

Social Identity and Social Cohesion: How Disrespect threatens Social Cohesion

Do Social Inclusion Policies affect Pro-EU Integration Party Voting Behaviour among Social Groups?

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1 Introduction

Arguably, some literature points to social inclusion policies and their relation to social identity threats as a possible major reason for a decline in commitment to the European Union (EU) (e.g., Cutts et al. 2011; Akkerman 2015; Ketola and Nordensvard 2018; Taggart and Pirro 2021). Social inclusion policies, a key focus of the EU, aim at bridging the social recognition gaps between lowly recognised and highly recognised social groups. However, while previously disadvantaged groups (e.g., migrants or non-religious people) might benefit in regard to equal recognition through democratic instruments, the traditionally advantaged groups (e.g., natives or religious adherents) may feel threatened by inclusion policies resulting from political responsiveness to claims by disadvantaged groups because such responsiveness endangers their 'special rights' which can be economic (Bisbee et al. 2019), cultural (Norris and Inglehardt 2019) or both (Mughan and Paxton 2006), depending on the cleavages between the social groups considered.

Consequently, either absence or promotion of inclusion policies may prompt improvements of or threats to the social identity of different groups. Thus, our study aims to investigate cross-nationally whether social inclusion policies that are threats to the privileges of the traditionally advantaged social groups stimulate fewer votes for pro-European parties from these groups. Conversely, it also seeks to inquire how votes for pro-European parties from traditionally disadvantaged groups change in response to social inclusion policies. That said, we inquire into how the meso-level (social groups) responds to political macro-level interventions (social inclusion policies); the meso-macro relationship is an important aspect of vertical EU cohesion because if social groups display strong solidarity with pro-EU integration parties, this reflects support for the macrolevel social context (social inclusion). Examples of these groups which we consider in our study are: 1) migrants vs. natives, and 2) non-religious people vs. religious people using migrant integration policy, and religious freedom policy, respectively.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Social Identity and Group Polarisation Theories

This study borrows its first theoretical argument from Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1986) who posit that human beings seek social recognition for their self-esteem, and it is in a group that such recognition is earned. In turn, the material or social incentives accruing from being a member of a group determine the level at which individuals identify with and support their groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). This quest for self-esteem is a primary need of human beings (Honneth 1995) and “the part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity” (Fukuyama 2018, p. 9). Since belonging to a social group provides recognition or disrespect in accordance with the value that societies attributes to said group, different groups try to connect with the providers of the recognition needed (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Fukuyama 2018).

Arguably, traditionally disadvantaged groups (who are becoming more conscious of their status and democratic channels to improve their status) and traditionally advantaged groups (who can be threatened by social change) are products of social interactions (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Honneth 1995; Valenzi 2022). In other words, due to scarcity of recognition, social groups compete for it because enhancing recognition for one group decreases recognition for another group, thus polarising the social groups (Honneth 1995; Fukujama 2018). According to Francis Fukuyama’s (2018) recognition thesis, “isothymia is the demand [by disadvantaged groups e.g., migrants, non-religious people etc.] to be respected on an equal basis with other people; while megalothymia is the desire [by advantaged groups e.g., natives, religious people etc.] to be recognized as superior” (Fukuyama 2018, p. 9). Previous research (e.g., Sanders et al. 2011) has reported social recognition as a significant predictor of negative or positive action tendencies. For instance, migrants show more positive evaluations of the host country when recognised (Huo and Molina 2006). However, political change towards more inclusive institutions also marks the beginning of threats to traditionally advantaged groups as democratic principles, such as the equality of all, gain more ground. For instance, national nostalgia is found to be more related to opposing the rights of migrants (Smeeke et al. 2015), who are perceived as bringing and practising incompatible culture in the host country (e.g., Ketola and Nordensvard 2018; Norris and Inglehardt 2019) and undeserving of social citizenship rights and welfare benefits (Reeskens and Van Oorschot 2012). This resentment can further influence political attitudes and behaviour (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992; Sanders et al. 2011). Thus, the continuous and divergent struggle for recognition between the disadvantaged groups and the advantaged groups – identity politics – remains a recurrent public discourse and concern for policymakers.

2.2 Social Groups, Social Inclusion, and Euroscepticism

In this section, we address why voting for pro-European integration parties as a political action may be a product of identity politics explained above. One of the core values of the EU as a supranational democracy is the social inclusion of traditionally disadvantaged groups and the EU expects member states to harmonise the same values in their various domestic democracies (Penninx et al. 2008). However, the necessity of EU unification has continuously come under attack in the last two decades (D’Appollonia 2002; Cutts et al. 2011; Akkerman 2015; Ketola and Nordensvard 2018) from Eurosceptic parties who are virtually all radical right-wing (Cutts et al. 2011; Taggart and Pirro 2021). These parties are known for “their rejection of individual and social equality, their opposition to the social integration of marginalized groups and the extension of democratic rights to them” (Betz 2009, p. 664) and their activities have been paying off with more votes from the electorate (Cutts et al. 2011).

Since the EU is a principal platform for policy development through its initiatives to create a framework for common inclusion policies among member states (Penninx et al. 2008), discontent with such policies may prompt Eurosceptic voting at EU and national elections (Werts et al. 2012; Borz 2016; Corbett and Walker 2019) most especially when there is temporal proximity between the two levels of elections (Gross and Chiru 2022). That way, as Europeanisation promotes minorities' rights and diminishes the privileges of the majorities like natives and religious adherents, it can be expected that pro-EU integration parties will gain more support from the former groups and less support from the latter groups.

2.2.1 Migration Background, Migrant Integration, and Euroscepticism

The relationship between migration background and political attitudes has been extensively researched with most studies showing that migrants are more likely to show more democratic satisfaction, vote for pro-EU integration parties, and display other "cohesive" attitudes than their native counterparts (Wenzel 2006; Maxwell 2010; Röder and Mühlau 2011, 2012; Sanders et al. 2011). This gap, which is explained by the 'frame of reference effect' or reference-point hypothesis – i.e., lower expectations of migrants from countries with poorer institutional performance – weakens over time with increased acculturation in the host country (Wenzel 2006; Maxwell 2010; Röder and Mühlau 2011 2012). However, studies have shown that positive migrant integration policies contribute to migrants' positive political attitudes and behaviour (Huo and Molina 2006). Overall, literature on the relationship between migrant integration policies and natives' political attitudes remains inconclusive.

Several studies – supporting intergroup contact theories – posit that migrant integration policies reduce xenophobic attitudes (e.g., Hooghe and de Vroome 2015; Schlueter et al. 2013; Callens and Meuleman 2017) especially when such policies promote assimilation and less economic benefits for migrants (Neureiter 2022). Some scholars – following social identity threat theories – find influences in the opposite direction (Mughan and Paxton 2006; Bartram and Jarochova 2022) while others conclude that no relationship exists (Meuleman and Reeskens 2008; Schlueter et al. 2013; Hooghe and de Vroome 2015; Bartram and Jarochova 2022). Following the theories of recognition and identity politics explained earlier, favourable migrant integration policies will make migrants show more support for pro-EU integration parties while unfavourable policies will make them act otherwise. On the other hand, natives may not overlook such strong migrant integration policies as they will remove their 'special rights' and make them compete equally with migrants in the social, economic, and political realms. Since nativism is a strong predictor of voting for Eurosceptic parties (Montgomery and Winter 2015; Ketola and Nordensvard 2018), while migrants are more likely to identify with Europe (Curtis 2014), natives may vote more often for Eurosceptic parties (discouraging migration), unlike migrants; in addition, on average, gaps in voting for pro-EU integration parties between migrants and natives should become wider as migrant integration policies get stronger. Thus, we propose our first hypothesis as follows:

H1: Since it supports migrants' identity, increasing migrant integration policy should increase migrants' votes for pro-EU integration parties, while the share of pro-EU integration parties among the natives would shrink.

2.2.2 Religiosity, Religious Freedom, and Euroscepticism

It is almost agreed among scholars that higher religiosity leads to more cohesive political attitudes like democratic satisfaction, institutional trust, and voting for established and pro-European parties (Lubbers et al. 2002; Norris 2005; Nelsen et al. 2011; Werts et al. 2012; Montgomery and Winter 2015; Cremer 2023). What remains astonishing, however, is that anti-establishment parties fail to attract support from religious people despite portraying the establishment parties as the destroyers of the traditional values that Christianity represents; instead, they get more support from non-religious people (Lubbers et al. 2002; Norris 2005; Werts et al. 2012; Montgomery and Winter 2015; Cremer 2023). This paradox follows

the ‘vaccine effect’ theories that religious people have pre-existing identification with religious parties promoting empathy, solidarity and other values that are contrary to the focus of Eurosceptic parties (Arzheimer and Carter 2009; Montgomery and Winter 2015; Cremer 2023). But it is not clear whether the positive relationship stays the same over time regardless of the level of religious freedom which may remove the ‘sole rights’ of the conventional religious group.

Generally, religious communities oppose progressive reforms that come with religious freedom, especially sexual rights and breaking with traditional gender roles (e.g., Valenzi 2022). Perhaps this leads to religious people starting to withdraw their support for Europeanisation (Nelsen et al. 2011). Since the EU promotes religious freedom, domestication of such freedom may pose a threat to the religious communities, and thereby lead them to renounce their allegiance with the establishment ruling parties. Therefore, in line with the theories of identity politics and social polarisation, as non-religious people become as equally recognised as their religious counterparts, the former will show more solidarity with the Union by voting more for pro-EU integration parties.

H2: Since it supports non-religious people’s identity, policies increasing religious freedom should increase non-religious people’s votes for pro-EU integration parties, while it decreases religious people’s votes for pro-EU integration parties.

3 Data, Research Design and Methodology

This research uses a multilevel mixed-effect model and exploits data from the European Social Survey (ESS) rounds 1–9 (2020) and Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Seth et al. 2020), as well as context variables including Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (Solano and Huddleston 2020), the religious freedom index of the Global State of Democracy (Skaaning 2020), GDP per capita and Net Migration Rate (World Bank 2022), and the Gini index (Gapminder 2022). As the first step, the ESS and CHES data are merged using party ID, country code and election year. This makes it possible to link “party voted for in the last national election” from ESS data with the “overall orientation of the [voted for] party leadership towards European integration” (with 7-point scale from 1 = Strongly opposed to 7 = Strongly in favour) from CHES data. Hence, our dependent variable – a vote for pro-EU integration parties – is a metric indicator with a low score for Eurosceptic party voting and a high score for pro-EU integration party voting.

The independent variables include migration background (migrants – any respondents with either one or both parents born abroad, vs. natives – respondents with both parents born in the country), and religiosity (an 11-point scale indicator that is based on the average of cumulated score of items “How often do you pray apart from at religious services?”, “How often do you attend religious services apart from special occasions?”, and “How religious are you?”). With some variation across the two cleavages, the control variables used are gender, age, years of education, employment status (harmonisation of “total contracted hours per week in main job, overtime excluded”, “employment relation” and “main activity, last 7 days”), political interest (“How interested are you in politics?” with a 4-point scale from “very interested” to “not at all interested”), and subjective relative deprivation (“feelings about household’s current income” with a 4-point scale from “living comfortably on present income” to “very difficult on present income”).

We use a series of four regression models for each of the two cleavages analysed: Model 1 including only the independent variable; model 2 adding all control variables to model 1; model 3 introducing the main context factor into model 2; and model 4 which adds the contextual control variables into model 3. With this stepwise approach, we investigate not only the main effects but also the cross-level

interaction effects which show how the cleavages vary with the contextual variables. Results are presented in tabular and graphical forms for easier interpretation and discussion.

4 Results

4.1 Migration Background

In Table 1 (see appendix), migrants, compared to natives, are more likely to vote for pro-EU integration parties in national elections across all models. Among the control variables, being female, older, educated, employed, and not relatively deprived reflect a positive association with the tendency of voting for pro-EU integration parties. In Fig. 1, an increase in MIPEX seems to be associated with an increase in votes for pro-EU integration parties in the national elections among migrants and natives. However, MIPEX does not appear to significantly moderate the pro-EU integration parties voting gap between migrants and natives, contrary to our first hypothesis. This outcome can be noticed before and after controlling for other context variables (GDP per capita, Gini index and Net Migration Rate) which also have no significant effects in the model.

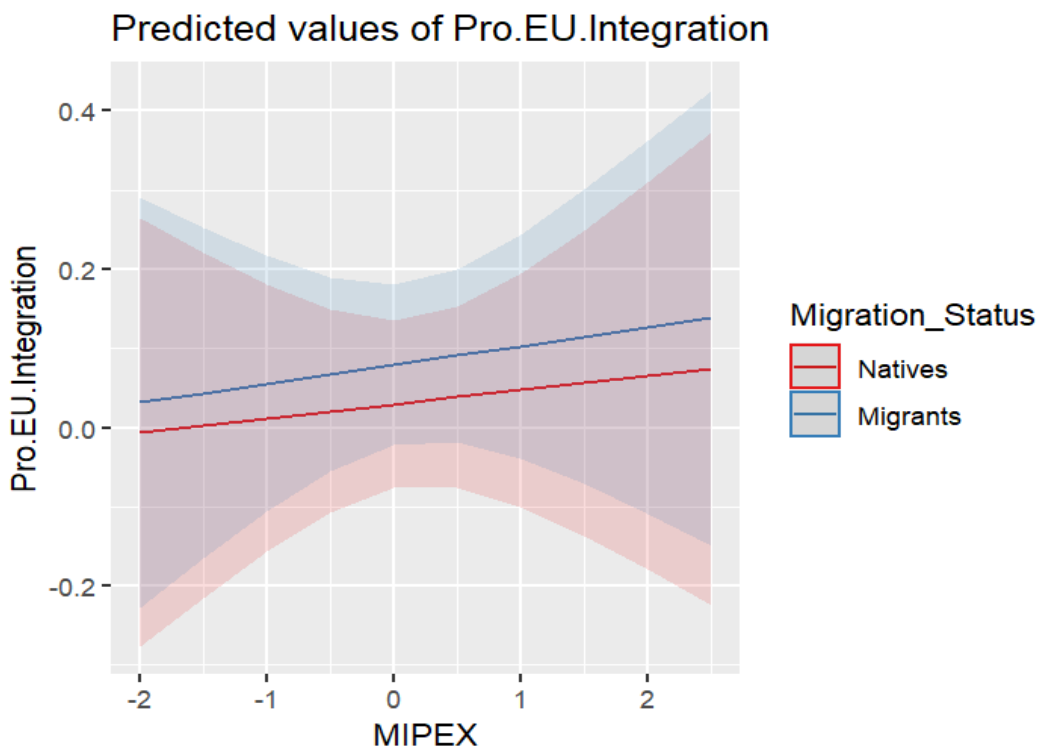


Fig. 1: MIPEX and pro-EU integration party voting behaviour among Migrants and Natives.

4.2 Religiosity

In Table 2 (see Appendix), higher religiosity tends to increase votes for pro-EU integration parties in all the models. Among the control variables, being female, older, educated, and not relatively deprived reflect a positive association with the tendency to vote for pro-EU integration parties. In Fig. 2, an increase in religious freedom appears to be associated with an increase in votes for pro-EU integration parties in the national elections among religious and non-religious people. It is worth noting that, although not statistically significant, the effect of religious freedom on non-religious people (red line) looks

stronger than that of the religious people (green line); suggesting that the former group tends to vote more often for pro-EU integration parties than the latter group as religious freedom improves. However, religious freedom seems not to significantly moderate the pro-EU integration parties voting gap between religious and non-religious people, contrary to our second hypothesis. This outcome can be noticed before and after controlling for other context variables (GDP per capita and Gini index), which also have no significant effects in the model.

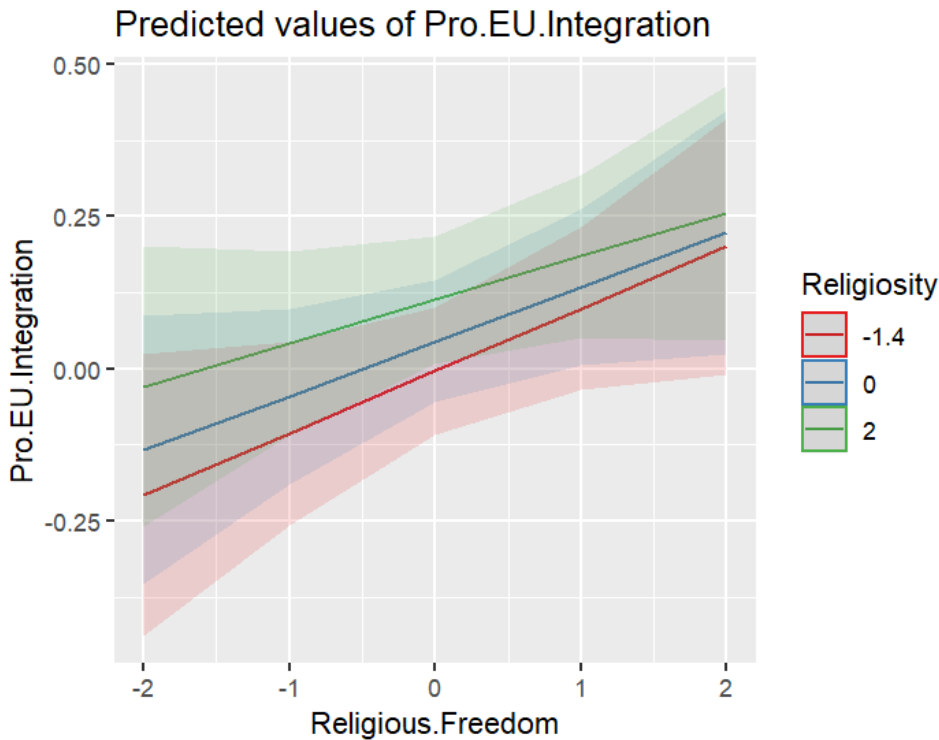


Fig. 2: Religious freedom and pro-EU integration party voting behaviour based on religiosity.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Migrants are more likely to vote for pro-EU integration across all models. This is in line with the findings of other scholars who assert that migrants are more likely to show positive political attitudes than natives (Wenzel 2006; Maxwell 2010; Röder and Mühlau 2011, 2012; Sanders et al. 2011). An increase in MIPEX seems to increase votes for pro-EU integration parties in the national elections among migrants and natives. This means that migrant integration policy may be a good instrument to increase votes for pro-EU integration parties in the national elections, thus sustaining or improving EU-cohesion. However, MIPEX appears not to significantly moderate the pro-EU integration parties voting gap between the migrants and natives, contrary to our first hypothesis. Thus, the first hypothesis (migrant integration policy may improve recognition for migrants and threaten natives) is not supported by the result.

That said, migrant integration policy does not seem to explain the gaps in votes for pro-EU integration parties between migrant-origin and native-origin groups. This supports previous studies which maintain that increasing migrant integration policies either cushion the existing worries of the natives (e.g., Schlueter et al. 2013; Hooghe and de Vroome 2015; Callens and Meuleman 2017; Neureiter 2022) or at least do not threaten the natives (Meuleman and Reeskens 2008; Schlueter et al. 2013; Hooghe and de Vroome 2015; Bartram and Jarochova 2022). In other words, migrant integration policy seems not to explain the gaps in votes for Eurocentric parties between migrant-origin and native-origin

cleavages. However, the context level estimates need to be interpreted with some caution because of the low number of level-two cases in this analysis. More research is still needed to shed more light on the role of migrant integration policies as a moderator on migration background and other political attitude indicators like democratic satisfaction. Similarly, further studies with more observations may find significant positive interaction effects, unlike ours that show insignificant positive effects. It might also be that heterogeneity of migrant origins or generations respond differently to migrant integration policies.

Higher levels of religiosity show a significant positive effect on votes for pro-EU integration parties in all the models. Interestingly, previous studies (Lubbers et al. 2002; Norris 2005; Nelsen et al. 2011; Werts et al. 2012; Montgomery and Winter 2015; Cremer 2023) assert the same position. Increases in policies for religious freedom seem to increase votes for pro-EU integration parties in the national elections among religious and non-religious people. That said, improvements in policies for religious freedom may be the right step towards improving votes for pro-EU integration parties in national elections, thus sustaining or improving EU-cohesion. In contrast to our second hypothesis, policies for religious freedom seem not to significantly moderate the effect of religiosity on pro-EU integration party voting, although the slope of the non-religious seems to be a bit steeper than that of the religious. As policies for religious freedom improve, non-religious people appear to vote more for pro-EU integration parties who generally promote equal recognition, but such efforts do not make religious people vote for Eurosceptic parties. This can be explained using the ‘vaccine effect’ theories that religious people have pre-existing identification with religious parties promoting empathy, tolerance, solidarity, and other values that are in contrary to the focus of parties promoting EU disunity (Arzheimer and Carter 2009; Montgomery and Winter 2015; Cremer 2023).

In sum, using primarily longitudinal data from the European Social Survey, Chapel Hill Expert Survey, and independent inclusion indices, our study suggests that higher social inclusion policies do not make the traditionally advantaged groups (natives and religious people) vote more often for Eurosceptic parties; instead, the policies motivate them to vote more often for pro-EU integration parties just like their traditionally disadvantaged counterparts (migrants and non-religious people). We therefore conclude that the presence of social inclusion policies does not constitute a threat to traditionally advantaged groups but gives more recognition to traditionally disadvantaged groups, in the context Eurosceptic or pro-EU integration party voting. As this paper is part of a broader project addressing social identity and social cohesion, we intend to further investigate the effect of such inclusion policies on other social cohesion indicators, especially democratic satisfaction, and to further analyse the position of migrants’ countries of origin, religious denominations, and other heterogeneities in the social groups. When it comes to the question of how to sustain European cohesion, our findings’ implication is that inclusion policies are not the reason for the gaps between the minorities and majorities in voting for pro-EU integration parties in national elections.

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Appendix

Table 1: Regression results for MIPEX and Pro-EU Integration Party Voting Behaviour between Migrants and Natives.

Predictors	M0		M1		M2		M3		M4	
	Estimates	p	Estimates	p	Estimates	P	Estimates	p	Estimates	P
(Intercept)	0.11	0.125	0.10	0.146	0.12	0.092	0.12	0.082	0.02	0.728
Migration Status (migrant=1)			0.04	0.010	0.04	0.009	0.04	0.008	0.05	0.003
Gender (male=1)					-0.05	<0.001	-0.05	<0.001	-0.05	<0.001
Age					0.04	<0.001	0.04	<0.001	0.04	<0.001
Education					0.03	<0.001	0.03	<0.001	0.03	<0.001
Activity (Full-time as ref) Parttime					0.00	0.789	0.00	0.786	0.00	0.770
Self-employed					-0.02	0.010	-0.02	0.010	-0.02	0.010
Retired					-0.00	0.979	-0.00	0.977	-0.00	0.978
Housewife					-0.01	0.345	-0.01	0.346	-0.01	0.362
Student					0.03	0.021	0.03	0.021	0.03	0.020
Unemployed					-0.03	0.023	-0.03	0.024	-0.03	0.025
Others					-0.03	0.009	-0.03	0.009	-0.03	0.010
Not known					-0.01	0.500	-0.01	0.498	-0.01	0.499
Political interest					-0.00	0.921	-0.00	0.921	-0.00	0.918
Subjective deprivation					-0.01	<0.001	-0.01	<0.001	-0.01	<0.001
MIPEX							-0.19	0.004	0.02	0.767

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Migration Status: MIPEX				0.02	0.152	0.01	0.750
GDP Per Capita						-0.53	<0.001
Gini index						0.21	0.001
NMR						0.03	0.718
Migration Status: GDP Per Capita						0.00	0.905
Migration Status: Gini index						-0.00	0.924
Migration Status: NMR						0.04	0.055
Random Effects							
σ^2	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	
τ_{00}	0.45 _{group}	0.46 _{group}	0.48 _{group}	0.44 _{group}	0.44 _{group}	0.26 _{group}	
τ_{11}		0.02 _{group.Migration_Status-Migrants}	0.02 _{group.Migration_Status-Migrants}	0.02 _{group.Migration_Status-Migrants}	0.02 _{group.Migration_Status-Migrants}	0.01 _{group.Migration_StatusMigrants}	
ρ_{01}		-0.39 _{group}	-0.41 _{group}	-0.38 _{group}	-0.38 _{group}	-0.35 _{group}	
ICC	0.47	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.47	0.34	
N	96 _{group}	96 _{group}	96 _{group}	96 _{group}	96 _{group}	96 _{group}	
Observations	98173	98173	98173	98173	98173	98173	
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	0.000 / 0.474	0.000 / 0.477	0.003 / 0.487	0.039 / 0.488	0.039 / 0.488	0.222 / 0.486	

Table 2: Regression results for Religious Freedom, Religiosity and Pro-EU Integration Party Voting Behaviour.

<i>Predictors</i>	M0		M1		M2		M3		M4	
	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>P</i>
(Intercept)	0.11	0.094	0.11	0.103	0.12	0.066	0.12	0.070	0.00	0.957
Religiosity			0.04	<0.001	0.03	0.001	0.03	0.001	0.04	<0.001
Gender (male=1)					-0.05	<0.001	-0.05	<0.001	-0.05	<0.001
Age					0.03	<0.001	0.03	<0.001	0.03	<0.001
Education					0.03	<0.001	0.03	<0.001	0.03	<0.001
Activity (Full-time as ref) Parttime					0.01	0.500	0.01	0.500	0.01	0.488
Self-employed					-0.01	0.225	-0.01	0.226	-0.01	0.229
Retired					0.00	0.881	0.00	0.880	0.00	0.873
Housewife					-0.00	0.856	-0.00	0.855	-0.00	0.868
Student					0.02	0.060	0.02	0.060	0.02	0.058
Unemployed					-0.02	0.169	-0.02	0.169	-0.02	0.173
Others					-0.03	0.017	-0.03	0.017	-0.03	0.018

Not known			-0.01	0.689	-0.01	0.692	-0.01	0.699
Political interest			0.00	0.522	0.00	0.524	0.00	0.535
Subjective deprivation			-0.02	<0.001	-0.02	<0.001	-0.02	<0.001
Religious Freedom					0.00	0.978	0.09	0.058
Religiosity: Religious Freedom					-0.01	0.369	-0.01	0.309
GDP Per Capita							-0.50	<0.001
Gini index							0.24	<0.001
Religiosity: GDP Per Capita							0.02	0.151
Religiosity: Gini index							0.00	0.981
Random Effects								
σ^2	0.43	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42
τ_{00}	0.51 _{group}	0.49 _{group}	0.51 _{group}	0.51 _{group}	0.52 _{group}	0.52 _{group}	0.27 _{group}	0.27 _{group}
τ_{11}		0.01 _{group.Religiosity}	0.01 _{group.Religiosity}	0.01 _{group.Religiosity}	0.01 _{group.Religiosity}	0.01 _{group.Religiosity}	0.01 _{group.Religiosity}	0.01 _{group.Religiosity}
ρ_{01}		-0.16 _{group}	-0.14 _{group}	-0.14 _{group}	-0.14 _{group}	-0.14 _{group}	-0.06 _{group}	-0.06 _{group}
ICC	0.54	0.54	0.55	0.55	0.56	0.56	0.40	0.40
N	112 _{group}	112 _{group}	112 _{group}	112 _{group}	112 _{group}	112 _{group}	112 _{group}	112 _{group}
Observations	83628	83628	83628	83628	83628	83628	83628	83628
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	0.000 / 0.541	0.002 / 0.543	0.004 / 0.555	0.004 / 0.555	0.004 / 0.558	0.004 / 0.558	0.255 / 0.552	0.255 / 0.552