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Degree Program in Policies and Governance in Europe

Course of Data Analysis for Social Sciences

Does Affective Polarisation Influence Turnout (also) in European Parliament Elections? Evidence from the 2024 EP Elections

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Academic Year 2024/2025

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between affective polarisation and voter turnout in the 2024 European Parliament elections, addressing a gap in the literature on supranational electoral behaviour. Drawing on individual-level data from the 2024 European Election Study and contextual indicators from the 2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey, the analysis employs multilevel logistic regression to model turnout as a function of affective polarisation while controlling for individual and structural factors. The study further examines whether the mobilisation potential of affective polarisation is conditioned by the degree of EU politicisation among parties.

Results indicate that stronger affective divides significantly increase the likelihood of voting, highlighting the role of emotionally charged identities in shaping participation beyond national elections. By contrast, EU politicisation does not independently influence turnout, and higher levels of elite-driven politicisation slightly dampen the mobilising effect of affective polarisation.

Overall, these findings emphasise the mobilising effects of affective polarisation also in European elections, while showing how EU politicisation continues to be largely elite-driven with minimal impact on the broader electorate.

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Introduction

The 2024 European Parliament (EP) election took place across the European Union (EU) between 6 and 9 June 2024. It marked the tenth direct election since 1979 and the first to be held after the United Kingdom departed from the EU. Held across the 27 member states, these elections saw the highest voter turnout since 1994, despite long-standing concerns over the so-called democratic deficit in EU institutions. The vote signalled renewed engagement in supranational politics and offered a compelling challenge to established explanations of electoral behaviour in EP contests (Beaudonnet et al., 2024).

Traditionally characterised as 'second-order' (Reiff and Schmitt, 1980), EP elections have long been perceived as low-stakes, poorly attended, and overshadowed by national concerns. However, in recent years, the increased politicisation of European issues among parties, defined here as the combination of increased salience and polarisation around European issues (Beaudonnet & Gomez, 2024), such as the migration crisis, the Green Deal, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, coupled with high levels of partisan polarisation across and within member states, suggests that this second-order paradigm may be losing explanatory power (Gatterman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the 2024 EP elections saw voter turnout rise to 50.74%, up from 42.61% in 2014 and marginally above the 50.66% recorded in 2019. Given its well-documented role in increasing participation in national elections (Harteveld & Wagner, 2023), affective polarisation, a form of partisan animosity defined by strong positive attachments to one's preferred in-party and intense negative feelings toward out-parties (Iyengar et al., 2012), emerges as a plausible driver in the EP context as well.

Rooted in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), affective polarisation goes beyond policy disagreements or ideological distances, tapping into emotionally charged group-based conflict, framing politics as a contest between 'Us vs. Them'. While its consequences for democratic stability have been widely discussed (Iyengar et al., 2019; McCoy & Somer, 2018), its potential to mobilise voters, particularly in supranational elections, remains unexplored. Recent scholarship suggests that affective polarisation serves as a key driver of political participation in national elections, particularly when individuals view elections as an opportunity to prevent perceived political adversaries from gaining power (Ward & Tavits, 2019).

Although EP elections do not directly determine the composition of the EU executive in the same way national elections typically do, their stakes have nonetheless increased. The EP now plays an increasingly significant role in both legislative decision-making procedures and the approval of key EU appointments, including the Commission President and the College of Commissioners, giving the winners of the election increased power to influence these appointments and shape the political

trajectory of the next Commission. Hence, against the backdrop of the EU's rising politicisation across party systems, it is both timely and necessary to address a significant gap in the literature by testing *whether and to what extent affective polarisation influenced voter turnout in the 2024 European Parliament elections.* Exploring this relationship provides new insights into how emotionally charged identities may be reshaping patterns of electoral engagement in a previously underperforming electoral arena.

At the same time, voter mobilisation cannot be fully understood without accounting for the strategic behaviour of political elites. In recent years, elite-driven politicisation of the EU has played a significant role in shaping the contour of electoral competition (Beaudonnet & Gomez, 2024). According to postfunctionalist theory (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), politicisation is not an automatic response to structural tensions, but a process activated and amplified by parties and elites. As political actors increasingly frame debates along identity-related lines, such as sovereignty, belonging, and cultural values, the salience of EP elections grows, especially when these messages reinforce affective divides within the electorate. In this context, the mobilisation potential of affective polarisation among citizens is likely to be conditioned by the extent to which political parties politicise the EU.

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on European elections by investigating the influence of affective polarisation on voter turnout in the 2024 European Parliament elections, as well as exploring whether this relationship was moderated by the degree of EU politicisation among political parties. By examining the intersection of individual emotional dynamics and elite-driven political conflict, this study offers a novel perspective on the drivers of political behaviour in supranational elections. It moves beyond existing silos in the literature to reveal previously overlooked patterns that emerge when demand- and supply-side dynamics are examined in tandem, providing new insights into how affective polarisation may also shape democratic participation in the EU context.

To investigate these questions, this study draws on individual-level data from the 2024 European Election Study (Popa et al., 2024), enriched with contextual-level indicators from the 2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Rovny et al., 2024). The analysis relies on a multilevel logistic regression approach that models individual-voter turnout as a function of affective polarisation, while accounting for both individual- and structural-level variables. A cross-level interaction is also tested to assess whether the relationship between affective polarisation and turnout is moderated by the degree of EU politicisation at the country level, operationalised as the multiplication of salience and polarisation of EU issues among national political parties.

The findings indicate that affective polarisation is a robust and significant predictor of voter turnout in the 2024 EP elections. Individuals with stronger emotional attachments are consistently more likely to participate, supporting the hypothesis that affect-driven identities play an increasingly central role

in shaping electoral engagement also in supranational elections. By contrast, the degree of EU politicisation does not exert a significant independent effect on turnout, and, unexpectedly, the interaction between affective polarisation and EU politicisation is negative, yet small in size. While often seen as a potential driver of political engagement, the results suggest that higher levels of politicisation may actually dampen—rather than amplify—the mobilising effect of affective polarisation. This aligns with a growing body of research (De Wilde et al., 2016), which shows that party politicisation does not necessarily produce a coherent or mobilising political environment and has largely failed to generate structured partisan competition at the EU level.

The remainder of the study is structured as follows. The following section presents the theoretical framework, introducing the hypotheses. The third section illustrates the research design, with a focus on the data, key variables, and modelling strategy. The fourth section presents and discusses the results of the empirical analysis, including robustness tests and country-specific findings. Finally, the last section concludes the study by outlining its contribution to the literature and offering suggestions for future research.

Background and Theory

Less at Stake? The Enduring Puzzle of Low EP Election Turnout

Since 1979 and up until 2014, despite reforms aimed at increasing the EP's credibility and powers, as well as strengthening the democratic dimension of the EU, voter turnout in EP elections has consistently declined (Franklin & Hobolt, 2010; Kritzinger et al., 2020).

Therefore, the dominant perspective among scholars was that EP elections are what Reiff and Schmitt (1980) called 'Second-Order National Elections' (hereinafter SOE). According to the SOE theory, EP elections are characterised by perceptions that 'less is at stake'. As a result, governing parties are usually punished, smaller parties tend to gain consensus, and turnout rates tend to be lower compared to First-Order Elections (FOE), such as national parliamentary or presidential elections (Reiff & Schmitt, 1980). This lower participation is partly attributed to the limited media coverage and fewer campaign resources invested by political parties, which contribute to a sense of diminished importance among voters (Marsh, 2020).

Viewed through the lens of normal vote theory (Converse, 1966), which posits that party identification shapes a voter's typical electoral behaviour, low turnout in EP elections can be explained by their lower perceived stakes. Indeed, a key distinction between EP and national elections lies in the institutional consequences of the vote. Whereas FOE determine the composition of national governments, EP elections do not directly shape the executive at the EU level—namely, the European Commission. At the individual level, this institutional disconnect further reduces the perceived

importance of EP elections (Gattermann et al., 2021). Although the introduction of the Spitzenkandidaten procedure in 2014 sought to partially address this issue by introducing pan-European lead candidates for the Commission presidency, its impact remains contested (Gattermann, 2016; Schmitt et al., 2015). With reduced political urgency, parties invest less in mobilisation efforts, and voter participation tends to rely more heavily on habitual loyalties rather than active engagement (Angelucci et al., 2020). Given the steady decline in partisanship across Europe (Heath, 2017), this trend contributed to a broader decrease in overall voter turnout.

In addition to institutional and party-level factors, individual-level characteristics also influenced turnout. Older generations typically participated more, as did individuals with higher political knowledge and greater exposure to political debate (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012; Petričević & Stockemer, 2020). Furthermore, Blondel et al. (1998) argue that low turnout in EP elections stems largely from a lack of interest and motivation among voters to engage in the EU's democratic governance.

At the country level, Franklin (2007) highlights that the Eastern enlargement exacerbated declining turnout, as many of the newly acceded member states exhibited historically lower participation rates. This trend is largely attributed to the absence of strong voting traditions following decades of authoritarian rule under Communist regimes. Conversely, turnout tended to be significantly higher in countries with compulsory voting laws, such as Belgium and Luxembourg, particularly when they are actively enforced through penalties for non-compliance (Franklin, 2001).

Importantly, researchers have also examined the timing of EP elections in relation to national electoral cycles. Findings suggest that when EP elections took place shortly after FOE, turnout tended to decline, primarily due to voters' electoral fatigue (Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015). In contrast, when EP elections were held before FOE, they often saw increased participation, as both parties and voters treated them as a barometer for the upcoming national elections (Plescia et al., 2020).

It is Hix and Marsh (2007) arguing that EP elections are largely interpreted as stand-ins for national elections and are primarily influenced by domestic rather than transnational factors. European issues have typically played a limited role in voter decision-making, party campaigning and media coverage (Schuck et al., 2011). Nevertheless, SOE theory does allow for the possibility that European issues may become salient, particularly when they are also prominent in national (first-order) elections (Reiff & Schmitt, 1980).

Broadly speaking, EP elections have traditionally served as an outlet for voters to express dissatisfaction with national governments, without directly influencing the composition of the next one, usually leading to weakening support for government parties (Marsh, 2020). Yet, the timing of EP elections within the national electoral cycle also plays a significant role.
On the one hand, when elections occur during the so-called 'honeymoon phase' early in a

government's term, governing parties may avoid losses and even gain support (Reiff & Schmitt, 1980). On the other hand, if EP elections are held mid-term, governing parties are more likely to suffer losses, though they may begin to recover as the next FOE approaches (Marsh, 2005). Additionally, voters tend to behave differently in EP elections, often following their heart rather than their head—voting less strategically, supporting smaller and/or extremist parties, while punishing larger ones (Oppenhuis, van der Eijk, & Franklin, 1996). Nonetheless, Schmitt (2005) notes that in post-communist countries, where party systems are less institutionalised and voter volatility is higher, government losses do not follow cyclical patterns, and smaller parties do not consistently benefit.

As such, despite institutional efforts to render EP elections more consequential and politically salient, their second-order nature persisted in both perception and practice. However, as explored in the following section, recent electoral developments suggest that this paradigm may be increasingly changing.

Turning the Tide: What the 2024 EP Elections' Turnout Reveals About a Changing Electorate

Although it would be premature to entirely dismiss the SOE theory (Gattermann et al., 2021), as presented in Figure 1, the last round of EP elections has shown a notable increase in voter turnout (50.74%) compared to 2014 (42.61%) and to a lesser extent to 2019 (50.66%), marking the highest turnout level since 1994 (European Parliament, 2025). While the turnout gap between national and European elections remains significant in many countries, the upward trend in participation in 2024 underscores the growing challenges the SOE theory faces in explaining evolving patterns of electoral engagement in European societies (Beaudonnet et al., 2024).

Figure 1. Voter turnout in EP Elections in the EU from 1979 to 2024

Source: European Parliament
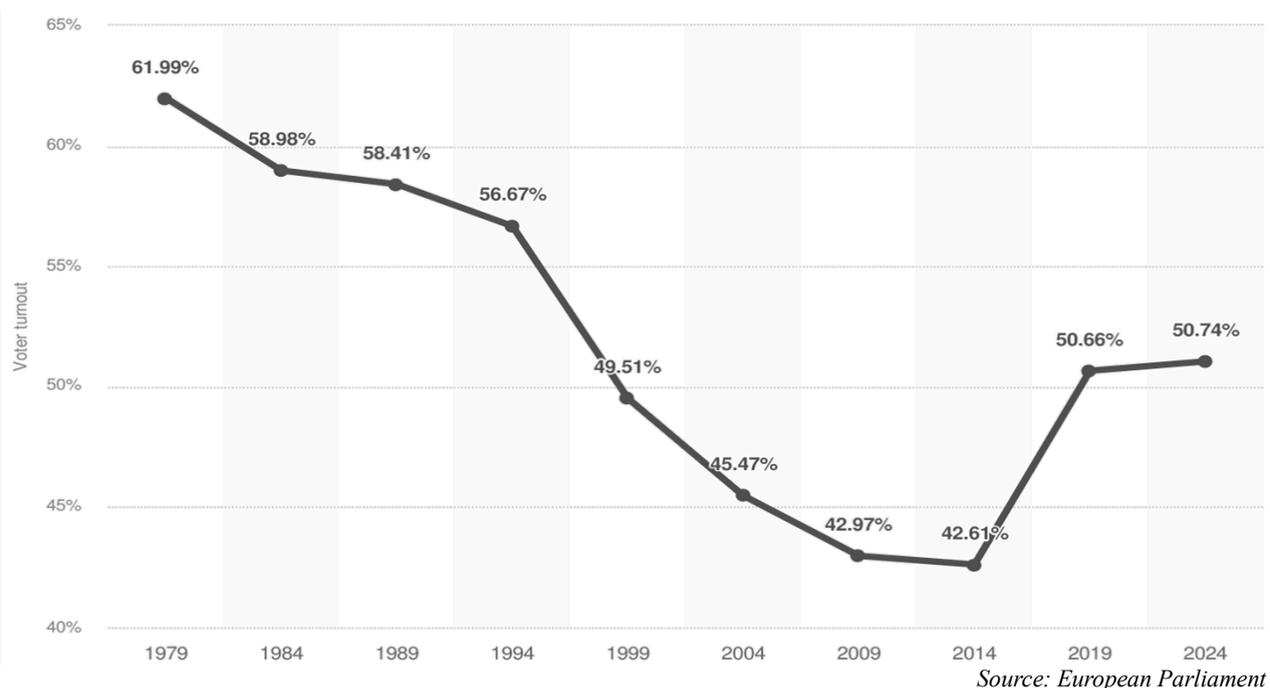
As an alternative to the SOE model, the past two decades have seen the emergence of a different analytical framework, commonly referred to as the 'Europe Matters' approach (Hix & Marsh, 2007). According to this perspective, EP elections are not merely secondary contests but possess a distinct political identity, with electoral competition increasingly structured around a pro- or anti-EU dimension rather than the traditional left–right axis typically observed in national parliamentary elections (Hobolt et al., 2009).

By 2019, European issues had already begun to play a prominent role in shaping voting behaviour (Gattermann et al., 2021), while also gaining increased salience among political parties (Plescia et al., 2020). In the context of SOE, it has traditionally been shown how smaller and often Eurosceptic parties would place greater emphasis on EU-related issues, while mainstream parties would largely remain silent. However, Maier et al. (2021) show that in the 2019 EP elections, mainstream parties increasingly campaigned on European issues, which contributed to a decline in support for extremist parties (Ehin & Talving, 2021) and led to a more dynamic and competitive electoral landscape across the party spectrum, marking a clear departure from the expectations of the SOE model.

Indeed, the increased prominence of European issues was anticipated to continue in the 2024 elections (Beaudonnet et al., 2024). As Braun (2021) highlights, this emerging sense of 'Europeanness' reflects a significant shift in public attitudes towards European integration, moving beyond primarily economic concerns to encompass deeper cultural dimensions. Importantly, EU elections have come to focus increasingly on concrete policy debates—what Bartolini et al. (2012) term *isomorphic issues*— the COVID-19 crisis, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Green Deal, and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, marking a departure from the traditional focus on questions regarding the EU as a polity (Gattermann et al., 2021). Collectively, these pressing challenges have heightened the EU's visibility and relevance, resonating strongly both within national capitals and across European public opinion (Beaudonnet et al., 2024).

Hence, from an electoral perspective, the upward trend in turnout observed in the 2024 European Parliament elections may be attributed to growing polarisation along the cultural axis (Le Corre Juratic, 2024) and the growing politicisation of European issues across party systems (Beaudonnet & Gomez, 2024). These developments suggest a shift in the nature of EP elections, making them appear more salient and contested. As a result, longstanding assumptions about turnout patterns have been challenged. The influence of structural factors such as electoral rules (Hix & Hagemann, 2009) and the timing of elections (Studlar et al., 2003) on EU-level turnout has diminished, while non-structural factors—particularly the growing politicisation of the EU—have gained explanatory relevance (Hosli et al., 2022). As the EU has grown in both scope and public visibility (Costa-Lobo, 2023), it has faced increasing levels of public scrutiny and awareness (Braun, 2021). This rising visibility has fuelled the

politicisation of the EU, shifting the integration process from one of passive acceptance to a more active—and often contentious—debate over its future direction (Hartland et al., 2025). In this context, the politicisation of EU issues can strengthen democratic representation by offering genuine political alternatives and intensifying party competition, thereby linking EU institutions more directly to societal concerns and divisions across Europe (Hix & Føllesdal, 2006). This shift reflects how voters may be increasingly mobilised by political conflict, issue salience, and perceived stakes, rather than mainly by institutional design or election scheduling.

In this context, affective polarisation emerges as a plausible driver of rising participation rates, as the 2024 EP elections were marked by intense partisan divisions across party systems, at times escalating into acts of political violence (Beaudonnet et al., 2024).

Hence, this paper seeks to contribute to the literature on EP elections by offering a novel analysis of how affective polarisation among the European electorate may be linked to higher levels of electoral participation. As Franklin (2014) argues, group identification—especially when individuals perceive that their group stands to gain or lose from an election—can give meaning to the voting act by raising the perceived stakes and mobilising affected voters.

Oxygen for European Democracies? Affective Polarisation in Europe

Research on affective polarisation (hereinafter, AP) in Europe has mushroomed in recent years; yet, its potential mobilising effects remain largely underexplored (with a few exceptions, Ward & Tavits, 2019; Wagner, 2021), and influential reviews on the topic—such as Iyengar et al. (2019)—make no specific mention of this aspect.

AP is conceived as the gap between the positive feelings individuals have toward their in-party and the negative feelings they express toward out-parties (Iyengar et al., 2012). The academic impetus for research on AP in the United States—particularly in the work of Iyengar et al. (2012)—stemmed from the observation that while positive feelings toward one's in-party had remained relatively stable, negative sentiments toward out-parties had increased dramatically. Drawing on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), early research on AP characterises polarised individuals as dividing the political landscape into in-groups and out-groups. This division fosters in-group favouritism while simultaneously intensifying hostility toward the out-group, often manifested through stereotyping, vilification, and prejudice (Ward & Tavits, 2019).

Different theories have emerged to explain the drivers of AP. Some scholars contend that it is an expressive, tribalist phenomenon rooted in political and social identities, while others view it as a rational response to policy disagreements (Huddy et al., 2018; Lelkes, 2021). Westwood et al. (2018), however, emphasise that AP can also stem from non-partisan identities, such as religion or ethnicity.

In Europe, research on AP has only recently gained traction, largely due to the systemic and

institutional differences that pose significant challenges to its measurement and analysis (Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021). In European multiparty systems, the impact of AP diverges from its manifestations in two-party systems, such as the USA. In the latter, political identities are closely aligned with party affiliations, making AP more straightforward (Iyengar et al, 2019), while in multiparty systems, political identities are often more fluid, with voters identifying with ideological blocs or broader movements rather than with a single party (Wagner, 2024).

In such contexts, different measures have recently been proposed where AP is best measured as the average dislike of out-parties compared to one's sympathy for the favoured in-party (Reiljan, 2020), or as the overall spread of affect across all partisans (Wagner, 2021). Research in Europe has also explored different directions of affective polarisation. Specifically, AP directed toward fellow citizens is referred to as 'horizontal' AP, while 'vertical' AP captures feelings toward the political elite (Harteveld, 2021).

Conceptually, however, important distinctions must be made. AP differs from ideological polarisation: while the latter typically centres on disagreements over policy issues along the left–right spectrum, the former is rooted in identity-driven attitudes that go beyond specific policy debates (Reiljan, 2020). Although it is often assumed that the two are strongly correlated, where higher ideological polarisation leads to higher AP (Webster & Abramowitz, 2017), other research findings suggest that this relationship can be relatively weak (Mason, 2018). Instead, AP appears to be driven primarily by 'partisan identities and the alignment of other social identities along party lines', a phenomenon known as 'social sorting' (Torcal & Comellas, 2022:4). This helps explain why AP can rise even in contexts where ideological polarisation is declining (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016).

Another important distinction concerns the definition of partisanship. Scholars conceptualise it either as a rational, evaluative alignment based on ideological congruence or as an emotional, affect-based attachment to a political party (Bankert et al., 2017), which can form the basis for social identities, much like ethnicity or gender (Greene, 2004). Yet, AP complements and extends these definitions by introducing a negative dimension. While positive partisanship is closely related to AP, as in-party feelings are often included in its measurement, AP also underscores the importance of negative partisanship, wherein individuals shape their political identity more through hostility toward out-groups than through allegiance to their own (Bankert, 2021). Importantly, negative partisanship does not necessarily require a corresponding identification with an in-party (Wagner, 2024).

Moreover, a broad scholarly consensus holds that AP is a harmful and potentially dangerous phenomenon. It is McCoy and Somer (2018) who coined the concept of 'pernicious polarisation', which not only reinforces an 'Us vs Them' mentality but also leads to the erosion of democratic norms and institutions, and increased support for illiberal parties (Svolik, 2019). As the perceived stakes of

elections increase, strong partisan identities and hostility toward opposing parties can make voters less likely to hold their preferred politicians accountable for undemocratic behaviour (Ward & Tavits, 2019), explaining the observed correlation between AP and democratic backsliding (Orhan, 2022). Again, AP also disrupts political cooperation, as rising animosity among voters spills over to party elites, making cross-party collaboration increasingly difficult (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015).

In fragmented systems, this hostility can, not only complicate government formation (Reiljan, 2020), but also undermine trust and cast doubt on the legitimacy of election outcomes, posing a serious threat to the foundations of representative democracy (Iyengar et al., 2019).

Despite the widely acknowledged negative consequences of AP, recent scholarship has begun to explore its potential mobilising effects. Harteveld and Wagner (2023:733) suggest that *'a potential saving grace—or at least a blessing in disguise—of affective polarisation could be that it increases engagement with, and participation in, politics.'* While few studies have already established a positive relationship between AP and voter turnout in national elections (Ward & Tavits, 2019; Wagner, 2021), this dynamic remains largely unexamined in the context of EP elections.

As noted above, EP elections are typically perceived as having 'less at stake' (Reiff & Schmitt, 1980). Yet, when politics is viewed through the lens of group conflict, AP can heighten emotional involvement and make people care more deeply about political outcomes than ideological disagreement alone (Harteveld & Wagner, 2023). This group-based view of politics would raise the perceived stakes, as the success or failure of one's political group becomes personally meaningful (Huddy et al., 2015). While rational choice research argues that voting is an irrational act due to its low individual payoff (Downs, 1957), identity-based politics may offer a powerful counterforce that motivates electoral participation (Edlin et al., 2007). Strikingly, Harteveld and Wagner (2023) find that the mobilising effect of AP in Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands was strongest not among the most politically engaged but among those who claimed to be least interested in politics, suggesting that identity-based conflict also activates otherwise disengaged segments of the electorate.

Put simply, the mechanism through which AP should influence turnout is straightforward: the more voters dislike opposing voters and political groups, the more they perceive elections as decisive conflicts between 'Us' and 'Them'. This perception increases the emotional stakes of electoral outcomes, turning voting into a necessary act to defend the in-group and keep the out-group from gaining power (Harteveld & Wagner, 2023). In this way, group-based affect might as well transform historically low-stakes elections, such as those to the EP, into high-stakes contests, thereby motivating electoral participation. It follows that:

H1: *In the 2024 EP elections, higher levels of affective polarisation are associated with a greater likelihood of voting.*

From Elites to Masses: The Moderating Role of EU Politicisation in Electoral Mobilisation

Notwithstanding the potential positive association between AP and voter turnout, the role of political elites in shaping its intensity and consequences warrants closer scrutiny. While the previous section highlighted demand-side dynamics, understanding AP requires equal attention to supply-side influences, namely, the strategic behaviour and messaging of parties and elites (Gidron et al., 2020; Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016). Elites are not merely passive observers but active agents capable of intensifying or dampening AP. Bäck et al. (2023) show that partisan cues from elites can significantly heighten affective divides, particularly among voters with strong partisan attachments. These cues reinforce social identities and deepen perceived divisions between groups. In contrast, Wagner and Harteveld (2024) offer compelling evidence that elites can also play a depolarising role. Signals of inter-party cooperation—such as unexpected or ideologically cross-cutting coalitions—can reduce AP, especially when they challenge existing partisan boundaries.

As pointed out above, the 2024 EP elections were characterised by high EU politicisation both among political parties and in the media, suggesting that elite-level attitudes can amplify affective divides and further increase the perceived stakes of electoral competition. Yet, this observed politicisation reflects the existence of an emerging transnational cleavage over the EU, which structures elite strategies and may ultimately shape the broader dynamics of affective polarisation.

Recent contributions inspired by the postfunctionalist theory of European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009) highlight how the political divide over the EU has evolved into a new cleavage transcending the traditional left–right ideological spectrum. Although recent EU elections have increasingly focused on concrete policy issues, such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Green Deal, and the war in Ukraine (Gattermann et al., 2021), these debates are often underpinned by broader questions of identity, sovereignty, and solidarity (Borbáth et al., 2023). Bartolini (2005) had already anticipated this development, predicting that the politicisation of European integration would cut across and transform national party systems by introducing new lines of political contestation.

Yet, while this transnational cleavage is visible in elite discourse and party competition, demand-side research calls into question its salience among voters. Studies show that voters' structure of political issues is far more heterogeneous and nationally specific than traditional supply-side models suggest (Wheatley & Mendez, 2021). What is often conceptualised as a single Green Alternative Libertarian (GAL)/Traditionalist Authoritarian Nationalist (TAN) cultural dimension in party-based analyses does not always translate into a unified axis in the minds of voters (Katsanidou & Jungmann, 2025). In some countries, EU integration aligns with identity-based concerns; in others, it clusters with economic issues or fails to coalesce into a clear dimension at all (Wheatley & Mendez, 2021).

Nevertheless, at the party level, this new transnational cleavage raises fundamental questions about

rules, identity, and belonging, and may intensify AP. While party polarisation has long been a key focus in the study of European elections, primarily understood in ideological terms along the traditional left–right dimension (Sartori, 1976), recent developments indicate a shift.

This new axis of conflict has begun to redefine the primary dividing lines between political groups, where political contestation over Europe is increasingly shaped by identity-related concerns, rather than solely by economic or redistributive debates (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). By tapping into identitarian issues, the politics of 'who we are' appears more emotionally polarising than the politics of 'who gets what' (Gidron et al., 2020). This new cleavage helps explain the intensification of EU politicisation, with literature highlighting the central role of political parties in shaping conflict over European integration (De Vries & Hobolt, 2012; Houde et al., 2022). Postfunctionalism posits that structural tensions, particularly identity-related ones, become politically consequential only when mobilised by elites and articulated through party competition (Kriesi, 2009). Politicisation thus extends beyond mere disagreement, encompassing the strategic activation of conflict by political actors (Hahm et al., 2022). Elections amplify these dynamics as parties reinforce group boundaries, intensify identity appeals, and frame political stakes in affective terms (Michelitch, 2015).

Following established research on EU politicisation (Beaudonnet & Gomez, 2024), two key components must be considered: salience and polarisation. When issues related to the EU become highly salient, parties articulate clearer positions and provide strong cues to the electorate, effectively reaching even less attentive citizens, fostering higher engagement (Steenbergen et al., 2007). At the same time, party polarisation is likely to influence electoral participation by broadening political alternatives across the ideological spectrum (Dalton, 2008). When parties adopt more distinct positions moving away from the ideological centre, they help voters better differentiate between competing options (Levendusky, 2010). By simultaneously clarifying electoral choices and increasing the congruence between party supply and citizens' demands (Le Corre Juratic, 2024), this ideological differentiation may enhance the perceived utility of voting. Taken together, these dynamics should raise the perceived stakes of elections and motivate electoral engagement. Accordingly:

H2: *Higher levels of EU politicisation increase the likelihood of voting in the 2024 EP elections.*

Furthermore, heightened EU politicisation may fuel AP among voters by intensifying perceptions of out-group threat, thereby amplifying the emotional stakes of elections (Lelkes, 2021). In this way, political elites do not merely mirror societal divides; they actively shape and amplify them. Hence:

H3: *The positive effect of affective polarisation on voter turnout is stronger in contexts where political parties exhibit higher levels of EU politicisation.*

Research Design

The Data

To test the hypotheses, this study draws on a combination of the 2024 European Election Study (EES) Voter Study (Popa et al., 2024) for individual-level data and the 2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Rovny et al., 2024) for party-level data.

The EES is a post-election survey conducted across all 27 EU member states following the EP elections held between June 6 and 9, 2024. Interviews were predominantly conducted online, and respondents were selected randomly from access panel databases, using stratification variables such as gender, age, and region to ensure representativeness. In each member state, approximately 1000 interviews were conducted, except for Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Malta, where 500 interviews were planned. This results in a total of 25,904 respondents.

The dataset includes a wide array of questions on key items on electoral behaviour, party preferences, and political attitudes. Additionally, the 2024 EES offers data harmonisation through question wording consistency with previous rounds and comparability with the CHES.

Hence, for party-level data, the 2024 CHES (Rovny et al., 2024) was used to create an index of EU politicisation as well as an index of parties' ideological polarisation, which provides expert-coded evaluations of political party positions on a wide range of issues, including European integration and selected EU policy topics. A total of 609 political scientists with expertise in European integration and political parties participated in the survey. Yet, although the 2024 wave covers the position of party leadership for 279 parties across 31 countries, including all EU member states except Luxembourg, the dataset was modified to include only political parties from EU member states while also excluding Luxembourg from the EES to test H2 and H3. This ensured consistency and alignment with individual-level data, which focuses exclusively on the 27 EU countries.

Building on established research (Beaudonnet & Gomez, 2024), the EU politicisation scores, and systemic polarisation indicators were then merged into the EES dataset. This integration enables an analysis of how individual-level affective polarisation varies according to the national context of party-driven EU politicisation and ideological polarisation.

Throughout the analysis, 'don't know' answers and missing data were excluded.

Operationalisation of Variables

The dependent variable

Given the paper's focus on explaining turnout, the dependent variable is constructed from the variable q5: '*The European Parliament elections were held on (date). For one reason or another, some people in (country) did not vote in these elections. Did you vote in the recent European Parliament*

elections?' Response options included Yes, No, and Don't know.

As is common in survey research, self-reported turnout was substantially higher than the official electoral data—a well-documented form of social desirability bias (Sciarini & Goldberg, 2016). To address this discrepancy, post-stratification weights reflecting real turnout figures were applied: respondents who reported not voting were weighted upward, while those who reported voting were weighted downward[1]. This adjustment ensures that the dataset more accurately reflects the officially recorded turnout levels in each member state. The variable was renamed *turnout* and recoded as a binary indicator where the baseline category (0) is '*No, I did not vote'*.

The independent variable

In line with established research (Harteveld & Wagner, 2023), horizontal affective polarisation was measured using the weighted spread-of-scores for multi-party systems, as proposed by Wagner (2021). This approach recognises that individuals can hold affective evaluations of party supporters even without identifying with a specific party. It includes all respondents who express like–dislike sentiments toward party supporters, regardless of their partisan affiliation. Notably, Wagner's measure also accounts for the possibility that individuals may feel positively toward multiple, ideologically proximate parties, rather than just one. As such, the index captures polarisation between broader ideological blocs rather than isolated party-level hostility, making it particularly well-suited to fragmented multiparty systems (Wagner, 2021). Furthermore, the choice to use the weighted rather than the unweighted version reflects differences in how surveys include smaller parties in like/dislike questions. Since their inclusion can skew affective polarisation scores, weighting smaller parties less helps reduce this distortion (Wagner, 2021).

Derived from the variable q20: *'Now, we'd like to know what you think about supporters of different political parties. How much do you like or dislike the supporters of each political party?'* where respondents were asked to rate supporters of up to seven parties in their country on a scale from 0 (strongly dislike) to 10 (strongly like), affective polarisation is then computed as follows:

$$Affective\ Polarisation = \sqrt{\sum_{p=1}^{P} v_p\ (like_{ip} - \overline{like_i})^2}$$

where p is the party supporter, v_p the vote share of each party in the 2024 EP elections ranging from 0 to 1, i is the individual respondent, $like_{ip}$ the like/dislike score assigned to each party supporter p by individual i. The mean affect $\overline{like_i}$ should itself be weighted by party size and computed as:

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[1] Real turnout data were sourced from official statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior in each country analysed.

$$\overline{like_\iota} = \sum_{p=1}^{P}(v_p * like_{ip})$$

The final measure, called *polar_w*, ranges from 0 to approximately 6 (SD=1.16), with higher values indicating greater affective polarisation between party supporters.

Interaction Term

EU Politicisation Index: To measure EU politicisation, this study relies on an index developed by Beaudonnet and Gomez (2024). The index conceptualises politicisation as the product of two components: the salience and the level of polarisation among political parties on the EU. It captures the idea that politicisation is highest in contexts where the EU is not only a prominent topic for all major parties but also where these parties hold strongly divergent positions. Accordingly, the systemic index is constructed by multiplying salience and polarisation scores, where salience is measured as follows:

$$Salience\ (S) = \sum_{p=1}^{P} v_p s_p$$

where p is any party in the national context, v_p is the vote share party p obtained in the 2024 EP elections, and s_p is the salience party p gives to the EU issue.

Polarisation, on the other hand, is operationalised as the variance in EU positions across parties, also weighted by vote share, and it is measured as follows:

$$Polarisation\ (P) = \sum_{p=1}^{P} v_p \left(p_p - \bar{p}\right)^2$$

where p_p is the position of party p on the EU, and $\bar{P}$ is the mean position of the party system distribution, that is:

$$\bar{P} = \sum_{p=1}^{P} v_p p_p$$

To compute this index, two main variables from the 2024 CHES (Rovny et al., 2024) were used.

For salience, the variable *eu_salience* was employed, which asked experts: '*During 2024, how important was the EU to the parties in their public stance?*' Responses ranged from 0 (*no importance*) to 10 (*great importance*).

For polarisation, the variable *eu_position* was used, asking: '*How would you describe the general*

position on European integration that the party leadership took during 2024?' Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly opposed*) to 7 (*strongly in favour*). In line with Beaudonnet and Gomez (2024), this variable was normalised to a 0–10 scale. Once constructed, the resulting politicisation index, called *eu_pol_index*, ranges from 4.843 being Malta to 81.536 being Poland (SD=18.961).

Individual-level controls

Partisanship: While being mechanically linked to affective polarisation, psychological theories of electoral participation also suggest that individuals who feel close to a political party are more likely to vote (Smets & Van Ham, 2013). This was measured using q19: '*Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to?*' Respondents could either indicate that they do not feel close to any party or select a specific party. The variable was renamed *partisanship_dummy* and recoded into a binary indicator, with *No* as the reference category (0) and all other responses grouped as *Yes* (1).

Political interest: Citizens who are politically interested and engaged are generally expected to exhibit higher levels of political efficacy, reflected in greater confidence in their ability to influence the political system and higher trust in institutions (Smets & Van Ham, 2013). Political interest was measured using q15: '*To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?*' with response options ranging from Very interested (1) to Not at all interested (4). The variable was renamed *pol_interest_rec* and recoded into a binary indicator, where Very interested and Quite interested were grouped as *Interested* (1), and Not very interested and Not at all interested were grouped as *Not interested* (0, reference category).

Political efficacy: the belief that one's actions can influence politics and that the system responds to citizens is positively associated with turnout. Individuals with higher efficacy are more likely to see elections as meaningful and to participate (Bélanger & Nadeau, 2005). Political efficacy was measured using q13-6: '*Politicians take into consideration the concerns of citizens like me.*', with responses ranging from 1 (Fully agree) to 5 (Fully disagree).
The variable was renamed *pol_influence_self_rec* and recoded into three categories: *Agree (1, 2)*, *Neither agree nor disagree (3)*, and *Disagree* (*4, 5*, reference category).

Ideological self-placement: Research suggests that right-wing or conservative voters are more likely to view voting as a civic duty compared to their left-wing or liberal counterparts (Smets & Van Ham, 2013). It was measured using q10: '*In political matters people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on an 11-point scale, where 0 means "left" and 10 means "right".*' The variable, renamed *lr_position*, was included in the models as it is.

Perception of the economy: Economic conditions are key drivers of political participation. While economic strain can mobilise voters seeking change (Schlozman & Verba, 1979), it may also deter participation if financial hardship leads individuals to prioritise personal concerns over politics (Rosenstone, 1982). Economic perceptions were measured using q14: *'What do you think about the economy? Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in your country...'* with response options ranging from *A lot better (1)* to *A lot worse (5)*. The variable was renamed *economy_perception_self* and recoded into three categories: *Better/A bit better (1,2, reference category)*, *Stayed the same (3)*, and *Worse/A bit worse (4,5)*.

Living standards: Similar to economic perceptions, self-assessed living standards may also influence political participation. This was measured using d11: '*Taking everything into account, at about what level is your family's standard of living? If you think of a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means a poor family, 7 a rich family, and the other numbers are for the positions in between, about where would you place your family?'* The variable was renamed *living_standard_rec* and recoded into three broader categories: *Poor/Quite poor family (1,2,3*, reference category), *Average family (4),* and *Rich/Quite rich family (5,6,7)*.

Attitudes towards European integration: Europhile citizens are more likely to perceive the elections as meaningful and are thus more inclined to vote (Braun, 2021). In contrast, Eurosceptic individuals often view the EU as irrelevant, making them more likely to abstain from participation. To measure it, q17 was used: '*Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means unification "has already gone too far" and 10 means it "should be pushed further". What number on this scale best describes your position?*' The variable was renamed *eu_integration_self* and included in the model as it is.

Age: Based on variable d4_age, the variable was renamed *age* and used as it is.
Age is one of the most commonly used predictors of individual voter turnout. Research consistently shows that younger adults are less likely to vote, with turnout increasing as individuals transition into adulthood and declining again in older age due to social withdrawal (Strate et al., 1989). Although this curvilinear relationship is often modelled by including an age-squared term, in this analysis, the coefficient was not statistically significant. As a result, age was retained as a linear predictor.

Gender: It was measured using variable *d3*: *'Are you male, female, other?'* which was recoded into a binary variable named *gender*. Respondents identifying as *other* were excluded due to small sample size (N=34), leaving *Male* (0) as the reference category.
Historically, men were believed to have higher turnout rates due to greater access to societal

resources. However, research indicates that the gender gap in electoral participation has largely closed (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

Levels of education: Education is recognised as one of the strongest predictors of voter turnout (Gallego, 2010). To capture it, d2 was used: *'What is the highest educational level that you have attained? If you have attained your highest educational degree outside your country, please select the educational level that comes closest to the highest educational level that you have attained elsewhere.'* The variable was renamed *edu_level_rec* and entered as a categorical variable with three levels: *Lower secondary or less* (reference category), *Secondary, and Tertiary or higher*.

Contextual-level controls

Electoral competitiveness: Operationalised as the margin of victory between the top two lists in percentage points, the variable called *electoral_competitiveness* was included in the model as a cardinal variable, where higher values indicate less competitive elections. Theoretically, competitiveness affects voter mobilisation: high-stakes elections with narrow margins tend to attract more voters, as they perceive their vote as more likely to influence the outcome (Franklin, 2004).

Systemic polarisation: Operationalised as the standard deviation of parties on the left-right dimension (Hobolt & Hoerner, 2019), it was included to capture the extent of ideological differentiation between parties within each political system. The literature suggests that greater ideological conflict increases the perceived stakes of elections and encourages voter participation (Downs, 1957). In more polarised systems, clearer distinctions between parties enhance representational clarity and raise the utility of voting, thereby boosting turnout (Levendusky, 2010). The index, called *systemic_polarisation*, was constructed based on the CHES variable lrgen: *'And finally, please tick the box that best describes each party's overall ideology on a scale ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right)'.*

Perceived parties' polarisation on the EU: Based on q18: *'And about where would you place the following parties on this scale, where 0 means European unification has already gone too far and 10 means it should be pushed further?'* the variable *perceived_eu_polar* was constructed by computing the weighted standard deviation of party positions on EU integration, as perceived by respondents. The calculation follows the same weighted spread-of-scores approach used to measure affective polarisation, with the key difference being that responses were aggregated at the country level. This aggregation ensures that the resulting variable reflects a structural, contextual measure of perceived EU-related party system polarisation within each national setting (Ellger, 2023).

Electoral fatigue: It was measured as the number of days between the most recent national parliamentary elections and the 2024 European Parliament elections. Research suggests that the

greater the temporal distance from the last national election, the higher the likelihood of turnout in the subsequent EP election (Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015).

Mandatory voting: Legal characteristics of elections shape turnout by either increasing the costs of abstention or lowering the barriers to participation (Geys, 2006). In the European case, only two countries adopt mandatory voting, namely Belgium and Luxembourg. Since mandatory voting is known to disproportionately inflate turnout rates, a robustness test excluding these two countries will be conducted to ensure that this institutional feature does not drive the observed effects.

Appendix **A** includes all the summary statistics.

The Modelling Strategy

Given the nature of the dataset and the focus of the research question, this study employs a multilevel logistic regression model.

First, respondents (level 1) are nested within the 27 EU countries (level 2), each representing a different political context. A multilevel approach is essential because individual observations are not independent of one another, which can result in downwardly biased standard errors. Although there are debates on the necessary number of clusters at the upper level, 27 is nonetheless sufficiently high and recognised by the literature (Elff et al., 2020).

Second, the analysis includes a cross-level interaction between an individual-level variable, affective polarisation, and a country-level variable, EU politicisation. To properly capture this interaction, the multilevel logistic regression allows the effect of affective polarisation to vary across countries. This approach is appropriate when the influence of individual-level predictors is expected to differ across contexts, and multilevel logistic regression offers a technically sound solution to model such variability (for a review, see Schmitt et al., 2021).

Results

Having identified the optimal modelling strategy and provided a comprehensive overview of the key predictors of individual voter turnout, the analysis now turns to the empirical testing of the hypotheses. As shown in Table 1, this is carried out through a series of multilevel logistic models. The first model includes only the main independent variable, affective polarisation, and its relationship with turnout. In the second model, all individual-level controls are introduced. From the third model onward, a cross-level interaction as well as structural-level variables are progressively incorporated and tested, thereby enhancing the robustness and analytical depth of the findings.

Hypotheses testing

The results provide robust evidence for the central role of affective polarisation in shaping individual voter turnout. Across all six models, the effect of affective polarisation remains consistently positive, statistically significant, and substantively meaningful. In Model 1, which includes only this predictor, the coefficient is strong and highly significant (logit = 0.451; $p < 0.001$). This means that affectively polarised people were about 57% more likely to vote in the 2024 EP elections.

While the size of the coefficient decreases with the addition of individual-level controls in Models 2 and 3 (logit $\approx$ 0.28), it remains highly significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that affective polarisation independently predicts turnout. As structural-level controls and the interaction term are introduced in Models 3 through 6, the effect of affective polarisation increases and stabilises (logit $\approx$ 0.37), maintaining high statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), suggesting a robust relationship: individuals with higher levels of affective polarisation are consistently more likely to vote. Hence, in line with expectations and prior research on the relationship between affective polarisation and turnout (Harteveld & Wagner, 2023), the former proves to be a strong predictor of the latter even in the 2024 EP elections. This provides strong support for the acceptance of H1 and allows for the rejection of the null hypothesis of no effect.

To strengthen the validity of the findings, robustness tests are reported in Appendix **B**. These tests rely on alternative measures of affective polarisation: the unweighted spread of scores and a vertical dimension of affective polarisation capturing the emotional distance between voters and political parties. Both approaches produce similar results, further confirming that affective polarisation is a significant and consistent driver of electoral participation. Yet, although statistical significance is preserved, the coefficients are smaller than those in the weighted version. This suggests that vertical affective polarisation is less effective in explaining participation in EP elections, while the unweighted version yields weaker effects due to its limitations. Specifically, the unweighted index does not account for the size of the parties being liked or disliked, making it a less dynamic and responsive measure. While affective polarisation using the weighted spread-of-scores is higher when voters strongly like or dislike bigger party supporters, the unweighted version lacks sensitivity to party size, thus underestimating the intensity and distribution of affective evaluations (Wagner, 2021).

Moving to H2, which posits *that higher levels of EU politicisation increase the likelihood of voting in the 2024 EP elections*, contrary to expectations, support was not found. Across all models, the coefficient for EU politicisation, measured as the multiplication of salience and polarisation (Beaudonnet & Gomez, 2024), remains statistically insignificant and close to zero, suggesting that higher EU politicisation alone does not have a meaningful impact on individual-level turnout in the 2024 EP elections.

Table 1. Multilevel Logistic Regression

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
polar_w	0.451***	0.280***	0.277***	0.371***	0.373***	0.369***
	(0.0128)	(0.0164)	(0.0165)	(0.0393)	(0.0393)	(0.0393)
partisanship_dummy						
No		Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Yes		0.395***	0.403***	0.402***	0.395***	0.396***
		(0.0403)	(0.0406)	(0.0406)	(0.0407)	(0.0407)
lr_position		0.0047	0.0034	0.0035	0.0035	0.0034
		(0.00656)	(0.00659)	(0.00659)	(0.00659)	(0.00659)
pol_interest_rec						
Not Interested		Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Interested		0.851***	0.853***	0.853***	0.842***	0.842***
		(0.0362)	(0.0364)	(0.0364)	(0.0367)	(0.0366)
pol_influence_self_rec						
Disagree		Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree		0.292***	0.280***	0.279***	0.274***	0.274***
		(0.0544)	(0.0547)	(0.0547)	(0.0547)	(0.0547)
Agree		0.247***	0.234***	0.238***	0.232***	0.232***
		(0.0498)	(0.0501)	(0.0501)	(0.0502)	(0.0501)
eu_integration_self		0.0305***	0.0317***	0.0315***	0.0322***	0.0322***
		(0.00573)	(0.00576)	(0.00576)	(0.00577)	(0.00577)
economy_perception_self						
Better/ A bit Better		Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Stayed the Same		-0.275***	-0.281***	-0.284***	-0.283***	-0.283***
		(0.0477)	(0.0480)	(0.0480)	(0.0480)	(0.0480)
Worse/A bit Worse		-0.306***	-0.300***	-0.303***	-0.304***	-0.304***
		(0.0464)	(0.0467)	(0.0467)	(0.0467)	(0.0467)
living_standard_rec						
Poor/Quite Poor		Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Average		0.143***	0.137**	0.138**	0.136**	0.136**
		(0.0422)	(0.0424)	(0.0424)	(0.0424)	(0.0424)
Rich/Quite Rich		0.226***	0.231***	0.231***	0.225***	0.225***
		(0.0447)	(0.0450)	(0.0450)	(0.0451)	(0.0451)
edu_level_rec						
Lower Secondary/ Less than Lower Secondary		Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Secondary		0.171***	0.167***	0.168***	0.169***	0.168***
		(0.0465)	(0.0468)	(0.0468)	(0.0468)	(0.0468)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary		0.366***	0.368***	0.370***	0.372***	0.371***
		(0.0489)	(0.0493)	(0.0493)	(0.0493)	(0.0493)
gender						
Male		Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Female		-0.0243	-0.0233	-0.0247	-0.0164	-0.0165
		(0.0340)	(0.0342)	(0.0342)	(0.0343)	(0.0343)
age		0.0157***	0.0157***	0.0158***	0.0159***	0.0159***
		(0.00113)	(0.00113)	(0.00113)	(0.00113)	(0.00113)
eu_pol_index			-0.00936	-0.00461	-0.00467	-0.00249
			(0.00709)	(0.00735)	(0.00736)	(0.00598)
c.polar_w#c.eu_pol_index				-0.00216**	-0.00218**	-0.00211**
				(0.000817)	(0.000817)	(0.000817)
perceived_eu_polar					-0.0219**	-0.0218**
					(0.00829)	(0.00829)
rev_electoral_fatique						-0.000889***
						(0.000229)
electoral_competitiveness						0.141
						(1.427598)
systemic_polarisation						0.0656
						(0.0586)
Intercept	-0.929***	-1.220***	-0.922**	-1.120***	-1.069**	-2.131***
	(0.145)	(0.180)	(0.326)	(0.336)	(0.337)	(0.400)
Random Effects Parameters						
variance(country)	0.543	0.565	0.443	0.448	0.449	0.260
	(0.151)	(0.158)	(0.126)	(0.128)	(0.128)	(0.0756)
N	23870	19281	18899	18899	18899	18899
AIC	29078.6	20946.1	20670.3	20665.2	20660.2	20652.5
BIC	29102.8	21079.8	20811.5	20814.3	20817.2	20833.0

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

In Model 3, which includes all individual-level controls but no contextual variables apart from the EU politicisation index, the coefficient is small, negative and not significant (logit = -0.0094; p > 0.05). As contextual-level variables are introduced in Models 4 to 6, the size of the coefficient slightly decreases in magnitude and remains not significant (logit ≈ -0046 in Models 4 and 5; logit = -0.0025 in Model 6; p > 0.05). This provides no evidence for a direct effect of EU politicisation on turnout. Thus, H2 is not supported, and the null hypothesis of no effect cannot be rejected.

While H2 receives no empirical support, the findings related to H3 are more definitive. H3 hypothesised that *the positive effect of affective polarisation on voter turnout would be stronger in contexts where political parties display higher levels of EU politicisation*. However, the data contradict this expectation. As illustrated in Figure 2 and reflected in Models 4 to 6, the cross-level interaction between affective polarisation and EU politicisation is consistently, yet moderately, negative and significant (logit ≈ –0.002; p < 0.01), indicating the reverse of the anticipated effect. This means that in contexts where the EU is more politicised, i.e. where parties are more divided and place greater emphasis on EU issues, the positive relationship between affective polarisation and turnout becomes weaker. Although moderate in size (logit ≈ –0.002), this dampening effect remains robust after accounting for multiple structural-level variables, indicating that the moderating role of EU politicisation is stable across varying model specifications. Thus, while the interaction term is statistically significant, its direction contradicts the initial hypothesis, leading to the rejection of H3.

Figure 2. Average Marginal Effect of Affective Polarisation at Varying Levels of EU Politicisation
Results are based on Model 6
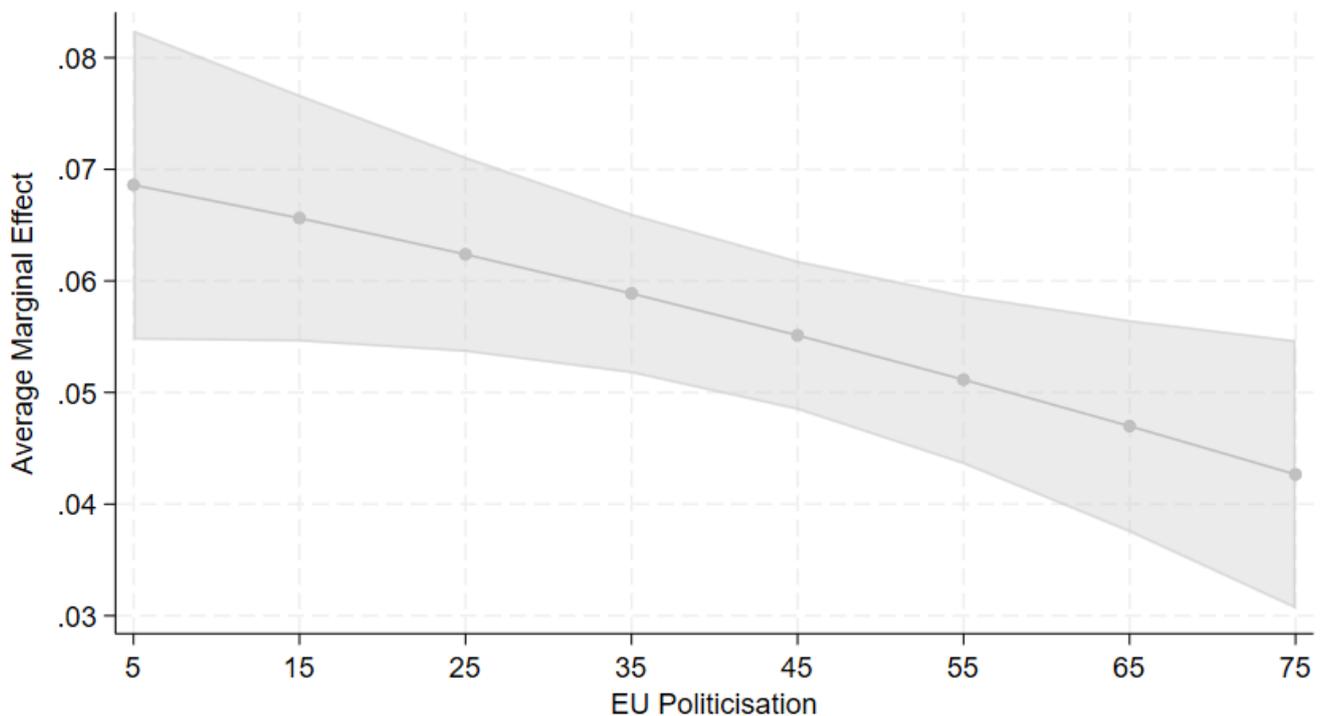
Instead of amplifying political engagement, higher levels of elite-level politicisation of the EU appear to curb the turnout-boosting effect of affective polarisation.

These counterintuitive results are best understood within the broader debate on the consequences of politicisation in the EU context. While often seen as a potential driver of political engagement, a growing body of research (De Wilde et al., 2016) shows that politicisation does not necessarily foster a coherent or mobilising political environment and has largely failed to generate a structured partisan competition at the EU level. Citizens do not perceive politicised EU issues as salient or personally relevant, even when emphasised by elites (Vasilopoulou & Gattermann, 2020). As a result, European Parliament elections still tend to function as second-order contests (Reif & Schmitt, 1980), where voter turnout is largely influenced by dissatisfaction with national politics rather than by meaningful engagement with European-level issues. While EU politicisation may be increasing among elites (Hooghe & Marks, 2018), it remains fragmented and lacks resonance with voters, undermining its potential to foster issue-based mobilisation.

Controls

In addition to the main explanatory variables used to test the 3 hypotheses, several individual-level and contextual controls also show meaningful and statistically significant associations with voter turnout, offering further insights into the socio-demographic and attitudinal factors that shape electoral participation.

Partisanship exhibits a consistently strong and statistically significant positive effect across all models in which it appears. In Model 2, the coefficient is substantial (logit = 0.395) and highly significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals with a strong party affiliation are markedly more likely to vote than those without such attachment. This effect remains stable in both magnitude (logit ≈ 0.4) and significance ($p < 0.001$) across the subsequent models, underscoring the central role of party identification in driving electoral participation (Angelucci et al., 2024).

In line with existing literature (Smets & Van Ham, 2013), individual self-positioning on the left–right scale shows no significant effect on turnout. Across Models 2 to 6, the coefficient remains positive (logit = 0.0047 in Model 2; logit ≈ 0.003 in Models 3 to 6) but never reaches statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that ideological self-placement does not influence the likelihood of voting, challenging the assumption that right-wing individuals are more likely to vote due to a stronger sense of civic duty compared to their left-wing counterparts.

Much like partisanship, political interest and political efficacy emerge as strong and consistent predictors of individual voter turnout. Across all models, individuals who express interest in politics are significantly more likely to vote than those who do not. In Models 2 through 6, the coefficient remains both substantial (logit ≈ 0.85) and highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), reinforcing the

crucial role of political engagement in driving electoral participation in European elections.

Regarding political efficacy, results from Models 2 through 6 show that individuals who neither agree nor disagree with the statement about having political influence are consistently more likely to vote compared to those who disagree (logit ≈ 0.28). Similarly, those who agree as compared to those who disagree also show a significantly higher likelihood of voting (logit ≈ 0.24). In both instances, the effects are highly statistically significant (p < 0.001). These findings suggest that individuals who perceive themselves as having at least some degree of political influence are more likely to participate in elections, underscoring the importance of political efficacy in shaping voter turnout.

In line with the expectations, Europhile individuals are also more likely to vote. In fact, across all Models, those who think European unification should be pushed forward are consistently more likely to vote (logit ≈ 0.03), with all coefficients showing high statistical significance (p < 0.001). These findings reinforce the notion that Europhile citizens are more likely to perceive the EU as legitimate and politically relevant, which in turn increases their likelihood of viewing European elections as meaningful and participating in them. In contrast, Eurosceptic individuals, who tend to see the EU as distant or ineffective, are more inclined to disengage and abstain from voting.

Furthermore, negative perceptions of the economy are associated with a significantly lower likelihood of voting. Across all models, individuals who believe that the economy has worsened over the past 12 months are consistently less likely to turn out compared to those who perceive economic conditions as having improved (logit ≈ -0.30). Similarly, even those who feel the economy has remained the same show lower levels of turnout (logit ≈ -0.28). In both cases, the effects are highly statistically significant (p < 0.001). These findings suggest that economic pessimism, whether based on perceived decline or stagnation, contributes to political disengagement. Rather than mobilising voters, dissatisfaction with economic conditions could foster a sense of disillusionment or futility, ultimately discouraging electoral participation.

A similar pattern emerges when considering perceptions of living standards. Across all models, individuals who describe themselves as rich or quite rich are significantly more likely to vote compared to those who consider themselves poor or quite poor (logit ≈ 0.23). Likewise, those who place themselves in the average category also demonstrate a higher likelihood of voting (logit ≈ 0.14), though the effect is somewhat smaller. The association is highly statistically significant for the rich/quite rich group (p < 0.001), while for the average group, the significance remains strong but slightly weaker from Model 3 onwards (p < 0.01). These results suggest that individuals' subjective assessment of their material well-being plays a role in shaping political participation. Feeling financially secure fosters a stronger sense of political efficacy or civic responsibility, thereby encouraging engagement in the electoral process.

The classic sociodemographic variables such as education, age and gender also show consistent effects across all Models.

Education appears to be a strong and positive predictor: individuals with secondary education have a significantly higher likelihood of voting compared to those with lower secondary education or less (logit $\approx$ 0.17, $p < 0.001$). This effect is even more pronounced for those with tertiary or more education, with logit coefficients around 0.37 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a robust positive association.

Age also shows a significant positive effect, with a smaller but consistent coefficient (logit $\approx$ 0.0157, $p < 0.001$), confirming that as individuals get older, the likelihood of voting increases steadily.

Gender shows no statistically significant effect, with small negative coefficients (logit $\approx$ -0.02) and non-significant p-values ($p > 0.05$), indicating no substantive difference between men and women in this context. This suggests that the gender gap has effectively closed even in EP elections, aligning with evidence from national elections (Mayer, 2010), but diverging from Dassonneville and Kostelka's (2020) recent claim of its persistence in the EP arena.

Among the additional contextual-level controls included in the final two models, perceived EU polarisation, which captures the average individual perception of party polarisation on the EU, shows a statistically significant and negative association with turnout (logit $\approx$ -0.022, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that in contexts where individuals perceive greater party polarisation on EU issues, the likelihood of voting decreases.

Similarly, electoral fatigue, measured as the number of days between the 2024 European Parliament elections and the most recent national parliamentary elections, also decreases the likelihood of voting. Although the effect size is small (logit = -0.00089), it is nonetheless highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that when elections occur in closer temporal proximity, voter turnout tends to decline due to reduced motivation or political overload.

Finally, neither electoral competitiveness nor systemic polarisation affects turnout. While the coefficient for the former is positive and relatively large (logit = 0.141), it fails to reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that the closeness of the race does not significantly influence individuals' likelihood of voting. Similarly, the coefficient for systemic polarisation is also positive and fairly robust in size (logit = 0.0656), but again not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), indicating that greater ideological distance among parties does not meaningfully impact voter participation.

Country-Specific Effects

To further strengthen the analysis and illustrate the cross-national validity of the findings, Figure 3 below presents a coefficient plot of the country-specific effects of affective polarisation on voter turnout (after accounting for all individual-level controls). This visualisation allows for a clearer understanding of whether the observed relationship is context-dependent or generalisable across different member states.

As shown, the effect of affective polarisation on turnout is positive in the vast majority of the 27 countries analysed, with most of the coefficients reaching statistical significance. Interestingly, just a few countries stand out for not displaying a statistically significant relationship between affective polarisation and voter turnout. These include Wallonia in Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, and Portugal. While the direction of the effect in these countries is generally positive, the lack of statistical significance suggests that affective polarisation does not exert a strong or consistent mobilising effect. Nonetheless, the mobilisation potential of affective polarisation is not confined to a particular national or regional context but rather emerges as a broadly relevant and consistent driver of electoral participation across the EU. While some variation in magnitude exists, likely reflecting differences in national political environments or levels of affective polarisation, the overall trend confirms that the latter exerts a stable influence on turnout, reinforcing the novel findings of the study.

The country-specific models on which the coefficient plot is based are reported in Appendix **C**, where all results are presented in detail.

Figure 3. Country-Specific Effects of Affective Polarisation on Voter Turnout
(Logistic Regression Coefficients based on Model 2)
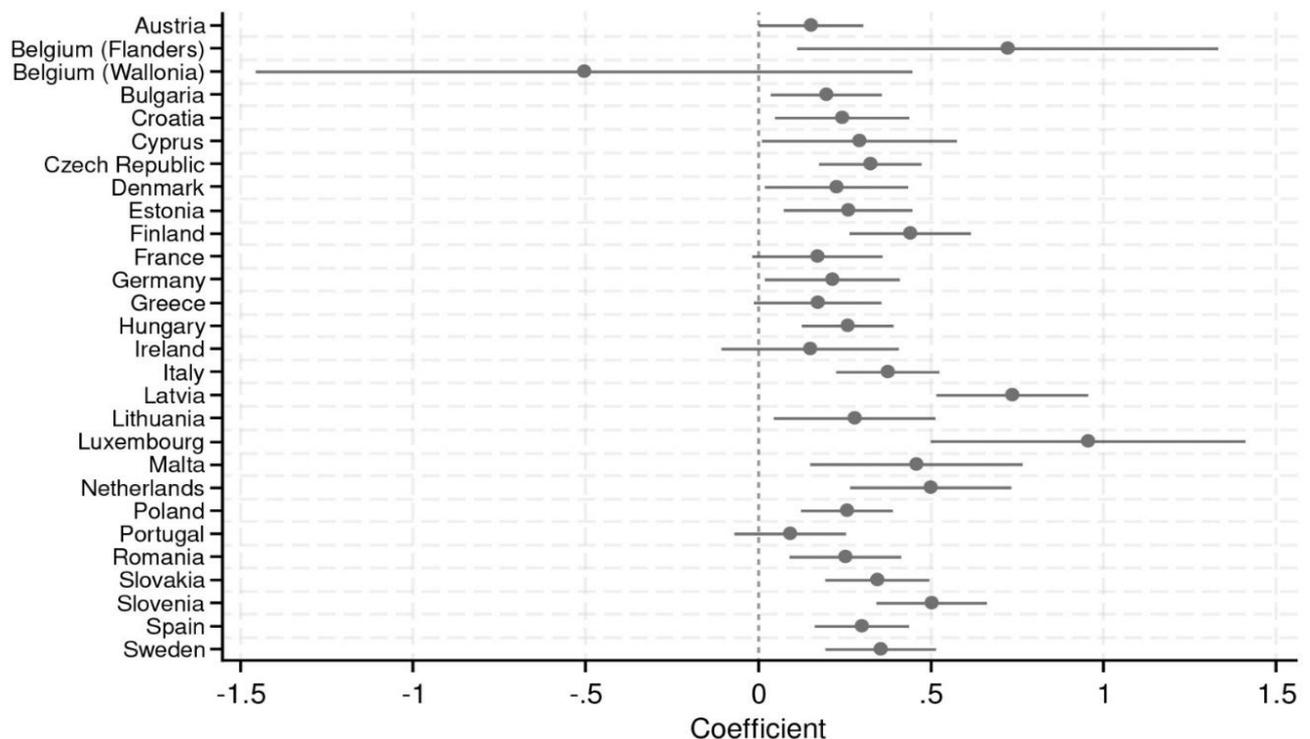
Conclusion and Discussion

Despite extensive research on turnout in EP elections, no study had yet examined the role of affective polarisation. Hence, this paper provided the first empirical assessment of how affective polarisation shaped voter turnout in the 2024 EP elections. The study aimed to test three hypotheses: first, that higher levels of affective polarisation would increase the likelihood of voting; second, that higher levels of EU politicisation among parties would independently influence participation; and third, that EU politicisation would amplify the effect of affective polarisation by reinforcing the mobilisation of voters. By employing multilevel logistic regressions, the study sought to provide an empirical account of how emotional attachments and elite-driven politicisation interact to shape electoral participation in supranational elections.

The results offer a nuanced picture. H1 is strongly supported: affective polarisation is consistently associated with higher probabilities of electoral participation, with individuals holding stronger emotional attachments significantly more likely to vote. In contrast, H2 finds no support. EU politicisation, captured as the product of issue salience and polarisation, does not independently affect turnout, suggesting that politicisation remains largely an elite-driven phenomenon, with limited resonance among voters who may perceive EU conflicts as abstract or distant (Vasilopoulou & Gatterman, 2020). H3 produces the most unexpected finding. Rather than reinforcing mobilisation, higher EU politicisation weakens the effect of affective polarisation. The interaction between affective polarisation and EU politicisation is consistently negative and significant: in contexts where party conflict over the EU is more pronounced and EU issues are more salient, the positive impact of affective polarisation on turnout diminishes. Rather than enhancing engagement, elite-driven politicisation appears to diffuse conflict in ways that undermine the mobilisation potential of affective divides.

Taken together, these findings yield several implications. First, they demonstrate that affective polarisation carries significant yet ambivalent democratic consequences. While it has traditionally been regarded as corrosive to compromise, interpersonal trust, and social cohesion (Iyengar et al., 2019), evidence indicates that it operates as a potent mobilising force also in EP elections. By raising the perceived stakes of elections and framing them as contests between 'Us' and 'Them', affective divides transform EP elections from low-salience, second-order contests into arenas of identity-driven participation. Yet mobilisation through antagonism is normatively problematic. Participation motivated by hostility often entails the rejection of political opponents rather than substantive endorsement of programmes, thereby weakening mechanisms of accountability and representation (Ward & Tavits, 2019). While affective polarisation may narrow participation gaps by activating disengaged or less-educated voters (Harteveld & Wagner, 2023), its cumulative effects risk

entrenching conflict and diminishing the EU's capacity for compromise, as ballots are cast to obstruct adversaries rather than to deliberate over competing visions (Medeiros & Noël, 2014). Thus, given its ambivalent nature, the key challenge lies not in its eradication but in its containment and redirection into constructive engagement rather than destructive division.

Second, the findings shed light on the validity of competing perspectives on EP elections. On the one hand, the consistent effect of affective polarisation complicates the SOE model, which assumes that EP contests are uniformly 'low-salience' and 'low-stakes' (Reiff & Schmitt, 1980). Affective divides clearly increase the perceived stakes of participation, showing that EP elections cannot be reduced to mere second-order contests, as affective polarisation mobilises voters in ways that transcend traditional left–right or nationally grounded lines of political conflict, cutting across established party loyalties and reflecting deeper identity-based cleavages. On the other hand, the absence of a positive effect of EU politicisation and its dampening of affective mobilisation, undercuts the 'Europe matters' approach. Contrary to expectations that European issue competition structures electoral behaviour (Hix & Marsh, 2007), results suggest that politicisation at the elite level has limited resonance among voters. This is consistent with the literature, which emphasises the weak translation of elite-driven politicisation into mass participation (De Wilde et al., 2016; Vasilopoulou & Gattermann, 2020).

In this respect, the results indicate a partial departure from the SOE model. While affective polarisation challenges the assumption of uniformly low-stakes contests, the weak effect of politicisation confirms that EU-level issue competition has not supplanted national logics of mobilisation. Thus, Europe (may) matter in symbolic or identity-laden terms, but not (yet) in a programmatic sense.

While this study offers the first empirical assessment of affective polarisation in supranational elections, it is nonetheless subject to important limitations that also point to avenues for future research. Most notably, the analysis relies on a single electoral cycle, providing a cross-sectional snapshot of the relationship between affective polarisation, EU politicisation, and voter turnout. Despite the novel findings of the study, such a design cannot capture potential temporal dynamics, including the evolution of affective divides, changes in EU politicisation among party systems, or shifts in voter responsiveness across multiple election cycles. Future research should adopt a longitudinal perspective, tracking multiple EP elections to determine whether the mobilising effects of affective polarisation persist over time and whether elite-driven politicisation may eventually amplify or attenuate these effects. Such data would also enable a more detailed investigation of causal mechanisms, including the durability of identity-driven mobilisation and potential feedback loops between turnout and polarisation, as observed in national elections (Harteveld & Wagner, 2023).

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Appendix A – Summary Statistics

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Tabulation of turnout

RECODE of turnout_dummy (Turnout: EP Election)	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No, did not vote	6304	24.58	24.58
Yes, voted	19340	75.42	100.00
Total	25644	100.00	

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

Descriptive Statistics of weighted affective polarisation

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
polar w	24109	2.32	1.163	0	6.015

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL VARIABLES

Descriptive Statistics of age

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
age	25904	48.498	15.599	16	99

Tabulation of gender

Gender	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Male	12506	48.37	48.37
Female	13349	51.63	100.00
Total	25855	100.00	

Tabulation of level of education

RECODE of edu_level (Education)	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Lower secondary/Less than lower secondary	4933	19.13	19.13
Secondary	11946	46.34	65.47
Tertiary/More than tertiary	8902	34.53	100.00
Total	25781	100.00	

Tabulation of perception of influencing politics

RECODE of pol_influence_self	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Agree	4221	16.95	16.95
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6148	24.69	41.64
Disagree	14531	58.36	100.00
Total	24900	100.00	

Tabulation of partisanship

RECODE of q19n (Party in Q9/Q11/Q18/Q20:Party Identification)	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	6716	28.31	28.31
Yes	17007	71.69	100.00
Total	23723	100.00	

Descriptive Statistics of left-right self-positioning

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
lr position	23339	5.372	2.639	0	10

Tabulation of interest in politics

RECODE of pol_interest (Interest in Politics)	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Interested	15705	61.21	61.21
Not interested	9951	38.79	100.00
Total	25656	100.00	

Descriptive Statistics of self-positioning on European Unification

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
eu integration self	24083	5.35	3.117	0	10

Tabulation of self-economic perception

RECODE of q14 (State of the Economy - Compared to 12 Months Ago)	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Better/A bit better	5786	22.80	22.80
Stayed the same	7516	29.62	52.42
Worse/A bit worse	12072	47.58	100.00
Total	25374	100.00	

Tabulation of living standard

RECODE of living_standard_self	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Poor/ Quite poor family	7626	29.88	29.88
Average family	9267	36.31	66.20
Rich/Quite rich family	8626	33.80	100.00
Total	25519	100.00	

STRUCTURAL LEVEL VARIABLES

Descriptive Statistics of self-perception of parties' polarisation on the EU

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
perceived eu polar	28	2.844	2.166	0	9.664

Descriptive Statistics of EU politicisation index

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
eu_pol_index	27	39.337	18.961	4.843	81.536

Descriptive Statistics of Electoral Fatigue

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
rev electoral fatique	28	761.821	502.274	53	1841

Descriptive Statistics of Electoral Competitiveness

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
electoral competitiveness	28	.063	.071	.002	.336

Descriptive Statistics of Systemic Polarisation

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
systemic polarisation	27	4.692	1.824	.62	8.545

ROBUSTNESS TEST- VARIABLES

Different measures of Affective Polarisation

Descriptive Statistics of vertical affective polarisation

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
ptv ap	24109	1.891	.99	0	11.384

Descriptive Statistics of unweighted affective polarisation

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
polar	24109	2.22	1.214	0	5

Appendix B - Robustness Tests

To assess the robustness of the main findings, this appendix presents additional models using two alternative operationalisations of affective polarisation and a model in which Belgium and Luxembourg are excluded to account for mandatory voting. These are designed to test whether the observed relationship between affective polarisation and voter turnout in the European Parliament elections holds under different measurement strategies.

Unweighted affective polarisation

This measure replicates the structure of the original index but omits the weighting by party size. It calculates the standard deviation of respondents' affective evaluations of party supporters without accounting for how large or electorally relevant the parties in question are. While this approach captures dispersion in affective evaluations, it treats all parties equally, regardless of their political relevance or visibility. As a result, it may underestimate polarisation in contexts where extreme affect is directed primarily at major parties. It is measured as follows:

$$\textbf{\textit{Unweighted affective polarisation}} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{p=1}^{P}(like_{ip} - \overline{like_i})^2}{n_p}}$$

Vertical affective polarisation

Vertical affective polarisation, called ptv_ap, was constructed using q9: *We have a number of parties in each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please answer on a scale where 0 means "not at all probable" and 10 means "very probable"*. Although the variable used is different, the operationalisation follows the weighted spread of scores as described in the main text:

$$Vertical\ Affective\ Polarisation = \sqrt{\sum_{p=1}^{P} v_p\ (like_{ip} - \overline{like_i})^2}$$

where p is the party, v_p the vote share of each party in the 2024 EP elections ranging from 0 to 1, i is the individual respondent, $like_{ip}$ the like/dislike score assigned to each party p by individual i. The mean affect $\overline{like_i}$ should itself be weighted by party size and computed as:

$$\overline{like_i} = \sum_{p=1}^{P} (v_p * like_{ip})$$

Table B.1 - Robustness Test based on Model 2 using the unweighted spread-of-scores

	Model 2
polar	0.233***
	(0.0154)
partisanship_dummy	
No	Baseline
Yes	0.429***
	(0.0401)
lr_position	0.00789
	(0.00654)
pol_interest_rec	
Not Interested	Baseline
Interested	0.857***
	(0.0362)
pol_influence_self_rec	
Disagree	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0.300***
	(0.0543)
Agree	0.258***
	(0.0497)
eu_integration_self	0.0338***
	(0.00571)
economy_perception_self	
Better/A bit Better	Baseline
Stayed the same	-0.286***
	(0.0476)
Worse/A bit Worse	-0.316***
	(0.0463)
living_standard_rec	
Poor/Quite Poor	Baseline
Average	0.149***
	(0.0421)
Rich/Quite Rich	0.231***
	(0.0446)
edu_level_rec	
Lower Secondary/ Less than Lower Secondary	Baseline
Secondary	0.173***
	(0.0464)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary	0.359***
	(0.0488)
gender	
Male	Baseline
Female	-0.0144
	(0.0339)
age	0.0164***
	(0.00112)
Intercept	-1.177***
	(0.180)
Random Effects Parameters	
variance(country)	0.564
	(0.158)
N	19281
AIC	21011.3
BIC	21145.1

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{*} p < 0.05,\ ^{**} p < 0.01,\ ^{***} p < 0.001$

Table B.2 - Robustness Test based on Model 2 using vertical affective polarisation

	Model 2
ptv_ap	0.0486**
	(0.0189)
partisanship_dummy	
No	Baseline
Yes	0.562***
	(0.0389)
lr_position	0.00523
	(0.00649)
pol_interest_rec	
Not Interested	Baseline
Interested	0.927***
	(0.0358)
pol_influence_self_rec	
Disagree	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0.240***
	(0.0539)
Agree	0.181***
	(0.0494)
eu_integration_self	0.0353***
	(0.00567)
economy_perception_self	
Better/A bit Better	Baseline
Stayed the Same	-0.281***
	(0.0473)
Worse/A bit Worse	-0.273***
	(0.0462)
living_standard_rec	
Poor/Quite Poor	Baseline
Average	0.147***
	(0.0418)
Rich/Quite Rich	0.213***
	(0.0443)
edu_level_rec	
Lower Secondary/ Less than Lower Secondary	Baseline
Secondary	0.183***
	(0.0460)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary	0.373***
	(0.0485)
gender	
Male	Baseline
Female	-0.00118
	(0.0337)
age	0.0185***
	(0.00111)
Intercept	-1.008***
	(0.181)
Random Effects Parameters	
variance(country)	0.549
	(0.154)
N	19281
AIC	21236.3
BIC	21370.0

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

Table B.3 - Robustness Test based on Model 6 excluding Belgium and Luxembourg

A third robustness model excludes Belgium and Luxembourg, the only two countries in the dataset that enforce mandatory voting. Given that compulsory voting significantly increases turnout by reducing the costs of participation, including these cases may artificially inflate the overall relationship between affective polarisation and electoral participation. By removing these countries, the model tests whether the observed effects hold in contexts where voting is voluntary and more reflective of individual-level motivations. As shown by the Table below, results remain consistent with the main findings, suggesting that the influence of affective polarisation on turnout is not solely driven by this institutional factor.

	Model 6
polar_w	0.374***
	(0.0395)
eu_pol_index	-0.00125
	(0.00555)
c.polar_w#c.eu_pol_index	-0.00218**
	(0.000820)
partisanship_dummy	
No	Baseline
Yes	0.397***
	(0.0410)
lr_position	0.00453
	(0.00665)
pol_interest_rec	
Not Interested	Baseline
Interested	0.853***
	(0.0370)
pol_influence_self_rec	
Disagree	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0.287***
	(0.0552)
Agree	0.245***
	(0.0506)
eu_integration_self	0.0333***
	(0.00581)
economy_perception_self	
Better/ A bit Better	Baseline
Stayed the same	-0.281***
	(0.0483)
Worse/A bit Worse	-0.304***
	(0.0470)
gender	
Male	Baseline
Female	-0.0120
	(0.0346)
age	0.0158***
	(0.00114)
edu_level_rec	
Lower Secondary/ Less than Lower Secondary	Baseline
Secondary	0.172***
	(0.0472)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary	0.373***
	(0.0498)
living_standard_rec	
Poor/Quite Poor	Baseline
Average	0.137**
	(0.0428)
Rich/Quite Rich	0.231***
	(0.0455)
perceived_eu_polar	-0.0223**
	(0.00836)
rev_electoral_fatique	-0.000619**
	(0.000236)
electoral_competitiveness	0.665
	(1.361)
systemic_polarisation	0.0476
	(0.0542)
Intercept	-1.988***
	(0.376)
Random Effects Parameters	
variance(country)	0.216
	(0.0649)
N	18219
AIC	20235.3
BIC	20414.9

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{*} p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

Appendix C - Full Model Specifications for Country-Specific Coefficient Plot

	Austria	Belgium (Flanders)	Belgium (Wallonia)	Bulgaria	Croatia	Cyprus
polar_w	0.151*	0.722*	-0.505	0.196*	0.242*	0.291*
	(0.0745)	(0.313)	(0.484)	(0.0809)	(0.0973)	(0.144)
partisanship_dummy						
No	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Yes	0.186	0.264	0.703	0.351	0.311	0.235
	(0.189)	(0.520)	(0.743)	(0.186)	(0.199)	(0.254)
lr_position	-0.0351	-0.130	-0.0809	-0.00469	0.0489	0.0201
	(0.0403)	(0.0796)	(0.112)	(0.0327)	(0.0352)	(0.0465)
pol_interest_rec						
Not Interested	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Interested	1.242***	0.0974	1073	1.025***	0.716***	0.526*
	(0.185)	(0.367)	(0.607)	(0.194)	(0.186)	(0.253)
pol_influence_self_rec						
Disagree	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0.417	0.219	-0.454	-0.202	0.241	0.372
	(0.277)	(0.442)	(0.813)	(0.307)	(0.442)	(0.491)
Agree	0.0175	0.994*	-0.0405	-0.379	-0.125	0.130
	(0.238)	(0.488)	(0.781)	(0.259)	(0.399)	(0.425)
eu_integration_self	0.0816**	-0.0767	0.0851	0.0159	0.0752*	-0.00236
	(0.0283)	(0.0654)	(0.0972)	(0.0281)	(0.0297)	(0.0403)
economy_perception_self						
Better/A bit Better	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Stayed the Same	-0.267	-0.522	-0.289	-0.0196	-0.102	-0.227
	(0.253)	(0.486)	(0.805)	(0.255)	(0.245)	(0.361)
Worse/A bit Worse	-0.0452	-0.689	0.311	0.0312	-0.133	-0.321
	(0.249)	(0.493)	(0.850)	(0.251)	(0.243)	(0.330)
gender						
Male	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Female	0.175	-0.317	-0.518	-0.0780	0.0434	-0.282
	(0.172)	(0.355)	(0.572)	(0.172)	(0.185)	(0.248)
age	0.0121*	0.0152	0.0317	0.00996	0.00675	0.0370***
	(0.00568)	(0.0113)	(0.0174)	(0.00604)	(0.00649)	(0.00816)
edu_level_rec						
Lower Secondary/Less than Lower Secondary	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Secondary	0.587**	0.246	-0.346	-0.0316	0.250	0.0229
	(0.224)	(0.500)	(0.637)	(0.241)	(0.282)	(0.363)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary	0.747**	0.379	0.00820	0.266	0.409	-0.283
	(0.252)	(0.483)	(0.762)	(0.259)	(0.303)	(0.345)
living_standard_rec						
Poor/Quite Poor	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Average	-0.128	-0.0254	0.543	0.622**	0.0464	0.241
	(0.215)	(0.554)	(0.694)	(0.206)	(0.231)	(0.296)
Rich/Quite Rich	-0.143	-0.0228	0.466	0.457*	0.176	0.0914
	(0.230)	(0.536)	(0.779)	(0.218)	(0.251)	(0.313)
Intercept	-0.719	0.851	2073	-1.396**	-2.717***	-1341
	(0.552)	-1187	-1737	(0.534)	(0.746)	(0.831)
Pseudo R²	0.116	0.0614	0.126	0.0891	0.0670	0.111
N	776	463	217	753	779	396

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

	Czech Republic	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany
polar_w	0.324***	0.227*	0.261**	0.438***	0.171	0.212*
	(0.0762)	(0.107)	(0.0940)	(0.0862)	(0.0957)	(0.104)
partisanship_dummy						
No	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Yes	0.428*	0.140	0.780***	0.0484	0.842**	1.295***
	(0.213)	(0.277)	(0.203)	(0.215)	(0.256)	(0.219)
lr_position	0.0293	-0.00618	0.0378	-0.0893*	0.0816*	0.0495
	(0.0383)	(0.0347)	(0.0438)	(0.0355)	(0.0345)	(0.0471)
pol_interest_rec						
Not Interested	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Interested	0.610***	0.725***	0.915***	0.792***	0.751***	0.828***
	(0.178)	(0.195)	(0.194)	(0.175)	(0.225)	(0.210)
pol_influence_self_rec						
Disagree	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree	-0.779*	-0.110	0.655*	-0.0448	-0.0230	-0.528
	(0.325)	(0.228)	(0.312)	(0.251)	(0.326)	(0.318)
Agree	0.806**	0.0446	0.174	0.504*	-0.473	0.600*
	(0.301)	(0.234)	(0.286)	(0.250)	(0.309)	(0.293)
eu_integration_self	-0.0245	0.0294	-0.00123	0.0514	-0.0172	0.123***
	(0.0290)	(0.0360)	(0.0342)	(0.0339)	(0.0349)	(0.0324)
economy_perception_self						
Better/A bit Better	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Stayed the Same	-0.368	-0.645**	-1.018**	-0.215	-0.170	-1.246***
	(0.244)	(0.201)	(0.329)	(0.249)	(0.327)	(0.327)
Worse/A bit Worse	-0.325	-0.887***	-1.369***	-0.523*	0.273	-0.511
	(0.235)	(0.262)	(0.310)	(0.245)	(0.301)	(0.314)
gender						
Male	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Female	-0.0414	-0.370*	0.346	-0.442**	-0.304	-0.162
	(0.166)	(0.176)	(0.200)	(0.171)	(0.192)	(0.191)
age	-0.000108	0.0178**	0.0309***	0.0162**	0.0180**	0.0209***
	(0.00571)	(0.00568)	(0.00653)	(0.00557)	(0.00615)	(0.00621)
edu_level_rec						
Lower Secondary/Less than Lower Secondary	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Secondary	0.104	-0.377	0.279	0.521*	0.229	0.268
	(0.284)	(0.247)	(0.264)	(0.239)	(0.271)	(0.234)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary	0.373	-0.0842	1.132***	1.001***	0.653*	0.120
	(0.308)	(0.240)	(0.284)	(0.246)	(0.284)	(0.269)
living_standard_rec						
Poor/Quite Poor	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Average	-0.00540	0.342	-0.488*	0.412	0.493*	0.425
	(0.204)	(0.260)	(0.234)	(0.212)	(0.238)	(0.224)
Rich/Quite Rich	0.223	0.221	-0.128	0.326	0.0899	0.799**
	(0.218)	(0.246)	(0.236)	(0.223)	(0.254)	(0.260)
Intercept	-0.438	-0.204	-2.095***	-1.402**	-1.702**	-1.389*
	(0.626)	(0.574)	(0.620)	(0.539)	(0.645)	(0.577)
Pseudo R²	0.0838	0.0885	0.208	0.133	0.132	0.192
N	755	696	698	764	687	777

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

	Greece	Hungary	Ireland	Italy	Latvia	Lithuania
polar_w	0.173	0.258***	0.149	0.375***	0.737***	0.279*
	(0.0944)	(0.0680)	(0.131)	(0.0770)	(0.112)	(0.118)
partisanship_dummy						
No	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Yes	0.513**	0.738***	0.308	0.586*	-0.123	0.823***
	(0.184)	(0.211)	(0.195)	(0.248)	(0.204)	(0.224)
lr_position	0.0228	-0.0492	0.0618	-0.0177	0.0333	-0.00720
	(0.0340)	(0.0377)	(0.0362)	(0.0313)	(0.0411)	(0.0395)
pol_interest_rec						
Not Interested	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Interested	0.612***	0.649***	1.246***	0.821***	0.842***	0.961***
	(0.179)	(0.192)	(0.175)	(0.177)	(0.198)	(0.254)
pol_influence_self_rec						
Disagree	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0.0365	-0.613	-0.322	0.839**	0.624*	0.0394
	(0.280)	(0.357)	(0.216)	(0.288)	(0.310)	(0.314)
Agree	0.0378	-0.579	-0.211	0.0967	0.280	0.597*
	(0.251)	(0.329)	(0.206)	(0.256)	(0.286)	(0.300)
eu_integration_self	-0.00270	0.0777*	-0.0670	0.104***	0.0719*	0.0103
	(0.0261)	(0.0320)	(0.0343)	(0.0285)	(0.0337)	(0.0360)
economy_perception_self						
Better/A bit Better	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Stayed the Same	-0.517	-0.560	-0.598**	-0.231	-0.225	-0.0184
	(0.271)	(0.314)	(0.216)	(0.237)	(0.278)	(0.249)
Worse/A bit Worse	-0.148	-0.841**	-0.273	-0.152	-0.167	-0.179
	(0.252)	(0.292)	(0.210)	(0.244)	(0.272)	(0.267)
gender						
Male	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Female	-0.247	-0.171	0.302	0.567**	0.182	0.512*
	(0.171)	(0.182)	(0.164)	(0.174)	(0.185)	(0.206)
age	0.0102	0.0379***	0.0255***	0.0114	0.0172*	0.000647
	(0.00658)	(0.00656)	(0.00628)	(0.00602)	(0.00722)	(0.00715)
edu_level_rec						
Lower Secondary/Less than Lower Secondary	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Secondary	0.172	0.0709	-0.706**	0.106	0.659*	0.489
	(0.212)	(0.284)	(0.255)	(0.189)	(0.288)	(0.322)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary	0.260	0.523	-0.436	0.954***	0.484	0.679*
	(0.237)	(0.309)	(0.268)	(0.245)	(0.296)	(0.329)
living_standard_rec						
Poor/Quite Poor	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Average	0.201	0.0000928	0.278	-0.184	0.674**	-0.137
	(0.186)	(0.214)	(0.219)	(0.217)	(0.238)	(0.263)
Rich/Quite Rich	0.341	0.486	0.434	-0.186	0.742**	-0.0239
	(0.221)	(0.269)	(0.223)	(0.233)	(0.235)	(0.265)
Intercept	-1.195*	-1177	-0.474	-2.126***	-3.882***	-1.779**
	(0.595)	(0.652)	(0.576)	(0.576)	(0.660)	(0.609)
Pseudo R²	0.0550	0.172	0.133	0.147	0.152	0.117
N	775	756	805	802	682	585

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

	Luxembourg	Malta	Netherlands	Poland	Portugal	Romania
polar_w	0.953***	0.458**	0.499***	0.256***	0.0918	0.253**
	(0.228)	(0.157)	(0.120)	(0.0659)	(0.0855)	(0.0805)
partisanship_dummy						
No	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Yes	-0.0202	-0.365	0.830***	0.0999	0.486*	0.657***
	(0.377)	(0.341)	(0.237)	(0.247)	(0.199)	(0.194)
lr_position	0.174*	-0.0302	0.0650	-0.0123	-0.0337	0.0355
	(0.0856)	(0.0708)	(0.0384)	(0.0316)	(0.0291)	(0.0331)
pol_interest_rec						
Not Interested	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Interested	0.903*	1.052**	0.911***	0.863***	1.047***	0.735***
	(0.385)	(0.340)	(0.180)	(0.208)	(0.184)	(0.181)
pol_influence_self_rec						
Disagree	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0.344	2.212***	-0.683**	0.0174	0.0854	0.461
	(0.815)	(0.647)	(0.230)	(0.249)	(0.250)	(0.287)
Agree	1.711**	0.187	0.459*	-0.254	-0.322	0.108
	(0.626)	(0.390)	(0.230)	(0.240)	(0.234)	(0.242)
eu_integration_self	-0.0725	0.137*	0.0999**	-0.0259	0.0206	0.0345
	(0.0657)	(0.0590)	(0.0360)	(0.0270)	(0.0310)	(0.0272)
economy_perception_self						
Better/A bit Better	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Stayed the Same	0.769	-0.271	-0.0218	-0.305	-0.179	0.287
	(0.562)	(0.469)	(0.216)	(0.215)	(0.227)	(0.250)
Worse/A bit Worse	-0.107	0.265	-0.345	-0.565*	-0.478*	0.216
	(0.514)	(0.470)	(0.235)	(0.231)	(0.225)	(0.229)
gender						
Male	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Female	-0.166	0.194	0.0691	-0.402*	0.100	-0.149
	(0.357)	(0.324)	(0.179)	(0.166)	(0.161)	(0.175)
age	0.0233	0.0142	0.0340***	0.0168**	0.0101	0.00280
	(0.0122)	(0.0102)	(0.00555)	(0.00588)	(0.00572)	(0.00582)
edu_level_rec						
Lower Secondary/Less than Lower Secondary	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Secondary	0.958	0.366	0.709**	0.357	-0.417*	0.877***
	(0.510)	(0.408)	(0.226)	(0.247)	(0.210)	(0.216)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary	0.108	0.564	0.967***	0.581*	-0.560*	0.448
	(0.467)	(0.432)	(0.237)	(0.273)	(0.224)	(0.238)
living_standard_rec						
Poor/Quite Poor	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Average	1.100*	-0.136	0.188	0.0739	0.190	0.254
	(0.505)	(0.475)	(0.263)	(0.208)	(0.189)	(0.220)
Rich/Quite Rich	-0.0935	-0.518	0.429	0.668**	0.532*	0.285
	(0.427)	(0.466)	(0.265)	(0.224)	(0.223)	(0.229)
Intercept	-0.770	-0.464	-3.916***	-1.207*	-0.453	-1.960***
	-1331	(0.908)	(0.658)	(0.563)	(0.480)	(0.533)
Pseudo R²	0.249	0.197	0.181	0.113	0.0933	0.126
N	382	331	790	806	840	743

Standard errors in parentheses
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

	Slovakia	Slovenia	Spain	Sweden
polar_w	0.345***	0.503***	0.299***	0.355***
	(0.0769)	(0.0824)	(0.0712)	(0.0809)
partisanship_dummy				
No	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Yes	0.432*	0.211	0.692**	0.465*
	(0.202)	(0.191)	(0.211)	(0.222)
lr_position	-0.0373	0.00307	0.0148	0.00853
	(0.0333)	(0.0342)	(0.0297)	(0.0297)
pol_interest_rec				
Not Interested	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Interested	0.688***	0.909***	0.984***	1.209***
	(0.182)	(0.175)	(0.169)	(0.185)
pol_influence_self_rec				
Disagree	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0.225	0.313	0.109	0.294
	(0.311)	(0.324)	(0.277)	(0.241)
Agree	0.501	-0.371	-0.363	-0.0173
	(0.276)	(0.282)	(0.238)	(0.235)
eu_integration_self	0.0505	0.0435	0.0323	0.0998**
	(0.0278)	(0.0266)	(0.0264)	(0.0340)
economy_perception_self				
Better/A bit Better	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Stayed the Same	-0.288	-0.0873	-0.278	-0.228
	(0.231)	(0.228)	(0.242)	(0.224)
Worse/A bit Worse	-0.332	-0.375	-0.565*	-0.441*
	(0.223)	(0.231)	(0.225)	(0.217)
gender				
Male	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Female	-0.110	0.0262	-0.0185	0.139
	(0.169)	(0.176)	(0.161)	(0.175)
age	0.0227***	0.0101	0.00920	0.0184***
	(0.00572)	(0.00564)	(0.00562)	(0.00538)
edu_level_rec				
Lower Secondary/Less than Lower Secondary	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Secondary	0.221	-0.202	-0.138	0.313
	(0.325)	(0.293)	(0.206)	(0.237)
Tertiary/More than Tertiary	0.110	-0.0335	0.455*	0.747**
	(0.350)	(0.308)	(0.197)	(0.243)
living_standard_rec				
Poor/Quite Poor	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Average	-0.0754	-0.133	0.283	0.308
	(0.211)	(0.204)	(0.192)	(0.227)
Rich/Quite Rich	0.191	-0.0574	0.0607	0.225
	(0.242)	(0.221)	(0.213)	(0.221)
Intercept	-2.039***	-1003	-1.095*	-2.292***
	(0.588)	(0.558)	(0.440)	(0.556)
Pseudo R²	0.128	0.151	0.146	0.146
N	786	778	856	803

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$