

# **Regional identity in a European context**

A quantitative study exploring how regional attachment  
influences EU support in France

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between regional identity and its influence on EU support. Going beyond the common focus on decentralized countries or entire European contexts, the research specifically examines the influence of regional identity within the more unitary state of France. Building on established theory linking identity to EU support, the study distinguishes between exclusive and inclusive regionalists, anticipating that exclusive regionalists are less likely to support the EU, while inclusive regionalists are more likely to express support. Utilizing data from the EVS and the Eurobarometer, a multiple regression analysis is employed to test the relationship. The analysis does not find evidence that individuals with exclusive regional attachment are less inclined to support the EU, suggesting a sense of ambivalence in their attitudes towards the EU. However, it does yield statistically significant support for the second hypothesis, indicating that individuals with inclusive regional attachment are more likely to support the EU.

*Key words:* Regional identity, EU, Regionalism, Social identity theory, Nested identities

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# 1 Introduction and background

The purpose of this section is to introduce the subject, state the research question while also providing a short background on regionalism in Europe to contextualize the study.

## 1.1 Introduction

Throughout much of the 20th century, the nation-state was the primary and often exclusive focus of study in the field of international relations. However, with the gradual rise in power of the European Union (EU) in the later decades of the 20th century, research in this field has expanded beyond the study of the nation-state. European integration has meant a loss of nation-state sovereignty, with decision-making shifting to a supranational level. At the same time that decision-making is being moved to the EU level, it has also devolved towards regional levels (Keating 1998). This is something that is reflected in a multilevel governance system that deals with the distribution of decision-making and responsibility at regional, national and supranational level (Hooghe and Marks 1996). The multilevel governance system has enabled regional actors to engage in international politics through representation in Brussels, creating a direct connection with the EU (Keating 1998, p. 167-170)

The territorial architecture of multilevel governance has been one of the most intriguing aspects following European integration. One of the lesser-explored dimensions of this complex tapestry is the influence of regional identity on attitudes towards the EU. Much has been written about how national identity affects support for the EU (see Hooghe and Marks 2005; Levy and Phan 2014). Yet, there is much less knowledge about the role of regional identity in shaping attitudes toward the EU. With the few studies that have highlighted this relationship, there does not seem to exist much consensus on how regionalism affects support for the EU on an individual level. On the one hand, for those individuals advocating for increased regional autonomy, the EU might appear as an unlikely ally, as it may contribute to a further shift of power away from their regional entities. On the other hand, further European integration diminishes the need for larger nation states while empowering smaller regional entities (Jolly 2007, p. 110). The lack of a clear consensus on the topic serves as a driving force for additional research of the relationship between regional identity and EU support

## 1.2 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on the relationship between regional identity and its effect on attitudes towards the EU on the individual level. More specifically, the thesis is guided by the following research question:

*What effect does regional identity have on the individual's EU support?*

Drawing from a theoretical framework that links identity to EU support and building on previous research in this domain, the thesis makes a distinction between exclusive and inclusive regionalists. Individuals falling into the former category are expected to be less inclined to support the EU while those in the latter category are more likely to express support. Using data from the European Value Study (EVS) and the Eurobarometer, the expected results are tested through a multiple regression analysis aiming to discover if there is statistical significant support of the proposed hypothesis.

The analysis relies on data reflecting the attitudes of French citizens. Previous research testing the relationship between regional identity and support for the EU have typically been concentrated on decentralized countries associated with high levels of regionalism (see Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001; Jolly 2009) or studies encompassing the entirety of Europe (see Chacha 2013; Brigevich 2018). There have been less studies of more unitary states, with the important exception of Brigevich's (2016) study of France. Yet there is a need to update this analysis because it was based on data from the early 21st century and France's party system and relationship to the EU has changed substantially since then (Chabal and Behrent 2022; Likaj et al. 2020). France, often presented as the archetype of the centralized state while at the same time having strong tendencies of regional identity (Loughlin 2007), serves as a distinct case in this research. The thesis contributes to the research field by broadening the generalizability of previous research of how regional identity affects support for the EU into a context of a centralized state. This research not only engages with the academic discourse in a field marked by lack of a clear consensus, but also carries broader implications for understanding what drives support for the EU. The study of public opinion towards the EU gains importance as the European public is perceived as the principal source of democratic legitimacy for the Union (Karv 2019)

## 1.3 Background - Regionalism in Europe

Defining a region is a difficult task since it can take on different meanings in different contexts. It could indicate smaller sub-state entities, like Catalonia in Spain, or encompass regions that extend across state boundaries, such as the Balkan region. Furthermore, some people use it to refer to an entire continent (Donat and Meyer 2020, p. 12). The EU uses its own system to divide Europe into regions with something called *Nomenclature des Unites Territoriales pour la Statistique* (NUTS). The NUTS classification is divided into three levels. First a socio-economic regional level, secondly regions for the application of regional policies and finally a level that encompasses small regions for special diagnoses (Eurostat). While a “region” is an ambiguous concept with different meanings, this paper looks at regions as a sub-state entity.

Regionalism is a concept that broadly speaking seeks to empower a sub-state region. In examining the historical context of regionalism in Europe, it's essential to note that prior to the 19th century, Europe could be described as already regionalised since it was mostly made up of local communities. After that, nation-states began a process of centralization and became the primary entities where power was exercised (Gren 1999, p. 14). The first main movement of regionalism in the 20th century is today defined as “old regionalism”. The movement stemming from the post world war II era did not lead to much strengthening of regions. It was characterized by a top-down approach with the powers of the nation-state still remaining largely unchallenged (Gren 1999, p. 15)

While old regionalism was predominantly driven from a top-down approach and limited to some extent, the “new regionalism” is much broader in scope. It was developed in the 1980s and is defined by factors such as globalization, economic restructuring, and the reshaping of the nation-state in the wake of European integration (Gren 1999, p. 16). Michael Keating's *"New Regionalism in Western Europe"* (1998) stands as one of the main contributions to this field. In the book, Keating does not argue that regionalism has brought about the end of the nation-state, but rather, European integration and regionalism presents challenges to the traditional European state. Regions have extended beyond their national boundaries and actively engaged in European international politics (Keating 1998, p. 161).

Much of the regional empowerment within the concept of “new regionalism” can be observed in Brussels. Following the Maastricht treaty, sub-state governments were allowed representation in the Council of Ministers creating a direct link with the EU. Additionally, the constitutional court ruling of 1995 affirmed that regions could have official representation in the EU, leading regional governments to establish offices in Brussels (Keating 1998, p. 167-170). Furthermore, the EU's principle of subsidiarity aims to ensure that decisions are made as closely as possible to the citizens affected by the decisions (Pavy 2019). Regional actors have used the principle as leverage, resulting in an enhancement of their powers at the regional level in relation to the national and supranational level (Gren 1999, p. 79). In summary, regions have been influenced by the EU in several ways within the framework of "new regionalism".

## 2 Previous research and theory

This chapter offers an exploration of previous research concerning the impact of regional identity on EU support and looks at the existing theoretical frameworks that link identity to EU support.

### 2.1 Previous research

It was not until the rejection of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 that the role of public opinion became more important for the study of European integration. In the 1990s, an extensive amount of literature was written about the public opinion towards the EU (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 415). The role of identity has emerged as a critical factor shaping the individual's support for the EU.

Considerable attention has been devoted to studying the impact of identity on an individual's support for the EU (see Hooghe and Marks 2005; Levy and Phan 2014). Nevertheless, the exploration of the connection between regional identity and EU support is a relatively underexplored area. The studies that have tested this relationship mostly focus on decentralized countries that are highly associated with strong regional identity such as Spain, the United Kingdom and Belgium (Brigevich 2016, p. 476).

Through a multilevel governance perspective, regional entities possess the capacity to impact decisions within the EU (Keating 1998). This perspective aligns with research indicating that regional parties typically regard the EU as a strategic ally. Such parties want to make the most of the opportunities provided by the EU, leading to a general perception of the EU as a supportive partner (Jolly 2007). Likewise, the voters of the regional parties tend to also have a positive view of the EU. In a study comparing the Scottish National Party's view on the EU during the last twenty years of the 20th century, the party went from not having much of an opinion to perceiving it as an integral part of Scottish independence. Simultaneously, the voters of the Scottish National Party became significantly more likely to support European integration during the twenty years. In the same timeframe, support for European integration fell in all of Europe (Jolly 2014, p. 89-90)

Spain, a member of the EU, is a country that similarly to Scotland is known for its strong regional identities. A few studies conducted in the country have explored the relationship between regional attachment and a sense of belonging to the broader European community. Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez (2001) studied the Spanish public opinion towards Europe and showed that strong regional attachment fosters a deeper attachment to Europe. Although attachment to Europe does not automatically translate to support for European integration, the authors claim that they in the Spanish context are so closely depicted that they are compatible (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001). In a later study, Brigevich (2012) also explored the relationship between regional and European identity in Spain. The study showed a relationship between regional identity and support for the EU but only as long as the individuals did not show exclusive regional attachment. In other words, regional and European attachment were compatible when also paired with attachment to the nation (Brigevich 2012).

In a subsequent study, Chacha (2013) moves away from only studying countries that are highly associated with strong regional identity and tests the relationship between regional identity and EU support in a EU-wide cross-national study. The study claims that regional attachment does in fact foster EU support. Like Brigevich's study in Spain (2012), the author differentiates between inclusive regional attachment and exclusive regional attachment. People with inclusive attachment are able to hold multiple identities while people with exclusive regional attachment solely align themselves with their own region (Chacha 2013, p. 212-213). The results show that inclusive regionalists are more likely to support European integration but find no relationship between exclusive regional attachment and support for European integration (Chacha 2013, p. 222). Brigevich (2016) provides additional insights into the distinction between inclusive and exclusive regional identity in France, revealing that those embracing inclusive regionalism are more inclined to feel attached to or identify themselves with Europe compared to the exclusive regionalists. Contrary to Chacha (2013), another EU-wide study argues that support for European integration actually is diminished by regional identity, regardless of whether it is characterized as exclusive or inclusive. The only group of regionalists that seems to foster EU support are the so-called pseudo-exclusive regionalists, meaning individuals who combine their regional identity with a supranational identity (Brigevich 2018)

Not surprisingly, there is a significant relationship between European identity and support for the EU. Findings from a cross-national study over time demonstrate that attachment to Europe is the largest predictor of support for both widening and deepening of the EU (Hobolt 2014, p. 674). This would explain why Brigevich (2018) found the pseudo-exclusive regionalists the only europhile type of regionalists. Similarly, another study tested how identity predicts support for the EU in Austria. The study was first able to prove that people with a European identity generally hold a more pro-EU attitude than those who do not. Although



this might not have come as a surprise, the study could furthermore prove a relationship between inclusive regional identity and support towards the EU. In fact, people who hold both a regional and European identity are equally as likely as those who solely hold a European identity to support the EU (Praprotnik 2020).

To summarize, previous research on the subject has been conducted in different ways and with different cases. There is no widespread consensus among researchers whether or not regional identity increases support for the EU. The complexity of the relationship has led to scholars looking at different types of individual-level regional identity. Various studies have explored both inclusive and exclusive aspects of regional identity, aiming to understand their nuanced effects on individuals' attitudes toward the EU. One could argue that exclusive regional identity depresses support for the EU and that the regional identity needs to be combined with a national identity (inclusive regional identity), in order to foster support for the EU. Other studies provide evidence that regionalists perceive the EU as an ally when instead accompanied by an European identity (Brigevich 2018, Praprotnik 2020)

## 2.2 Theory

### 2.2.1 Social identity theory

As the EU originated as an international organization primarily concerned with trade liberalization, the study of public support towards the EU was mainly focused on an utilitarian approach. This approach is based on a cost benefit analysis where people with high income and high levels of human capital are more likely to support EU integration (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 420). As time went on and the EU enlarged its competences not only focusing on economic cooperation. This change followed with a shift in the study of public support of the EU with researchers turning to a social identity approach.

Social identity theory derives from a broader field of social psychology. It was originally developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner and aims to understand how socio-cultural factors affect one's attitudes and behavior. For a good recent overview of social identity theory (see Mols and Weber 2013). The theory begins with the assumption that individuals categorize themselves into social groups based on a shared identity. A shared identity can be anything from religion, nationality, ethnicity or any other social group. Once a shared identity is found in the social group, the identity becomes a significant aspect of how individuals view themselves and others (Mols and Weber 2013, p. 506-508). From social identity theory came the minimal group paradigm experiment. The method finds that

individuals show a preference for their in-group members over out-group members. People tend to compare their own group favorably to other groups and this comparison strengthens the significance of their social identity (Curley 2009, p. 650). The theory suggests that the more a member identifies with the group, the less inclined they are to favor the inclusion of an outsider. Similarly, individuals who weakly identify with their in-group are more inclined to welcome outsiders since the outsiders do not pose a threat to their identity (Curley 2009, p. 652).

While social identity theory was introduced by social psychologists in the late 1970s, it has since then extended its focus on a range of different research fields. Among other things it has served as a good starting point in analyzing attitudes towards the EU (Mols and Weber 2013, p. 511). The identity approach explains public support for European integration by emphasizing the role of identity. Attitudes towards European integration are partially influenced by the individual's national attachment and perception of other cultures. Analyses indicate that considerations related to identity are equally, if not more significant, than socioeconomic factors (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 421).

As mentioned before, the social identity theory suggests that individuals show preference to their in-group. This in-group favoritism is often accompanied by out-group bias (Curley 2009, p. 650). In the EU context, public opinion studies have shown that many Europeans with a strong national attachment are likely to oppose the EU. As individuals develop attachment to their nation through a common historical and cultural identity, they are more likely to uphold and protect their national identity while resisting institutions as the EU that might pose a threat to them (Levy and Phan 2014, p. 569) From an identity approach, the nation would then be perceived as an in-group while the EU is perceived as an out-group.

### 2.2.2 Nested identities

Social identity theory helps us understand how identity shapes individuals' perceptions of their own and other social groups. While studies have shown that people with strong national identity are less supportive of European integration (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 421; Levy and Phan 2014, p. 569), it does not necessarily mean that individual identity to their group is strictly exclusive. Individuals are able to have multiple nested identities.

At the more theoretical level, Brewer suggests in his *theory of optimal distinctiveness* (1999) that individuals can blend various identities into a nested structure. Like the social identity theory of Henri Tajfel and John Turner, Brewer acknowledges the need for differentiation from other groups. Most individuals are however part of different groups and different social identities are able to be

combined (Brewer 1999). This can be visualized with Mary C. Waters's study on identity in the United States where she shows how the population define themselves from multiple identities, e.g. Irish-american or Italian-american (Waters 1990)

When speaking of territorial identity, individuals with nested identities can simultaneously feel commitment to both their region and their nation (Guinjoan and Bermúdez 2019). With the European Union evolving into a system of multilevel governance the nation state has lost some of its sovereignty with cultural and political policies being transferred upward to the EU and downwards to regional levels (Keating 1998). European integration has led to a multilevel governance system where the in-group and out-group are being blurred (Levy and Phan 2014, p. 569-70). With the idea of nested identities the theory would suggest that territorial identity is not a zero-sum game. As an increasing number of individuals identify with both their nation and the EU, increased attachment to the EU does not necessarily lead to less national attachment.

### 3 Hypothesis

In light of the theoretical approaches, the research on public attitudes towards the EU is complex and the relationship between identity and support for the EU is double edged. For some individuals, the identity is structured as exclusive. Social identity theory has taught us that individuals who show preference to their in-group often show bias towards their out-group. This phenomenon is exemplified with an exclusive national identity where individuals draw sharp lines between their nation (in-group) and the EU (out-group). In the same way, regional identity can be structured as exclusive. In this case the regional identity is the primary identity instead of the national. As presented earlier in chapter 2, previous research suggests that exclusive regional attachment may not align with and could potentially result in less support for the EU. This expectation is formulated in the first hypothesis of the thesis.

*H1: Individuals with a stronger sense of exclusive regional attachment are less likely to support the EU*

Other individuals structure their identity as inclusive. With nested identities, attachments to different territorial levels are compatible. This has become evident in the European context where integration is leading to the distinction between the in-group and out-group becoming less clear. Although exclusive regional attachment seems to result in less support for the EU, previous research has demonstrated that individuals with regional attachment, when paired with multiple identities, can foster support for the EU. In light of the theoretical idea of nested identities and previous research on how inclusive regional identity affects support for the EU, the second hypothesis of the thesis is formulated as:

*H2: Individuals with a stronger sense of inclusive regional attachment are more likely to support the EU*

## 4 Case selection

For this study, France was chosen as the selected case. One possibility would have been to look at how regional identity affects support for the EU in all of Europe. However, Europe is not unanimous and what affects EU support can vary between countries. Every country's relationship to the EU is unique and when studying EU attitudes, different patterns will emerge in different national contexts (Mols and Weber 2013, p. 512). It is therefore difficult to generalize EU attitudes across nations. National or regional identity can affect the support towards the EU in different ways depending on the national context. Focusing the study on a specific country with more similar units of analysis can thus reduce the risk of other factors affecting the studied variables.

The previous research that has studied a similar relationship to the one of this thesis have either focused on Europe as a whole or specific decentralized countries associated with high levels of regionalism (see Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001; Chacha 2013). Only focusing the study on a country associated with a strong regional identity makes it difficult to generalize the result across nations. It would therefore be wise to study the relationship between regional identity and support for the EU in a country that is not as associated with decentralization and regional identity to further the generalizability of this particular relationship.

In this thesis, the argument is made for France as a good case for testing how regional identity affects support for the EU. France as a country is a relatively unexplored area for this type of research (except Brigeovich 2016). It is also an interesting case where French society has been dominated by two conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, the country is traditionally regarded as a highly centralized country. But at the same time, there are also strong regional identities with movements that have pushed for more decentralization and regional rights (Loughlin 2007).

France is often presented as the archetype of the centralized state. The aftermath of the french revolution led to regional autonomy being eliminated and an establishment of a well-organized administrative unitary state. The strong influence of the state was evident and was characterized with its top-down structure (Cole 2006, p. 33). Although France remains centralized, decentralization efforts have been made. This became most evident with the decentralization reform of 1982 which meant a significant diminishment of power for the state with decision-making moving to local and regional bodies (Cole 2006

p. 34). The decentralization reforms did not only involve administrative regionalisation but also led to a revival of regional identity in certain French regions (Wagstaff 1999). In a Eurobarometer survey from 2017, French citizens stated how attached they felt to their region. The graph below shows how over 80% of French citizens feel either “fairly attached” or “very attached” to their region.

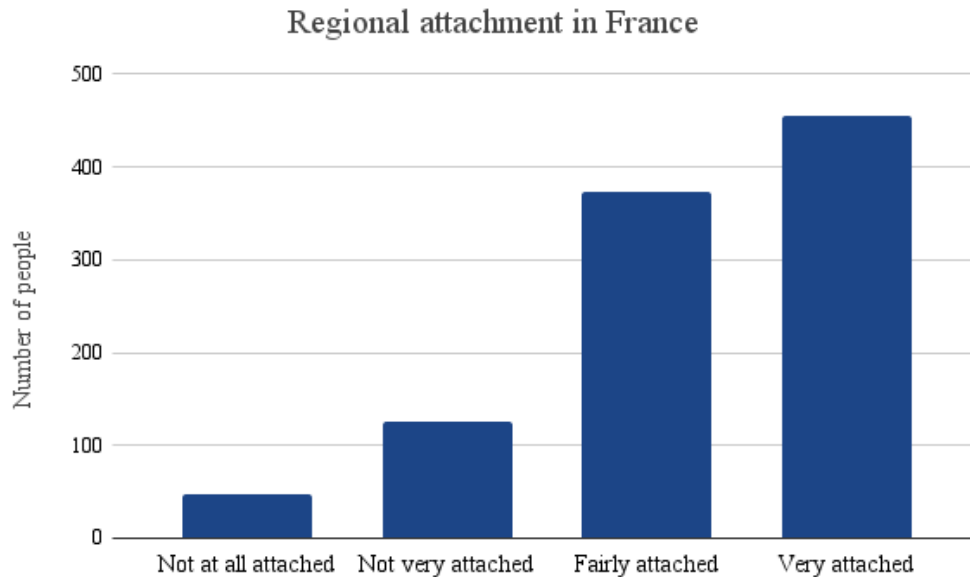


Figure 1: Graph showing french citizens answers to the question: “Please tell me how attached you feel to your region” (Eurobarometer 2017)

To put it briefly, France does seem to have regional identities which is why this thesis is expecting the regional identity to have some type of effect on the EU attitudes. Secondly France is still highly centralized which contributes to the research field that mainly has been studying federal or decentralized countries associated with a strong sense of regional identity

An important thing to address is the existing study that has explored the relationship between regional attachment and support for the EU in France (Brigevich 2016). Nevertheless, I argue that there is a valid rationale for further examining this relationship in the French context. The main argument for an updated version of the Bridgevich study is that the data being used in the study dates back to 2004 and the current political landscape in France differs significantly from the time when the survey was carried out.

In the last decades France has moved away from a traditional left-right spectrum and can instead be described as organized around a two axis spectrum: globalist-nationalist and neoliberal-antineoliberal (Chabal and Behrent 2022). Furthermore, the shifting political landscape in France has seen a constant rise of the right-wing party Front National which have benefitted from the rising

Euroscepticism in the country (Likaj et al. 2020). When mapping positive EU attitudes in France there appears to be a declining trend since the 1990s. (Likaj et al. 2020, p. 9-10).

In addition to this, the eurozone crisis has led to a shift in public opinion where EU attitudes are less driven by an identity approach but instead individuals form opinions on socio-economical considerations (Hobolt and Wratil 2015). The changing political landscape in France and the shifting EU attitudes therefore creates incentive to explore how identity affects EU support with updated data. Furthermore, the Brigevich (2016) article primarily looks at the impact of regional identity on European attachment and European citizenship, rather than directly measuring its influence on support for the EU. In contrast, this thesis is focused specifically on examining the effect of regional identity on EU support.

# 5 Research method

The purpose of this research method chapter is to detail the materials utilized, the operationalization process, the variables employed in the analysis, and the chosen methodology.

## 5.1 Material

For the statistical analysis of the thesis, data will be collected from both the EVS and the Eurobarometer. The reasoning behind using two dataset is to test the robustness of the analysis. The aim is to show that the relationship uncovered in the analysis is not specific to one particular dataset.

First of all, this thesis plans to use the EVS dataset. It is a large-scale survey that explores cultural and political values of individuals across European nations. Since 1981, the research program has conducted waves of surveys every nine years with the latest fifth wave being conducted between 2017-2020. The respondents are all aged from 18 and above. Regarding the methodological approach, the EVS usually conducts their studies through Face-to-Face interviews with randomly selected individuals (European Value Study 2018). The data used in the analysis comes from the latest wave of study conducted by the EVS. The EVS dataset has also been used in studies that, similar to this one, explores the relationship between regional identity and support for the EU (see Praprotnik 2020; Bridgevich 2018).

In addition to the EVS, this thesis intends to use the Eurobarometer to ensure that the results are not specific to a single dataset. Eurobarometer is a polling instrument that is used to measure public opinions of individuals in Europe. It is a way to monitor attitudes towards issues related to the EU and towards other subjects. The public opinion surveys are organized in different ways and the specific survey used in this thesis will be based on the “Standard Eurobarometer”. The Standard Eurobarometer is conducted twice a year and is regarded as the main public opinion survey of the European Commission. The respondents are all over 18 and in most cases interviewed face-to-face. To reach representativeness, the responses are later weighed for geography and demography (European Union n.d.)



The analysis uses Standard Eurobarometer 87 which was conducted in the spring of 2017 (Eurobarometer n.d.). The reason for not using a more up-to-date survey is that the identity questions in the most recent Eurobarometer surveys have only asked individuals about their attachment to their city, country or continent. None of these surveys encompasses questions about regional identity, with the most recent exception being the one conducted in the spring of 2017. Like the EVS, the Eurobarometer is also a common source used in this type of study (see Chacha 2013). Moreover, it is the material most frequently used in the study of public opinion towards the EU (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 421)

## 5.2 Operationalization

The variables need to be operationalized in a way that allows for empirical observation and measurement (Esaïsson et al. 2017 p. 96). The operational indicators were derived from the survey questions of the EVS and the Eurobarometer. Some recoding were needed in order to better match the independent variables with the operational indicators which will be approached more in detail below.

### 5.2.1 Dependent variable

The concept of EU support is complex and seems to be more than a unidimensional variable. With the multifaceted nature of EU support, there does not exist much scholarly consensus on what it actually means to support the EU and how to correctly measure it (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 415). Thus, relying on different yet comparable questions from both the EVS and Eurobarometer dataset enables capturing EU support in a different way.

Firstly, EU support will be operationalized with the following EVS question:

*“Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them” - European Union*

The response alternatives are: *a great deal, quite a lot, not very much, none at all*

As mentioned, the support for the EU is complex and multidimensional. Most studies of public opinion towards the EU do however use questions from the Eurobarometer due to its capacity to make cross-national comparisons over time (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 416)

The second operationalization of EU support is based of the following Eurobarometer question:

*“In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?”*

### 5.2.2 Independent variable

The independent variable used to explain variation in the dependent variable is regional attachment. Following the hypothesis of the paper, the explanatory variable will be divided into two different variables, each anticipated to affect the variation in the dependent variable differently. The first variable being inclusive regional attachment and the second one exclusive regional attachment.

Individuals with inclusive regional attachment are as mentioned before individuals who are able to feel attachment at different territorial levels which comes from the theoretical idea of nested identities. The operationalisation of inclusive regional attachment is similar to how Chacha (2013) measures inclusive regional attachment and how Hooghe and Marks (2005) measures inclusive national attachment. The operationalization follows the response to the question from the EVS question:

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

The response alternatives are: *Very close, close, not very close, not close at all*

The question used in the Eurobarometer dataset to capture inclusive regional attachment is fairly similar and is based on the following question:

*“Please tell me how attached you feel to your region”*

The response alternatives are: *Very attached, fairly attached, not very attached, not at all attached, do not know*

A potential issue of the question is its failure to specify the meaning of “region” in this context. As previously mentioned, the concept of a region is ambiguous and can take on different meanings in different contexts (Gren 1999, s. 14). Thus follows the risk that the respondent might interpret a region as something broader than a sub-state entity, which is what this paper looks at the region as. However, the question about regional attachment is posed alongside other questions about attachments on different geographical levels, such as city, country and the EU.

Ideally, this will lead to the respondent interpreting a region as a territorial level below the national level, in alignment with the paper's definition of a region.

Regarding the other independent variable, there is no clear variable in the dataset that provides a clear operationalization of exclusive regional attachment from a single question. There is no question asking the respondent if they feel more attached or close to their region than other territorial units. Exclusive regional attachment is therefore recoded from the variable measuring regional attachment and national attachment. With the exclusive regionalists perceiving their region as the primary territorial identification, a new variable is generated with individuals who feel a greater attachment to their region than to their nation. The new variable is made into a dichotomous variable that takes the value of 1 for individuals with exclusive regional attachment. Contrary to inclusive regional attachment, the exclusive regionalist does not include individuals who feel as close or closer to their nation than to their region. Conversely, inclusive regionalists can maintain an equal level of attachment to both their region and nation, and even exhibit a stronger attachment to the nation

### 5.3 Control variables

The thesis will use control variables with the aim to control for underlying mechanisms that might affect the relationship between regional identity and support for the EU. This is done by isolating the independent variable from the influence of other explanatory factors (Teorell and Svensson 2007, p. 183). The control variables that will be used in this study are based on existing theories about what influences individuals' attitudes towards the EU. One of these theories is *utilitarianism*, which is based on a cost-benefit analysis and believes that variation in EU support depends on socio-economic factors. European integration benefits people with high income and human capital and generally finds greater support in these groups (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 420).

Suppose that the regression model finds a relationship between regional attachment and EU support. When using a control variable based on utilitarianism, An answer is obtained to the question of whether the relationship remains if taken individuals' income/education into account. If, for instance, the regions within a country with a strong regional identity are also the most economically prosperous regions, it becomes less apparent that it is in fact the regional identity itself that influences an individual's support for the EU. By isolating the independent variable to control for other variables, it may turn out that the relationship in the bivariate analysis was misleading (Teorell and Svensson 2007, p. 186).

The EVS and the Eurobarometer use different questions and therefore allows to control for different variables in different ways. Within the utilitarian approach, people with higher levels of human capital are expected to benefit from European integration while less educated people are being less supportive of the EU (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, p. 420). The analysis will consequently control for *levels of education*. Additionally, the analysis will control for *income* with a question from the EVS survey that asks respondents of their total net income.

Another factor that explains EU support is the cue-taking explanation. Put simply, The EU is complex and most people lack a clear understanding of its functioning. As a result, people tend to shape their opinions based on domestic cues such as the incumbent government and national political parties (Andersson 1998). Like Bridgevich (2018) who did a similar study using the EVS dataset, this analysis controls for confidence in the national government. Additionally, the analysis controls for national party cue-taking from a question asking respondents about party affiliation. The answers are then transformed into a right-left scale and used as a control variable in accordance with the Chacha study (2013)

## 5.4 Variable list

Every variable used in the analysis will be listed below. The table shows the variable name, mean, standard deviation, min-max value and description. The variables from the EVS dataset are listed first and followed by the variables from the Eurobarometer dataset

<b>Variable name</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Min - Max</b>	<b>Description</b>
EVS variables				
EU support	2.393	0.862	1-4	Respondents are asked to rate how much they trust the EU.
Inclusive regional attachment	3.129	0.838	1-4	Respondents are asked how attached they feel to their region.
Exclusive regional attachment	0.088	0.283	0-1	Dichotomous variable coded from the inclusive regional attachment variable and a question asking the respondents about their national attachment. Respondents indicating that they feel greater attachment to their region are coded as 1 and considered exclusive regionalists, the rest not meeting this criteria are coded as 0.
Income	4.659	2.800	1-10	Respondents are asked about their household total income. Recoded on a scale from 1-10.
Education	5.027	2.059	1-8	Respondents are asked about their highest educational level that they have attained.
Ideology	5.988	2.698	1-10	Respondents are asked how they would place their political views on a scale from “the right” to “the left”
Government trust	2.030	0.839	1-4	Respondents are asked to rate how much they trust the national government.
Eurobarometer variables				
EU support	2.978	1.007	1-5	Respondents are asked to rate their image of the EU
Inclusive regional attachment	3.235	0.845	1-4	Respondents are asked how close they feel to their region
Exclusive regional attachment	0.095	0.293	0-1	Dichotomous variable coded from the inclusive regional attachment variable and a question asking the respondents about their national attachment. Respondents indicating that they feel greater attachment to their region are coded as 1 and considered exclusive regionalists, the rest not meeting this criteria are coded as 0.
Education	2.708	1.990	1-4	Respondents are asked at what age they finished full time education. Recoded into four categories
Ideology	6.110	2.251	1-10	Respondents are asked how they would place their political views on a scale from “the right” to “the left”

*Table 1: Variables used in the regression analysis*

## 5.5 Method

The most appropriate approach to test the hypothesis is constructing a statistical analysis by using a quantitative method. The choice of doing a statistical analysis came naturally since the design proves effective when gathering information from a large amount of units. The statistical method also proves effective when describing and organizing data in order to attain results that can be generalized (Esaiasson et al. 2017 p. 96).

The material that forms the foundation of the analysis consists of already existing data collected from previously conducted surveys. The method can therefore be characterized as a quantitative secondary analysis (Esaiasson et al. 2017 p. 291). One disadvantage with using preexisting data is the limitation of not being able to formulate the questions when operationalizing the variables. There is thus a risk that questions in the EVS or Eurobarometer do not provide a perfect accurate description of the variables that will be studied. This might in turn run the risk of impairing validity (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 59).

While there would have been benefits of constructing a survey it would also have been a time consuming process. Using data from existing surveys both saves time, important in the limited timeframe of the thesis and provides a large sample of data regarding attitudes among citizens of EU countries. In addition to that, it is data that has been used in previous research to examine individuals' regional attachment and EU support (see Chacha 2013; Bridgevich 2018)

As previously mentioned, the dependent variable is “EU support”. The independent variable is regional attachment, both inclusive and exclusive. The unit of analysis used is French citizens. To determine the relationship between regional identity and support for the EU, a regression analysis will be used to conduct the analysis. The choice of regression model is however not as clear cut.

The choice of regression model depends on the dependent variable which is “support for the EU”. With a dichotomous dependent variable, a logistic regression model would be the most appropriate choice. However, the operationalization of EU support is derived from a survey that allows answers on a scale and not binary responses, making logistic regression unsuitable for this context. The choice would then fall on a linear regression model, given the interval scale assumption (Teorell and Svensson 2007, p. 160). The answer options for the question that aims to measure “EU support” will be possible to

rank but the difference between the values is not necessarily constant. An individual who answers that they feel “positive” about the EU might be closer in their support to someone who feels “very positive” rather than someone who feels “neutral”. Consequently, we are employing ordinal scale variables.

Given the interval scale assumption of the linear regression model, in this case, the ordinal scale variables will be interpreted as though they were at an interval scale level. This aligns with the principles of the social science discipline, which asserts that when there are approximately 5 answer options, the ordinal scale provides a good approximation of an interval scale (Teorell and Svensson 2007, p. 111).

The analysis will as mentioned control for different variables. Naturally, the analysis will then be using a multiple regression analysis to take into account that other factors may also affect support for the EU. The regression model will look like this:

$$y_i = a + \sum \beta_j x_{j,i} + \varepsilon_i$$

This regression model describes the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variable, while at the same time controlling for other explanatory variables. The  $a$  describes the intercept and describes the value of the dependent variables if the independent and control variables are all equal to zero. Similar to a simple regression, the  $\beta_j$  is the slope coefficient of the multiple regression, with the difference that it controls for other explanatory variables. The slope coefficient ( $\beta_j$ ) represents the expected change in the dependent variable ( $y_i$ ) relative to one unit change in the independent variable, while holding all the control variables constant (Teorell and Svensson 2007, p.192). To illustrate this in the context of the analysis, let’s say that the coefficient ( $\beta_j$ ) is 0.5. This means that, holding constant the control variables, a one-unit increase in regional identity (e.g. going from feeling “fairly attached” to “very attached” to one’s region) is associated with a 0.5 unit increase in support for the EU.

To actually be able to draw any conclusions from the analysis, the hypothesis will undergo a significance test. The results will report both the standard error and the p-value of the regression coefficient. The standard error permits the research to construct a confidence interval. Simply put, the larger the standard error, the more uncertain the estimates. The p-value represents the probability of obtaining a result equal to or more extreme than the actual observed results, assuming the null hypothesis is true (Teorell and Svensson 2007, p. 394). This implies that a low p-value suggests that the observed results are unlikely to have occurred by random chance alone, providing support for the hypothesis put forth in the thesis

This analysis will undergo a significance test at a 5% risk level which is by tradition the most widely used risk level (Teorell and Svensson 2007, p. 128). That suggests that a p-value below 0.05 implies that the independent variables in the regression model have a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable. This would suggest that there is enough evidence to continue believing in the hypothesis of the thesis.



## 6 Result

In this results chapter, the outcomes of the regression analysis are presented in two tables, each utilizing the two different datasets to test the robustness of the analysis

### 6.1 Results from the EVS data

Table 1 is presenting the results of the relationship between regional identity and support for the EU for the respondents in the EVS survey. The table is divided into four different models presenting different results. Model 1 displays only the independent variables testing how inclusive and exclusive regional identity correlates with EU support alone. In model 2 the utilitarian control variables are introduced, followed by model 3 which only controls for the cue-taking variables. Finally, model 4 is the full model which includes inclusive regional attachment, exclusive regional attachment and all control variables.

Table 2: Regional attachment and EU support

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Inclusive regional attachment	0.082*** (0.025)	0.118*** (0.026)	0.050* (0.029)	0.067** (0.029)
Exclusive regional attachment	-0.237*** (0.073)	-0.273*** (0.076)	-0.095 (0.082)	-0.128 (0.085)
Income		0.011 (0.008)		-0.005 (0.009)
Education		0.070*** (0.011)		0.036*** (0.013)
Ideology			0.048*** (0.008)	0.041*** (0.009)
Government trust			0.433*** (0.027)	0.421*** (0.029)
Constant	2.160*** (0.079)	1.644*** (0.103)	1.082*** (0.117)	0.928*** (0.134)
N	1 771	1 634	1 198	1 144
R2	0.0101	0.0456	0.2112	0.2157
Adjusted R2	0.0090	0.0432	0.2085	0.2112

Note: Regression coefficient with standard errors in parenthesis

Statistical significance: \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: European Value Study 2020

The preliminary model reveals a statistically significant positive relationship between inclusive regional attachment and support for the EU. This supports the thesis second hypothesis: *Individuals with a stronger sense of inclusive regional attachment are more likely to support the EU*. The coefficient for inclusive regional attachment is (0.082), indicating that one-unit increase in regional attachment results in only a small increase of EU support.

There is still a statistically significant relationship between inclusive regional attachment and support for the EU when controlling for utilitarian variables

separately in model 2 and when including all control variables in model 4, adding further support for H2. However, it is worth noting that the coefficient is only significant at the 0.1 level when introducing cue-taking variables separately in model 3. When introducing the utilitarian variables in model 2, the relationship increases with the coefficient going from (0.082) to (0.118), while at the same time increasing the significance. The utilitarian variables are functioning as suppressor-variables, meaning that they suppress the effect of the independent variable when not controlled for (Teorell and Svensson 2007, p.194). This suggests that in models 1 and 3, the positive impact of inclusive regional attachment appears smaller than its actual magnitude when utilitarian variables are not taken into account.

Model 1 also reveals a statistically significant negative relationship between inclusive regional attachment and support for the EU, lending support for the thesis first hypothesis: *Individuals with a stronger sense of exclusive regional attachment are less likely to support the EU*. But as the table above demonstrates, only model 1 and 2 shows a significant relationship. When incorporating cue-taking variables in model 3 and 4, the coefficient fails to reach statistical significance, resulting in the rejection of H1. The weakening and loss of significance in the presence of these control variables imply that ideology and government trust might be key factors in explaining the observed relationships between exclusive regional attachments and EU support.

In model 4, most of the control variables exhibit significance as positive predictor of support for the EU, aligning with existing literature on the role of utilitarianism and cue-taking shaping attitudes towards the EU. The income variable does however act differently. On its own, income correlates positively with support for the EU. Once inclusive and exclusive regional attachment, education, ideology, and government trust are taken into account, there is no longer statistically significant evidence supporting an association between income and support for the EU. Model 4 achieves the highest adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, indicating that it has the best ability to account for the variance in support for the EU among the models considered. Overall, the findings seen in table 1 underscores the multidimensional nature of EU support, highlighting the influence of regional attachment, socio-economic factors and political factors.

## 6.2 Results from the Eurobarometer data

Table 2 is presenting the results of the relationship between regional identity and support for the EU for the respondents in the Eurobarometer survey. Similar to table 1, it is divided into four different models presenting different results. Model 1 displays only the independent variables, model 2 introduces the utilitarian

control variables, model 3 which only controls the cue-taking variables and model 4 that includes the independent variables and all control variables.

*Table 3: Regional attachment and EU support*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Inclusive regional attachment	0.087** (0.038)	0.121*** (0.039)	0.061 (0.044)	0.088** (0.044)
Exclusive regional attachment	-0.140 (0.112)	-0.195* (0.114)	-0.112 (0.127)	-0.163 (0.130)
Education		0.076*** (0.016)		0.060*** (0.019)
Ideology			0.051*** (0.016)	0.047*** (0.016)
Constant	2.709*** (0.127)	2.399*** (0.140)	2.534*** (0.172)	2.317*** (0.185)
N	986	969	793	782
r2	0.0059	0.0283	0.0157	0.0271
adjusted r2	0.0039	0.0253	0.0119	0.0221

*Note: Regression coefficient with standard errors in parenthesis*

*Statistical significance: \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .*

*Source: Eurobarometer*

Overall, the results in table 2 give similar results to the regression models of the EVS dataset. In model 1, inclusive regional attachment demonstrates once again a positive relationship with support for the EU. The coefficient is a statistically significant predictor of support for the EU, with a coefficient of (0.087). Conversely, the coefficient for exclusive regional attachment is negative but fails to reach statistical significance.

With the incorporation of the utilitarian variable in Model 2, there is a change in the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The utilitarian variable serves as a suppressor once again, strengthening the relationship between the X and Y variables. This results in the negative relationship between exclusive regional attachment and support for the EU becoming statistically significant,

although only at the 0.1 significance level. However, both inclusive and exclusive regional attachment loses statistical significance in model 3, emphasizing the nuanced influence of political orientation.

The final model integrates all independent and control variables and shows similar results to the full model of the EVS dataset (see table 1). The coefficient for exclusive regional attachment is negative (-0.163), suggesting that individuals with a stronger sense of exclusive regional attachment may be less likely to support the EU. However, this relationship is not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 significance level (p-value = 0.207) which leads to the rejection of H1: *Individuals with a stronger sense of exclusive regional attachment are less likely to support the EU*. Regarding the second hypothesis, the coefficient for inclusive regional attachment is positive and statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level (p-value = 0.046). Thus, the results support H1

## 7 Concluding discussion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the relationship between regional identity and its impact on EU support. More specifically, the thesis tested how regional identity affects attitudes toward the EU at the individual level in France. By gathering data from two surveys measuring individuals' attitudes, the thesis constructed a multiple regression analysis to answer the research question: *What effect does regional identity have on the individual's EU support?* Drawing from relevant literature and identity theory, the analysis distinguished between inclusive and exclusive regional identity, with the expectation that each would lead to different effects on the individual's support for the EU.

The analysis was not able to support the first hypothesis that stated: *Individuals with a stronger sense of exclusive regional attachment are less likely to support the EU.* In the full model that included the independent variables and the control variables, neither the analysis based on the EVS dataset nor the Eurobarometer dataset could prove a negative statistically significant relationship between exclusive regional identity and support for the EU. The EVS analysis did demonstrate a significant relationship but not when including the cue-taking variables. These variables were included as control to account for underlying mechanisms that might affect the relationship between regional identity and support for the EU. This is a justified inclusion, as these variables may play an important role in the insignificant relationships between exclusive regional attachments and support for the EU.

The rejection of the first hypothesis is somewhat surprising. With the theory of social identity, individuals favoring their in-group were expected to show bias against their out-group. This phenomenon was exemplified with an exclusive national identity where individuals draw sharp lines between their nation (in-group) and the EU (out-group). Exclusive regionalists were therefore expected to show similar attitudes towards the EU, particularly considering existing research that has established a negative relationship between the two (Brigevidich 2018). Still, the exclusive regionalists seem to have a sense of ambivalence in their attitudes towards the EU. Some answers could be found in Keating's work (1998) who argues that with European integration, regional entities now possess the capacity to impact decisions at the supranational level. For those advocating more regional autonomy, the EU may seem an unlikely ally with power moving even further away. However, European integration reduces the need for larger nation-states, empowering smaller regions.

While there is no evidence supporting the idea that individuals with a stronger sense of exclusive regional attachment are less likely to support the EU, the evidence for individuals with inclusive regional attachment is statistically significant in this analysis. Some individuals construct their identity inclusively, where attachments to different territorial levels coexist. This phenomenon

becomes apparent from the result indicating that in France, nested identities play a substantial role. The relationship may not be powerful but the findings still indicate that, when combined with multiple identities, regional identity does influence an individual's level of support for the EU. This somewhat corresponds with the findings of the Brigevich (2016) study, which found that inclusive regionalists in France, based on data from 2004, are more inclined to feel attached to Europe. However, one should be careful in making assumptions about stagnant EU attitudes, as this thesis is focused on examining the effect of regional identity on EU support rather than European attachment.

As previously discussed in the thesis, there have been limited studies exploring the relationship between regional identity and EU support in unitary states. This thesis has contributed to broadening the generalizability of previous research on regional identity by showing that regional identity indeed has a significant impact in a unitary state. The analysis showed that exclusive regionalists exhibited ambivalence towards the EU but also suggested that, when combined with multiple identities, regional identity does have an impact on EU support. This thesis does not delve deep into European integration theories but if regional identity continues to play a role in affecting EU support, future studies may explore its implications for intergovernmentalism. If regional identity influences EU support even in unitary states, it poses a challenge for intergovernmentalists who emphasize the role of national governments in shaping attitudes toward the EU

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