

Assessing European Attitudes Towards the European Union

Introduction

Using R, I wanted to address a research question of how German and French voters lean politically amongst older and younger voters and how this impacts different stances regarding the European Union through analyzing trust in the European Union Parliament, how voters lean on further European unification, and how voters would vote to remain or leave the EU. This question came about from seeking to understand how older and younger voters are changing the political landscape as new right-wing populist governments and political parties emerge throughout Europe, either challenging the establishment or taking power themselves. I predicted that younger voters would lean more right-wing than older voters in both countries.

Initial results showed that, on average, German voters leaned more left-wing, while French voters were more moderate. There is a general lack of trust in the EU Parliament among German and French voters, with older German voters having slightly less trust and younger French voters having slightly more. Most German and French voters would vote to remain in the EU. German voters support unification, while French voters don't support or oppose unification. German and French voters' political orientations and ages are expressed through impacts on trust towards the EU Parliament, more or less European unification, and how voters would vote on remaining or leaving the EU. These findings are important because they help address how voters feel toward specific aspects regarding the European Union and whether political orientation or age is more important to understanding outcomes in exit polls or votes.

Background

This question is important because changing European demographics and other political events have changed how voters see and trust the European Union. Brexit and the refugee crisis

begin the question of how voters feel about the European Union. I believe I will find younger voters lean more right-wing because of the outcomes of European elections in the last five years. The 2019 UK general election, Fidesz in Hungary, the AfD in Germany, the National Front in France, and recently, the 2023 Dutch election have all shown new or continuing popularity for right-wing populist political parties. Golden Dawn in Greece and the League in Italy partially succeeded in their respective elections. The French National Front and Dutch Party for Freedom have adopted anti-EU positions towards its power and financial packages during the European debt crisis and against austerity. The AfD in Germany has attacked immigration and the European debt crisis (Carrieri & Vittori 2021). As such, European integration with other countries remains a contested issue, with voters who want more integration voting for left-wing parties and green parties over more right-wing parties (Pellegata & Visconti 2022). I will explore patterns of older and younger voters in Germany and France and political orientation, as age can cause changes in political orientation and can be intertwined with changes towards different policies. Determining how voters lean by age and orientation may help predict and explain referendum and election results.

Data and Approach

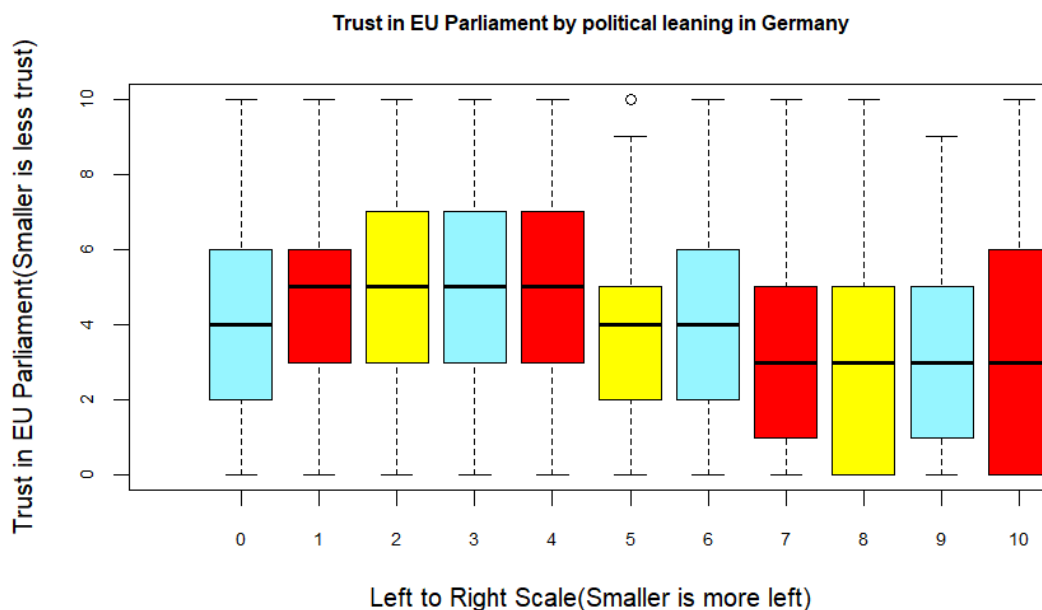
The dataset used for this analysis was the European Social Survey Data Round 10 from 2020 to 2022, which surveyed European voters regarding beliefs and attitudes towards specific aspects of national and European issues. There are 59,685 rows, each asking a specific question to respondents about their political and personal beliefs, attitudes, technology use, and other varying questions. The data is a mix of countries where respondents live from 2020 to 2022, with each respondent given an ID number. The key variables I used are the age of respondents (agea), how voters lean politically (lrscale), voter's trust in the EU Parliament (trstep), voting for

remaining a member of the EU or leaving (vteurmmb), and whether European unification should go further or not (euftf). Political orientation on the lrscale, EU Parliament trust, and European unification are scaled from 1-10 from left to right, with more left to more right, no trust to complete trust, and too far to unify more. Voting to remain a member of the EU or leave is organized towards voting to remain, leave, a blank ballot, a spoiled ballot, not voting, and not eligible to vote. The age of respondents ranges from 15 to 90 for German respondents and 16 to 90 for French respondents. I grouped these variables, analyzing them through political orientation and age.

I started by understanding the data I wanted to use for my approach. To do this, I subsetting German and French respondents from the main dataset and then subsetting each further by their age, with 52 and greater as the age used for older German voters and 50 or more for older French voters based on the median of both groups of respondents. To analyze each variable individually, I removed missing values (77,88 and 99, meaning refusal to answer, don't know, and no answer) in responses to political orientation, trust in the EU Parliament, stances on EU unification, and voting for remaining in the EU or leaving. Furthermore, I subsetting the ages of older and younger voters to the specific variables I wanted to analyze. For statistical significance, I used t-tests to assess the significance of age and political orientation for German and French voters on trust in the EU Parliament, their stance on EU unification, and how they would vote towards being an EU member. I then made boxplots of German and French voters on 1.) Trust in EU Parliament based on political orientation 2.) Stances on European Unification based on political orientation, and 3.) political orientation based on age.

Results

From my results, my hypothesis of younger voters leaning more right was proved wrong. German older and younger voters leaned more left-wing, with values of 4.48 and 4.20, while French older and younger voters leaned more moderate, with values of 5.21 and 4.93. Voter lack of trust in the EU Parliament showed values of 3.96 and 4.59 for older German and younger voters and 4.05 and 4.77 for older French and younger voters. 3464 older German voters and 3078 younger German voters would vote to remain, while 748 older French voters and 707 younger French voters would too. German voters lean slightly towards European unification, with values of 5.89 and 6.29 among older and younger voters. In contrast, French voters aren't supportive of more or less unification, with values of 5.37 and 5.54. For trust in the EU Parliament, age and political orientation impact German voters, but only age does for French voters. For stances on European unification, age, and political orientation also impact German and French voters. For voting on remaining a member of the EU or not, age has an impact on both French and German voters, while political orientation doesn't have an impact on German voters but does on French voters.



The graph above shows respondents' trust in the EU Parliament, given their political orientation on a left-to-right scale in Germany. As respondents gradually gained more right-wing beliefs, the median decreased, indicating less trust in the EU Parliament. The median for voters that leaned with a 7 or more, indicating more right-wing, was a 3 for trust in the EU Parliament. The median for voters from 1 to 4 as more left-wing was 5 for Trust in EU Parliament, indicating not overly trusting or overly distrusting of the EU Parliament.

Conclusion

Through this project, my research question was how German and French voters lean politically amongst older and younger voters and how this impacts different stances regarding the European Union. Age and political orientation amongst German and French voters impacted trust in the EU Parliament. Age and Political Orientation impacted German voters towards EU unification while it didn't for French voters. Age impacted both French and German voters on voting for or against EU membership, but political orientation did not for German voters. Vice-versa, political orientation did for French voters. These findings are important because they help address how voters feel toward specific aspects regarding the European Union, whether political orientation or age should be used to understand outcomes through exit polls or votes, and which factor is more important for the outcome.

Certain limitations are present in the study, however. One issue that limited the outcome was the number of respondents of different ages. Some ages had more respondents than others, which may be indicated by the graph regarding political leanings by age in France and Germany (Rmd file). Another limitation is the number of missing values as answers, reducing the usable data for the t-tests and boxplots. How respondents truly feel about certain issues may also not be

reflected fully in the survey data as respondents may have put different values than what they believe because they didn't want to say their actual beliefs, which can skew the data.

GitHub Link-

<https://github.com/WillT678/Analyzing-German-and-French-attitudes-towards-the-European-Union>

(Dataset exceeded the 25 MB limit on GitHub. Attempted to use Github LFS to transfer file but was unsuccessful - Linked as drive folder)

Works Cited

Carrieri, Luca & Davide Vittori: Defying Europe? The Euroscepticism of radical right and radical left voters in Western Europe, *Journal of European Integration*, 2021:

[10.1080/07036337.2021.1882454](https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.1882454), accessed December 17, 2023.

Pellegata, Alessandro, & Francesco Visconti,, Voting for a social Europe? European solidarity and voting behavior in the 2019 European elections. *European Union Politics*, 23(1), 79-99,

2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165211035054>, accessed December 17, 2023.