**Integrationists, Critical Europeanists and Pessimist Europeanists:
Attitudinal mindsets on the EU among German students**

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Abstract

We investigate the mindsets on the EU of students enrolled in a German university. We conducted an online survey among students of a German university (N=730) and asked them closed questions on the EU enlargement, the allocation of authority at the EU level, the way democracy works at the EU level and an open question on their wish for the future of the EU. We then ran a latent class analysis of the recoded answer categories from the open question and of our set of closed questions. Our three-class solution highlights variation in support of the EU among students. Indeed, while the vast majority of the respondents show highly supportive attitudes toward the EU, we can distinguish between “Integrationists” (in favour of pursuing the EU integration project; 68% of the sample), “Critical Europeanists” (supportive of the EU but dissatisfied with the way democracy works at the EU level; 20,50% of the sample) and “Pessimist Europeanists” (supportive of the EU but afraid of the implosion of the EU; 11% of the sample). A further analysis of the narratives provided by members of each class to the open question enables us to shed light on variation within each latent class. In particular, we find variation (1) in the dimensions and policies the EU should further integrate according to the Europeanists, (2) in the types of EU institutions to be further democratised and strategies to improve the democratisation of the EU regime according to the Critical Europeanists and (3) in strategies the EU should follow to avoid its implosion according to the Pessimist Europeanists. Our study highlights the importance of the use of non-standardised measures and mixed-methods data collection for grasping citizens’ mindset on the EU in its multidimensionality and complexity.

Keywords: EU, attitudes, mixed-methods, students

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Introduction

During the last decade, the European Union has been facing severe crises that affected its legitimacy among citizens: the Euro crisis in 2008-2009, the so-called “European refugee crisis” in 2015, the consequences of the 2016 Brexit referendum or the ongoing rule of law crisis with Poland and Hungary. More recently, the European Union played a key role during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only in managing the acquisition of anti-Corona vaccine, but also in having to face the closing of national borders within the EU for the sake of organising national lockdowns. During this turbulent phase, Europeans have been experiencing the strengths and weaknesses of the current institutional power structure of the EU. Severe crises give Europeans the opportunity to confront with the European Union project. Indeed, the EU experiences peaks in its politicisation in the public debate during such shocks and crises (Hutter, Grande, and Kriesi 2016). Moreover, citizens consider the EU as one of the most important problems faced by their country during such severe EU crises (Teney and Rupieper 2021). The current turbulent phase faced by the EU is also likely to alter citizens’ mindset on the European Union. Such mindsets go beyond the mere support of or opposition to country’s EU membership and encompass opinions toward the various facets of the institutional power structure of the European Union. Indeed, attitudes toward the EU are multidimensional (Boomgaarden et al. 2011) and encompass positions toward EU enlargement, the deepening of integration, or satisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level. These dimensions might vary independently from each other and from the overall support of the EU. For instance, one might be strongly supportive of the European Union project while being highly critical of the current level of democracy at the EU level or be against further enlargement. If we want to grasp citizens’ mindset on the EU in its complexity, we need to go beyond the analysis of a simple standardised measure of support of and opposition to the EU and encompass EU attitudes in their multidimensionality.

In this article, we want to unpack these mindsets on the EU among a sample of German students by running a latent class analysis on EU attitudes measured with a mix of standardised closed and open-end questions. By using such a case-oriented explorative statistical technique, we investigate the profiles of students sharing a similar mindset on the EU. According to the best of our knowledge, our study is the first one investigating citizens’ attitudinal mindset on the EU with a latent class analysis. More concretely, we conducted an online survey among students of a German university and asked them not only closed questions on three distinct dimensions of EU attitudes EU but also an open question on their wish for the future of the EU. We then ran a latent class analysis of the recoded answer categories from the open question and our set of closed questions on a sample of 730 German students. Our three-class solution highlights variation in support of the EU among students. Indeed, while the vast majority of the respondents show highly supportive attitudes toward the EU, we can distinguish between “Integrationists” (in favour of pursuing the EU integration project; 68% of the sample), “Critical Europeanists” (supportive of the EU but dissatisfied with the way democracy works at the EU level; 20,50% of the sample) and “Pessimist Europeanists” (supportive of the EU but afraid of the implosion of the EU; 11% of the sample). Lastly, we investigate variation within each class by analysing the narratives provided by members of each class to the open question. In particular, we find variation (1) in the dimensions and policies the EU should further integrate according to the Europeanists, (2) in the types of EU institutions to be further democratised and strategies to improve the democratisation of the EU regime according to the Critical Europeanists and (3) in strategies the EU should follow to avoid its implosion according to the Pessimist Europeanists. All in all, our study highlights the importance of the use of non-standardised measures and mixed-methods data collection for grasping citizens’ mindset on the EU in its multidimensionality and complexity.

This article is structured as follow: we will first explain why students can be considered as belonging to the ideal type of Europeanists. We will then highlight the importance of considering the multidimensionality of EU attitudes to better grasp attitudinal mindsets on the EU. In the second part of our article, we will describe our data collection and the operationalisation of the variables used in our latent class analysis. We will present our results by interpreting the profile of the three latent classes and investigating their particularities by using some excerpts from the open question before concluding.

German students as ideal type of Europeanists

By drawing on a sample of German students, we focus on a group of Europeans most likely to hold highly positive opinion toward the EU. Indeed, highly educated young Europeans constitute the social group benefiting the most from European Integration (e.g., Fligstein 2008; De Vries 2018; Díez Medrano 2010; Kuhn 2015). They belong to the social groups most likely to experience positive social interactions with other Europeans and to benefit strongly from the EU single market and free movement rights. High education and younger age are indeed positively associated with a larger volume of transnational social practices, such as short trips abroad or contacting friends abroad (Fligstein 2008; Díez Medrano 2010; Teney and Deutschmann 2018). Moreover, through exchange programs such as Erasmus+, the EU enables students to acquire experiences in transnational mobility during their studies (Parey and Waldinger 2011: 196). Students are therefore likely to acquire transnational human capital (Parey and Waldinger 2011; Carlson 2012). Transnational social capital refers to the amount of knowledge and personal skills that enables a person to operate in different fields beyond the nation-state (Gerhards and Hans 2013: 100), such as foreign languages, knowledge of other countries, or intercultural competencies (Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson 2016). Transnational social capital is an asset to be able to fully benefit from the EU single market and navigate more comfortably beyond one's national labour market. Students are therefore much more likely to consider the EU single market in a positive light (Parey and Waldinger 2011; Carlson 2012). Indeed, various studies have repeatedly shown that highly educated young people belong to the groups who support the EU most and identify the most as Europeans (e.g., Fligstein 2008; Díez Medrano 2010; Kuhn 2015; Kuhn et al. 2021). Furthermore, a recent study points to the fact that social groups characterised with a high educational level constitute the groups most homogeneous in their attitudes toward the EU and in their identification as European (reference removed for peer-review). Thus, students tend not only to hold particularly positive attitudes towards the EU, but they are also very likely to show highly homogeneous opinion towards the EU.

Besides the particularities of the social groups of students, the national context of our study is also important to mention. Citizens in Germany tend indeed to hold more positive attitudes toward the EU than Europeans from other countries (Banchoff 1999; Díez Medrano 2003). According to De Vries (2018: 79), Germans are characterised by a certain regime scepticism toward the EU; that is, they tend to be supportive of the EU and their benefits but evaluate the procedures operating at the EU level less positive than the ones at the national level. The landmark book of Díez Medrano (2003) on the framing of the European Union in different member states highlights the particularly cosmopolitan discourse on the EU carried out by the elites in Germany. Accordingly, the reinvention of German identity after the WWII trauma has been explicitly directed toward European and international components and has, in turn, largely influenced the public discourse on the EU in Germany. Thus, by analysing the mindsets on the EU among a sample of German students, we focus on a homogeneous social group with a particularly positive mindset on the EU.

All in all, our study focuses on a group that can be defined as an ideal type of Europeanists. This has one obvious major limitation: our results cannot be generalised to other social groups and our conclusions will have to remain restricted to our target group. On the other hand, our sample provides a great advantage. By investigating the mindsets about the EU of a social group characterised by highly homogeneous and positive attitudes toward the EU, we can assess the extent to which the EU receives unconditional and undifferentiated support from its most fervent supporters. Does this ideal type of Europeanists endorse positive attitudes uniformly on all dimensions of EU attitudes? Or does this group of Europeanists show a more differentiated and contrasted mindset on the EU? To which extent does this social group of Europeanists incorporate this turbulent phase of the EU in its mindset on the EU? Besides investigating support of the EU in its multidimensionality, our sample design enables us to evaluate the assumed homogeneity in students' EU attitudes. Do students hold a highly homogeneous mindset on the EU? Or do they show a differentiated profile in their opinions on various dimensions of EU attitudes? With this contribution, we aim to answer these research questions.

Mindset on the EU: Between ambivalence and multidimensionality

Previous studies highlighted the stability of EU support in Germany over time. Indeed, German public opinion toward the EU seems to have remained relatively unaffected by the severe crises faced by the EU during the last decades. For instance, the Euro crisis impacted mainly the attitudes of citizens residing in member states hardly hit by the economic crisis. By contrast, citizens from member states -including Germany- that did not face such an economic hardship were not affected by the Euro crisis in their support of the EU (e.g., Teney 2016; Schäfer and Gross 2020: 41). In a similar vein, the so-called 2015 "European refugee crisis" does not seem to have increased or decreased the level of support for the EU and the European integration project (Stockemer et al. 2020; Yeung 2021). de Wilde (2021) provides a more long-term picture on the stability of EU support over time. Accordingly, he observes a drop in the support of the EU straight after a severe crisis such as the Euro crisis or the so-called "European refugee crisis" at the aggregate level. However, the overall support of the EU increases again over time. Interestingly, de Wilde also shows that the share of "Don't know" in social surveys on the EU support item has decreased over time. He thus concludes that the overall population become less indifferent toward the EU, while the overall support of the EU remains stable over time and this, despite severe crises.

However, these studies tend to focus on standardised one-dimensional measurement of attitudes toward the EU (with some exceptions, see for instance Teney 2016). Indeed, while overall support of the EU might be stable, other underlying attitudinal dimensions might give a more contrasted picture. Similarly to the decrease of indifference toward the EU over time observed by de Wilde (2021), the growing politicisation of the EU in the public debate -which goes hand in hand with the severe crises faced by the EU (Hutter, Grande, and Kriesi 2016)- might lead citizens to hold more fine-grained and differentiated attitudes toward the EU. While we are not able to estimate statistically the effect of the COVID-crisis on various attitudes toward the EU -as we collected cross-sectional data-, we are nevertheless able to assess attitudes toward the EU in their multidimensionality. This, in turn, allows us to assess the extent to which students hold unconditional positive attitudes toward the EU or whether they hold a more differentiated and contrasted opinion on the EU.

Studies highlighting the importance of encompassing more attitudinal dimensions than the overall standardised EU support item have been burgeoning. In particular, researchers using

qualitative data collection and qualitative data analysis argue in favour of a more fine-grained operationalisation of EU attitudes. First, the aforementioned work of Díez Medrano (2003) highlights variation in the framing of Europe across groups and countries and the multidimensionality in citizens' attitudes toward the EU. Second, Duchesne et al. (2010) and Duchesne et al. (2013) stress convincingly the ambivalence and indifference expressed by many group discussion participants from Paris, Brussels and Oxford when they talk about Europe. Besides these landmark qualitative studies on EU support, several quantitative studies also share this plea for a more differentiated measurement instrument. For instance, Stoeckel (2013) points to the prevalence of ambivalent and indifferent attitudes toward the EU among a large share of EU citizens by analysing Eurobarometer data. Furthermore, several studies depart from the main EU-support items from international surveys to develop innovative battery of items assessing the multidimensionality of EU attitudes. They all come to the recommendation of using a broader range of items covering different attitudinal dimensions of EU support and opposition (see for instance Boomgaarden et al. 2011; de Vreese, Azrout, and Boomgaarden 2019; Beaudonnet and Di Mauro 2012; De Vries 2018). More recently, Favell and Reimer 2021 argue that focusing on standardised one-dimensional measurement of EU-related items might hide a more complex relationship between citizens and Europeanisation, such as cosmopolitan practices. Thus, the use of standardised and unidimensional instruments for measuring attitudes toward EU should be left aside in favour of more fine-grained measures assessing attitudes toward the EU in their ambivalence and multidimensionality.

In this article, we want to contribute to this research avenue by analysing the data of a unique survey mixing closed and open questions on the EU. Encompassing not only standardised items on EU support measuring different attitudinal dimensions but also an open question about wishes for the future of the EU enables us to provide a more comprehensive insight into the mindsets of German students on the EU. On the one hand, the quantitative standard instruments measuring three distinct attitudinal dimensions of the EU regime enable us to compare quantitatively the relevance of each dimension in students' mindset. More precisely, we use items measuring both the scope (i.e., enlargement of the EU) and the level (i.e., allocation of further political power at the EU level) of the EU integration project. Our third item measures the evaluation of the performance of one facet of the EU process, namely satisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level. On the other hand, evaluating students' answers to an open question on their wishes for the future of the EU gives us the opportunity to consider their opinion on the EU without any predetermined stimulus. Incorporating both standardised items and students' answers to the open question within a single analysis allows us to unpack students' mindset of the EU by considering its complexity. Moreover, we use a case-oriented explorative statistical technique (latent class analysis- LCA) to investigate the profiles of students sharing a similar mindset. The LCA aims to reduce the complexity of the data by classifying cases into a limited number of classes that are characterised by low within-class and high between-classes heterogeneity. In contrast to other data reduction techniques such as factor analysis, LCA focuses on similarities between respondents on a set of indicators, and not on similarities between indicators (as in the case of factor analysis). In the second part of our analysis, we describe the classes from the LCA regarding their socio-demographic profile and investigate variation within each LCA class by analysing narratives provided by class members to the open question.

Data & Methods

Our analysis is based on an online survey we conducted from 19 April to 20 May, 2021. All students enrolled at the XXX University (name removed for peer-review) were invited per email to participate to the online survey and received a reminder two weeks later. In total, 1750 students participated in our survey. This corresponds to a response rate of 6,21% of the entire student population enrolled at the University of XXX at the time of the survey (N: 28.174). In order to enhance the response rate, we raffled 50 Amazon vouchers worth 20 euros each. The invitation and reminder emails, as well as the questionnaire, were provided in both English and German. The questionnaire was composed of a mix of standardised closed items and open questions on the EU. Besides socio-demographic characteristics, the topics included in the questionnaire encompassed students' experience and wish to go abroad during their studies, their levels of national and supranational identification, their attitudes toward the EU, the meaning they give to the EU and their wish for the future of the EU. The open question on students' wish for the future of the EU used for our latent class analysis was the last question of our questionnaire and was non-compulsory. In total, 730 students answered this open question. Our latent class analysis is therefore restricted to a sample of 730 students.

The latent class analysis is run on a battery of standardised closed questions on attitudes toward the EU as well as on students' answers to the open question: "What do you wish for the future of the EU?". The battery of standardised closed questions is composed of four items tapping three different attitudinal dimensions. The first item measures attitudes towards EU enlargement ("The EU should continue to accept new member states"). The second one assesses satisfaction with the way democracy works at EU level. Both items could be answered with a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Lastly, we build an additive index based on the following two items: "EU institutions should transfer some of their decision-making power back to the member states" (reversed coding) and "The member states should transfer some of their decision-making power to the EU", as these two items measure the same underlying attitudinal dimension (Cronbach alpha: 0,66). Our additive index ranges from 2 (strongly in favour of power back to the member states) to 10 (strongly in favour of more power to the EU level).

Turning now to the open question on the future of the EU, we quantify and standardise respondents' narratives in such a way that the answers to the open question can be used as indicators in a latent class analysis. For each respondent, we first coded each separate argument provided to the open question in a separate answer category, so that each respondent is allocated as many answer categories as arguments contained in his or her answer. These answer categories were then transformed into dummy variables with the value of 1 if the respondent mentioned the particular argument in his or her answer to the open question (and the value of 0 if the argument was not mentioned). Since respondents' answers to the open question were complex and often contained more than one argument, most of the respondents have therefore a value of 1 in more than one dummy variable. Students' answers to the open question were coded into a total of 23 dummy answer variables. We keep for the latent class analysis the dummy variables that were mentioned by at least 4% of the students, which represents six dummy variables in total. This coding was carried out by two different researchers. We ran a Cohen's Kappa-test to assess the intercoder reliability (Landis and Koch 1977a). We obtained Kappa-values between 0,41 - 0,80 on the generated dummy variables, which -according to (Landis and Koch 1977b: 165)- can be interpreted as *moderate to substantial* agreement between the coding of the two researchers. Only one dummy variable (Statusquo_o) showed a value slightly below the threshold of "moderate agreement", but is still considered a fair agreement (0,39).

The list of the standardised closed items and the dummy variables of the open question used in our latent class analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of Variables used in the Latent Class Analysis (N:1750)

Label	Range	Mean/share	Meaning
Enlarge_c	1-5	3,6376	The EU should continue to accept new member states (1= Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree)
Satis_demo_c	1-5	2,9223	I am satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU (1= Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree).
Power_c	2-10	6,7731	Additive index generated out of variables indicating that the member states should transfer decision-making power to the EU and that the EU should transfer decision-making power back to the member states (reversed coding). (2 = less power for the EU; 10 = more power for the EU).
Unity_o	0/1	11,66 %	Wishes/hopes for more unity between EU-States. A sense of cultural and political togetherness including all EU-States. More common ground and further cohesion of the EU. A unified Europe with less competition and disagreement between states (mutual support, more consensus, convergence of the member states).
Coop_o	0/1	5,89 %	Wishes/hopes for more cooperation between the EU states. A better and more direct communication between the states as well as a better collaboration, especially in times of crises (Covid-, climate, dept-, refugee-, financial-crisis) but also in everyday politics.
Climate_prot_o	0/1	7,83 %	Wishes/hopes for more climate protection within the EU. Wish that the EU takes the climate crisis more seriously. A stronger focus and more commitment to fight the climate crisis in domestic as well as in foreign policy (environmentally-related policy, sustainable economy, a global role model for environmental protection, environmental sustainability as an export product).
Statusquo_o	0/1	4,91 %	Wishes/hopes for a status quo of the EU in the future. The EU should remain as a democratic institution and stay as it is. It should not radicalise, get weaker, have more countries leaving or break apart (permanency and stability).

Stronger_say_o	0/1	4,63 %	Wishes/hopes that the EU has a stronger say than the member states and more rights and duties for the EU parliament. There should be more decisions based on majority and less on consensus and the ability of overruling single member states. In general, a slight centralisation of political power on EU level and therefore more influence in- and outside the EU (centralised foreign, migration and trade policy, more decision-making powers, abolition of the member states' veto power, more ability to act).
Democracy_o	0/1	4,34 %	Wishes/hopes that democracy in the EU should be strengthened in terms of more opportunities for direct participation and politics for the ordinary citizen. A return to basic democratic principles and less political influence for big companies. Also, a more clear and transparent communication so more people can participate. The EU should adhere to its own democratic principles (citizen participation, more direct democracy, referendums, wide information programs and transparency).

We ran a latent class analysis with the software LatentGold on a restricted sample composed of respondents who answered our open question on the future of the EU (N: 730). We selected a three-cluster solution based on goodness-of-fit statistics (lowest BIC statistic) (see Table A in appendix). The three-cluster solution also shows a good distribution of cases across the three classes. Moreover, this three-cluster model can classify respondents to one of the three classes very well: the three-cluster solution misclassifies only 8,8% of the respondents from our sample. All EU indicators used in our latent class analysis contribute significantly to the three-cluster solution according to their Wald-test (see Table B in appendix). However, this three-cluster solution does not perfectly satisfy the assumption of local independence. Following (Vermunt and Magidson 2005), we relax the assumption of independence between the pairs of items with particularly large bivariate residuals (i.e., larger than 3,84). Accordingly, we specify the following pairs of items as jointly dependent in the model estimation: Power_c and Stronger_say_o; Coop_o and Unity_o; Climate_prot_o and unity_o; Enlarge_c and Democracy_o; Climate_prot_o and Coop_o; Power_c and Democracy_o. The three-cluster LCA models with and without local dependencies show substantively similar results. The table with the overall model fit statistics (Table A), the table presenting the Wald test for each EU indicator (Table B), the table with bivariate residuals of our latent class analysis (Table C) can be found in the Appendix. In the result section, we present the characteristics of our three-cluster model estimated with Bootstrap L².

Results

Table 2 presents the profile of each of the three latent classes. In this table, we see the share of the members of the three classes endorsing each of our EU-indicators used to build the latent class model. The last column of Table 2 shows the distribution of the EU indicators for the entire sample used in the LCA. In addition, Table 3 provides the socio-demographic characteristics of students belonging to the three classes. Besides the usual socio-demographic characteristics, Table 3 also contains one attitudinal item measuring interest in politics that varies significantly across the three latent classes. The last column of Table 3 presents the distribution of the socio-demographic

characteristics for the entire sample used in the LCA. In this section, we describe the profile of the students belonging to the respective class regarding the variables used in the LCA. Next, we investigate variation within these classes by interpreting some narratives of members of the class provided to the open question. Lastly, we describe these classes according to their socio-demographic profile.

Table 2: Profile of Members of the three Latent Classes (N:730)

Indicators	Cluster1 „Integrationists“	Cluster2 „Critical Europeanists“	Cluster3 „Pessimist Europeanists“	Overall average
Cluster Size	0,6808	0,2053	0,1139	1.000
Unity_o				
0	0,6403	0,8758	0,9684	0,7260
1	0,3597	0,1242	0,0316	0,2740
Coop_o				
0	0,8094	0,9746	0,9465	0,8589
1	0,1906	0,0254	0,0535	0,1411
Climate_prot_o				
0	0,7741	0,8826	0,9626	0,8164
1	0,2259	0,1174	0,0374	0,1836
Statusquo_o				
0	0,9860	0,9996	0,0623	0,8836
1	0,0140	0,0004	0,9377	0,1164
Stronger_say_o				
0	0,9338	0,8801	0,9502	0,9247
1	0,0662	0,1199	0,0498	0,753
Democracy_o				
0	0,9662	0,6124	0,9868	0,8959
1	0,0338	0,3876	0,0132	0,1041
Enlarge_c (Mean)	3,8689	3,1571	3,9693	3,7342
Statis_demo_c (Mean)	3,0433	1,7899	3,5031	2,8383
Power_c (Mean)	7,4276	6,1616	6,9655	3,5178

Table 3: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the three LCA Classes (N:730)

Variable	Categories	Class1 Integrationists	Class2 Critical Europeanists	Class 3 Pessimist Europeanist	Overall
Subject of studies (%)	humanities	55,78	53,69	54,43	55,21%
	Social sciences	20,52	24,83	22,78	21,64%
	Natural sciences	23,71	21,48	22,78	23,15%
Gender ***	Male	34,46	56,38	27,85	38,22
	Female	64,34	40,94	47,70	60,41
	Diverse	1,20	2,68	0	1,37
Parents Education	at most secondary educational degree	37,45	32,89	31,65	35,89
	Tertiary educational degree	62,55	67,11	68,35	64,11
I am interested in politics (mean/sd)		3,99 (1,00)	4,26*** (0,85)	3,55*** (1,16)	4,00 (1,02)
Migration Background [1=yes]		,018* (0,38)	0,22 (0,41)	0,29 (0,45)	0,20 (0,40)
Spent an academic term abroad [1=yes]		0,24 (0,43)	0,26 (0,44)	0,24 (0,43)	0,25 (0,43)
Age		23,34 (4,10)	23,67 (3,56)	22,98 (4,20)	23,37 (4,01)
N		502	149	79	730

Note. Interest in politics is measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

CramersV & Chi²: * $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,01$, *** $p < 0,001$.

t-test: * $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,01$, *** $p < 0,001$

The first class is the largest one and is composed of 68,08% of the respondents. Members of the first class tend to wish more unity (35.97% of the respondents belonging to the first class answered “more unity” to our open question), more cooperation (mentioned by 19,06% of class 1 members) and more climate protection (22,59% of members of class 1 mentioned climate protection to our open question) within the EU. They show an average level of support for further

enlargement and of satisfaction with the way democracy works within the EU. However, they tend to favour allocating more power to the EU to a larger extent than average. In sum, this first class is constituted of students favouring the continuation of the European integration project and supporting more climate protection by the EU. We therefore label members of the first class “Integrationists”. If we now have a look at some answers of Integrationists to the open question on their wishes for the future of the EU, we can see that this wish for more integration can take different forms. First, Integrationists can hope for an ambitious integration boost in order to build an overall stronger European Union. This is illustrated by our first two excerpts:

‘I would like the EU to move closer together and cooperate even more. I would like the EU to take a clearer stance on authoritarian regimes, inside and outside the Union. I would like the EU to continue to show that strength does not consist in military power, but in political and economic cooperation and unity. I hope that the Union will be able to cope with future crises and will continue to exist for a long time.’ *(authors’ translation; ID: 158, female, 25, no migration background, lived abroad, undergraduate of Business, Administration and Law, parents: tertiary education)*

‘More cooperation, more climate protection, standing up for our values (human rights, etc.), global solidarity, international cooperation and mutual aid.’ *(authors’ translation; ID: 2833, female, 20, no migration background, lived abroad, undergraduate of Natural sciences, Mathematics and statistics (Biology), parents: at most secondary education)*

By contrast, other Integrationists wish further integration in particular policy fields, such as climate change and environmental issues or a fairer allocation of displaced persons, as illustrated in the last two excerpts:

‘I think it would be great if the EU were given more powers to be able to set stricter requirements in terms of environmental protection and animal welfare. I also hope that regional and minority languages will be supported more by the EU and that the EU will be able to impose more requirements on the states in this regard.’ *(authors’ translation; ID: 191; Female, 25, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of Education, social work, parents: at most secondary education)*

‘More cohesion and solidarity, above all a communal and fair distribution of refugees. Abolition of the Dublin Agreement. Bigger joint steps to face the climate crisis.’ *(ID: 268; Female, 25, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of Health and Welfare, parents: tertiary education)*

Lastly, the socio-demographic profile of the Integrationists does not differ much from the overall average of the socio-demographic characteristics (compare “Integrationists” column with the last column of Table 3). This is probably due to the large size of this first class: as 68% of the sample belong to this class, the overall average of the socio-demographic characteristics is strongly biased toward the average of the first class.

Turning now to our second class, it is composed of 20,53% of our sample and characterised by respondents who are less enthusiastic and more critical toward the EU than the Integrationists as they show a large dissatisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level. 38,76% of the members of class 2 answered to our open question that they wish more democracy in the EU. Moreover, the level of satisfaction with the way democracy works at the EU level is particularly low for this class (class-average of 1,79 compared to sample-average of 2,84). Furthermore, the

second class is the class showing the lowest level of support of further EU enlargement (class average of 3,16 compared to sample average of 3,73) and further power allocation to the EU level (class average of 6,16 compared to sample average of 3,52). Even if this class shows a more dissatisfied view on the EU than the Integrationists, its members can nevertheless not be characterised as Eurosceptic, as the class-averages for our item on EU enlargement (average of 3,16 on a 1-to-5-point scale) and allocation of power (average of 6,16 on a scale ranging from 2 to 10) remain very high in absolute terms. Besides their more critical stance on the EU, members of the second class are the ones wishing the most often the EU would have a stronger say in the world (12% of class 2 members answered “stronger say” to our open question). Because of their critical stance on the way democracy works in the EU while remaining supportive of the EU project, we label members of the second class “Critical Europeanists”.

The Critical Europeanists’ answers to our open question on their wish for the future of the EU point here again to a diversity of elements of the EU regime and institutions that are wished to become more democratic or face more transparency. As illustrated in the four following excerpts, these elements range from lower lobbyism, a stronger EU parliament, more transparency and accessibility for citizens to more fight against corruption and a more democratic way for the attribution of EU commissioners’ posts.

‘More cohesion and more decision-making power of the EU institutions in order to be able to appear stronger and more united internationally. But also beyond that, clearer elections for EU posts and increased action against corruption within the EU institutions and member states.’ *(authors’ translation; ID: 299, male, 28, no migration background, did not lived abroad, postgraduate of social sciences, parents: at most secondary education)*

‘I hope that the countries of the EU will continue to grow together and allow themselves to be shaped by joint decisions. I also hope that the EU's democratic system will be reformed so that the MEPs of the EU have the greatest decision-making power.’ *(authors’ translation; ID 211; male, 20, no migration background, did not lived abroad, undergraduate of Natural sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, parents: tertiary education)*

‘I would like the EU to have more democratic legitimation through the EP's right of initiative and an increase in the ability to act through a move away from the unanimity principle in the Council.’ *(authors’ translation; ID: 1051; male, 24, has migration background (one parent from Switzerland), lived abroad, postgraduate of Business, Administration and Law, parents: tertiary education)*

‘That especially the political events in the EU become more transparent and accessible for the citizens, so that Europeans do not feel totally at the mercy and powerless against it. I think that is the only way to build a stronger European identity. In addition, Europe must clearly stand up for its own values, internally and externally, because these are actually our advantage.’ *(authors’ translation; ID: 2733; female, 20, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of social sciences, parents: tertiary education)*

The Critical Europeanists are more likely to be men and to be interested in politics than average. It seems thus that interest in politics goes hand in hand with a more critical opinion on the lack of democracy and transparency of some elements of the EU regime and its institutions. In fact, their shared wish of strengthening the democratic level of the EU regime and its institutions make them the most pro-integration group in our analysis. Indeed, they wish among other a strong European Parliament, an elected European Commission and a better integration of citizens within the EU apparatus, which would imply a radical change of the status quo toward a democratised, integrated EU. By contrast, the previous class of the Integrationists are less radical in their wish for further European integration, as they mostly restrict this further integration to particular policy fields, such as fight against climate change.

Turning now to our last and smallest class (composed of 11,39% of the sample), class 3 is mainly characterised by the fact that almost all its members (93,77%) answered to our open question that the EU should not fall apart. Members of the third class do not differ from the average sample on the other EU indicators used in our latent class analysis. In sum, class 3 members are characterised by average attitudes toward the EU (which are on average very positive) and by a focus on the perceived threat of the EU falling apart. For this reason, we label members of the last class “Pessimist Europeanists”. The Pessimist Integrationists are more likely to be women and to be less interest in politics than average (see Table 3). However, they do not differ from average on the other socio-demographic characteristics. Our last set of excerpts of answers to the open question points here again to various strategies suggested by the Pessimist Europeanists to prevent the overall collapse of the EU, to secure peace within the EU or the EU founding values such as democracy and human rights.

‘I hope that the politicians think realistically so that the EU continues to exist and does not disintegrate in an attempt at an ideal image.’ (authors’ translation; ID: 526, male, 23, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary, parents: tertiary education)

‘I hope that Europe will continue to exist for many years and that the exchange between the countries will be promoted and demanded even more, already among schoolchildren and students, but also more intensively between adults, so that understanding among the member states is always supported.’ (authors’ translation; ID: 1456, male, 23, has migration background (both parents from Soviet Union), not born in Germany, lived abroad, undergraduate of Business, Administration and Law, parents: tertiary education)

‘My wish for the future of the EU is that it will continue to exist and that objective, diverse discourse can continue to take place and that right-wing populism will be stopped. I wish that the EU will continue to stand for freedom, openness, tolerance and diversity and that supranational cooperation will continue to be promoted and valued. I also wish that refugees and fugitives are accepted and welcomed and that they are given the opportunity to live in dignity in Europe and Germany, whereby structural (e.g. bureaucratic) obstacles are dismantled. I wish that peace in Europe will continue to exist.’ (authors’ translation; ID: 393, female, 24, no migration background, lived abroad, postgraduate of Health and Welfare, parents: tertiary education)

‘My wish for the future of the EU is that it will continue to exist and that objective, diverse discourse can continue to take place and that right-wing populism will be stopped. I wish that the EU will continue to stand for freedom, openness, tolerance and diversity and that supranational

cooperation will continue to be promoted and valued. I also wish that refugees and fugitives are accepted and welcomed and that they are given the opportunity to live in dignity in Europe and Germany, whereby structural (e.g. bureaucratic) obstacles are dismantled. I wish that peace in Europe will continue to exist.' (*authors' translation; ID: 1420, female, 21, no migration background, lived abroad, undergraduate of Social sciences, parents: tertiary education*)

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to unpack German students' mindset on the EU. For this purpose, we conducted an online survey among students from the University of XXX in Germany. In our analysis, we combined items measuring three dimensions of attitudes toward the EU and the answers of an open question on students' wishes for the future of the EU. The results of a latent class analysis point to three classes of students that differ regarding their EU mindset. We named the largest class (which covers 68% of our sample) the Integrationists, as most members of this class share the preference of pursuing the EU integration process. Moreover, the Integrationists have a tendency of wishing more EU regulations against climate change. A further analysis of some Integrationists' answers to our open question shows that this wish for further integration applies to various components of the EU regime and EU policies. Our second class, the Critical Europeanists, constitutes 20,50% of the surveyed students. They are more likely to be male and to be interested in politics than the other classes. This class is characterised by a tendency to be dissatisfied with the perceived lack of democracy and transparency of the EU. Here again this dissatisfaction covers different elements of the EU regime and EU decision making process, as highlighted in the Critical Europeanists' answers to the open question. Despite this critical stance on the current way democracy works at the EU level, the Critical Europeanists have an overall very positive and supportive opinion toward the EU. In fact, their shared wish of strengthening the democratic level of the EU regime and its institutions make them the most pro-integration group in our analysis. Indeed, they wish among other a strong European Parliament, an elected European Commission and a better integration of citizens within the EU apparatus, which would imply a radical change of the status quo toward a democratised, integrated EU. By contrast, the previous class of the Integrationists mostly restrict their wish of further integration to particular policy fields, such as fight against climate change. Lastly, the Pessimist Europeanists constitute our smallest class (11% of our sample). This class also shows very positive and supportive attitudes toward the EU. However, the Pessimist Europeanists tend to be afraid of a potential collapse of the EU. They are on average less interested in politics and more likely to be female.

Overall, the vast majority of the surveyed students shares a very positive mindset on the EU: their answers to our set of closed questions as well as their answers to our open question point to a particular Europhile mindset. The variation between the three classes should therefore be relativised: the surveyed German students are very likely to support the EU and wish for a sustainable continuation of the European Union project. Where their opinions diverge, however, is on the potential fear of a collapse of the EU and on the extent to which the EU (or part of it) should be further integrated or should improve its level of democracy and transparency.

The extent to which our results can be generalised to other students enrolled in other universities in Germany and to students from other EU countries is obviously an open question. The university where we conducted our survey is a middle-size university in a small city in the Northern part of Germany. Students enrolled at this university are likely to come from the surrounding area. It is therefore likely that a similar survey conducted in another German university that attracts a larger share of students from other German states or from abroad might hold different results.

Furthermore, students socialised in Germany are very likely to have a unique mindset on the EU. Indeed, the framing of the EU in the German public discourse and in the educational system is characterised by a strong cosmopolitan perspective: the EU is considered as guarantor of peace and democracy within Europe (Díez Medrano 2003). This particular framing of the EU in the German public discourse is highly likely to have influenced our respondents during both their childhood and early adulthood. This, in turn, implies that our results are very unlikely to be generalisable to other EU countries. Conducting a similar survey containing a large battery of EU items and some open questions among students attending universities in other EU countries would help contribute to our understanding of mindsets on the EU among highly educated young adults and their variation across countries.

Lastly, our study highlights the importance of considering different attitudinal dimensions when analysing public opinion toward the EU. Indeed, public opinion toward the EU is much more complex than the usual survey item of support of and opposition to country' EU membership (Boomgaarden et al. 2011; de Vreese, Azrout, and Boomgaarden 2019; Beaudonnet and Di Mauro 2012). Moreover, considering both closed items tapping at different attitudinal dimensions and open questions in the analysis of mindsets on the EU turns out to be a promising research avenue: students' answers to our open question help us refine and complement our assessment on their attitudes toward the EU based on our battery of closed items. The analysis of mixed-method data on opinion toward the EU is likely to help us push forward the debate on public opinion toward the EU.

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Appendix

Table A: Model fit evaluation information for 1 to 5-cluster-solutions of a Latent Class Analysis

	LL	BIC(LL)	Npar	L ²	df	p-Value	Class-error
1-Cluster	-5179,09	10503,24	22	1742,79	708	0,000	0,000
2-Cluster	-5115,03	10441,04	32	1614,66	698	0,000	0,099
3-Cluster	-5075,30	10427,51	42	1535,20	688	0,000	0,075
4-Cluster	-5044,38	10431,61	52	1473,37	678	0,000	0,107
5-Cluster	-5020,73	10450,21	62	1426,05	668	0,000	0,149

Table B: Wald-Test-Statistics for each EU indicators of our three-cluster-solution

Variables	Cluster1	Cluster2	Cluster3	Wald	p-Value	R ²
More unity (dummy)	0,844	-0,042	-0,801	25,85	0,000	0,082
More cooperation (dummy)	0,776	-0,546	-0,229	16,30	0,000	0,043
Clima protection (dummy)	0,615	0,016	-0,632	15,68	0,000	0,031
EU should remain (dummy)	-0,550	-2,382	2,932	10,65	0,005	0,843
Stronger EU (dummy)	-0,210	0,460	-0,250	9,23	0,009	0,007
More democracy (dummy)	-0,514	1,460	-0,946	38,80	0,000	0,223
EU enlargement	0,233	-0,586	0,353	28,94	0,000	0,078
EU democracy	0,452	-1,380	0,928	41,68	0,000	0,264
EU power scale	0,304	-0,503	0,199	25,87	0,000	0,083
Intercept	0,995	-0,203	-0,792	76,33	0,000	

Note: The Wald test assess the extent to which each indicator contributed to define classes. P-value should be lower than 0,05.

Table C: Bivariate Residuals of our final three-cluster-solution

Indicators	Unity_o	Coop_o	Climate_prot_o	Status_q_uo_o	Stronger_o	Democra_cy_o	Enlarge_c	Democra_cy_c	Power_c

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Unity_o	-								
Coop_o	0,0000	-							
Climate_prot_o	0,0000	0,0000	-						
Status_quo_o	0,0010	0,0529	0,0573	-					
Stronger_o	0,0672	1,5335	0,3876	0,0334	-				
Democracy_o	0,5155	0,7124	0,0141	0,0634	0,4583	-			
Enlarge_c	1,2476	1,0827	1,1638	0,0825	0,0855	0,0000	-		
Democracy_c	1,7292	0,0567	0,1446	0,0365	0,7221	0,0510	0,5880	-	
Power_c	0,0788	0,9383	0,0043	0,0008	0,0000	0,0000	0,0667	0,0000	-

Note: This table presents the bivariate residuals of the three-cluster solution in which we allowed for local dependency between pairs of indicators showing bivariate residuals higher than 3,84. Accordingly, we specify the following pairs of items as jointly dependent in the model estimation: Power_c and Stronger_say_o; Coop_o and Unity_o; Climate_prot_o and unity_o; Enlarge_c and Democracy_o; Climate_prot_o and Coop_o; Power_c and Democracy_o.