

# Minority Status and Support for Supranational Integration\*

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## Abstract

This article proposes a novel theory of minority status and support for supranational integration. We argue that the gap in status and opportunities between majority and minority individuals affects the evaluation of international institutions. Individuals whose socioeconomic status and opportunities are restricted because of minority traits are more dissatisfied with national institutions and more favorable toward supranational integration than their majority counterparts. We test our theory on the European Union, the most advanced case of regional integration. Using different operationalizations of minority status and an exact matching strategy we demonstrate a robust positive association between minority status and support for supranational integration. Testing the mechanisms, we present evidence that integration in the host country and discrimination drive these effects.

**Keywords:** Ethnic politics, Supranational integration, Minority groups.

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Do individuals with minority traits hold distinctive attitudes toward supranational institutions? Prior research on international institutions has focused on utilitarian explanations or feelings of cultural threat, without considering how the ethnic background of individuals affects the development of political attitudes (Dellmuth et al., 2022; Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). However, understanding how minority traits affect support for supranational institutions is a pressing concern in light of the growing diversity of societies, and the increasing contestation of international institutions (e.g., De Vries, Hobolt, & Walter, 2021; Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2006).

This article seeks to fill this gap by introducing a new theory of support for international institutions that accounts for the different experiences of minority and majority individuals in their country of residence. We posit that the exposure to different status and opportunities in the country of residence leads majorities and minorities to evaluate international institutions differently. Because of their lower status relative to majority individuals, minorities tend to be less attached to domestic institutions and less likely to perceive delegations of national sovereignty to supranational organizations as an identity threat. Hence, we expect minority individuals to be more supportive of supranational institutions. Moreover, we expect that the factors influencing the status of minorities, such as cultural integration and discrimination, also moderate the opinion gap between majority and minority individuals.

We apply our theory to the European Union, which provides an ideal case study for our analysis. The EU is arguably the “most advanced IO in terms of the depth and scope of rule-based integration among its member states” (De Vries, Hobolt, & Walter, 2021, p. 4), as well as the most ambitious attempt to develop a continental-scale and multi-national political system beyond the nation-state (Hix & Høyland, 2011). Additionally, Europe has a rich history of nation-states with clear ethno-cultural majorities, yet most EU member states are not ethnically homogeneous (Pan, Pfeil, & Videsott, 2018). Both historical and recent migration flows across Europe have increased the share of individuals that do not identify or are not recognized as members of a country’s ethnic majority. Therefore, by focusing on Europe we are able to explore the opinion of different types of minorities about supranational integration, and how these opinions compare with those of majorities.

Using data from the European Social Survey (Gedeshi et al., 2020; Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway, 2018) we demonstrate the existence of an opinion gap between majorities and minorities regarding supranational integration. To operationalize minority status, we use survey items that ask respondents about parental origins, spoken language and minority self-identification. We also zoom in on specific minority subsamples, namely first- and second-generation migrants as well as regional minorities. Regardless of the operationalization, we find that minority status correlates positively with support for European integration. To ensure that our results are not biased by common confounders in the literature on public opinion toward IOs, we match majority and minority individuals with exactly the same sociodemographic characteristics and further adjust our regression models for several individual-level and country-level covariates. Our results are robust to the use of different survey data, to another measure of EU support, and to several alternative estimation strategies.

In the final part of the analysis, we present several additional tests that explore the mechanisms of our theoretical framework. The results highlight the importance of cultural integration and

discrimination in the host society. Recent first-generation migrants are generally more enthusiastic about both international and domestic institutions than majorities, but this gap shrinks with the time spent in the country and with integration indicators such as getting citizenship. By contrast, second-generation migrants and historical minorities tend to be less satisfied with national government and democracy than majorities, which suggests that support for supranational integration among these groups might be rooted in negative experiences with the nation-state. We thus provide suggestive evidence that perceptions of discrimination and political exclusion drive support for supranational integration and dissatisfaction with national institutions.

The paper contributes to the literature on public opinion toward international organizations by demonstrating a divide between domestic majorities and minorities. Current theories link international attitudes to a broad array of individual and societal factors, such as economic evaluations (Anderson & Reichert, 1995; Gabel & Palmer, 1995), cultural considerations (Hooghe & Marks, 2004), social trust (Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2018), and political cues (Hobolt, 2007; Hooghe & Marks, 2005). Instead, our theory highlights the behavioral and attitudinal implications of descent-based characteristics. Moreover, while prior studies have recognized the importance of “national identity” in shaping support for supranational integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2005), they have typically treated identity-formation as exogenous to the status of individuals in the society. Instead, we link the formation of political preferences to negative experiences with the nation-state that characterize minority populations (Fouka, 2019; Gehring, 2020).

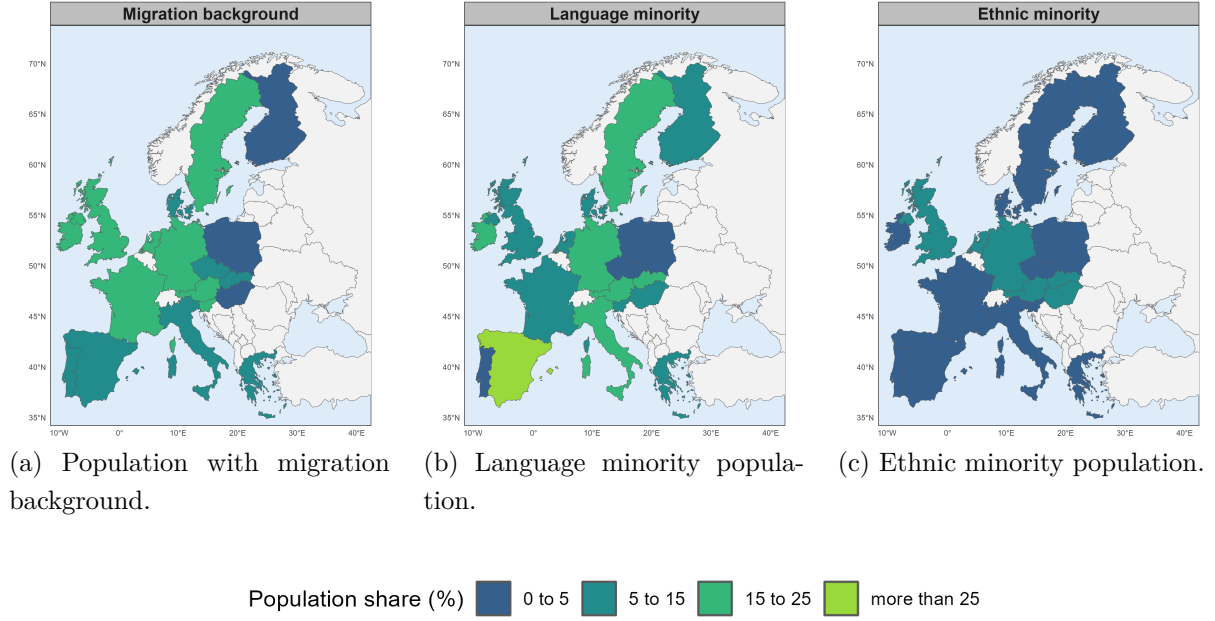
Finally, we relate to the literature on the political and socioeconomic integration of marginalized populations in multi-ethnic societies (Dancygier & Saunders, 2006). These studies demonstrate that the status gap between majority and minority individuals has important attitudinal and behavioral implications (Chong & Kim, 2006; Gaikwad & Nellis, 2017; Kuo, Malhotra, & Mo, 2017). Notably, research has shown that minorities feel less attached to the state (Elkins & Sides, 2007), and that political exclusion drives this relationship (Wimmer, 2017). We contribute to this literature by highlighting the implications of minority status for political opinions beyond the state level.

This paper is structured as follows. We start by describing the data used in the analysis. Section 2 then introduces the theoretical and empirical puzzle and provides comparative evidence of the majority-minority gap in supranational attitudes. Section 4 lays out the theoretical argument, whereas Sections 6 and 7 test our theory and provide suggestive evidence of the causal mechanism. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings and suggest avenues of further research.

## 1 Case and Data

We mainly use data from the European Social Survey for the analysis (Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway, 2018). We study Europe because it combines high variation in minority traits across states with the most advanced project of supranational integration to date. Moreover, studying minority attitudes in the European setting is a least-likely case since ethnicity is rarely thought of playing a major role in EU politics. The ESS contains multiple

Figure 1: Shares of domestic minority population by country and trait.



Note: Population shares are computed by averaging ESS responses by country using the included analysis weights. The colored countries are included in the main analyses, whereas the light gray ones are not. Population data come from the ESS, and state border polygons from CShapes 2 (Schvitz et al., 2021).

measures of ethno-linguistic and migratory background that proxy for minority status, as well as an item on individual support for European integration. Therefore, it allows us to compare support for supranational integration between domestic majorities and minorities across various minority traits for a large sample of European states and over a decade. Each ESS survey round is sampled to represent country populations, and offers post-stratification and population weights for researchers to improve the representativeness of derived statistics.

We restrict the integrated longitudinal ESS file by removing the first and fifth waves because they do not include the EU support item. Moreover, since our distinction between majority and minority individuals only applies to mostly homogeneous nation-states with clear majorities, we remove Belgium which has a system of ethnic power-sharing, and Luxembourg which is a principality.<sup>1</sup> We also restrict the sample to EU member states, and remove Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania because they host a large Russian minority.<sup>2</sup> Next, we delete country-rounds where there is no variation in either treatment status or in the outcome.<sup>3</sup> Appendix B.1 provides descriptive information on the country-rounds used in the analysis and the relative sample sizes.

<sup>1</sup>In our view, the difference between nation-states and dynastically-governed states when it comes to the status of minorities lies in the legitimacy of nation-states being clearly linked to representing one cultural group, whereas dynastic states rule by the principle of loyalty to the crown.

<sup>2</sup>We argue that for ethnic Russians the EU does not provide the same geopolitical alternative to the nation-state, a role that might be better fulfilled by a stronger and more assertive Russian motherland. Hence minority status for states with large Russian populations does not follow the same logic outlined by this paper.

<sup>3</sup>For instance, in Croatia, the majority of ESS respondents report speaking an “other” language and zero to speak Croatian. In some country-rounds, the EU question is simply not asked.

We construct three binary measures of minority status based on socio-demographic and attitudinal variables in the ESS. First, a binary item codes whether respondents have at least one parent who was born in a country other than the one the respondent currently resides in. We refer to this variable as *migration background*. The indicator variable *language minority* captures whether the respondent speaks any language other than the country’s majority language at home.<sup>4</sup> A third indicator codes whether the respondent considers themselves a member of an *ethnic minority*. Figure 1 shows the proportions of a country’s population bearing minority traits according to the three measures of minority status. According to ESS data, individuals with migration background represent 15.5 percent of the resident population in these countries, whereas language minorities and ethnic minorities each represent 14.3 and 5.3 percent. Therefore, Figure 1 suggests that, despite some cross-country variation, there are large minority populations across Europe. Moreover, the plots indicate that variables measuring minority status with observable traits, such as migration background and spoken language, capture a broader population than the one relying on respondents’ self-identification.

Our main dependent variable is a 10-point Likert item that captures individual attitudes relative to the nation-state of residence and to supranational integration. *Support for EU integration* asks respondents whether they believe EU integration has gone too far (0), or whether it should continue further (10). We interpret this variable as measuring the extent to which individuals support the process of European integration, and thus the delegation of state sovereignty to supranational institutions. Appendix B.2 and B.3 provide descriptive statistics of ESS data, as well as additional information on trends in support of supranational integration over ESS rounds.

## 2 Minority Status and European Attitudes: An Empirical and Theoretical Puzzle

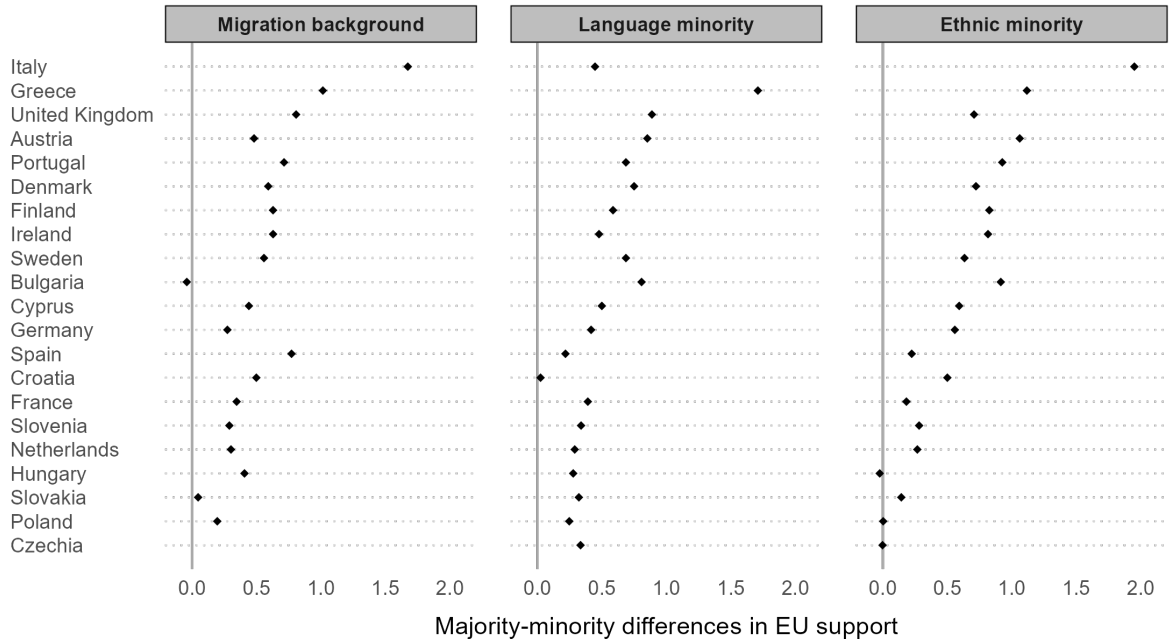
We start by empirically illustrating the variation of interest. Figure 2 displays average majority-minority differences in EU support for the main sample of European countries. It is striking that minority individuals show more positive attitudes toward European integration than majorities, regardless of the operationalization of minority status. How can we explain this pattern?

There is an established literature concerned with the drivers of support for supranational integration in the European context. However, the bulk of this literature is color-blind, in the sense that individual minority traits are never considered to explain variation in supranational attitudes. Overall, explanations of support for international institutions can generally be grouped into several theories (see Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). *Cultural* explanations predict citizens attached to the nation-state to oppose supranational integration because they perceive it as a threat to

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<sup>4</sup>The variable takes value 1 if the respondent’s first language spoken at home is the country’s majority language and no other language is spoken in the household, or if both the first and the second household languages are the country’s majority language. Otherwise, the indicator takes value 0. We require that all languages spoken in the household are the country’s majority language because there is evidence that ascriptive characteristics – which are likely not captured by survey items – are targets of discrimination even when individuals assimilate in the local majority language (Choi, Poertner, & Sambanis, 2020).

Figure 2: Minority-majority differences in support for supranational integration across Europe.



Note: Squares indicate average differences in support for supranational integration between respondents with an without a minority trait in a country over all ESS rounds in the data. Averages computed with analysis weights to improve their representativeness.

their national culture. Empirically, scholars have shown that individuals with inclusive national identities show more support for supranational integration than those with exclusive identities (Carey, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Risse, 2010). *Utilitarian* theories expect supranational attitudes to be the result of an individual cost-benefit evaluation of integration. The classic version of the utilitarian argument links individual support for integration to judgments of egotropic or sociotropic benefits of a more developed EU (Anderson & Reichert, 1995; Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Gabel & Palmer, 1995). According to the benchmarking version, individuals evaluate supranational institutions based on their knowledge of domestic politics, and on the comparison of aggregate European and domestic economic performances (Anderson, 1998; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). Finally, another strand of literature points at *cues* from politicians as drivers of individual support for supranational integration (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Hobolt, 2007; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Wrátil & Wäckerle, 2022).

We believe that the mainstream literature on supranational integration neglects the role of inherited traits, and in particular the political and cultural identities that distinguish majority and minority individuals. Even when cultural theories argue that attachment to “the nation” matters for supranational attitudes (Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Risse, 2010), the discussion glosses over the different meaning that “nationality” takes when individuals have a migration background or hold any minority identity. This neglect is striking considering the large research showing that minority populations have distinct preferences (e.g., Dancygier & Saunders, 2006; Gaikwad & Nellis, 2017; Karakoç & Wang, 2021), and that much of these differences derive from processes that systematically expose minority individuals to disadvantaged interactions with domestic political institutions (e.g., Choi, Poertner, & Sambanis, 2020; Hemker & Rink,

2017; Olsen, Kyhse-Andersen, & Moynihan, 2021; Wimmer, 2017). Moreover, domestic populations in Europe and elsewhere in the world are increasingly diverse, thanks to globalization and crisis-induced migration flows.

Despite the growing understanding of majority support for supranational institutions, research on minority attitudes is underdeveloped. Not only is mainstream scholarship of supranational integration unable to explain the majority-minority gap, but previous research that considers minority attitudes lacks clear empirical support, especially when it comes to the mechanisms linking minority status and supranational attitudes. Previous studies suggest that minority individuals are motivated by either the direct benefits from supranational integration (Dowley & Silver, 2011), or by a cognitive association between domestic and supranational institutions (Isani & Schlipphak, 2017). In the rest of the paper, we demonstrate that these explanations are incomplete and at best valid for specific minority categories, while introducing a new theory that emphasizes the domestic status of minority individuals.

### 3 Testing the Gap in Supranational Attitudes

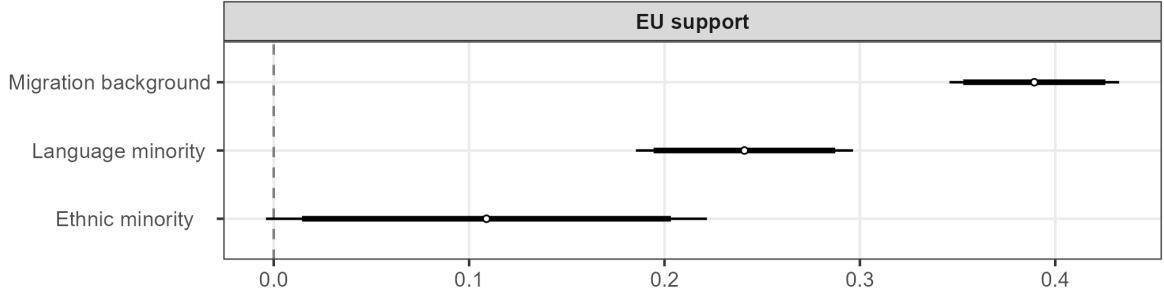
We first demonstrate the claim that minority individuals have higher support for supranational integration, and that the association exists across a variety of dichotomous measures of minority status. Therefore, the goal is to estimate the average difference in attitudes toward supranational integration that can be solely attributed to bearing a minority trait.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, majority and minority populations are often different along many socioeconomic and cultural dimensions that might bias our estimates. Hence, our populations of interest exacerbate the common problem of finding appropriate counterfactuals in cross-sectional survey data.

While previous studies confronted this inferential challenge by simply regressing individual attitudes on minority traits and individual control variables, we propose a more rigorous approach that relies on a matching strategy to select a comparable sample of individuals according to major observable socio-economic indicators (e.g., Deole, 2019). More precisely, we use exact matching, which consists in restricting comparisons of mean outcomes to subclasses of two or more individuals with exactly the same covariate profile (Iacus, King, & Porro, 2012; King & Nielsen, 2019). Compared to matching methods based on Mahalanobis distances and propensity scores, exact matching reduces the dependence of estimation results on the researchers' arbitrary decisions, and provides a sample whose characteristics are exactly balanced rather than on average (King & Nielsen, 2019). The samples produced with exact matching approximate a fully-blocked experimental design, which has interesting properties such as being more efficient and comparable than traditional matching (King & Nielsen, 2019). Nevertheless, we provide estimates from samples matched on the propensity score as a robustness test (see Appendix C.2). Another major advantage of exact matching is not to rely on balance diagnostics for model eval-

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<sup>5</sup>We do not claim that it is any inherited or visible trait that causes distinctive attitudes among minority individuals. As we show in the next sections, these differences are likely to be rooted into individual experience, socialization, and interaction with majority individuals and institutions. It is only through these experiences that minority individuals develop specific political preferences or opinions. From this background, we reject any essentialist position on ethnicity and attitudes.

Figure 3: Effect of minority status on support for supranational integration.



Notes: *EU support* measures on a 10-point Likert scale whether European integration went too far (0) or should continue further (10). Data from the ESS. Observations always exactly matched on survey round, country, gender, age, educational achievement, unemployment history and settlement type. All models contain matching weights. Standard errors clustered by subclass. The thick bars are 90 percent confidence intervals and the thin bars are 95 percent confidence intervals.

uation because the samples have *exactly the same covariate distributions* (Iacus, King, & Porro, 2012). However, to illustrate the differences in covariate balance before and after matching, Appendix E provides comparisons of covariate balance across treated and control groups for all matching exercises (Ali et al., 2014; Ho et al., 2011).

We build matched samples for each minority trait variable. We match majority and minority respondents strictly on country and survey round, gender, age, level of education, economic background, and on the type of their settlement. This provides a comprehensive set of “hard” demographic characteristics and baseline attitudes that are correlated with more specific divides on political issues.<sup>6</sup> After matching minority individuals we run linear regressions to estimate differences in mean outcomes (Ho et al., 2007).<sup>7</sup> We do not match nor control for individual political attitudes in our main specification for two reasons. First, we are concerned that controlling for attitudinal items might introduce simultaneity and post-treatment biases in our estimates. With the exception of the declared ethnic minority status variable, our treatment indicators are reasonably prior to the attitudinal outcomes. Second, given the limited size of the original dataset, an exact matching on too many variables produces exceedingly small samples. However, we demonstrate that the main results are robust to the inclusion of additional attitudinal controls.

The results in Figure 3 confirm the existence of a majority-minority gap in support for supranational integration. White dots represent point estimates from OLS regressions on the matched samples (see Table C1 in the Additional Materials for coefficient estimates). The standard errors are corrected for clustering at the level of matching groups (subclasses) and observations are weighted by the probability of being selected into a subclass, as suggested in the MatchIt package

<sup>6</sup>Other variables of interest such as income are sadly not available for most observations in the ESS.

<sup>7</sup>All analyses are performed with R (R Core Team, 2020). Regressions are run with the `fixest` package (Bergé, 2018) and type S and M statistics computed with `retrodesign` (Timm, 2019). Tables produced with `texreg` (Leifeld, 2013), plots with `ggplot2` (Wickham, 2016), and matching is implemented with the `MatchIt` package (Ho et al., 2011).



instructions (Ho et al., 2011). Our results suggest that conditional on identical socioeconomic characteristics, minority individuals are more supportive of supranational integration under the EU. Respondents with migration background display a higher support for EU integration by ca. 0.39 points. Linguistic minority individuals have higher support for the EU by 0.24 points, and ethnic minority respondents by 0.11. The results are more noisy and less precisely estimated for ethnic minorities because of the smaller matched sample of around 21 thousand respondents as opposed to 62 thousand for linguistic minorities and 104 thousand for individuals with migration background. The main results in Figure 3 are statistically significant and unlikely to lead to wrong inferences about the association between minority status and EU support, as demonstrated by tests for type M and type S errors (Gelman & Carlin, 2014) reported in Table C1.<sup>8</sup>

## Robustness of the Empirical Strategy and Alternative Explanations

In the Additional Materials we present extensive evidence of the robustness of the previous results and rule out alternative explanations of the gap. We start by probing the robustness of the results to our modeling choices. In Section C.2 we show that our results are robust to alternative estimation strategies to exact matching. Namely, we present estimates from regressions run without matching but with fixed effects, then on samples matched within sub-state political units, and finally on samples matched on the propensity score. Moreover, in Section C.3, we test the robustness of the gap to the use of an alternative outcome. Namely, we present estimates for the majority-minority gap in the support for Eurosceptic parties. Finally, in Section C.4, we replicate the analysis with completely different survey data, namely the International Social Survey Program, which provides a new sample and alternative measures of minority status and EU support (ISSP Research Group, 2012, 2015). Across all different robustness tests, we are able to consistently replicate the majority-minority gap for respondents with migration background and minority language speakers, whereas estimates for ethnic minorities are less stable.

In Section C.5, we demonstrate that alternative explanations from the literature on support for international organizations cannot explain our results. We run several tests controlling for socio-economic characteristics (Anderson & Reichert, 1995; Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001), political attitudes such as left-right and GAL-TAN position and political interest (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002; Kriesi et al., 2006; Noël & Thérien, 2008), and trust in domestic institutions (Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2018; Harteveld, van der Meer, & Vries, 2013). Estimated differences between majority and minority support for supranational integration remain large and statistically significant when controlling for alternative explanations, with the exception of the ethnic minority indicator. The inability of alternative explanations to account for the majority-minority gap suggests that the status divide caused by observable minority traits is independent of other factors.

We interpret these results as evidence of a strong association between domestic minority status

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<sup>8</sup>Type M error refers to by how many times the coefficient might overestimate the true effect given the statistical significance of the coefficient. According to this statistics, our results are very unlikely to exaggerate the true estimate. Instead, type S error refers to the probability that a coefficient is of the opposite sign than the true effect given a certain standard error. Our results indicate that the type S error probability are extremely low.

and higher support for supranational integration. Contrary to previous studies, we demonstrate that this association holds across different minority traits, suggesting a general pattern that goes beyond the idiosyncrasies of specific minority groups. Having demonstrated the existence of a majority-minority gap in supranational attitudes that previous theories cannot explain, the next section presents a theory of how the different status of majority and minority individuals within European nation-states shape their attitudes toward supranational institutions.

## 4 A Theory of Minority Status and Supranational Attitudes

We start from the general notion that individuals are more supportive of institutions through which they feel represented. Because modern nation-states derive their legitimacy from the political expression of a nation associated to specific linguistic and racial traits, individuals that are perceived to belong to this nation tend to hold more positive attitudes toward domestic institutions and stronger identification with the state (Staerklé et al., 2010), whereas individuals with visible minority traits tend to suffer a lower social status and more discrimination. Accordingly, research shows that minorities feel less attached to the state (Elkins & Sides, 2007), and that political exclusion and the perception of inequality drive this relationship (Levin et al., 1998; Wimmer, 2017).

Unlike nation-states, supranational institutions are usually associated with more cosmopolitan ideas of political membership, and as such have looser ethno-cultural connotations. EU institutions are a case in point, as they are designed to represent both the European population at large through the Commission and the European Parliament, and the Member States through the Council. Therefore, supranational institutions are inherently more inclusive to ethnic and cultural traits, and easier to identify with for domestic minorities than the constituent member states.

Moreover, supranational institutions can be perceived as a threat to national sovereignty (Hooghe & Marks, 2005). In the pursuit of cosmopolitan values such as international peace and human rights, supranational institutions limit the policy autonomy of their member states. For example, the EU has promoted the respect of minority rights and non-discrimination laws (Ahmed, 2015; Sasse, 2008), and acted to reduce nationality problems in post-communist states (Bieber & Bieber, 2021). While the loss of sovereignty implicit in supranational integration can spur backlash among majority individuals, minorities are less likely to perceive integration as an identity threat. Hence, we argue that conditional on similar personal benefits from deeper integration, minority individuals are more positive about supranational institutions than majority individuals.

By extension, we expect to observe two sets of empirical patterns. First, we expect a gap of opposite sign when it comes to attitudes toward domestic institutions, with minorities being generally more negative than majorities. While supranational and domestic institutions are not substitutes, minorities should display more negative evaluations of domestic institutions because of their lower opportunities in (and attachment to) the state. Second, we expect integration and discrimination in the state of residence to moderate the opinion gap between majorities and

minorities. With integration we refer to the process whereby minorities socialize into the host society, building local networks and acquiring local culture and values. As minority individuals integrate into the host society, we expect their political attitudes to converge toward the majority mean. Instead, with discrimination we refer to experiences of unequal treatment from state actors or civil society members (Oskooii, 2016). We predict such negative experiences to reduce minority attachment to the state and to amplify the opinion gap relative to the majority.

## 5 Three European Minority Populations

In Section 2 we illustrated the puzzling gap in support for supranational integration with both observable and subjective indicators of minority status. These admittedly broad measures help maximize the generalizability of the puzzle and can be replicated using data from most social science surveys. At the same time, the populations captured by these general minority indicators are considerably heterogeneous and overlap with one another to some extent.

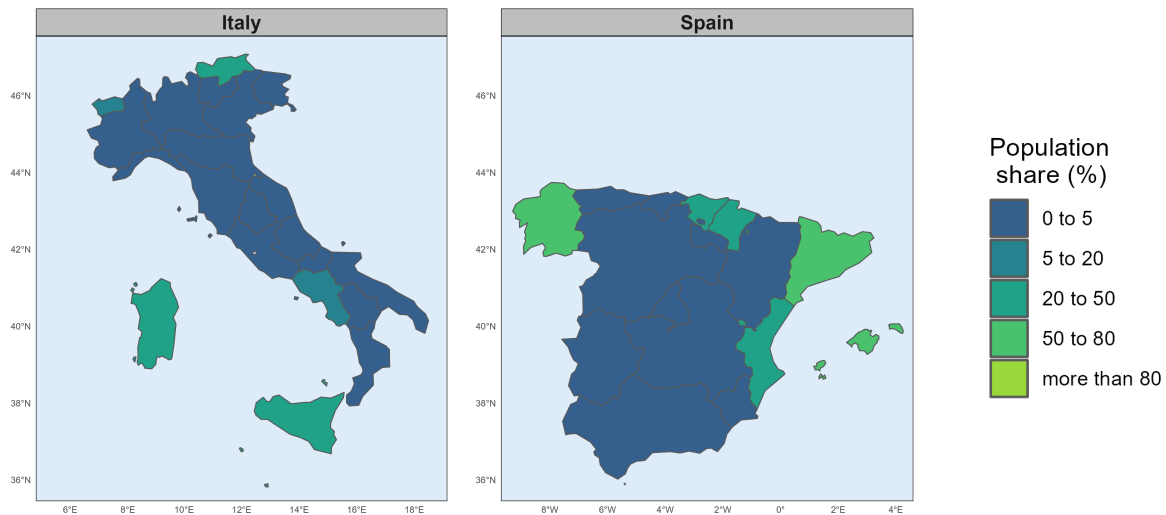
Therefore we test our theory on specific minority populations instead. ESS data allows us to identify more socially and politically relevant populations based on respondents' country of birth, parents' origins, and languages spoken at home. Specifically, we focus on first- and second-generation migrants, as well as historical linguistic minorities. We classify respondents as *first-generation* migrants if both they and their parents were born abroad. Meanwhile, we define as *second generation* migrants those individuals who were born in the state of residence, but having at least one parent who was born abroad. Individuals are coded as *historical linguistic minorities* if they have no migration background and speak a historical language of the state other than the one spoken by the majority in the country.<sup>9</sup> Hence, historical minority language speakers are a sub-population of linguistic minorities, but without a migration background.

This more fine-grained definition of minorities has several advantages. First, it increases the transparency of the results because we are able to rule out overlaps between different minority groups in the data. Second, both first- and second-generation migrants, as well as historical language minorities are well-studied populations. Therefore our findings relate to established literatures in political science and economics. Third, each of the minority populations we identify has a distinctive relationship to the state and the society of residence, which allows us to test different implications of our theory. On the one hand, first-generation migrants are the least similar population to natives in terms of their socio-demographic profiles and political values (Dancygier & Saunders, 2006). However, their time of residence in the country and assimilation efforts introduce variation in the level of integration. Instead, second-generation migrants have similar political values and expectations toward the state compared to majority individuals, but they also carry inherited minority traits that make them susceptible to discrimination (Dancygier et al., 2015; Eriksson & Vernby, 2021). Finally, historical language minorities tend to live in areas where they constitute a regional majority. Therefore, their experiences of discrimination and

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<sup>9</sup>Historical linguistic minorities are populations that either remained unassimilated during the process of European state-building, or were created through the formation of nation-states whose borders split ethnolinguistic communities across multiple countries. For more information on historical minority populations and to see the complete list of historical minority languages in the data, see Appendix A.2.

Figure 4: Shares of population speaking historical minority languages by NUTS region.



Note: Population shares are computed by averaging ESS responses from the fifth to the eighth round by country using the included analysis weights. Population data from the ESS, and NUTS region border polygons from GiscoR.

exclusion concern the access to national politics and regional autonomy rather than day-to-day relations with majority members (Wimmer, 2017).

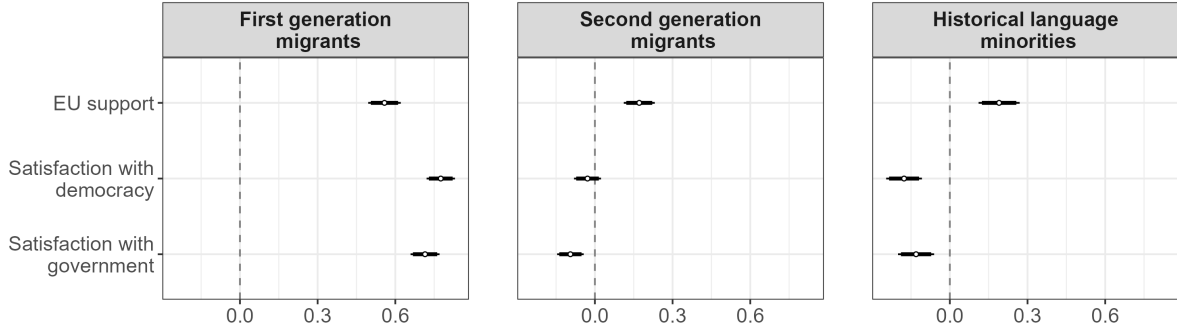
The coding of historical minority languages is subject to some measurement error because it is based on the language list in the ESS questionnaire. To probe the face validity of our measure, Figure 4 shows the share of individuals speaking historical minority languages in Italy and Spain at the level of NUTS 2 regions according to ESS data.<sup>10</sup> The plots indicate that historical minority language speakers are settled in regions with traditionally strong minority identities such as Sardinia, Tirol and Valle d'Aosta in Italy, or the Asturias, Basque countries, Catalonia and Galicia in Spain.

## 6 Supranational and Domestic Attitudes Among European Minorities

According to our theory, we expect these three minority populations to display higher support for supranational integration, as well as more negative attitudes toward domestic institutions. We use two variables to measure domestic attitudes. *Satisfaction with national democracy* captures respondents' evaluation of how democracy works in the state, ranging from being extremely dissatisfied (0) to extremely satisfied (10). Similarly, *satisfaction with national government* captures respondents' evaluation of the national government's performance, from extremely dissatisfied (0) to extremely satisfied (10). As in the previous analysis, we match majority and minority individuals with exactly the same socio-demographic characteristics (see balance descriptives in

<sup>10</sup>The plots are produced with data from the fifth to the eighth ESS rounds and spatial data of NUTS regions from the `giscoR` package (Hernangómez, 2022).

Figure 5: Effect of minority status on domestic and supranational attitudes.



Note: *EU Support* measures on a 10-point Likert scale whether European integration went too far (0) or should continue further (10). *Satisfaction with democracy* measures to what extent respondents are satisfied with how democracy works in the country (0 = Extremely dissatisfied, 10 = Extremely satisfied). *Satisfaction with government* measures to what extent respondents are satisfied with the country's government (0 = Extremely dissatisfied, 10 = Extremely satisfied). Data from the ESS. Observations always exactly matched on survey round, country, gender, age, educational achievement, unemployment history and settlement type. All models contain matching weights. Standard errors clustered by subclass. The thick bars are 90 percent confidence intervals and the thin bars are 95 percent confidence intervals.

Appendix E). We create three separate matched samples for each minority population. It is important to note that, conditional on having the same covariate profile, the comparison group of majority individuals is the same for all minorities.

Figure 5 displays the estimated differences in attitudes toward European integration and domestic political institutions relative to majority individuals for the three minorities. The estimates for EU support replicate the findings of the main analysis. Both first- and second-generation migrants, as well as historical minority individuals display significantly higher support for integration relative to domestic majorities. Estimates are robust to the inclusion of state-level control variables (see Appendix C.1 for full regression output).

As predicted by our theory, the positive effect of minority status on supranational attitudes corresponds to a negative association with domestic attitudes among second-generation migrants and historical minorities. This suggests that higher support for supranational integration among minorities goes hand-in-hand with consistent dissatisfaction with domestic institutions.

However, first-generation migrants do not fully conform to this pattern. We find evidence that first-generation migrants have consistently higher satisfaction for all types of political institutions. We interpret these results as reflecting the different expectations toward the state among first-generation migrants. The latter are likely to perceive themselves as better off in the host country and therefore see domestic institutions in a more positive light (Alba & Nee, 2003; Dancygier & Saunders, 2006). Moreover, they are likely to be less informed about domestic politics, and to know less about the flaws of the state. Previous studies found a similar pattern among recent migrants such as European Muslims (Isani & Schlipphak, 2017).

## 7 Mechanisms: Minority Integration and Discrimination

In the final analysis section we provide suggestive evidence for the causal pathways implied by our theory. We report results in coefficient plots (Figure 6), but more details and tables can be found in the additional materials.

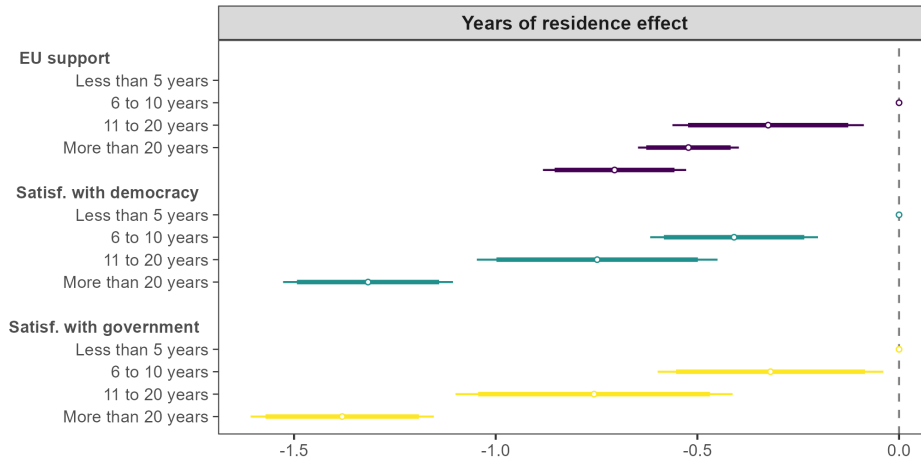
First, we explore if the opinion gap between majorities and minorities decreases with the level of integration of minority individuals. We proxy the level of integration of first-generation migrants with the time spent in the country and with host state citizenship. Although subject to endogeneity issues, these variables capture the extent to which migrants have been socialized to the host society’s norms and political culture. We compare support for domestic and supranational institutions among first-generation migrants conditional on the number of years spent in the country. Our estimates in Plot (a) indicate that the longer migrants reside in a state, the less they support European integration, and the less satisfied they are with domestic institutions. Because natives generally have more negative evaluations of both types of institutions than first-generation migrants, the results suggest that over time and through integration the opinions of first-generation migrants converge to the mean attitudes among natives. Similarly, we compare the attitudes of natives to first-generation migrants with and without citizenship of the country of residence. Coefficients in Plot (b) indicate that the opinion gap between natives and first-generation migrants also shrinks with citizenship.

Second, we explore the moderating effect of discrimination, measured with respondents’ reported perception of discrimination along ethnic, linguistic or racial lines. We compare natives to second-generation migrants who report feeling discriminated, and to those who do not. Results in Plot (c) indicate that second-generation migrants who perceive to be discriminated present generally higher support for supranational integration (p-values between 12.9 and 13.8 percent) and significantly lower satisfaction with domestic institutions compared to majority respondents. Instead, second-generation migrants who do not perceive to be discriminated have generally higher support for European integration, but they do not display significantly different attitudes toward state institutions.

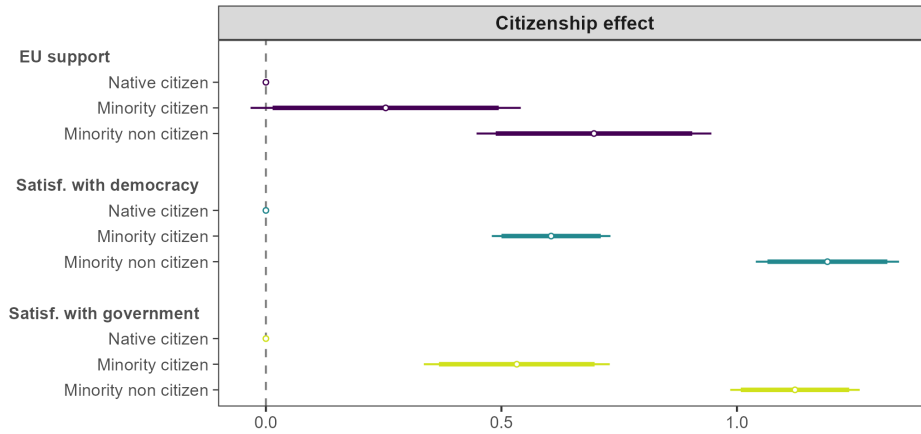
Finally, we look at political exclusion from government to explore the effect of discrimination among historical language minorities. Models in Plot (d) compare support for domestic and supranational institutions between three groups, that is members of the state’s majority, members of minorities with access to the government, and members of minorities without access to the government. We find that groups with no access to the government are, on average, more supportive of supranational integration and less satisfied with domestic institutions than majority individuals (see also Table D4). Moreover, the opposite relationship does not seem to apply to included historical minority groups, which display more positive attitudes toward both domestic and supranational institutions than majorities.

Taken together, the results provide suggestive evidence of the hypothesized causal pathways. In particular, we find that the status of minority individuals in a country affects their evaluation of political institutions. Hence, the factors that influence individual and group-level minority status, such as integration and discrimination, also affect minority support for different types of governance within and beyond the state.

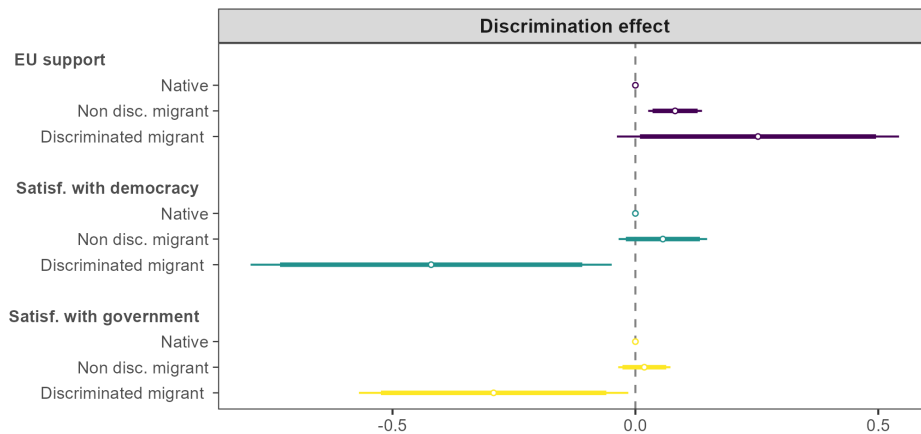
Figure 6: Mechanisms.



(a)

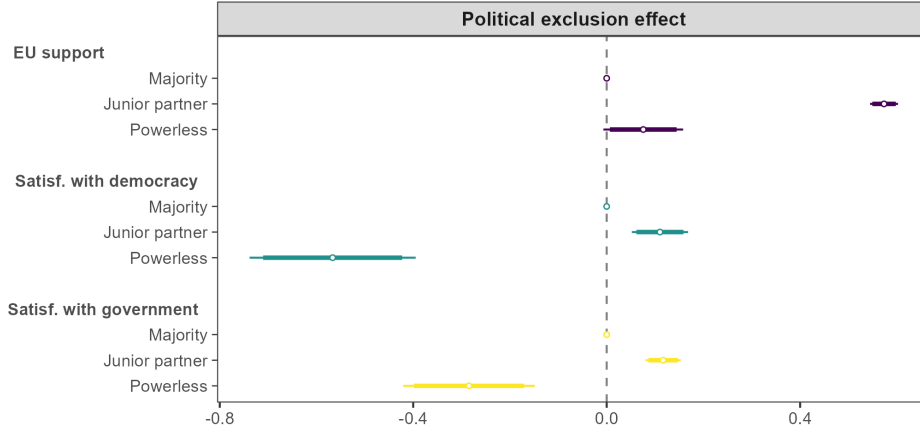


(b)



(c)

Figure 7: Mechanisms continued.



(d)

## 8 Conclusion

In times of growing politicization of international politics, scholars have devoted much attention to the sources of public support for international organizations. Within such rich literature, this paper identifies a largely neglected trend: Minority individuals hold more favorable views about supranational integration than their majority counterparts. We provide unprecedented comparative evidence of majority-minority gaps in support of international institutions, and develop a new theoretical framework to explain these patterns. Unlike previous research, which sparsely looks at the attitudes of selected minorities such as recent migrants or Muslims, our study is the first to systematically theorize why bearing any visible minority trait can affect the evaluation of international institutions.

From a theoretical perspective, the most important contribution of this paper is to bring together research on public opinion toward international organizations with studies of ethnic politics. Our overarching argument is that individuals evaluate supranational institutions based on the status and opportunities they enjoy in the nation-state. Because existing studies strongly suggest that minorities with visible ethnic and racial traits face systematic socio-economic disadvantages in the country of residence, we expect minorities to look more favorably at supranational institutions that set limits on the nation-state and are perceived as not discriminating along visible minority traits. As such, our theory applies to a potentially vast set of minority populations that might face systematically lower status within nation-states.

The analysis yields several interesting findings. First, focusing on the case of the European Union, we uncover a robust positive association between minority status and support for supranational integration. This pattern holds across different data sources, outcome definitions and estimation methods. Importantly, results are also robust to different operationalizations of minority status. Using ESS data, we first identify minority individuals based on their parental origin, spoken language, and minority self-identification. We then zoom in on specific minor-



ity populations, namely first- and second-generation migrants, as well as historical language minorities, uncovering once again a positive association with support for supranational integration. These findings speak in favor of theorizing the effect of minority status in general, rather than looking at selected minorities in isolation. Second, we explore attitudes toward domestic institutions and find that second-generation migrants and regional minorities are less satisfied with democracy and government in the state of residence than majorities. This is consistent with our theory which predicts that positive views about supranational integration are driven by negative feelings toward the nation-state. Third, we provide suggestive evidence that the lack of social integration and negative experiences with the nation-state, such as discrimination and political exclusion, moderate the relationship between minority status and support for political institutions.

Our study suggests a number of promising areas for future research. First, although ESS data allows to operationalize minority status in multiple ways, it is not designed to be representative of minority groups, like most social science surveys. Therefore, future research on minority attitudes would benefit from original surveys that specifically target otherwise underrepresented minority groups. Second, while our empirical strategy makes the most of the available information on survey respondents, it is impossible to exclude that some unobserved factors might partly explain our findings. Moreover, because we only observe respondents once, there is little information about how attitudes toward supranational integration form over time and in response to life events. Therefore, longitudinal and experimental research might help explore the causal pathways implied by our theoretical framework. Finally, our results only speak to how minorities evaluate the European Union. Future work might investigate whether the patterns we observe are valid for other regional integration projects, such as the Mercosur in Latin America or the African Union.

**Competing interests:** The authors declare none.

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