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VARIATIONS IN EUROPEAN IDENTITY

A quantitative analysis of changes in European identity among educational levels and geographical groups after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022

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Abstract

Multiple studies conceptualise European identity along the lines of social identity theory, as a collective group built on shared values, norms and solidarity, for which Europeans then can identify with. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has been shown to have had an impact on Europe and its residents, consequently causing an increase in European identity (Nicoli et al., 2024; Steiner et al., 2023). Current research has however not dwelled into details of how variations among societal groups might have been affected, such as assessing changes in variations among groups of individuals commonly studied in relation to European identity. This study therefore aimed towards addressing the research gap on the Russian invasions' impact on identity changes amongst the societal groups: educational attainment levels, geographical regions and border proximity. European Social Survey (ESS) data was utilised for a quasi-longitudinal study across two time-points, presenting an OLS regression analysis with interactive models, investigating changes in European identity variations amongst 61 483 respondents across twenty-four European states. The main findings indicated contradicting or non-significant results, leading to more questions than answers, Thus, opening for future research to contribute more knowledge of how identity may change in relation to crises. Furthermore, adding knowledge of how individuals amongst societal groups may seek out collective groups, for which they can identify with and feel a belonging to in times of uncertainty.

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1. Introduction

The 24th of February in 2022 will go down in history as the date when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which came as a shock to the world (Gehring, 2022, pp. 1492-1494), consequently causing a geopolitical crisis. The shock of the invasion, followed by the world trying to grasp the situation, resulted in multiple states turning their attention towards Europe. Whereas individuals within Europe turned towards each other, consequently indicated in Nicoli et al. (2024, p. 3084) and Steiner et al. (2023, p. 284) studies: that collective attachment to Europe increased, thus resulting in an enhancement of European identity.

There is however a gap in the literature, argued to be found in the lack of research investigating individual and geographical changes in group variations among educational attainment levels, geographical regions and border proximity to the geopolitical crisis, i.e., research focusing on these groups in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. As previous studies have primarily focused on whether there has been an overall increase in European identity (Nicoli et al., 2024), investigated specific educational levels on limited observations (Steiner et al., 2023) or conducted research focusing on the political perspectives of the invasion (Hooghe et al., 2024; Genshel, 2025; Oana, Moise & Truchlewski, 2025). The geopolitical crisis has been ongoing for over three years at the time of this study being carried out. The question has however not been asked at this moment, as to whether previous variations among and within societal groups might have shifted due to the Russian invasion? Could Europeans consequently have become more aligned in their attitudes towards European identity, thus creating a decrease of within-group variations? I therefore argue for the relevance of contributing further knowledge and understanding concerning the effects and influence of geopolitical crises on possible changes in identity variations. Specifically investigating how variations in European identity among educational attainment levels, geographical regions and border proximity to the geopolitical crisis might have been impacted by the Russian invasion.

The choice of focusing on these three groups is grounded in previous research indicating considerable variations in levels of European identity within the groups (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012; Mitchell, 2015; Matthijs & Merler, 2020). The contribution will add knowledge to previous studies having studied European identity in relation to other European events, such as the impact of the Eurozone crisis in 2009 (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016; Bergbauer, 2018, p. 3; Matthijs & Merler, 2020) and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Gehring, 2020;

Kiratli, 2024). Along with studies focusing on investigating individual-level characteristics of demographic-, socioeconomic and political groups, as well as macro aspects of geographical factors (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012; Agirdag, Huyst & van Houtte, 2012; Hakhverdian, van Elsas, van der Brug & Kuhn, 2013; Mitchell, 2015; Gehring, 2022). This study does therefore also have a purpose to test these previous indications of variations amongst educational attainment and geographical groups by conducting an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis with interactive models, analysing European Social Survey (ESS) data with respondents across twenty-four European states, from two time-points.

1.1. Aim

The aim of this master thesis is to investigate and address possible changes in levels of European identity variations among educational attainment levels and geographical groups of individuals, by comparing two time-points, before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. A total of twenty-four European states, equalling a total of 61 483 observations, are utilised in this study for the purpose of conducting a wide assessment across multiple European states. Where the aim and purpose lie in contributing to previous knowledge regarding impacts of geopolitical crises on societal attitudes towards European identity. The aim is divided in three primary parts with each part focusing on investigating changes after the invasion of Ukraine. The first (1) part is aimed at investigating variations within the educational group, secondly (2) to explore possible changes in variations between the Eastern and Western regions of Europe, and lastly (3) to address and investigate possible changes in European identity variations in relation to individuals residing in bordering states to the geopolitical crisis; Russia and/or Ukraine, compared to those who do not reside in bordering states.

2. Previous research and theory

This chapter and the following subheads will discuss previous research, theoretical frameworks and the empirical setting for which this study is built around. This is presented as a means of grasping the extent of this master thesis and the research gap it aims to address. The disposition will start by giving an overview of the theoretical framework and the concept of European identity, followed by previous studies of educational attainment- and geographical variations, as well as previous research of how impacts of crises affect changes in identity variations. Whilst the final subchapter will present the hypotheses for this study.

2.1 Social identity theory

Social identity theory is an important foundational and theoretical framework when discussing the subject of identity and how it is conceptualised, which is necessary to comprehend when studying the concept of European identity and to what extent it can be used to discuss and enlighten individuals identity formation and variations in identity. Social Identity Theory (SIT) is one of the primary theories which researchers apply in relation to studies on identity formation, where the theory argues for social identity, also called ‘self-categorisation’, as an individuals’ sense of belonging to a chosen socially constructed group. Individuals then develop feelings of an emotional attachment based on common values and shared goals within the collective group. It is often presented as individuals constructing a feeling of ‘us’ in comparison to ‘them’, where ‘them’ is represented by other groups (Tajfel, 1978, pp. 62-67; Tajfel, 1981, p. 255; Hogg, 2016, p. 6; Bar-Tal, 1998, pp. 94,112). Tajfel (1978, p. 62), one of the pioneers of social identity theory, described social identity in the lines of that part of individuals self-perceptions which evolves into individuals seeking to associate themselves with various social groups, for which they identify themselves as being aligned with.

Social identity theory is commonly applied as it aligns with the frequently utilised measurement of European identity, specifically an individuals’ emotional attachment to Europe (Sinnott, 2005, p. 212; Agirdag, Huyst & van Houtte, 2012, p. 199). Kuhn (2019, p. 1215) and Bellucci, Sanders and Serricchio (2012, pp. 61-62) does for example describe European identity as a concept originating from the theoretical framework of social- and collective identity. Collective identity is closely related and built on similar principals as social identity theory and is therefore mentioned here. European identity is hence recognised by them as a form of identity that goes

beyond national identity, meant to bring about perceptions of ‘us’, i.e., a feeling of belonging to a group or a community grounded in common interests. Sinnott (2005, p. 212) also discusses identity in a similar manner, and describes it as a matter of proximity to others and finding a space for where a person can belong and feel attached to, such as a specific group of individuals which one can identify itself as being a part of.

This study will focus on the measurement of identity perceptions among individuals, and how a circumstantial event such as a crisis, might impact or rather stimulate individuals' feelings of belonging to a collective group, such as how it is described by social identity theory. Which can then transform into what is relevant for this study: an attachment to Europe, in other words European identity (Bergbauer, 2018, p.15). Social identity theory will therefore be of foundational significance to comprehend the empirical setting.

2.2. European Identity

European identity started to develop as a concept in the 1970's as an integrated part in further advancing European integration, which evolved as Europe grew to become more directly tied to its residents (Eder, 2006, pp. 259-261; Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 7-9). European identity can also be discussed as European identification, where ‘identification’ is tied to an individual's process of later being able to ‘identify’ and feel an emotional attachment to a social group according to Erikson (1968, pp. 159-160). Following this argument, and having a standing point in social identity theory, the concept of European identity will be utilised throughout this study, rather than the wording of European identification, as the previous reflects better upon the purpose of investigating changes in identity variations in relation to social identity theory and societal groups.

Bergbauer (2018, pp. 18,22-24) describe European identity as a form of collective construction built together by individuals, tying back to the theoretical framework of social identity and by further detailing European identity as a fluctuating, socially constructed group of individuals within the geographical area of Europe with an emotional attachment to Europe. In other words, individuals who perceive a sense of belonging to a constructed group of equals with shared values and norms. These shared values can be drawn from what is often considered as ‘European values’; rule of law, human- and social rights, and democracy. Bergbauer (2018, pp. 1,18) does also argue for European identity as existing alongside national identity, not in

opposition to it, meaning that identity does not need to be one or the other. An individual can perceive itself as identifying with multiple collective groups. Such as Fiedler (2023, p. 27) argue that identity exists on multiple levels, such as identities on individual-, group- or national levels.

There have been indications over the years of transnational identity formation, such as studies on Eurobarometer data which show that over 50 percent of the survey respondents indicated feeling of belonging both to one's national identity, and European identity (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, p. 64). Which can be seen as giving weight to the important contributions of survey data in analysing variations among individuals and how various influential factors can impact individuals attachments across borders. Several studies focus on the concept of European identity and acknowledge it as a concept of substance where researchers, as described above, can assess fluctuations in European identity among individuals in relation to what may cause it by utilising survey data. Such as the reasonings behind why individuals may identify with higher levels of European identity in times of crises, or why certain social groups may indicate higher levels of European identity than others (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, pp. 61-62).

One aspect of similarity among large quantities of previous research on European identity is the measurement used to operationalise European identity. Some use the measurement of whether individuals *feel* or *identify* as European (Agirdag, Huyst & van Houtte, 2012, p. 205; Balcells, Tellez & Villamil, 2023, p. 355), whereas a larger quantity of studies utilise the measurement of 'attachment' (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, p. 62; Mitchell, 2015, p. 337; Gehring, 2020, p. 8; Royuela, 2020, p. 832; Nicoli, et al., 2024, p. 3076; Bauhr & Charron, 2024, p. 384). Royuela (2020, p. 832) describes the use of 'attachment' as a measurement of emotional sentiments or feelings of closeness to Europe, i.e., an individual's emotional attachment to their perception of Europe. Although acknowledging that there are varying operationalisations of European identity, each of them having their own limitations. Bauhr & Charron (2024, p. 384) discuss some of these limitations, such as the aspect of how individuals may have different perceptions of Europe, hence meaning that attachment to Europe can have various meanings among individuals. Sinnott (2005, pp. 221-222) does however argue that emotional attachment is one of the utmost suitable means of measuring European identity.

However, the concept has been under critique by some arguing that European identity is a fleeting concept with primary issues in the fact of the concept having varying measures, such

as whether it is measured through emotional attachment or in relation to national identity (Royuela, 2020, p. 832). It is of importance to reflect upon those who do not acknowledge European identity as a concept of significance, to also explain why this study does not agree with them. There are those who argue that the idea of a common identity lacks any real weight and that the lack of consensus acts as a limitation and weaknesses to studies of European identity. Critics do also argue for strong doubts in finding some sort of unity based on a social identity among the various European states, where they express the difficulties of the nation state and ethnic identity being too deeply rooted (see Eder, 2009, p. 433; Stråth, 2002, p. 388; Cederman, 2001, p. 163). These studies, and the critique against the concept of European identity, is acknowledged. However, this study does not agree with the criticism, on the basis of strong existing arguments in favour of the concept, such as valid and sound theoretical frameworks, along with a large quantity of peer reviewed research on the impacts of individuals attitudes towards Europe (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012; Kuhn, 2015; Hobolt & de Vries, 2016; Steiner, et al., 2023; Nicoli, et al., 2024; Genschel, 2025). An increase in European integration, and the growing interdependence among European states, has created stronger connections and linkages between the people of Europe. Hence making the studies of European identity more salient than ever (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). This study will thus focus on European identity as reaching across all European states, not solely bound to EU member states.

The concept is prominent in previous research relating to various crises which have had an impact on Europe, such as the Eurozone crisis (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016; Bergbauer, 2018, p.3; Matthijs & Merler, 2020), Covid-19 (Nicoli et al., 2024) and the Russian aggression (Gehring, 2022; Schulte-Cloos & Dražanová, 2023; Steiner et al., 2023; Chueri & Törnberg, 2024; Kiratli, 2024; Nicoli et al., 2024; Genschel, 2025). Where these studies then aimed at addressing whether, or how, European identity changed, showing indication of varying results. Covid-19 did for example have the greatest impact on increasing European identity amongst individuals who were closely affected by the pandemic (Nicoli et al, 2024, p. 3084). Meanwhile Gehring (2022, p. 1513) highlighted the Russian aggression as having an impact through threat perception, thus increasing European identity amongst those who felt threatened. The purpose of utilising European identity for this study lies in the aim presented earlier, of contributing further knowledge of how European identity variations change when being affected by a geopolitical event, specifically focusing on the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 on educational attainment levels, geographical regions and border proximity.

2.3. Explanations for variations among individuals

Studies of individuals feelings of European identity are quite extensive, and several of them use quantitative research methods, such as studies assessing individual-level attributes of demographics, socioeconomics and political characteristics which may influence or otherwise generate variations in attachments to Europe. These individual characteristics set out the basis of European identity studies, where identity is primarily measured through observational data, most frequently collected through surveys (Sinnott, 2005, p. 212). The following paragraphs will present previous research within the field of European identity studies on the individual level, with a primary focus on individuals educational attainment.

The theoretical concept of European identity is largely studied in relation to various events which may cause changes in variations among those who have an emotional attachment to Europe. Investigating these changes within European identity does primarily involve various individual level characteristics and influential factors, such as impacts of socioeconomic groups, e.g., individuals educational attainment where they assess the construction of identity formation in the early years of education (Agirdag, Huyst & van Houtte, 2012), as well as investigating how educational knowledge and the amount of years in school consequently may indicate an average increase in European identity (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, p. 68-69; Hakhverdian et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2015; Matthijs & Merler, 2020, p. 112; Steiner et al., 2023). Individuals perception of economic benefits has also been seen as having an influential impact, such as how the Eurozone crisis had an impact on decreasing levels of European identity amongst those with high income according to Matthijs & Merler (2020, pp. 111-113). Garry and Tilley (2009, pp. 362, 368-371) does also emphasise the socioeconomic aspects, both on the individual- and macro scale, as an influential factor on European identity variations as previous research has estimated that socioeconomic benefits have a substantial impact on collective identity changes.

Demographic groups, such as gender have for example shown to be quite non-linear, where women and men tend to display similar average mean, although women tend to be slightly more attached to Europe. Age is however disputed as some studies show similar tendencies among all age groups towards European identity (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, pp. 68-69; Agirdag, Huyst & van Houtte, 2012, p. 206), whilst others indicate varying within-group results of age (Matthijs & Merler, 2020, p. 105). Political groups are also of interest, such as political

influences (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, pp. 67-71; Schulte-Cloos & Dražanová, 2023, p. 12) or political standings (Oana, Moise & Truchlewski, 2025), which can be summed up to indicate vast variations depending on the empirical context and the question in hand. Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio (2012, pp. 62-70) does also emphasise the impacts of political interest, such as variations among political groups. As well as having a high political interest being associated with higher average levels of attachment to Europe. The background of these studies does to a large degree stem from the interest in wanting to grasp the foundational structure of how European identity is formed, perceived and varies among social groups. All these individual-level characteristics; demographics, socioeconomic and political attitudes, are common factors to include in an analysis measuring variations in European identity. Utilising control variables of demographic, socioeconomic and political characteristics in relation to studies of European identity is a common technique of identifying possible confounding social characteristics which may influence individuals attachment and perceptions in ways that can affect the outcomes of the performed study (Garry & Tilley, 2009, p. 371; Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, pp. 65-70; Matthijs & Merler, 2020, p. 108; Steiner et al., 2023, pp. 287-288; Bauhr & Charron, 2024, p. 385; Kiratli, 2024, p. 1703). Following paragraphs will go into further detail on the main individual-level characteristic of interest, education.

Agirdag, Huyst & van Houtte (2012) and Mitchell (2015) does for example study the beginning of social constructions by applying social identity theory, where they conduct studies on the rise of attachments to Europe during individuals educational years. The aim of their studies was to contribute more attention towards the constructed self and association to identities, and how this is impacted by the first years of education. Agirdag, Huyst and van Houtte (2012, p. 204) did for example utilise multiple levels in their conducted study, comparing variations among groups of school children on both an individual level, while also assessing variations among schools on the micro level. Thus, investigating the impact of both individual-level and micro-level factors. Erikson (1968, p. 128) similarly emphasised the importance of educational impressions in early school years relating to identity formation among individuals, thus pointing towards the significance of education.

Others, does on the other hand travel forwards in an individual's academic life, such as Mitchell (2015, p. 345) and Steiner et al. (2023, pp. 285-290,298), focusing on the aspect of attaining higher levels of education, and summarises both their studies by for one, emphasising the

positive effect of exchange studies through Erasmus. Secondly emphasising the overall impact of higher educational studies. Mitchell (2015) show that Erasmus exchanges is seen to on average contribute knowledge on the importance of activities and relations across territorial borders among higher tertiary education, where social identity can take form and change through interactions with other Europeans. Steiner et al. (2023, pp. 285-290,298) does on the other hand conduct their study in a similar empirical manner as this study by assessing the Russian invasion, although by utilising another time-period, another method and a smaller sample. They conduct two survey rounds among Erasmus students, and have similar results as Mitchell (2015), indicating that students undergoing an Erasmus education in Western Europe, had an average increase of higher level of attachment to Europe after the invasion, compared to before. Thus, also indicating that as threat perceptions became salient from an outside aggressor; the observations of their study then signalled higher sentiments towards European identity. Steiner et al. (2023) study is of relevance due the foundation they set out, which this study can further develop upon by further assessing variations amongst educational levels and the geographical regions of Eastern and Western Europe in relation to the Russian invasion.

Mitchell's (2015) and Steiner et al. (2023) studies does however only acknowledge higher tertiary education, whilst Agirdag, Huyst and van Houtte (2012) studied children of low ages. Therefore, excluding a vast sample of observations to investigate, such as individuals attaining educational levels in-between. Hakhverdian et al. (2013, pp. 532-533) highlights the importance of studies investigating variations amongst educational levels as these individuals are an important societal group for the future of every country. Aspects of educational levels are therefore of high relevance. Lower educational levels have e.g., been shown in previous studies to be empirically less prone to positive attitudes towards Europe. Having larger tendencies of for example being more Eurosceptic in relation to the EU. Whilst thus being more prone to nationalistic tendencies (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016, p. 420; Matthijs & Merler, 2020, p. 112), as they do not picture themselves as belonging to a larger transnational collective. Whilst higher levels of education have empirically been estimated to possess more positive attitudes towards European identity in previous research (Hakhverdian et al., 2013; Bauhr & Charron, 2024, p. 381; Mitchell 2015; Steiner et al., 2023, p. 298) drawing on the fact of greater possibilities being obtained to a greater extent by higher educational attainment. Such as greater access to transnational gains, e.g., studies abroad and socioeconomic benefits (Mitchell, 2015, p. 345; Deutschmann, Delhey, Verbalyte & Aplowski, 2018, p. 971).

One of the main interests for this study is to assess variations in education after the Russian invasion, in comparison to before the invasion. The interest is grounded in previous research indicating that the invasion has shown to have an impact of, on average, increasing the levels of attachment overall among individuals (Nicoli et al., 2024). Compared to how identity is otherwise known to not indicate rapid changes, as it is rather known to change at a slow pace (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 22). The focus of changes in variations at the individual-level for this study will therefore be educational attainment, explicitly the aspect of changes in variations among educational levels. The thought of assessing levels of educational attainments for the purpose of this study lies in above presented research. Where individuals who attain medium to lower levels of education are on average related to more scepticism towards European identity, whereas individuals with higher educations are on average more positive. This study aim test these previous results, where it is theoretically expected that variations between all educational levels will have been affected, thus anticipating an overall average increase in higher levels of European identity when assessing the aftermath of the Russian invasion. Drawing some of the theoretical argument from social theory and previous research on changes in identity variations during crises. Other possibly influential characteristics, such as demographics, further socioeconomic factors and political attitudes will be included to check for potential confounding effects.

2.4. Explanations for geographical variations

Geographical- and individual level factors are quite common to be used in harmony, as they collectively can indicate greater in-depth understandings of the subject as more influential factors are applied in the analysis (Agirdag, Huyst & van Houtte, 2012, p. 203; Bauhr & Charron, 2023, p. 387). This provides greater understandings of how not only individual aspects may present the entire picture, as they could become influenced by characteristics on the aggregated geographical level. Previous studies have for example shown that there are variations in European identity present among geographical groups, such as regional variations relating back to historical and cultural differences among European states, such as the Eastern and Western European divides (Bergbauer, 2018, pp. 118-119).

One way of measuring variations among countries, such as dividing them into geographical regions, is for example seen in the study by Matthijs & Merler (2020, pp. 102-108) where they utilised a dummy variable to differentiate between two geographical regions: South and North

of Europe. Where the argument behind the divide lies in historical aspects and empirical divisions between European regions, which also ties into Bauhr and Charron (2024) and Gehring's (2020; 2022) studies of how individuals can be shaped by their geographical area. Matthijs and Merler's (2020 pp. 102-108) argued that European identity follows with an individual's perception of the circumstantial gains it may acquire from the collective, i.e., the higher gains, the greater the possibilities are for positive attachments to Europe. Changes of outer circumstances, such as a crisis, can play an important role in how identity evolves. Their results indicated positive effects of the Eurozone crisis aftermath among individuals with high educational attainment and their attitudes towards European identity, across both North and South regions. Whilst lower educational attainment indicated signs of hesitation and withdrawing attitudes towards collective identity, primarily in the North. Their overall conclusion of the demographics of age and educational attainment in relation to geographical regions of North and South, indicated that individuals in the North of Europe were more prone to feel a collective identity in good times, whilst individuals in the South reflected the opposite, i.e., more positive attitudes towards a collective identity in times of hardship (Matthijs & Merler, 2020, pp. 110,112). These results indicated that there have been variations in attachment towards Europe based on both individual characteristics, including influential macro factors. The study is highly relevant for this paper as it presents previously researched effects of one form of crisis in relation to individuals socioeconomics, and geographical location.

Bauhr and Charron (2024) and Moise, Truchlewski and Oana (2024) used geographical variables as well, although in another way of measuring where individuals reside using geographical groups to show dimensions of European identity. Their studies argue for the relevance of including geographical factors to differentiate between country/regional specific perceptions, i.e., including the possible influential factor relating to regional residence. This can be related to what Steiner et al. (2023, p. 283) emphasise in their article, that the Russian aggression after 2022 has been argued to be of risk for bordering states, such as Poland and Finland as they are geographically close to the geopolitical crisis. Which implies that there are possibilities of changes in variations occurring among individuals dependent on the aspect of border proximity, e.g., due to instability and perceived threats in times of geopolitical instability. Bauhr and Charron (2024, pp. 380,385-390) study did primarily focus on the positive correlation between an individuals' area of residence in relation to border proximity, i.e., individuals who reside in societies in proximity to borders with another European state

have an increased likelihood of being influenced across borders. They also assessed whether individuals who reside in regions with low corruption and sound government settings indicate more positive effects of border proximity. Their study indicated higher chances of transnational/cross-border relations when individuals reside in areas close to borders of another European state, thus finding themselves on average more positive towards European identity, drawing parallels to social identity theory.

Although Bauhr and Charron (2023) investigate the relationship on a smaller level, among individuals at the regional level within countries, it nevertheless incited an interesting angle of how individuals are affected vis-à-vis the aspect of borders. The impact of regions on the country-level, such as assessing Eastern and Western Europe, has also been seen to indicate variations in attachments to Europe (Chueri & Törnberg, 2024, p. 4). Gehring (2020, pp. 3,8) argue that there are multiple regional factors which may cause variations in attitudes towards European identity in relation to the Russian aggression. For example, border proximity to Russia or historical ties to the Soviet Union among Eastern European states, whereas Eastern Europe already indicated higher levels of European identity before the Russian invasion. Gehring (2022, pp. 1493-1494) further elaborates on this argument in a later study, where threat perceptions may be perceived to a larger extent from regions with historical ties and border attachments to the aggressor. Hence implying that multiple Eastern European states may perceive the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 as a heightened external threat towards territorial safety, where these conditions may foster a stronger sense of attachment to Europe. Matthijs & Merler (2020, pp. 102-108) did for example investigate Northern and Southern regional divides within Europe, finding that there are large variations which need to be addressed, implying towards the importance of researching individuals within European regions when studying variations in European identity. This study will reoccur in the next chapter to be further elaborated and discussed in relation to crises.

This study does therefore draw inspiration from above presented research by not only applying individual-level measures, but by also using geographical predictors with a focus on geographical regions and border proximity, to estimate changes in European identity variations after the Russian invasion. Previous research shows that there are interesting and relevant factors of geographical relevance to account for when investigating crises and the effect it may have on individuals residing in various areas of Europe.

2.5. Times of crises and changes in identity

Previous research investigating crises and changes in identity has a central role behind the reasoning of conducting this study. Identity is known for changing at a slow pace (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 22), although it has been shown to change more drastically with the impact of various crises (Matthijs & Merler, 2020; Nicoli et al., 2024), therefore making it interesting to assess groups of individuals to investigate where these swift changes occur. The aim of this study, as discussed previously, is to investigate the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 by comparing two time-points, before and after the invasion. Which will fulfil the purpose of conducting an analysis investigating the effect that the geopolitical crisis is anticipated to have had on changes in European identity variations.

Europe has for the past decade faced multiple and various crises and will mostly likely continue to face various crises in the future (Ferrera, Kriesi & Schelke, 2024, pp. 706-707). Previous research can hence be categorised into multiple fields and subcategories, as well as overlapping fields of academia on studies assessing the effects of conflicts, crises and perceived threats, in relation to how it shapes and impacts identity (Fiedler, 2023; Steiner et al., 2023; Chueri & Törnberg, 2024; Nicoli et al., 2024). Following research below will develop on the empirical and theoretical frameworks surrounding studies of crises and identity.

Starting with a sociological theoretical framework, is the in- and outgroup theory, theorised by Stein (1976, pp. 145,165). In- and outgroups are developed in relation to crises, described as occurring when individuals perceive a common threat. This is theorised as resulting in raised cohesion within an established ingroup towards the perceived outgroup, somewhat like the previously discussed social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, pp. 62-67). This theoretical framework is of relevance to understand the possibility of changes in identity variations, consequently resulting in possible increases of attachments to Europe, especially in times of crises. Certain conditions do underline this theory, such as whether the threat is perceived by the entirety of the group, and whether there are possible solutions to the conflict for which the group can work towards collectively. This underlying theory of in- and outgroups could to some extent explain variations among groups of individuals, and how it may fluctuate in relation to external events of transnational crises (Steiner et al., 2023, pp. 284-285). The relevance of the presented theoretical framework is to be used alongside social identity theory, to further cement to theoretical reasonings behind conducting this study.

Tying back to the theoretical framework of social identity theory and in-out groups, comes the distinction of how Europeans may become more attached to Europe as a means of protecting the shared European values of rule of law, human- and social rights, and democracy (Bergbauer, 2018, p. 1). Discussions of democracy and the importance of states sovereignty has become salient as a reaction towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Steiner et al. (2023, pp. 283-284) argue that the fact of Ukraine being invaded as a democracy has raised the awareness and discussion of European values and norms, such as the importance of democracy (Bergbauer, 2018, p. 1). Which may cause an effect of a heightened attachment to Europe according to Steiner et al. (2023, p. 284). This heightened attachment to Europe can also be tied to the levels of threat perceptions individuals may be subjected to. Gehring (2020, p. 2) did for example conduct a study utilising survey respondents to test variations in identity trends in relation to the heightened Russian aggression in 2014. Although specifically looking at the EU, the results indicated that the perceived threat, along with the annexation of Crimea, resulted in a strong indication of higher levels of European Union identity, which can be connected to European identity to some extent. A considerable change from before, where stronger EU positive attitudes mostly related to specific benefits from the EU, such as economic benefits. While this the study indicated a more distinct turn towards feeling of belonging and community to an in-group in relation to a perceived threat from Russia.

Gehring (2022, p. 1490) conducted another similar study two years later, somewhat like Bauhr and Charron's (2024) study on border implications for individuals attitudes. As mentioned above, the time of both of Gehring's studies were in relation to the growing perceptions of an imminent Russian threat, where the result indicated a significant positive effect on attitudes towards European Union identity. Some results did have varying effects, such as variations in states with border proximity to the Russian territory. The overall results did however indicate that Russia was perceived as the out-group, and where individuals within the EU became more attached to the perceived in-group of equals, i.e., other Europeans. Hooghe et al. (2024) study indicated similar results where they estimated that the Russian invasion in 2022 had an impact on national political parties with historical ties to the Soviet Union, as well as an impact on those who are in close geographical proximity to the geopolitical conflict. These national political parties hence indicated higher levels of support for Ukraine, compared to those who are geographically distant. Whilst Balcells, Tellez and Villamil's (2023) study showed contradicting results, as the Spanish population indicated a direct effect of changing attitudes

in Spain in relation to the Russian invasion. They argued that there was increasing indications of consequences emerging among populations of countries in the periphery of conflicts, where individuals to a greater extent perceive external states conflicts as possible threats towards their own safety. Hence implying that the Russian invasion could possibly have resulted in an overall average impact on all Europeans, no matter the geographical distance to the geopolitical crisis.

The empirical setting for this study is built around the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, considered as a crisis with extensive geopolitical consequences. Where previous studies on the effects of crises have come to include theoretical frameworks of how conflict impacts identity, such as studies by Stein (1976), Gehring (2020; 2022) and Matthijs and Merler (2020). Others more closely in time, have now focused on changes in European identity in relation to the Russian invasion in 2022, such as Steiner et al. (2023) and Nicoli et al. (2024), which represents the previous research most closely aligned to this master thesis. Nicoli et al. (2024, pp. 3067, 3084-3085) conducts their study by utilising survey data to study the impact of crises, both the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion in 2022, on attitudes towards European identity. They emphasise the impact and effect of crises on strengthening collective identity, as they argue that one of the reasonings behind the higher degree of attachment to European identity was caused because by greater collective decision-making on the supranational level, with joint responses and actions towards both the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion in 2022. Nicoli et al. (2024) set out that European identity had an average increase overall among their sample of five European countries, both because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion. Whilst Steiner et al. (2023) study indicated that individuals who attain high levels of education in Western Europe, are on average more attached to Europe after the Russian invasion than before, as discussed in subchapter 2.3. This leaves behind multiple unanswered questions, such as the question of assessing variations among a larger number of observations and states, as well as assessing possible variations amongst social groups, where this study will focus on the relevance of educational attainment levels and the aspects of geographical groups.

Events, such as crises, are however quite peculiar to study whilst the crisis is ongoing, due to possibilities of swift changes. Especially crises which occur over extended periods of time, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The relevance of this type of research are highly salient currently as the Russian invasion in Ukraine is still ongoing, marking the third year of the invasion on the 24th of February 2025. This study will thus account for the time-period before

the Russian invasion (2020/2022) and after the invasion (2023/2024). The empirical setting presented by previous research on the effects of crises on how identity changes, gives relevance to the aim of this paper to further contribute knowledge to European identity variations among educational levels and geographical groups in relation to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

2.6. Hypotheses

The hypotheses below are framed and phrased as a means of fulfilling the aim of this study; to investigate the average changes in variations among educational levels and geographical groups of various individuals divided into two time-points of 2020/2022 and 2023/2024. Where all observations equalled 61 483 respondents, from twenty-four European countries.

H1a. Individuals attaining medium education will indicate an on average greater increase in attachment to Europe after the Russian invasion.

H0a(null). There is no relationship between the Russian invasion and change in educational level variations for medium education.

H1b. The highest levels of attachment to Europe are expected to persist among individuals attaining higher levels of education after the invasion.

H0b(null). There is no relationship between the Russian invasion and persistent high levels of attachment to Europe.

The above presented H1a and H1b are argued to be of relevance as they are motivated based on previous research which brought attention to the important aspects of educational attainment for changes in identity, as well as research acknowledging previous indications of variations among educational levels. Hypothesis 1a (H1a) will therefore test previous knowledge of variations among educational levels. This study theoretically hypothesise that the geopolitical crisis of the Russian invasion caused an effect of higher attained levels of attachment to Europe among all educational levels, decreasing previous variations. Causing a potential effect of greater change in variations among individuals who attain educational levels categorised as medium education. Whilst Hypothesis 1b (H1b) hypothesise that individuals attaining higher levels of education will be expected, as presented in previous research, to indicate the highest levels of attachment to Europe after the invasion. Both hypotheses are followed by a null

hypothesis which will be rejected if the anticipated relationship of H1a and H1b is estimated as supported (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018, p. 4).

H2. The average levels of attachment to Europe among individuals residing in Western European states are expected to increase after the Russian invasion.

H0₂(null). There is no relationship between the Russian invasion and increases of attachment to Europe among individuals residing in Western European states.

Hypothesis H2 above follows the same logic as the above presented hypotheses, whereas hypothesis H2 will focus on previous research on variations among individuals who reside in different geographical regions. Based on previous research, the possible influence of geographical regions and the effects of crises; following hypothesis is formulated to test the assumption of the Russian invasion having caused an extensive impact on Europe. Causing states at further geographical distances to indicate an average of higher levels of attachment to Europe after the Russian invasion. Although Hypothesis H2 anticipates higher levels of attachment to Europe after the invasion among Western European states, it is not said that Eastern European individuals did not indicate strong attachments to Europe since before, and after. Hypothesis H2 firmly wants to illustrate that European attachment is expected to have heightened among individuals who are at farther geographical distances from the crisis.

H3. Individuals residing in states bordering Russia and/or Ukraine are expected to indicate an average increase of attachment to Europe after the Russian invasion.

H0₃. There is not relationship between the Russian invasion and increases in attachment to Europe among those residing in bordering states to Russia and/or Ukraine.

Hypothesis H3 is introduced as a means of looking towards individuals closer to the crisis, theoretically constructed based on presented previous research on the impact of border proximity, transnational influences and threat perceptions on changes in identity. Hypothesis 3 tests the anticipated relationship between geographical border proximity to the geopolitical crisis having an effect of average increases after the invasion, in attachment to Europe amongst those who reside in states bordering Russia and/or Ukraine.

3. Data & Method

Following chapter will present the chosen data and method of analysis, which was utilised for the purpose of testing the hypotheses. This chapter will be dispositioned by firstly presenting the chosen data used to conduct the analysis. Further subchapters will present operationalisations of the dependent-, independent- and control variables. Finally, the chapter will conclude by presenting the chosen method of analysis and add further information on how the analysis was conducted, along with performed statistical assessments.

3.1. Data

The data utilised for this study is collected from the European Social Survey (ESS) data set, specifically the ESS survey rounds which were conducted in 2020/2022 and 2023/2024¹ (ESS ERIC, 2024). The purpose of utilising these years is due to the aspect of analysing groups of individuals after the time of the invasion, by comparing to before the invasion, as identity has been seen in previous research to change more drastically in relation to crises (Matthijs & Merler, 2020; Gehring, 2022; Steiner et al., 2023; Nicoli et al., 2024). Compared to how levels of identity are otherwise quite robust and slow at changing (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 22). In that regard, the years of 2020/2022 and 2023/2024 were chosen as the best fit to assess variations among individuals attitudes with some slight margins to before and after the invasion in 2022. The round utilised for the years of 2020/2022 was collected during a longer period than usual due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which is the reason behind smaller samples being collected in 2022 after the date of the invasion. This is however not seen as an issue for the analysis as most of the observations were gathered between 2020-2021, before the invasion (European Social Survey, 2022, 23rd of June).

The ESS conducts survey's every two years at a cross-national level across Europe, with the aim of measuring individual patterns of attitudes, feelings, beliefs and behaviour from randomised samples for innovation and research purposes. The surveys are conducted through interviewers in a face-to-face setting, except for round 10 where parts of the round were conducted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic². ESS surveys consist of two types of sections, where the core questions are designed for the purpose of tracking differences and variations

¹ Round 10 (2020/2022) and Round 11 (2023/2024)

² Round 10: face to face. Round 10SC: online (Covid-19)

over time, hence making it a suitable dataset for assessing two time-points. The sample selection of participants is randomised, with the exceptions of individuals having to be 15 years of age and above, and that there are no reoccurring individuals for each survey round for the purpose of cross-sectional sampling. They also follow the rules of suitable sample sizes, averaging at a minimum of 1,500 individuals per country (European Social Survey, n.d.).

Survey data is a good fit for a study wanting to assess individual level characteristics, although there are some limitations which needs to be addressed, such as social desirability bias. This bias can be explained as the occasion when individuals are not true to their answers when responding to surveys, i.e., when the response is not true to what they believe but rather respond what they think is wanted or 'more acceptable', for example due to societal norms. This is especially prevalent in the cases of surveys being collected face-to-face, causing a possible bias in responses due to adjustments of what is believed to either sound better to themselves, or to the personnel conducting the interview. It is hard to control for social desirability bias, and it is commonly addressed as a limitation that may be present in survey research. ESS surveys are conducted face-to-face, which increases the risk for social desirability bias to exist within the data, although they do limit the possibilities as the respondents answers are anonymous. They also minimise the possibilities of another limitation, nonresponse bias. This bias is controlled by setting a minimum target of 70% for country responses (European Social Survey, n.d.). The applied questions which will be used as measurements for this study are not viewed as being at high risk of social desirability bias, e.g., by not being sensitive to societal norms (Larson, 2019, pp. 534-536). However, it is still of relevance to acknowledge the possible social desirability bias that could exist in the dataset. Another limitation for this study is the limitation of generalisability, this is because of the two time-points not consisting of the same observations/ individuals. Meaning that this study cannot compare the same group of individuals across time, the measure purely lies in investigating and estimating the average attachment to Europe across a cross-sectional sample of individuals.

Furthermore, the data chosen for the years of 2020/2022 and 2023/2024 made twenty-four European states available for utilising in this study, hence making it possible to conduct a quasi-longitudinal comparison across two time-points among the large sample size (N= 61 483) of individuals. Thus, having the ability to assess attitudes among groups of individuals across time, while maintaining the cross-sectional character of the ESS dataset. Only analysing available

EU member states was tried as an initial test, where the most significant change was indicated as a higher r-squared value³. The choice of utilising all available European states, not limiting the sample to the European Union (EU), enhances possibilities of conducting a more broad and nuanced study. This study does also recognise European identity as being found beyond EU members, as European identity is not limited to the political membership of the EU. Please view Table 1. depicting all selected countries, including mean attachment to Europe before and after the invasion, as well as *Appendix A. Figure 1* for a visualisation of attachment to Europe across the accounted years of interest, 2020-2024. Note that the focus of this study is not aimed towards specific countries, but the overall change in variations among European groups.

Table 1. Average mean attachment to Europe before and after the invasion, by country

Country	Before	After	Observations (N)	
Austria	5.967	6.731	3 114	
Belgium	5.988	5.801	2 438	
Croatia	5.966	6.120	1 925	
Cyprus	4.905	5.360	1 097	
Finland	6.398	6.508	2 873	
France	6.412	6.718	2 984	
Germany	6.652	6.843	8 174	
Great Britain	6.310	6.215	1 939	
Greece	4.805	5.080	2 639	
Hungary	5.380	5.346	2 593	
Iceland	5.931	6.117	1 489	
Ireland	7.366	7.013	2 292	
Italy	6.497	6.133	2 813	
Lithuania	5.896	6.344	1 898	
Netherlands	6.221	5.974	2 654	
Norway	5.775	6.099	2 533	
Poland	5.991	5.843	2 378	
Portugal	6.422	6.586	1 846	
Serbia	6.297	6.772	1 627	
Slovakia	6.632	6.853	1 814	
Slovenia	3.642	3.775	1 840	
Spain	5.858	6.651	3 000	
Sweden	6.110	6.075	3 249	
Switzerland	6.404	5.948	2 274	
Total:	24	143,8	146,9	61 483

The choice of this specific dataset in relation to the chosen time-points can be seen as current in the standards of academia, however, the situation at hand may quickly change, i.e., that future

³ R², only EU member states: 0.1057.

data may endure many changes in short periods of time (Genschel, 2025, p. 6). This needs to be acknowledged when assessing a specific geopolitical event. It will be influential when the results are discussed, such as whether the results can be viewed as long- or short-term effects. On the other hand, it is not the purpose of this study to find results of long-term effects but rather to investigate the crisis average effect on changes in identity variations. Following three subchapters will present the chosen variables, operationalised into measures of various characteristics and influential factors for the purpose of conducting an appropriate analysis to test and fully comprehend the empirical context (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, pp. 38-39), as well as for the purpose of testing the hypotheses and fulfilling the aim of this study.

3.1.1. Operationalisation of the dependent variable

The dependent variable for this study is measured as emotional attachment to Europe, which is commonly used as a measure for European identity. The variable is defined and measured through the European Social Survey (ESS) as emotional attachment to Europe, outside of individuals own national identity, which is used as a core question in each survey round: “And how emotionally attached to you feel to Europe?”. The first question, leading to the main variable, asks the respondents how emotionally attached they feel towards their own country, which is then followed by the question of “And how emotionally attached do you feel to Europe?”. Where the latter is hence used for the purpose of this analysis. The respondents are then able to choose an answer from a scale of 0-10. The variable is hence measured as an ordinal scale from 0-10, where 0= “Not at all emotionally attached” and 10= “Very emotionally attached”. The variable is originally coded as ‘atcherp’ but was renamed ‘attachment’ in Stata to ensure clarity thru the analysis, while preserving the scale from 0-10 (Table 2.) for the purpose of not losing valuable data variation (European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure, 2024, pp. 20-21).

Table 2. Attachment to Europe, European identity

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev.	(N)
attachment	0	10	6.1477	2.4994	61 483

The operationalisation of attachment to Europe is appropriate and methodologically comprehensive to assess cross-time variations among groups of individuals. Hence, creating a sound operationalisation for testing the hypotheses. Please view *Appendix A. Table 12* to view

the average mean of attachment to Europe by country, which will give an overview of the variation among the selected twenty-four European states. Previous research utilising the measurement of European identity through the usage of emotional attachment does also remain as the most consistent and validated measure. The measure does also align with social identity theory, which gives emphasis to emotional aspects of belonging to collective groups, in this case, European identity (Sinnott, 2005, pp. 221-222; Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, p. 62; Mitchell, 2015, p. 337; Gehring, 2020, p. 8; Royuela, , p. 832; Nicoli, et al, 2024, p. 3076). Hence the decision of utilising the ESS question “And how emotionally attached to you feel to Europe?” as the operationalised measurement of European identity.

3.1.2. Operationalisation of the independent variables

This chapter will be dispositioned following the order of the presented hypotheses in chapter 2.6, hence starting with the main independent variable of two time-points, i.e., before and after the Russian invasion, followed by educational levels utilised to test H1a and H1b, moving on to region for H2 and finally geographical border proximity for H3.

The main independent variable for the purpose of this study is time, specifically the period before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This is operationalised by generating a binary dummy variable which distinguish between two time-points, before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. ‘After the invasion’ has the meaning of ‘after the date of which the invasion started’, i.e., the 24th of February 2022, accounting for the invasion still being active at the time of this study in the spring of 2025. The dummy variable was named ‘dummy_after’ and is constructed and generated in Stata as a binary dummy variable of two values. The value of “0= Before the invasion”, based on data collected in 2020/2022 and the value of “1= After the invasion”, based on data collected in 2023/2024.

Table 3. Dummy variable, measure for before and after the Russian invasion

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	(N)
dummy_after	.45584	.49805	61 483

The ESS dataset allows for combining two or more survey rounds into one dataset, hence making it possible to maintain the cross-sectional character of the dataset, while making it possible to conduct a quasi-longitudinal analysis and compare attitudes among individuals across twenty-four European states. Please view *Appendix C. Table. 14.*, for a visual table

depicting attachment to Europe before and after the Russian invasion, by country and t-test. The operationalisation of the dummy variable does also constitute as a suitable measure for investigating variations and differences among groups of individuals at two time-points, having relevance for the geopolitical event in question. The variable will be presented by itself, as well as being used to generate interaction variables for all three hypotheses. Inspiration was partly drawn from Steiner et al. (2023, pp. 290-292) study as they utilised a similar measure for differentiating between two points in time. However, it should be acknowledged that the results of this analysis will not be adequate to draw conclusions on causality, as there could be several lesser circumstantial events which may have had an impact on individuals attitudes towards European identity.

The second independent variable is education, measured through the original ‘eised’ variable in the ESS dataset, which was renamed ‘education’ for the purpose of easier interpretation of the regression outputs. The variable education is structured as measuring educational levels, checking for the highest attained educational level among the respondents, with the levels based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). It is structured as a categorical variable, asking respondents for: “Highest level of education, ES – ISCED”, where the respondents then opt for the fitting level matching their educational attainment, ranging from values 1-7 and value 55= Other, which remains from the original ESS coding.

Table 4. Operationalised variable edu, educational levels

Variable	Mean	Std. dev	(N)	
education	2.2555	.5510	61 483	
Original levels	Generated levels	Percent	Min	Max
Less than lower secondary	Low education	5.67	0	1
Lower secondary				
Lower tier upper secondary	Medium education	63.10	0	1
Upper tier upper secondary				
Advanced vocational				
Lower tertiary education	Higher education	31.22	0	1
Higher tertiary education				
Other	<i>Removed as missing</i>	x		

The variable was recoded into three measurable levels of educational attainment (see Table 4.) to assess variations in attachment to Europe, comparing before and after the Russian invasion. Preserving the seven separate categories was not necessary as educational levels are often merged into more comprehensive educational attainment levels (Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio, 2012, p. 69). The recoding of the variable means that it captures variations in attachment to Europe among individuals, dividing the observations into three educational levels, holding low education as the reference point. Stata was then told to recognise this variable as categorical (i.education), which thereby ensures that the variable is treated in a way that each category becomes a dummy within itself (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018, p. 252). Note that all following categorical variables are treated the same way. This variable is chosen as the best possible measure of variations among educational levels because of its structure, cross-sectional availability to compare groups of individuals among the European states and is consistently applied within similar research. The educational variable will be used to test Hypothesis H1a and H1b by being merged into an interaction variable in relation to the first independent variable, dummy_after. Further information will follow in subchapter 3.1.3.

The third independent variable is operationalised, generated and constructed as a binary dummy variable measuring the defined geographical regions of Eastern and Western Europe, dividing the twenty-four utilised European states and their observations into the suitable region of which they are acknowledged as belonging to (Eder, 2006, pp. 264-265). The binary dummy variable was generated as a macro/geographical variable, coded as geo_region, which serves the purpose of clustering observations into two values of 0-1, where 0= East (Eastern European states) and 1= West (Western European states), see Table 5 below.

Table 5. Geographical regions, East – West

Variable	Mean	Std. dev	(N)
geo_region	.7710	.4201	61 483
0 = East	Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia and Slovakia		
1 = West	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland		

Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio (2012, pp. 66,69-70) argue that macro-level variables are important as contextual factors to consider when conducting a study of changes in European identity variations among groups of individuals situated in multiple European states. Some studies can therefore be seen to include geographical variables in their analysis, either as independent variables or additional control variables (Matthijs & Merler, 2020; Gehring, 2022). The operationalisation of measuring two geographical regions serves the purpose of testing Hypothesis H2, whether Western European states indicate an on average greater increase in attachment levels to Europe after the Russian invasion, in comparison with Eastern states. This independent variable will therefore be presented by itself, as well as being included in an interaction term, thus generated into an interaction variable with the independent variable `dummy_after`. Further information will follow in subchapter 3.1.3. Limitations does however exist surrounding this measure of geographical regions, such as a limited representation of Eastern states due to non-availability of states for the survey rounds used in this study. They total sample of the Eastern regions make up for 25.07%, which could possibly lead to issues with generalisability and statistical significance.

The fourth independent variable is generated as a binary dummy variable, `geo_proximity`. Which was generated to test Hypothesis H3 by being presented by itself, as well as being generated into an interaction variable in relation to the independent variable `dummy_after`. `Geo_proximity` is a generated binary dummy variable based on the ESS dataset, which measures the twenty-four European states and whether they border Russia and/or Ukraine. The reasoning behind this measure lies in previous research in Chapter 2.4 and 2.5. Where individuals who are in proximity to the ongoing geopolitical conflict could be hypothesised to have been more affected, in comparison with those individuals who reside in states at geographical distances (Gehring 2022, p. 1490). The variable assesses generated clusters of observations within states that border Russia and/or Ukraine. In other words, the variable measures individuals border proximity to the geopolitical crisis, hence the used wording of geographical border proximity, as the variable measures individuals within states. The dummy variable contains two binary values, 0= Not close, and 1= Geographical border proximity (see Table 6.). A map of the world (Worldometer, n.d.) was exploited to distinct between states which does or does not border to Russia and/or Ukraine. It is important to note that although Norway borders Russia in the far North, the country of Norway has been chosen to be excluded from geographical border proximity for the purpose of measuring the effects of border proximity on individuals. The

choice was carefully made based on previous research (Talleraas & Koch, 2024; Holm-Hansen & Aasland, 2024, pp. 17, 29-30) and theoretical arguments due to the region being isolated in the periphery, not having an extensive border compared to others, as well as having limited geopolitical relevance for the specific geopolitical crisis; the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Table 6. Dummy variable, measure for border proximity to Russia and/or Ukraine

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev.	(N)
geo_proximity	0	1	1.1879	.39067	61 483
Not close (=0)	Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland				
Geographical border proximity (=1)	Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia				

The variable clusters individuals on an aggregated level (by region). Meaning that individuals who reside in countries bordering Russia and/or Ukraine will be given the value of 1. Remaining 19 states are given the value of 0 (see Table 6.), which acts as the reference point. The inclusion of both Russia and Ukraine is based on the geopolitical crises being rooted in the Russian aggression, while being primarily played out through the invasion of Ukraine. Please view *Appendix C. Table. 14.*, for an informative table of attachment to Europe before and after the invasion by country, including average means, total change and an executed t-test for significance. The variable geo_proximity was generated as a means of being presented by itself but primarily as being utilised in relation testing Hypothesis 3 of which includes the need of an interaction term. Following subchapter will go into detail on the three interaction terms for this analysis, which will exploit all four independent variables.

3.1.3. Interaction terms

The interaction terms for this study are a necessary means of being able to investigate and assess changes before and after the invasion, as this study anticipated a conditional relationship between the measure of time after the invasion, and the three groups of interest to investigate (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, p. 347; Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018, p. 256). This means that the time aspect of before and after needs to be put into a conditional relationship to each of the

variables separately to test all three hypotheses. The interaction variables are thus motivated to be of relevance due to the anticipated moderating impact of the invasion (dummy_after) on the three groups of education, geographical region and border proximity. Interaction variables were therefore generated as a means of testing this anticipated moderating effect.

Table 7. Interaction variables

Variables	Interaction variable	Min	Max
dummy_after	(ref. before # low education)	0	1
x	after# medium education	0	1
education	after # high education	0	1
dummy_after	(ref before # east)	0	1
x geo_region	after # west	0	1
dummy_after	(ref before # not close)	0	1
x geo_proximity	after # geographical border proximity	0	1

The interaction variables make it possible to investigate the cross-level interaction between these variables in relation to the time-point 2023/2024, hence making it possible to investigate changes in variation after the Russian invasion. Where it is anticipated that the time aspect will have a moderating effect on changes in educational-, regional- and proximity variations. The reference points for each of the interaction variables equal the opposite of what it tested, for example the reference point of education is tested against before to after the invasion (before # low education). So, the interaction variable does therefore measure the effect of the Russian invasion on low education, comparing from before the invasion to after the invasion, thus having an impact on the other two educational levels as they are compared to low education. The same logic is applied to all interactions.

3.1.4. Control variables

The control variables for the conducted analysis are based on the presented relevance of individual-level control variables in relation to European identity studies in Chapter 2.2 and 2.3, and macro-level control variables in Chapter 2.4 and 2.5. All control variables will follow a specific order in the regression table, which is based on a categorical order of demographics, socioeconomics and political attitudes (see Table 8.). EU membership, which is commonly controlled for in previous research, was considered, generated, and tried as a possible control variable. It became evident in Stata that the independent variable geo_region and EU

membership overlapped each other, hence implicating the results through high multicollinearity. The theoretical reasoning behind this is due to most of Western European states being members of the EU, hence an overlap in the variables as their measurements align in relation to the dependent variable. Therefore, the choice was made to exclude EU membership as a control variable from the analysis.

All control variables are collected and generated using available data and information from the ESS dataset. They all serve the purpose to make the results more reliable and generalisable, limiting the possibility of confounding factors. Some variables have been reversed to better suit the theoretical angle of the analysis, meaning that some variables were originally coded as ranging from positive to negative values. Table 8. displays the descriptive statistics of each control variable and the correct order of which it will be displayed in the regression table (see Table 10.).

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of utilised control variables

Control variables	Min	Max	Mean	Std. dev	(N)
Gender (ref. male)	0	1	1.5117	.49986	61 483
Age	15	90	51.600	18.060	61 483
Born in country (ref. yes)	0	1	1.0937	.29150	61 483
House-hold income (ref. low)	1	3	2.0582	.74104	61 483
Political interest (ref. not interested)	1	4	2.5402	.89749	61 483
Placement on left-right political scale	0	10	4.9633	2.3294	61 483
How satisfied with the way democracy works in country	0	10	5.5354	2.5691	61 483

Note. .a= Refusal*, .b = Don't know* and .c = No answer* were excluded as missing values.

Firstly, this study considers demographic characteristics as necessary control variables due to the analysis being built around individual level data (Bauhr and Charron, 2024, p. 385). Gender is measured through ESS as the variable 'gndr' but was renamed 'gender' in Stata for easier interpretation. The variable is coded as a binary dummy variable, which was recoded from ranging between 1-2 to range between the values of 0= Male and 1= Female, where Male will act as the reference point. The same logic will follow for all categories, where the lowest value will be used a reference point for all variables, apart from continuous variables. 'Agea' is the

next in order, a continuous variable in ESS which measures respondents age, where individuals (N) ranges between the ages of 15-90. The variable was renamed age, and controls for how European identity varies among ages. The last demographic control variable is recoded as 'borncountry', originally 'brncntr', i.e., whether the respondent is asked to answer whether they are born in the country of residence or not. The categorical variable is a binary dummy variable, ranging from 0= Born in the country, to 1= Not born in the country, originally having the values of 1-2.

Secondly is the chosen aspect, which is read in the ESS codebook as "A household's total net income, all sources" renamed 'hh_income', while originally coded as 'hinctnta'. The original variable ranges from a scale between 1-10, representing deciles of 10 income categories. The choice was made to merge some of the values by recoding it into a scale of three values, 1= Low income, 2= Medium income, and 3= High income, making the variable more comprehensive for the purpose of controlling for income variations and attachment to Europe. Value 1 (Low) will constitute as the reference point, whereas value 2 and 3 will be treated in relation to value 1 as separate binary dummy values within their categories.

Thirdly, is the aspect of political attitudes in relation to individuals attachment to Europe. By adding measures for political attitudes, the analysis controls for the potential impact it might have on the primary analysis. This is hence controlled by adding the following three control variables. First, political interest which defines to what degree individuals perceive their own comprehensive interest in politics by asking respondents "How interested in politics", which is measured through the variable 'polintr'. The categorical variable was recoded to reverse the order of values to better suit the analysis, resulting in the scale of responses equalling, 1= "Not at all interested", 2= "Hardly interested", 3= "Quite interested", 4= "Very interested". Value 1 will be the reference point, whereas value 2, 3 and 4 will be treated in relation to value 1 as separate binary dummy values within their categories. Secondly, the variable of 'lrscale', which measures individuals perceptions of where they perceive themselves as fitting on the bipolar political scale "Placement on left right scale", measuring from 0= Left to 10= Right. The variable controls for individuals political placement in relation to the primary analysis. The third control variable measures political attitudes of whether an individual is satisfied with "How satisfied with the way democracy works in country". The variable is named 'stfdem' and ranges from of 0= Extremely dissatisfied to 10= Extremely satisfied. The relevance of this

control variable is related to the theoretical assumption of these questions being sparked in relation to a geopolitical crisis where an authoritarian state invades a sovereign democratic state (Steiner et al., 2023, pp. 283-284).

3.2. Method

This study will utilise an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis with interaction terms, also referred to as interactive models by Kellstedt & Whitten (2018, p. 256). The analysis introduces all interaction terms by generating interaction variables (see Table 7.), by utilising the four independent variables. The justification of utilising this method lies in the argument of an OLS regression being one of the best fitted methods for an analysis of individual-level survey data, where one can investigate the average variations among social groups and the relationship between applied measures, as well as being able to differentiate between two time-points by using interactions to assess possible correlations (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, pp. 332, 342-353; Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018, pp. 256, 271). All the work of processing selected variables and the executed coding was conducted in the coding program Stata 18.0 (StataCorp, 2025).

The initial idea was to utilise a multilevel regression analysis, with the purpose of combining individual-level data with macro-levels. The purpose was to analyse possible correlations between the two levels of analysis, that is, the possible effect of macro variables on individual level relations to the dependent variable, attachment to Europe. The thought of the two levels of analysis was due to the possibility of individuals clustering on country or regional levels. However, it became evident that individuals were not clustered on the aggregated level during diagnostic checks, where the results indicated low intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) when checking for both country⁴- and regional⁵ level. Hence the exclusion of utilising a multilevel analysis, and the choice of an OLS regression instead, as it was more sufficient for the purpose of this study.

Instead, dummy variables will be utilised to account for possible significances of variations across geographical regions and border proximity to Russia and/or Ukraine. Even though there were indications of low clustering, the choice was made to test for country-fixed effects as well in the OLS regression with interaction terms. However, country-fixed effects were ultimately

⁴ Clustering, ICC value: 0.0412

⁵ Clustering, ICC value 0.0017

excluded from the analysis as there was no substantial clustering within countries, as well as within-country changes not being relevant for this analysis as the focus lies in an overall examination across states, not within. There were also substantial changes being made to the geographical variables depending on the country of reference for the country-fixed effect, which constituted as the main problem. There were also indications of high multicollinearity between the measure of country-fixed effects and the geographical variables, which was supported by a VIF test⁶. This means that the relevant geographical variables; geographical regions and border proximity, accounts for the examination of variations across states by grouping them by geographical relevance. Please view *Appendix D. Table 15.*, if interested in the test of applying country fixed effects to the OLS regression, note that the country dummies are suppressed in the table.

The final regression, which is displayed in Chapter 4 (see Table 10), consists of four models, ranging from 2-5. Model 1 is found in *Appendix B, Table 13.*, which displays the simple binary regression between European identity (attachment to Europe) and the main independent variable of time in relation to the Russian invasion (before/after). Each model has the purpose of adding interaction variables which are clustered around the hypotheses and operationalisations. Model 2, 3 and 4 has the purpose of adding the interactions needed to test for hypothesis H1a, H1b, H2 and H3. Model 5 will then include all control variables presented in subchapter 3.1.4. The dataset became restricted when including all models, meaning that the final model set the number of observations for the whole analysis to a total of 61 483 observations. All observations will thus be equal across models to ensure that the same number of observations are compared to each other.

The hypotheses will be tested one at a time, controlling for the outcome of the regression analysis and testing it against each hypothesis (see Table 9.), with the aim of being able to reject the null hypotheses. For one of the hypotheses to be supported, it is necessary for the chosen variable in relation to the hypothesis to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating the correct anticipated direction of effect, as well as indicating a sufficient correlation coefficient estimate. A sufficient coefficient estimate can vary as coefficient ranges between the values of -1.00 – 1.00, where the latter represents a perfect linear relationship (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, p. 326). If the variable is not regarded as too close to 0.00, and fulfil the other criterions,

⁶ Highest VIF equalled 26.30. Mean VIF equalled 3.86.

then the hypothesis should be regarded as being supported by the OLS regression outcome. In conclusion, the conducted OLS regression analysis with interaction terms ensures the possibility of testing the three hypotheses of educational attainment, geographical regions and border proximity. Hence ensuring the aim and purpose of this study to contribute to the research gap on the effects of the Russian invasions impact on changes in variations among these groups of individuals. Please view Table 9 below for an informative reminder of the anticipated outcome of the analysis.

Table 9. Reminder of anticipated outcome

Hypothesis	Focus	Expected effect	Main variables
H1a	Time x Education	Individuals attaining medium education will indicate increased attachment to Europe after the invasion	dummy_after# education
H1b	Time x Education	The highest increase of attachment to Europe is expected to persist among individuals attaining high education after the invasion	dummy_after# education
H2	Time x Region	Individuals residing in Western Europe have increased attachment to Europe after the invasion	dummy_after# geo_region
H3	Time x Border Proximity	Individuals residing in bordering states indicate increased attachment to Europe after the invasion	dummy_after# geo_proximity

3.2.1. Statistical assessments

There are however assessments which needs to be addressed when conducting this method of analysis. Conducting a sufficient and generalisable OLS regression analysis with interactive models also involves the necessity of conducting statistical assessments to ensure that the analysis produces reliable results. Linearity is the first one, which is not as relevant for this study as most variables constitutes of dummies, essentially meaning that the analysis is not focused on finding a linear relationship. However, three control variables are of continuous character; age, lrscale and stfdem, which means that these were subjected to a lowess smoother plot test to check for linearity. The tests did not show any signs of the variables having a non-

linear relationship and were therefore suitable to remain as continuous variables for the analysis. Further assessments are to address possible statistical errors that are necessary to be controlled for, such as issues of multicollinearity or indications of potential heteroscedasticity (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, pp. 346-352).

All necessary assessments were conducted, which included statistical checks for multicollinearity⁷, robust standard errors to control for heteroscedasticity, as well as checks for normal distribution of errors and influential outliers. The interactive models are accepted to indicate higher collinearity which resulted in seemingly high multicollinearity, which is expected when the used independent variables for the interaction variables overlap themselves, meaning that it is inevitable. The VIF score is therefore not seen as an issue but should be acknowledged when interpreting the standard errors of the interaction term, as being cautious when interpreting the results (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018, p. 270). The robust standard error check did correct for some small indications of heteroscedasticity with all variables accounted for and will therefore be used in the last Model (5) in the main regression table. Concluding that there were no indications of significant errors, except for the multicollinearity aspect, ensures sound estimates of the outcome presented by the conducted OLS regression analysis with interactive models. The normal distribution was found to be sound and the check for influential outliers showed that there were some outliers, although none of concern. When conducting analyses where observations are individuals, it is important to be careful of whether to remove outliers as they do reflect reality.

One check was made after the regression outcome had been interpreted, a ‘margins dydx’ check to indicate marginal means within the three educational levels after the invasion. The margins check was used to show the marginal means within low, medium and high education after the Russian invasion, including all other variables. Please view Table 11. in subchapter 4.1.

A two-tailed t-test was conducted on the relationship between attachments to Europe before and after the invasion, to assess both changes, variations per country and statistical significance. As running a t-test of the total change and statistical significance per country gives an interesting insight into country variations (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, p. 322; Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018, p. 204). Please view *Appendix C, ‘Table 14. Average attachment to Europe*

⁷ Mean VIF: 5.49.

before and after the invasion, by country' for an informative table of variations by country. The t-test indicated interesting variations, with a statistical significance among fourteen European states, meaning that they indicated a significant change in attachments to Europe across time-points, not including the effects of any other factors. Whilst the remaining ten states did not indicate a significant change across time-points. This could e.g., be due to small changes, such as Slovenia which indicated a small negative change of -0.035. Other influential aspects when comparing two groups (time-points) can also be sample size or high standard errors (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018, pp. 177-178). The results of the two-tailed t-test show that there was not a unison change among all European states, which further strengthens the importance of assessing geographical variations. As well as the importance of involving more influential factors into the analysis, such as individual-level characteristics, to conduct a more nuanced analysis.

4. Results

This chapter will conduct a detailed analysis of the results of the presented OLS regression with interactive models (see Table 10.) and testing the hypotheses. The chapters disposition is separated into four subheads, where each subhead will present an analysis of the regression outcome and test each hypothesis separately, except for the last subhead which will present an analysis of the outcome in relation to the control variables, constant/intercept and r-squared. Below presented Table 10. displays the results of the conducted OLS regression with interaction models across Models 2-5, excluding the binary regression model. Followed is a reminder of the tables structure: Model 1 presents the simple bivariate regression and can be found in *Appendix B, Table 13*. Model 2 adds the interaction variable to test for Hypothesis H1a and H1b, Model 3 then adds the interaction variable to test for Hypothesis H2. Model 4 adds the interaction variable to test for Hypothesis H3, and finally, Model 5 adds the chosen control variables, following the order of demographics, socioeconomics and political interest. All variables have been subjected to coding following the theoretically expected outcome, which means that most variables obtain values ranging from negative to positive, with few exceptions. However, the analysis will first describe the outcome of the binary regression.

The baseline, Binary Model (1), depicting the binary regression results, of attachment to Europe and the Russian invasion, is found in *Appendix B, Table 13*. The outcome indicates a statistically significant relationship across all models, along with a changing positive coefficient estimate ranging between an 0.108-0.251 unit increase on average, as well as the note of the significance decreasing from the binary regression to the interactive models. The ranging standard error presented within the parenthesis (SE=0.02-0.10) indicate, on average, how certain the coefficient estimates are. The lower the standard error, the better coefficient estimate, which means that the observation estimates are sound, as the standard error is seemingly low. This should be kept in mind when reviewing all standard errors in Table 10. Adding all the remaining variables across models, whilst the coefficient remains strong, points towards a robustness of the predictor. The simple binary regression hence indicates a positive correlation, meaning that on average, attachment to Europe increased when looking at the overall dataset between 2020-2024. Which was anticipated as the relationship has been prevalent in previous research (Steiner et al., 2023, p. 298; Nicoli et al., 2024).

Table 10. Multivariate regression including interaction terms

Attachment to Europe	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Russian invasion (ref. before)				
After invasion	0.195 (0.08)*	0.211 (0.10)*	0.250 (0.10)*	0.251 (0.10)*
Education levels (ref. low)				
Medium education	0.429 (0.06)***	0.448 (0.06)***	0.446 (0.06)***	0.335 (0.06)***
High education	0.966 (0.06)***	0.976 (0.06)***	0.963 (0.06)***	0.622 (0.06)***
Interaction 1				
(ref. before invasion#low education)				
After invasion # Medium education	-0.084 (0.09)	-0.085 (0.09)	-0.097 (0.09)	-0.176 (0.08)
After invasion # High education	-0.076 (0.09)	-0.077 (0.09)	-0.094 (0.09)	-0.233 (0.09)*
Geographical region (ref. east)				
West		0.101 (0.03)**	0.611 (0.04)***	0.058 (0.04)
Interaction 2				
(ref. before invasion#east)				
After invasion # West		-0.016 (0.05)	-0.050 (0.06)	0.114 (0.06)
Border proximity (ref. not close)				
Geographical border proximity			0.915 (0.04)***	0.712 (0.04)***
Interaction 3				
(ref. before invasion#not close)				
After invasion # Border proximity			-0.061 (0.06)	-0.037 (0.06)
Control variables				
Gender (ref. male)				
Female				0.284 (0.02)***
Age				0.007 (0.00)***
Born in country (ref. yes)				
Not born in country				0.281 (0.03)***
House-hold income (ref. low)				
Medium income				0.133 (0.02)***
High income				0.334 (0.03)***
Political interest (ref. not interested)				
Hardly interested				0.254 (0.03)***
Quite interested				0.455 (0.03)***
Very interested				0.778 (0.04)***
Placement on left-right political scale				-0.031(0.00)***
How satisfied with the way democracy works in country				0.228 (0.00)***
Constant	5.521 (0.06)***	5.427 (0.07)***	4.873 (0.07)***	3.347 (0.08)***
Interaction term	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
r2	0.013	0.013	0.026	0.099
N	61 483	61 483	61 483	61 483

Note.*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. Standard errors in parentheses. Binary regression in Appendix B.

4.1. Testing of Hypothesis 1

The first Hypothesis H1a is tested through the conducted OLS regression with interactive models utilising data from before and after the Russian invasion, in relation to the dependent variable, attachment to Europe and adding the independent variables of `dummy_after` and education. These are then merged as an interaction variable, as presented in Model 2 and across all other models. The simple OLS regression outcome shows that medium education can be seen as having a statistically significant increase in European attachment by an average unit increase of 0.429-0.355 (SE= 0.06) across models, in comparison to low education. Accounting for all variables. However, this result stretches across both time-points; 2020-2024. The aim and hypothesis for H1a wanted to investigate whether the Russian invasion could be seen as having an impact on increasing levels of attachment among individuals with medium educational attainment after the time of the invasion (2023/2024). This outcome can be seen below Interaction 1. Hypothesis H1a can directly be seen as not being supported, as the relationship is not statistically significant, meaning that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Thus, meaning that there will be no further analysis in relation to hypothesis H1a.

The next hypothesis, closely linked to the latter one, is hypothesis H1b, aimed at investigating, as well as supporting previous research, that high educational attainments persist as the educational level where attachment increases at the most. The simple OLS regression shows that previous researchers are accurate, and that high education can be seen as having the highest average increase in attachment to Europe across 2020-2024. However, the same cannot be seen for the anticipated and hypothesised relationship for hypothesis H1b, which was contradicted. The impact of the Russian invasion, accounting for all variables in Model 5, can be seen to have had a negative effect on the average increase of attachment among individuals attaining high education after the time of the invasion, when compared to low education. Indicating a statistically significant negative coefficient estimate of an average unit decrease of -0.233 (SE= 0.09). Thus, indicating a decrease in attachment after the Russian invasion among individuals with high education, in comparison with low educated respondents. The variable was non-significant across Model 2-4, thereafter gaining statistical significance with all variables accounted for. Which means that Hypothesis H1b cannot be supported, as well as the resulting outcome not being able to reject the null hypothesis.

The results of above tested hypothesis H1a and H1b, indicating contradicting results to the anticipated outcome that was hypothesised, did consequently cause the choice of running margins estimates of investigating the margins mean within the three educational levels (see Table 11.). Which indicated interesting results, quite in the contrary to previous research on educational levels in relation to European identity.

Table 11. Margins mean, education after the invasion

After invasion (ref. before)	change (dy/dx)	std. error	p > (t) (significance)
Low education	0.332	0.089	0.000
Medium education	0.155	0.025	0.000
High education	0.099	3.09	0.002

Note. Results account for all variables in the regression.

Above presented table of margins means indicate that individuals attaining lower levels of education are seen to on average have had an increase in attachment to Europe, estimated by a margin means of 0.332, after the invasion of Ukraine. As being compared to medium and high education which indicate lower increases of attachment, 0.155 for medium and 0.099 for high education, although noting the high standard error of 3.09 for high education. Meaning that individuals with low education indicated on average higher increases in attachment after the invasion than medium and high education. Further discussion will follow in Chapter 5.

4.2. Testing of Hypothesis 2

The next hypothesis, H2, was phrased as a means of testing the anticipated outcome of respondents in Western Europe indicating increasing levels of attachment to Europe compared to Eastern Europe, after the invasion. This was made possible by including the interactive model 3, presenting the interaction variable under Interaction 2, as testing the anticipated conditional relationship between the time after the invasion and Western Europeans attachment to Europe. With all variables accounted for in Model 5, both the simple OLS regression, which is not related to the hypothesis but still mentioned, and the interactive model can be seen to indicate a non-significant relationship. Therefore, as the interaction variable resulted in a non-significant relationship, the resulting outcome is not able to support hypothesis H2, as well as not being able to reject the null hypothesis H0₂. Thus, not being further discussed in the results.

4.3. Testing of Hypothesis 3

The last hypothesis H3 served the purpose of testing the anticipated conditional relationship between the time after the invasion and geographical border proximity, specifically individuals anticipated increase in attachment in relation to residing in states bordering Russia and/or Ukraine. This was made possible by including the interactive model 4 and presenting the generated interaction variable below Interaction 3. The outcome of the performed simple OLS regression, disregarding the interaction model momentarily, showed a statistical significance of an average increase in attachment to Europe among those who reside in bordering states to Russia and/or Ukraine. The coefficient estimates indicated an average positive increase in attachment by a unit increase ranging between 0.915 in Model 4 to 0.712 (SE= 0.04) in Model 5, with all variables accounted for. This does however only indicate the average increase in attachment across both time-points, 2020-2024, thus not being related to hypothesis H3, yet still being interpreted as it is a result. The interactive model one the other hand; the result of significance for Hypothesis H3, did however indicate a non-significant relationship for the conditional relationship between after the invasion and border proximity. Thus, implying that the outcome cannot support hypothesis H3, and is therefore not able to reject the null hypothesis H_{03} .

The following subchapter will present an analysis of the control variables added to control for confounding factors. The subchapter will also include an assessment of the constant/intercept value and the r-squared (r^2) presented in the regression table.

4.4. Control variables, constant and explained variance

Further analysis leads to the final Model 5, where the chosen control variables are introduced, meaning that they were introduced in the final model as a means of controlling for confounding variables in the main analysis. None of which resulting in a confounding relationship. All control variables fell within the expected outcome, all indicating an on average positive coefficient effect and a statistically significant relationship to the dependent variable. With the only exception being the left-right political scale which indicate a statistical significance but with a negative coefficient estimate of -0.031 (SE= 0.00). This is however not surprising as the variable is coded as a bipolar scale where left = 0 and right =10, compared to e.g., political

interest which is coded as having a negative to positive scale. Following paragraphs will shortly describe the estimated outcomes of the control variables across the dataset between 2020-2024.

The demographic control variables consisted of gender, age and whether an individual is born in the country they reside in, all indicating positive effects in comparison to their reference points. Women, does for example, indicate an on average higher attachment to Europe than men, with a positive coefficient of 0.284 (SE= 0.02) and a low standard error. Age is measured as a continuous variable and has a wide range of values, meaning that the low coefficient of 0.007 (SE= 0.00) is normal, indicating an on average small positive effect on individuals attachment to Europe as they grow older. The final demographic measure of ‘born in country’ indicates a positive effect on individuals who are not born in the country where they reside, as they are on average indicating higher levels of attachment to Europe by a positive coefficient estimate of 0.281 (SE= 0.03). This falls within previous indications shown in studies utilising individual-level measures, such as Steiner et al. (2023, p. 291) which indicated that women were on average more positive towards attachment to Europe both before and after the Russian invasion. Or the indications of age not having that big of an effect according to Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio (2012, p. 68) and Nicoli et al. (2024, p. 3088).

Socioeconomic controls were included in the form of measuring house-hold income, where the assessed results indicate that both categories of medium and high income resulted in a positive effect of an average 0.133 (SE= 0.02) unit change for medium income, and 0.334 (SE= 0.03) for high income in comparison to the reference point of low income. Hence indicating that individuals who are categorised as having a high income are on average more attached to Europe than both low- and medium income households. The results further support that of Bauhr and Charron (2024, p. 387), who indicated similar trends in house-hold income.

The final control category of control variables measured three aspects of political attitudes: political interest, left-right political affiliation and satisfaction with democracy in the country of residence. Political interest, where ‘Not interest at all’ acts as the reference point, shows a steady incline of positive coefficient estimates ranging from 0.254-0.778 (SE= 0.03-0.04) across the political interest levels, indicating that individuals do on average become gradually more attached to Europe as they become more politically interested. The second measure of political attitudes, which was discussed earlier, where an individual categorises themselves on the political scale, ranging from left to right, presenting the first negative coefficient estimate

of -0.031 (SE= 0.00) per unit change. Indicating that individuals who affiliate themselves as being more to the left on the political scale does on average indicate higher levels of attachment to Europe, although the unit change is regarded as quite low. Where both indications for political interest and orientation on the political scale are supported by previous results from Bellucci, Sanders & Serricchio (2012, p. 68). The final variable measures individuals satisfaction with their country's democracy, which indicates an expected positive coefficient estimate meaning that individuals who to a greater extent are satisfied with their country's democracy, does on average indicate a 0.228 (SE= 0.00) unit change in higher levels of attachment to Europe.

With all Models accounted for and interpreted, the outcome indicates that none of the control variables had a confounding effect on the main analysis, they were however important for the analysis in helping to explain more of the variation. This does also mean that the main analysis can be concluded to be robust in relation to the accounted for individual-level factors.

The final aspects to reflect upon when analysing Table 10, is the constant/intercept and the r-squared (r^2). First, the constant will be discussed as the intercept, accounting for all models indicates an intercept of 3.347 (SE= 0.08). The intercept displays the mean value of the dependent variable when all other variables are 0, thus meaning that it represents all base values of the regression; an individual who is represented in all the baseline categories (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, p. 334). Secondly, the r-squared (r^2) which explains the model fit, as well as the variance in the dependent variable when explained by the independent variable. The r^2 ranges from 0.000 in the binary regression model (see Appendix B, Table 13), to a maximum of 0.099 in the last Model, thereby showing the variance in the dependent variable when the independent-, interaction- and control variables are accounted for. The incline of the r-squared across models can also be argued to show sound indications of all variables adding explanations of variance to the dependent variable. The model fit of the r-squared can be argued to be sound in relation to the use of a larger number of observations, as well as for the fact of studying survey data (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018, p. 199).

5. Discussion

This study drew inspiration and knowledge from previous research into forming the four assumptions for which this thesis found its aim and purpose. Resulting in the choice to conduct an analysis investigating educational- and geographical variations among individuals in twenty-four European states in relation to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Utilising ESS data made it possible to conduct a large quasi-longitudinal comparison across two time-points by means of measuring before (2020/2022) and after (2023/2024) the Russian invasion. The total amount of observations reached 61 483 observations across models, measuring individuals average perceptions and attitudes across the available twenty-four European countries.

The assumptions were altogether based on the theoretical arguments of their being an overall impact of the Russian invasion, consequently causing an increase in European identity among societal groups. The theoretical argument was based on the previously discussed studies of primarily Steiner et al. (2023) and Nicoli, et al. (2024), where they conducted their studies in close approximation to the date of the full-scale invasion in 2022, presenting estimates of an increase in attachment to Europe in relation to the Russian invasion. As well as being foundationally based on the theoretical frameworks of social identity theory and in-out groups, as well as previous studies between European identity and the effect of crises by Gehring (2020; 2022) and Matthijs and Merler (2020). The anticipated outcome, phrased through all hypotheses were tested through the OLS regression with interactive models, where the outcome was nowhere near what was theorised all along this paper. Three out of four hypotheses were not possible to be discussed to much extent due to there being indications of the interaction variables having a non-significant relationship. Meaning that the results indicated a non-significant relationship between the time-point after the Russian invasion and medium educational levels, the Western region and border proximity to the geopolitical crisis. Thus, resulting in this study not being able to support hypothesis H1a, H2 and H3, or reject their null hypotheses.

Hypothesis H1b, addressing high education in relation to after the invasion, was the one interaction term which indicated a small statical significance after all variables were accounted for. It was however surprising to see that the results indicated the opposite of what the expected direction of estimate was thought to result in. Instead of there being a positive increase amongst those with high education, the results indicated an average decrease in attachment to Europe

after the invasion, in comparison to low education. This contradicted both hypothesis H1b, as well as being an outlier in relation to previous studies of highly educated individuals being the ones to show the greatest increases of attachment to Europe in general (Mitchell, 2015; Steiner et al., 2023). The results were interesting, resulting in the choice of checking for margins means within the three levels of education (see Chapter 4.1. Table 11.). The results of the margins check detected the interesting fact of there being a higher increase among those with low education, in comparison to medium and high education. Whereas low education indicated a significant margin mean of 0.332, compared to medium education (0.155) and high education (0.099), with all variables accounted for.

Hypothesis H1b was not supported as the estimated direction of effect was shown to be the opposite, but it did however detect an interesting aspect, together with the margins mean, of how previous research may to some extent be contradicted. As the result of low education shows an average estimated higher increase of attachment to Europe after the Russian invasion, compared against those with higher educational levels, is not what could be anticipated from previous research (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016, p. 420; Matthijs & Merler, 2020, p. 112). It can however be discussed as indicating affects how a geopolitical crisis could influence those societal groups who are least likely to indicate increases in their European identity, finding some support in social identity theory and in-out groups in relation to possible broad impacts of crises. Future research is encouraged to take off from these results and further research the impact of geopolitical crises, although this time by centring on those who are least expected to indicate increases. Such as those with low education, or other societal groups who have been previously found to indicate on average lower levels of attachment to Europe. Instead of focusing on those who are most anticipated to indicate average increased levels of attachment, such as high educational attainment, which in previous research has been the educational level of focus. Both quantitative and qualitative research is encouraged to further nuance results of investigating these groups in relation to attitudes towards European identity.

Previous research, which were foundational to this study, such as Steiner et al. (2023) and Nicoli et al. (2024) did indicate more positive results of European attachment increasing after the Russian invasion. Although the only aspect of consideration for this comparison is the results in Table 10 of the interaction between after the invasion and high education. One aspect to consider is the timing of their studies in relation to this one. They performed their analysis in

close approximation to the time of the invasion date in 2022 (Steiner et al., 2023, p. 286; Nicoli et al., 2024, p. 3075), whilst this study utilised later data from the time of 2023/2024 to measure 'after the invasion'. The results of their study compared to this study can be theoretically speculated as being dissimilar due to the timing of controlling for increases in European identity. It could be speculated that their results indicated a short-term spike in attachments to Europe close to the date of the invasion, whereas the results from this study might emphasise this speculation. The results from this study are however built on a much larger samples, across more states, than Steiner et al. (2023) and Nicoli, et al. (2024) research studies, as well as indicating largely insignificant results. The results of this study are surprising to the extent of this study being inspired by the two above presented studies as well as by theoretical frameworks. Such as if discussed in relation to how European identity was anticipated to have increased in the aftermath of a geopolitical crisis amongst the three groups of analysis. Where the anticipated effect was partly based on social identity theory, in-out groups and previous research on the effects of crises on changes in identity formation, thus anticipating significant and greater changes than the outcome indicated. Future research is encouraged to further investigate these assumptions of whether it is true that identity changes at a slow pace, as argued by Hooghe and Marks (2009, p. 22). As well as whether geopolitical crises, such as the Russian invasion, can be seen to cause spikes of increased levels of attachment to Europe, thus not causing long-term effects of identity changes.

However, Appendix C, Table. 14 does show that there are changes among individuals within countries when comparing attachment to Europe before and after, although showing only small estimates of changes in levels of attachment to Europe. As well as there being evidence of a rise in attachment across 2020-2024 in the binary regression. This study did however not focus on within-country effects, as the ambition lied in looking at the overall picture of European states, rather dividing them into groups of education, geographical regions and border proximity. The expectation hence lied in there being some kind of change in variations which the analysis would have picked up among the three groups of education, region and border proximity. This was however not the case. Future research is therefore encouraged to further study ESS data on individuals attitudes towards European identity, such as investigating societal groups with a focus on within-country effects. As this could develop interesting future research on within-country variations in relation to various crises, or within-country variations in general across chosen timepoints.

One of the main limitations, although quite clear as most of the outcome indicated non-significant results, is the limitation of not knowing for certain that there are no other circumstantial events which may have influenced the respondents answers of attachment to Europe. Nicoli et al. (2024) did for example control for the rise in European attachment in relation to both the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion. The results should therefore be carefully considered in relation to generalisability, as the findings of the outcome might not be fully applicable to the European population. Generalisability should also be considered cautiously as this study investigated diverse respondents, not the same group of individuals, across two time-points. Future research is encouraged to further study the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 in relation to individuals feelings of emotional attachment to Europe. As well as researching future geopolitical crises, to assess whether European identity might come to evolve among groups of individuals in Europe.

5.1. Conclusion

This master thesis has analysed and fulfilled its purpose of investigating changes in levels of European identity variations amongst educational attainment levels and geographical groups of individuals. Specifically, by investigating the anticipated impact of the time after (2023/2024) the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The conducted study has been underlined by previous research and theoretical frameworks, creating a sound foundation for which this study has been able to take form. As this study has continued to build on the argument of identity research like these being of relevance, as European identity sets out an important basis for collective cohesion, norms and values amongst the European states and its residents.

The interaction outcomes were not aligned with the initial expectation, as three out of four hypotheses could not be discussed due to non-significance, whilst only one variable measure (high education) was statistically significant but indicated the opposite of the expected outcome for Hypothesis H1b. However, as discussed in previous chapter: all results do indicate something, even though they are not in line with the set-out expectations for the study. I therefore argue that the relevance of this study remains strong for researchers within the academic field, as well as to society overall. As this study contributed with further knowledge and results of how the Russian invasion can be put in relation to increases or decreases in attachment to Europe. Although the main analysis, as mentioned, indicate a primarily non-

significant result, the outcome is still argued to constitute as an insightful contribution for the academic field of identity studies.

The contributions of this study should be taken into consideration for future research as an encouragement to further investigate changes in European identity variations, both on the individual- and geographical level. It is also encouraged to conduct qualitative research, further investigating the details and circumstantial effects of attachments to Europe amongst societal groups. The Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022 can be generalised to have caused an effect amongst individuals of Europe, as seen by the within-country effect (Appendix C, Table 14.). Although not being indicated when analysing the overall impact of the invasion on the specific groups of educational levels, geographical regions and border proximity across the twenty-four European states. However, as we live in an era of geopolitical crises and uncertainty, we can find that the results of this master thesis highlight the importance of further studying how and if crises have an impact on identity changes. Since in times of crises, collective groups are a great means of finding stability within the surrounding uncertainty.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Descriptive statistics

Figure 1. Visualising distribution of attachment to Europe, 2020-2024

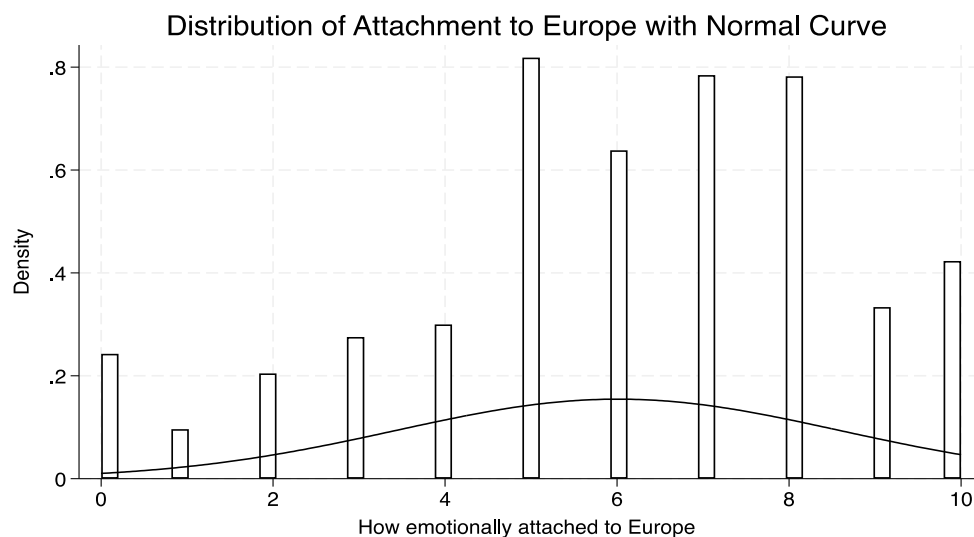


Table 12. Average Attachment to Europe, by country 2020-2024

Country	Attachment (mean)
Austria (AT)	6.376
Belgium (BE)	5.887
Switzerland (CH)	6.040
Cyprus (CY)	5.093
Germany (DE)	6.426
Spain (ES)	6.557
Finland (FI)	6.747
France (FR)	6.265
Great Britain (GB)	4.947
Greece (GR)	5.364
Croatia (HR)	6.020
Hungary (HU)	7.172
Ireland (IE)	6.292
Iceland (IS)	6.115
Italy (IT)	6.088
Lithuania (LT)	5.924
Netherlands (NL)	5.913
Norway (NO)	6.501
Poland (PL)	6.480
Portugal (PT)	6.737
Serbia (RS)	3.699
Sweden (SE)	6.135
Slovenia (SI)	6.093
Slovakia (SK)	6.163

Appendix B. Binary regression model (1)

Table 13. Binary regression model (1)

Attachment to Europe	Binary Model (1)
Russian invasion (ref. before)	
After invasion	0.108 (0.02)***
Constant	6.099 (0.01)***
Interaction	No
r ²	0.000
N	61 483

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Appendix C. Attachment to Europe before and after the invasion, by country

Table 14. Average attachment to Europe before and after the invasion, by country

Country	Before	After	Change	T-test
Austria (AT)	5.967	6.731	0.764	***
Belgium (BE)	5.988	5.801	-0.188	-
Switzerland (CH)	5.966	6.120	0.154	-
Cyprus (CY)	4.905	5.360	0.455	**
Germany (DE)	6.398	6.508	0.110	-
Spain (ES)	6.412	6.718	0.305	***
Finland (FI)	6.652	6.843	0.191	*
France (FR)	6.310	6.215	-0.094	-
Great Britain (GB)	4.805	5.080	0.275	*
Greece (GR)	5.380	5.346	-0.034	-
Croatia (HR)	5.931	6.117	0.186	-
Hungary (HU)	7.366	7.013	-0.353	***
Ireland (IE)	6.497	6.133	-0.364	***
Iceland (IS)	5.896	6.344	0.448	***
Italy (IT)	6.221	5.974	-0.247	**
Lithuania (LT)	5.775	6.099	0.324	*
Netherlands (NL)	5.991	5.843	-0.148	-
Norway (NO)	6.422	6.586	0.164	-
Poland (PL)	6.297	6.772	0.475	***
Portugal (PT)	6.632	6.853	0.221	*
Serbia (RS)	3.642	3.775	0.133	-
Sweden (SE)	5.858	6.651	0.793	***
Slovenia (SI)	6.110	6.075	-0.035	-
Slovakia (SK)	6.404	5.948	-0.456	***

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. -p. not significant. Two tailed t-test

Appendix D. Country-fixed effects, excluded from analysis

Table 15. Applied country-fixed effects, excluded from analysis

Attachment to Europe	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
After invasion (ref. before)	0.241 (0.08)**	0.125 (0.09)	0.157 (0.09)	0.145 (0.10)
Education levels (ref. low)				
Medium education	0.449 (0.06)***	0.436 (0.06)***	0.436 (0.06)***	0.480 (0.06)***
High education	1.059 (0.06)***	1.052 (0.06)***	1.051 (0.06)***	0.848 (0.06)***
Interaction 1				
(ref. before invasion#low education)				
After invasion # Medium education	-0.117 (0.09)	-0.091 (0.09)	-0.091 (0.09)	-0.170 (0.08)*
After invasion # High education	-0.105 (0.09)	-0.091 (0.09)	-0.089 (0.09)	-0.203 (0.09)*
Geographical region (ref. east)				
West		0.159 (0.07) *	0.296 (0.07)***	-0.229 (0.07)***
Interaction 2				
(ref. before invasion#east)				
After invasion # West		0.125 (0.05)**	0.096 (0.06)	0.240 (0.06)***
Border proximity (ref. not close)				
Geographical border proximity			0.149 (0.08)	0.103 (0.08)
Interaction 3				
(ref. before invasion#not close)				
After invasion # Border proximity			-0.054 (0.06)	-0.010 (0.06)
Control variables				
Gender (ref. male)				
Female				0.250 (0.02)***
Age				0.008 (0.00)***
Born in country (ref. yes)				
Not born in country				0.309 (0.03)***
House-hold income (ref. low)				
Medium income				0.149 (0.02)***
High income				0.348 (0.03)***
Political interest (ref. not interested)				
Hardly interested				0.283 (0.03)***
Quite interested				0.520 (0.03)***
Very interested				0.810 (0.04)***
Placement on left-right political scale				-0.029 (0.00)***
How satisfied with the way democracy works in country				0.235 (0.00)***
Constant	5.760 (0.06)***	5.603 (0.07)***	5.466 (0.07)***	3.504(0.08)***
Country-fixed effects (ref. DE)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
r2	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.146
N	61 483	61 483	61 483	61 483

Note. *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. Country dummies are suppressed. DE: Germany.