

Citizen Support for European Union Membership: The Role of Socialisation Experiences

Abstract

We explore whether there is a socialisation effect of European Union (EU) membership on citizens' attitudes towards their country's membership of the EU. Using a sample of 15 Western European countries, we show that this is the case. First, we provide evidence of a positive life-long socialisation effect; citizen support for their country's membership of the EU increases with years spent living in an EU member state. Second, we show that those who joined the EU during their formative years are less supportive of the EU, whilst those who spent their formative years in a non-democracy are more positive about EU membership. The size of these effects is very small in comparison to that found for the lifelong socialisation effect, suggesting that the life-long socialisation process of continued EU membership is much more important for EU attitudes. This study offers new insights into the formation of EU attitudes.

Keywords: European Union; political socialisation; EU attitudes; public opinion; formative years

On the 23rd June 2016 the United Kingdom held a referendum on its membership of the European Union, when a small majority voted to leave. The UK's referendum has intensified an already voluminous debate on citizens' attitudes toward the EU. Existing literature shows that EU attitudes are shaped by a multitude of factors such as age, political ideology, attitudes towards immigrants, and national identity (Down & Wilson 2008, 2013, 2017; Eichenberg & Dalton 2007; Fox & Pearce 2018; Hobolt & de Vries 2016; Hooghe & Marks 2007; McLaren 2002; Rekker 2017). Little is known, however, about the effect of European Union membership itself on the formation of citizens' attitudes towards the EU.

In this study we investigate whether EU membership has a socialisation effect on citizens' attitudes toward their country's membership of the EU. Although existing studies explore the socialisation effect of the European Union on member states (Checkel 2001) and political elites (Beyers 2005; Hooghe 2005; Lewis 2005), to our knowledge, no study has explored such a socialisation effect of living in the EU on *citizens'* attitudes.¹ We put forward two ways in which the experience of EU membership may affect citizens' attitudes toward their country's membership of the institution: first, through a life-long socialisation effect, and second, through the occurrence of important EU-related events during one's formative years.

We use a sample of 15 Western European countries and show that there is a positive socialisation effect of continuously experiencing EU membership. We find that citizen support for EU membership *increases* with years spent living in an EU member state. This is the case both before and after controlling for individual-level factors and the inclusion of country and year fixed effects. Secondly, in addition to this life-long socialisation process, we show that key events experienced throughout the formative years also affect citizen support for EU

membership, both positively and negatively. Specifically, we find that people who spent their formative years in non-democracies are *more* supportive of EU membership than those who did not. Yet, those whose country joined the EU in their formative years are *less* supportive of EU membership. However, the size of these effects is fairly negligible, especially when compared to the size of the lifelong socialisation effect, and the result for joining the EU in the formative years is not robust to alternative model specifications. The paper thus contributes to the literature on attitudes towards the EU and shows how the experience of living in an EU member state is an important determinant of support for EU membership.

European socialisation of states and elites

The establishment and expansion of the European Union has shaped the rules, procedures, laws, institutions and policies of its member states (Goetz and Hix 2000; Risse et al. 2001; Saurugger 2014). This development, often referred to as Europeanisation, captures the top-down process through which European integration affects domestic-level politics. In addition to the Europeanisation of member states, existing studies explore the impact of European institutions on individual state agents, political elites, or career civil servants, a process referred to as European socialisation (Checkel 2005; Beyers 2005; Hooghe 2005; Lewis 2005). In these studies, socialisation is defined as: ‘the process of inducting individuals into the norms and rules of a given community’ (Hooghe 2005, p. 865). In the context of the European Union, this suggests that individuals who are embedded within the European framework adopt the common values and norms that are prevalent within the EU. So far, evidence of such a socialisation

process amongst political elites and career civil servants is mixed (Beyers 2005; Hooghe 2005; Lewis 2005).

In the existing literature the ‘targets’ of European socialisation have thus either been member states or individual policy makers (Checkel 2005). The question of whether the European Union has had a socialisation effect on its *citizens* has so far remained unanswered. Since political elites have been the dominant actors in the creation of the European project, it may be the case that socialisation into a community of European values has occurred only at the elite level. However, other studies have shown that governing institutions do have a socialisation effect on the attitudes of their citizens (Mishler and Rose 1996, 2001, 2007; Neundorf 2010; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2011, 2014). In addition, a recent study by Oshri et al. (2016) provides evidence that the EU itself has had a socialisation effect on the democratic values of its citizens.

Firstly, studies on the ‘socialist socialisation hypothesis’ argue that the experience of living in a socialist or communist regime has a socialisation effect on citizens’ attitudes toward communism, democracy, and capitalism. Various studies have shown that such ‘legacy effects’ exist, although they are moderated by the type of communist regime as well as the economic performance of the new regime (Mishler and Rose 1996, 2001, 2007; Neundorf 2010; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2011, 2014). These findings suggest that experiencing certain kinds of institutions matters for citizen attitudes, and that institutional political socialisation is a potentially important explanatory factor for political attitudes held by citizens.

Secondly, a study by Oshri et al. (2016) explores the socialisation effect of EU membership on attitudes toward democracy. To our knowledge, this is currently the only study of the socialisation effect of a *supranational* institution on citizens’ attitudes. The authors find

evidence of a positive socialisation effect of EU membership on citizens' attitudes toward democracy: EU citizens become more supportive of democratic values as years of EU membership increases. Thus, contrary to common belief, it appears that the EU has been successful in creating a community of values (Oshri et al. 2016). In this study, we extend the study of the socialisation effect of supranational institutions on citizens' attitudes, and explore whether the EU has also had a positive socialisation effect on the attitudes of its citizens toward their country's membership of the EU. Whilst such an effect has so far only been studied in the context of political elites, we argue there are good reasons to expect a similar process to also operate for citizens in the case of the EU.

Socialisation of citizens' attitudes toward EU membership

The EU is thought to have a socialisation effect on political elites because elites experience high levels of exposure to the norms and rules of the European Union. Although the experience of the EU is very different for elites compared to citizens, we argue that ordinary citizens also experience a high degree of exposure to the EU, especially in light of its increased integration. The nature of citizens' exposure to the EU is different, yet pervasive. Citizens may not participate in negotiations or the drafting of treaties, but their daily lives are permeated by European influences. In 19 out of the 28 member states citizens pay for their groceries with the euro. Across all member states citizens purchase European products in their supermarkets, own European passports and travel freely to other EU member states. European citizens furthermore increasingly interact with citizens from other EU countries who exercise their right to work,

study and live in any of the member states. In addition, citizens vote in European elections and Europe is an important topic of debate in most domestic political arenas.

Based on existing studies of ‘the mere exposure’ effect (Rekker 2018; Zajonc 1968), we expect these day-to-day encounters with the EU to result in the development of positive attitudes toward the EU. The exposure effect holds that people’s attitudes become more favourable as exposure to a particular object increases (Rekker 2018, see Bornstein 1989 for a review of this literature). Put simply: ‘objects, ideas, or people more frequently encountered in the physical or social environment are usually more positively evaluated’ (Kwan et al. 2015, p.50). Increased exposure to a particular brand for instance increases brand ratings among consumers (Tom et al. 2017). The exposure effect may occur as a response to both conscious and non-conscious cues, but several studies have found that exposure effects are actually larger when individuals are unaware of the stimulus (Bornstein 1989; Bornstein and D’Agostino 1992). This suggests that citizens of the European Union do not need to develop detailed knowledge of the EU for a socialisation effect to occur.

These findings tie in with research on the ‘status quo bias’, which finds that people tend to favour the status quo in elections because it represents the familiar, well-known, option (Christin et al. 2002). We expect this status-quo bias to strengthen over the years. Thus, as citizens’ interactions with the EU increase, their familiarity increases as well. We thus expect that increased levels of exposure to the EU, reflected by the cumulative experience of years spent living in an EU member state, will result in a positive socialisation effect on citizens’ attitudes toward EU membership.

The idea that length of exposure to a certain institution or regime is important for citizens' support for that institution is supported by previous research. As mentioned above, Oshri et al. (2016) find a *positive* life-long socialisation effect of EU membership on the development of democratic attitudes among citizens, where citizens who have lived longer in the EU are more pro-democracy. Furthermore, studies have found that length of exposure to communist regimes has a positive socialisation effect on citizens' support for communist values which is related to how long citizens experience a communist regime (Pop-Eleches & Tucker 2014).

Although the nature of the European experience of citizens and elites is very different, we thus expect a similar mechanism to be at play for both groups. EU membership results in the creation of a new community of values, and the repeated interaction with this community enhances familiarity with the community and results in positive attitudes toward the community itself (Checkel 2005; Hooghe 2005). Our first hypothesis is thus as follows:

H1 - Life-long Socialisation Hypothesis: *People become more positive about the EU the longer they live in an EU-member country.*

Formative years and attitudes toward EU membership

In addition to a life-long socialisation effect, we furthermore expect that specific EU-related events experienced during one's formative years contribute to the formation of attitudes on EU membership. This is in line with theories of political generations that suggest that the political

context in which someone spent their youth is crucial for forming their subsequent attitudes. Mannheim (1968) argued that those who were born at the same point in time had the same set of experiences during their ‘formative’ years, and empirical evidence has suggested that the young are more malleable in their attitudes than the old (Bartels & Jackman 2014; Jennings & Niemi 1981; Krosnick & Alwin 1989). Mannheim initially suggested that the age at which people are particularly susceptible to this influence is late adolescence and early twenties, since these are the ages at which young people become aware of the political world but have not yet formed fixed views on it. Others in the field have tended to agree with this proposition.

The formative years hypothesis has been substantiated by a wide variety of studies: the party in power during a generation’s youth has been found to have a lasting impact on vote choice (Ghitza & Gelman 2014; Shorrocks 2016; Tilley 2002; Tilley & Evans 2014); those who were young during the rise of unconventional participation during the 1960s and 1970s are particularly likely to engage in protest behaviour compared to other generations (Grasso 2014); and exposure to communism during youth also has lasting, negative influences on support for democracy and capitalism (Neundorff 2010; Pop-Eleches & Tucker 2014). Such research confirms the importance of early, formative experiences for later attitudes and behaviours.

Previous research has argued that spending the formative years within an EU-member state has a positive effect on citizen support for EU membership (Down & Wilson 2013; Rekker 2018). The arguments for this follow a similar logic to those presented above in relation to the life-long socialisation effect: that exposure to the institution, in this case during the impressionable formative years, generates familiarity and a set of shared preferences. The role of EU membership in the formative years has also been emphasised in explaining why younger

citizens tend to be more supportive of EU membership (Down & Wilson 2013; 2017; Fox & Pearce 2017). Thus, in addition to a life-long socialisation effect, we expect that the experience of EU membership during one's formative years also has a positive effect on attitudes toward EU-membership later in life such that:

H2a: *Citizens whose country was an EU member during their formative years are more supportive of EU membership than citizens whose country was not a member of the EU during their formative years*

H1 and H2a capture the expected effects of simply experiencing EU membership, either during the life-course or during the formative years. In addition to such effects, we expect that important EU-related events that occur during one's formative years will also have an effect on attitudes toward EU membership. We identify three such events: joining the EU, EU-related referendums, and the experience of transitioning from a non-democracy to a democracy. These events thus reflect certain EU-related interventions that occur during someone's formative years.² These events may have either positive or negative effects on citizens' attitudes toward the EU, depending on the nature of the event. As we set out below, based on existing research we expect EU referendums and the experience of joining the EU to have a *negative* effect on attitudes about EU membership, but we expect that the experience of transitioning from a non-democracy to EU membership will have a *positive* effect on attitudes toward EU membership.

Citizens who experienced either joining the EU or who experienced an EU-related referendum during their formative years were likely exposed to a period of arguments both for and against the institution. Cue theory suggests that attitudes toward the European Union require political priming in order to become salient (Hooghe & Marks 2005). Thus, periods in which a

country is debating whether or not to join the EU, as well as periods surrounding EU referendums on other topics such as further integration, are likely characterised by increased salience of the European topic. Referendum campaigns in particular provide an environment in which both voters and political parties clarify their positions vis-à-vis the EU (de Vries & Edwards, 2009; Steenbergen, Edwards & de Vries 2007), and periods when countries are joining the EU are likely to be characterised by a similar type of debate.

Referendums on EU-related topics tend to be unpredictable, but especially since the early 2000s, voters have often voted *against* the pro-European political consensus that exists among mainstream political parties in Western Europe (Franklin et al. 1994; 1995; Hobolt 2009). Furthermore, research suggests that the more divided the national elite is, the more likely it is that citizens are cued to oppose further European integration (Hooghe & Marks 2005). The outcomes of referendums on Europe have also been shown to correlate strongly with the popularity of the incumbent government (Franklin et al. 1994, 1995). Because most incumbent governments have favoured further European integration, referendums have provided anti-European parties on both the extreme left and right ends of the political spectrum with a platform to display their anti-European viewpoints and mobilize anti-European sentiments, or feelings of uncertainty about the European process, that exist within the electorate (de Vries & Edwards 2009). These considerations lead to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

H2B - Formative Years Joining the EU Hypothesis: *The experience of joining the EU during the formative years will have a negative effect on citizen support for EU membership.*

H2C - Formative Years Referendum Hypothesis: *The experience of an EU-related referendum during the formative years will have a negative effect on citizen support for EU membership.*

Finally, we expect that experiencing a non-democratic regime in the formative years is important for support for EU membership. The EU has been a key tool in promoting democracy across Europe (Dinan 2005). The EU actively aims to increase support for democratic values among its citizens and existing research suggests that EU membership has indeed done so successfully (Oshri et al. 2016). As such, EU membership is closely related to the establishment of democratic governance at the national level. In terms of citizen support for EU membership, we therefore expect that citizens who spent their formative years in a *non*-democratic regime are more supportive of the EU because they see it as a positive alternative to the previous institutional arrangement. We therefore formulate Hypothesis 2D as follows:

H2D - Formative Years Non-Democracy Hypothesis: *The experience of living in a non-democracy during the formative years will have a positive effect on citizens' support for EU membership.*

Data and Methods

The data used to test our hypotheses is the Eurobarometer surveys from 1973-2013. We use only surveys from this period which include our dependent variable of interest, and so the specific

Eurobarometer surveys used are: the Mannheim Trend File 1973-2002³ and subsequent Eurobarometer surveys 58.1 (2002); 59.1 (2003); 60.1 (2003); 61 (2004); 62 (2004); 63.4 (2005); 64.3 (2005); 65.2 (2006); 66.1 (2006); 67.2 (2007); 68.1 (2007); 69.2 (2008); 70.1 (2008); 71.1 (2009); 71.3 (2009); 72.4 (2009); 73.4 (2010); 75.3 (2011); 77.4 (2012); and 79.5 (2013). Using the Eurobarometer provides a long time-series on our dependent variable, which measures citizen opinion towards European Union membership. In this paper, we focus on the following countries who were members by the end of 1995: West Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, and Finland.⁴ Since countries only join the Eurobarometer when they join the EU, a much smaller time series is available for Eastern European countries that joined in later enlargements and these countries also have little variation on some of our key independent variables. The results presented thus apply to Western Europe.

The dependent variable we use here is a measure of support for the European Union, commonly used in studies examining public opinion towards the EU. Respondents were asked whether they thought membership of the EU was a good thing, a bad thing, or neither. We recode this into a dichotomous variable, where (1) indicates thinking EU membership is a good thing and (0) indicates any other response. Although there are other dimensions of EU support (e.g. confidence in the EU, or support for specific policies such as the Euro), this question was asked for the entire series of the Eurobarometer, making it particularly useful for this analysis. A recent study has found that this question shows similar patterns over time to other EU attitude questions (Guinaudeau & Schnatterer 2017, also see Gabel 1998).

To test the hypotheses we follow the analytical strategy developed in Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2014). Their method uses both cross-country and within-country variation in exposure to communism to assess the socialising impact of communism on attitudes towards democracy and capitalism. We aim to do the same for the EU: leveraging cross-country and within-country variation in exposure to EU membership as well as various EU-related formative-years socialisation experiences, in order to assess the socialising impact of the EU on citizen support for membership. The first stage is to create measures of exposure to EU membership and formative-years socialisation.

To test H1 (the life-long socialisation hypothesis) we create the independent variable *years as an EU citizen*, which is simply the number of years a respondent has been living in an EU-member country. This is created from a combination of the age of the respondent, the year the respondent was surveyed in, and the country the respondent was surveyed in since countries joined the EU at different points in time. The distribution of this variable is presented in fig. A1 in the appendix.⁵

To test H2 A through D, we construct four independent variables measuring different aspects of socialisation experience. All of these variables operationalise the ‘formative years’ as when someone is between the ages of 15 and 25, since these are the ages at which most research suggests attitudes are particularly malleable (Alwin & Krosnick 1991; Bartels & Jackman 2014; Jennings & Niemi 1981). Individuals at these ages are becoming aware of the political and social context within which they live but have yet to develop fixed views on it. *EU member* is a dichotomous variable for whether the respondent was an EU citizen (i.e. lived in an EU member state) for more than half of their formative years. *Joining* is a dichotomous variable for being in

the formative years when their country joined the EU. *Referendum* is a dichotomous variable for being in the formative years when a referendum on some aspect of the EU occurred.⁶ *Non-democracy* is a dichotomous variable for whether the respondent spent more than half of their formative years under a non-democratic regime. To define a regime as non-democratic, we used the Electoral Democracy Index from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (Coppedge et al. 2016; Teorell, Coppedge, Skaaning, & Lindberg 2016), which provides a variety of indicators of democracy through expert coding throughout the twentieth century.⁷

All of these independent variables vary within countries (based on the different ages and different survey years of the respondents) and across countries (based on the different countries of the respondents). We model the relationship between these measures and support for EU membership using a series of logistic regression models. Model 1 just includes these five independent variables. Following Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2014) we control for other individual-level factors associated with support for EU membership in model 2, and then we add country and year fixed effects in model 3. This latter stage is to ensure our results are not driven by unobservable differences between countries or survey years.

The individual-level factors include *age*, which is particularly correlated with our independent variables. *Years as an EU citizen* is statistically significantly positively correlated with age (Pearson's $r = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$), which is as expected since respondents should live longer in the EU as they age, provided they are living in an EU-member country. As we should expect, those who spent more than half their formative years in an EU-member state are younger on average (34) than those who did not (57), whilst those who spent more than half of their formative years in non-democracies are older on average (63) than those who did not (40). Those

who experienced an EU-related referendum at some point during their formative years are younger on average (31) than those who did not because the first EU-related referendum did not occur until 1972. Only *joining* is unrelated to age in the sample as a whole: both those who experienced their country joining the EU in their formative years and those who did not have an average age of 46. *Age* is measured as a series of dummies: 18-25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; 66-75; and 76+ to allow for a non-linear effect, as there is evidence that whilst older ages are often less supportive of the EU, the oldest age groups in European countries are in fact particularly supportive of the EU because they witnessed the Second World War and its aftermath (Down & Wilson, 2013). *Age* thus controls for these general age/cohort patterns identified by Down & Wilson across Western European countries.⁸

We also control for education, employment status, and gender. Education is also correlated with age and the independent variables: *age left education* is treated as categorical, going from up to 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22 or older; and still studying. *Employment status* has six categories: employed (non-manual) (reference); employed (manual) homemaker; student/military service⁹; retired; unemployed, and *female* is a dichotomous variable for being a woman.

Results

We start by reporting some descriptive associations between our main independent variables and our dependent variable. *Years as an EU citizen* is weakly (Pearson's $r=0.1$) but statistically significantly ($p<0.001$) positively associated with thinking that EU membership is a good thing,

consistent with H1. This is shown in fig.1, which presents the relationship between *years as an EU citizen* and support for the EU graphically. Although the linear, positive relationship between the two shown here is statistically significant, there is also some suggestion that there may be a curvilinear relationship, with the level of support for EU membership dipping slightly or at least flattening after 45 years as an EU member. This could be because there are diminishing returns to experiencing extra years of EU membership once a citizen has already been an EU member for a number of years. We include *years as an EU citizen*² in the regression models alongside *years as an EU citizen* to examine further this potential curvilinear effect.¹⁰

Figure 1 here

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the other independent variables, measured during the formative years. All pairwise comparisons in Table 1 are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Consistent with our expectations (H2A) and previous literature, those who spent more than half their formative years as an EU citizen are more likely to say that EU membership is a good thing. Citizens who were in their formative years when the country was joining the EU are slightly less supportive than those who were not in their formative years during this period (in line with H2B). Those who experienced a referendum are also less supportive of the EU than those who did not (in line with H2C). Finally, those who spent their formative years in a non-democracy are more supportive than those who did not (in line with H2D).

Table 1 here

Table 2 shows the results of our logistic regression models for support for EU membership. Model 1 includes only the key independent variables, whilst model 2 includes the individual-level controls. The results in these two models are similar. *Years as an EU citizen* has a positive and statistically significant effect on support for EU Membership, showing those who have lived longer in the EU are more likely to think their country's membership of it is a good thing. This is in line with H1. The statistically significant, negative coefficient for *years as an EU citizen*² does suggest that the relationship is not wholly linear, however, as suggested in figure 1. Those who spent more than half of their formative years when their country was an EU member are more supportive of EU membership, in line with H2A. Those whose country joined the EU when they were in their formative years are here *more* supportive of EU membership. This is inconsistent with H2B. In accordance with the expectations of H2C and H2D, those who experienced a referendum in their formative years are less supportive of the EU than those who did not, and those who spent more than half of their formative years in a non-democracy are more supportive.

Table 2 here

Model 3 adds country and year fixed effects, which given the level of cross-country variation in support for the EU likely gives us the most accurate estimates. *Years as an EU citizen* remains positive and statistically significant in this model. Figure 2 shows the predicted probability of a citizen saying EU membership is a good thing by *years as an EU citizen*, calculated from model 3. This shows that a citizen who has spent 40 years as an EU member is around 15 percentage points more likely to say that EU membership is a good thing compared to an EU citizen who has spent 5 years in the EU, all else being equal. This represents a positive

effect of continued EU membership on citizen attitudes that is of a reasonably large magnitude, and supports H1. For higher values of *years as an EU citizen* (45 years onwards), the relationship levels out and then decreases for those who have spent 55 or more years living in the EU. This is consistent with the curvilinear relationship identified in Figure 1. This could represent diminishing returns to spending longer as an EU citizen: the longer a citizen has spent living in the EU, extra years become less important for EU support. That there appears to be a decrease after 55 years is more puzzling, although since only citizens in the founding six countries can have spent this long living in the EU we are hesitant to make strong claims about this pattern.

Figure 2 here

The magnitude of the coefficients for the formative years variables become smaller, indicating that over-time and cross-country differences are important for understanding the relationship between these independent variables and support for EU membership. The effect of EU membership during the formative years is no longer significant in this model once cross-country and over-time variation is taken into account. This indicates that spending the formative years in an EU-member state does not in itself make a citizen more supportive of EU membership, contradicting H2A. Similarly, experiencing a referendum during the formative years is also statistically insignificant in this model, suggesting that the results for this variable in the previous models were more related to the types of countries and/or time periods which experience referendums rather than because of their effects on citizens.

The coefficient for *joining* becomes negative and statistically significant in this model, bringing this result in line with the expectation of H2B once year and country differences are taken into account. However, although statistically significant, the magnitude of the effect is very

small, with the predicted probability of saying EU membership is a good thing only 0.7 percentage points lower if a citizen joined the EU in their formative years compared to those who did not. The coefficient for *non-democracy* remains positive and statistically significant in model 3, consistent with H2D. The magnitude of the effect is again small, with those who spent their formative years in a non-democratic state 1.1 percentage points more likely to say that EU membership is a good thing in comparison to those who did not. Thus, whilst we find support for H2B and H2D, suggesting that joining the EU or experiencing a non-democracy during the formative years contribute to citizen attitudes, the effect of these experiences is ultimately fairly negligible. This is especially the case when compared with the size of the effect of *years as an EU citizen* on citizen support for the EU.

Robustness Checks

We conducted a number of robustness checks to verify these results. Full tables of these robustness checks can be found in the appendix. Firstly, the analysis presented here uses the Eurobarometer 1973-2013, but this means that some countries are not present for the whole time series as they only enter the Eurobarometer when the country joins the EU.¹¹ To check this does not affect the results, we ran the analysis on two restricted datasets: one for all countries 1995-2013, and one 1973-2013 for just those countries that are present for all these years (France, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg, Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ireland, and Denmark). The results for *years as an EU citizen* remain the same in both these specifications, although it's magnitude is smaller when using the restricted time-span. The

results for the formative years variables are inconsistent in both these specifications and where statistically significant remain very small in magnitude.

Secondly, the original six EU members (France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands) may have a different patterns of EU support due to their joint efforts to create the EU in the post-war period. We thus re-run the analysis with 1) a variable for the year a country joined instead of country fixed effects and 2) excluding the original six member states. The results for *years as an EU citizen* and *non-democracy* are very similar in these models as those presented in table 2, whilst the results for the other three variables are again inconsistent between specifications.

Thirdly, previous research has emphasised that there are different dimensions to EU support (Hobolt & de Vries 2016). We are restricted in our outcome measure because of the need to have a long time span to test our hypotheses. In order to test whether our results are driven by this outcome variables we conducted the analysis with another dependent variable that is found in all years 1984-2013 (except 2012): *Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (your country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Community/European Union?* The results using this dependent variable are again similar to the main results for *years as an EU citizen* and *non-democracy*, but inconsistent with the main results for the other three variables.

Fourthly, previous research has found that age differences in EU support vary across countries (Rekker 2018), but our models assume that age effects are constant across countries. Given the relationship between age and *years as an EU citizen* this variation could affect our results. Thus, we also ran the models with an interaction between age and country, and with each

country in turn omitted from the analysis. Once again, *years as an EU citizen* and *non-democracy* have similar coefficients to that in the main results, and the magnitude of the effect of *non-democracy* is somewhat larger in this model.

To summarise, the results for *years as an EU citizen* are robust across all six alternative model specifications, and for *non-democracy* they are robust across five of them. The results for the other three variables vary between the main results and all the robustness check models, and even where they are statistically significant they are substantively very small.

Discussion and Conclusion

We have set out both a life-long hypothesis as well as several formative years hypotheses on the socialisation effect of EU membership on citizens' attitudes toward the EU. Our findings suggest that the EU does not only socialise states or political elites, but also its citizens. Based on empirical analysis of 15 West European countries we find evidence of a positive, life-long socialisation effect of EU membership: those who lived in an EU member state for a longer period of time are more likely to think of their country's membership as a good thing. This finding is robust across models and model specifications. It is also substantively large, with those who spent 40 years living in the EU predicted to be around 15 percentage points more likely to say that EU membership is a good thing compare to those who only spent 5 years. This is a novel finding and shows that the EU as a supranational institution can have a socialising effect on citizens as they experience continued membership of, and interaction with, the institution.

We do find that some EU-related experiences during the formative years also have an effect on support for EU membership. In line with expectations, we find that those who spent

more than half of their formative years in a non-democracy are more positive than those who have no experience with non-democratic regimes during their formative years, a result that is robust to other model specifications. Conversely, those who joined the EU during their formative years are less positive than those who did not, although this result is less robust. However, the magnitude of both these effects is very small and so we conclude that these experiences during the formative years are of little relevance for citizens' support for the EU. Living in the EU is much more relevant for EU attitudes than is experiences during the formative years. Whilst the formative years have often been found to be important for citizens' attitudes in other domains, our finding indicates that we should also be concerned with socialisation across the life-course. This may be especially relevant when it comes to institutions such as the EU which citizens experience continuously from the moment of joining.

We highlight four important points about our findings. Firstly, our findings specifically relate to citizens' attitudes towards their country's EU membership and do not necessarily translate to citizens' attitudes towards increased European integration, support for specific European policies, or support for the Euro. As existing research has shown, attitudes towards the EU are multifaceted and support for one area of the European project does not necessarily imply support for others (Boomgaarden et al. 2011; de Vries 2018; de Vries & Steenbergen 2013; Hobolt & Brouard 2013; Hobolt & de Vries 2016; Stoeckel 2012). Further research would be required to establish the effects of life-long European socialisation, as well as the impact of key events, on attitudes toward the Euro or European integration.

Secondly, as discussed, our findings hold only for our sample of 15 Western European countries. Once enough time has passed, further research would be required to establish whether

a life-long socialisation effect exists in Eastern European countries. We would suggest that in this context it would be particularly interesting to explore the interaction between EU membership and economic prosperity, since research on socialist and communist regime change in these countries strongly suggests that an interaction exists between attitudes toward a new regime and the economic success of such a regime (Neundorf 2010).

Thirdly, our findings do not suggest that citizens necessarily become Europhiles when they spend an increasing number of years living in an EU country, nor do they suggest that citizens with long periods of European socialisation will necessarily vote to remain in the EU in hypothetical future referendums. Our findings *do* suggest that the experience of living in an EU member-state affects attitudes towards EU membership among citizens and that so far this effect has been positive.

Fourth and finally, the exact mechanism of European socialisation is something that requires further study. Existing literature on the socialising effect of the EU on states and state agents has developed extensive theoretical frameworks that capture these processes such as strategic calculation, role-playing and normative suasion (Checkel 2005). Future research agendas could productively apply these theoretical frameworks to the study of the European socialisation of citizens.

For those concerned about the future of the EU, our findings are broadly positive. We find that the experience of EU membership generally leads citizens to be more positive about the EU. It remains to be seen, however, whether this still holds in the context of the EU's more recent history with respect to the financial crisis, economic austerity, and Brexit.

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Disclosure statement

We are not aware of any potential conflict of interest

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Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Associations between the Independent Variables and Support for EU Membership

	% saying EU membership is a good thing
Formative Years as an EU Citizen	65.6%
Formative Years as a non-EU Citizen	55.1%
Formative Years when Country Joined the EU	59.4%
Not in Formative Years when Country Joined the EU	61.3%
Formative Years during a Referendum	59.6%
Formative Years without a Referendum	61.3%
Formative Years in a non-Democracy	63.9%
Formative Years in a Democracy	60.4%

All pair-wise comparisons statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. $N = 886,475$. Source: Eurobarometer, 1973-2013.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models for Support for EU Membership

	Model 1	Model 2 (individual- level controls)	Model 3 (country and year FE)
Years as an EU Citizen	0.039* (0.001)*	0.042* (0.000)	0.044* (0.001)
Years as an EU Citizen ²	-0.001* (0.000)	-0.001* (0.000)	-0.001* (0.000)
EU member in formative years	0.517* (0.006)*	0.239* (0.009)	-0.004 (0.009)
EU joined in formative years	0.069* (0.006)	0.086* (0.006)	-0.031* (0.007)
Referendum in formative years	-0.197* (0.006)	-0.291* (0.007)	-0.016 (0.008)
Non-democracy in formative years	0.507* (0.007)	0.609* (0.007)	0.058* (0.010)
Age. Reference: 18-25			
26-35		-0.176* (0.009)	-0.127* (0.009)
36-45		-0.244* (0.010)	-0.143* (0.011)
46-55		-0.283* (0.011)	-0.106* (0.012)
56-65		-0.317* (0.013)	-0.084* (0.014)
66-75		-0.388* (0.015)	-0.105* (0.016)
76+		-0.477* (0.018)	-0.075* (0.019)
Female		-0.344* (0.005)	-0.278* (0.005)
Employment status. Reference: employed (non-manual)			
Employed (manual)		-0.351* (0.007)	-0.307* (0.007)
Homemaker		0.121* (0.008)	-0.076* (0.008)
Student		0.134* (0.026)	0.271* (0.028)
Retired		-0.199* (0.009)	-0.119* (0.009)
Unemployed		-0.434* (0.010)	-0.405* (0.011)
Age left education. Reference:			
14 or younger			
15		-0.115*	0.005

	(0.009)	(0.009)
16	-0.020	0.146*
	(0.008)	(0.009)
17	0.219*	0.298*
	(0.010)	(0.010)
18	0.264*	0.394*
	(0.008)	(0.009)
19	0.335*	0.480*
	(0.011)	(0.012)
20	0.414*	0.591*
	(0.012)	(0.013)
21	0.550*	0.751*
	(0.014)	(0.014)
22 or older	0.649*	0.902*
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Still studying	0.365*	0.441*
	(0.026)	(0.028)
Country and Year FE	N	N
		Y

*p<0.01. N=886,475. Source: Eurobarometer, 1973-2013. Coefficients are log odds. Standard errors in parentheses.

List of Figure Captions

Fig.1. The relationship between *years as an EU citizen* and support for the EU

Source: Eurobarometer 1973-2013. N=886,475

Fig.2. Predicted probability of saying EU membership is a good thing. Calculated from model 3.

¹ The exception to this is Oshri et al.'s (2016) study which explores the socialisation effect of the European Union on *democratic values*. Our paper differs in that we are interested in the socialisation effect on attitudes toward the EU itself.

² For some citizens, of course, these events happen when they are older and could still have an effect on attitudes (a 'period' effect). However, we cannot measure most of these period effects because they occurred before the start of our survey data, and so we focus on whether the event occurred during someone's formative years.

³ Schmitt, H., Scholz, E., Leim, I., Moschner, M. (2008) The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File 1970-2002, v2.0.1.

⁴ Countries only join the Eurobarometer when they join the EU. Thus, for Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, and Finland, we have a smaller time series of data than for the other 10 nations. However, the shortest time-span available for any one country is still 19 years. Furthermore, all the results presented below are robust to both only including those countries for which we have a complete span of data 1973-2013 as well as restricting the analysis to post-1994 survey years.

⁵ It is important to note that this is a somewhat imperfect measure, since those who have immigrated to the country will be classed as having lived in the EU since their birth or since the country joined the EU, rather than since they arrived in the country. However, we lack a measure of immigration status across the Eurobarometer years and so this is unavoidable.

⁶ The following referendums are included: Denmark 1972; France 1972; Ireland 1972; UK 1975; Denmark 1986; Ireland 1987; Italy 1992; France 1992; Denmark 1992/1993; Ireland 1992; Finland 1994; Sweden 1994; Austria 1994; Ireland 1998; Denmark 1998; Ireland 2001/2002; Denmark 2000; Sweden 2003; France 2005; the Netherlands 2005; Spain 2005; Luxembourg 2005; Ireland 2008.

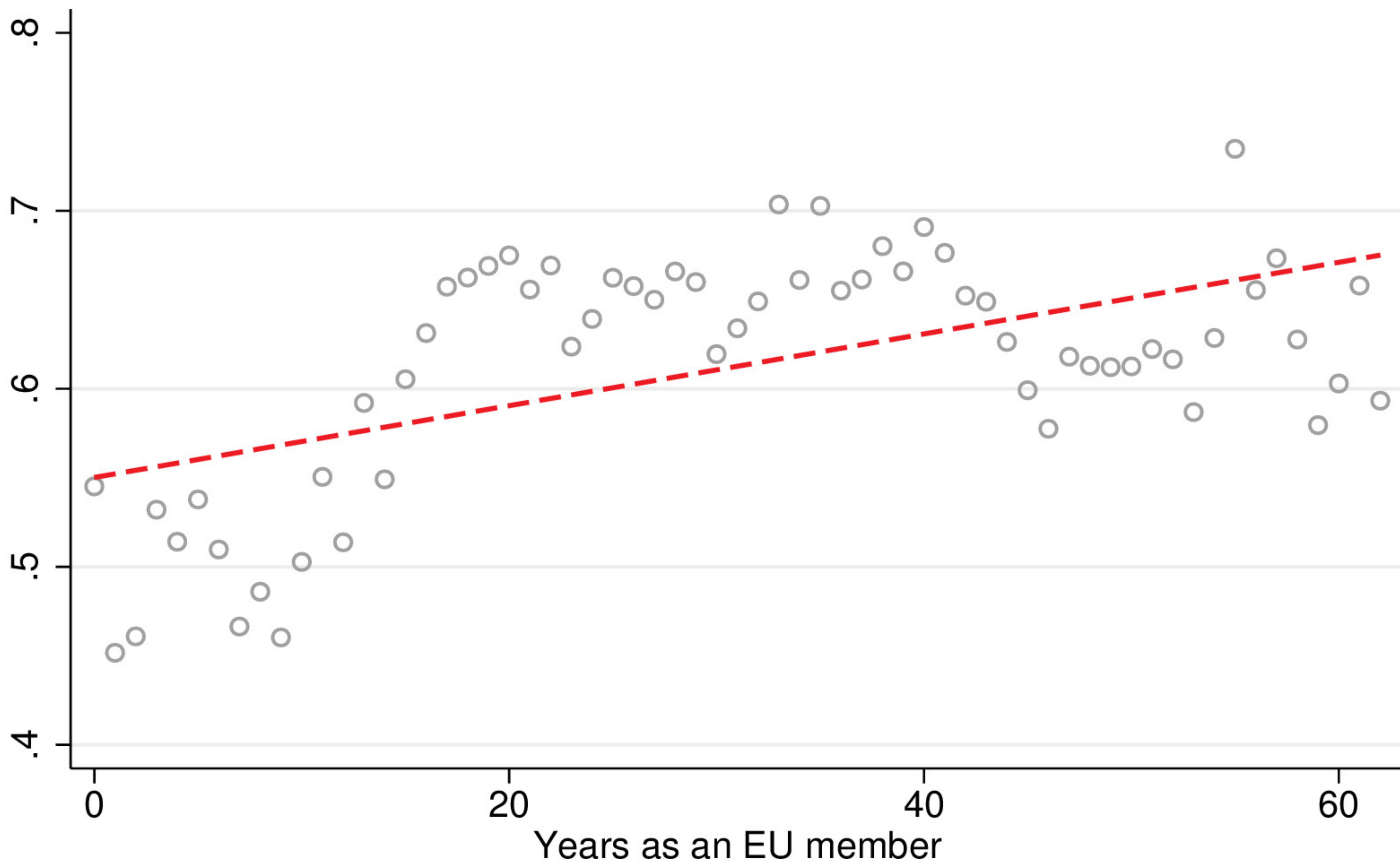
⁷ The following groups were therefore defined as experiencing non-democracy for more than half of their formative years: Austria, b. 1915-25; Belgium, b. pre-1928; Denmark, b. pre-1895; Finland, b. pre-1899 or 1910-24; France, b. pre-1926; West Germany, b. pre-1932; Greece, b. pre-1954; Italy, b. pre-1927; the Netherlands, b. pre-1910 or 1920-25; Portugal, b. pre-1955; Spain, b. pre-1957; Luxembourg, b. pre-1928; Ireland, b. pre-1904; the UK, b. pre-1898; Sweden, b. pre-1901.

⁸ It is worth noting here that there is a rich statistical literature on disentangling age, period, and cohort (APC) effects, and dealing with the identification problem which arises from including all three terms in one model: $A=P+C$, and once you know the value of any two of A, P, and C, then you automatically know the value of the third for any given respondent. However, in this analysis we are less concerned with disentangling the effects of age (or 'life-cycle') and cohort, and aiming instead to investigate the effect of specific EU-related experiences. Thus, the *age* term in our models gives the combined effect of both age and cohort, which Down and Wilson (2013) show operate in the same direction since individuals become less pro-EU as they *age*, and younger *cohorts* are more pro-EU. We are interested in identifying the importance of individuals' socialisation experience on EU attitudes, over and above these general trends, and this is measured by the variables *years as EU citizen*, *EU member*, *joining*, *referendum*, and *non-democracy*, whilst controlling for this previously-identified general trend.

⁹ The coding of the Eurobarometer in early years makes it impossible to separate these two categories.

¹⁰ We also report the results with just a linear effect for *years as an EU citizen* in the appendix. Our conclusions are the same with respect to the key effect of this variable.

¹¹ Greece 1980-2013; Spain and Portugal: 1985-2013; Austria, Sweden, and Finland: 1994-2013.



○ Proportion saying being an EU member is a good thing

--- Fitted values

