



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
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A UTILITARIAN APPROACH TO EXAMINING PREFERENCES FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The Case of COVID-19

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute to the discussion of utilitarian appraisals for European integration. Following a long line of utilitarian literature examining how individuals conceptualize personal economic benefit due to integration, this thesis examines European integration preferences under the new COVID-19 case. This approach adds to a growing discourse on the factors influencing European integration, taking interest in public opinion rather than elite agency. Using Eurobarometer survey data polling on public opinion (N >16,000), this thesis examines the validity of utilitarian preference formation within the EU. Hypotheses are constructed from supposed traditional winners of European integration and from Euro Crisis literature speculating that beneficiaries of European integration change during times of crisis. Results show that during the COVID-19 crisis, the traditional utilitarian winners of European integration, characterized by higher human capital, did not respond with greater support for European integration. However, results do support the idea that those experiencing economic stress during crisis favor European integration due to a changed nature of integration policy during crisis.

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1. Introduction

In 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and rapidly spread, sending the world into crisis. Although COVID-19 is recognized as primarily a health crisis, the economic shock brought on from the pandemic would mark the most significant global economic crisis experienced in more than a century (World Bank, 2022, para. 1). Closed borders and workplaces acutely crippled the global economy and tested the strength of European solidarity. Sovereign governments and international structures alike had to pivot to address the dual health and economic threat. The European Union (EU) and broader European Project, which strives for collaboration in pursuit of shared values, responded to the pandemic with ambitious policy and initiatives. The EU's response would mark a significant advancement in European integration akin to mobilization previously experienced during the 2009-2011 Global Financial/Euro Crisis (Fromage, 2020, pp. 401 & 385). Thus, the Euro Crisis serves as an apt case for comparison to a new COVID-19 case. Ultimately, the collaborative mobilization experienced under both crises would contribute to economic recovery across the EU. Although the speed of recovery differed between the two crises, an observed pattern of crisis and subsequent leap in European integration draws attention. This thesis follows a long line of literature studying the mechanisms behind European integration using a specific utilitarian perspective.

The aim of this thesis is to evaluate utilitarian appraisals for European integration. Specifically, do utilitarian hypotheses on European integration, as found within prior literature, hold true under the COVID-19 case? This thesis utilizes utilitarian theory that assumes preferences for European integration are based on rational cost/benefit evaluations (S. B. Hobolt & Wratil, 2017, p. 240). Simply, the theory predicts that integration will be chosen when it maximizes personal perceived benefit of the individual. Those who understand integration to benefit themselves will prefer integration according to utilitarian theory. Despite the longstanding awareness of salient economic influences on personal preferences within European Studies, the utilitarian school has taken a back seat to popular elite driven "grand theories" within the literature. However, with the grand theory of functionalism, there is recent renewed interest in the formation of individual preferences on European integration. Therefore, an opportunity emerges to not only underscore the importance of utilitarian evaluations, but quantitatively evaluate pre-existing utilitarian hypotheses against novel COVID-19 Eurobarometer data.

This thesis evaluates individual-level appraisals of European integration with the COVID-19 case, inspired by utilitarian literature beginning in the late 1990s. Therefore, this study is heavily connected to past works and the analyses performed mirror prior methodology. Earlier literature has already secured a link between utilitarian theory and European integration preferences through quantitative methods. This thesis builds on former studies and results produced either support or deviate from prior literature. Through assessing preestablished utilitarian theories with a new case, results intend to fill a gap in the discourse by bridging past utilitarian observations with new findings.

This thesis predicts that foundational hypotheses found within early utilitarian literature, predicting the winners and losers of European integration, will hold true under the COVID-19 case. Known as the human and financial capital hypotheses, those with greater human and financial capital are expected to favor European integration due to expected personal gain (Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 7). Additionally, this thesis predicts that certain utilitarian findings that emerged in the wake of the Euro Sovereign Debt Crisis will closely mirror those in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Greater economic stress and perceived benefit from crisis policy will compel individuals to favor European integration. Across all hypotheses, preference for European integration is evaluated using Eurobarometer public opinion data. Eurobarometer data, and the methodology used in this thesis, were selected due to their prominence within the utilitarian literature.

Despite the different nature of the two crises, the significant economic shock and shift of integration policy during crisis to target vulnerability provide similarities between the cases making them suitable

for comparison. Moreover, emerging COVID-19 utilitarian studies guides analyses and provides confidence in the ability to draw meaningful results from the new crisis case.

This research is important because it can help academics and legislators better understand an aspect of European integration and the effects of crisis. Having the ability to predict support or opposition to integration can aid in the policy making process and provide insight to national and EU politicians. Moreover, evaluating utilitarian appraisals of European integration at the individual level takes a microscope to public opinion and places value on individuals, acknowledging a diversity of preference formation.

This thesis is structured as follows:

This thesis proceeds by providing background to the utilitarian theoretical framework used, by linking the utilitarian school to grand European integration theories and discussing its relevance. The theory of utilitarianism, and its relationship to driving integration preferences through the European Project's history, is detailed in three sections- pre-Euro Crisis, Euro Crisis, and the COVID-19 time periods. Literature connecting utilitarian theory with quantitative analyses during these time periods supports three proposed hypotheses bridging pre-existing utilitarian research to unexplored COVID-19 questions. Literature and hypotheses are followed by quantitative analysis with methods inspired by previous works. A discussion of results as they relate to the broader literature and hypotheses presented concludes the thesis.

2. Background & Theory

2.1 From Elite Driven to Public Opinion

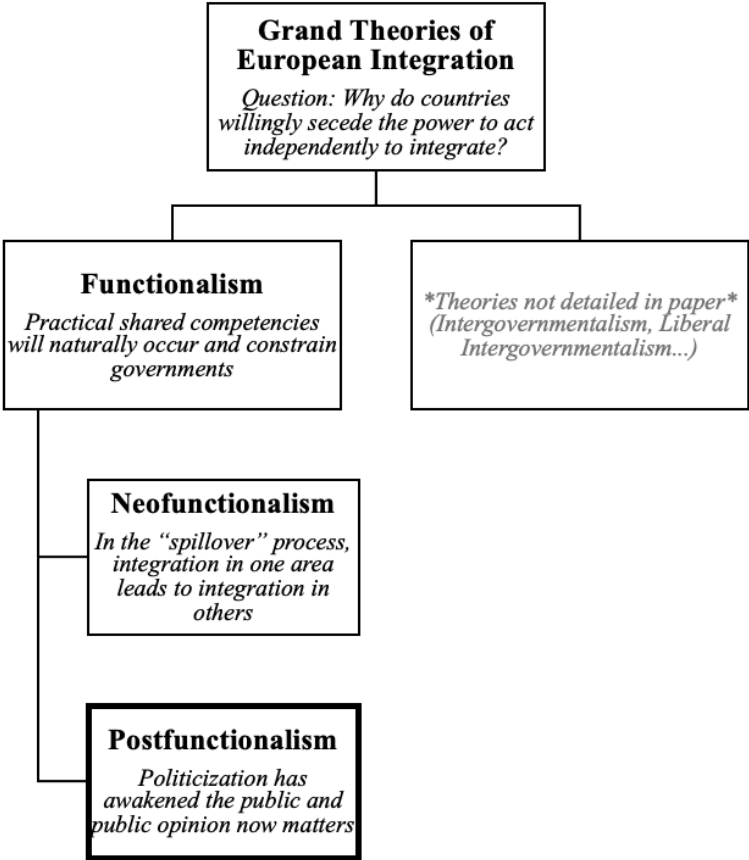
The aim of this thesis directly relates to one of the premier questions in European Studies: “What drives European integration?”. Preceding the establishment of the EU in 1993, academics have worked to explain why countries willingly secede economic and/or political sovereignty to a supranational level. This agreement to intergovernmental cooperation and oversight is known as integration. There exists a constant balancing act between maintaining state autonomy and integrating. The European Project is the shining example of integration since European countries have come together to cooperate economically and politically at the supranational level. The unique scope and depth of European integration has attracted extensive research. Namely, grand theories have since garnered the most attention in their attempts to best explain European integration, and more recently disintegration and Euroscepticism. Schools such as functionalism, intergovernmentalism, and liberal intergovernmentalism are popular examples falling into the category of grand theories (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, pp. 1113–1133). To keep up with the evolving European Project, that has been referred to as *sui generis*- of its own kind- due to its unique character, the grand theories themselves have had to evolve in tandem. Theories have thus undergone change, been revisited, or even replaced with alternate explanations within the popular discourse. This thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse of what drives integration and by what mechanisms.

Despite prolonged interest in integration, preference for European integration at the individual-level is a rather underemphasized pursuit in literature considering the extended history of European integration studies. Initial deemphasis of preferences, specifically public opinion and individual preference, is likely the result of the European Project originally being perceived as an elite project (Foster & Frieden, 2021, p. 2; Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 3). The agency of the general public was once not considered leading in the process of European integration. So much was the emphasis on political and societal elites, the concept of permissive consensus described the atmosphere where the general public passively went along with “deals cut by insulated elites,” (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 5). Most of the grand theories saw integration theorized/occurring in a permissive consensus environment where government actors, elites, and interest groups steered the direction and speed of integration. A shift to public opinion began to take place in the late 1990s and received significant attention when postfunctionalism emerged as a leading theory (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 1–23). Postfunctionalism has placed more emphasis on the individual and preferences of the general public. Since postfunctionalism, there has been a larger push to understand integration preferences of the general public and what influences their formation. This thesis works to add to this understanding of individual-level influences.

The theory of functionalism will guide a conversation about preferences for integration, but this thesis’s analyses are primarily derived from utilitarian theory. The two theories intersect at the individual-level and functionalism can provide an avenue for individual preferences to matter in the integration process. This intersection, which brings meaning to individual-level analyses, is the reason why functionalism warrants discussion (Figure 2).

2.2 Functionalism- Bridging the Gap Between Grand Theories and Public Opinion

Fig. 1: The Evolution of Functionalism and the Importance of Public Opinion



Source: Own Draft

Since this thesis is interested with individual-level sentiment on European integration, functionalism’s evolution is important for understanding how individuals can fit into a larger discourse on European integration. Working to understand individual preferences for European integration only goes so far without first establishing a connection between public opinion and European integration. The grand theory of functionalism and its successors largely focus on elites, but functionalism contains aspects that are applicable to individuals and preferences for integration. Literature has recognized this important connection which has led to the aforementioned increased interest in public-opinion within European Studies. This shift to public opinion did not happen overnight, and understanding functionalism’s history is beneficial for understanding public opinion in a larger European integration context (Fig. 1).

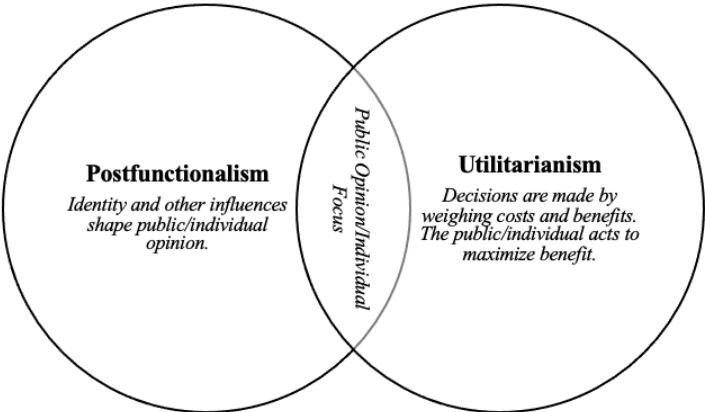
The original functionalism in international relations was popularized by David Mitrany who hypothesized that economic and technical relationships would bind international agencies, and cooperation would lead to interdependence “dominated by the need to solve mutual problems,” (Alexandrescu, 2007, p. 25). Simply, the functionalist school operates on the idea that there is a mismatch between the demands of problems and existing authority structures (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 3). This mismatch creates a desire for reform that existing structures cannot fulfil, but supranational integration can respond to this pressure. All following evolutions of functionalism have this theorized mismatch in common- needs that are unfulfilled with the current scope of authority structures and therefore compel change.

Neofunctionalism, the first evolution of functionalism (Haas, 1958, pp. 1-592), explains regional integration as actors that functionally integrate in one area which leads to integration in other areas through the process of spillover. This proposes a gradual snowballing where integration naturally leads to more integration. While not an emphasis of the theory, the functionalist framework leaves room for public opinion if EU politicization occurs (S. B. Hobolt & Wratil, 2017, p. 239). It was even early theorized that neofunctionalism would lead to politicization- “the controversiality of joint decision making goes up”- as spillover seepes into more policy areas which concern the public (Schmitter, 1969, p. 166). This theory of politicization would eventually be picked up and once again alter functionalism into a new form. The politicization theorized in the late 1960s would be realized in the early 2000s.

Hooghe & Marks’s (2009) postfunctionalism was the first major leap in bridging mass public opinion with European integration theory. Postfuctionalism posits that politicization has changed EU decision making and that preferences are influenced by identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 1–23). This occurrence makes sense, as politicized controversial EU action draws the public’s attention and opinions. In postfunctionalism, public opinion is now important because domestic politics (individuals) affect European outcomes (EU actions and integration) through referendums and party leaders considering the political implications of European policies (p. 21). This school has grown to be a leading integration theory and theorists continue to apply and explore its mechanisms. European policies now matter to individuals, and elites can no longer operate under permissive consensus and a passive public. The public has gained a voice and can steer integration. Therefore, theories must accommodate for public opinion. Postfunctionalism explores identity-based factors shaping preference, but other perspectives can be explored. The shift to public opinion has meaning for the field and the utilitarian motivations of the public discussed in this thesis.

Given the functionalism’s academic prominence and evolution to have a larger focus on the individual, the theory serves as a suitable starting point to connect grand theories to public opinion. As aforementioned, this thesis pursues a specific utilitarian approach to examining public opinion’s preferences for European integration. Utilitarianism and postfunctionalism thus intersect at the public and individual-level (Figure 2). Using a utilitarian perspective does not compete against popular integration theories due to its specified nature. Moreover, the utilitarian school should not be confused with the grand theories discussed because grand theories can be thought of as broad schools which identify actors and place integration in a larger body of literature (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, p. 1114). Rather, the utilitarian school adds to the discussion about public opinion on integration with a bottom-up focus. Moreover, utilitarian preferences, can be a mechanism in which integration can be affected.

Fig. 2: Linking Utilitarianism to European Integration



Source: Own Draft

This section has connected the grand theory of functionalism, and its multiple evolutions, to individual preferences studied in this thesis. Ultimately, utilitarian based integration evaluations of the general public are valuable only if the public is valued in the integration process. With the attention of grand integration theory shifting to study politicization and preferences of the general public, research into explanatory factors such as identity politics and economic motivations can be given renewed life. There now exists a popular avenue in which public opinion matters when theorizing about what drives European integration.

2.3 Utilitarianism

The school of utilitarianism believes that decisions are made on a rational cost-benefit analysis (S. B. Hobolt & Wratil, 2017, p. 240). Individuals weigh options given, considering their personal condition and environment, and act according to what maximizes their perceived benefit (“utility”). Although not strictly economic in nature, the school of utilitarianism has frequently measured economic interests and how they factor into decision making. This use of utilitarianism, and its relationship to economics, will be used in the construction of this thesis’s evaluations, as seen in past works. In the European integration context, utilitarian considerations mean that those perceiving the most net benefit from integration will be in support of future integration efforts (S. Hobolt et al., 2014, p. 129). Since different groups of individuals have different utility functions, different demographics evaluate European integration differently. A diverse Europe equates to diverse preference formation. Therefore, breaking down utilitarian considerations is complex, as a multitude of different factors such as social class, education, and income can all affect how someone perceives their political environment. The utilitarian school is useful because understanding how/why public opinion is formed can aid in understanding how/why integration progresses.

Utilitarianism is not a new concept and has been used as a tool to analyze integration at the start of the European Project. For example, functionalism has economic motivations interwoven into the theory-predicting “pareto-improving economic gains” driving elite actor interests (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 4). Economic considerations were often in the background of early grand integration theories informing elites. However, the individual utilitarian appraisals have by in large not made their way into the forefront of popular integration theory. Moreover, even with postfunctionalism’s focus on the individual and preference formation, select recent literature has come to suggest a diminishing importance of economic utilitarian considerations as identity politics has gained increasing attention (Foster & Frieden, 2021, p. 2). The school of utilitarianism and the study of public preferences in European Studies are interesting because of their enduring nature within literature but seeming background status (often operating within other theories). This long and evolved literature on the topic aids in building analyses.

This thesis does not claim utilitarian evaluations deserve dominance or supremacy when it comes to explaining or predicting integration preferences. Rather, it is in spite of utilitarian theory’s non-dominance in literature that the school provides a valuable perspective, and scholars continue to use the utilitarian lens in European Studies. Therefore, this thesis builds on past work and demonstrate utilitarianism’s enduring relevance in a time when focus is shifting to public opinion. Moreover, while not arguing that utilitarianism should be presented as a complete explanation of preferences and integration, this thesis upholds that utilitarian appraisals of integration deserve recognition.

2.4 Theory & Crisis

Due to the European Project’s history with crises, integration theories have been shaped by crisis events. Crisis, in the context of European integration, presents the Union an opportunity of integration or disintegration when faced with a threat (Schimmelfennig, 2018, p. 969). The EU has earned the reputation of being born and shaped through crisis as periods of turmoil have tested union solidarity and historically resulted in strengthened EU authority (Jones et al., 2021, p. 1519). The beginning of the European Project took the form of market integration in the wake of the second World War in

effort to prevent future destruction of Europe. Since then, events such as the Euro Crisis, migration crisis, Brexit, Ukraine War, and COVID-19 have tested the European Project. Each crisis and subsequent integration have prompted theorists to evaluate their explanations against extraordinary circumstances and authentic leaps in integration post-crisis.

Due to crisis, some theories have had to grapple with foundational hypotheses not aligning with the reality of integration. For example, the aforementioned neofunctionalist spillover predicts a gradual progression in integration. However, when confronted with crisis and periods of rapid integration and periods with no integration, more theorizing was needed. For postfunctionalism and utilitarianism, concerned with public opinion, crisis introduces a new factor and landscape in which public opinion is shaped. With crisis, a new question is introduced to the respective theories- “how does crisis affect public opinion on integration within this theoretical framework?”.

When faced with crisis, this thesis’s school of utilitarianism must build crisis into hypotheses of how individuals construct their utility functions to appraise integration. Put simply, the theory must accommodate for crisis. It has been observed that during a crisis (Euro Crisis), beneficiaries of integration change, prompting a slightly different group of individuals to favor integration (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, p. 128). In other words, crisis creates an environment in which different groups of people favor integration than would during normal times. In the economic sense, crisis typically results in economic insecurity and higher perceived economic risks on individuals. The intersection between crisis and preference formation will be discussed in depth to structure following hypotheses. Utilitarian literature has predominately focused on the Euro Crisis and its aftermath. This thesis draws inspiration from the Euro Crisis literature and presents COVID-19 as a new case in which utilitarian preferences can be explored. After all, the pandemic has displayed the same pattern in which the EU has pulled together when faced with a challenge (Jones et al., 2021, p. 1519).

3. Literature & Hypotheses

3.1 Pre-Euro Crisis- Foundational Utilitarian Appraisals

This thesis’s analyses predominantly draw on literature which have quantitatively evaluated utilitarian theory in the European integration context. Quantitative works were chosen due to their prominence within the literature and their ability to evaluate theory against human responses. Public opinion surveys have opened the door for quantitative evaluations of utilitarian theory. As aforementioned, utilitarian evaluations have been around since early European integration literature. Unsurprising, due to the evolution of European Project beginning with economic integration and expanding into the political sphere. With economic integration proceeding political integration, theorizing based on economic gain/loss at the expense of autonomy made sense. Early on, economic motivations were predominantly theorized at a high-level involving elites. However, few works would establish foundational hypotheses of individual utilitarian appraisals of European integration in the late 1990s. They would set the stage for a long line of utilitarian literature with quantitative analyses to follow.

3.1.1 Quantitative Design with Utilitarian Theory- Initial Hypotheses

Two primary theories would come to have lasting influence on the school of utilitarianism applied to European integration studies- the human capital and capitalist/financial capital hypotheses. The hypotheses assert that those with higher human capital and financial capital benefit more from integration and therefore will be more supportive of integration efforts (Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 7). It should be noted that those with low human or financial capital do not necessarily derive zero benefit from integration, but they are not viewed as the clear “winners” of integration. These hypotheses connect utilitarian motivations (perceived benefit equating to support) to observable measures (such as income and level of education) thereby allowing one to quantitatively assess utilitarian theory and its real-world applications (Figure 3). Although technically distinctive theories assessing different factors, the two theories coincide and are predominantly presented together within literature.

Fig. 3: The Human and Financial Capital Hypothesis



Source: Own Draft

Human Capital Hypothesis:

Human capital can be interpreted as occupational skill and education level. Functionally, those with higher human capital are thought to be able to adapt and compete in a competitive liberalized market (Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 7). While a segment of the population may disfavor integration due to the fear of being outcompeted in the market, those with high levels of education and occupational skill may favor integration efforts due to their advantaged position within society. They can reap the benefits of market integration without the fear over occupational competition.

Financial Capital Hypothesis:

High levels of financial capital, typically measured by income level, are thought to result in increased support as well since increased financial capital enables one to exploit new market opportunity in an integrated market. For example, increased financial capital allows individuals to invest in new economic opportunities and grow business operations within a monitored larger market. A more integrated market typically means trade liberalization and more opportunity (S. Hobolt et al., 2014, p. 129).

Multiple papers in the late 1990s find support for these foundational utilitarian hypotheses by conducting quantitative studies with public opinion data on European integration (Anderson & Reichert, 1995; Gabel, 1998; Gabel & Palmer, 1995). These early works constitute a foundation for utilitarian literature.

Proposed early in the European project's history, the human and financial capital hypotheses still function on the same mechanism of who benefits from integration. Considering the theories' presence and continued evaluation within literature, *Hypothesis 1 asserts that during times of COVID-19, those with higher human capital will be more supportive of European integration.* The reasoning behind the evaluation of human capital specifically will be detailed in further sections. Even with extraordinary circumstances, further integration during crisis still theoretically upholds the human capital hypothesis according to Hypothesis 1.

As demonstrated, select influential 1990s literature discusses the links between utilitarian motivations and European integration preferences. However, literature on the topic burgeoned after the European Sovereign Debt Crisis (2009). It should be noted that some utilitarian literature can be found related to other events such as the 2004 EU enlargement preferences (S. B. Hobolt, 2016, pp. 664–680) and European migration preferences (Brücker, 2018, pp. 293–320), but the Euro Crisis would present the first major opportunity for the utilitarian school to evaluate theory against actual instances of significant integration in a turbulent time. Therefore, the content of this thesis is inspired by many works that came after this influential crisis in the early 2000s. Additional hypotheses are derived from Euro Crisis literature.

3.2 The Euro Crisis- Utilitarian Appraisals Meet Crisis

The Euro Crisis, sometimes referred to as Eurozone Crisis or the European Sovereign Debt Crisis, disrupted Europe from 2009 to the mid 2010s. Considering the 1999 introduction of the Euro, the single currency had only a decade before the strength of the single market currency came into question. The 2009 crisis was a mixture of three crises- a global financial, banking, and sovereign debt crisis- which shocked the Eurozone and sent multiple countries into economic default. Due to the unique character of the EU, the negative fallout from what resembles a balance-of-payment crisis, fell mainly on debtor countries and taxpayers (Frieden & Walter, 2017, p. 372). Debtor countries, referring mainly to select Southern European countries with weaker economies and high outstanding debts, were predominantly blamed (Matthijs & McNamara, 2017, pp. 229-245). Political turmoil accompanied economic distress and controversial bailouts of struggling national economies were chosen over European disintegration. It was a time of extreme division, but unity and further integration were chosen. The Eurozone triumphed, but the asymmetric burden left debtor countries reeling from austerity and economic shock- effects which would plague national economies and welfare states till this day. The severity of the crisis and subsequent wave of integration measures intended to prevent future crises of this nature sparked further utilitarian investigations of integration.

Faced with disintegration, what factors influenced individuals to choose integration? The utilitarian school pursued this question. Although intense high-level politics over burden sharing was at play, the economic effects on the individual and mass public opinion were also being explored. Due to political turmoil, the focus was not striving to explain integration solely based on economic impact or benefit, rather to primarily demonstrate its influence on public opinion. This thesis's use of the COVID-19 case mirrors this intention.

3.2.1 Euro Crisis Evaluations of Utilitarian Theory

When looking into the utilitarian findings of quantitative studies during this time, it has been argued that utilitarian concerns increase in salience during times of crisis. When examining preferences over monetary integration, utilitarian concerns during the Euro Area Crisis and Global Financial crisis became heightened as times of crisis encouraged the public to form cost-benefit opinions (S. B. Hobolt & Wratil, 2017, p. 238). Additionally, when examining aspects of the human and financial capital

hypotheses during this crisis period, some support was found- promising for Hypothesis 1 (Daniele & Geys, 2015, p. 15; Foster & Frieden, 2021, p. 15). Considering evidence of increased utilitarian considerations and continued support for the human/financial capital hypotheses during the Euro Crisis, the overarching utilitarian school required minimal refinement when faced with crisis. However, crisis demanded new inquiries.

During this period of political and economic instability, further questions were being explored looking into the effects of economic impact, financial insecurity, regional differences, and type of integration. These new avenues have inspired this thesis's analysis of the COVID-19 case. The Euro Crisis prompted academics to realize that before crisis, the idea of "integration" to the individual was primarily associated with gradual economic and political intertwining. Crisis introduces significant economic stress and risk across all levels of analysis and changes the face of integration. Scholars picked up on this and theorized that during the Euro Crisis, the typical winners and losers do not apply, and integration is no longer "integration as usual" (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, p. 625). This thesis will go on to detail that this change in integration perception remains true for the COVID-19 case as well. Moreover, the type of EU policy shifts during crisis and specifying the type of integration can change outcomes in individual support.

3.2.2 Euro Crisis Policy & Changing Integration

Superficially, the Euro Crisis legislation benefitted traditional winners of integration and offered salvation to countries and those in distress. This newfound crisis policy targeting distress will have ramifications, to be discussed, on the overall perception of European integration.

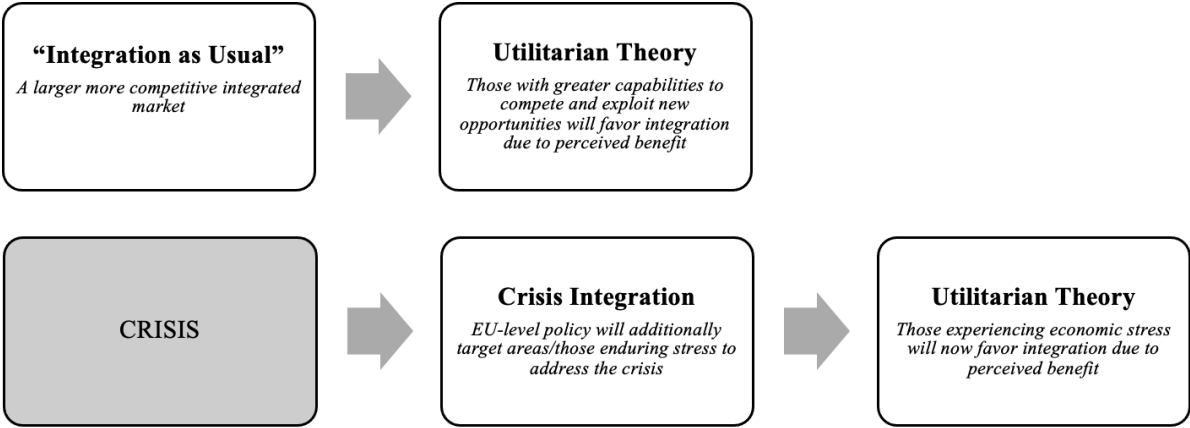
The Euro Crisis integration witnessed theoretically upheld the human/financial capital hypotheses during extraordinary times. EU fiscal/monetary supervision and creation of guard rails to prevent future crisis were numerous. Each EU policy and agreement of oversight passed meant further integration. For instance, the emphasis on financial supervision was so high that in 2011 three new EU supervisory authorities were created (MEMO/10/434). Increased financial supervision (integration of fiscal/monetary systems) benefits traditional winners of integration since those with higher human and financial capital can operate under reduced risk. Through this mechanism, crisis integration theoretically benefits the traditional winners of integration.

Differing to traditional integration legislation, crisis policy targets areas of stress. For example, EU level intervention in ensuring deposit guarantee schemes (Directive 2014/49/EU) benefits those in financial distress by offering a safety net for savings. Moreover, the prominent example of EU aid to the distressed during the Euro Crisis was the controversial economic bailouts of Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain (Southern debtor countries). The European Commission with the ECB and IMF provided financial support and created the European Stability Mechanism (2012) to provide loans to countries in distress (Frieden & Walter, 2017, p. 382). The EU effectively decided to save the Eurozone and single currency. While this act can be superficially viewed as a shift in legislation during crisis to target the vulnerable, Euro Crisis legislation presented a unique double-edged sword that offered salvation at the expense of extreme obligation on debtor countries to pay for what they got themselves and the union into. Extreme tightening and austerity of debtor countries sent many southern European economies into record levels of unemployment and deep recessions (Frieden & Walter, 2017, p. 379). This unfolding of events would influence utilitarian integration literature due to the observed change in nature of crisis policy.

While certainly not a complete detailing of the extensive EU policy created due to the Euro Crisis, the examples provided demonstrate ways in which EU policy changed during crisis changed, and so too did the beneficiaries.

3.2.3 Crisis & Integration Preferences- A Shift in Winners

Fig. 4: Crisis and a Change in Integration



Source: Own Draft

Described concisely, crisis theoretically causes integration policy to change to target vulnerability. This is a shift away from “integration as usual” (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, p. 625). The Euro Crisis policy displayed this characteristic. Targeting stress makes logical sense, as crisis legislation would be expected to address areas of distress and further integration through increased EU-level competence. A change in the nature of integration policy therefore shifts the winners of integration, and preferences will supposedly reflect this difference (Figure 4). However, with the Euro Crisis’s double-edged policy, offering aid alongside asymmetrical political stigma and blame, identifying the exact shift in beneficiaries/preferences proved to be complex. Those undergoing hardship did not simply benefit from crisis policy without consequence in the Euro Crisis case. Literature of the time reflects complexity in this deceptively “simple” chain of events.

Reflecting intricacy and difficulty within deciphering clear winners under crisis policy is Bechtel et al. (2014), which investigates the original financial and human capital hypotheses on a specific policy (bailouts) of the Euro Crisis. As noted in the aforementioned Euro Crisis legislation, traditional winners and supporters of European integration should still be upheld. However, they find that the politicized bailout of countries’ economies did not follow traditional economic winners and losers within the case of Germany (Bechtel et al., 2014, p. 835). This seeming contradiction to traditional utilitarian theory can plausibly be because bailouts are an extreme example of European integration, even in the scope of crisis legislation. Moreover, having the study in Germany, the strongest creditor country within the union may have affected results making it difficult to generalize. Therefore, support for the traditional human/financial hypotheses on “general” integration can still hold true as well as the nontraditional influence on bailouts specifically found in Bechtel et al. (2014). Regardless, the study in Germany exemplifies the two important realities of crisis and the utilitarian school- the type of crisis policy can change the winners of integration and crisis policy typically targets the distressed. Furthermore, attention rightfully belongs on individuals, preference formation, and utilitarianism.

3.2.4 Economic Stress on the Individual

In other literature, there is a revealed relationship between economic stress and preferences for European-level agency. Studying the effects of economic stress would become a popular niche in the utilitarian literature. In one study, it is observed that economic insecurity during normal times leads to disapproval over the euro, but in times of crisis, the opposite relationship emerges (S. Hobolt et al., 2014, p. 129). The study suggests that during crisis, citizens’ preferences change, and European unity is preferred to independent national-level action (p. 134). Similarly, identifying as being unemployed during the Euro Crisis returns as significant and positively related to support for European economic governance (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, p. 637). In this study, unemployment is considered the most

economically vulnerable (p. 634). Taken together, there is evidence, although limited, that suggests crisis introduces a political and economic environment where more hardship is endured and EU policy/integration during crisis offers perceived relief.

In theory, these new beneficiaries will respond favorably to European integration. Limited support during the Euro Crisis example may be due to the dual nature described of the crisis policy, providing support with the stigma and burden on the tail-end. The COVID-19 case, and its differing response may yield stronger results. *Hypothesis 2* draws from this Euro Crisis realization of altered winners and losers of crisis policy and posits that *individuals that identify as having experienced financial hardship due to the COVID-19 crisis will be more likely to support integration*. This hypothesis functions on the same utilitarian theory and chain of events put forward during the Euro Crisis (Figure 4). During the COVID-19 crisis, those enduring financial stress will theoretically prefer EU integration due to a changed nature in perceived EU integration policy.

It should be noted that Hypothesis 2 is not simply the converse of Hypothesis 1. Although there can be a relationship between the groups of people discussed in the two hypotheses, human and financial capital is not synonymous with self-identified economic stress. Those low or high in financial and human capital alike can resonate with negative financial consequence.

3.2.5 Economic Stress on the Country

Within the wave of utilitarian literature emerging from the Euro Crisis, studying the effects of economic stress during crisis surged. Economic stress comes in different forms and at different levels of analysis, opening up a wide variety of relationships to explore. Country-level economic characteristics were popular additions to utilitarian studies as control variables or separate investigations in their own right (Daniele & Geys, 2015, p. 14; Foster & Frieden, 2021, p. 12; S. Hobolt et al., 2014, p. 140; Nicoli, 2019, pp. 407–409).

Inspired from Hypothesis 2, which focuses on individual economic impact, *Hypothesis 3* states that *individuals within countries that experienced greater economic stress during the COVID-19 crisis, will be more likely to support integration*. As aforementioned, crisis integration legislation targets the vulnerable. Socio-trophic utilitarian considerations may compel individuals to connect themselves and their personal well-being (egocentric) to their own national situation- a citizen can be sensitive to both (Hooghe & Marks, 2005, p. 421). Moreover, in theory, countries that experience economic stress will experience greater pressure to integrate at the expense of national sovereignty. This connects back to the functionalism mismatch between demands of problem structures and the inability of current authority structures to meet such demands (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 3).

In other words, Hypothesis 3 primarily functions off the same utilitarian mechanism as Hypothesis 2, but the relationship between economic stress and preference for integration is evaluated considering country-level economic stress. It is important to highlight that Hypothesis 3 remains an individual-level analysis. Hypothesis 3 can be viewed as a robustness check by bringing in country-level controls, and Hypothesis 2 can be viewed as primary out of the investigations. The key relationship of interest, between economic stress and individual preference, remains the same.

Overall, the study of individual utilitarian appraisals of European integration flourished in the wake of the Euro Crisis. Crisis literature invited inquiries on supposed newfound benefactors as well as well as the effect of economic stress on utilitarian preference formation. The study was both enriched and diversified during this time period. As a result, the impact on the utilitarian school is reflected in the two out of the three hypotheses of this thesis drawing support from Euro Crisis literature.

3.3 The COVID-19 Crisis- Utilitarian Appraisals Under a New Case

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a new opportunity to evaluate utilitarian hypotheses under a different crisis. Although the COVID-19 crisis was first and foremost a health crisis, the virus

delivered a measurable economic shock across Europe that can be used to craft utilitarian-based investigations. Just as the Euro Crisis, with its complex politics and economic fall-out, was able to be studied, so too can the COVID-19 shock. The two crises invite comparisons where comparisons can be made. Hypotheses 2 & 3 pursue this comparison by evaluating an aspect of utilitarian theory explored during the Euro Crisis- the effect of economic stress on preferences- with the COVID-19 case. Moreover, although Hypothesis 1 is not specifically “crisis” related, evaluating the traditional human capital hypothesis is important due to its consistent use within literature across all time periods. Revisiting if conventional winners of European integration hold true during COVID-19 is valuable to the utilitarian literature. Following previous works, this thesis utilizes control variables to minimize extraneous relationships. Moreover, interpretation of results acknowledges crisis differences.

Reinforcing the case, the exogenous nature of the COVID-19 crisis may serve as an advantage for certain utilitarian inquiries. As previously detailed, during the Euro Crisis, evidence of a shift in the winners and losers during crisis was prevalent but identifying the exact winners and losers of integration proved difficult. The aspect of endogeneity and asymmetric shock that came with the Euro Crisis undoubtedly complicated analyses. Mixed origins and shouldered burden for the Euro Crisis likely clouded literature’s ability to decipher utilitarian motivations. In contrast, the COVID-19 case could depict a similar preference shift, but under different circumstances. Specifically, COVID-19 hit all member states and can be seen as a symmetric shock (Lionello, 2020, p. 25). Unlike the Euro Crisis, COVID-19 was viewed as primarily exogenous and therefore no singular country or group of countries were blamed. While the COVID-19 crisis certainly comes with its own set of complex influences, not having extreme political and economic blame thrown around may make the distinction of crisis policy targeting vulnerability more unified. Thus, the COVID-19 case may provide a clearer picture between the processes motivating Hypothesis 2-3.

Overall, despite the COVID-19 crisis’s unique character, opportunities to research utilitarian effects on integration preferences are plentiful. The hypotheses presented in this thesis allow for the COVID-19 crisis to stand as another case to hold up to “traditional” utilitarian hypotheses (Hypothesis 1) and “crisis” hypotheses developed in response to the Euro Crisis (Hypotheses 2 & 3). Results from this analysis can provide further support for the theory or suggest a divergence, plausibly due to the nature of the crisis.

3.3.1 COVID-19 Policy & Changing Integration

In addition to the economic shock delivered by the Euro Crisis and COVID-19, the two crises share a similar shift in integration legislation, resulting in a supposed change in winners of integration. This allows the crisis hypotheses to function on the same mechanism as they did under the Euro Crisis. During and immediately following of the COVID-19 crisis, the EU played a hands-on role crafting crisis/recovery policy to target distress. On the health side, the EU mobilized to support vaccine research and fund the acquisition of medical equipment (Wolff & Ladi, 2020, p. 1027). While not directly economic, tackling the source of the crisis can be viewed as economically beneficial as getting the virus under control means the economy can sooner get back on track. Moreover, having a supranational COVID-19 plan can reassure economic anxiety and promote recovery. A recovered and collaboratively monitored economy can especially benefit traditional winners of integration. Additional policy directly related to the economy was plentiful. The European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) was created, loan aid to companies was granted, and the European Stability Mechanism was strengthened (Wolff & Ladi, 2020, p. 1028). By implementing such assistance, the EU showed great resolve to support the people within the European Community. Just as the EU adapted to meet the needs of the Euro Crisis, the EU provided during COVID-19 as well. Moreover, both are cases of crisis leading to increased European integration and power delegated to the EU level.

The crowning achievement of the COVID-19 response has been the recovery fund NextGenerationEU (NGEU). Some have coined NGEU a “Hamiltonian moment” and a turning point in European

integration since there now exists a form of joint borrowing to support national economies (Lionello, 2020, p. 22). Joint borrowing was formerly proposed in the form of Euro Bonds during the Euro Crisis but was shot down in favor of Southern austerity policy. Risk sharing, such as joint borrowing, has always been a controversial topic within the EU, but the Euro Crisis's divisive narrative of *Northern Saints* and *Southern Sinners* was not present in the COVID-19 crisis (Matthijs & McNamara, 2017, p. 230). This change in political climate between the two crises likely contributed to the approval of NextGen. Therefore, the EU choosing to implement a joint borrowing instrument to fund recovery can be seen as a significant form of integration. NextGen can be viewed as beneficial to both the traditional winners of integration, who classically prefer integrated economies, and beneficial to those undergoing financial stress, due to its recovery focus.

Overall, NextGen and numerous other COVID-19 crisis initiatives that have contributed to the ongoing EU recovery mirror a shift in integration legislation similar to the one seen with the Euro Crisis. By the EU stepping in and responding to the pandemic, integration has shifted to benefit the vulnerable as well (e.g.- the unemployed with the SURE program). This wave of policy inspires utilitarian Hypotheses 2 & 3 and with recent data, preferences can now be tested with the COVID-19 case. According to theory, the EU's policies targeting COVID-19 relief and recovery should compel those experiencing financial stress to prefer European integration, alongside the traditional beneficiaries.

3.3.2 Emerging COVID-19 Crisis Literature & Integration Preferences

This thesis's analyses also receive inspiration from recent post-COVID-19 literature. With the new case to analyze, post-2020 papers have started to review preferences during and immediately after the pandemic. Using the utilitarian school, it has been observed that an increased concern over COVID-19 is positively associated with support for European integration in Germany (Krehbiel & Cheruvu, 2021, p. 10). Additionally, in a study examining support for European integration on Greece and Italy, positive economic assessments and household finances were found to be correlated with trust in the EU (Kouloglou & Georgarakis, 2023, p. 29). This provides loose support for Hypothesis 1 as the authors used utilitarian motivations to frame their hypotheses and findings (p. 31). To the best of current knowledge, a larger utilitarian study inclusive of all EU members has yet to be conducted. This thesis hopes to fill that gap and bridge past utilitarian concepts to the COVID-19 case.

While conducted with a limited survey of five countries, a study finding a positive relationship between exposure to economic risk (measured by concern) and increased support for fiscal integration provides encouraging support for Hypothesis 2 & 3 (Bremer et al., 2023, p. 18). Overall, literature is understandably sparse due to its novelty, but moving to fill a gap this thesis pursues.

As evidenced in recent works, quantitative studies on utilitarian evaluations can be applied to the COVID-19 case. This thesis seeks to contribute to the literature by testing whether the traditional human/financial capital hypothesis holds true and whether economic stress during crisis results in greater support for European integration.

4. Method & Material

This thesis utilizes quantitative methods to evaluate the presented hypotheses. Using quantitative methods to study European integration through survey responses connects theory to concrete sentiment. Moreover, quantitative methods allow for one to test theory off of human responses and search for congruency. Inconsistency between theory and quantitative tests can signal needed revision on the theory side or quantitative design. Conversely, if quantitative studies act in accordance with proposed theory, results can provide evidence of the theory's soundness. As common with quantitative research based on human responses, this thesis's analyses face limitations from data availability and survey design. Specific limitations of this study are detailed, along with tools to mediate error.

4.1 Data

To test the four hypotheses presented, Eurobarometer 2021 data (Eurobarometer 95.3) is used for the dependent variable and individual-level control variables. Eurobarometer is a polling instrument started by the European Commission to inform EU institutions on public opinion. Eurobarometer's unique data and reputability make it a popular tool for researchers in European Studies. The 95.3 dataset is a special COVID-19 questionnaire polling for sentiment related to the COVID-19 crisis. The survey was administered to the 27 member states (N= 26,523) and 12 other countries/territories of interest using random probability (Total N= 37,225). The frequency of respondents by country ranges from ~500 to ~1000 (Appendix 1). Not all questions were administered to the +12, and this thesis's dependent variable covers only the EU 27. Interviews were conducted through a random sample design. Survey administrators acknowledged the effect of COVID-19 on the survey methods and exhibited caution- surveying in-person and online.

Eurobarometer data was chosen for this study due to the type of questions included and because specific survey and demographic questions are repeatedly asked in the same manner across multiple years. Therefore, while this particular study is not running longitudinal regressions across time, prior utilitarian literature has utilized Eurobarometer data with similar or matching variables (Daniele & Geys, 2015, pp. 650–670; Foster & Frieden, 2021, pp. 1–27; Gabel, 1998, pp. 333–354; Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, pp. 624–641). Subsequently, specific variable coding, variable selection, and controls included in this study draw inspiration from previous studies. This further grounds analyses in previous literature and allows for stronger comparisons.

Country-level data for Hypothesis 3 (real GDP per capita, deficit/surplus, real GDP growth rate, inflation, unemployment) come from Eurostat. Additionally, control variables for EU spending and revenue are created from data (under the Multiannual Financial Framework) provided by the European Commission. For this study, 2020 data is used for all country-level variables. Therefore, a lag of approximately one year between country-level economic data and survey data exists. This lag is included since the year 2020 best reflects the negative economic impact at the height of COVID-19. Moreover, Hypotheses 2 and 3 are interested in how people internalize the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, not current economic conditions at the time of the survey.

In sum, Eurobarometer data provides the primary means in which to construct variables to evaluate preferences for European integration. Eurostat and European Commission data can be understood as supplementary for constructing a country-level analysis (Hypothesis 3) and introducing country-level controls. Variables used and a brief description are outlined in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Variables

Variables			
Individual-Level		Country-Level	
Variable Name	Description	Variable Name	Description
COVID-19 Impact	Respondent's COVID-19 financial impact (1= Agree, 0= Disagree)	GDP Growth	Real GDP growth rate, showing COVID-19 impact
Education	Age at which respondent stopped schooling (4 categories)	Unemployment	National unemployment rate
Occupation	Respondent's occupational category (7 categories)	GDP	Real GDP Per Capita, showing national economic performance
Age	Respondent's age (4 categories)	Deficit/Surplus	Net lending/borrowing
Male	Respondent's gender (1= Male, 0= Female)	Inflation	National inflation rate
Left	Respondent being ideologically <i>left</i>	EU Revenue	Country contribution to the EU budget
Right	Respondent's being ideologically <i>right</i>	EU Expenditure	Country reception of funds from the EU budget
Class	Respondent's class (4 categories)		
Unemployed	Respondent's employment status (1= Unemployed, 0= Other)		
Integrate (Main Dependent Variable- All Models)	Respondent's sentiment towards further integration (1= Agree, 0= Disagree)		

*All country-level variables use 2020 data

4.2 Construction & Application of Variables

4.2.1 Dependent Variable

Across all three hypotheses, the dependent variable of interest is support for European integration. To gauge support for integration, the Eurobarometer question asking for agreement/disagreement on the statement “More decisions should be taken at the EU level” is used. The original coding had respondents answer as “totally agree”, “tend to agree”, “tend to disagree”, “totally disagree” (with a “don’t know” category as well). The frequencies of the original variable show that the two categories expressing agreement and the two categories expressing disagreement do not heavily skew to indicate an overwhelming positive or negative sentiment (Appendix 1). Therefore, the outcome variable is recoded so that 0 is “disagree” and 1 is “agree”. Transforming the dependent response into a binary variable is a common practice in the utilitarian literature (Foster & Frieden, 2021, p. 9; Nicoli, 2019, p. 404). The new variable maintains a relationship where “agree” has a higher frequency than “disagree”, but both categories maintain a healthy number of respondents (N > 10,000) (Appendix 1). Having a binary categorical variable will be further explored in following sections and will affect how the quantitative analysis in this thesis is conducted.

4.2.2 Constructing Hypothesis 1

H1: Preference for integration will be positively related to level of human capital.

For Hypothesis 1, human capital is measured with the variables *education* and *occupation*. According to Hypothesis 1, those within higher educational categories will be more supportive of European integration than those within lower ones. The education variable is based on Foster & Frieden’s (2021) method where age at which the respondent reported stopping formal schooling is broken down into four categories from low to advanced (less than 18 = low, at age 18= medium, between 19 and 23= high, and 24 or more = advanced) (p. 10). While this Eurobarometer measure of education is not a perfect representation of precise levels of educational attainment, coding education into categories is

common within the utilitarian literature and suits this analysis (Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 16; Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, p. 631).

Similar to level of education, occupation is also used within the literature to capture human capital (Foster & Frieden, 2021, p. 10; Gabel & Palmer, 1995, p. 15). Keeping with Hypothesis 1, those with higher occupational skill are hypothesized to be more supportive of European integration. Using Kuhn & Stoeckel's (2014) method, level of occupational skill is measured by comparing different occupational categories off of a baseline "unskilled manual worker" (p. 631). Drawing inspiration from their methods, this thesis sorts occupation into seven different categories (student, unemployed, retired, other white collar, management and supervisors, skilled manual workers, and unskilled manual workers). Understandably, "skill" is difficult to measure and classify across various occupational positions. Using an unskilled occupation as a reference category and looking for significant differences when comparing to other occupations is a way to test if human capital has an influence on preferences with the available data.

While measures for human capital exist within Eurobarometer (*education and occupation*), measuring level of financial capital is limited within the dataset. Notably, an income variable is not included in Eurobarometer and therefore cannot be used as a measure of financial capital or as a control variable. Typically, income is associated with higher financial capital as financial assets and wealth are thought to be related (Daniele & Geys, 2015, p. 4). Kuhn & Stoeckel (2014) acknowledge this fault in the Eurobarometer dataset and treat education and occupation as a measure of general "socio-economic status" within their study (p. 631). Within the paper, they go on to base their utilitarian expectations off of the two measures. Due to the close relationship between the human and financial capital hypotheses, it was/is necessary to discuss both their relevance in literature and when designing this study.

Although not equivalent to financial capital or income, self-identified *class* (working, lower middle, middle, upper middle, and high class) is the closest proxy for wealth the dataset provides and is therefore included as a control variable.

4.2.3 Constructing Hypothesis 2

H2: Individuals that identify as having experienced financial hardship due to the COVID-19 crisis will be more likely to support integration.

To analyze Hypothesis 2, COVID-19 induced financial hardship is measured by the Eurobarometer question polling for agreement and disagreement with a statement inquiring if the "coronavirus pandemic has had serious financial consequences for you personally." This independent variable originally took the form of "totally agree", "tend to agree", "tend to disagree" and "totally disagree" (with a "don't know" category as well). Hypothesis 2, tested with the original coding, can be found in Appendix 2. The new variable used in the primary analysis, *COVID-19 impact*, is coded as binary where 1 is "agree" and 0 is "disagree". "Totally agree" and "tend to agree" are combined, "tend to disagree" and "totally disagree" are combined, and the "don't know" category is dropped. The frequency distributions of the original and new *COVID-19 impact* variable show the effect of recoding on the variable (Appendix 1). According to Hypothesis 2, those with greater financial stress/hardship (i.e.- responding 1 for agreement with the statement) will be more supportive of integration. It is worth noting that individual "hardship" in this thesis is based on personal subjective evaluations of endured financial stress. Additionally, this thesis looks at self-identified crisis induced financial stress specifically.

4.2.4 Individual-Level Control Variables

Subsequent models include a collection of individual-level control variables thought to potentially have an impact on integration preferences. Controls for level of *education* and *occupation* are added for reasons outlined in Hypothesis 1 and for their general utility as control variables.

Self-identified social *class* is included for its potential relationship to income and wealth. Moreover, Kuhn & Stoeckel (2014) also note in their paper that social class is a “crucial determinant of support for European economic integration” (p. 628). *Class* is broken down into categories of working, lower middle, middle, upper middle, and higher class.

Controlling for ideology is added due to literature finding and association between the far left and the far right and Eurosceptic beliefs (De Vries & Edwards, 2009, pp. 5–28). Following Foster & Frieden’s (2021) measure of ideology, the Eurobarometer survey question asking respondents to place themselves on “left” to “right” 10-point scale is converted into two separate variables expressing extreme left (identifying as 1-2) and extreme right ideology (identifying as 9-10). Thus, ideology is represented as two binary variables coded as *left* and *right*.

Unemployment status is added since employment status can be viewed as having an effect on integration preferences through utilitarian theory (Foster & Frieden, 2021, pp. 1–27; Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014, p. 634). Unemployment can be framed as an indicator of economic position within society or as an indicator of economic stress or vulnerability and can therefore have an impact on integration preferences through utilitarian mechanisms aforementioned. However, this thesis decides to select a different measure of economic stress that is specific and targeted to the COVID-19 case. Unlike the other control variables detailed in this section, unemployment is included as a category in the occupation variable and will appear as such in the result table when appropriate. For the individual-level, unemployment status appears as *unemployed* and should not be confused with the country-level variable *unemployment* to be later discussed.

Finally, classic control variables of gender (*male*) and *age* are included in the analysis as well. Gender is coded as 0 for female and 1 for male. In terms of a specific potential effect gender may have on integration preference, it has been posited that males may benefit more from integration due to a heightened status within society in comparison to females (Anderson & Reichert, 1995, p. 239). Age is added since distribution of individual characteristics (education, values, etc.) may vary across generation (Gabel, 1998, p. 344). Additionally, recent evidence has suggested that younger generations may be more supportive of the EU (Rekker, 2018, pp. 56–77). Since Eurobarometer already has an ordinal age variable, this study preserves the variable categories (15-24, 25-39, 40-54, 55-98). Maintaining age categories allows for comparisons between a rough delineation of generational differences.

Education, occupation, class, ideology (left and right), unemployment (unemployed), gender (male), and age are the individual characteristics found in the Eurobarometer dataset and controlled for in this thesis’s analyses. As demonstrated, their selection and coding are based on prior literature which has theorized their effects and/or quantitatively studied their influence. Many of the control variables have a rich literature behind their potential effects on integration preferences but are not the focus of this thesis. For this reason, the control variables are included in the models, but not a focal point in the interpretations.

4.2.5 Constructing Hypothesis 3

H3: Individuals within countries that experienced greater economic stress during the COVID-19 crisis will be more likely to support integration.

Hypothesis 3 is a variation of Hypothesis 2 due to its investigation of economic stress in relation for preference for integration. Hypothesis 3 differs by bringing in country-level measures of stress and control variables. As discussed, country-level effects have been studied in utilitarian investigations of integration preferences in prior literature. Examining country-level influences under the new COVID-19 case adds to the study and provides robustness through additional controls. It is important to note that although the variables pertain to the country and its economy, the hypothesis itself remains an investigation at the individual level. The unit of interest remains individuals. Keeping the relationship

at the individual level maintains a strong sample size, since aggregating at the country-level drastically decreases the number of observations (to the number of countries in the study- 27).

To measure economic stress and impact COVID-19 had on countries, the independent variable, 2020 real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate (*GDP growth*) and the national unemployment rate (*unemployment*) are used. *GDP growth* and *unemployment* have been used to measure economic stress in previous literature (S. Hobolt et al., 2014, pp. 128–147; Nicoli, 2019, pp. 397–425).

GDP is a popular indicator for economic activity since the measure captures the value of goods and services produced by a country in a specific time period (Eurostat). Real GDP is a variation where the calculation accounts for changes in prices, giving a more accurate representation of economic performance. The growth rate then takes the GDP of one time period and compares to against a reference year to look for development in a country's economy. For this study, the growth rate given for 2020 is calculated off the previous year (2019). Since 2019 marked the start of the pandemic and economic chaos ensued, the growth rate for 2020 captures economic stress a country endured due to the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, almost all countries analyzed reported a negative real GDP growth rate for 2020 indicating a strong economic contraction. From 2019 to 2020 the EU average GDP growth rate went from 1.8 to -5.6 (Eurostat).

The national unemployment rate is an additional indicator of economic stress since a high unemployment rate signals a larger portion of the labor force being out of work. Elevated unemployment is typically a sign of an unhealthy economy. Similar to 2020 GDP growth data, the 2020 unemployment data shows economic stress caused by COVID-19. From 2019 to 2020 the EU average unemployment rose from 6.8 to 7.2 (Eurostat).

Considering Hypothesis 3 and *GDP growth* and *unemployment* as the independent variables, it should be expected as the GDP growth rate gets higher in value (meaning the economic contraction was less severe), respondents within the countries will be less likely to support integration. This seeming converse in interpreting results to the stated hypothesis is due to a stronger negative number for RGDP growth being higher in absolute value but lower when interpreting the results. With respects to *unemployment*, as the unemployment rate rises, respondents within countries will be more likely to support integration in line with Hypothesis 3. Following theory, more economic stress should equate to increased levels of support.

4.2.6 Country-Level Control Variables

Just as individual level controls are added, country-level ones are introduced to control for potential extraneous relationships. Drawing inspiration from previous studies, real *GDP* per capita, inflation rate, lending/borrowing, EU revenue proportional to country GDP, and EU expenditure proportional to GDP are modeled. All country-level variables are from 2020. Aside from standing as popular economic controls across literature working at the country-level, many of the variables' relationship to economic stress and EU perception make them particular measures of interest for this thesis.

Real *GDP* per capita- GDP adjusted for inflation and population- is included to control for the overall performance of the countries' economies. Countries with stronger performing economies may have been able to better absorb the COVID-19 shock, thereby affecting EU preferences.

Inflation is added since it can be expected that higher levels of inflation within a country, signaling an increase of prices for consumers, will affect how individuals perceive integration (Foster & Frieden, 2021, p. 7). A country's inflation rate can signal the health of the economy where a lower inflation rate is typically seen as beneficial.

The proportion of *deficit/surplus* (measured by net lending/net borrowing) is an additional measure that relates to the health of the economy and can therefore be linked to EU preferences. Creditor countries with stronger economies and less borrowing are more likely to fear the moral hazard

associated with burden sharing. Moral hazard, meaning creditor countries are more likely to fear that other countries less well-off (those in more debt) will “take advantage of their generosity,” was found to influence preferences over fiscal integration (Bremer et al., 2023, p. 4). For this variable, countries with larger *deficit/surplus* could plausibly be less likely to approve of integration.

Finally, EU spending and budget as a proportion to each country’s real GDP per capita is added to the analysis. Naturally, a country’s contribution (*EU revenue*) and reception (*EU expenditure*) of funds may plausibly affect perception of the EU and integration (Anderson & Reichert, 1995, pp. 231–249). Data is provided by the European Commission on the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.

Overall, the inclusion of country level economic measures contributes to the thoroughness of this thesis’s analyses. Including country level economic stress and related effects investigates the presence of country-level influences on the individual forming preferences. The relationship of interest-economic stress affecting integration preferences through the utilitarian theory- remains the same.

4.3 Quantitative Technique

This thesis uses logistic regressions (logit) to test the three hypotheses presented. Logistic regressions were selected due to the binary categorical dependent variable of interest across all hypotheses- *integrate* (agreeing or disagreeing for more integration). This method differs from a linear regression because responses of “agree” or “disagree” are not continuous- they are distinct categories. By working with logit, odds are generated of a certain outcome of interest occurring. For this investigation, the outcome of interest is “agreement on more European integration”.

5. Results & Discussion

Four models constitute this thesis's results (*Table 2*). Model 1 tests Hypothesis 1 through examining human capital's effect on integration (*education* and *occupation*). Related individual-level control variables previously mentioned are included. Model 2 tests Hypothesis 2 by relating the COVID-19 individual economic impact to integration, excluding human capital variables. Model 3 adds *education* and *occupation* back in to test for the effect of *COVID-19 impact* with a more complete model. Finally, Model 4 tests Hypothesis 3 by bringing in country-level COVID-19 economic stress (*GDP growth* and *unemployment*) and country-level economic variables for controls.

Table 2: Results

Variable	Model 1- Human Capital	Model 2- COVID-19 Impact	Model 3- Human Capital & COVID-19 Impact	Model 4- Country Level
COVID-19 Impact	<i>Odds Ratio</i> (<i>Standard Error</i>)	1.435*** (0.150)	1.397*** (0.132)	1.182* (0.104)
Education (base low)				
Medium	0.970 (0.140)	—	0.954 (0.134)	0.970 (0.087)
High	0.853 (0.146)	—	0.862 (0.141)	1.013 (0.107)
Advanced	0.675* (0.152)	—	0.696* (0.148)	0.932 (0.133)
Occupation (base Unskilled Manual)				
Student	0.977 (0.197)	—	0.972 (0.198)	0.841 (0.139)
Unemployed	0.782 (0.149)	—	0.746 (0.142)	0.677*** (0.098)
Retired	0.830 (0.125)	—	0.872 (0.136)	0.780* (0.104)
Other white collar	0.873 (0.173)	—	0.884 (0.176)	0.791* (0.100)
Management/Supervisors	0.814 (0.145)	—	0.832 (0.149)	0.750** (0.101)
Skilled Manual	0.931 (0.150)	—	0.928 (0.150)	0.830 (0.123)
Age (base 15-24)				
25-39	0.692*** (0.065)	0.715*** (0.055)	0.695*** (0.066)	0.718*** (0.059)
40-54	0.583*** (0.068)	0.617*** (0.059)	0.581*** (0.068)	0.596*** (0.065)
55-98	0.559*** (0.068)	0.618*** (0.067)	0.564*** (0.069)	0.585*** (0.064)
Male (Gender)				
	0.971 (0.045)	0.976 (0.040)	0.971 (0.047)	0.960 (0.048)
Left				
	1.023 (0.144)	1.022 (0.141)	1.014 (0.145)	1.026 (0.147)
Right				
	0.884 (0.149)	0.807 (0.126)	0.854 (0.143)	0.786 (0.129)
Class (base Low)				
Lower Middle	0.869 (0.110)	0.842 (0.128)	0.882 (0.110)	0.943 (0.097)
Middle	1.190 (0.162)	1.104 (0.175)	1.241* (0.163)	1.293*** (0.121)

Upper Middle	1.196 (0.195)	1.051 (0.196)	1.289 (0.204)	1.457*** (0.174)
Higher	1.509* (0.340)	1.374 (0.305)	1.516* (0.331)	1.650*** (0.295)
Unemployed	<i>Included in Occupation</i>	0.862 (0.081)	<i>Included in Occupation</i>	<i>Included in Occupation</i>
GDP Growth	—	—	—	0.937** (0.030)
Unemployment	—	—	—	0.910** (0.042)
GDP	—	—	—	1.000 (0.000)
Deficit/Surplus	—	—	—	0.898*** (0.028)
Inflation	—	—	—	0.704*** (0.072)
EU Revenue	—	—	—	0.465** (0.169)
EU Expenditure	—	—	—	3.594** (1.891)
<i>Observations</i>	<i>16,604</i>	<i>22,981</i>	<i>16,502</i>	<i>16,301</i>

*Asterisks denote significance *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

*Clustered by Country and use Eurobarometer (w1) weights

Referring to the results, Model 1 shows no significant support for Hypothesis 1. Results do not suggest that increased education or occupational skill results in increased preferences for integration. Although this finding may initially seem contradictory to the utilitarian theory, insignificant results may be the case due to the unique nature of the COVID-19 crisis policy. Unlike the Euro Crisis policy which put in place permanent integration through institutionalizing mass economic oversight and guard-rails (theoretically benefitting traditional winners of integration), COVID-19 policy can be seen as more temporary. For instance, the SURE program targeting unemployment is temporary along with NextGen and its associated Recovery Plan (Lionello, 2020, pp. 26, 35). Therefore, despite the EU taking massive leaps in solidarity in order to confront the crisis, the “flavor” of integration may be viewed as short-term increased EU authority and cooperation in exchange for quick relief. Simply, integration in the COVID case may not benefit the traditional benefactors of integration since major policies and initiatives were designed to be provisional impending hopeful recovery. It should be noted that “short-term” policies and initiatives do not mean that meaningful progress in integration did not occur. As pointed out, actions such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s switch to support EU borrowing, can have long-term implications on the future of European integration that have yet to be seen (Lionello, 2020, p. 42). The long-term effects of crisis policy are yet to play out, and intended “short-term” projects can linger long past expected expiration. Just because a policy is perceived as being short-term does not mean it is in practice.

A modest amount of support for the human and financial capital hypothesis during the Euro Crisis could be attributed to extensive lasting integration reforms (supposedly benefiting traditional winners) paired with the aforementioned asymmetrical financial and political blame clouding identifying clear winners. While COVID-19 policy has the advantage of examining traditional benefactors of integration under a crisis not shrouded in asymmetrical political strife, the insignificant finding for Hypothesis 1 teaches researchers that the type of integration policy during crisis is important and suggests that the traditional utilitarian winners of integration may not always benefit or prefer integration.

Turning to Hypothesis 2, Models 2 & 3 suggest that the financial impact from COVID-19 did in fact affect how individuals view European integration. Considering the significance and the odds ratios

exceeding 1 in both models, there is a positive significant relationship between financial consequence experienced during COVID-19 and preference for increased integration. Specifically, based on Model 3's odds ratio for COVID-19 impact, those that identify as suffering financial consequence due to COVID-19 have a 39.7% increase in the odds to respond in favor of increased integration compared to those that do not identify as financially impacted. The data suggests that the hypothesized change in beneficiaries of integration did in fact shift to favor those vulnerable and stressed. Considering the character of COVID-19 crisis policy targeting and funding recovery, Hypothesis 2's significance aligns with the utilitarian theory that individuals will choose what they view as personally beneficial. In this case, those that incurred financial consequence from COVID-19 will turn to EU integration for support.

Model 4 supports Hypothesis 3 since GDP growth is significant and presenting a relationship where a one unit increase in GDP growth (meaning a less severe COVID-19 shock) equates to a 6.3% decrease in the odds the respondent supports integration. Although unemployment, the other indicator of country-level economic stress, is significant, the results do not support Hypothesis 3 as the odds ratio below 1 indicates a state in which a one unit increase in unemployment equates to an individual being less likely to support integration. This opposing unemployment result to the stated hypothesis is interesting and worth further future exploration. Overall, the findings of Model 4 suggest that respondents did in fact consider economic stress at the country-level as well when forming personal preferences on European integration.

Looking across all four models, the relationship between experienced economic stress (*COVID-19 impact*) and integration preference is attenuated across models. Simply, the strength of the relationship decreases when more variables are added to the model. However, significance is still maintained across models even with decreased significance in Model 4. This may be due to a degree of independent variable collinearity. The variables *COVID-19 impact*, *GDP growth*, and *unemployment* are capturing a similar effect- economic stress- and thus can result in decreased significance.

Although not a focus of the thesis, a brief note can be made about age. Age is highly significant across all models and displays that as a respondent increases in age category, they become less likely to support integration compared to 15–24-year-olds. Overall, support is not found for Hypothesis 1, but results support Hypothesis 2 & 3.

5.1 Study Limitations & Advantages

As with previous works, this thesis and its analyses are bound by limitations shaping the overall advantages and disadvantages of the study. Notably, the relationships examined in this thesis have preference for integration as their dependent variable. Therefore, this thesis is not measuring utilitarian influences on actual instances of integration. Rather, this thesis is examining utilitarian influences on preferences, which can have influence on integration through aforementioned theory (politicization and the integration theory of functionalism). There has been previously expressed disappointment over the absence of a measure that “explicitly captures variation in support for actual integrative reforms over time and across nations,” (Gabel, 1998, p. 340). However, this is not to say that measuring preferences for “general” perceived integration has no value. With such a design, broader trends in sentiment over integration can be drawn. Moreover, securing a link between the individual and general integration serves as a natural first step. Perhaps future research can investigate ways in which to quantitatively measure utilitarian appraisals and tangible integration outcomes. Nevertheless, the complexity of such a design has likely hindered such inquiries and contributed to the enduring popularity of the methods this thesis utilizes.

As discussed within the data section, Eurobarometer survey questions have shaped the analyses. Advantageously, the specific dataset used enables this thesis to examine the influence of COVID-19 economic impact as it relates to preferences for integration through specific COVID-19 and integration questions. This is a divergence from multiple studies that have had to rely on a question

polling for sentiment about whether respondents were “for or against EU or European Community (EC) membership” as a proxy for support for integration (Foster & Frieden, 2021, pp. 1–27; Gabel, 1998, pp. 333–354; Gabel & Palmer, 1995, pp. 3–19). Having a more precise dependent integration variable, measuring preference for increased EU decision making, can be viewed as benefit of the dataset. With that said, omissions in the Eurobarometer dataset such as questions related to income and wealth constrain possible investigations.

Overall, this thesis’s strong connection to previous literature results in confidence that the analyses produced are not subject to limitations beyond the scope of what similar studies have been confronted with. Likewise, there is confidence that the results represent a continuation to the previous literature and contribute to the ongoing discussion of utilitarian based integration preferences.

5.2 Future Research

Results from Hypothesis 1, suggesting that traditional beneficiaries of integration may not hold true, depending on the type of crisis integration policy, encourage deeper inquiries into the diversity of integration legislation during times of crisis. With time, future studies can hopefully review specific advancements in integration during the COVID-19 case and reflect on how enduring sentiment is in the long run. With the EU’s persistent history with crisis, it is also conceivable that future crises can be examined in this manner and further dissect the human and financial capital hypotheses under different conditions.

Additionally, with the significant finding that there is a connection between the COVID-19 financial hit and preference for integration at the individual-level, support Hypothesis 2 and the concept that beneficiaries of integration do in fact change during crisis begs future inquiries. Considering the evidence of utilitarian motivations at play during the COVID-19 case, perhaps future work can examine how utilitarian motivations intersect with other influences on preference formation. This thesis has never sought to present utilitarian motivations as a complete explanation of integration preference formation. Therefore, examining how utilitarian motivations interact with other influences such as party and identity politics is an expected evolution. Literature is already leading in this direction by considering multi-influences of preference formation (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 1–23; Kouloglou & Georgarakis, 2023, pp. 29–44; Russo, 2023, pp. 554–574).

Results from this thesis shine a light on utilitarian driven individual preferences and invite future studies. Future cases, unexplored interactions, and designing a longitudinal study are examples of where this thesis leaves off.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary & Reflection

This study has examined individual preferences for European integration using the utilitarian theory. This thesis's design follows literature that has hypothesized and quantitatively examined the relationship between economic factors and preference for European integration. Literature on the subject burgeoned after the Euro Crisis and thus strongly motivated investigations in this thesis. The Euro Crisis's similarities to the new COVID-19 crisis inspired hypotheses and comparison. Hypotheses were evaluated with quantitative methods using Eurobarometer 95.3 survey data. A large N survey (> 16,000) of EU respondents allowed for public opinion on European integration to be examined against utilitarian hypotheses found in literature.

Ultimately, two primary utilitarian relationships were evaluated with the COVID-19 case. The longstanding human capital hypothesis, asserting those with higher human capital benefit and support European integration, was assessed by looking at education level and occupation. In contrast to the Euro Crisis's case, support for the human capital hypothesis was not found under COVID-19. Additionally, this thesis examined the concept that during crisis, the winners of European integration shift to benefit those enduring economic stress. Results produced support this idea as evidenced by increased support for European integration from individuals that identify as having been financially impacted from COVID-19. This finding of economic stress having an effect on perception of EU integration in a time of crisis supports the utilitarian theory presented.

Overall, this thesis and its findings have shed light on the importance of studying bottom-up preference formation in European Studies. With the knowledge that utilitarian motivations do in fact affect how individuals perceive integration, academics and politicians alike can structure the integration conversation around public opinion. Both national and EU decision makers can benefit. With a deeper understanding of utilitarian economic motivations, political decision makers can not only better react to shifting public opinion but alter agenda and policy to proactively address expected political environments. Practically, this study has demonstrated that economic stress on the individual does not go unnoticed and individuals value the EU for what it offers. The fact that evidence suggests individuals turn to the EU in times of stress highlights a beauty where supranational cooperation has meaning at the smallest level.

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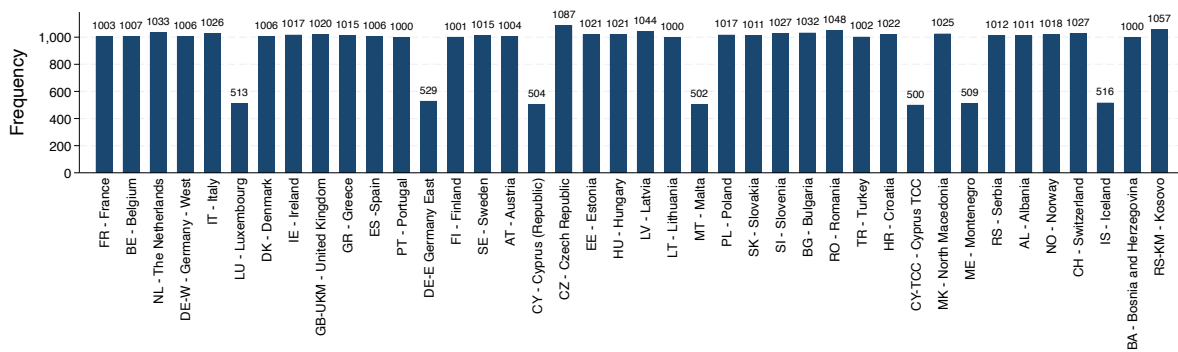
Appendix

Appendix 1: Additional Information & Descriptive Statistics

Countries included within analyses:

France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany*, Italy, Luxembourg, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia (EU 27). *Eurobarometer 95.3 splits Germany East and West (Models 1-3 maintain this coding. Model 4 merges the two under one “Germany”).

Fig. A1a: Distribution of Respondents by Country (EB 95.3)



Dependent variable (measuring integration) frequency distribution before and after recoding:

Fig. A1b: Distribution of Respondents: “More decisions should be taken at the EU level”(EB 95.3)

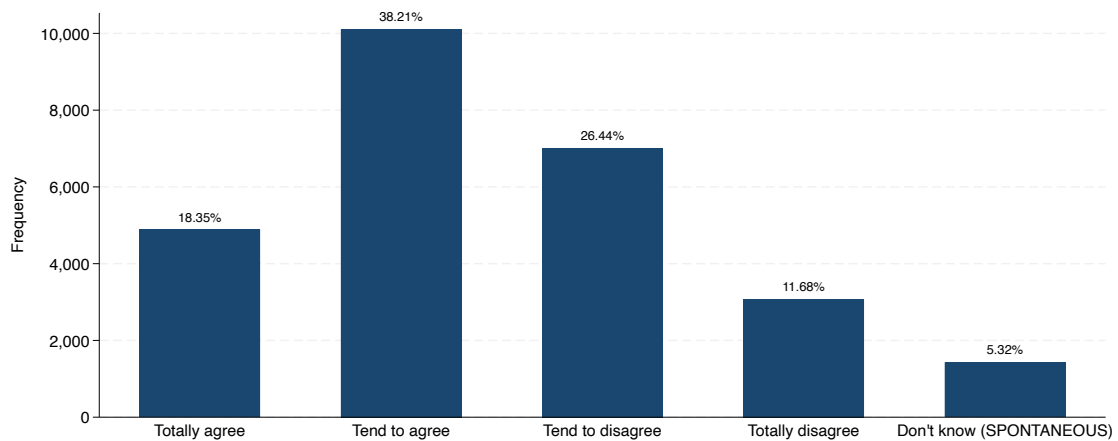
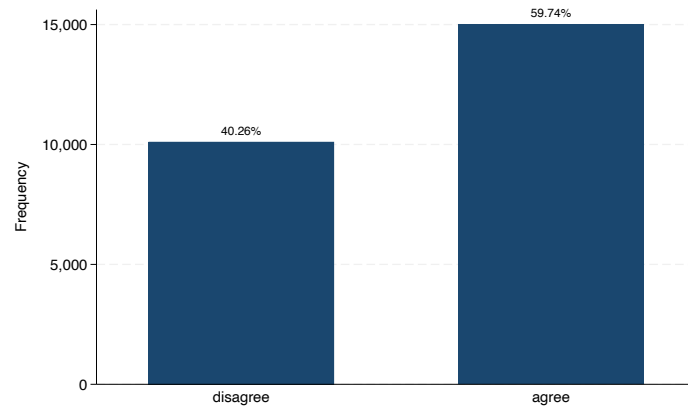


Fig. A1c: Distribution of Respondents: “More decisions should be taken at the EU level”(EB 95.3)



Independent Variable (COVID-19 impact) frequency distribution before and after recoding:

Fig. A1d: Distribution of Respondents: Serious financial consequence from COVID-19 (EB 95.3)

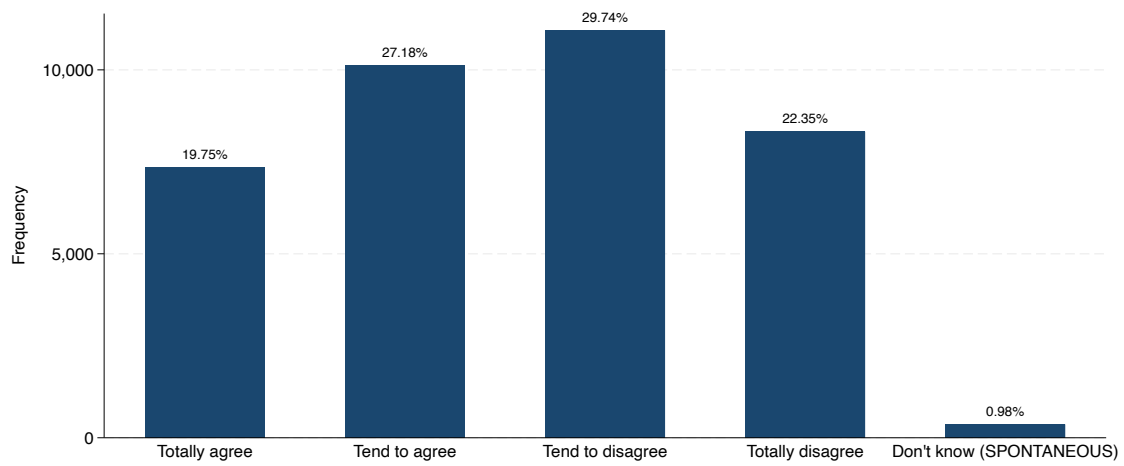
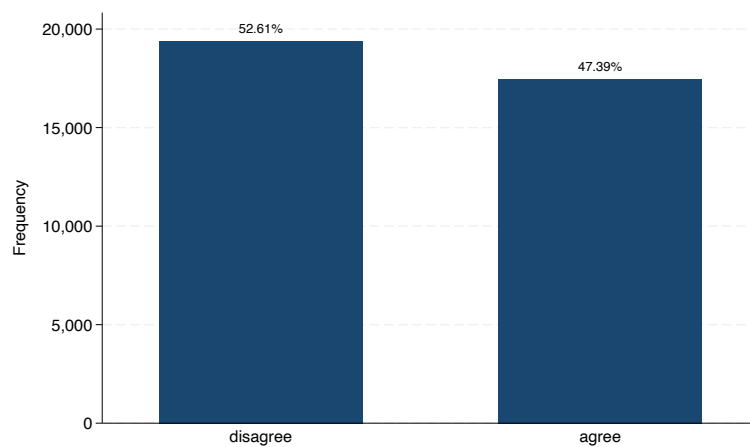


Fig. A1e: Distribution of Respondents: Serious financial consequence from COVID-19 (EB 95.3)



Appendix 2: Robustness

Table A2a: COVID-19 Impact Maintaining Original Categories

Variable	Model 5- Human Capital & COVID-19 Impact (Orig. Coding)
COVID-19 Impact Orig. (base totally disagree)	
Disagree	1.137 (0.132)
Agree	1.498*** (0.185)
Totally Agree	1.527*** (0.233)
Education (base low)	
Medium	0.951 (0.133)
High	0.862 (0.140)
Advanced	0.696* (0.147)
Occupation (base Unskilled Manual)	
Student	0.971 (0.196)
Unemployed	0.745 (0.141)
Retired	0.876 (0.138)
Other white collar	0.879 (0.171)
Management/Supervisors	0.832 (0.148)
Skilled Manual	0.927 (0.149)
Age (base 15-24)	
25-39	0.694*** (0.066)
40-54	0.580*** (0.068)
55-98	0.565*** (0.070)
Male (Gender)	
	0.971 (0.047)
Left	
	1.018 (0.143)
Right	
	0.852 (0.143)
Class (base Low)	
Lower Middle	0.879 (0.109)
Middle	1.248* (0.160)
Upper Middle	1.310* (0.202)
Higher	1.535** (0.330)

<i>Observations</i>	16,502
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Asterisks denote significance * $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$*
**Clustered by Country and use Eurobarometer (w1) weights*
**Display: Odds Ratio/Standard Error*

Table A2a provides a robustness check to Model 3 (Table 2) by running a logit with the original coding of *COVID-19 impact* (omitting the “don’t know” category). The original coding contains four categories expressing differing levels of agreement and disagreement to having experienced “serious financial consequence from COVID-19”. It is first worth noting that “disagree” does not return as significant. However, the results displayed support the paper’s main finding that those who identified as experiencing financial stress were more likely to prefer European integration. This is supported by the “agree” and “totally agree” categories returning as significant and with an odds ratio greater than one. Additionally, looking between the two categories of agreement shows that stronger agreement (moving from “agree” to “totally agree”) equates to greater support for European integration.