar when using data from ESS Wave 8 (see Appendix). However, Spain, Ireland and Lithuania have counterintuitive results with conservation predicting a vote in favour of membership, while results from that wave in Belgium and the Netherlands support our hypotheses. We consider these outliers in the discussion below.

Table 3. Direct effects of values on voting remain (ESS round 9; estimator = wlsmv).

	Universalism → Intention to vote remain	Conservation → Intention to vote remain
Single-group model (N = 24,603)	b (SE)	b (SE)
	0.188 (0.017)**	-0.151 (0.016)**
Multiple-group model across 13 countries (N = 24,603)		
AT	0.247 (0.044)**	-0.133 (0.043)**
BE	-0.097 (0.086)	-0.040 (0.071)
BG	0.779 (0.534)	-0.622 (0.487)
CY	-0.307 (0.157)*	0.300 (0.147)*
CZ	0.716 (0.158)**	-0.607 (0.132)**
DE	0.401 (0.080)**	-0.223 (0.045)**
FI	0.293 (0.069)**	-0.161 (0.057)**
FR	0.223 (0.065)**	-0.190 (0.045)**
IE	-0.069 (0.082)	0.049 (0.068)
IT	0.358 (0.101)**	-0.295 (0.081)**
NL	0.199 (0.084)*	-0.085 (0.061)
PL	0.582 (0.275)*	-0.655 (0.240)**
SI	0.113 (0.163)	0.065 (0.093)

*Note.* For the meaning of the country codes see Table 2; b= unstandardized estimate; SE=standard error; \* p ≤ 0.05; \*\* p ≤ 0.01; coefficients directed at “Remain” are probit coefficients.

Results of the second model (m2), in which we tested whether the effects of universalism and conservation are mediated through attitudes towards immigration and identification with Europe, are presented in Table 4. The model fit for the single-group model is good:  $\chi^2 = 2184.782$  (df = 79); CFI = 0.952; RMSEA = 0.033. We found that across Europe, without considering country differences, the direct effects of universalism and conservation on the intention to vote in favour of membership disappeared and were fully mediated through attitudes towards immigration and identification with Europe. However, values had direct significant effects on opposition to immigration and identification with Europe. People who emphasise the value universalism are less likely to oppose immigration (-) and more likely to identify with Europe (+). By way of contrast, people who prioritise conservation values are more likely to oppose immigration (+). However, we found no association of conservation and identification with Europe. Finally, people who oppose immigration are more likely to be opposed to membership and those who identify with Europe are more likely to vote in favour of membership. Model fit for the multiple-group model is acceptable:  $\chi^2 = 4541.898$  (df = 1087); CFI = 0.925; RMSEA = 0.041. The direct effects of universalism and conservation on the intention to vote in favour of membership disappeared in six out of nine countries. We found some remaining effects of universalism in Belgium (+) (which had no effect in the first multiple-group model), Cyprus (-), and the Czech Republic (+) and direct effects of conservation in Cyprus (+), the Czech Republic (-), and Germany (-). Again, values had direct significant effects on opposition to immigration and identification with Europe. People who value universalism are less likely to oppose immigration (-) and more likely to identify with Europe (+) except in Cyprus, Ireland, and Slovenia. On the other hand, people who prioritise conservation values are more likely to oppose immigration (+) except in Bulgaria. Results are mixed with regard to identification with Europe. Those who value universalism are associated with greater European identity everywhere. However, while people who express conservation values feel less attached to Europe in Austria, Bulgaria, and Italy (negative effect), their counterparts in Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Slovenia feel more strongly attached to Europe (positive effect). Finally, opposition to immigration and identification with Europe are almost consistently related to the intention to vote remain across countries except for Poland. Accordingly, people who oppose immigration are more likely to vote against membership and people who feel attached to Europe are more likely to vote in favour of membership. Thus, the effects of values on voting intentions are mostly indirect and in most of the countries fully mediated through attitudes towards immigration and identification with Europe. Robustness checks with ESS round 8 with 11 countries (also omitting Hungary) revealed similar results

suggesting that the mechanisms relating values, attitudes towards immigration, identification with Europe, and intentions to vote in favour of membership have not systematically changed over time (see Appendix).

Finally, findings on the effects of the control variables revealed that older age and residing in small towns and countryside areas were often associated with higher conservatism and lower universalism. Moreover, higher education and income satisfaction were often associated with higher universalism, support for immigration, identification with Europe, and intentions to vote in favour of membership. Although these patterns were found in many countries, there were several exceptions (detailed output can be obtained from the first author upon request).

Table 4. Full model results (ESS round 9; estimator = wlsmv).

Hypothesis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	IdEU → Remain	Oppo → Remain	Univ → Remain	Cons → Remain	Univ → IdEU	Cons → IdEU	Univ → Oppo	Cons → Oppo
Single-group model (N = 24,703)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
	0.141 (0.003)**	-0.264 (0.012)**	-0.032 (0.021)	-0.027 (0.018)	0.386 (0.024)**	-0.018 (0.022)	-0.629 (0.016)**	0.459 (0.003)**
Multiple-group model across 13 countries (N = 24,703)								
AT	0.141 (0.011)**	-0.394 (0.030)**	-0.086 (0.053)	0.055 (0.047)	0.760 (0.059)**	-0.194 (0.062)**	-0.572 (0.037)**	0.408 (0.034)**
BE	0.184 (0.014)**	-0.277 (0.051)**	-0.339 (0.092)**	0.028 (0.075)	0.475 (0.115)**	0.130 (0.083)	-0.552 (0.063)**	0.330 (0.045)**
BG	0.122 (0.019)**	-0.101 (0.040)*	0.462 (0.379)	-0.379 (0.342)	1.636 (0.621)**	-1.214 (0.568)*	-0.533 (0.268)*	0.406 (0.246)
CY	0.206 (0.018)**	-0.363 (0.082)**	-0.536 (0.162)**	0.508 (0.152)**	0.360 (0.190)	-0.206 (0.181)	-0.448 (0.080)**	0.479 (0.073)**
CZ	0.092 (0.013)**	-0.291 (0.047)**	0.429 (0.161)**	-0.395 (0.136)**	0.619 (0.190)**	-0.128 (0.159)	-0.754 (0.131)**	0.665 (0.108)**
DE	0.178 (0.011)**	-0.320 (0.054)**	0.087 (0.091)	-0.141 (0.048)**	0.702 (0.109)**	0.059 (0.061)	-0.611 (0.055)**	0.285 (0.030)**
FI	0.128 (0.015)**	-0.329 (0.063)**	0.054 (0.091)	-0.077 (0.065)	0.375 (0.084)**	0.136 (0.067)*	-0.588 (0.046)**	0.314 (0.038)**
FR	0.187 (0.010)**	-0.201 (0.041)**	0.031 (0.071)	-0.087 (0.052)	0.382 (0.102)**	-0.039 (0.073)	-0.576 (0.059)**	0.464 (0.042)**
IE	0.166 (0.015)**	-0.129 (0.040)**	-0.171 (0.089)	0.059 (0.071)	0.175 (0.096)	0.231 (0.082)**	-0.570 (0.056)**	0.371 (0.045)**
IT	0.199 (0.011)**	-0.196 (0.033)**	-0.075 (0.121)	-0.011 (0.091)	1.143 (0.164)**	-0.775 (0.132)**	-1.048 (0.099)**	0.663 (0.075)**
NL	0.161 (0.018)**	-0.199 (0.049)**	-0.016 (0.099)	-0.080 (0.061)	0.404 (0.097)**	0.245 (0.068)**	-0.744 (0.072)**	0.222 (0.042)**
PL	0.154 (0.021)**	-0.061 (0.115)	0.411 (0.366)	-0.563 (0.298)	0.700 (0.281)*	-0.320 (0.252)	-1.131 (0.220)**	0.801 (0.189)**
SI	0.109 (0.016)**	-0.254 (0.064)**	-0.081 (0.183)	0.121 (0.107)	0.223 (0.245)	0.494 (0.139)**	-0.682 (0.134)**	0.437 (0.070)**

*Note.* For the meaning of the country codes see Table 2; IdEU=European identity; Oppo= Opposition to immigration; Univ=Universalism; Cons=Conservation; Remain=Intention to vote remain; b=unstandardized estimate; SE=standard error; \* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; coefficients directed at “Remain” are probit coefficients.



## Summary and discussion

European integration has become increasingly contested in recent years. Moreover, European integration is an on-going process, the study of which is likely to provide significant insights into intergroup dynamics, human values, and a large number of related processes of interest to social scientists. As a result, there has been extensive scholarly enquiry into why individuals vary in their support for European integration. Adding to this literature, we consider the role of personal values as determinants. In doing so, we make three cross-country contributions. Conceptually, we clarify ‘values’, which have been much discussed and typically operationalised as political attitudes to social issues, as being personal and thus theoretically antecedents of political attitudes. We, for the first time, apply Schwartz’s theory of basic human values to explain European identity and support for EU membership in a cross-country study. We theorise that these basic human values determine both support for membership of the EU as well as two of the most consistently demonstrated determinants of the latter, attitudes to immigration and identifying as European, which act as mediators in the relationship between values and support for membership. Finally, we demonstrate that this psychological theoretical framework effectively predicts attitudes to membership of the European Union using multigroup structural equation modelling across 13 EU member states.

As previously shown in the literature, our full models support Hypotheses 1 and 2; that identifying as European and holding positive attitudes to immigration, respectively, increased one’s chance of hypothetically voting in favour of EU membership in a referendum. Our direct effect models support Hypotheses 3 and 4, showing that, in most countries, holding universalist values increases support for EU membership, whereas holding conservation values does the opposite. By contrast, the results of our full models fail to support Hypotheses 3 and 4, as the effects of universalist and conservation values are mediated by identifying as European and attitudes to immigration. Indeed, universalism is repeatedly shown to predict European identity, supporting Hypothesis 5, whereas there is no consistent effect of conservation on European identity (Hypothesis 6). Finally, the effects of universalist and conservation values on attitudes to immigration are highly consistent and as hypothesised, supporting Hypotheses 7 and 8 respectively. The results from wave 8 of the ESS, as shown in our appendices, are largely the same. Overall, we conclude that support or opposition towards

European Union membership is likely to reflect deeper psychological predispositions, which had been overlooked by existing political and economic explanations.

We now discuss a number of further issues resulting from this study. Causal inference from observational data, especially cross-sectional data, is inherently precarious (Halaby, 2004), regardless of the method used to analyse the data. Thus, the proposed causal linkages between values, European identity, opposition towards immigration and voting intentions need to be backed by strong theoretical reasoning. We believe that the associations that we have found are indicative of a causal chain (Schwartz et al., 2017). Moreover, the personal motivational basis of political attitudes and voting intentions on EU membership, as demonstrated here, is likely to be evident for voting in other types of elections and referendums. Theories of party choice that include political attitudes, such as spatial voting or issue voting, may therefore benefit from incorporating personal values as done so in this study. In addition to personal values and other individual-level predictors it may also be beneficial to consider country-level predictors in future research such as GDP, size of the immigrant population or cultural values (Schwartz, 2006) to systematically explain in a theory-driven way differences in effects across countries.

Finally, although our theoretical framework of voting in EU referendums finds support in most countries, the two countries in which the model receives the weakest support—Cyprus and Ireland—have party systems that do not historically include strong centre-left, pro-European parties, though do have historically far left, Eurosceptic parties. This suggests that, within countries, parties may have a role in determining how values are mobilised—in this case creating a situation in which universalism leads to opposition to EU membership, despite both increasing European identity and reducing opposition to immigration in the full models, as we would expect. More fundamentally, before 1999 Ireland claimed that Northern Ireland was part of its “national territory” while Cyprus currently claims sovereignty over the Turkish-recognised “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”, highlighting the threat to conservation values by polities other than the EU and perhaps leading to the unusual positive direct effect of conservation on support for EU membership in those countries.

By way of contrast, there is no obvious East-West divide in our results, with Bulgaria and Poland’s results fitting our theoretical framework well, though Slovenia’s somewhat less so. This fits the recent findings of Akaliyski and Welzel (2020) on the convergence towards

‘western’ emancipative values in central and eastern EU member states and Kaasa and Minkov’s (2020) findings on broader global convergence in terms of “important child qualities” and “important in life qualities”.

In sum, our study is the first to systematically try to explain the motivational underpinnings of supporting EU integration. Whereas values in general usually do not serve as proximate determinants of support for EU integration, they do provide the motivational basis for important predictors thereof: identification with Europe and openness to immigration. Thus, values are indirect driving forces behind Europeans’ endorsement of membership of the EU. Future studies should thus consider the role of values in the formation of public opinion towards issues of European integration and beyond.

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## Appendix

Table A1. Measurement invariance of universalism, conservation, and opposition to immigration across countries (estimator = mlr).

	ESS round 8, 11 countries, N = 22,940			ESS round 9, 13 countries, N = 25,151		
Model	$\chi^2$ (df)	CFI	RMSEA	$\chi^2$ (df)	CFI	RMSEA
Configural	1167.196 (264)	0.980	0.041	1428.247 (312)	0.977	0.043
Metric	1535.620 (324)	0.974	0.042	1753.721 (348)	0.972	0.043

Note.  $\chi^2$  = chi-square test statistic; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

Table A2. Percentage of respondents who would vote “Remain” or “Leave” in a referendum on EU membership (ESS round 8)

Country	Country code	N (without missing values)	% Remain	% Leave
1. Austria	AT	1,753	72.45	27.55
2. Belgium	BE	1,697	84.38	15.62
3. Czech Rep.	CZ	1,736	64.86	35.14
4. Germany	DE	2,651	86.04	13.96
5. Finland	FI	1,758	72.47	27.53
6. France	FR	1,815	75.48	24.52
7. Ireland	IE	2,508	88.80	11.20
8. Italy	IT	2,014	71.05	28.95
9. Netherlands	NL	1,507	76.71	23.29
10. Poland	PL	1,500	90.80	9.20
11. Slovenia	SI	1,136	80.72	19.28

Note. WNV=would not vote; DK=don't know what to vote, RF=refused to answer.

Table A3. Direct effects of values on voting remain (ESS round 8; estimator = wlsmv).

	Universalism → Intention to vote remain	Conservation → Intention to vote remain
Single-group model (N = 22,622)	b (SE)	b (SE)
	0.207 (0.016)**	-0.093 (0.014)**
Multiple-group model across 11 countries (N = 22,622)		
AT	0.485 (0.055)**	-0.389 (0.052)**
BE	0.239 (0.079)**	-0.124 (0.060)*
CZ	0.218 (0.076)**	-0.132 (0.076)
DE	0.264 (0.052)**	-0.228 (0.037)**
FI	0.215 (0.060)**	-0.024 (0.049)
FR	0.261 (0.050)**	-0.218 (0.041)**

IE	0.012 (0.048)	0.113 (0.053)*
IT	0.297 (0.071)**	-0.168 (0.065)**
NL	0.215 (0.079)**	-0.103 (0.050)*
PL	0.078 (0.149)	-0.049 (0.135)
SI	0.117 (0.156)	0.076 (0.095)

*Note.* For the meaning of the country codes see Table 2; b = unstandardized estimate; SE = standard error; \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; coefficients directed at “Remain” are probit coefficients. Single-group model fit:  $\chi^2 = 1120.737$  (df = 40); CFI = 0.946; RMSEA = 0.035. Multi-group model fit:  $\chi^2 = 2146.225$  (df = 480); CFI = 0.925; RMSEA = 0.041.

Table A4. Full model results (ESS round 8; estimator = wlsmv).

Hypothesis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	IdEU → Remain	Oppo → Remain	Univ → Remain	Cons → Remain	Univ → IdEU	Cons → IdEU	Univ → Oppo	Cons → Oppo
Single-group model (N = 22,657)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
	0.129 (0.003)**	-0.240 (0.012)**	0.013 (0.019)	0.026 (0.017)	0.298 (0.025)**	0.014 (0.023)	-0.650 (0.016)**	0.500 (0.014)**
Multiple-group model across 11 countries (N = 22,657)								
AT	0.051 (0.004)**	-0.097 (0.014)**	0.037 (0.027)	-0.038 (0.024)	0.900 (0.115)**	-0.268 (0.107)*	-0.896 (0.095)**	0.865 (0.091)**
BE	0.048 (0.004)**	-0.030 (0.010)**	0.017 (0.024)	-0.021 (0.017)	0.358 (0.138)**	0.203 (0.100)*	-0.803 (0.096)**	0.528 (0.064)**
CZ	0.032 (0.005)**	-0.095 (0.012)**	0.014 (0.027)	-0.006 (0.027)	0.348 (0.119)**	0.072 (0.118)	-0.421 (0.072)**	0.374 (0.070)**
DE	0.040 (0.003)**	-0.057 (0.010)**	0.003 (0.015)	-0.017 (0.011)	0.487 (0.087)**	-0.012 (0.061)	-0.575 (0.054)**	0.488 (0.038)**
FI	0.046 (0.005)**	-0.063 (0.017)**	0.002 (0.027)	0.009 (0.019)	0.443 (0.092)**	0.203 (0.073)**	-0.779 (0.071)**	0.433 (0.048)**
FR	0.068 (0.004)**	-0.058 (0.012)**	0.011 (0.019)	-0.025 (0.015)	0.472 (0.091)**	-0.146 (0.073)*	-0.642 (0.064)**	0.481 (0.048)**
IE	0.019 (0.003)**	-0.027 (0.007)**	-0.021 (0.012)	0.042 (0.012)**	0.377 (0.080)**	-0.358 (0.087)**	-0.626 (0.055)**	0.380 (0.053)**
IT	0.068 (0.004)**	-0.050 (0.009)**	0.023 (0.025)	0.022 (0.022)	0.500 (0.122)**	-0.520 (0.109)**	-0.804 (0.091)**	0.732 (0.080)**
NL	0.071 (0.005)**	-0.071 (0.012)**	0.001 (0.025)	-0.011 (0.016)	0.216 (0.116)	0.066 (0.077)	-0.627 (0.081)**	0.322 (0.049)**
PL	0.018 (0.003)**	-0.022 (0.009)*	-0.015 (0.036)	0.007 (0.033)	0.512 (0.247)*	0.092 (0.229)	-0.866 (0.191)**	0.680 (0.172)**
SI	0.038 (0.005)**	-0.033 (0.020)	-0.008 (0.056)	0.028 (0.037)	0.466 (0.278)	0.317 (0.176)	-1.010 (0.206)**	0.706 (0.121)**

*Note.* For the meaning of the country codes see Table 2; IdEU=European identity; Oppo=Opposition to immigration; Univ=Universalism; Cons=Conservation; Remain=Intention to vote remain; b=unstandardized estimate; SE=standard error; \* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; coefficients directed at “Remain” are probit coefficients. Single-group model fit:  $\chi^2 = 1693.506$  (df = 79); CFI = 0.960; RMSEA = 0.030. Multi-group model fit:  $\chi^2 = 4271.520$  (df = 919); CFI = 0.952; RMSEA = 0.042