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Identarian Atlanticism and foreign policy implications: a study of European public attitudes

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ABSTRACT



An increasing number of scholars have studied the role of identity in shaping states' foreign policy. In Europe, the existence of diverse national identities renders shared senses of European identity an important foundation for any foreign policy requiring supra-national coordination. Most studies support the view that strengthening senses of European identity promote 'Europeanist' foreign policy paradigms that emphasize the importance for Europe to act as an autonomous and independent global player. However, we suggest that the effects of European identification on citizens' foreign policy preferences remain poorly understood. In this paper, using novel survey data, we statistically assess the linkages between citizens' sense of European identity and their preferences to align with the United States. We find European identity to be strongly tied to 'Atlanticist' foreign policy attitudes and attribute much of this effect to feelings of ideational proximity. Our results provide insights into the future of Europe's international positioning and showcase the importance of considering the relative proximity in actors' identities when studying the impact of such identities on foreign policy attitudes.


KEYWORDS

European identity; foreign policy; Atlanticism; Europeanism; strategic cultures

Introduction

European identity has been increasingly highlighted as an ideational force shaping political dynamics and policy outcomes across the continent. Authors have shown that it exists alongside EU citizens' national identities (Delanty, 2019; Habermas, 1998) and largely bases itself on attachment to certain shared ethical and political values (see Akaliyski et al., 2021; Green, 2007; Habermas, 1998; Kufer, 2009). In turn, it has been shown to represent a necessary building block for policies requiring coordination among European countries (Ceccarelli, 2021; Von Essen & Ossewaarde, 2023). In parallel, in the field of International Relations, the constructivist turn since the turn of the century has led to an increasing acceptance that notions of identity play a significant role in shaping actors' preferences and states' actions on the world stage (see Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1992). The existence of numerous and diverse national identities across Europe

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renders shared senses of European identity an especially important foundation for any foreign policy requiring supra-national coordination (Luedtke, 2005; Van den Abbele, 2021).

This is especially important in the context of increasing attempts to coordinate foreign policy at the EU level. Indeed, scholars have established the existence of a 'Europeanist' strategic culture across Europe that promotes foreign policy coordination and integration among European states. Many have presented such Europeanism as a type of European continentalism that seeks to maximize Europe's autonomy and capacity for independent action on the world stage (see Becker & Malesky, 2017; Biehl et al., 2013; Wojtowicz, 2020). Notably, some leaders like French President Macron have linked Europeanist policies to the need to preserve a 'European civilization' defined in identarian terms (Staunton, 2021). These narratives suggest that European identity can promote a continentalist and autonomous foreign policy rather than enhancing the continent's ties with more distant geopolitical players. In line with such a view, scholars such as Risse (2012) have argued that more coherent European identities across member states would allow the EU to pursue a more united foreign policy and to act as a more autonomous global player.

However, not all agree that Europeanist strategic cultures are primarily characterized by the desire for continental autonomy and independence. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, studies have found increasing support for European foreign policy coordination at a time coinciding with a rise in the perceived importance of the transatlantic security relationship (see Capati, 2024; Freudlsperger & Schimmelfennig, 2022). Some have similarly argued that Europeanist strategic cultures are associated with a combined belief in the importance of EU institutions and NATO (Dooley, 2022; Freudlsperger & Schimmelfennig, 2022). Interestingly, political forces opposing further European integration often coincide with ones expressing anti-US, pro-Russia, and pro-China foreign policy views (Jakimow et al., 2024). In light of this evidence, even if European identity has indeed led to a rise in Europeanist strategic cultures, it is unclear if such a trend has come at the expense of the transatlantic relationship.

In this article, we seek to clarify the linkages between European identity and foreign policy preferences. We suggest that, on the one hand, if citizens across the continent perceive their shared identities to be unique and fundamentally different from those of other actors on the world stage, it is indeed possible that stronger senses of European identity would lead them to embrace a type of Europeanist foreign policy which emphasizes Europe's policy autonomy and political independence. However, on the other hand, it is also possible that European identity is perceived to be in line with those of other international actors such as the United States. In this case, such identity may either promote competing strategic cultures such as Atlanticism (see Becker & Malesky, 2017; Biehl et al., 2013; Webber et al., 2004) or a type of Europeanism that is not contrary to close transatlantic alignment and cooperation. This is especially a possibility given the ideational and historical proximity that has characterized transatlantic relations (Schmitz-Robinson, 2009).

To investigate this issue, we test whether citizens' senses of European identification are tied to foreign policy stances that emphasize close alignment with the United States. We propose a mechanism in which feelings of ideational closeness to the United States have become embedded in European identity and play a part in promoting Atlanticist feelings across the continent. Findings in support of such a mechanism would be significant as

they would indicate that narratives suggesting the decline of the transatlantic relationship in the context of rising coordination and integration among European states are misplaced. They would also highlight the importance of considering citizens' perceptions of relative identarian proximity or distance to other international actors when studying their foreign policy attitudes. Significant implications would also arise for the future geopolitical position of the region amid the ongoing US–China rivalry and tensions with Russia.

We largely base the analysis on novel data from surveys that we conducted in nine EU member states in 2022 while also consulting data from surveys that we conducted in 2020 to strengthen the robustness of findings. The data represents a unique opportunity to investigate our research question as it contains both items related to different aspects of European identification and ones seeking to understand respondents' foreign policy attitudes and preferences. To our knowledge, no similar data was available before we carried out these surveys.

We primarily test our argument concerning foreign policy attitudes toward the US, while also running tests on attitudes towards China and Russia. To preview our results, senses of European identification are found to be significantly and positively tied to desires to align with the United States (but not with China and Russia). We furthermore find that over three-quarters of this effect is attributable to feelings of ideational proximity to the United States embedded in respondents' senses of European identity. These results suggest that the rising salience of European identity across the continent will not necessarily lead to a decline in the transatlantic relationship. Instead, it could also strengthen it by promoting Atlanticist paradigms or versions of Europeanist strategic cultures that are supportive of close foreign policy alignment with the United States.

The rise of European identity and its policy impacts

European identity has emerged as an increasingly common focus of academic study over the past decades. Since the early days of the European Union, scholars such as Inglehart (1970) had anticipated the development of a European identity over time through the cognitive mobilization of individuals in a process comparable to the one resulting in national identity. Despite this, some have pointed out that shared senses of European identification have been slow to spread among broad constituencies, especially among lower socio-demographic classes (Delanty, 2019; Stanley, 2013; Walkenhorst, 2009). Since the 2010s, increasing evidence nevertheless points to the consolidation, to a certain degree, of European identity. Indeed, both academic studies and public opinion survey projects have recently provided evidence in favor of this assertion (see Chopin, 2018; Eurobarometer, 2021; Grimm, 2021).

European identity has been argued to exist alongside citizens' national identities and to be primarily tied to attachment to shared political values and ethical standards (Green, 2007; Habermas, 1998; Kufer, 2009; Risse, 2010). Indeed, unlike national identities, European identity cannot be defined by cultural, religious, or linguistic traits since it needs to accommodate the diverse nature of individuals across the continent (Fleurant, 2001). In the EU, foundational documents such as the Lisbon Treaty have been shown to have laid forth some of the values based on which the European community would be defined. These include principles such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality,

the rule of law, and human rights, as well as shared ideals of pluralism, tolerance, justice, and solidarity (see Lenaerts et al., 2021; Mader, 2019). Interestingly for our research, European identity's emphasis on political and ethical values is what potentially enables sentiments of identarian proximity between Europeans and other actors situated outside of the continent. Indeed, such feelings would not be possible based on identities defined by cultural, linguistic, or ethnic characteristics unique to Europe or parts of it.

Shared senses of European identification have been argued to represent an important foundation for public policies requiring cooperation or integration beyond national boundaries. This is especially relevant given the increasing presence of the European Union and its institutions across many policy areas. Studies have shown that national identities provide a stable and lasting structure to individuals' political views and preferences (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Wagner et al., 2012). Given this, they may hold constraining effects on governments' policymaking at both the formulation and implementation stages (Lindstam et al., 2021). Shared senses of European identification can serve this role for policies that cannot be fully implemented through national democratic institutions and that require cooperation among several European states (Ceccarelli, 2021; Von Essen & Ossewaarde, 2023). In addition, they can help provide a sense of shared purpose and mutual trust for policy frameworks (see La Barbera & Cariota, 2012).

This role is particularly important in foreign policy, which is increasingly formulated at the EU level. If accepting constructivist frames of analysis in International Relations, European identity represents an important object of analysis if seeking to understand the preferences of European actors and, in turn, the behavior of European states on the world stage. The field has indeed increasingly accepted that public opinion represents a credible constraint over foreign policy (Herrmann et al., 1999; Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017; Rathburn, 2007). Studies in recent years have empirically demonstrated that the public holds relatively principled and stable preferences on matters of foreign policy (Herrmann et al., 1999; Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). Public attitudes have, as a result, been argued to significantly constrain foreign policy formulations in both democratic and autocratic polities (Gries & Turcsanyi, 2022; Li, 2022). In the next section, we show how it could play a role in furthering (or diminishing) traditionally dominant strategic cultures and foreign policy paradigms across the continent.

Atlanticism and Europeanism in European foreign policy

Atlanticism has been identified as one of the dominant strategic cultures across Europe in recent decades. Authors such as Becker and Malesky (2017) have indeed argued that the varying salience of Atlanticist strategic cultures in different European countries is a key factor explaining their different policies vis a vis NATO and defense spending. While it has been conceptualized in different ways across existing literature, Graeger and Haugevik (2009) point out that it can be categorized as a 'specific type of security policy identity and orientation', while Mouritzen (2007) simply argues that it is tied to a 'propensity to act with the US' in foreign policy. In line with these authors, we contend that Atlanticism can be conceptualized as a strategic culture following the lens brought forth by Snyder (1977) and will use it to refer to strategic cultures and foreign policy paradigms emphasizing the desirability of consistent foreign policy alignment with the United States for European countries.

The emergence of Atlanticism in Europe has been tied to both economic and geopolitical considerations. Already in the early years of the twentieth century, scholars have identified the existence of Atlanticist discourse across the continent (see Scott-Smith, 2023). However, these ideas gained further prominence after World War II. In the post-war years, Europe largely relied on the United States' financial assistance to recover from the damages inflicted by the conflict. The Marshall Plan played an important role in promoting positive images of the United States and of its importance to European countries during this period (Ellwood, 2010). During the ensuing Cold War, the development of institutions and alliances such as NATO led the United States to be viewed as a protector against Soviet aggression and expansionism across much of Western Europe (Daalder, 2003). From this perspective, one could see Atlanticism as primarily the result of Europe's economic and security needs in the latter half of the twentieth century.

However, strategic cultures typically have foundations beyond transient geopolitical self-interest. Notably, several authors have argued that Atlanticism in Europe is grounded in ideational realms rather than simply being the result of rationalist calculations on the part of European actors. Graeger and Haugevik (2009) indeed argue that Atlanticism has become deeply embedded in the security identities of European states. Many argue that, beyond official actions and rhetoric, Atlanticism entails an ideological embrace of the United States (Mouritzen, 2007; Schmitz-Robinson, 2009). Relatedly, Alessandri (2013) points out that the construction of the transatlantic community greatly relied on common values and similar visions of society on both sides of the Atlantic. Based on this evidence, we adopt the view that the emergence of Atlanticism as a European strategic culture was made possible by feelings of ideological and identarian proximity to the United States in addition to certain economic and geopolitical interests. Its current-day endurance is hence also likely the function of the persistence of such sentiments among actors across Europe.

Notably, some have argued that Atlanticism has been on the decline since the turn of the century (Daalder, 2003). This has led to increasing attention being given to Europeanism, as the two strategic cultures have often been presented as competing throughout the literature on European foreign policy (see Becker & Malesky, 2017; Biehl et al., 2013; Graeger & Haugevik, 2009). Indeed, one salient strand of Europeanism has been described as a type of European continentalism aiming to reduce the United States' influence over the continent and promote a more independent foreign policy for the European Union (Dunne, 2004). This orientation can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century when politicians such as Charles de Gaulle articulated the need to build Europe's foreign policy around the same ideals. To this day, such currents remain strong in countries such as France, with its present-day leader Emmanuel Macron making increasing Europe's capacity for independent action on the world stage a key foreign policy priority. Following authors such as Risse (2012), shared senses of European identity are particularly important in promoting such foreign policy autonomy and independence.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all agree that Europeanism and Atlanticism are in opposition. Indeed, some have suggested that closer foreign policy coordination and integration among European states can occur concurrently with a strong transatlantic relationship and investments in alliances such as NATO (see Mi, 2022; Zyla, 2011). This perspective is particularly common in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and Sweden (Dooley, 2022). It was particularly notable in

the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 when support for closer Europeanism in foreign policy rose despite renewed belief in the importance of the transatlantic security relationship (see Capati, 2024; Freudlsperger & Schimmelfennig, 2022). Interestingly, some of the populist political movements within which anti-American and pro-Russian sentiments are common are also the ones most opposed to further supra-national integration at the European level (Fagersholm, 2024). This illustrates that Atlanticist and Europeanist attitudes are not necessarily contradictory stances in the minds of some citizens.

The above literature makes it clear that the linkages between European identity and Atlanticist foreign policy preferences are complex. Indeed, even if accepting that increasing senses of European identification promote Europeanist ideals (which itself remains untested), it is unclear which strand of Europeanism would rise as a result. Problematically, the relationship between European identity and support for different strategic cultures and foreign policy paradigms across the continent remains largely untested from an empirical perspective. Indeed, to our knowledge, no studies have quantitatively assessed the direction and magnitude of relevant effects on cross-national data measuring the views of European citizens. Our ensuing analysis aims to clarify these effects and test whether stronger senses of European identity are indeed playing a part in bringing about the demise of Atlanticism or whether additional complexities need to be considered to adequately understand them.

Hypotheses

In line with this objective, we formulate two hypotheses that will be tested through our statistical analysis. They follow those of other studies such as Jiang et al. (2024) that have sought to test the impact of national identity on foreign policy preferences in settings other than Europe. Through our hypotheses, we will first identify the linkages between citizens' sense of European identity and their foreign policy preferences, which have been the subject of extensive theorizing but little empirical testing. We will then seek to understand the precise mechanism behind any effects found between the two.

Our first hypothesis seeks to challenge the conclusions most easily derived from the existing literature, namely that rising senses of European identification contribute to challenging Atlanticism as the continent's dominant strategic culture by promoting strands of competing Europeanist frameworks that emphasize the importance of Europe's autonomy from the United States. Hypothesis 1 arises from the view that, if citizens perceive their European identities to be similar to those of other geopolitical players, such identities could lead them to privilege consistent alignment with these actors rather than autonomy from them. This is particularly relevant regarding the United States, a country possessing close historical, cultural, and value-based affinities with many European countries (Alessandri, 2013). If this is the case, European identification could strengthen Europe's Atlanticist orientations or versions of Europeanism embracing NATO and the transatlantic relationship.

Hypothesis 1: Stronger senses of European identity are positively and significantly tied to closer foreign policy alignment preferences with the United States.

To clarify the mechanism behind any effects found in support of H1, we formulate a second hypothesis to identify mediative pathways between European identity and foreign alignment preferences with the United States. Specifically, we hypothesize that any significant linkages between these two variables are, at least partially, attributable to feelings of identarian proximity with the United States among European citizens. This view is in line with the numerous studies that have argued that Atlanticism has historically been the result of ideational affinities in addition to rational geo-strategic interests (Alessandri, 2013; Graeger & Haugevik, 2009). In addition, it is supported by recent evidence suggesting that, despite some differences, Europeans and Americans remain largely aligned in regard to basic political values and support for the foundations of the international liberal order (Joannin, 2022). Hypothesis 2 is fully spelled out below.

Hypothesis 2: Any positive correlation found between stronger senses of European identity and closer foreign policy alignment preferences with the United States is, at least partially, due to European citizens' feelings of ideational proximity with the United States.

Data and measurement

We use public opinion survey data that we gathered as part of the Sinophone Borderlands project and carry out our empirical tests using R. The survey aimed to investigate the diverse variables influencing citizens' attitudes toward the major international powers including the United States, China, and Russia. To understand how identity and ideational factors can shape foreign policy views, the surveys included several questions aimed at identifying respondents' identarian attachment, which will constitute key independent variables for this study. Our analyses largely use data from the 2022 wave of the survey, during which nine EU member states were surveyed. The targeted national samples of 1500 respondents are representative of the general population according to gender, age, region within the country, education level, and rural-urban division (Turcsanyi et al., 2020).¹ Additional information regarding the timing of the survey in each country and the sampling strategy used is available in Appendix 1. The exact countries that were surveyed as part of the 2022 wave are shown in Figure 1. As illustrated, our sample of EU countries is diverse and includes states holding various characteristics in terms of geographic location, historical background, and cultural orientation. As a result, it provides the basis for a thorough and generalizable analysis.

It is important to acknowledge the specific timing of the survey. Indeed, the data was collected in the summer of 2022, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This timing could hence be associated with unusually friendly European attitudes toward the United States given its central role in the West's initial response to the conflict. However, from a methodological perspective, all the statistical analyses outlined below examine between-unit variations within the same period. This allows us to control the effects of the time context in which the data was collected, which applies equally across survey respondents. In addition, while alignment preferences are continuously shaped by context-specific effects, available literature suggests that ideational and identarian affinities between citizens of different states represent relatively stable and slowly shifting notions that are unlikely to see abrupt changes in the short term (see Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). As our analysis seeks to identify the existence of such ideational orientations and their effects

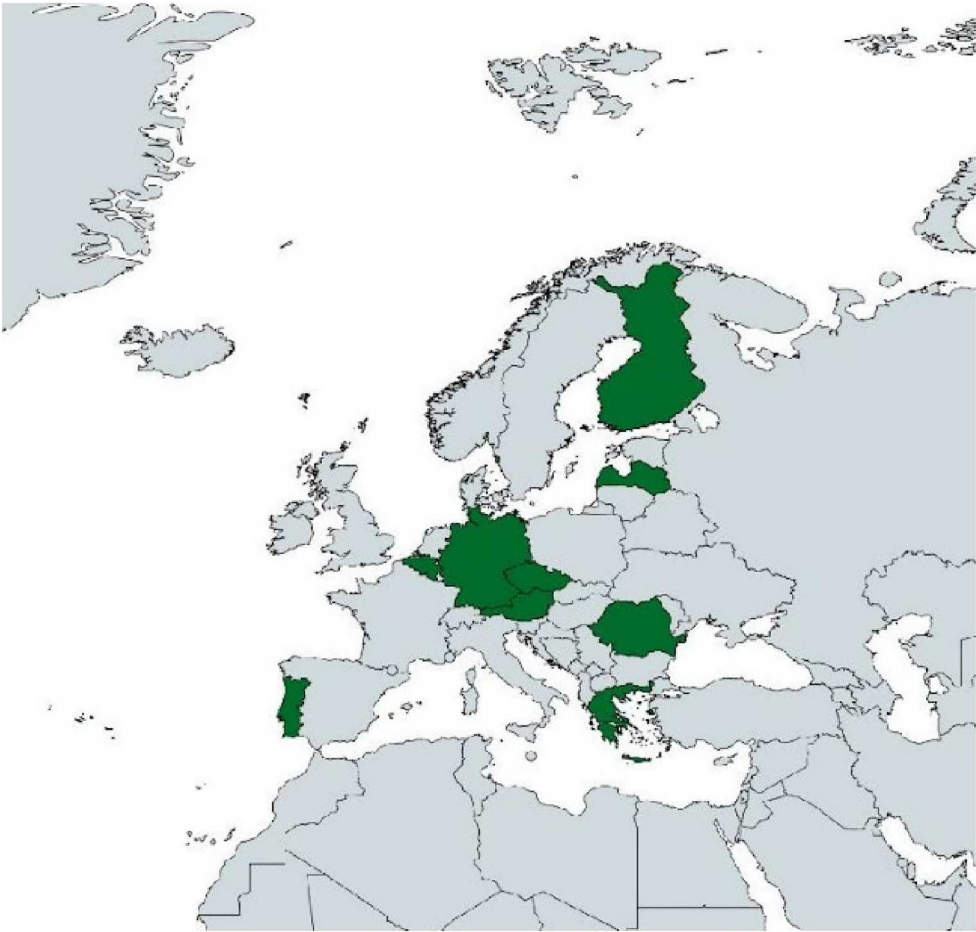


Figure 1. Surveyed Countries – 2022 Wave.

in shaping alignment preferences with the US, the timing of our survey should not be considered to be a major limitation of this study. Still, to conclusively establish this and further the robustness of our results, we separately run our analyses testing linkages between European identity and foreign policy alignment preferences with the United States on another wave of the survey that we conducted in 2020. Additional information regarding this survey wave is included in Appendix 2. This choice will provide further confidence in any conclusions made about Hypothesis 1.

Measuring foreign alignment preferences

As the main dependent variable in our models seeking to measure foreign policy preferences with the United States, a survey question asking about foreign policy alignment was used: ‘How closely should your country’s foreign policy align with the United States?’. The answers are expressed on a categorical scale ranging from 0, corresponding to a response of ‘Not at all’, to 10, corresponding to a response of ‘Completely’. Average responses by country are shown in Figure 2. As illustrated, respondents preferred relatively high levels

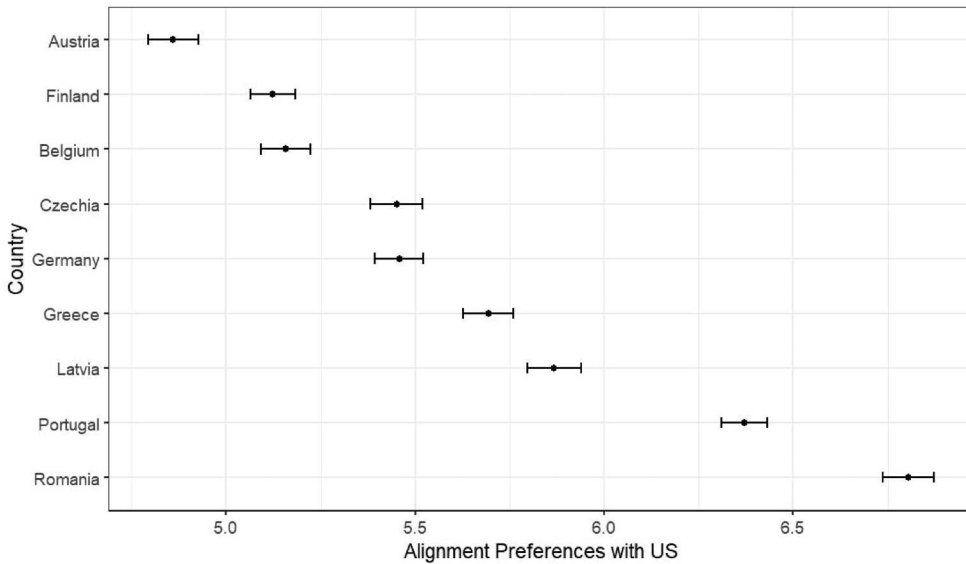


Figure 2. Mean Foreign Policy Alignment Preferences with the US.

of foreign policy alignment with the United States, with mean responses ranging from just under 5 in Austria to just over 6.75 in Romania.

It is important to justify our use of foreign alignment preferences as the main dependent variable in our analysis. Europeanist strategic cultures indeed do not preclude some degree of ties with countries outside of Europe. Such cooperation could even be seen in a positive light if undertaken in a manner coordinated at the European level and to further European interests. However, unlike the case with simple ties or cooperation, consistent foreign policy alignment with a non-European state is incompatible with versions of Europeanist strategic cultures in foreign policy that embrace the importance of continentalist autonomy and independence. Indeed, such alignment implies continuity over time and a certain degree of relinquishment of policy autonomy, whether in terms of real or opportunity costs (Jiang et al., 2024). As a result of this, support for policy alignment with the United States can be seen as representing the expression of Atlanticist strategic cultures and ideas and suggests a certain rejection of at least some strands of competing Europeanist ones.

In addition, the general phrasing of the question, which omits any reference to specific issue realms or areas of cooperation, represents another advantage for our study. Indeed, we aim to study European foreign policy attitudes and preferences in a broad sense. Using a question on views toward the US on a specific question would risk introducing biases tied to issue framing and transient contextual factors that possess little stability over time. Their omission from our variable hence renders it a better tool for detecting general attitudes toward foreign policy.

Measuring European identity

To instrumentalize senses of European identity for our main independent variable, we construct an index based on several survey questions. To construct it, we use three

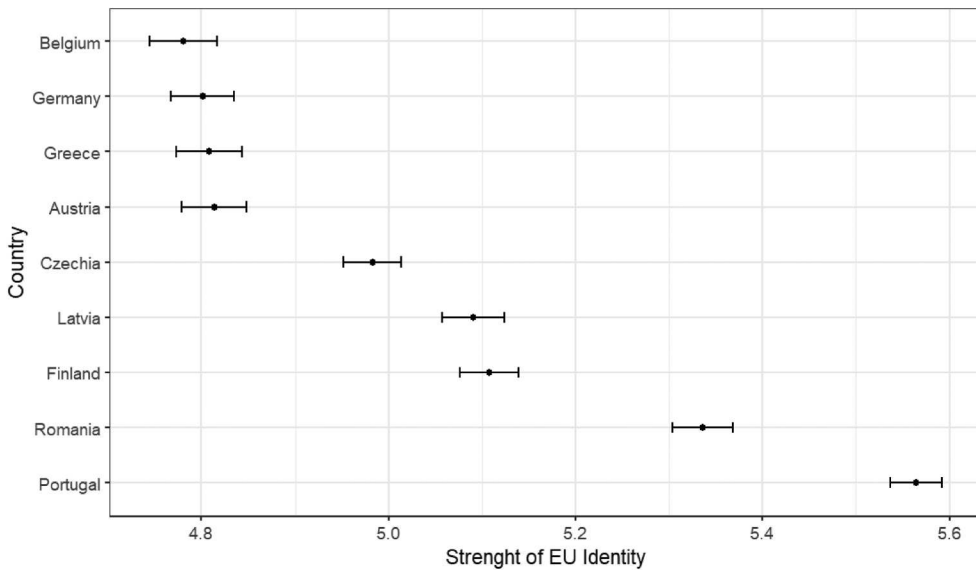


Figure 3. Mean Strength of European Identity.

different survey items testing respective agreement with the statements ‘I feel a bond with European people’, ‘I am glad to be European’, and ‘The fact that I am European is an important part of my identity’. All responses to these questions are recorded using a 7-point Likert scale. The resulting index showcases a high degree of internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha score of 0.89. This significantly exceeds the threshold of 0.70 often interpreted as indicating an appropriate degree of index consistency (Taber, 2018), thus validating our usage of the index. Average scores on our resulting index by country are shown by included country in Figure 3. As indicated, most respondents express relatively high levels of European identification, with scores ranging from approximately 4.8 in Belgium to 5.5 in Portugal.

It is important to acknowledge that notions of identity have long been recognized as being highly complex and multi-dimensional in nature (see Tatum, 2000). In particular, senses of nationhood have been shown to be influenced by numerous factors, both internal and external to individuals (Larsen, 2017). As a result, authors have acknowledge the difficulty of effectively conceptualizing and instrumentalizing identitarian variables (Larsen, 2017). However, this paper aims to study the effects linking European identity and foreign policy preferences rather than contributing to the theoretical understanding of identity. Our index is in line with such an analytical aim and represents a parsimonious measure consistent with numerous existing quantitative studies on questions of identity (see Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Pehrson et al., 2009).

Measuring ideational notions of Atlanticism

For use in our analyses testing Hypothesis 2, we construct another index measuring ideational expressions of Atlanticism, which we conceptualize as representing feelings

Table 1. Atlanticism Index — PCA Results.

	Factor Loading
Cultural Similarity with the US	0.64
US cultural attractiveness	0.78
Favourability toward US Political Values	0.80
Favourability toward Americans	0.75
Eigenvalue: 2.21	
55per cent of the variance explained	

of ideational proximity with the United States. Using Principal Component Analysis (PCA), we compute factor loading scores for four survey questions investigating different facets of respondents' assessments of the US: the perceived similarity of cultural values between the United States and Europe ('How similar are [the US] and [your country] regarding cultural values?'), the cultural attractiveness of the United States ('How attractive or unattractive do you consider the cultures of [the US]?'), favorability toward American political values ('How attractive or unattractive do you consider the political values of [the US]?'), and favorability toward Americans ('How positively or negatively do you feel about the following groups of people on a scale of 0–100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?[Americans]'). Our choice of measures is consistent with previous studies having developed similar indices measuring citizens' feelings of ideational proximity with foreign states (see Jiang et al., 2024). The full wording of and summary statistics for each of the survey items used for the construction of our index are available in Appendix 3.

Single-component and no-rotation PCA results stemming from the final four variables are shown below in Table 1. We obtain an eigenvalue of 2.21 which indicates that our index accounts for over 55per cent of the observed variance in the included variables. This falls above the threshold of 1 above which the index is considered to hold significance when applying the Kaiser-Guttman criterion. In addition, every included item exhibits a factor loading greater than 0.60, surpassing commonly used thresholds for index inclusion (see MacCallum et al., 2001). The combined evidence from the above results suggests that our index is internally coherent and represents a valid measure of ideational expressions of Atlanticism among European citizens.

Control variables

In addition to the above main dependent and independent variables, the models used for this analysis include several controls. The precise wording of all included control variables and descriptive statistics pertaining to them are included in Appendix 4. Selected controls include both respondents' demographic characteristics and ones related to their political attitudes. In the former category, we include gender, age, education, and urban-rural residence. In terms of political attitude controls, we include identification in terms of left-right ideology and levels of political interest. Political interest has indeed been widely acknowledged to play a significant role in shaping political behavior on a wide variety of questions by existing literature (Luskin, 1990). Similarly, authors such as Gromet et al. (2013) have shown that general ideological orientations must be considered when studying citizens' policy preferences.

Estimation

To test Hypothesis 1, we first run a multi-level regression. The multi-level nature of our regression approach is justified by the nested structure of our data, in which individual-level responses are collected among residents of different countries. As a result of the fact that national contexts, whether in terms of political, cultural, or media environments, can be highly impactful in shaping policy preferences on a wide range of questions, we expect that they also play a role in shaping foreign policy attitudes toward the United States. The main multi-level regression model, on which the discussion in the upcoming sections will be centered, controls country-specific fixed effects. Indeed, as shown in [Figure 2](#), mean baseline preferences of alignment with the United States differ significantly between included countries. Controlling country-level fixed effects allows us to account for this and removes the need to include country-level controls to account for the factors that could lead to different observed levels of alignment preferences. We also consider the need to control random effects in our model. It is indeed possible that the effect of European identity in shaping foreign policy preferences differs among countries. However, no theoretical or empirical conclusions from available literature allow us to conclusively determine this. As a result, we decide to only include fixed effects in our main regression model. However, random effects were included in some model iterations as a test of our results' robustness. As a further test of such robustness, we add control variables to the models sequentially.

We run a few additional regression models to clarify our initial results and exclude some competing explanations for our findings. We devise two sets of multi-level regressions following the specifications described above to investigate any linkages between European identity and foreign policy preferences toward countries other than the United States. It is indeed possible that stronger senses of European identification are associated with generally higher degrees of willingness to align with foreign actors rather than being tied to Atlanticist sentiments uniquely relevant to attitudes toward the United States. To test this possibility, these models include alignment preferences with China and Russia as their dependent variables. They will help establish whether the effects identified by our analysis can indeed conclusively be attributed to ideational expressions of Atlanticism. In addition, we also run our multi-level regression on data from the 2020 wave of the survey to conclusively establish their stability over time.

Finally, we devise a mediation analysis to test Hypothesis 2. The pathways tested through this analysis are shown in [Figure 4](#). This will help establish the extent to which any significant effects tying together European identity and foreign policy preferences with the United States are indeed the result of Atlanticist orientations embedded in such identity. If this is indeed the case, both the correlational pathways represented by a and b will be significant

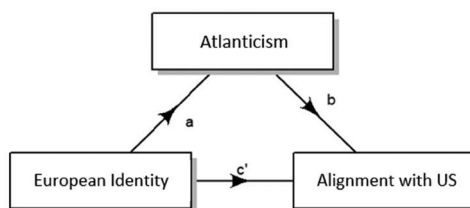


Figure 4. Mediation Analysis Pathways.

and positive. If, on the other hand, c' demonstrates significance but the indirect pathways do not, the effect of European identity in shaping foreign policy preferences toward the United States would be due to some of its other characteristics not directly in line with our hypotheses. Both a naïve mediation analysis and one containing the controls included in our multilevel regressions are run to establish the robustness of our results.

Results

Results from our main multilevel regression model that uses alignment preferences with the United States as its dependent variable and contains both demographic controls and ones about political characteristics are shown in Figure 5. Full model output

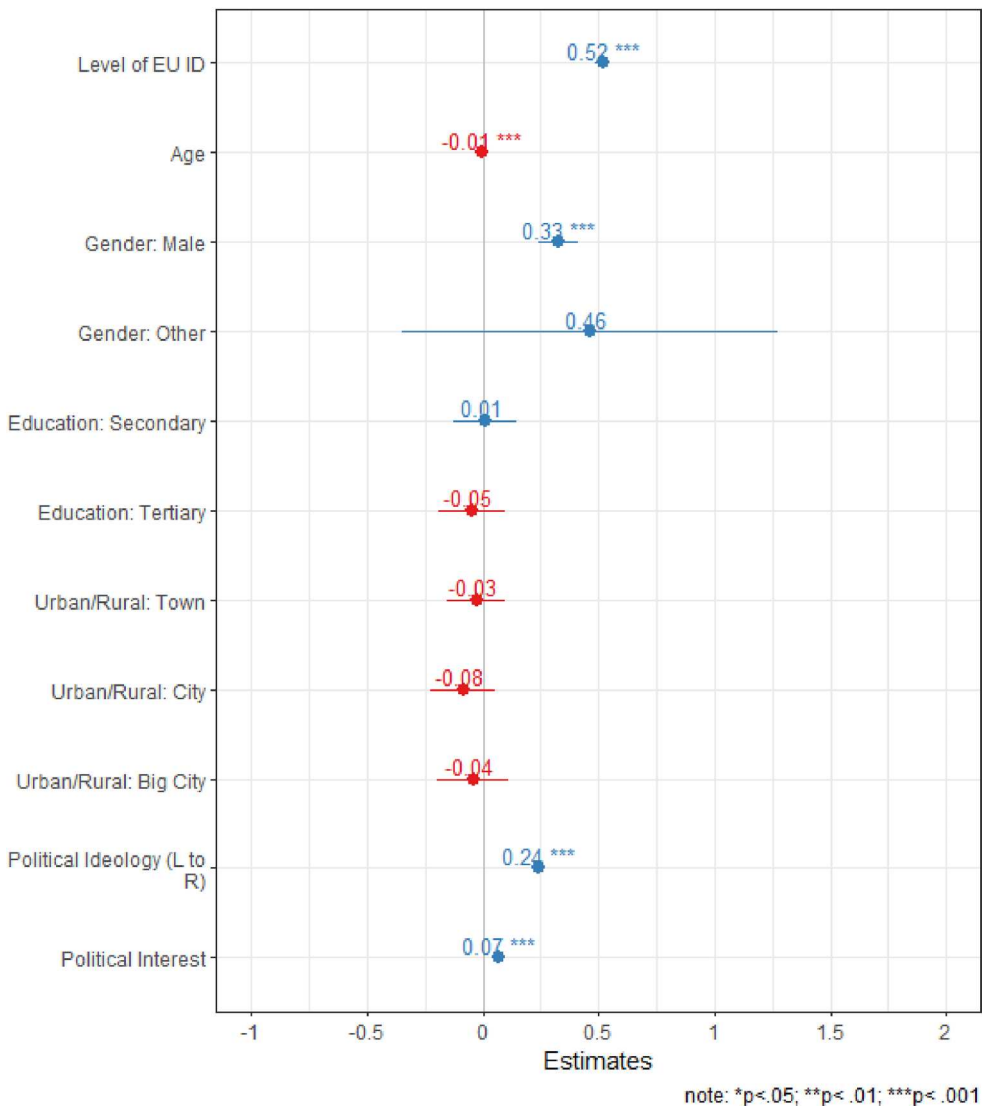


Figure 5. Multilevel Model Results – Alignment with US (2022 Wave).

tables containing results from all iterations of this model are available in Appendix 5. As illustrated, European identity is significantly and positively tied to alignment preferences with the United States. Most demographic controls exhibit no significance in effects, while more right-wing political ideologies and greater degrees of political interest are shown to be positively and significantly associated with alignment preferences with the United States. However, the magnitude of their effects is lesser than the one tied to our main explanatory variable of interest: European identity. The effect of this variable is highly robust across all model iterations. These results provide ample evidence in favor of Hypothesis 1 by establishing a significant, positive, and robust link between citizens' sense of European identification and their preferences to align with the United States.

It is hypothetically possible that the effect discussed above is due to the fact that greater levels of European identification are generally tied to attitudes more permissive of foreign alignment toward foreign states. In such a case, it would have little to do with Atlanticist views or any other attitude orientations specific toward the United States. To test this possibility, we run two more sets of multilevel models testing the linkages between European identity and foreign alignment preferences with Russia and China, respectively. The results are shown in Figures 6 and 7, with full result tables included in Appendix 6. Unlike the case with alignment preferences toward the United States, European identity was significantly and negatively tied to ones toward Russia, while not meeting significance thresholds with China. The effect was highly robust across all model iterations in the case of Russia. The results of these two models provide a high degree of confidence that the results of our main multilevel model are due to some specificities regarding attitudes toward the United States.

To establish the robustness of our results over time, we also run the model using alignment preferences with the United States as its dependent variable on data from the 2020 wave of the survey. Results of the main model are shown in Figure 8, with full output from all model iterations available in Appendix 7. As shown, the results closely mirror those stemming from the analysis of 2022 data, with the significance and direction of the effect tied to European identity remaining unchanged. This provides us additional evidence that this effect is robust and makes it clear that our findings are not caused by transient contextual factors such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In addition, as different countries were surveyed in 2020 relative to 2022, it also proves that our results are not due to the selection of countries included in the sample.

Having found evidence against a plausible alternative explanation for our results and established their stability in different time contexts, we run a mediation analysis to conclusively establish whether the observed linkage between alignment preferences with the United States is due to the existence of ideational elements of Atlanticism embedded in European identity. The results from the model containing all controls are illustrated in Figure 9, with full output tables from both this model and the naïve one included in Appendix 8. As shown, both the direct and indirect pathways through which European identity shapes foreign alignment preferences toward the United States are highly significant. However, about 72 per cent of the effect attributed to European identity in our multilevel regression model is found to be mediated by notions of ideational Atlanticism. The magnitude and significance of the effects are highly robust across the naïve and controlled analyses. These results provide strong evidence in favor of Hypothesis 2 and

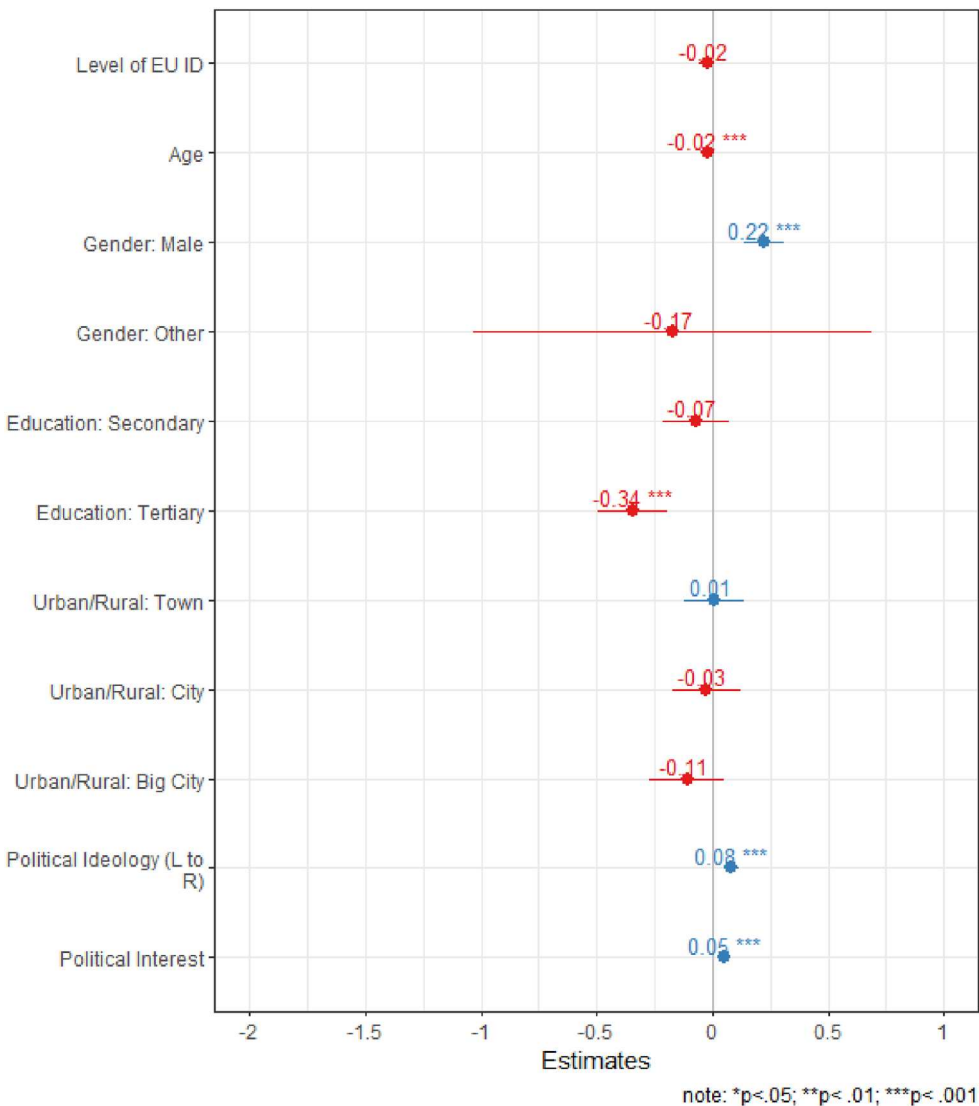


Figure 6. Multilevel Model Results – Alignment with Russia.

allow us to highlight one significant mechanism through which European identity helps promote foreign policy orientations friendly to the United States.

Discussion

The results shown in [Figure 5](#) provide strong support for Hypothesis 1. They showcase that European identity affects foreign policy preferences in a way that promotes Atlanticist feelings and acknowledge the importance of the transatlantic relationship. Notably, these effects run counter to strands of Europeanist strategic cultures that embrace a continentalist vision focused on the importance of foreign policy autonomy (see [Risse, 2012](#)). These paradigms have often been presented as historically competing with Atlanticism

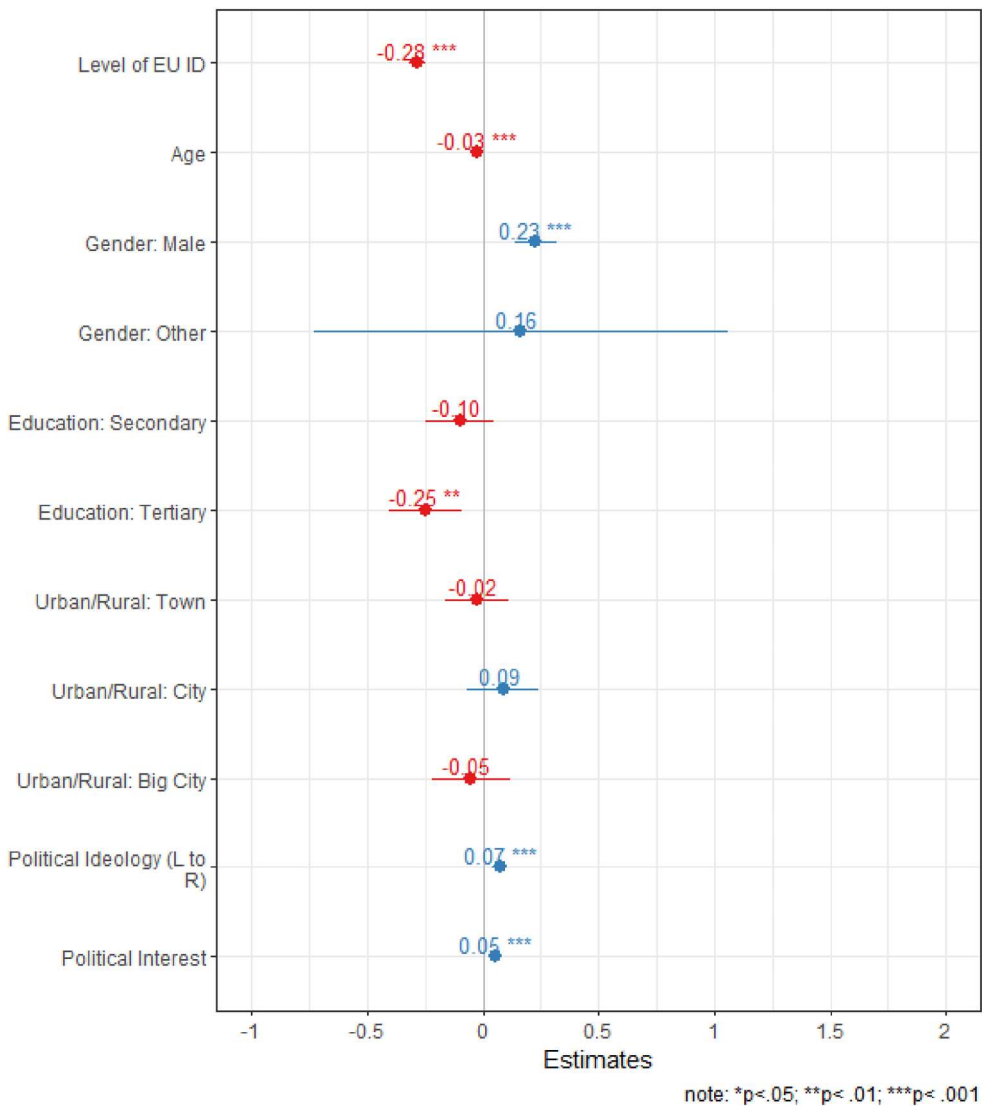


Figure 7. Multilevel Model Results – Alignment with China.

(Becker & Malesky, 2017; Graeger & Haugevik, 2009). Our analysis however suggests that they are unlikely to replace the latter as a result of strengthening senses of European identification among citizens across the continent.

It is important to acknowledge that our analysis does not allow us to determine whether our findings result from the continued endurance of Atlanticist strategic cultures across Europe or whether they illustrate the rise of versions of Europeanism more accommodative of NATO and recognizing the importance of the transatlantic relationship. Regardless, they contradict the conclusions of authors such as Daalder (2003), who predicted the ‘end of Atlanticism’. Indeed, our analysis suggests that Atlanticist feelings remain strong across Europe and are not likely to be eroded by rising senses of European identification across the continent. Even if the European Union increasingly moves toward

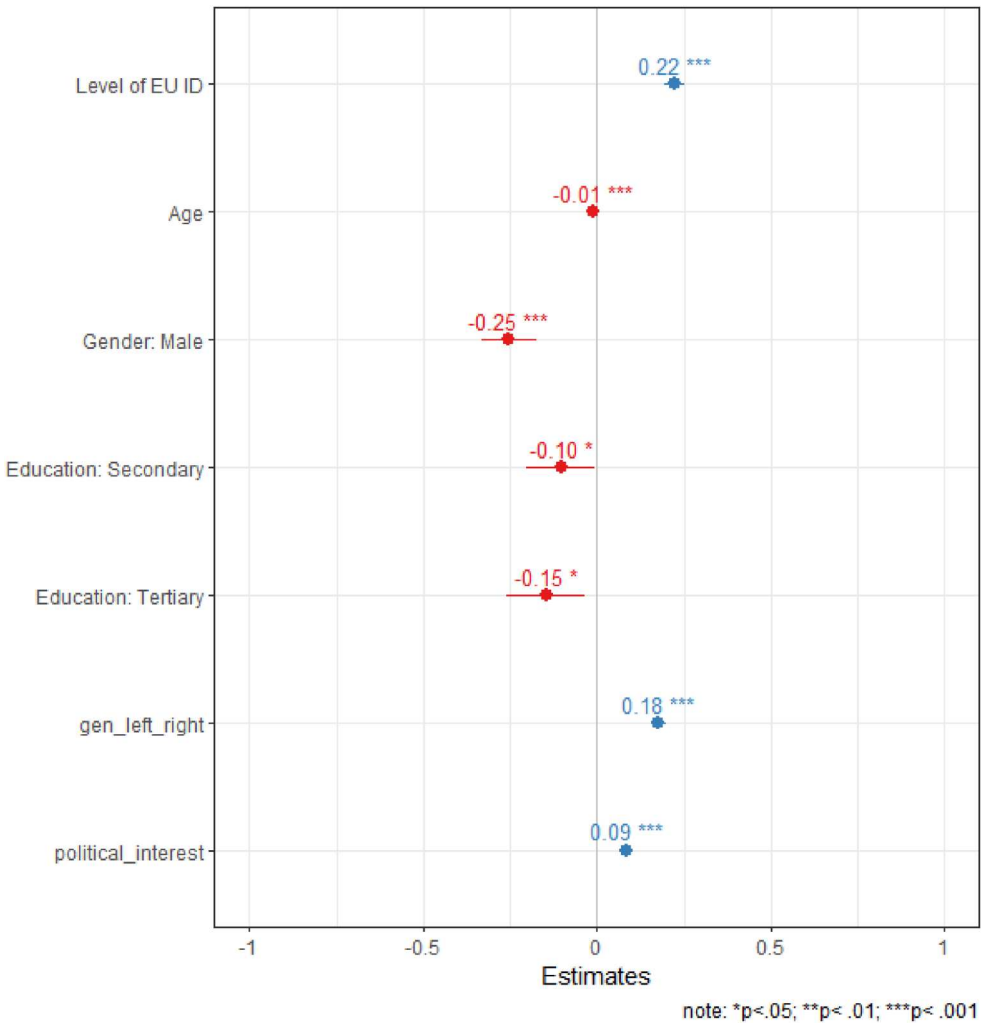


Figure 8. Multilevel Model Results – Alignment with US (2020 Wave).

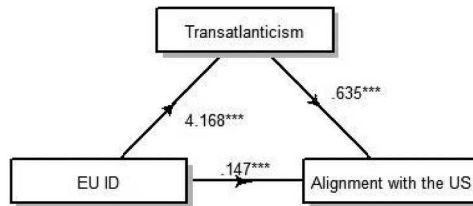


Figure 9. Mediation Analysis Results.

institutional integration and identarian cohesion, preferences are likely to remain for policies incorporating the United States and transatlantic alliance structures into European foreign policy frameworks. This trend is supported by recent events surrounding Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, following which calls have occurred in unison for

stronger foreign policy coordination and integration among European states and for recognizing the importance of the transatlantic security partnership (Capati, 2024; Freudlsperger & Schimmelfennig, 2022).

Of course, the positive linkage between European identity and foreign alignment preferences with the United States could be due to a multitude of reasons. Some may propose that individuals expressing a higher degree of European identification are simply more prone to accepting alignment with foreign powers in general. However, the results shown in Figures 6 and 7 disprove this perspective. Indeed, European identity was associated with preferences for lesser foreign policy alignment with other key geopolitical actors such as Russia and China. As a result, our findings suggest that it is specificities in attitudes toward the United States in particular that are the source of the effect identified through our analyses.

Another avenue of potential explanation suggested by existing studies is tied to the rising populism seen in many European settings. Indeed, authors including Dyduch and Müller (2021) and Raik (2022) contend that Eurosceptic populism has, in some cases, motivated leaders to 'de-Europeanize' their foreign policies and instead prioritize other bilateral or multilateral frameworks of cooperation. In this case, it is possible that supporters of these movements, who are likely to be more attached to their national identities than a European one, support Atlanticism as an alternative to European frameworks of foreign policy coordination or integration. However, it is important to note that the same populist political forces are ones in which anti-American and pro-Russian sentiments are common (Fagersholm, 2024; Jakimow et al., 2024). As a result, it is unlikely that Euroscepticism among their supporters leads to Atlanticist foreign policy preferences.

Through Hypothesis 2, we lay forth another explanation for the linkages between European identity and preferences to align more with the United States. Indeed, we contend that feelings or ideational proximity with the latter embedded in citizens' senses of European identity can help explain why such an identity is positively tied to preferences to align with the latter. Our mediation analysis provides significant evidence in favor of Hypothesis 2. Indeed, more than 70 per cent of the effect of European identity on alignment preferences with the United States was mediated by our index of Atlanticist attitudes measuring ideational feelings of proximity among European citizens. While this does not preclude the simultaneous existence of other explanations, it makes it clear that Atlanticist sentiments represent the primary mechanism through which European identity shapes citizens' foreign policy preferences toward the United States. Figure 9 furthermore makes it clear that such sentiments have become embedded in senses of European identity, as demonstrated by the positive and highly significant link between the two.

Our mediation analysis also clarifies why our models investigating alignment preferences with Russia and China did not exhibit any significant effects. Indeed, while many have identified close value-based and ideational connections between European and American actors (Joannin, 2022), the same affinities are not present between the European and Russian or Chinese actors, who are primarily perceived through the lenses of competition or threat. Our results suggest that to adequately assess the effects of European identity on actors' foreign policy attitudes, feelings of ideational difference or proximity with other states should be taken into account.

Conclusion

The potential of identity in shaping states' behavior on the international stage and domestic actors' foreign policy preferences has been widely acknowledged in International Relations (see Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1992). Given the emerging consensus that the public holds meaningful opinions on matters of foreign policy and that public opinion can constrain states' behavior on the world stage (see Herrmann et al., 1999; Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017; Rathburn, 2007), an increasing number of studies have sought to explain how identities shape the foreign policy attitudes of different populations around the world. In Europe, scholars have suggested that an expanding sense of shared European identification could contribute to the 'decline of Atlanticism' predicted by Daalder (2003). In contrast, some have argued that it could strengthen strands of Europeanist strategic cultures that emphasize continental visions and the importance of Europe's autonomy on the world stage (Kantner et al., 2008; Risse, 2012).

Through our analysis of the linkages between European identity and foreign policy preferences, we provide evidence against this view. Indeed, we find that shared senses of European identification are significantly tied to preferences for greater alignment with the United States. We furthermore attribute this effect to ideational notions of Atlanticism embedded in citizens' sense of European identity. These orientations encompass feelings of value-based, identarian, and cultural similarity between Europe and the United States. Our findings illustrate that the existence and strengthening of European identity can promote Atlanticist foreign policy orientations, whether they represent the embodiment of a fully-fledged Atlanticist strategic culture or are embedded in versions of Europeanist ones that believe in the importance of the transatlantic relationship and NATO.

Our results are significant for anyone seeking to predict the future of Europe's international strategic positioning. Indeed, they suggest that any expectations for the death of Atlanticism in the face of potentially expanding institutional integration and identarian cohesion among European countries are premature. Such feelings are indeed likely to persist among European citizens in upcoming years, whether as part of broader Atlanticist orientations or more pro-American Europeanist ideals. More broadly, our findings showcase the importance of considering the relative proximity or difference in actors' identities when studying the impact of such identities on their foreign policy attitudes and preferences. As illustrated, perceived identarian proximity can indeed lead to preferences for closer and more friendly foreign policies toward other states.

Note

1. In Latvia and Belgium, ethno-linguistic characteristics were also used as sampling quotas.

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