

## Holidays abroad of Dutch citizens do not increase their appetite for greater European integration

Juan Díez Medrano<sup>1</sup>, Juan J. Fernández\*

Departamento de Ciencias Sociales & Instituto Carlos III-Juan March, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain

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### ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between international travel and pro-European dispositions? Most theoretical research on European integration argues that international travel fosters these dispositions, and many cross-sectional studies support this expectation. However, support for this association rests on strong and questionable micro-foundational assumptions. This article critically engages with the association between international travel and pro-European dispositions. To do so, we draw on social psychology models and tourism research, which emphasize that the quality and impact of travel experiences are highly heterogeneous and contingent on individual, interactional, and contextual factors. Building on these perspectives, we predict no association between international travel and support for further European integration. To test this prediction, we use panel data from the Netherlands and employ two-way fixed-effects models to evaluate both the positive and negligible association hypotheses. In line with our prediction, we find that among Dutch citizens, within-individual increases in the number of international trips are not significantly related to changes in support for European integration. In summary, evidence from a rigorous test does not support the claim that typical international travel fosters pro-European dispositions.

Social scientists have inquired into the individual and aggregate impact of travel on both sending and receiving populations. This literature views travel abroad as transformative and has emphasized its impact on self-concept, life satisfaction, and attitudes and values, among other aspects (e.g. Pungh, Gnoth, & Del Chiappa, 2020; Wang, 2017). A subset of this general literature has focused on the impact of travel and tourism on the emergence of supranational geopolitical identifications (e.g. Gillen & Mostafanezhad, 2019; Trani, Menzel, & Loy, 2024). In particular, scholars of European integration have theorized and empirically examined the role of travel abroad in generating pro-European dispositions among European citizens (Fligstein, 2008; Mau, 2007). The analysis of the impact of international travel on pro-European dispositions also helps evaluate the success of a key European Union institution, the Schengen free movement area. This area was originally conceived as an economic project, but also as an identity-transforming instrument that would boost citizens' support for European integration (Caligaro, 2013).

This article revisits the link between international travel and pro-European dispositions under the light of the more general literature

on travel, tourism, and social psychology. Theory and research on European integration broadly concurs that travel abroad contributes to instilling pro-European dispositions (Delhey, 2004; Fligstein, 2008; Kuhn, 2015; Mau, 2007; Pötzschke & Braun, 2019; Recchi, 2015). To formulate this expectation, authors commonly draw on the *transactionalist approach* formulated by Karl Deutsch and others in the 1950s, which argues that cross-national interactions – including international travel – contribute to dispelling cross-cultural prejudices, foster the recognition of common objectives, and create mutual trust, ultimately increasing supranational identification and support for the creation of supranational governance structures (Deutsch, 1957; Kuhn, 2015; Recchi, 2015; Stevens & Duhamel, 2022). In line with the transactionalist approach, multiple empirical analyses document cross-sectional associations between travel abroad and pro-European dispositions (e.g. Ceka & Sojka, 2016; Ciaglia, Fuest, & Heinemann, 2018; Diez Medrano, 2020; Green, 2007; Kuhn, 2015; Rother & Nebe, 2009; Schroeder, Rössel, & Datler, 2015; Sojka & Vázquez, 2014; Stoeckel, 2016).

However, it is questionable whether Europeans' conventional

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [jjfgonza@clio.uc3m.es](mailto:jjfgonza@clio.uc3m.es) (J.J. Fernández).

<sup>1</sup> Both authors contributed equally to this study.

international travel experience meets the conditions listed by the transactionalist approach. In this article, we critically engage with prior work on the consequences of international travel. We provide three main reasons why travel abroad does not necessarily lead to more support for European integration: First, experiences in another country are not necessarily positive and therefore may not be conducive to the development of favorable attitudes towards European integration (Prati, Cicognani, & Mazzoni, 2019). Second, travelers do not necessarily meaningfully engage with the host populations of the countries that they visit (Sigalas, 2010). Third, liking the people and the places one visits abroad does not necessarily make people feel “European” and, based on this European feeling, move them to support more European integration. Indeed, the possible link between travel and pro-European dispositions remains an unsettled issue, as previous empirical tests have only involved the use of cross-sectional data.

In this context, a rigorous analysis of this relationship is needed for both scientific and policy reasons. The Schengen project was part of a package of measures adopted by European institutions in the 1990s to bring European unification closer to the people. It was hoped that these measures would increase popular support directly – i.e. through approval of the measures themselves – and indirectly – i.e. by increasing international travel and familiarity with Europe’s countries and peoples (see Caligaro, 2013; Foret, 2008). However, we still do not know whether more frequent travel has the beneficial effects that European Union administrators and politicians expected.

In this article, we conduct a rigorous test of the link between travel and pro-European attitudes through a case study of the Dutch population. We draw on LISS, a panel data survey conducted annually in the Netherlands. The Netherlands constitutes a best-case scenario for a possible impact of international travel on attitudes towards European integration. Since Dutch citizens stand out in Europe for their ability to speak several languages (Eurostat, 2024a) and their proclivity to engage in foreign trips (Eurostat, 2024b), they should be more likely to become involved in meaningful and effective cross-cultural communication that is conducive to pro-EU dispositions than travelers from other EU states.

Our analytical strategy consists in estimating two-way fixed-effects models that control for time-invariant individual characteristics and capture longitudinal trends affecting all participants (e.g. economic crises or major political events such as changes in government). While several authors have hypothesized that the effect of travel abroad on pro-European dispositions is positive and cumulative, they do not hypothesize that reductions in international travel foster anti-European dispositions. Our model specification therefore accounts for the expected asymmetric causal effect of travel on support for European integration.

The statistical results clearly challenge the prevalent view of a positive and significant link, because increases in travel by Dutch citizens are not significantly related to changes in support for further integration. These results invite a more complex approach to the effect of travel – one that makes it conditional on the travel experience and on individual characteristics. We thus further our analysis by testing an additional hypothesis encountered in the literature: travel abroad has a stronger impact on progressive than on conservative individuals (Fligstein, 2008). Again, we find no support for this hypothesis.

The structure of the article is as follows: First, we summarize the literature on the relationship between travel and pro-European dispositions; second, we appraise the core assumptions in that literature and previous tests of the hypothesis; third, we propose a more rigorous test and present the corresponding statistical results. The article ends with a discussion of the results and proposals for further research.

## Previous research

### Structural/Utilitarian Approach to pro-European dispositions

The structuralist (also known as utilitarian) approach to pro-European dispositions argues that people who travel often across Europe become aware of the benefits of the elimination of barriers to cross-border movement in the European Union and then develop a predisposition to support further European integration (Sweet & Sandholtz, 1998). As regular travelers depend on the elimination of barriers to transactions across the EU, they are also expected to engage in political action to further eliminate those barriers (Fligstein & Sweet, 2002). By implication, this approach suggests that people who travel more often across Europe will be more likely to mobilize in favor of the removal of any remaining barriers than those who do not travel as often.

These views draw largely on Deutsch et al.’s 1950s (Deutsch, 1957) work on the creation of security communities such as NATO and the European Community and later extensions of this approach (Delhey, 2007; Delhey & Deutschmann, 2016; Delhey, Deutschmann, Verbalyte, & Aplowski, 2020; Kuhn, 2015; Recchi, 2015; Recchi et al., 2011). This scholarship is known as *transactionalism* and argues that cross-border transactions – including cross-national travel – foster mutual trust between national populations and eventually lead to the emergence of a supranational society tied together by a dense network of interdependencies (Delhey, 2007). Recchi (2005) and Kuhn (2015) reflect this understanding in their work when they create synthetic transactionalist indices to test the *transactionalism* hypothesis in models that predict European identification and/or support for European integration.

### Cultural Approach

A cultural approach to pro-European dispositions also suggests a link between international travel and these dispositions. Authors in this approach argue for an indirect effect of travel abroad on support for European integration through European identification. The main mediating mechanism in this line of argument is interaction and communication – not sheer personal interests, as the structural/utilitarian approach holds.

Authors invoking the interaction and communication mechanism take their inspiration from Deutsch’s theory of national identity (Deutsch, 1953) and from *group contact theory*. In his 1953 book, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, Deutsch argues that widespread shared national identification rests on persistent interactions between peoples with different origins, leading to what he calls “effective communication.” The latter involves the capacity for mutual understanding and the construction of shared projects. Applying this argument to the formation of supranational identities, Deutsch et al. (Deutsch, 1957) argue that persistent cross-national interactions facilitate effective communication between people from different European countries and foster deep social entanglements, eventually leading to superordinate European identification and support for European integration.

Deutsch’s theory of nationalism has clear affinities to *intergroup contact theory*, as developed by Allport, Pettigrew, and others (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). These authors posit that intensive interaction between members of different groups gradually leads them to recognize what they share in common, which slowly dilutes out-group stereotypes and deflates inter-group conflict. Importantly, Allport (1954) specified that the positive consequences of inter-group interaction would more likely ensue when those interacting have the same status, when they share a common goal, and when contact is institutionalized (e.g. non-segregated schooling; the elimination of passport controls). More recently, research has added the role of close and prolonged interactions (e.g. Finseraas & Kotsadam, 2017) and friendship potential among the interacting individuals (e.g. Pettigrew,

1998; Van Laar, Collete, Stacey Sinclair, & Sidanius, 2005; Stolle, Soroka, & Johnston, 2008; Laurence, 2011) to these scope conditions.

Many empirical studies on attitudes have responded to the shared expectation of the structural/utilitarian and cultural approaches regarding international travel, and assessed whether this particular form of transnational activity is related to pro-European dispositions. To our knowledge, all of these studies have drawn on cross-sectional data, and generally indicate positive associations between stays abroad and European identification (e.g. Ceka & Sojka, 2016; Ciaglia et al., 2018; Díez Medrano, 2020; Green, 2007; Rother & Nebe, 2009; Schroedter et al., 2015) support for the EU, and support for European political integration (e.g. Díez Medrano, 2020; Fligstein, 2008; García Faroldi, 2009).<sup>2</sup> Both the structural and cultural approach to travelling across Europe lead to the same hypothesis:

*H1: The more frequently people travel abroad within Europe, the stronger their pro-EU dispositions are.*

#### *A critical assessment of the role of international travel in established approaches*

In this section, we provide a critical assessment of the link between international travel and pro-European dispositions as established in the structural/utilitarian and cultural approaches. The structural approach assumes that transnational experiences are quasi-uniformly positive and satisfactory, but this may simply not be the case. Indeed, the rich literature on travel and tourism documents complex variations in levels of satisfaction (e.g. Sarra, Di Zio, & Cappucci, 2015; Štumpf, Vojtko, & Valtrová, 2018). Environmental complexity, information asymmetry, information and normative conformity, cultural differences and value incongruence, and discrimination, are some of the causes that can interfere with a good travel experience, according to Shang and Pan (2024) (for literature on discrimination, see Tse & Tung, 2021; Mouafir, 2015). Along these lines, according to a 2015 Eurobarometer, only 56.4 % of residents in the Netherlands who had their main vacation abroad were very satisfied with how tourists were welcomed by local residents (European Commission, 2016).

Whereas travel satisfaction is heterogeneous, the transformative impact of tourism may depend on the type of travel itself (for literature classifying tourists into types, see Cohen, 1979; Klippendorf, 1986; Munt, 1994; Uriely, 2005). “Alternative tourism” (e.g. cultural, religious, educational, volunteer), for instance, ought to have a more transformative effect than mass tourism (Reisinger, 2013). Moreover, since repeat travel depends on the quality of the previous experience (Lehto, O’Leary, & Morrison, 2004), those who have had non-ideal experiences in their international trips may think twice before travelling to that destination again (Štumpf, Vojtko, & Janecek, 2020; Stylidis, 2022). From this standpoint, a potential positive correlation between travel and support for European integration may not stem from a true causal effect, but from the influence of unmeasured individual characteristics (e.g. psychological traits or transnational skills) that prompt more positive travel experiences and more favorable attitudes towards European integration.

The cultural approach also makes two major assumptions that may not hold in reality. It assumes (1) that travel abroad entails frequent and ‘deep’ contact with natives from other countries and 2) that a potential emerging ‘we-feeling’ shared by tourists and residents translates into European identification.

There is evidence that the tourism experience can lead to changes in tourists’ attitudes towards local people (Yu & Lee, 2013). However, there are several reasons to believe that the first requirement for this to happen, frequent and ‘deep’ contact, may not often be met. In particular, the usual characteristics of international travel and pre-existing skills militate against these forms of contact. Tourists travel abroad for a

limited period of their lives, at most a few times a year, for a limited number of days per trip, and not always to the same locations (European Commission, 2011). In addition, most tourists often have a limited knowledge of the local language and neither party may have sufficient command of the lingua franca necessary to engage in fulfilling conversations (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2009) in resident-tourist interactions.

Tourists also often travel with relatives from their own country (European Commission, 2016), and most social interactions while abroad are in-group. They may also be seeking relaxation, and be unwilling to engage in the effort needed to establish high-quality contacts (Birtel et al., 2024). As a result, interactions with locals are generally commercial and episodic, and not sociable in nature. These commonly brief, asymmetric and superficial encounters are not the types of inter-group interaction that Deutsch et al., Pettigrew, or Allport had in mind when they developed their theories. Instead, these authors considered that recurrent, long-term, engaging/deep, and, in the course of time, multiplex interactions were essential for the dispelling of prejudices and the formation of we-feelings.

The cultural approach also assumes that the potential ‘we-feeling’ emerging from tourist-local interactions translates into European identification. However, there are reasons to believe that this shared feeling may not translate into this particular form of identification. As noted by Theresa Kuhn (2015), European identification is more likely when the space of inter-group interaction and relationships spans interactions with individuals in several other European countries, whereas a bi-national identification is more likely when it only encompasses one foreign country. Also, for positive cross-national interactions to generate European identification, the superordinate “European” label has to be a salient category of identification in people’s minds that they will retrieve under the right circumstances. However, the political constitution of Europe and discursive Europeanization through print and digital media, as well as by audiovisual means, are not sufficiently developed to make this category highly salient (Risse, 2011; Sojka, 2025). The expectation that people will develop European identification because of their holiday experiences in other European countries thus hinges on very strong and untested assumptions about the range of countries in which tourists spend their holidays and about Europe’s entitativity.

The discussion in this section raises strong objections to the assumption that standard foreign travel across Europe, without further qualification, instills pro-EU dispositions. Our alternative hypothesis thus reads as follows:

*H2: The frequency with which people travel abroad across Europe has no impact on their pro-EU dispositions.*

At the same time, the research on international travel and intergroup contacts discussed above suggests that the impact of travel abroad across Europe on people’s pro-EU dispositions is conditional on a host of factors. We know of no survey that would allow us to test for the effect of travel conditional on the quality of the experience or any other factor listed above. However, we can test a hypothesis laid out by Neil Fligstein in *Euroclash* (2008) that is sensitive to the possibility of interactions between travel abroad and other factors. Fligstein speculates that because of their chauvinistic outlook, conservative individuals may be more refractive to the positive effect of travel abroad on pro-European dispositions (see also Koch, Josiassen, & Assaf, 2019).<sup>3</sup> Our statistical analysis below tests this additional hypothesis, which reads as follows:

*H3: The positive effect on pro-EU dispositions of travelling abroad across Europe is stronger among people with progressive political orientations than among people with conservative political orientations.*

<sup>3</sup> “People who hold conservative political views that value the ‘nation’ as the most important category will not want to travel, know, or interact with people who are ‘not like them.’ When they do, they will not be attracted to the ‘others’ but instead will emphasize their cultural differences” (Fligstein, 2008: 137)

## From Theory to Empirics

To the best of our knowledge, all prior work exploring the relationship between cross-border transactions, including travel, and support for European integration has uniformly relied on cross-sectional data. This potentially carries the risk of omitted variable bias when assessing the effect of travel on European identification. To address this problem, our analysis below uses panel data instead of cross-sectional data, which allows us to control for time-constant individual conditions.

Another problem with the empirical tests performed thus far is that they do not adequately translate the asymmetric nature of the causal arguments. Foundational research in this area *does not* argue that reductions in the frequency of travel abroad or the accumulation of spells during which people do not travel abroad causes anti-European dispositions. Rather, it argues for a positive and cumulative effect of travel abroad on pro-European dispositions. In other words, their single key prediction is that *increases* in international travel foster those attitudes. This expected restricted effect is actually in line with increasing research focused on asymmetric causal processes (Lieberson, 1985). For instance, one expects that an antibiotic will cure an infection, but does not expect that stopping the treatment will lead to this infection's recurrence. Taking the asymmetric nature of many causal processes into account, Allison (2019) proposes a novel approach to statistical modelling that we implement below.

The theoretical discussion above suggests two mutually exclusive predictions. The dominant approach in European integration research presumes that increases in international travel foster support for further European integration. Our alternative approach based on tourism research and intergroup contact theory suggests the absence of a consistent, significant average relationship between international travel and support for European integration.

We test the two mutually exclusive predictions through a case study of the Netherlands. As noted above, the Netherlands constitutes a best-case scenario for a possible impact of international travel on attitudes towards European integration. Dutch citizens stand out from other Europeans for their fluency in foreign languages (Eurostat, 2024a); they also travel abroad more often than other Europeans do (Eurostat, 2024b). This means that compared to travelers from other countries, they have more transnational capital and are thus more able to engage in meaningful and effective cross-cultural communication abroad. In other words, it should be easier for them to participate in the 'deep' intercultural exchanges that transactionalism considers a necessary condition for the development of supranational ties.

## Data and Methods

To assess the association between foreign travel and pro-European dispositions, we draw on the LISS Panel, which is a probabilistic panel of individuals living in the Netherlands. The LISS Panel includes 15 yearly waves. We use all available waves up to date – covering 2008–2023. We utilize this source because, unlike survey panels conducted in other European countries (e.g. CRONOS, POLAT or SOEP), LISS has consistently included questionnaire items on support for European integration, international travel, socio-demographic factors, and political behaviors and attitudes.

The outcome variable in this study measures support for European integration through a scale with polar values European integration 'has already gone too far' (1) or 'should go a step further' (5). This questionnaire item has also been included in the European Social Survey and has been analyzed in several studies to explore generational differences (Ringlerova, 2019), the consistency of between- and within-person attitudes (Brandt & Morgan, 2022) and the role of education in pro-European dispositions (Fernández, Teney, & Medrano, 2023).

Our key independent variables reflect respondents' recent travel experiences and are structured similarly. We consider both domestic and international travel to control for potential socio-economic and

psychological conditions related to travel in general. The item *domestic holidays* measures whether over the past 12 months the respondent has taken a holiday within the Netherlands not even once (1), one time (2), two times (3), three times (4), four times (5) or five times or more (6). The item *holidays abroad* measures foreign travel over the past 12 months and provides the same six response options. These two variables are weakly correlated ( $r = 0.154$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Unfortunately, the questionnaire does not ask about the destination of foreign holidays, the frequency of interactions with locals, and the quality of these interactions.<sup>4</sup> Eurostat's (2024a) evidence shows that in 2013–2022 between 74.9 % and 88.4 % of all trips made by residents in the Netherlands were to another EU member state.<sup>5</sup>

The following models control for several time-varying individual-level characteristics that are theoretically relevant to the explanation of pro-European dispositions or have been identified by empirical analysis as correlated to these pro-European dispositions. For instance, Fernández and Teney (2024) argue that individuals feeling less financially secure display more risk aversion and as a result oppose further European integration to prevent additional losses. Following this argument, the models control for *subjective financial insecurity* through an index of two variables that captures how well respondents can live off their household income and if they are satisfied with their financial situation.

The statistical analysis below also controls for level of education, one of the most robust predictors of pro-EU attitudes, at least in cross-sectional analyses (Foster & Frieden, 2021; Hakhverdian, Van Elsas, Van der Brug, & Kuhn, 2013). To this end, the analysis includes two dummy variables, one for *higher vocational education* and the other one for *university education*.

The structural/utilitarian approach to European integration attitudes expects associations between two stratification measures, occupation and income, and pro-European dispositions. Individuals who are employed in upper-class occupations or earn higher incomes incur lower opportunity costs and can expect disproportionate potential gains from European integration, which should influence their preferences (e.g. Fligstein, 2008; Gabel & Whitten, 1997). The statistical models below include three dummy variables for current or previous occupation: 1) *higher academic professional* (e.g. engineer), 2) *higher supervisory professional* (e.g. manager), and 3) *intermediate academic or supervisory professional* (e.g. teacher). In addition to these measures of occupational status, the models also include a variable for the CPI-adjusted, net *individual income*. The raw income variable had imputed values and was included in the Background Module. We convert nominal into 2015 real income to control for inflation changes and then use the logged transformation of this variable to correct for its large right-hand skew.

Finally, the literature has tested life-cycle effects on pro-European dispositions, and a correlation between political attitudes and pro-European dispositions, with mixed results (Elsas, Erika, Hakhverdian, & Van der Brug, 2016; Elsas, & Erika, and Wouter Van Der Brug., 2015; Garry & Tilley, 2015; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010). To control for life-cycle effects, our models include four dummy variables corresponding to the age groups 16–29, 30–44, 45–59 and 60 or more. To control for political attitudes, our models include a 10-point *left-right self-placement scale*. The Appendix includes definitions of all variables and Table A1 provides descriptive statistics.

As noted in the "Previous Research" section, work on the link between travel and pro-European dispositions has so far only relied on cross-sectional data and models. This may be problematic because cross-sectional travel indicators can be correlated with a broad range of time-constant confounding factors (e.g. parents' child-raising style, respondents' intelligence, genetic predispositions, place of birth, or stable

<sup>4</sup> It does not collect information on the duration or the destination of those stays abroad either.

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, according to the Central Bureau voor Statistiek (CBS), 2024, in 2005–2016 between 81.6 % and 84.1 % of all holidays abroad taken by residents in the Netherlands had another EU member state as a destination.

personality traits) which, if unaccounted for, could lead to biased estimates. To overcome this problem, we estimate two-way fixed effects models, whose estimates are only influenced by longitudinal (also called within-individual) variations in the dependent and independent variables. This is accomplished by centering the independent variable of interest, that is, subtracting the average for that variable from the specific values observed for each individual in the sample. Through this transformation, the estimates capture the longitudinal relationship between individual changes in the independent variable of interest and individual changes in the outcome.

Unit (i.e. respondents) FE models have the well-known advantage of preventing biases in parameter estimates caused by time-constant unobserved heterogeneity (Allison, 2009; Wooldridge, 2015). In this study, FE estimation ensures that parameter estimates of the effect of travel are not in any way influenced by uncontrolled time-constant individual characteristics (such as the ones mentioned above). Moreover, the two-way fixed effects models presented below include wave FE to control for events or developments that happen in a particular time frame and are shared by all survey respondents (e.g. economic or political crises). To

assess statistical significance in a way that takes within-person autocorrelation into account, we use robust standard errors.

To model the asymmetric relationship between travel abroad and pro-European dispositions, we use the elegant statistical procedure recently suggested by Richard and Ryan (2017) and, especially, Allison (2019), which includes two different variables in a statistical analysis. The first one measures the cumulative period-to-period *increases* in the values for the focal independent variable during the period of observation; the second one measures the cumulative period-to-period *declines* in the values for the focal independent variable during the period of observation. In our case, this means that we decompose the variables holidays abroad and domestic holidays into two different variables each, the first one referring to positive travel – i.e. accumulation of increases – and the second one referring to negative travel – i.e. accumulation of declines.

Finally, a word of caution: the coefficients in two-way FE (TWFE) models may still capture unaccounted confounded factors that vary over time.

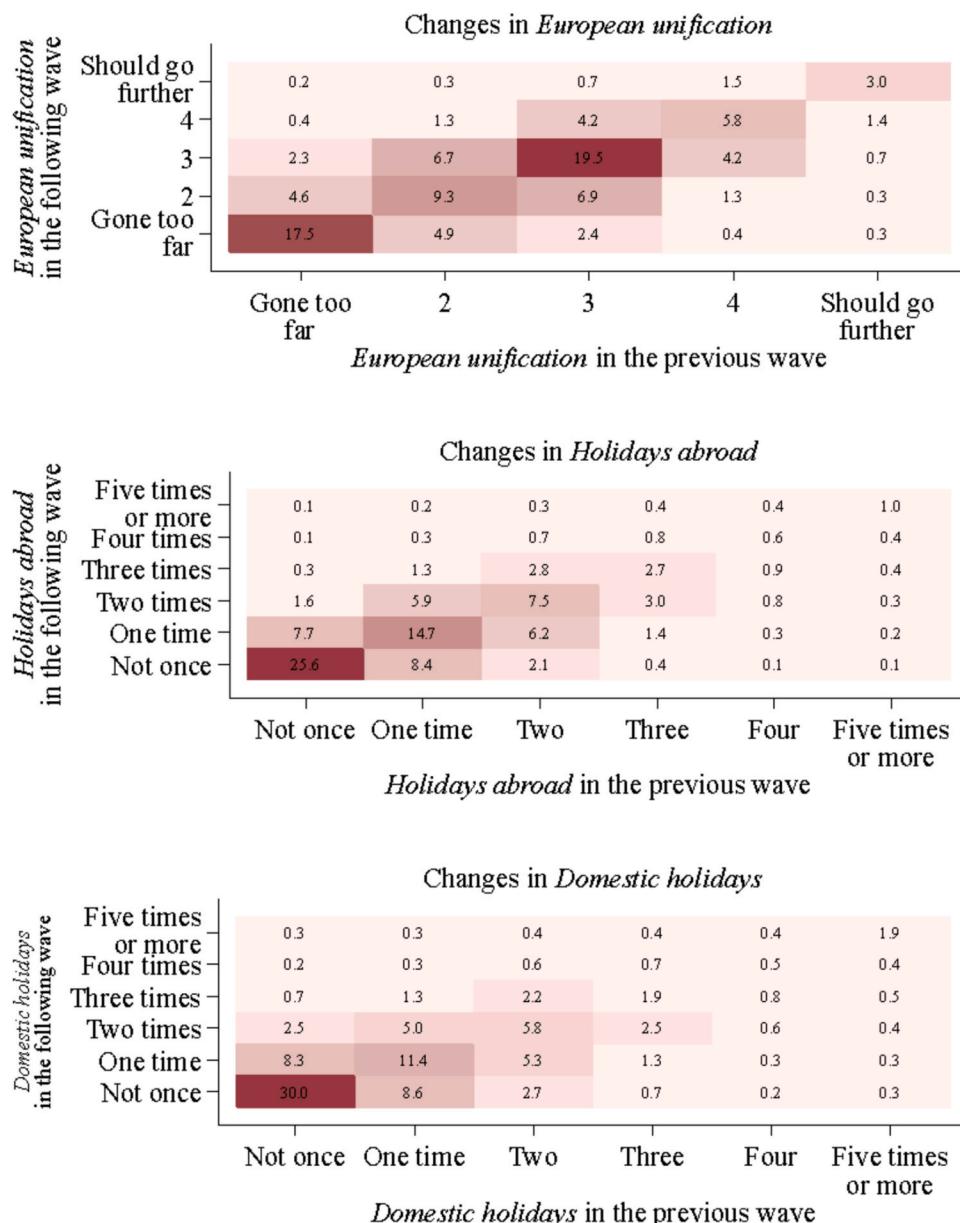


Fig. 1. Heatmaps of interwave changes in European Unification, Holidays abroad and Domestic holidays.

## Results

We begin the analysis by examining the central variables in the analysis: travel and support for further European integration. If residents in the Netherlands do not change their yearly travel routines or if their views on further European integration do not change, then the longitudinal approach will not be warranted. Fig. 1 displays heatmaps of inter-wave changes in *European unification* and the original version of *holidays abroad* and *domestic holidays*. It shows substantial longitudinal variation in the three items. Attitudes to further European integration remained stable over time (55.0 %). However, in about one in five individual-years attitudes become more favorable (22.3 %) and in about one in five individual-years (22.8 %) attitudes become less favorable. Also, while the majority of survey participants travel abroad the same number of times year after year (51.1 %), in one in five individual-years this number increases (21.4 %) and in one in four individual-years (25.2 %) the number becomes smaller. Similar patterns can be observed for domestic holidays. There is thus enough variation in the analysis' main variables of interest to justify the use of two-way fixed effects regression to estimate the effect of travel on support for further European integration.

Table 1 includes four TWFE models predicting support for further integration. Model 1 only includes the control variables and model 2 adds two variables related to spending *holidays abroad*. As noted above, the first one – *holidays abroad positive* – measures the cumulative number of holiday trips abroad above those of the previous year, whereas the

second one – *holidays abroad negative* – measures the cumulative number of trips abroad below those of the previous year. Model 3 replaces the two variables for *holidays abroad* with two variables for *domestic holidays* and the full model, model 4, includes the variables measuring holidays abroad and domestic holidays simultaneously.

Model 1 indicates that the associations between within-respondent changes in age, education, and individual income and support for further European integration are not statistically significant. In contrast, the associations between *subjective financial insecurity* and *left-right orientation* and support for further European integration are both negative and statistically significant. In line with previous work (Fernández and Teney, 2024), respondents who perceive that their financial security has worsened are significantly more likely to become less supportive of further European integration. Moreover, respondents whose ideological self-placement shifts to the right are also more likely to change their views and become less supportive of further European integration. Associations connected to a change in social class are also non-significant. Moving into a *higher academic* or a *higher supervisor* job are not consistently related to shifts in support for further integration.

Model 2 adds two variables, *holidays abroad positive* and *holidays abroad negative*. In this model (as well as in models 3 and 4), the coefficients for *subjective financial insecurity* and *left-right orientation* are still significant and in the same direction. More importantly, the coefficient for *holidays abroad positive* is not statistically significant at the conventional 5 % level, although it is significant at the 10% level. The coefficient for *holidays abroad negative* is also non-significant. This means that, on average, increases in the frequency of international travel are not related to increases in support for European integration. On average, decreases in international travel are also unrelated to support for further European integration.

To test for the possibility that the frequency with which people travel domestically may suppress the relationship between travel abroad and pro-EU dispositions, Model 3 includes *domestic holiday positive* and *domestic holiday negative* to test for the possibility that travel per se, whether domestic or international, impacts on pro-EU dispositions. The statistical findings rule out this possibility, as neither of the two coefficients is statistically significant. Model 4 includes all variables. The coefficients for *financial insecurity* and *left-right index* retain their sign and statistical significance. Again, the coefficient for *holiday abroad positive* remains significant only at the 10% level. In all, the results obtained for models 2 to 4 are in line with H2 (rather than with H1) and justify the conclusion that holidays abroad do not impact on people's pro-EU dispositions.

### Potential Heterogeneous Effects of International Travel

As we discussed in the "A critical assessment of the role of international travel in established approaches" section, travel abroad across Europe may only foster pro-EU dispositions under very specific conditions, such as the perceived quality of the experience or the salience of the European Union in people's minds. In this regard, Neil Fligstein (2008) hypothesizes that the impact of travel abroad across Europe on pro-EU dispositions is stronger among left-leaning than among conservative individuals. Models 5 to 7 (Table 2) allow us to test this prediction by including a variable that measures respondents' self-reported left-right orientations, as well as four interaction terms with travel abroad and domestic travel that capture the expected causal asymmetry of the relationship between travel and pro-EU dispositions.

Before describing the statistical results, however, a brief methodological note about interactions in FE models is in order. As noted by Quintana (2021), a simple multiplication of two factors (e.g. *holidays abroad positive\*left-right index*) to measure interaction effects in models that center on within-individual changes is problematic, because the coefficient estimate for these multiplicative terms still partially captures between-individuals variation. Quintana (2021) shows that "double-de-meaning", that is, de-meaning the predictor variables and then de-

**Table 1**  
Two-way FE models predicting support for further integration, 2007–2023.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Holiday abroad positive		0.014 (0.007)	0.014 (0.007)	
Holiday abroad negative		-0.007 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.006)	
Domestic holiday positive			0.003 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)
Domestic holiday negative			-0.002 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.006)
Age 16–29	0.088 (0.054)	0.092 (0.054)	0.088 (0.054)	0.093 (0.054)
Age 30–44	0.047 (0.038)	0.050 (0.038)	0.047 (0.038)	0.050 (0.038)
Age 45–59	0.003 (0.023)	0.004 (0.023)	0.004 (0.023)	0.005 (0.023)
University education	-0.021 (0.081)	-0.026 (0.081)	-0.022 (0.081)	-0.026 (0.081)
Higher vocational education	0.040 (0.051)	0.038 (0.051)	0.040 (0.051)	0.038 (0.051)
Higher academic	0.095 (0.053)	0.096 (0.053)	0.095 (0.053)	0.096 (0.053)
Higher supervisor	-0.094 (0.050)	-0.093 (0.050)	-0.094 (0.050)	-0.092 (0.050)
Intermediate prof.	0.017 (0.034)	0.018 (0.034)	0.017 (0.034)	0.018 (0.034)
Financial insecurity	-0.033*** (0.008)	-0.033*** (0.008)	-0.033*** (0.008)	-0.033*** (0.008)
Ind. net income logged	0.003 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)
Left-right index	-0.018*** (0.004)	-0.018*** (0.004)	-0.018*** (0.004)	-0.018*** (0.004)
Wave FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Case FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	2.714*** (0.052)	2.716*** (0.052)	2.715*** (0.052)	2.716*** (0.052)
Observations	47,435	47,435	47,435	47,435
R-squared	0.033	0.033	0.033	0.033
Number of cases	9959	9959	9959	9959

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 2**  
Two-way FE models predicting support for further integration, 2007–2023.

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Holiday abroad positive	0.014* (0.007)	0.014 (0.007)	0.014 (0.007)
Holiday abroad positive*Left-right index	−0.009*** (0.002)	−0.003 (0.003)	−0.001 (0.003)
Holiday abroad negative	−0.008 (0.006)	−0.008 (0.006)	−0.008 (0.006)
Holiday abroad negative*Left-right index		−0.007** (0.002)	−0.005 (0.003)
Domestic holiday positive	0.002 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)
Domestic holiday positive*Left-right index			−0.004* (0.002)
Domestic holiday negative	−0.001 (0.005)	−0.001 (0.005)	−0.001 (0.005)
Domestic holiday negative*Left-right index			−0.001 (0.002)
Age 16–29	0.091 (0.054)	0.090 (0.054)	0.089 (0.054)
Age 30–44	0.052 (0.038)	0.052 (0.038)	0.052 (0.038)
Age 45–59	0.011 (0.023)	0.012 (0.022)	0.013 (0.022)
University education	−0.029 (0.081)	−0.032 (0.081)	−0.031 (0.081)
Higher vocational education	0.035 (0.050)	0.034 (0.050)	0.035 (0.050)
Higher academic	0.093 (0.052)	0.092 (0.052)	0.094 (0.052)
Higher supervisor	−0.085 (0.050)	−0.083 (0.050)	−0.083 (0.050)
Intermediate prof.	0.018 (0.034)	0.017 (0.034)	0.017 (0.034)
Financial insecurity	−0.032*** (0.008)	−0.032*** (0.008)	−0.032*** (0.008)
Ind. net income logged	0.003 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)
Left-right index	−0.016*** (0.004)	−0.016*** (0.004)	−0.016*** (0.004)
Wave FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Case FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	2.625*** (0.048)	2.624*** (0.048)	2.622*** (0.048)
Observations	47,435	47,435	47,435
R-squared	0.035	0.035	0.035
Number of cases	9959	9959	9959

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p < 0.001, \*\* p < 0.01, \* p < 0.05.

meaning the product of these de-meaned variables, solves the issue. This transformation generates a new variable, whose coefficient only captures the moderating influence of within-individual changes in the variables that interact. The model discussed below include this double-demeaned interaction term.

The full model 7 shows that the effect of increases in holidays abroad is not significantly shaped by respondents' ideology. In fact, the *domestic holiday positive\*Left-right index* term is the only statistically significant interaction. This tells us that the positive effect of increases in domestic holidays is significantly larger for left-leaning respondents than for right-leaning respondents. However, to better interpret the interaction coefficients, it is necessary to examine the marginal effects of the travel variables at different levels of the *left-right index* (Mize, 2019). Fig. 2 depicts these marginal effects for the four travel variables. It shows that the coefficient for *holiday abroad positive* never attains statistical significance at the standard 5 % level. Meanwhile, the coefficient for *holiday abroad negative* is negative and significant among people who become much more conservative. These empirical findings are hard to square with Fligstein's hypothesis: Individuals who become more conservative over time do not then become more resistant to a positive effect of travel abroad. H3 is thus not supported. Among individuals in this ideological segment, declines in international travel significantly reduce

their support for further integration.

## Discussion and Conclusion

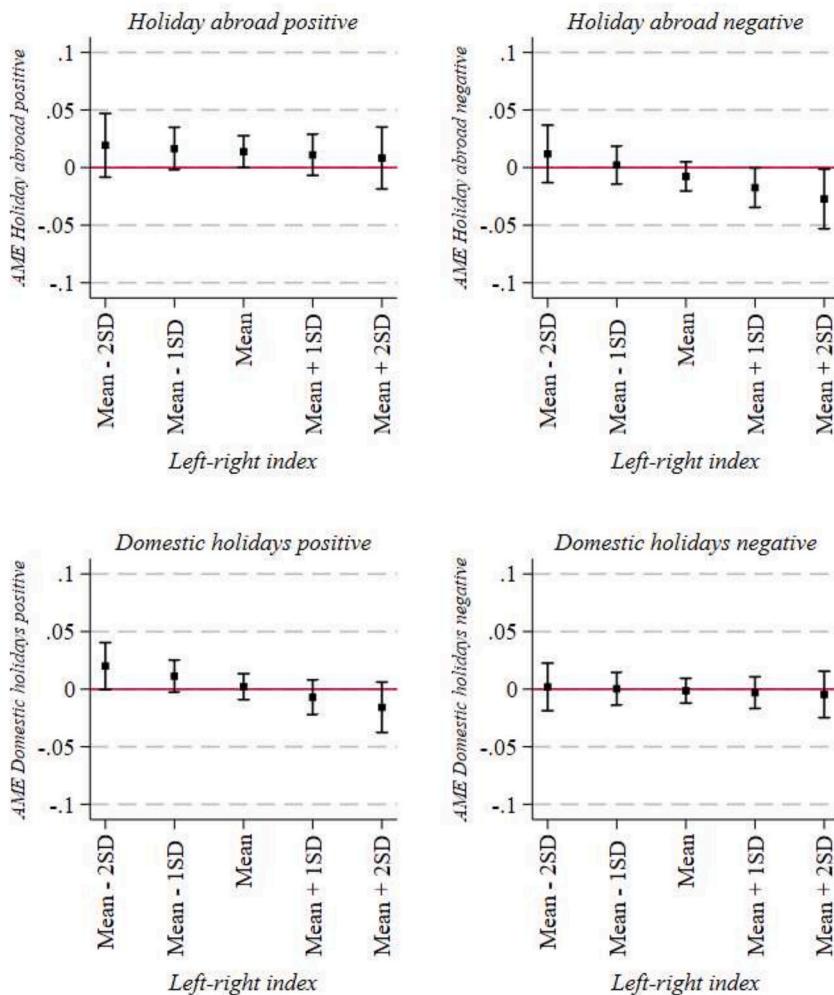
International travel and tourism can potentially alter national identification and generate new cosmopolitan, transnational or supranational identifications. The literature on travel and pro-European dispositions provides a valuable focus on these incipient identifications, expanding the theoretical and empirical agenda of research on travel and tourism. Along these lines, studies on European integration argue that travel abroad increases support for European integration directly, by leading people to appreciate the European Union's dismantling of barriers to movement within the European Union, and indirectly, by instilling in people a European identification that is expressed as support for European integration.

We challenge these arguments on three main grounds. The standard expectation of a causal link between international travel and pro-European dispositions assumes that (i) travel abroad is necessarily a positive experience; (ii) it leads to meaningful exchange with local populations of the sort that would lead to the development of a "we" feeling between travelers and local populations; and (iii) people connect their experiences abroad to the European Union (instead of taking it for granted, so that if they develop a "we" feeling with local populations from European countries other than their own, this is felt and expressed as European identification). These assumptions are quite demanding and to a large extent do not reflect European populations' experiences and standard practices when they travel abroad. There are not therefore strong reasons to believe that travel abroad per se would lead to changes in support for European integration.

We then proceed to test the literature's hypotheses using panel data from the Netherlands and state-of-the-art statistical techniques that do justice to the arguments put forward in the literature, by modelling the expected asymmetric effect of travel; that is, the expectation that *increases* in the frequency of travel abroad lead individuals to express greater support for European unification, while declines in the frequency of travel abroad do not have an impact on support. The panel structure of our data also allows us to estimate models that control for individual heterogeneity. Based on two-way fixed-effects models and using the standard 5 % significance level, the statistical results do not support the hypothesis of a positive association between the frequency of travel abroad and pro-EU dispositions. Dutch citizens who over time increase their number of trips abroad do not become significantly more likely to support further integration. Given this null finding, we explore a potential heterogeneous association. Despite the fact that individual left-right orientation strongly shapes support for further European integration, it does not significantly moderate the link between increases in foreign travel and the outcome.

Like any other, this study has limitations. Arguably, the study's main limitation lies in its limited external validity. Further research could examine if the patterns documented in this study for the Netherlands also apply to other EU countries. Beyond this, the article faces other limitations. Although most international trips taken by Dutch citizens are to European countries, the lack of data on respondents' destinations is a limitation.

Moreover, it is possible that the absence of a causal relationship between travel and pro-European attitudes reflects an issue with the dependent variable. The survey question asks respondents whether they support further European integration, but holiday travel may instead influence their satisfaction with existing EU membership rather than their desire for deeper integration. Another potential limitation of the statistical analysis is the omission of certain time-varying factors that could exert a stronger influence on attitudes towards integration. While financial security is accounted for, other variables – such as social values – may play a more significant role in shaping pro-EU sentiments. Finally, the study does not control for contact with Europeans within the respondents' home country. If domestic interactions with Europeans



**Fig. 2..** Marginal effects of the variables holidays abroad positive, holidays abroad negative, domestic holidays positive and domestic holidays negative at different levels of left-right index.

enhance support for integration, they could offset the effects of travel abroad, thereby masking any potential impact.

In the future, theory and research could consider the impact of extra-European travel on European identification and support for integration. While most international travel occurs within regional boundaries, globalization has facilitated both intercontinental and regional mobility, making it pertinent to examine how encounters outside Europe shape European identity. A recent cross-national study—despite sharing the methodological limitations of earlier work on intra-European travel—finds that previous sojourns in non-European countries are associated with stronger European identification (Pötzschke & Braun, 2019).

Here, insights from conflict theory and social identity theory—both of which, in contrast to intergroup contact theory, posit that interactions with out-group members are more likely to strengthen than dilute in-group identities—offer a useful theoretical starting point (on conflict theory: Blalock, 1967; Bobo, 1999, Bobo, 2004; on social identity theory: Tajfel, 1982; Hornsey, 2008). The central challenge, as with the relationship between intra-European travel and European identification, lies in explaining why contact with non-Europeans would activate pro-European rather than purely national loyalties.

Conflict theory offers limited guidance in this respect, as representative works in this tradition (see references above) do not address how individuals prioritize among nested identities and political allegiances (i.e. European vs. national). Social identity theory, meanwhile, predicts that a supranational identity, such as “European” is more likely to become salient when individuals perceive that it confers higher status

than national identity in a given context. As an alternative hypothesis, one might speculate that the structural insecurity experienced by Europeans abroad—resulting from the absence of EU citizenship protections, the typically greater geographic and cultural distance, and the limited presence of co-nationals—combined with the realization of shared views and values with other Europeans abroad, could foster a sense of solidarity. Encounters with other Europeans in non-European countries may heighten awareness of one’s European origins and the significance of EU citizenship, thereby reinforcing European identity and support for further European integration.

From a policy perspective, the findings above suggest that the expansion of intra-European tourism under the Schengen Agreement has not substantially bolstered pro-European attitudes among Dutch citizens. However, this outcome should not be interpreted as an indictment of the Schengen regime. Its establishment pursued multiple objectives beyond fostering pro-European sentiments, including the efficient allocation of labor and human capital across member states. Moreover, long-term and professionally motivated mobility within the EU may have had the intended integrative effects, even if short-term holiday travel has not. These results highlight the broader difficulty of fostering European integration “from below”—a challenge also reflected in the mixed evidence regarding the attitudinal effects of EU student mobility programs such as Erasmus and Socrates (see Kuhn, 2012; Mitchell, 2015; Sigalas, 2010).

The European Union offers a model of economic and labor market integration that may inform expectations regarding about cultural

change in other world regions undergoing similar transformations. In recent decades, South East Asian countries have seen rapid economic development and growing intra-regional commercial integration (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023), followed by rising levels of intra-regional migration (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024), and tourism (ASEAN Secretariat, 2025). The emergence of trans-national trade agreements and blocs – such as ASEAN and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) — may increase public awareness of being part of a broader regional community. We are tempted to predict that, as income per capita rises and current barriers to the movement of goods and people are removed (Lan, 2023; Nita, 2017; Sugiyarto & Mendoza, 2014), intra-regional travel will intensify and pan-Asian dispositions will spread. However, the Dutch case — where international tourism does not appear to translate into increased support for integration — cautions against such projections. As in Europe, public policies inspired by both sociological and constructivist nation-building theories (Anderson, 1983; Breuilly, 1982; Deutsch, 1953; Mann, 1992; Weber, 1976), for instance education policies that instill supranational identifications and extol the virtues of regional integration, may be more effective in fostering pro-integration dispositions, by combining bottom-up social integration and top-down identity construction.

Replication files are available at: <https://figshare.com/s/ce85a4a>

## Appendix A. Appendix

### *Definitions and operationalization of all variables.*

#### *Study 1: Support for European integration in the Netherlands.*

*European integration:* The original variable is “cv22n105” in the Politics and Values Module. The item translated into English reads: “Some people and political parties feel that European unification should go a step further. Others think that European unification has already gone too far. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means that European unification should go further and 5 means that it has already gone too far?”. The variable has been recoded to “European unification has already gone too far” (1) and “European unification should go further” (5).

*Holidays abroad:* The original variable is “cs22o103” in the Social Integration and Leisure Module. The item translated into English reads: “How often did you take a holiday abroad over the past 12 months? We understand a holiday to be a stay (abroad) away from one’s own home environment, for relaxation or pleasure, including at least one overnight stay.” Possible response answers are “not once” (1), “one time” (2), “two times” (3), “three times” (4), “four times” (5), “five times or more” (6).

*Holidays abroad positive:* This variable represents the cumulative number of inter-wave increases in the raw variable *holidays abroad*. To construct the variable, we follow the coding of Allison (2019).

*Holidays abroad negative:* This variable represents the cumulative number of inter-wave decreases in the raw variable *holidays abroad*. To construct the variable, we follow the coding of Allison (2019).

*Domestic holidays:* The original variable is “cs22o102” in the Social Integration and Leisure Module. The item translated into English reads: “How often did you take a holiday within the Netherlands over the past 12 months? We understand a holiday to be a stay (within the Netherlands) away from one’s own home environment, for relaxation or pleasure, including at least one overnight stay.” Possible response answers are “not once” (1), “one time” (2), “two times” (3), “three times” (4), “four times” (5), “five times or more” (6).

*Domestic holidays positive:* This variable represents the cumulative number of inter-wave increases in the raw variable *domestic holidays*. To construct the variable, we follow the coding of Allison (2019).

*Domestic holidays negative:* This variable represents the cumulative number of inter-wave decreases in the raw variable *domestic holidays*. To construct the variable, we follow the coding of Allison (2019).

*Financial insecurity:* We construct a latent variable based on two items of the Income Module (variables ciXXX006 and ciXXX378). The first asks: “How satisfied are you with your financial situation?” and the response options range from “Not at all satisfied” (0) to “Entirely satisfied” (10). The second item asks: “Can you indicate, on a scale from 0 to 10, how hard or easy it is for you to live off the income of your household?” and the response options range from “very hard” (0) to “very easy” (10). Both variables were reverse-coded. We then use principal components factor analysis to construct a latent factor. The eigenvalue = 1.734 and the proportion explained by the first factor is 86.73 %.

*Education variables:* The original variable is “oplzon” in the Background Module. It captures the “Highest level of education irrespective of diploma”. The response options are “Primary school” (1), “VMBO (Intermediate secondary education, US; junior high school)” (2), “HAVO/VWO (higher secondary education/preparatory university education, US: senior high school)” (3), “MBO (intermediate vocational education, US: junior college)” (4), “HBO (higher vocational education, US: college)” (5), “WO (university)” (6), “Other” (7). We constructed a new education level variable with values (1) including “Primary school”, “VMBO (Intermediate secondary education, US; junior high school)” and “HAVO/VWO (higher secondary education/preparatory university education, US: senior high school)”; value 2 includes “MBO (intermediate vocational education, US: junior college)”; value 3 includes “WO (university)”. Value (7) in “oplzon” is set to missing.

Based on the education level, we then construct two dummy variables:

*Higher vocational education* is a dummy that distinguishes those with “HAVO/VWO (higher secondary education/preparatory university education, US: senior high school)” (1) from the rest (0).

*University education* is a dummy that distinguishes those with “WO (university)” (1) from the rest (0).

*Occupation:* Constructed from the variable “cwXX404” in the Work and Schooling Module. It includes 9 options: “Higher academic or independent

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## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Juan Díez Medrano:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.  
**Juan J. Fernández:** Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

Juan J. Fernandez reports financial support, administrative support, travel, and writing assistance were provided by Spanish State Research Agency. If there are other authors, they declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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profession (e.g. architect, physician, scholar, academic instructor, engineer)" (1), "Higher supervisory profession (e.g. manager, director, owner of large company, supervisory civil servant)" (2), "Intermediate academic or independent profession (e.g. teacher, artist, nurse, social worker, policy assistant)" (3), "Intermediate supervisory or commercial profession (e.g. head representative, department manager, shopkeeper)" (3), "Other mental work (e.g. administrative assistant, accountant, sales assistant, family carer)" (4), "Skilled and supervisory manual work (e.g. car mechanic, foreman, electrician)" (5), "Semi-skilled manual work (e.g. driver, factory worker)" (5), "Unskilled and trained manual work (e.g. cleaner, packer)" (5) and "Agrarian profession (e.g. farm worker, independent agriculturalist)" (5). Based on the occupation variable, we then construct two dummy variables:

*Higher academic professional* is a dummy that distinguishes those with that profession (1) from the rest (0).

*Higher supervisory professional* is a dummy that distinguishes those with that profession (1) from the rest (0).

*Intermediate academic or supervisory professional* is a dummy that distinguishes those with that profession (1) from the rest (0).

*Individual income*: Represents the personal net monthly income in euros. It was constructed on the basis of the variable "nettoink\_f" (Imputed monthly individual income (nettoink\_f) included in the Background Module. For wave 1 the variable is nettoink. The values were then converted into real euros in 2015 using the CPI tables of CBS (2022). The resulting value was logged due to a strong right-hand skew.

*Left-right orientation*: Constructed from the variable "cv19k101" in the Politics Module. The question reads "In politics, a distinction is often made between "the left" and "the right". Where would you place yourself on the scale below, where 0 means left and 10 means right?". Response options range from 0 ("Right") to 10 ("Left").

*Age group*: We create dichotomous variables from the raw continuous age variable "leeftijd" in the Background Module. The dichotomous variable distinguishes the groups *age 16–29*, *age 30–44*, *age 45–59* and *age 60+* from the rest.

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Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS) (2022) Consumer prices; price index=2015. <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/en/dataset/83131ENG/table?dl=5FA7>

**Table A1**

Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Unification	80,034	2.550	1.155	1.000	5.000
Holiday abroad	73,769	2.233	1.247	1.000	6.000
Holiday in the NL	73,769	2.153	1.318	1.000	6.000
University education	79,719	0.109	0.312	0.000	1.000
Higher vocational education	79,719	0.250	0.433	0.000	1.000
Higher academic professional	67,099	0.077	0.267	0.000	1.000
Higher supervisory professional	67,099	0.089	0.285	0.000	1.000
Intermediate academic or supervisory professional	67,099	0.362	0.481	0.000	1.000
Subjective financial insecurity	59,574	-0.021	0.990	-1.830	3.927
Individual income logged	76,032	6.592	2.264	0.000	12.524
Left-right orientation	70,931	5.217	2.170	0.000	10.000
Age 16–29	79,902	0.145	0.352	0.000	1.000
Age 30–44	79,902	0.216	0.412	0.000	1.000
Age 45–59	79,902	0.276	0.447	0.000	1.000

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- Juan Díez Medrano** is Professor of Sociology at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. His research interests include public opinion and European integration, nationalism, ethnic conflict, and economic sociology. His address is Department of Social Sciences; Universidad Carlos III de Madrid; c/ Madrid 126, 28903 Getafe, Spain; [juan.diez@uc3m.es](mailto:juan.diez@uc3m.es)
- Juan J. Fernández** is Associate Professor of Sociology at University Carlos III of Madrid. His research interests include European integration, social policy reforms and reproductive rights politics. His address is Department of Social Sciences; University Carlos III of Madrid; c/ Madrid, 126; 28,903 Getafe, Spain; [jjgonzalez@clio.uc3m.es](mailto:jjgonzalez@clio.uc3m.es)