Social groups, economic turmoil and support for the European Union. Evidence from Spanish regions over thirty years (1990-2020)

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Abstract

In recent decades, the literature on public support for the European Union (EU) has examined utilitarian and affective theories. Nonetheless, a comprehensive study of the variations in support across social groups, particularly in times of economic turmoil and across large periods of time, has been neglected. Drawing on previous studies, we investigate the support for EU membership across social groups, and the potential distinct impact that economic crises have on their attitudes towards the EU. In order to test these propositions, we integrate several databases from the *Eurobarometer* across a thirty-year period (1990-2020), with economic data from FEDEA and attitudinal data from the *Integrated Values Survey*. Even when controlling for alternative explanations of EU support, our results reveal that social groups with more mobility, education/skills and less dependence on the national welfare system, tend to support EU membership in higher numbers than the population average. Likewise, our results

indicate that economic crises at the regional level impact the public appraisal of the EU across all social groups, but students and skilled manual workers hold their ground in higher numbers than the rest of occupations. Finally, we also find differential attitudes across Spanish regions that should inspire further research regarding EU funds, transnational connections to other EU countries and regions, and the role of nationalism and party cues in driving support to the EU. We reinforce the robustness of our findings with two specifications of logistic regressions, and robust standard errors.

Keywords: European Union; Spain; Public opinion; Regional differences; Euroscepticism.

Resumen. *Grupos sociales, crisis económicas y apoyo a la Unión Europea. Evidencia de las regiones españolas durante treinta años (1990-2020)*

En las últimas décadas, la literatura sobre el apoyo de la opinión pública a la Unión Europea (UE) ha examinado teorías utilitaristas e identitarias. No obstante, no existe un estudio sistemático de las variaciones del apoyo entre grupos sociales al proceso de integración, particularmente en tiempos de crisis económica y durante largos períodos de tiempo. Basándonos en estudios previos, investigamos el apoyo a la pertenencia a la UE en todos los grupos sociales y el impacto potencial que las crisis económicas tienen en sus actitudes hacia la UE. Para hacer esto, integramos varias bases de datos del *Eurobarometer* durante un período de treinta años (1990-2020), con datos económicos de FEDEA y datos actitudinales del *Integrated Values Survey*. Incluso cuando se controlan las explicaciones alternativas del apoyo de la UE, nuestros resultados revelan que los grupos sociales con más movilidad, educación/habilidades y menos dependencia del sistema nacional de bienestar tienden a apoyar la pertenencia a la UE en mayor medida que el promedio de la población. Asimismo, nuestros resultados indican que las crisis económicas a nivel regional impactan en la valoración pública de la UE en todos los grupos sociales, pero los estudiantes y trabajadores manuales cualificados se mantienen firmes en mayor número que el resto de ocupaciones. Finalmente, también encontramos actitudes diferenciales entre las comunidades autónomas españolas, que deberían inspirar más investigaciones sobre los fondos de la UE, las conexiones transnacionales con otros países y otras regiones de la UE, así como el papel del nacionalismo y las señales de los partidos para impulsar el apoyo a la UE. Reforzamos la solidez de nuestros hallazgos con dos especificaciones de regresiones logísticas y errores estándar robustos.

Palabras clave: Unión Europea; España; Opinión pública; Diferencias regionales; Euroescepticismo.

Resum. *Grups socials, crisis econòmiques i suport a la Unió Europea. Evidència de les regions espanyoles durant trenta anys (1990-2020)*

En les últimes dècades, la literatura sobre el suport públic a la Unió Europea (UE) ha examinat teories utilitàries i afectives. Tot i això, no s'ha realitzat un estudi exhaustiu de les variacions de suport entre grups socials, especialment en èpoques de crisi econòmica i durant grans períodes de temps. A partir d'estudis anteriors, investiguem el suport a la pertinença a la UE entre grups socials i el potencial impacte diferencial que tenen les crisis econòmiques en les seves actituds envers la UE. Per tal de posar a prova aquestes proposicions, integrem diverses bases de dades de l'*Eurobarometer* durant un període de trenta anys (1990-2020), amb dades econòmiques de FEDEA i dades actitudinals de l'*Integrated Values Survey*. Fins i tot quan es controlen les explicacions alternatives del suport de la UE, els nostres resultats revelen que els grups socials amb més mobilitat, educació/competències i menys dependència del sistema nacional de benestar tendeixen a donar major suport a la pertinença a la UE que la mitjana de la població. Així mateix, els nostres resultats indiquen que les crisis econòmiques a nivell regional impacten en la valoració pública de la UE en tots els grups socials, però els estudiants i els treballadors manuals qualificats mantenen una millor opinió que la resta d'ocupacions. Finalment, també trobem actituds diferencials entre les regions espanyoles que haurien d'inspirar més investigacions sobre els fons europeus, les connexions transnacionals amb altres països i regions de la UE i el paper del nacionalisme i les accions de partit a l'hora d'impulsar el suport a la UE. Reforcem la robustesa de les nostres troballes amb dues especificacions de regressió logística i errors estàndard robustos.

Paraules clau: Unió Europea; Espanya; Opinió pública; Diferències regionals; Euroescepticisme.

1. INTRODUCTION

Legitimacy is a fundamental aspect of the normal functioning of institutions, as well as their ability to implement public policy and to guarantee social and political stability in any governance system (Dahl, 1956; Easton, 1965; Lipset, 1960). More specifically, social legitimacy directly conditions citizens' compliance with institutions, the scope of application of public policies, and the participation and political mobilization of citizens (Arregui, 2012). These principles hold particularly true for the European Union (EU) as a supranational institution (Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018; Zaum, 2013) that strongly relies on domestic elites and public opinion of the different Member states (MS) to both formulate and implement its agenda. As the process of EU integration has shifted towards a "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), we need to study EU legitimacy to ensure the efficiency and even the survival of the European project.

        In this sense, support for EU integration has lost the stability that characterized it since the mid-1990s (Hix, 2013). Previous literature has proposed two main theoretical explanations to account for public support towards the EU based upon affective support (Chalmers & Dellmuth 2015; Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018; De Vreese & Boomgarden, 2005; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; McLaren, 2002), and utilitarian cost-analysis evaluations (Anderson & Reichert 1995; Christin, 2005; Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018; Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998). Inside this second mechanism, economic recessions foster negative evaluations of the EU (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Braun & Tausendpfunf, 2014; Serrichio et al, 2013). Nonetheless, previous research has neither examined the average impact of economic crises on Euroscepticism nor its asymmetric effect among different social groups at the regional level and across large periods of time.

        How do different social groups evaluate the EU? How do financial crises impact the support towards the EU among social groups? Our research paper introduces a richer classification of social groups as included in the *Eurobarometer* and previous

literature, plus examining the impact of recessions across a large period of time, at the regional level. Drawing on Gabel's theory of socio-professional status (1998), we propose a typology of social groups along the axes of social mobility (Baumann, 1998), skills (Kitschelt, 1994), and attachment to the national welfare system (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Kriesi et al, 2008). Our expectation is that liberal professionals, service-workers, students, skilled manual workers, and managers and supervisors strongly support the EU, even in moments of economic crises. On the contrary, we expect that unskilled manual workers, drivers and salesmen, jointly with the retired, unemployed, and homemakers exhibit less support for EU integration, especially in episodes of economic turmoil.

In this research paper, we examine these questions with an integrated database from *Eurobarometer* waves, economic data from FEDEA (Fuente, 2022) and attitudinal data from the *Integrated Values Survey* (Haerpfer et al, 2021), spanning from 1990 to 2020. The total number of observations rises up to 28 715 individuals across a thirty-year period in Spanish regions, from the early years after accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) (1986) to nowadays. Altogether, our results find that liberal professionals, managers and supervisors, and service-sector employees support the EU in higher numbers regardless of the nature of the economic cycle. We also find that periods of economic crisis at the regional level worsen the opinion of individuals about EU membership. In this situation, students and skilled manual workers are more likely to maintain their support towards the EU. Finally, we find that even after controlling for these explanations, regional units still exhibit differential levels of support to EU membership. Alternative explanations based on identity, and other individual-rational factors (i.e., education) are also confirmed with our empirical analysis. Results are consistent and robust —we confirm them both with our main specification of ordinal logistic regression with robust standard errors, and the multinomial logistic regression with robust standard errors as well.

This research paper develops as follows. Section 2 discusses existing research on the factors that influence appraisal of the EU and develops testable hypotheses. Section 3 provides an account of the data, operationalization and method employed. Section 4 displays the evolution of EU support by region over the last thirty years. Section 5 presents the empirical analysis and discusses its implications. Section 6 concludes, discusses the main results considering existing literature, and pinpoints several implications for academic research and EU policymaking.

2. THEORY - EU SUPPORT

2.1.   Theories of EU Support - Utilitarian

In his seminal work, Easton (1975) differentiated between affective (diffuse) and utilitarian (specific) support to understand the mechanisms behind the stability of political systems. While diffuse support is stable and less prone to change, specific

support is contingent on the fit between policy outputs and the cost-benefit analysis of the individual. Supranational organizations like the EU (Arregui, 2012; Zaum, 2013), as well as other regional integration institutions (Schlipphak, 2015), increasingly depend on public opinion to effectively implement transnational decisions (Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018). In this context, the literature on public support towards the EU has identified two main explanations based upon rational-economic calculus and affective-identity explanations.

Support for the EU has strongly relied on utilitarian theories as a powerful explanation to explain the differences among individuals, regions and countries. Economic-based theory explains support to the EU based upon the rational evaluations of individuals about the costs and benefits for their own wellbeing and/or their region or country (Anderson & Reichert 1995; Christin, 2005; Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018; Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998). The socioeconomic status of EU citizens is a key determinant of support towards the EU (Gabel & Palmer, 1995) as the (individual) benefits accrued from EU integration due to the uneven endowments in education, occupational skills, and income shape their attitudes toward the supranational organisation (Gabel, 1998). As liberalisation reforms take place and national economies open up to international competition, low-income, less skilled citizens more dependent on the constrained social spending of the national welfare system will be less likely to support EU integration (Gabel & Palmer, 1995).

Ultimately, the prioritisation of economic integration via liberalisation, deregulation and the establishment of the European Monetary Union has left the social dimension largely out of the picture (Copeland, 2015). Social legitimacy matters because of its effects on the acquiescence of citizens to norms and institutions, the application of public policies, and the citizens' involvement in political life (Arregui, 2012). The EU's "social deficit" pervades both its policies and interests, thus conditioning its outputs and outcomes (Copeland, 2015). During the economic crisis of the Eurozone, the trend has only deepened with more emphasis on personal responsibility, lower wages in already low-paid sectors, and an ideological buttressing of the neoliberal economic ideals (Ibid). In this same direction, the benefits from the solidarity and redistribution EU policies reveals that such interventions have missed their mark, and thus have proved as an inefficient instrument to address the EU's "social deficit'' (Arregui, 2021).

As a contemporary parallel phenomenon to European integration, globalisation introduces a new structural conflict that engenders "winners" and "losers" of the process (Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi et al, 2008), and reduces the room to manoeuvre of national governments (Hellwig, 2015). As consequences of the integration of the economy are not homogenous across the national community, the unfolding of this phenomenon introduces twin changes in the supply and demand side of politics. On the one hand, the electorate undergoes a transformation due to globalisation. High levels of education and interaction with several individuals in the daily work context engender more progressive attitudes on social issues (i.e., socio-cultural workers and managers), while manual workers remain more conservative on these topics

(Kitschelt, 1994). On the other hand, political parties adapt their strategies to new patterns of party competition to consolidate key electoral bases. Thus, "winners" and "losers" are identities felt by citizens, and political elites respond to this new social configuration in order to win political power.

Chiefly, the "winners" of globalisation would correspond to individuals who are objectively endowed with beneficial factors to seize new opportunities. Thanks to their higher education and mobility (Baumann, 1998), they can enhance their lives from the opportunities of integration. Examples would include entrepreneurs, qualified employees in internationally competitive sectors, and cosmopolitan citizens (Kriesi et al, 2008). Conversely, "losers" perceive that the blurring of national boundaries diminishes their life perspectives and chances, particularly their social status and security. Examples would include local entrepreneurs, qualified employees in protected sectors, and nationalistic citizens (Ibid). As a paradigmatic example, low-skilled workers are more likely to go against the cultural, economic and political consensuses of globalisation (Dancygier et al, 2015) and EU integration (Chalmers & Dellmuth, 2015; Hooghe & Marks, 2005) as they are more exposed to losing their jobs (Rodrik, 2016).

- H1 - The more the personal benefit accrued from EU integration, the higher the individual support for EU membership

The Euro crisis fuelled economic evaluations of the EU (Braun & Tausendpfunf, 2014; Serrichio et al, 2013) that tended to decrease the support for the European club (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014). As the economic situation deteriorates, more individuals perceive that EU membership goes against their personal and/or regional/country interests due to both the ideological straitjacket of economic "austerity" and the control over macroeconomic policy that it holds (Copeland, 2015). High perceptions of corruption and elite misbehaviour were the main drivers behind a long-run loss in institutional trust in Portugal and Spain, which were connected to the lack of responsiveness of elites to domestic constituents during the economic crisis (Torcal, 2014) and thus the "social deficit" of the EU in the last instance (Copeland, 2015). Still, previous research finds no significant evidence of the impact of financial crises on the support towards the EU between the years 2007 and 2009 (Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018).

- H2 - If an economic recession occurs, individual support in the EU will decrease

Altogether, our expectation is that liberal professionals, service-workers, students and qualified manual workers as well as managers and supervisors strongly support the EU, even in moments of economic crises. On the contrary, we expect that unskilled manual workers, drivers and salesmen together with the retired, unemployed, and homemakers exhibit less support for EU integration. In times of

economic turmoil, we expect that competition for jobs increases for low-skilled workers, and that they depend more on the welfare state's resources. Likewise, this increase in competition for jobs is likely to trigger cultural resentment against unskilled immigrants, who are seen as both a cultural and economic threat as a result. This would be the outcome of individual higher skills, more mobility and less dependence on the welfare state as contingent on their socio-professional status (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Gabel, 1998). Altogether, the social groups more benefited from European integration will have more tools to also adapt to economic downturns.

- H3 - If an economic recession occurs, the "winners" of European integration maintain their support for EU membership more than the "losers"

2.2.   Theories of EU Support - Affective

Conversely, the alternative explanation of national identification with a certain *demos* argues, that identity is a more important factor to guide evaluations of the EU. Literature has found that citizens who identify with exclusive, close-knit national communities are less likely to support the EU than those with more inclusive, communitarian and European identities (Chalmers & Dellmuth 2015; Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018; De Vreese & Boomgarden, 2005; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; McLaren, 2002). In this sense, the educational level of individuals has been pinpointed as a critical factor to learn about and feel closer to the EU (Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Inglehart, 1970; Norris & Inglehart, 2009), but also as a means to engage in socialisation processes that tend to prime cosmopolitanism and other dominant values (as quoted in Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018 - Caldeira & Gibson, 1995; Harteveld et al., 2013; Inglehart, 1970; Norris & Inglehart, 2009).

- H4: The higher European identity in regions, the higher the support for EU membership

Beyond the alternative explanations and our theoretical proposal, we expect that trust in the national government and individual determinants also play a role in driving support for EU membership. On the one hand, citizens usually employ the evaluation of national governments as a heuristic shortcut to evaluate the EU (Anderson, 1998; Armingeon & Ceka 2014; Harteveld et al., 2013; Johnson, 2011; Rohrschneider 2002). If individuals feel their national institutions are non-efficient and/or corrupt, and trust in the European institutions is high, European integration is perceived as a more desirable goal (Muñoz et al., 2011; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). On the other hand, we take into account the age, gender and education of respondents as literature has pointed out that older adults, women, and less educated individuals are less likely to support the EU. Moreover, we also control the economic development of regions to capture differences across subnational units that could engender differential structural expectations and/or interests regarding the EU.

3. DATA, OPERATIONALIZATION AND METHODS

3.1.   Data

To effectively assess the four presented hypotheses, we construct a novel dataset combining both individual and regional level data from 1990 to 2020. The total number of observations rises up to 28 715 individuals across a thirty-year period in Spain from the early years after accession to the EEC (1986) to 2020. We retrieve individual-level and regional-level data from the *Eurobarometer* (i.e., EU's membership support, gender, age, employment, education and European identity). Also, we rely on key variables used in the literature as main predictors or control variables for estimating support to the EU. As such, we gather data outside the *Eurobarometer* waves from the *Integrated Values Survey* (i.e., trust in national government) and the *Fundación de Estudios de Economía Aplicada (FEDEA)* (i.e., real GDP per capita).[1]

3.2.   Data operationalization

As the dependent variable, we operationalize the support for EU membership at the individual level from the *Eurobarometer*. It consists of a categorical variable that reflects to what extent individuals support EU membership. Specifically, the question asks to what degree respondents believe that EU membership has been a "bad thing", "neither good nor bad" or a "good thing".[2] As the variable can be ordered from the lowest level ("a bad thing") to the highest level of support (a "good thing"), it allows us to estimate different model specifications. When specifying the dependent variable as nominal, we can estimate a multinomial logistic regression; if we wish to exploit the ordering in the measure, an ordered logistic regression is the best choice.

In order to examine our hypotheses, we include three main independent variables in the models. First, we include as main predictor the employment of individuals from the *Eurobarometer* to test whether those that show higher levels of support to EU membership correspond to the expected ones. In the *Eurobarometer*, respondents are classified in 18 categories, which may impede to analyse how levels of support vary consistently across theoretically relevant groups.[3] Also, previous research has operationalized social groups as dichotomous between manual workers and the rest (Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018), thus neglecting variation inside and across social groups.

Drawing on Gabel (1998) and Kriesi et al. (2008), we create different typologies of social groups according to the axes of social mobility (Baumann, 1998), skills and attachment/dependence to national welfare states. Hence, we classify them in nine

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[1] See Data Appendix for a summary of our dataset (Table A1).
[2] The question is asked as follows: "Generally speaking, do you think that Spain's membership of the European Union is …?". There has been some variation in the phrasing of the question across years but the structure and the meaning have remained unaltered since 1990.
[3] See Appendix for the 18 categories from the Eurobarometer (Table A2).

theoretically relevant categories such as: *Homemakers, Unemployed at the moment and Retired (1), Students (2), Fishermen and Farmers (3), Liberal Professionals -Employed or Self-employed- (4), Managers and Supervisors (5), Employed in the Services Sector (6), Salesmen and Drivers (7), Skilled Manual Workers (8) and Unskilled Manual Workers and Servants (9)*.

Second, we look at the effect of economic crises on the support to the EU. Following trade literature, we construct a dummy variable which is equal to 1 if region *i* at moment *t* experiences an economic downturn (negative economic growth) and is equal to 0 otherwise (Broll & Jauer, 2014). Hence, our second coefficient of interest is the interaction between economic crises and social groups.

Third, we incorporate European identity as the third predictor drawing on the *Eurobarometer* once again. The question asks whether respondents see themselves, in the near future, as *Spanish (only) (1), Spanish and European (2), European and Spanish (3)* and *European (only) (4)*. Exploiting the ordering of the variable from the lowest level of European identity (*Spanish only*) to the highest one (*European only*), we compute the mean European identity for each year and region. However, the *Eurobarometer* is conducted twice per year, with some questions not being administered systemically each year (e.g., European identity). Hence, we also retrieve data on all the years that the question was included in the questionnaire, and then we compute for each year and region the mean value of European identity. Due to missing data, we compute this value over periods of five years (i.e., it remains constant over five-year periods).

As control variables, we include factors that may have an effect on both, the dependent and independent variables, and that have been extensively used in the literature on EU support. At the individual level, we control for characteristics such as age, gender and education with data from the *Eurobarometer*. We introduce age as a continuous variable, and its squared form, to capture, also, the effect of age on EU support after a certain threshold. In addition, we include education disaggregated by primary education, secondary education and tertiary education/still studying.[4] Finally, at the regional level, we control for real GDP per capita and trust in the national government. The former variable is obtained by computing real GDP divided by population for each year and region for all the years with data from FEDEA. The latter one is computed in the same fashion as European identity, calculating the value at the regional level from individual data from the database of the *Integrated Values Survey*. For each year and region, it obtains a value between 1 (lowest trust) and 4 (highest trust) that remains constant over five-year periods due to missing data as in European identity.
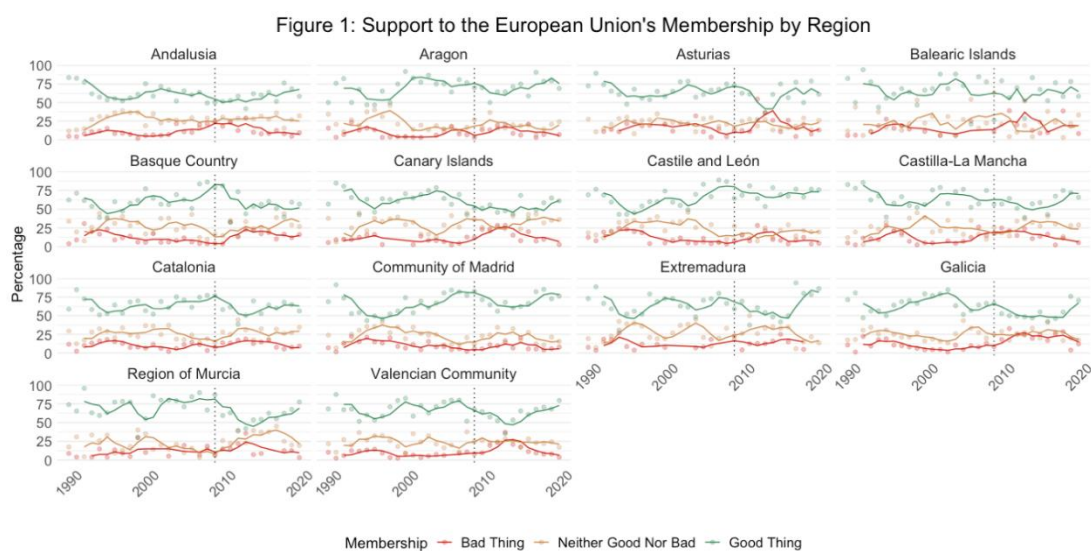
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[4] We propose this disaggregation departing from the 4 categories offered by the *Eurobarometer*: finished full-time education up to 15 years (*primary education*), finished full-time education between 16 and 19 years old (*secondary education*) and finished full-time education at twenty years old or older, and still studying (*tertiary education & still studying*).

3.3.   Empirical strategy

The main aim of our research paper is to study the effect of key predictors —and one interaction— on EU support within regions in Spain across time. Therefore, our dependent variable is membership, while the main explanatory variables are occupation, economic crisis, and European identity. As the dependent variable is categorical, we predict EU support using both an ordinal logistic regression and a multinomial logistic regression. Our preferred estimation is the former one as the interpretation is relatively more straightforward and it exploits the ordering of the dependent variable. Simultaneously, to further enrich our analysis, we also estimate a multinomial logistic regression to explicitly assess the effect of the independent variables on the support level relative to the base support level (i.e., "bad thing" vs "good thing" and "neither good nor bad" vs "good thing").

In both models we control for region and year fixed effects to eliminate all time-invariant and region-specific unobserved characteristics that could be potentially correlated between our main explanatory variables and the error term, and to get rid of all unobserved time trends that affect regions. This allows us to have consistent estimates even if there is correlation between the time-invariant characteristics of regions and the independent variables. However, when controlling for region and year fixed effects, an additional problem could arise, namely, omitted variable bias. Therefore, we also add control variables in our fixed effects regression (real GDP per capita, trust in national government, gender, level of education and age). In addition, even if the coefficient is consistent, if standard errors are not well estimated this could lead to a misinterpretation of the results. Therefore, we also estimate our two models with robust standard errors.

4. BACKGROUND - SUPPORT FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION IN SPANISH REGIONS: 1990-2020

Figure 1: Support to the European Union's Membership by Region

Membership — Bad Thing — Neither Good Nor Bad — Good Thing

Own Elaboration. Data: Eurobarometer (1990-2020). Moving average (line) computed with t, t-1 and t-2 values for EU Membership percentages

In the last thirty years, support for the EU has fluctuated within regions across time, but there has been no large differences between regions[5]. In the nineties (1990-1999), the difference between the regions with the highest support for the EU and those with the lowest support amounted to slightly more than 10 % (Figure 1). This percentage increased up to more than 15 % in the last decade (2010-2020). However, when computing the mean over the whole time-span (1990-2020), the average EU support does not deviate largely across the regions with the highest values and the lowest ones (11 %). Thus, in this period, Aragon, Murcia and the Community of Madrid held the highest support for the EU with an average proportion of their population considering EU membership a "good thing" equivalent to 70, 67 and 67 %, respectively. On the contrary, the regions with the lowest support for EU membership amounted to 61, 59 and 59 % in Andalusia, the Canary Islands and the Basque Country, respectively. Altogether, there were no large differences in the support for the EU when computing the average over several years and not controlling for other factors.

However, the figure suggests that there is a link between the fluctuations of the economy and the support for the EU across regions. It indicates that the economic performance of a country (or region) may have an effect on the proportion of the population considering EU membership a "good thing" (or a "bad thing"). For instance, starting from 2008/2009 (Figure 1, dashed line), there is a clear downward trend in the support to the EU in majority of regions (Catalonia, Asturias, Murcia the Basque Country and Aragon, among others). Simultaneously, there is an upward trend in the proportion of population dissatisfied with the EU (Asturias, Valencia, Galicia, Canary Islands and the Basque Country, among others).

This tendency might suggest the presence of a link between economic growth and the support to the EU. In this sense, individuals might support the EU as long as there are tangible benefits from membership, but their support might decrease with economic downturns (Braun & Tausendpfunf, 2014; Serrichio et al, 2013). As a consequence, we aim to validate this descriptive evidence by estimating the impact of economic crises on the support to the EU within regions, as well as the differential support across social groups, maintaining constant other relevant factors.

5. RESULTS

5.1.   Ordinal logistic regression

To start, we find that the "winners" from European integration show a higher support for the EU relative to the other social groups (H1). The ordered logit for liberal professionals to consider EU membership as beneficial is 0.24 more than homemakers, unemployed and retired, when the other variables are held constant in the model (Table 1). This coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.001 p-level, allowing us to

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[5] Figure 1 does not display data for Cantabria, La Rioja and Navarre due to the small sample size in some years of the dataset that could lead to unreliable conclusions.

reject the null hypothesis with high statistical confidence. Thus, for liberal professionals, the odds of considering EU membership a "good thing" (versus "neither good nor bad" or a "bad thing") are 1.28 times higher than for homemakers, unemployed and retired, *ceteris paribus*.[6] Similarly, for managers and supervisors, the odds of considering EU membership a "good thing" are 1.21 times higher than for the base category, *ceteris paribus* (for service-workers this estimate amounts to 1.20). Again, these coefficients are statistically significant at the 0.01 and 0.001 p-values, respectively.

Hence, liberal professionals, managers and supervisors, and service-workers, are the social groups with the highest level of support to the EU when controlling for other variables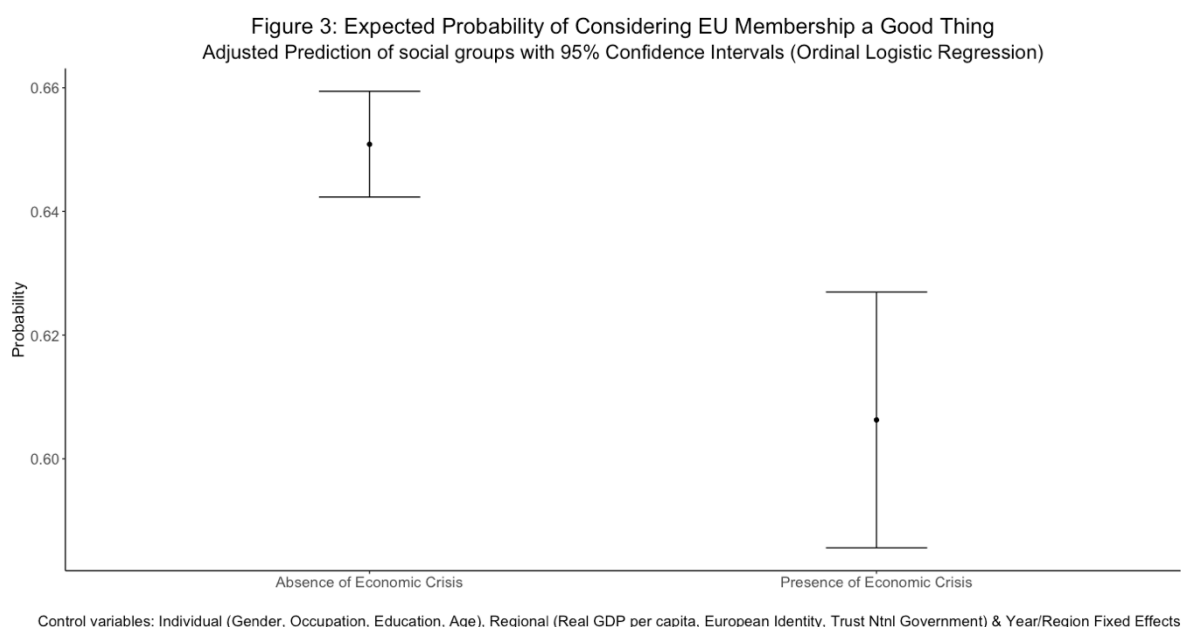. On the other hand, we find that the "losers" from European integration show a lower support for the EU relative to the other social groups (Figure 2). In this fashion, for unskilled manual workers and servants, the odds of considering EU membership a "good thing" (versus "neither good nor bad" or a "bad thing") are 0.87 times higher than for homemakers, unemployed and retired, *ceteris paribus*. This coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 p-level. Thus, unskilled manual workers are the social group with the lowest level of support to the EU when controlling for other factors. Similarly, fishermen and farmers, and salesmen and drivers, share the same coefficient's direction but are non-different from zero. Findings are consistent with previous literature on the asymmetric benefits accrued from EU membership (Arregui, 2021; Gabel, 1998; Gabel and Palmer, 1995), and the political (re)alignment of segments of the electorate towards "less EU" (Dancygier et al, 2015; Kriesi et al, 2008).

Figure 2: Expected Probability of Considering EU Membership a Good Thing
Adjusted Prediction of social groups with 95% Confidence Intervals (Ordinal Logistic Regression)

Control variables: Individual (Gender, Education, Age), Regional (Real GDP per capita, European Identity, Economic Crisis, Trust Ntnl Government) & Year/Region Fixed Effects
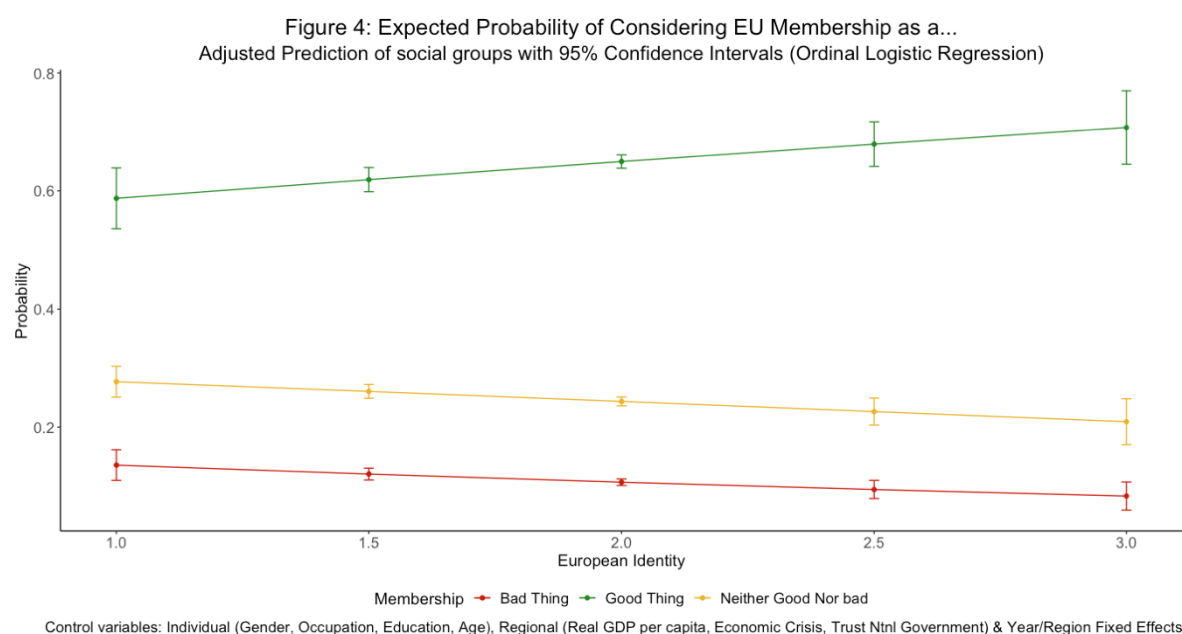
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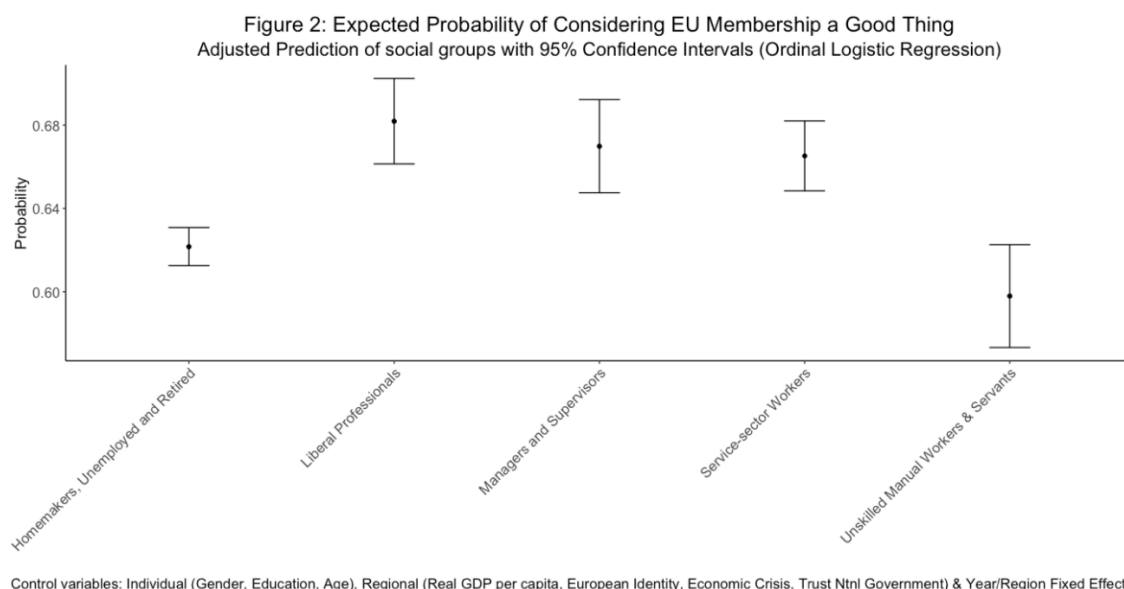
[6] The odds ratios can be obtained by exponentiating the ordered logit coefficients. To simplify the interpretation of the coefficients, relevant coefficients of the regression table are also interpreted in terms of odds ratios.

Besides, our results find that individuals exhibit a lower support for EU membership in times of economic crises (H2). The ordered logit for individuals in moments of economic downturn being in a higher support category is 0.29 less than in times of positive economic growth, *ceteris paribus*. Economic downturns increase the odds of considering EU membership a "good thing" versus the combined "neither good nor bad" or a "bad thing" about 0.75 times more than in economic growth periods, *ceteris paribus*. This coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.001 p-value, which allows us to reject the null hypothesis with high statistical confidence. Therefore, economic recessions have a negative statistically significant effect on the support to the EU within regions as shown in the past at the national and comparative level (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Braun & Tausendpfunf, 2014; Serrichio et al, 2013) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Expected Probability of Considering EU Membership a Good Thing
Adjusted Prediction of social groups with 95% Confidence Intervals (Ordinal Logistic Regression)

Control variables: Individual (Gender, Occupation, Education, Age), Regional (Real GDP per capita, European Identity, Trust Ntnl Government) & Year/Region Fixed Effects

However, social groups do not react similarly to economic downturns. In the presence of an economic crisis, the odds of considering EU membership as a good thing (versus "neither good nor bad" or a "bad thing") for students are 1.34 times higher than for homemakers, unemployed and retired, *ceteris paribus*. Similarly, the odds of considering EU membership a good thing (versus "neither good nor bad" or a "bad thing") for skilled manual workers are 1.32 times higher than for the reference group, all things equal. Both estimates are statistically significant at the 0.01 p-value. As opposed to these social groups, the rest of categories do not hold a statistically significant coefficient, meaning that they do not differ from the base category. Plausible explanations are that skilled manual workers are more protected against globalisation than their unskilled counterparts (Dancygier et al, 2015; Kriesi et al, 2008; Rodrik, 2016) and students are not as exposed to the job market as other social groups in society.

As an alternative explanation, we find that regions with higher European identity show a higher support for EU membership (H4). As expected by the literature investigating identity as a key factor guiding evaluations of the EU (Chalmers & Dellmuth 2015; Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018, among others), we find a one unit increase in European identity would result in a 0.28 unit increase in the ordered log-odds of being in a higher support category, *ceteris paribus*. This coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 p-value. Therefore, a higher level of European identity has a statistically significant effect on the support to the EU within regions (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Expected Probability of Considering EU Membership as a...
Adjusted Prediction of social groups with 95% Confidence Intervals (Ordinal Logistic Regression)

Membership — Bad Thing — Good Thing — Neither Good Nor bad

Control variables: Individual (Gender, Occupation, Education, Age), Regional (Real GDP per capita, Economic Crisis, Trust Ntnl Government) & Year/Region Fixed Effects

Even after controlling for the classical explanations of support to EU integration, Spanish regions still display differentiated patterns of attitudes. In comparison to the Balearic Islands, the regions of Andalusia, Aragon, Asturias, Canarias, Castilla-La Mancha, Castile and León, Valencia, Extremadura, Galicia, La Rioja and Murcia show an expected higher probability of considering EU membership a "good thing", *ceteris paribus* (statistically significant difference). On the contrary, the Basque Country, Navarre, Catalonia and Madrid show an expected lower probability of considering EU membership a "good thing", *ceteris paribus* (statistically significant as well). Finally, Cantabria does not hold a statistically significant coefficient, meaning that it does not differ from the Balearic Islands on the level of EU support.[7] We further discuss these results in the Discussions & Conclusions section.

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[7] See Figure A1 in the Appendix for the expected probability of considering EU membership a "good thing" across regions.

To conclude the inferential results' main section, the coefficients from the control variables hold the expected effects. Trust in the national government goes in the expected positive direction (p-value < 0.001) —the higher the trust in the domestic institution, the higher the support for EU membership (Armingeon & Ceka 2014; Harteveld et al., 2013; Johnson, 2011). Then, real GDP per capita is associated positively with European support (statistically significant at the 0.001 p-value); women show lower support for the EU than men as indicated in previous findings (Nelsen & Guth, 2000); and more educated individuals show a higher level of support to the EU relative to the least educated as predicted by theories of individual utility and confirmed in the literature (Chalmers & Dellmuth, 2015; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Inglehart, 1970; Norris & Inglehart, 2009). Lastly, age is not statistically significant, but the sign suggests that it is positively correlated with EU support until a cutoff point where support declines with age.

Table 1: Ordinal Logistic Regression with Robust Standard Errors

	Membership
Occupation (Base: Domestic Chores, Unemployed and Retired)	
- Students	0.0755 (1.10)
- Fishermen and Farmers	-0.0118 (-0.08)
- Liberal Professionals	0.246*** (3.86)
- Managers and Supervisors	0.195** (2.86)
- Employed in the Services Sector	0.185*** (3.45)
- Salesmen and Drivers	-0.0165 (-0.19)
- Skilled Manual Workers	0.0696 (1.37)
- Unskilled Manual Workers and Servants	-0.138* (-2.13)
Economic Crisis	-0.293*** (-4.30)
Occupation (Base: Domestic Chores, Unemployed and Retired) * Economic Crisis	
- Students * Economic Crisis	0.295** (2.64)
- Fishermen and Farmers * Economic Crisis	0.212 (0.66)
- Liberal Professionals * Economic Crisis	0.121 (1.01)
- Managers and Supervisors * Economic Crisis	0.0990 (0.79)
- Employed in the Services Sector * Economic Crisis	0.0529 (0.55)
- Salesmen and Drivers * Economic Crisis	0.158 (0.92)
- Skilled Manual Workers * Economic Crisis	0.278** (3.00)
- Unskilled Manual Workers and Servants * Economic Crisis	0.126 (0.91)
European Identity	0.280* (2.03)
Real GDP per capita	0.0000799*** (6.06)
Trust in National Government	0.282*** (3.33)
Gender (Base: Male)	
- Female	-0.152*** (-5.90)
Education (Base: Primary Education)	
- Secondary Education	0.366*** (10.86)
- Tertiary Education and Still Studying	0.663*** (16.34)
Age	0.00471 (1.14)
Age Sq.	-0.0000138 (-0.34)
Observations	28715
Log pseudo-likelihood	-24351.236
Pseudo R2	0.0333
BIC	49451.8
AIC	48848.5

The model includes but does not report region and year fixed-effects. *t* statistics in parentheses. + p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

5.2.   Multinomial logistic regression

We estimate an additional multinomial logistic regression with robust standard errors specification to contrast both the direction and the statistical significance of the coefficients from the ordinal logistic regression.[8] Our results confirm previous findings about higher support for the EU among the "winners" from European integration relative to the rest of social groups (H1). The multinomial logit for services-workers relative to homemakers, unemployed and retired is 0.17 unit lower for considering EU membership a "bad thing" relative to a "good one", *ceteris paribus*. In other words, service-workers are less likely than homemakers, unemployed and retired to consider EU membership a "bad thing" relative to a "good one". This coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.1 p-value. Similarly, liberal professionals, managers and supervisors share the same coefficient's direction, but the coefficients are non-different from zero.

In the same fashion, the multinomial logit for liberal professionals relative to homemakers, unemployed and retired is 0.34 unit lower for considering EU membership "neither good nor bad" relative to a "good one", *ceteris paribus*. That is, liberal professionals are less likely than homemakers, unemployed and retired to consider EU membership "neither good nor bad" relative to a "good thing". This coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.001 p-value. This also applies to managers and supervisors, and services-workers (negative coefficient and statistically significant at the 0.001 p-value). On the contrary, the multinomial logit for unskilled manual workers and servants relative to homemakers, unemployed and retired is 0.15 higher for considering EU membership "neither good nor bad" relative to a "good thing", *ceteris paribus*. Hence, unskilled manual workers and servants are more likely than homemakers, unemployed and retired to consider EU membership "neither good nor bad" relative to a "good thing".

As with the ordinal logistic regression, we find that in times of economic crises individuals show a lower support for EU membership (H2). The multinomial logit for individuals in moments of economic crisis relative to times of growth is 0.34 unit higher for considering EU membership a "bad thing" relative to a "good one", all things equal. This coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.001 p-value. That is, in economic downturns it is more likely that individuals consider EU membership a "bad thing" relative to a "good one". Additionally, the interaction term between economic crisis and employment points out in the same direction as in the previous ordered regression. Whenever there is an economic crisis, students and skilled manual workers are less likely than homemakers, unemployed and retired to consider EU membership a "bad thing" relative to a "good one", *ceteris paribus* (H3).

Finally, we also confirm H4 and the expected effect from control variables. If a region were to increase its real GDP per capita, trust in national government or European identity by one unit, the multinomial log-odds considering EU membership

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[8] The regression results can be found in the Appendix (tables A3 and A4).

a "bad thing" rather than a "good one" would be expected to decrease, *ceteris paribus* (coefficients statistically significant at the 0.001, 0.001 and 0.05 p-value, respectively).

6. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Our analysis offers an updated understanding of the public support towards the EU in two directions. Drawing on Gabel (1998), we find that liberal professionals, service-sector workers, and managers and supervisors are the social groups that feel that their country has benefited the most from EU membership. They are more educated, mobile and exposed to diversity (Kitschelt, 1994), which also situates them as the core supporters of European integration and liberalism in social issues (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Rennwald and Evans, 2014). Still, our results find that manual workers are divided in their support towards the EU based on their skills (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Gabel, 1998) that previous literature treated as unified and operationalized it as dichotomic with the rest of social groups as alternative value (Chalmers & Dellmuth, 2015; Hooghe & Marks, 2005).

This research paper also provides additional evidence that economic crises diminish the support for the EU (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Braun & Tausendpfunf, 2014; Serrichio et al, 2013). Our findings reveal that students and skilled manual workers are the least likely groups to downgrade their support towards EU membership in times of economic crisis. In the first case, students are not as exposed to the job market as other social groups in society and they still have mobility to access Erasmus+ programs and other education initiatives from the EU (Sigalas, 2010) such as Interrail, that can trigger the adoption of European identity (Kuhn, 2012). On the other hand, the higher skills of some manual workers might isolate them from the worst outcomes of both globalization and recession in comparison to their unskilled counterparts (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Gabel, 1998; Rodrik, 2016).

Both the methodological robustness of the research design and the data collection effort since the accession of Spain in the EEC strongly buttress the reliability of our findings. Individuals nested in regions that seem more dependent on EU funds due to their economic and social structure (i.e., less economically developed, more dependent on the agricultural sector, less urban) support EU membership in higher numbers than the average Spanish citizen. Catalonia, the Basque Country, Navarre and Madrid appear as the least pro-EU membership regions, when controlling for other factors. Potential explanations might encompass the impact of nationalism and regionalism on the development of European identity, and the impact of party cues derived from the strength of radical left platforms in both territories (i.e., *Euskal Herria Bildu* in the Basque Country and Navarre, *Candidatures d'Unitat Popular* in Catalonia, and *Unidas Podemos* in both) that are vocal about the "social deficit" of the EU (Copeland, 2015). In the case of Madrid, we could entertain the idea that the higher share of VOX, as a radical right party, also erodes support for the EU.

Further studies should incorporate the impact of EU structural funding on attitudes towards the EU at the national and regional level, also exploring its conditionality on factors such as education, identity, the awareness of the EU and other relevant attributes of regions (Chalmers & Dellmuth, 2015; Crescenzi et al, 2020; Dellmuth & Chalmers, 2018). Likewise, Gabel's (1998) argument about the impact of borders on EU support should be tested at the Spanish level. As the geography of some border connections complicates transborder interactions (i.e., Aragon and Navarre's frontier in the Pyrinees), the probability to engage in cross-border interaction (social and economic) is lower, and so would then be attitudinal change as a product of interborder trade or socialisation. Trade openness with the EU or similar measures could also better illuminate differences across regions and social groups. Altogether, we would obtain empirical evidence to improve EU decision-making and policymaking, particularly in times of economic turmoil and with particular attention to the left-behind groups in the European integration (and globalisation) process (Arregui, 2021).

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APPENDICES

Tables

Table A1: Data Appendix

Variable	Type	Description	Source
Membership	DV	Spain's membership of the EU is: A bad thing (1) Neither good nor bad (2) A good thing (3)	Eurobarometer (1990-2020)
Occupation	IV	Domestic Chores, Unemployed at the Moment and Retired (1) Students (2) Fishermen and Farmers (3) Liberal Professionals– Employed or Self-Employed- (4) Managers and Supervisors (5) Employed in the Services Sector (6) Salesmen and Drivers (7) Skilled Manual Workers (8) Unskilled Manual Workers and Servants (9)	Eurobarometer (1990-2020)
Economic Crisis	IV	Real GDP per capita positive economic growth (0) Real GDP per capita negative economic growth (1)	FEDEA (1990-2020)
European Identity	IV	Mean value of European identity over periods of five years	Eurobarometer (1990-2020)
Real GDP per Capita	Control	Computed as the fraction between Real GDP and Population	FEDEA (1990-2020)
Trust in National Government	Control	Mean value of trust in national government over periods of 4 to 5 years (depending on data availability)	Integrated Values Survey (1990-2020)
Age	Control	Variable capturing the age of respondents	Eurobarometer (1990-2020)
Gender	Control	Male (0) Female (1)	Eurobarometer (1990-2020)
Education	Control	Primary Education (1) Secondary Education (2) Tertiary Education (3) Still Studying (4)	Eurobarometer (1990-2020)

Table A2: Eurobarometer Employment Classification

Code	Category
1	Homemaker, or without any current occupation, not working
2	Student
3	Unemployed or temporarily not working
4	Retired or unable to work through illness
5	Farmer
6	Fisherman
7	Professional Self-Employed (Lawyer, Medical Practitioner etc.)
8	Owner of a shop, craftsmen, other self-employed person
9	Business proprietors, owner (full or partner) of a company self employed
10	Employed professional (Employed Doctor, Lawyer, Accountant, Architect)
11	General Management, Director or Top Management
12	Middle Management, other Management
13	Employed position, working mainly at a desk
14	Employed position, not at a desk but travelling (salesmen, driver, etc.)
15	Employed position, not at a desk, but in a service job (hospital, restaurant etc.)
16	Supervisor
17	Skilled manual worker
18	Other (unskilled) manual worker or servant

Table A3: Multinomial Logistic Regression with Robust Standard Errors

Base Outcome: 3 (Good Thing)	Membership (1: Bad thing)
Occupation (Base: Domestic Chores, Unemployed and Retired)	
- Students	-0.167 (-1.39)
- Fishermen and Farmers	0.112 (0.51)
- Liberal Professionals	-0.136 (-1.36)
- Managers and Supervisors	-0.0969 (-0.91)
- Employed in the Services Sector	-0.170+ (-1.90)
- Salesmen and Drivers	0.138 (0.98)
- Skilled Manual Workers	-0.0352 (-0.42)
- Unskilled Manual Workers and Servants	0.145 (1.27)
Economic Crisis	0.343*** (3.38)
Occupation (Base: Domestic Chores, Unemployed and Retired) *Economic Crisis	
- Students * Crisis	-0.369+ (-1.93)
- Fishermen and Farmers * Crisis	-0.337 (-0.78)
- Liberal Professionals * Crisis	-0.266 (-1.49)
- Managers and Supervisors * Crisis	-0.228 (-1.21)
- Employed in the Services Sector * Crisis	-0.106 (-0.71)
- Salesmen and Drivers * Crisis	-0.291 (-1.14)
- Skilled Manual Workers * Crisis	-0.367** (-2.60)
- Unskilled Manual Workers and Servants * Crisis	-0.0516 (-0.26)
European Identity	-0.453* (-2.02)
Real GDP per capita	-0.0000962*** (-4.60)
Trust in National Government	-0.454*** (-3.32)
Gender (Base: Male)	
- Female	0.0380 (0.93)
Education (Base: Primary Education)	
- Secondary Education	-0.396*** (-7.43)
- Tertiary Education and Still Studying	-0.674*** (-10.59)
Age	0.00737 (1.10)
Age Sq.	-0.0000854 (-1.30)
Constant	1.789** (2.69)
Observations	28715
Log pseudo-likelihood	-24145.364
Pseudo R2	0.0415
BIC	49768.9
AIC	48578.7

The model includes but does not report region and year fixed-effects. *t* statistics in parentheses. + p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table A4: Multinomial Logistic Regression with Robust Standard Errors

Base Outcome: 3 (Good Thing)	Membership (2: Neither good nor bad)
Occupation (Base: Domestic Chores, Unemployed and Retired)	
- Students	-0.0821 (-1.04)
- Fishermen and Farmers	-0.0887 (-0.51)
- Liberal Professionals	-0.340*** (-4.58)
- Managers and Supervisors	-0.286*** (-3.64)
- Employed in the Services Sector	-0.221*** (-3.57)
- Salesmen and Drivers	-0.0840 (-0.81)
- Skilled Manual Workers	-0.104+ (-1.76)
- Unskilled Manual Workers and Servants	0.154* (1.99)
Economic Crisis	0.230** (2.84)
Occupation (Base: Domestic Chores, Unemployed and Retired) * Economic Crisis	
- Students * Crisis	-0.165 (-1.31)
- Fishermen and Farmers * Crisis	-0.126 (-0.35)
- Liberal Professionals * Crisis	-0.00206 (-0.01)
- Managers and Supervisors * Crisis	0.0358 (0.25)
- Employed in the Services Sector * Crisis	0.0358 (0.25)
- Salesmen and Drivers * Crisis	0.00473 (0.04)
- Skilled Manual Workers * Crisis	-0.194+ (-1.82)
- Unskilled Manual Workers and Servants * Crisis	-0.265 (-1.64)
European Identity	-0.139 (-0.87)
Real GDP per capita	-0.0000781*** (-5.12)
Trust in National Government	-0.168+ (-1.76)
Gender (Base: Male)	
- Female	0.258*** (8.68)
Education (Base: Primary Education)	
- Secondary Education	-0.386*** (-9.92)
- Tertiary Education and Still Studying	-0.704*** (-15.13)
Age	-0.0144** (-2.97)
Age Sq.	0.0000894+ (1.86)
Constant	1.355** (2.75)
Observations	28715
Log pseudo-likelihood	-24145.364
Pseudo R2	0.0415
BIC	49768.9
AIC	48578.7

The model includes but does not report region and year fixed-effects. *t* statistics in parentheses. + p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figures

Figure A1: Expected Probability of Considering EU Membership a Good Thing
Adjusted Prediction of regions with 95% Confidence Intervals (Ordinal Logistic Regression)
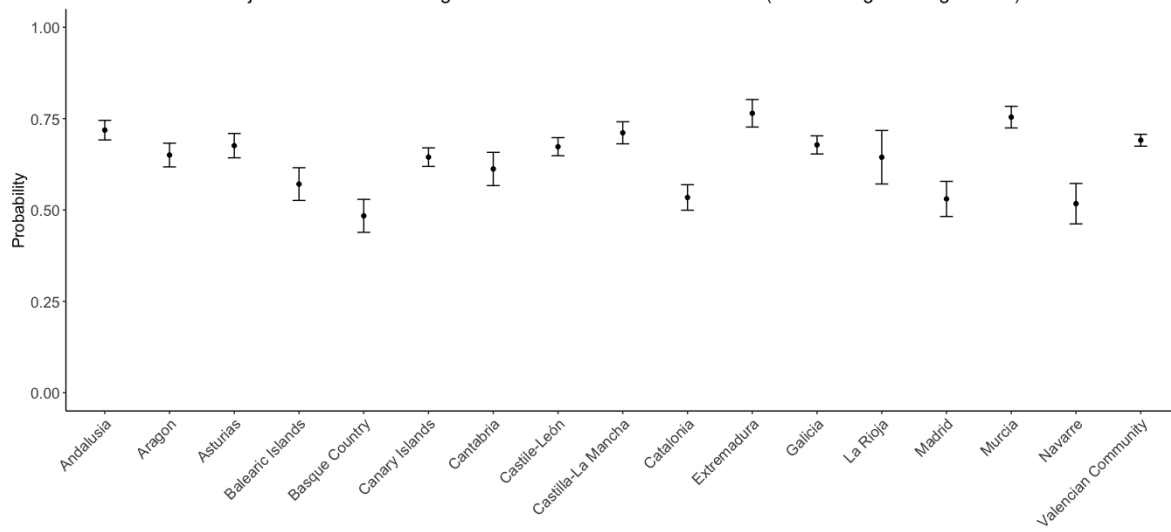
Control variables: Individual (Occupation, Gender, Education, Age), Regional (Real GDP p.c., European Identity, Economic Crisis, Trust in National Gvt) & Year Fixed Effects