Interacting identities: A comparative experimental study of the impact of existing and emerging identity(ies) in the EU on attitudes to integration

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https://ewds.strath.ac.uk/euidtriggers
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Abstract

The potential of the EU flag to promote a convergence in popular attitudes to the EU in the various member states is at the heart of many EU initiatives to promote a ‘Peoples’ Europe’. Experiments that test Billig’s ‘banal nationalism’ concept reveal that implicit exposure to visual triggers, such as the flags of established nations, has a measurable effect on related attitudes moderated by existing national attachments. This paper extends this research and examines the relationship between implicit exposure to EU-related symbols, attitudes to the European Union, and identification with the European Union, an ‘identity in formation’. We test this relationship using large-scale online survey experiments containing visual stimuli, comparing findings within the UK, and between the UK and Ireland. Our analysis of 4350 responses finds that exposure to implicit cues that raise the salience of the European Union interacts with supranational identification to shape related attitudes. This effect differs by national context. It is demonstrated that ‘functional’ rather than ‘symbolic’ EU triggers have a significant effect on attitudes towards the European Union. Unlike the findings of previous seminal research on implicit exposure to national images, the symbolic version of the EU flag had no effect on EU-related opinions. In addition, contrary to previous findings on the homogenising effect of national flags, we found that exposure to the EU ‘functional’ trigger led to polarisation of opinion.

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1 This research is funded by UK Economic and Social Research Council grant: RES-000-22-4348
3 Hassin et al., 2007, 2009; Butz, 2009.
5 Hassin et al. 2007.
6 Hassin et al. 2009.
Introduction

‘You cannot imagine how much time is spent arguing about the EU flag here at Europe House’ (Michael Shackleton, Head of UK Information Office, European Parliament, 10 May 2011)

A majority of respondents to Eurobarometer surveys now identify themselves as somewhat European.\(^7\) There is growing scholarly interest in the transformation of European national identities, attitudes towards European integration and the possible emergence of a post-national EU identity.\(^8\) Considerable effort is expended by executives and officials, through Treaty revisions and Commission and Parliament actions, to bring the European Union ‘closer to the people’ and to encourage a greater sense of identification with the European Union project.\(^9\) There is considerable popular consensus that ‘identity matters’ and that EU symbols have a role to play in fostering any emerging EU identity. BBC reports on the division in the UK coalition government over whether or not to fly the EU flag on Europe Day in May 2011, and the flurry of tabloid headlines that followed, exemplified the extent of this perception.\(^10\) However, there is little empirical evidence on the impact of

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\(^7\) Green, 2007; Fligstein, 2008.


\(^9\) See for example, European Commission, 2001.

\(^10\) ‘Number 10 shuns EU flag tradition’, BBC News, 7 May 2011; ‘Downing Street won’t fly EU flag as Cameron snubs Europe Day... but Lib Dems WILL hoist banner’, 9th May 2011, Daily Mail; ‘Coalition
implicit exposure to such symbols in practice. There is also a need for detailed empirical information on the extent to which the nature and intensity of the various national identity(ies) in the EU and attachment to the EU mediate the impact of different types of symbols.

A growing body of experimental literature in the field of political psychology has demonstrated that subliminal exposure to visual primes (e.g. flashing a national flag on a computer screen for a few milliseconds) affects political preferences.\(^{11}\) Butz has recently argued that national symbols may provoke ‘enhanced national identification and the promotion of group unity at an unconscious level’.\(^{12}\) This experimental research provides support for Billig’s argument that ‘the primary function of national symbols is to bring to mind the concepts and emotions associated with one’s nation’.\(^{13}\)

The present project extends and adapts this experimental approach by applying it to the EU. Existing experimental studies of the role played by EU symbols in relation to EU identity have explored the effect of such symbols in association with positive and divided over flying the European Union flag: Coalition faced a new split last night – over the issue of Europe’, 13 May 2011, Telegraph; See also the bemusement over the ferocity of this debate as expressed by Michael Shackleton, European Parliament, and Jonathon Scheele, European Commission in their article in ‘The Parliament Magazine’ (Shackleton and Scheele, forthcoming).

\(^{11}\) Hassin et al., 2007, 2009; Kemmelmeier and Winter, 2008; Ehrlinger et al., 2011.


\(^{13}\) Billig’s, 1995.
negative news reports about the EU. This study is the first attempt to assess, in an experimental framework, the extent to which implicit exposure to EU symbols provokes a shift in attitudes to the EU. A key innovation in this project is that existing studies on implicit or subliminal triggers, and Billig’s examples, focus on established identities. The underlying assumption is that a symbolic trigger, such as a flag, acts as shorthand for a pre-existing narrative about national identity. EU identity is best described, however, as an ‘identity in formation’. While the ‘heroic’ narratives associated with established identities may have no such equivalent for EU citizens, the EU increasingly impinges directly upon the daily lives of EU citizens in a low-level manner, at an unconscious level.

A key distinction in this study is between functional and symbolic primes and between instrumental and affective responses. Recent experimental research on implicit triggers exposes participants to symbolic national stimuli (for example, national flags) to measure changes in attitudes and behaviour. However, as EU

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14 See Bruter’s (2003) innovative study of the effect of news and symbols on EU identity in which participants were invited to participate in a study on the ‘media and Europe’. See also his panel analysis on the time-bomb effect of news and symbols on political identity (Bruter 2009). Although the current study follows a similar rationale, respondents exposed to the various experimental cues were not presented with accompanying information on the EU or made aware that they were participating in a study on the EU (see Research Design below). This allowed us to test the impact of subliminal exposure to the different types of EU related cues employed. This also ensured respondents did not elect to participate in our survey on the basis of pre-existing strong EU-related opinions (positive or negative).


identity is an ‘identity in formation’, exposure to the symbolic stimuli associated with established nations, such as flags and anthems, may not have the same intensity of effect on EU citizens. Similarly, individual reactions to EU triggers are more likely to be instrumental than affective. As EU citizens are increasingly exposed to a range of functional reminders of their EU membership, such as the Euro, driving licences, passports, separate queues for passport control in airports and car registration plates, exposure to these functional primes is more likely to shape political attitudes.

Finally, the present project compares the impact of the different types of EU triggers on public attitudes across a range of national identities: English, Scottish, British, Welsh, and Irish. For example, according to most traditional measures, the UK and Ireland represent extreme ends of support for the EU among member states. These two countries present a particularly interesting comparison for examining the relationship between exposure to EU symbols and support for the EU. However, national identity in the European Union is not contiguous with member-state borders. Due to data limitations (sample size and lack of relevant questions at the sub-state level), data drawn from Eurobarometer-type surveys cannot capture the relationship between non-state national identities and support for the European Union. It has been suggested, for example, that Scottish (overall positive) attitudes towards the EU may be of a utilitarian nature, viewing the EU as an instrument in gaining greater independence for Scotland. To shed light on these expectations we

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17 Although please note that there is variation in national attitudes to the EU within the UK – see Figures 1 and 2 in this paper.

18 Haesly, 1994; Carey, 2002; Dardanelli, 2005.
need empirical data that compare what happens to the opinions of English, Scottish and Welsh identifiers once they are exposed to EU symbols.

**Theoretical Framework**

*Banal Europeanism*

As Hooghe and Marks note, the study of EU identity suffers from an ‘incomplete account of the construction of identity’ and lacks clear hypotheses concerning ‘the relative causal weight of identity’ in the European integration process.\(^{19}\) A clear understanding of what constitutes EU identity and how it is measured is required before definitive conclusions can be drawn as to the extent and depth of EU identity or concerning its significance for the process of European integration. Identity is not always passionate or heroic. It may also be mundane, even banal\(^ {20}\) and absorbed unconsciously.\(^ {21}\) This is difficult to capture with self-reports of stated identities employed in the attitudinal surveys that dominate the empirical study of EU identity. There is a growing recognition that while few would ‘die for Europe’,\(^ {22}\) daily exposure to EU-related norms, symbols and practices is likely to play a role in shaping identification with the European Union.\(^ {23}\)

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\(^{19}\) Hooghe and Marks, 2008: 23.


\(^{21}\) Gellner, 1997:94

\(^{22}\) Smith, 1995: 139.

The issue of the nature of identity, and the relationship between sentiment and interest in shaping identity, has long been debated in the literatures on nationalism and national identity. The affective dimension of identity refers to the ‘we’ feeling or sense of belonging and to the sentimental attachment of an individual to a political unit. Many have focussed on the affective dimension of identity, on the importance of shared histories, values and language, of ethnic symbolism\(^{24}\) or the ‘psychic income’\(^{25}\) associated with a shared identity. Others, however, have recognised the functional,\(^{26}\) even instrumental,\(^{27}\) elements implicit in the concept of identity. Thus, as Gellner argues, ‘Men do not in general become nationalists from sentiment or sentimentality, atavistic or not, well-based or myth-founded: they become nationalists through genuine, objective, practical necessity, however obscurely recognised’.\(^{28}\)

For EU citizens the salience of the European Union is largely based on daily low-level engagement with the EU in practical and unremarkable ways (carrying passports or driving licences, conforming to legislation, using the Euro), which nevertheless remind citizens of their involvement in the larger EU system whether for good or ill.

Drawing on insights from the literatures on national identity and community

\(^{24}\) Smith, 1995.


\(^{26}\) Deutsch et al, 1957.

\(^{27}\) Brass, 1979.

formation,\textsuperscript{29} banal Europeanism maintains that European Union identity is underpinned by a process which is \textit{banal, contingent and contextual}. Central to this approach is the largely implicit, even sub-conscious, process through which the EU impacts upon attitudes towards European integration.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Interacting Identities}

An extensive literature charts the complexities of the interacting identities within the EU.\textsuperscript{31} The picture that emerges in relation to the EU member states is not predominantly one of competition between national and European Union identities, but one of shifting self-perceptions at national level in relation to which the EU acts as both a framing context and even as a resource for some national identities.\textsuperscript{32} Hooghe and Marks\textsuperscript{33} and Risse,\textsuperscript{34} however, hypothesise that exclusive national


\textsuperscript{30} Cram, 2012.


\textsuperscript{32} Cram, 2009b.

\textsuperscript{33} Hooghe and Marks, 2008.

\textsuperscript{34} Risse, 2010.
identities remain one of the most significant barriers to public support for European integration.

The UK is often presented in the EU literature as an example of a state with an unusually strong UK identity exemplified by low levels of identification with the EU as recorded in most Eurobarometer-type surveys. This has been interpreted in one study on European Union identity as the result of particularly strong nationalism, meaning ‘exclusive identification with one’s nation-state’ in Britain, which mitigates the emergence of a European Union identity. However, great care should be taken in the analysis of UK politics. The concept of a ‘British’ people is something of a misnomer and ‘Englishness’ should not be taken as proxy for ‘Britishness’. More nuanced studies of the interplay between state, sub-state and supra-state identities note, for example, that: ‘Those identifying themselves as English, the dominant nationality, in the UK are less supportive of the EU than those identifying with the minority identities. This suggests that the English resist the threat the EU poses to their identity, whereas the Scottish, Welsh and Irish perhaps see the EU as a positive force for the expression of theirs’.

Some have gone further, portraying the relationship between Scottish and Welsh nationalist movements and the European Union as highly instrumental. Haesly, for example, has argued that ‘the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru advocate “instrumental” support for the European Union by encouraging them to view the EU

as the means by which independence becomes feasible.’ In practice, the reality is less straightforward, since with changing contexts have come changing political opportunities for the SNP\textsuperscript{38} and also for Plaid Cymru.\textsuperscript{39} Both the Welsh and the Scottish cases demonstrate the contextual nature of the public ‘imaginings’\textsuperscript{40} of Europe and the EU. As shifts in domestic and international opportunity structures emerged, national movements adapted their attitude to the European Union accordingly. It is now largely, however, accepted that any calls for ‘independence’ will be made within the context of membership of the European Union.

Key to understanding the process of European Union identity formation is an appreciation of the nature and complexities of the relationship between European Union identity and the range of national state identities and sub-state national identities with which it interacts. National identity is not contiguous with member state borders. The EU as an institution provides a context within which calculations as to the contingent benefits of affiliation with any given level of administration are made. In the multi-level, multi-national system of the EU, the process through which existing and emerging identities interact, and how the EU institutional structure impacts upon this process, requires detailed analysis.

Hassin et al found, in a series of experimental studies, that subliminal exposure to the Israeli national flag had a homogenising effect on the political attitudes of

\textsuperscript{38} Mitchell and Cavanagh, 2001.

\textsuperscript{39} Wyn Jones, 2009.

\textsuperscript{40} cf Anderson, 1991.
individuals at extreme ends of the Israeli nationalist spectrum.\textsuperscript{41} The potential of the EU flag to promote a convergence in attitudes in the various member states is at the heart of many EU initiatives to promote a ‘Peoples’ Europe’. However, it has also been demonstrated experimentally that the impact of national state symbols may have a polarising impact depending on existing identities. Drawing on social identification theory Gilboa and Bodner\textsuperscript{42} found that adolescents, immigrants and particularly the ultra-religious Israelis were less likely to identify strong national associations with their national anthem. Gilboa and Bodner’s insights are supported by Butz’s reminder of the multi-referential nature of national symbols and of the ability of such symbols to provoke division as well as cohesion.\textsuperscript{43} Sachs’s study of national and Islamic identities in Indonesia also revealed the capacity for national symbols to provoke disunity and specifically to invoke discord amongst groups that felt disadvantaged within the national context.\textsuperscript{44}

\textit{Symbols}

The attachment of symbolic signifiers to instrumental benefits is central to understanding how ongoing and sustained identification with a political authority is generated. The interplay between interest and identity in the development and maintenance of political communities had been recognised, for example, in Almond and Verba’s analysis of the affective and evaluative dimensions of political

\textsuperscript{41} Hassin et al, 2009.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.,19.
\textsuperscript{43} Butz, 2009.
\textsuperscript{44} Sachs, 2009.
engagement, and the contribution these made to the creation of the ‘civic culture’. Central to the development of identification with the political regime is the extent to which functional benefits, whether material or otherwise, become attached to meaningful symbols or signifiers of attachment to the relevant political unit such that these symbols resonate with the public and become capable of mobilising ‘national’, or in this case, ‘EU’ sentiment.

Deutsch was a pioneer in the social scientific study of national identity, seeking to make this intangible phenomenon subject to empirical analysis and argued that a detailed mapping exercise was required. He stressed the importance of mapping the extent to which secondary symbols, carrying implicit messages about nationhood, had become attached to daily events and patterns of communication. Billig, referring to the nation state, argued that there was a need for a taxonomy of ‘flaggings’. There has been considerable attention paid to the role played by symbols in forging a European Union identity. Detailed analysis of the extent to which secondary symbols, carrying implicit messages about European Union identity, become attached to daily events and patterns of communication amongst the various European people(s) is still, however, required.

As Butz argues (2009:797), ‘particular types of associations may be activated and become influential in different contexts and situations’. Sachs cautions political

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47 Billig, 1995:175.
entrepreneurs seeking, for example, to promote unity through nationalist projects, that the real world outcomes of such attempts at identity manipulation may diverge significantly from their initial intentions.\textsuperscript{49} This caution is particularly relevant for the EU with respect to its explicit identity-building exercises. The present study employs an experimental approach to establish the extent to which EU triggers, from ceremonial flags to more mundane functional reminders, have become associated in the popular perception with valued public goods and to establish how different types of visual signifiers impact upon political attitudes.

\textit{Implicit Cues and Political Behaviour}

A growing body of research in the field of cognitive research has demonstrated the impact on political behaviour of subtle exposure to primes that have become conditioned with national associations, such as flags, emblems or anthems.\textsuperscript{50} Since the human ability for conscious processing of information is limited, Hassin et al. (2009: 136) argue that ‘if ideologies depended on conscious resources for their operation, they would have been much less efficient in controlling our behavior than if they did not depend on these resources...[W]e hence hypothesize that ideologies and, more specifically, national ideologies can operate nonconsciously.’ Central to this literature is the importance of unconscious associations and behaviours provoked by exposure to national symbols.

\textsuperscript{49} Sachs, 2009.

\textsuperscript{50} Butz et al., 2007; Butz, 2009; Ehrlinger et al., 2011; Ferguson et al., 2007; Gilboa and Bodner, 2009; Hassin et al., 2007, 2009; Kemmelmeier and Winter, 2008; Sachs, 2009.
There is an expanding body of empirical evidence to support this approach. Hassin et al.\textsuperscript{51} and Butz et al.\textsuperscript{52}, for example, have conducted a number of studies which have demonstrated the effects of subtle exposure to the Israeli and US flags, and how these flags activate existing attachments (positive or negative). Hassin et al.\textsuperscript{53} found that subliminal priming with national flags affected not only voting intentions in both Italy and Israel, but also how participants actually voted in general elections. Ehrlinger et al. (2011) found in a recent study that US participants primed with the confederate flag were less willing to vote for Barack Obama and more likely to view black candidates negatively. These studies, however, have mostly used what we call a “symbolic” version of the national flag (a flag presented in an abstract context), i.e. one that is not linked to practical scenarios.

The present study develops this research in a manner consistent with the precepts of banal Europeanism. It compares the impact of implicit exposure to banal functional triggers, related to the everyday, practical interactions between citizens and the EU, with that of implicit exposure to the symbolic trigger of the EU ceremonial flag. The EU is a multi-level governance structure with a strong presence of existing national state and sub-state national identities. EU identity, to the extent that it exists at all, is still under construction. As such, the ability of the EU flag to trigger a strong associated narrative that evokes feelings of attachment to a group or an ideology or to shape the behaviour of individuals in a consistent direction is expected to be limited. In this context, it is likely that the ceremonial EU flag will evoke weaker

\textsuperscript{51} Hassin et al., 2007, 2009.

\textsuperscript{52} Butz et al., 2007.

\textsuperscript{53} Hassin et al., 2009.
associations, and have less measurable effects on political attitudes, than other, more mundane, everyday reminders of the instrumental realities of EU membership.

Hypotheses

Based on this theoretical framework, we tested these hypotheses:

Symbols:
H1. Following the “banal Europeanism” approach, functional visual stimuli that refer to the practical benefits of the EU (for example, easier passport controls for EU citizens at the airport) will have a stronger impact than the purely symbolic ones (the EU flag presented in the abstract). In the same sense, this impact will be stronger on responses that refer to the instrumental benefits of the EU rather than on affective responses.

Identities:
H2. As there are contrasting reactions to the EU within national populations, these symbols will activate different connotations among those who feel attached to the EU and those who do not. In other words, EU (group) identification should moderate the effect of the visual cues on EU-related responses. The impact of the visual cues will activate positive connotations and, by extension, will lead to pro-EU responses those who are strongly attached to the EU. But when exposed to the same cues, those that report no attachment to the EU should report more anti-EU positions.

National context:
H3. The above effects are likely to vary across countries. Especially in the stateless nations (Scotland and Wales) where the EU is viewed as an instrument in debates on their constitutional status, we expect the EU symbols to affect individual responses.

Research design

During April 2011 we conducted a series of online survey experiments. The surveys were administered by YouGov (and its affiliate in Ireland), a British online opinion research organisation. YouGov recruits members for its opt-in panel (currently containing over 350,000 respondents) via a variety of methods, such as advertising campaigns on non-political websites and recruitment agencies. When conducting a survey, YouGov draws a relevant sub-group from its panel of respondents by emailing them and asking them to follow an Internet link to the survey.\(^\text{54}\) Unlike previous research on flag effects that uses student or other small groups, the YouGov panel allowed us to use a demographically, geographically and nationally wider and more variegated sample of respondents.\(^\text{55}\)

\(^{54}\) http://www.yougov.co.uk/about/about-methodology.asp

\(^{55}\) Our sample of 4350 respondents is much larger than those typically used in the literature. As a point of comparison, Bruter’s 2009 six country comparison was unusually large for this experimental genre at N=1197.
Materials for our experiments were developed on the basis of two previous pilots we had conducted at the [University name removed] in January 2010 and January 2011. The pilots used printed materials and early versions of a short questionnaire on EU-related attitudes. The online experiments analysed in this paper included participants who identified themselves as: English, Scottish, Welsh, British or Irish. Participation in each of the five samples was determined by individual responses to a previous online questionnaire, which included a national identity/attachment question (March 2011). The screening identity questions asked:

[If resident in the UK:] “If you had to choose just one, which of the following words best describes the way you think of yourself?” [British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Other]

[If resident in Ireland:] “Many people think of themselves as being part of a particular nationality, for example as French or American or whatever. Do you think of yourself as Irish or as belonging to some other nationality, or do you not think of yourself in this way? I think of myself as...”[Irish/Another nationality/I don't think of myself in this way]

Based on responses to the above question, participants were initially assigned into one of the five identity groups/samples. During the random assignment of respondents to conditions, one of our aims was to maintain a similar demographic mix across the five national groups. The five groups were similar in terms of interest in political affairs and educational attainment. They were also similar in terms of age, with the exception of the Irish sample, which was overall younger. In April 2011, these participants were invited to take part in the online “Social Trends Survey
2011”. The survey title was designed to make no reference to political issues/current affairs or the EU, in order to avoid attracting participants that were either overly interested in politics or held strong opinions on the EU. Before completing a short online questionnaire, participants were presented with an introductory page. The introductory page contained the survey title (“Social Trends Survey 2011”), followed by a large photograph, which was in turn followed by instructions (see Appendix A for instructions). The questionnaire that followed contained questions on the EU and, in the end, some personal questions (national/supranational attachments and demographics).

Regarding the visual priming, respondents from each of the five groups were randomly and implicitly exposed to different versions of the same image. Exposure to these images will serve as our key independent variable. By implicit exposure we mean that participants were unaware of the EU-related nature of the experiment. We used this subliminal, implicit element to accommodate a key finding of recent studies; namely, that a range of social-psychological phenomena – including political behaviour, attitudes and identities - are informed by nonconscious, “gut” reactions. These reactions can bypass cognitive awareness and the social desirability biases connected to the latter.56 Some participants were primed with implicit images of a key European symbol: the EU trigger (treatment condition). The trigger was either symbolic (an EU flag presented in an abstract context) or functional (an EU symbol presented on a sign during airport passport control) (H1). The responses of participants exposed to the EU trigger were compared to the responses of

56 See overview in Hassin et al., 2005.
participants who saw similar images that had the EU trigger removed (control condition) (see Appendix A for images). Table 1 provides information on the random assignment of respondents from the five national groups to conditions.

The aim of this visual manipulation is to document whether exposure to the EU trigger has any impact -positive or negative - on EU-related opinions, compared to the control condition (no EU cue). We analyse the impact of implicit visual triggers on two dependent variables. The variables are based on the first and second items in the online questionnaire. These two items appeared on the first screen (page), which immediately followed the introduction page that contained the photograph. The two questions replicate standard items used in existing surveys (Eurobarometers).

The first item measures abstract or what we call “affective” attitudes towards the EU:

“In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?”

The control image plays an important role in ensuring that it is the effect of the specific EU symbol that we are measuring rather than simply the presence or otherwise of a flag. For example, rather than employing a non-descript (control) flag to compare the impact of exposure to the EU flag, in his 2003 study, Bruter simply removes the flag and replaces it with "landscapes, people etc" (2003: 1158). This means that his analysis could be measuring the impact of a flag’s presence (compared to its absence) rather than the impact of the specific EU symbol.
The second question asks about the practical or what we call “instrumental” benefits of the EU:

“Generally speaking, would you say that [the UK / Ireland]* benefits or does not benefit from being in the European Union?”

[Responses: Greatly benefits/Largely benefits/Somewhat benefits/Benefits only a little/Does not benefit at all]

* UK residents read “the UK”; Irish residents read “Ireland”

Low scores on both variables reflect pro-EU responses. The two variables were normalised to range from 0 to 1.

Since we hypothesised an interaction between exposure to the visual cue and respondents’ supranational attachment (H2), we used the following intensity of attachment question:

“People may feel different degrees of attachment to their country or to the European Union. How attached do you feel to … the European Union

[Responses: Very attached/Fairly attached/Not very attached/Not at all attached]
The original EU attachment variable was recoded to create two groups: the attached (Very attached/Fairly attached) and the not attached (Not very attached/Not at all attached).

All tests took the form of a 2 (priming: control vs. EU image) × 2 (attachment: low vs. high) ANOVA, replicated across the five samples (H3):

[Panel with two diagrams about here]

Results

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the percentage of respondents in each sample that gave extremely pro-EU responses on the two dependent variables (“have very positive image of the EU” in Figure 1 and “country greatly benefits from EU” in Figure 2). Three things are immediately evident from the two graphs. First, especially for Ireland there is greater agreement with the instrumental item that reflects benefits from the EU, compared to the item that simply measures opinions on the abstract (affective) dimension. Second, the Irish sample shows the most extreme support for the EU in both affective and instrumental terms. Third, the English sample lies at the other extreme, with the weakest support. Only 2% of the English group claim to be very supportive of the EU. The other samples lie somewhere between these two extreme cases. Notice that the British sample does not include a representative percentage of Scottish, English, Welsh and Northern Irish respondents. It simply includes those who selected “British” as their identity in the screening question (March 2011).
Moving to the main part of our analysis, we entered cases into a 2 (priming: control vs. flag) × 2 (attachment: low vs. high) ANOVA, which was replicated across the five identity samples. In those cases where we found different results across groups, we also tested for the significance of cross-group differences. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, those with a stronger sense of attachment to the EU were more likely to give pro-EU responses on both the affective (Table 1) and the instrumental questions (Table 2).

Regarding the impact of the subliminal priming of respondents with the EU triggers, the results in Table 2 suggest that exposure to the symbolic visual cue (a flag decorating a public building) does not affect respondents per se (main effect). Similarly, the symbolic visual cue does not affect respondents when moderated by EU attachment (interaction effect). In other words, the image has the same (null) effect for a respondent that feels strongly attached to the EU and a respondent that feels weakly attached to the EU. On the contrary, in what seems to highlight an instrumental/functional undercurrent in EU symbols, Table 3 suggests that the functional version of the EU symbol (in a context that primes practical benefits – for example during passport control), does have a significant effect on respondents’ opinions. This is not a main effect, but only appears when exposure to the image is moderated by EU attachment. In particular, exposure to the functional image leads
those already attached to the EU to more pro-EU responses. Conversely, it leads those not attached to the EU to more anti-EU responses. What further supports our “functional” reading of EU support is that the aforementioned interaction effect is significant only with the “instrumental” dependent variable: the airport image only affects responses that reflect opinions on the practical benefits of the EU.

Finally, these effects were only present among Scottish and Welsh respondents. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the direction of these effects in the two samples. Using our recoded 0 (pro-EU) to 1 (anti-EU) scale, Scottish respondents that were already attached to the EU became more likely to have a positive opinion on the EU when exposed to the practical EU symbol on passport control than those who did not see the EU symbol. Scottish respondents that were not attached to the EU became more likely to have a negative opinion when exposed to the EU symbol on passport control than those who did not see the EU symbol.

[Figures 3 & 4 about here]

We have already discussed the exceptional nature of Wales and Scotland. The key point that emerges from this discussion relates to the central place reserved for the EU in the national debates in the two ‘stateless nations’ of Scotland and Wales. Its relevance is directly linked to utilitarian concerns: the EU may offer a safety net for a small European state. Our findings reinforce a reading of this function of EU symbols as reminders of utilitarian benefits rather than as signifiers of a “heroic” common past and destiny. Dardanelli has referred to the ‘Europeanisation of Scottish self-government’ which included a ‘change in collective identities, with the decline in
primary identification with the UK and the concomitant rise in primary identification with Scotland’. A rise in the primary Scottish identity had ‘altered the balance between the “affective” and the “utilitarian” perception of the UK in Scotland, by weakening the former and emphasising the latter’ (Ibid.).

In essence, implicit exposure to EU symbols appears to strengthen the effects (pro-EU and anti-EU) of existing attachments (H2). This polarising effect only applies when these symbols are presented in a functional form (the case of common borders primed by the airport photo) and their impact is evident on instrumental responses (‘country benefits from EU membership’) (H1). On the contrary, a ceremonial flag flying outside a building has no impact on opinions. Last, these visual effects only apply to specific national groups, the ones more likely to view the EU as an instrument in their national constitutional debates (H3).

Conclusion

Measuring identity is notoriously difficult and measuring how identities interact is more difficult still. This paper drew upon a unique comparative dataset, which takes the study of EU identity(ies) to a new level. Existing empirical research on EU identity has focused predominantly on the extent to which individuals claim to identify as Europeans. The focus on self-reported identification as a European in existing

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59 cf Abdelal et al., 2009.
surveys cannot assess the extent of often unconscious or implicit identification with the EU, the impact of this on attitudes and behaviour, or how this interacts with conscious attachment to the EU or to the nation. This research employed experimental methods derived from political psychology to examine the link between implicit exposure to EU-related symbols, attitudes to the European Union, and identification with the European Union, an ‘identity in formation’.  

The results from a series of online survey experiments containing visual cues were compared within the nations of the UK, and between the UK and Ireland. It was demonstrated that ‘functional’ rather than ‘symbolic’ EU triggers have a significant effect on attitudes towards the European Union. Unlike the findings of previous seminal research on implicit exposure to national images, the symbolic version of the EU flag had no effect on EU-related opinions. The effect of ‘functional’ triggers was observed only in relation to ‘instrumental’ rather than ‘affective’ attitudes. In addition, contrary to previous findings on the homogenising effect of national flags, we found that exposure to the EU ‘functional’ trigger led to polarisation of opinion. In particular, the effect varied according to the degree to which subjects were attached to the EU. It is also important to note that these effects were only applicable to the respondents of two nations (Scotland and Wales). These two nations are thought to view the EU as an instrument in ongoing debates on their constitutional status. Overall, these results are consistent with the claims of banal Europeanism: that EU identity is best understood as a process which is banal.

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60 cf Laitin, 1998.

61 Hassin et al. 2007.

contingent and contextual; low-level and instrumental, rather than “hot” and passionate.
Appendix A: Visual cues

Photos were accompanied by this instruction: “Please click on the photo above to proceed to the survey.” To ensure that respondents paid at least some attention to the image, respondent could proceed to the survey only by clicking on the centre of the image. Respondents could not move backwards in the survey. Therefore there was no option for taking a second look at the image.

Figure A1: Symbolic cue (Flag): EU treatment
Figure A2: Symbolic cue (Flag): Control
Figure A3: Functional cue (Airport sign): EU treatment
Figure A4: Functional cue (Airport sign): Control
References


*Political Psychology* 30(5):779-804.


Cram, Laura 2009b Identity and European Integration: Diversity as a source of Integration. *Nations and Nationalism* 15(1), 109-128


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Symbolic cue (flag)</th>
<th>Functional cue (airport)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>EU treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online fieldwork: April 2011 (YouGov)
TABLE 2. Analysis of Variance: Test A (symbolic image, EU attachment and affective responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample (df)</th>
<th>EU Flag</th>
<th>F-ratios EU attachment</th>
<th>EU Flag × EU attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English (1,446)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>171.5*</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish (1,455)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>292.3*</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British (1,435)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>302.1*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh (1,387)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>198.9*</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish (1,400)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>111.1*</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable: Negative image of EU
* p < .05
**TABLE 3. Analysis of Variance: Test B (functional image, EU attachment and instrumental responses)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample (df)</th>
<th>EU sign at airport</th>
<th>F-ratios</th>
<th>EU sign at airport × EU attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English (1,489)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>200.9*</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish (1,459)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>312.2*</td>
<td>4.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British (1,441)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>256.3*</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh (1,415)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>224.9*</td>
<td>5.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish (1,383)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>164.1*</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent variable: Nation does not benefit from EU membership

* p < .05
FIGURE 1. Affective support for EU (% "very positive image")
FIGURE 2. Instrumental support for EU (% “country greatly benefits”)
FIGURE 3. The impact of the functional cue on instrumental responses by EU attachment (Scottish sample)
FIGURE 4. The impact of the functional cue on instrumental responses by EU attachment (Welsh sample)
Test A

**Symbolic trigger**
(control - EU flag, 0-1)

**EU attachment**
(low - high, 0-1)

**Affective response**
(negative EU image, likert)

Test B

**Functional trigger**
(control - EU airport, 0-1)

**EU attachment**
(low - high, 0-1)

**Instrumental response**
(no benefits from EU, likert)