Thought communities and preconditions for polity formation in the European Union
Evidence from six EU member states

Jozef Bátor and Pavol Baboš
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Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

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Abstract

How do citizens in EU member states think about the EU? And what are the implications of different ‘thinking styles’ for citizens’ preferences regarding formation of policies, politics and polity in the EU? The current paper uses relational class analysis (RCA); (Goldberg, 2011) and analyses perceptions of the EU as a political order by citizens in six selected member states. These include France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. We build on the three constitutional models of the EU qua polity proposed by Fossum (2021) including: a) the EU as an intergovernmental political order; b) the EU as a federal union; and c) the EU as a regional cosmopolitan government. Each of the constitutional models contains specific features depending on how the political order is configured in terms of policies, politics and polity. In this paper we focus primarily on the perceived relationship between policy and polity. We developed a survey to test ‘thinking styles’ of the population in relation to the EU qua political order. The data was collected in March 2022 and target samples were over 1000 respondents per country. By identifying transnationally distributed ‘thought communities’, the paper shows how integration is perceived, in terms of which constitutional polity model enjoys popular support and hence what the popular pre-conditions for polity formation in a differentiated Union are.

Keywords

Constructs | European Union | Polity | Relational class analysis | Thought communities
Introduction

How do citizens in EU member states think about the EU? And what are the implications of different ‘thinking styles’ for citizens’ preferences regarding formation of policies, politics and polity in the EU?

The current paper uses relational class analysis (RCA); (Goldberg, 2011) and analyses perceptions of the EU as a political order by citizens in six selected member states. These include France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – three founding / large member states and three members of the Visegrad group (two of which represent the most notorious examples of the ongoing ‘sovereignist’ backlash) (cf. Fabbrini, 2021).

We build on the three constitutional models of the EU proposed by Fossum (2021): a) the EU as an intergovernmental political order; b) the EU as a federal union; and c) the EU as a regional cosmopolitan government. Each constitutional model contains specific features depending on how the political order is configured in terms of policies, politics and polity. In this paper we focus primarily on the perceived relationship between policy and polity. Based on this and building on an earlier pilot study (Bátora and Baboš, 2020), we developed a survey to test ‘thinking styles’ of the population in relation to the EU qua political order. The data was collected in March 2022 and target samples were over 1000 respondents per country. By identifying transnationally distributed ‘thought communities’, the paper shows how integration is perceived, in terms of which constitutional polity model enjoys popular support and hence what the popular pre-conditions for polity formation in a differentiated Union are.

With a focus on identifying ‘thought communities’ in multiple EU member states, this research complements earlier work on attitudes towards the EU focusing on the effects of transnational life experiences (Boomgarden et al., 2011; Kuhn, 2015); on the relation between collective identities and future scenarios of the EU’s institutional development (Kuhn, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2021); on emerging political cleavages in the EU member states (De Wilde et al., 2019); on unpacking views on various aspects of EU policies among citizens (Cichocki, 2011; Balcer et al., 2017; Göncz and Lengyel, 2021) and on meanings attached to the EU among citizens in a specific national context (van den Hoogen et al., 2022). Using RCA, we identify two thought communities in the selected EU member states: Statists and pragmatists. We then correlate the data on these communities with data on social demography of respondents, their political preferences, their trust in EU institutions and their support for particular scenarios of EU integration. Based on this, we identify communities of citizens sharing thinking styles that would suggest their support for particular polity types in the EU.

The paper proceeds as follows: The first section builds on Fossum (2021) and reviews the following three constitutional models of the EU qua polity – the republican EU of sovereign
states model, the federal EU model, and the cosmopolitan Union model. We discuss how these kinds of macro-level models as theoretical constructs connect to public perceptions in societies in the EU and point out that to analyse citizens’ views of these, it is necessary to tap into their thinking styles. The second section then outlines our methodology. We build on the concept of relationality (cf. Mannheim, 1954; Goldberg, 2011) and develop our analytical framework based on relational class analysis (RCA). We then introduce our dataset drawing upon a survey of representative samples of citizens in six EU member states. In the third section we then discuss our findings. We identify two thought communities in every member state under study. We label those statists and pragmatists and each of these communities encompasses members on opposite ends of the same construct – i.e. nation-state statists and EU-federalist statists and, respectively, nation-state pragmatists and supranational pragmatists. We make several findings. First, we discuss what groups from among the members of our thought communities would support different visions of the EU qua polity. Second, we discuss the implications of the constellation of thought communities for the possibility of copying state standards of political organization in the EU and, alternatively, for embracing more innovative institutional designs. Third, we discuss what the though community constellation means for the prospects of re-organizing the EU as a federal type state. Fourth, as membership in thought communities varies between member states, we discuss the continued salience of national evolutionary paths in the development of the EU’s member states as units of political organization.

**Constitutional polity models of the EU and the conditions for their public support**

The EU has been characterised as a differentiated political order. Differentiation in this case relates to countries’ participation in various aspects of European integration, i.e., different degrees and forms of participation in various policy fields and in various institutional arrangements on the EU level (Leuffen et al., 2013; Fossum, 2015). This includes participation both of member states and non-member states, as well as various types of opt-out and opt-in arrangements (Leruth et al., 2019). A question that arises amid this development is whether and what form of a democratic polity is being formed at the EU-level.

On the one hand, we need an analytical conception of differentiation that is conducive to democracy, and on the other hand we need to understand the characteristics of the EU’s differentiation configuration, which refers to the manner in which territory, function, hierarchy and rights are configured (Fossum, 2021). Modern multilevel representative democracy is configured along decisional, functional, territorial and citizen incorporation lines. These four dimensions are required for understanding how democracy and differentiation relate to each
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other in modern political systems (Fossum 2019). The four differentiation dimensions reflect democracy’s onus on governing capability and citizen participation/representation. The first differentiation dimension is decisional or law-making differentiation and pertains to division of power and law-making (executive, legislative and judicial). The second is competence-based functional differentiation since modern political systems rely on competence that is functionally differentiated in different sectors. The third is territorial differentiation, and the fourth refers to the rights and obligations that we associate with citizenship. Fossum (2021) outlines three such institutional constellations featuring particular combinations of institutional and procedural arrangements for democratic governance in a differentiated Union. Not all, however, assume formation a single polity at the EU level.

First is a republican EU of sovereign states (see also Bellamy, 2019, p. 95). This constitutional model builds on the notion that democratic governance is only possible in sovereign states, and in this case, it would be located at the level of member states. This is also where decisional or law-making differentiation would be present and with no significant institutional and procedural arrangements providing for law-making and decision-making at the EU level. The same goes for the other three dimensions. Member states are the principals and, if anything, EU institutions are agents and only equipped with the authority that member states decide to delegate to them. Such a constitutional model presupposes the EU developing as a polity based on cooperation and coordination arrangements among a group of sovereign nation states. Any benefits from membership that may come in the form of public policy, is the result of the coordination among national governments and it is national governments that are accountable to the people.

Second, is a federal Union (see also Fabbrini, 2015; 2019). A democratic federation is a ‘a system of shared rule combined with self-rule embedded in a constitutional arrangement’ (Fossum, 2021, p. 32). In this constitutional model, decisional and law-making differentiation would be organized around vertically and horizontally divided levels in a federal EU. Division of powers between the legislative, executive and judiciary branches would operate at both levels. Functional differentiation operates in ways ensuring that each level – federal and sub-unit – perform their functions as specified in the constitution. Territorial differentiation also operates based on the division of powers between the federal level and the level of the sub-units, with the principle of non-centralization being of core importance (no level of governance can remove powers from the other levels). Finally, in terms of citizens’ incorporation, the federal level grants citizenship rights and subunit levels can grant additional rights (e.g., the right to vote in the subunit elections). This constitutional model assumes a federal state-like polity on the EU level. As law-making and decision-making are, at least in part, anchored within
EU-level institutions, these are also responsible for public policies and should be accountable to a European demos.¹

Third, is a *cosmopolitan Union* (see also Eriksen and Fossum, 2007; 2015). This constitutional model builds on the notion of governing beyond the nation state and on the idea that the EU is a ‘regional cosmopolitan vanguard’ (Fossum, 2021, p. 16). Here, decisional and law-making differentiation would be happening in a multi-level structure ranging from the global through the macro-regional to national and multiple sub-national levels. Functional differentiation would build on the principle of gradual growth in the volume of functions ranging from a minimal set of functions on the global level, some functions on the EU-level and numerous functions on the national level. Territorial differentiation would operate as a system of an all-encompassing global level including the EU-level of governance which, in turn, would include the national level of member states. Lastly, citizens’ incorporation would start with a limited set of rights including all citizens of the globe, with gradual expansion of rights at the EU-level, and finally a wide-ranging set of rights on the national level. Notably, neither the global level nor the EU-level would feature strong formal institutions, as the system of governance would involve a constant process of adjustments and delivery of policies across levels. There would be a pyramidal structure where institutions at the global level would have the most limited range of functions, while institutions on the EU-level would be less limited; most decisions and policy-making processes would be done by institutions on the national level. Correspondingly, in this polity model, national institutions of governance would play a somewhat more curtailed role than in the first two constitutional models.

Obviously, these are ideal-typical models or analytical-heuristic devices and, as Fossum (2021, p. 4) notes, the actual real-world context of the EU as a differentiated Union requires a degree of conceptual ‘stretching’ for these models to be useful in explaining the EU’s functioning. Fossum provides a number of examples of how such stretching operates in academic studies and think-tank analyses i.e., how analysts seek to fit their interpretations of governance in the EU to one of the outlined models. It may also be the case that ordinary citizens have various concepts of the Union in mind when they think about it. As we argued in an earlier study (Bátora and Baboš, 2020), concepts of the Union depend on the style of thinking about the Union. In other words, the way people perceive the EU, its role in the world, its policies and its impact on their lives, depends to a large extent on how they conceptualise it in their minds. The likelihood of citizens supporting a particular way of reforming and developing the EU, will also depend on the kind of cognitive frameworks they use when thinking about the Union. In turn, the likelihood that politicians will use a way of framing the EU in public discourse that will *resonate* in a (i.e., find strong support or strong rejection), depends

¹ It needs to be noted that Fabbrini distinguishes the concept of federal union from that of the federal state. In his view, federalism can take on both state and non-state forms.
on the degree to which there are groups of citizens sharing cognitive frames and styles of thinking about the EU that complements this framing. Following Mannheim (1954), groups of citizens sharing particular cognitive frames and styles of thinking can be referred to as ‘thought communities’. To identify these, the next section introduces a methodology building on RCA.

**Methodology**

One way of exploring peoples’ attitudes towards the EU as a political order is to study their attitudes towards a set of pre-defined future scenarios of EU reform as Goldberg et al. (2021) have done. Such an approach reveals preferences for a set of features of the Union, and in connection with a set of indicators such as voter preferences and nationality, provides useful findings. On the one hand, this approach is valuable in that it maps the popular support for various scenarios of future integration. On the other hand, it does not avoid the problem of assuming that respondents understand the proposed concepts in the same way across the board. Thus, we seek to complement existing research with the current attempt at teasing out thinking styles present in the population. When choosing the right methodological approach to find out how people think about the EU, we followed the argumentation laid out by DiMaggio et al. (2018). As they point out, studying the meaning of a concept or a construct from the peoples’ perspective (the EU in this case) requires more than studying individual responses to survey questions. We seek to move beyond individual responses, in order to reveal the relations among survey items. This way, we can examine broader belief systems of (sub)populations. DiMaggio et al. call this the *relationality* principle - ‘the principle that meaning emerges not from single entities but out of relations among them’ (2018, p. 32; see also Goldberg, 2011).

Relationality is an important element in revealing belief systems or thinking styles because the same survey response may have various meanings or, in fact, distinct and mutually divergent meanings to several respondents. Putting several survey items together allows us to reveal the underlying meaning structure in the individual responses and identify subgroups of a population sharing the same structure of responses, i.e., thinking styles.

DiMaggio et al. argue that, next to relationality, multiplicity is another key element to be considered. As already said, a belief system undergirding a thinking style is defined by a particular relationship among survey items, and most probably, there will be a number of such patterns in any population for any meaning domain. In other words, most likely, there will be at least two subgroups of a population that think about a social phenomenon distinctively and, thus, fit within distinct thought communities.
Relational Class Analysis

We employ RCA to identify and analyse thought communities. RCA was introduced by Goldberg to analyse the extent to which people ‘organize meaning in similar ways’ (2011, p. 1403). Goldberg claims that the traditional social scientific methods that employ a relational approach in studying people’s attitudes focus either on similarities 'between variables (e.g., multidimensional scaling, factor analysis) or between individuals (e.g., cluster analysis)' (2011, p. 1404). Goldberg’s approach is designed to overcome this issue and is ‘sensitive to relational patterns both within and between observations’ (Ibid.).

Goldberg’s approach enables identification of thought communities that captures relevant aspects of a ‘construal’ because it clusters people with the same pattern of expectations towards the EU. So, if there is a community A with a specific understanding of the EU leading to specific expectations from the EU, only persons with an aligned set of expectations are included in that thought community. However, two people with mutually opposing positions may on occasion be included in the same thought community. This is because RCA clusters people according to a specific relationship among all survey items, and not where a respondent is placed on a single item.

For a reader familiar with statistical methods frequently used to reveal latent structures in survey data, the RCA may seem rather similar to Latent Class Analysis (LCA). There are, however, a few key differences between them. LCA uses maximum likelihood function to partition people into subgroups – classes whose members have i) as similar attitudes as possible, but ii) the independence between classes is maximized. Put differently, when it comes to the substantive issues, members of a class identified by LCA are in agreement. RCA on the other hand, identifies classes that maximize similarity, not between respondents’ attitudes, but between relations among all pairs of responses. Contrary to LCA, members of a class identified by RCA need not be in substantive agreement, but they “employ similar principles for organizing meaning in a particular social domain.” (Ibid.)

We included 10 items representing five principles of EU’s political order into RCA (see Appendix 1 for a full list of items). To perform the analysis, we used an R package called ‘RCA’ (Goldberg and Stein, 2016). The analysis produces two main results: The vector of class membership and a matrix of relationality measure among tested items for each class. The relationality matrix can be then used to visualize classes in the form of network graphs or heatmaps.

As we argued above, and in line with the argument that national contexts are crucial for processes of sense-making (Zerubavel, 1997), we performed the analysis on a country-by-country basis. There is an additional reason for why we performed the analysis in six member states separately. The data collection process was designed to produce six representative samples of
the respective countries. The findings are thus representative of and generalizable to a given member state.

Having performed the analysis, we produced heatmaps including the relationality measure in order to analyse mutual relationships within individual thought communities and countries (see Appendix 2). The number of identified classes is a product of a partitioning algorithm and thus is not a deliberate choice of the authors (as opposed to factor analysis / latent class analysis). In other words, the decision on respondents’ membership in a particular thought community (and thus the size of communities in each country) is the result of the partitioning algorithm and not the researchers’ choice.

Data

For this study, we conducted an original survey in six EU member states – France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Slovakia. Selecting these countries, we ensured that the study comprises a variety of smaller and larger EU member states, Western and Eastern members, and including EU founding members along with countries that joined the EU in 2004. Our selection also includes variation in the state’s long-term position to EU political integration and democratic governance at the EU level. Hungary and Poland stand out as having governments with the most significant populist imprint in the course of the last decade, while France and Germany are countries which have, so far, not had governments led by populist parties (although support for populist parties in these countries has been growing). The selection of countries thus also allows us to study possible correlations between long-term presence of populist governments and the respective constellation of thought communities in these countries.

Data was collected by a professional contracted agency with experience in pan-European surveys and offices in all the member states studied. The survey was translated from Slovak into the local languages (Polish, French, German, Italian, and Hungarian). Translations were controlled by reverse translation testing provided by the agency and also by the authors of this paper. Surveys were then conducted using Computer Aided Web Interviewing in March 2022. In each of the selected member states, we collected a representative sample of about 1000 respondents. The survey was administered online, and stratified quota sampling was used to ensure representativeness of the sample in regard to gender, age, education, region and residence size.

Attitudes towards various aspects of European integration were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Based on the three theoretically driven constitutional models of the EU’s political order as proposed by Fossum (2021) – a Union of sovereign states, a federal Union, a cosmopolitan
Union – we developed 10 statements capturing the key principles of the models. In formulating the statements, we focused on a) policy outputs, both practical (e.g., financial benefits) and less tangible ones (e.g., peace and democracy); and b) structural arrangements supporting delivery of such policy outputs (e.g., level and principles of decision-making). Also, we focused on a number of key domains including core state powers (defence, diplomacy and intelligence) and various aspects of economic cooperation in the EU’s single market. Finally, as our aim was to tease out attitudes and thinking styles of respondents, statements were not formulated as descriptions of facts but rather as statements capturing principles of political organization in the EU. In the questionnaire, respondents were thus asked to rate their level of approval of a particular structural set-up of governance institutions or principles of political organization in the Union (see Appendix 1 for full list of items). Given these features of our methodological approach, our analysis is different from that of van den Hoogen et al. (2022) who also used CCA, but focused on identifying meanings attributed to the EU among EU supporters in one of the member states, i.e., the Netherlands.

**Results**

Relational Class Analysis identified two thought communities in all six states. Visual representations of thought communities in a form of network diagram are found in Appendix 3, and correlation heatmaps are found in Appendix 4.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Thought Communities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought community</th>
<th>Characteristics of thinking style / construct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statists</strong></td>
<td>- Thinking about the democratic polity at EU-level (including democratically elected officials) goes <em>hand in hand</em> with thinking about all measured policy aspects, whether practical/financial benefits or less tangible public goods (e.g., peace and equality).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The governance structures – as an expression of a polity – and policy outputs at the EU-level, are seen as mutually dependent, similarly to those in sovereign states. The EU is thus similar to a sovereign state.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 Given the budgetary limits, the number of statements that could be included in the online questionnaire was set to 10.

3 An extension of RCA employed by Boutyline (2017).
- Provision of policy outputs by the EU is linked to more competences and stronger governance structures at the EU-level.

- Thinking style organized around the construal of the state.

- The opposing ends of the spectrum in this construal are EU-level federalist statists and nation state statists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Thinking about polity-building at the EU-level as an independent process from various types of cooperation providing policy outputs, including on peace or security.  

Thinking about various types of benefits and policies is mostly aligned, but at the same time, thinking about public policies at the EU-level is not aligned with thinking about democratic polity building at the EU-level.

Responses to questions about policy outputs are not in line with / separated from responses about EU-level governance or EU-level competences.

Thinking style organized around the construal of policy outputs de-coupled from structural / institutional governance arrangements for the delivery of such outputs.

The opposing ends of the spectrum are supranational pragmatists and nation state pragmatists.

4 An exception from this pattern among the pragmatists is Germany, where federalization is relatively strongly related to policy outputs.
Thought community 1: Statists

The attitudes of people in thought community 1 (TC1 - Statists) are aligned and uniform regarding all 10 items (statements in the survey). In sociological terms, survey responses to all 10 items show clear affinity to each other. This means that people who tend to accept more EU policies in one area, for instance in the economy or security domain, tend to also accept them in others. In addition to that, they link this to polity building in form of the transfer of competences to EU-level decision-making. Thus, this community understands that in order to benefit from public policies there must be a state-like polity, and vice-versa. In other words, they perceive the EU to mirror a nation state in the sense that delivery of public policies necessitates decision-making which must be nested within the same level.

By saying that the survey responses have a similar structure we do not claim that all respondents must agree with all the statements. Neither do we say that all respondents disagree with the 10 statements. Affinity among all the survey items only means that the respondents in this particular thought community tend to answer to all items in a very similar manner. As we take respondents’ answers as reflection of their thinking style, we then argue they think in the same way, i.e., fit within the same thought community. Simply put, whether it comes to federalization, economic integration, democracy promotion or police cooperation, members of TC1 either want it all or reject it all.

Because some of the statements used in the RCA asked about the institutional set-up of the EU and desired governance level, we can observe that respondents who want more from the EU in terms of policy outputs, also accept the EU as a democratic polity, i.e., having its own political institutions accountable to voters and not member states. On the other hand, people in this thought community who reject stronger EU-level governance, also accept less policy outputs. Thus, we argue, respondents in this community acknowledge that the EU’s ability to provide outputs (just as any political system does) is linked to decision-making which requires compromises among member states and does not allow national politicians to decide independently from others. Subsequently, people either accept the EU-level of governance and require the EU to deliver, or they reject the EU’s governance altogether and also reject the EU’s outputs. Either way, they are consistent in the belief that polity-building and delivering policies goes hand in hand.

This thinking style corresponds to a classical state centric way of thinking about political integration as a gradual formation of a federal state out of a group of states giving up their sovereignty. Building on the work of Milward (1993), Moravcsik (1998, 2001) and Fabbrini (2019), we label this TC the Statists. This is a community formed around the construal of the state and involving the opposition between the concept of the nation state and the concept of the EU as a federal state.
Table 2: Size of thought communities in individual countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Statists</th>
<th>Pragmatists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own survey

Thought community 2: Pragmatists

Pragmatists share many of the attributes of the first community. When respondents in TC2 think about the EU, they separate the European level of governance from the outputs that the EU as a political system provides. In other words, people in this TC recognize that there are at least two distinct domains – policies that the EU should provide, and a polity that the EU could be (with the exception of Germany). However, for people in this thought community the polity form and policy outputs are mutually independent. Therefore, when members of TC2 Pragmatists positively respond to statements related to the EU’s role in delivering policies in areas of security, peace or economy, they do not link this automatically to the need to have structures and procedures for EU-level decision-making in these areas. In their thinking, these two are mutually independent domains or issue areas. In the view of the intergovernmentalist TC2, it is possible for the EU to deliver outputs (similarly to a national political system), while there is no need for a democratic polity at the EU-level. In their line of thinking, policy and polity are simply not correlated.

In contrast to TC1 Statists, the Pragmatist TC2 is not so uniform across all six member states in our study. Although the general pattern is present, a few nuances can be identified. The common feature for all TC2 in all six countries is that members of this community construe the perception of the EU along two mutually independent dimensions. Nuances can be found
in said dimensions, specifically regarding which issue areas are more closely related to political federalization, and what the core features of the policy dimension are. In Germany, TC2 members associate building a democratic EU polity (in terms of federalization) with policy outputs in areas such as security, peace, democracy and cooperation. However, German Pragmatists see the free market issue as separate. Particularly the item formulated in terms of free market integration is dissociated with other issues. Hypothetically, this could be explained by Germany’s traditional advocacy of ordo-liberal policies in the EU – i.e., an approach focusing on the need for a limited but strong state capable of regulating free market actors with the aim of protecting core democratic and social norms (Tranøy and Schwartz, 2020).

Pragmatists in France and Italy share similar characteristics. On the one hand, they see policy issues in the area of peace, security and democracy as a separate dimension, and the policy outputs are in their view closely related. On the other hand, there is a polity dimension based on political federalization. However, both French and Italian Pragmatists perceive free market issues (free movement, lower taxes, digital services, etc.) as a part of polity-building and not related to issues of cooperation and peace.

Looking at the Central European societies and how the Pragmatists construe the understanding of the European Union, we see no homogeneous picture. The Slovak and Hungarian TC2 is rather similar. Pragmatists in both countries link the democratic principles and support for civil society strongly to political federalization on the EU level. On the other hand, peace and cooperation as a product of EU membership establishes the core of the second dimension, independent from political federalization. Interestingly, attitudes towards free market issues seem to be marginalised, as they do not correlate with any other positions on any other issues, not even with each other (0.26 in Hungary, and 0.22 in Slovakia).

Pragmatists in Poland are to a considerable extent similar to their Slovak and Hungarian counterparts. They understand the EU in separate dimensions. One is focused on policy outputs in the issue areas of democracy, cooperation and peace. Independently, the second understanding of the EU is democratic polity-building in terms of political federal institutions. Contrary to Hungary and Slovakia, Pragmatists in Poland link democratic issues closer to peace and intergovernmental cooperation than to political federalization. Also, free market items are more strongly correlated to each other to a degree (0.35).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatists</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Market</td>
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Again, as was the case with the Statist TC1, belonging to TC2 Pragmatists does not inform us about respondents’ preferences in terms of what kind of democratic polity they prefer to serve as provider of public policies. In principle, members of TC2 may (and mostly do) appreciate that the EU membership provides benefits, but they do not necessarily accept EU-level governance in order to have these benefits provided. While some of them – those on the supranational end of the pragmatist spectrum – do think of EU-level governance structures, others in the TC2 (those on the nation-state end of the pragmatist spectrum) see governance decision-making as resting with national governmental institutions.

**Thought communities and pro- versus anti- EU attitudes**

As we already suggested, the thinking style of a respondent (i.e., membership in a thought community) cannot be equated with being pro-/anti-EU. We believe this argument deserves full explanation at this point. We mentioned a few times in previous sections that belonging to a particular thought community does not inform us about a person’s attitudes towards any aspect of European integration. By identifying ‘thinking style’, we argue, we can understand
how a person construes the image of the EU, which principles of polity-building are important, and how this person relates polity-building to policymaking. Thus, thought community membership does not directly reveal what kind of polity constellation in the EU a person favours.

Consider, for instance, a person to be a member of the TC Statist group. Such a person perceives the public policy outputs to be closely associated with the level of governance. In other words, the policy-making competences are nested within the polity and thus should be at the same level, either nation-state level or federal EU-level. Put simply, if the EU is to provide the policy outputs, it should also be allowed to make the decisions. In other words, should the decision-making ability be taken away from the EU, the policy outputs should not be expected either. Thus, the TC membership only tells us whether a person construes the EU as a federal entity where the policy-making and decision-making goes hand in hand. It does not tell us whether a person wishes such a form of integration, i.e., a stronger EU with more competences and more responsibilities for policy outputs, or whether precisely because of the perceived link the person rejects a stronger EU. As a result, we have both federalists and nation-state sovereignists in the same thought community (TC1). Being on the opposite sides of the attitudinal scale in terms of EU integration, they still use the same construal of the EU. The same principle holds for the second, Pragmatist thought community (TC2). Looking at TC2, we see two types of people in relation to the desired form of integration: Pragmatists could very well be in favour of more EU, but also against further integration. The key to understanding what belonging to the TC2 means, is that a position on democratic polity-building does not inform us about a person’s position on policy outputs, as these dimensions are, on average, mutually independent.

We illustrate this by studying respondents’ trust in three EU institutions: the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU (see Figure 1). Firstly, in both TCs there are people who trust and distrust the three institutions. This underscores our earlier point that both TCs include people who are pro- or anti-EU. Secondly, the TC Statists have a higher share of people who are neutral in their trust in EU institutions. As Figure 1 indicates, the share of people who trust EU institutions increases as we move from Statists to Pragmatists, i.e., in the directions of decreasing link between polity and policies.

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5 The fact that policymaking and polity building do not automatically co-evolve is not a uniquely EU-related phenomenon. We find growing expansion of policies without corresponding adjustments of state structures (i.e. changes to the polity form) in a number of modern states including the US or Germany. Orren and Skowronek (2017) refer to this as the rise of the policy state.
Figure 1: Trust in EU institutions, by thought communities

Further indication of the degree of support in the two TCs for different polity forms in the EU can be found by looking at the respondents’ answers to a survey question asking them to identify what they think should be the appropriate path of EU integration. The answers indicate similar patterns as in Figure 1. They show that preferences for the development of the EU qua polity do differ within the same thought community.

Source: Authors
Figure 2: Preference for different scenarios of EU integration for one’s country – by thought communities

Source: Authors

Connecting findings on respondents’ membership in TCs with their survey responses regarding trust in EU institutions (figure 1) and preferences for further development of EU integration (figure 2) allows us to speak to the potential of populations in the 6 EU member states to embrace particular constitutional models of the EU qua polity. The model of a republican EU of sovereign states would likely find support among the nation-state statists and, possibly, among the nation-state pragmatists (this can be seen in the latter group’s low level of trust in EU institutions in figure 1 and low level of approval of the EU in figure 2). The EU as a federal state polity model would likely find support among the federalist statists. And the group of supranational pragmatists would possibly support the notion of the EU as a cosmopolitan Union. The latter relates to the notion that supranational pragmatists do not necessarily expect a federal governance structure in the EU, while they simultaneously expect the EU to deliver policy outputs and place high levels of trust in EU institutions and/or in further deepening of EU integration.

It is also interesting to note that among the statists, there is a notably higher number of respondents who are uncertain as to whether they trust EU institutions than among the pragmatists (see figure 1). Hypothetically, this can be explained with the relative familiarity of the
state as a model of political organisation. There are relatively clear expectations as to how a state operates and how state governance works. As the EU is not a state, though, those thinking about it in statist terms will understandably be more doubtful and uncertain as to whether its institutions should be trusted – either because there are no proper state-like governance institutions at the EU-level or because nation state governance institutions are challenged by the process of EU integration. Conversely, members of the Pragmatist TC are possibly somewhat less uncertain when it comes to their trust in EU institutions – possibly because they decouple policy outputs and polity form. This leaves room for more flexible thinking about the polity form and the governance structures related to it. This could possibly also include more ‘integration license’ among the pragmatists.

Finally, building on earlier analyses by Fliegstein (2008) and Kuhn (2015), it could be expected that younger people with higher education, higher income and based in larger cities are more likely to support the EU. Although support for EU integration is not the same as a thinking style, or a conception one construes about the EU, the question arises whether the same socio-demographic factors also reflect in the composition of the thought communities. Put differently, can thinking style also be predicted based on demographic factors? In order to see whether the thought communities differ in any of their socio-demographic factors, we performed multinomial logistic regression analysis. The list of indicators includes gender, age, level of education, income, and size of area of residence. On the one hand we found very few indicators to be significant in various countries. For example, people living in larger cities in Italy (and to some extent Poland and Germany) are more likely to be members of TC1 / Statists, but no effect of residence size was found in the remaining three countries. Income seems to have an effect in Germany and Poland. People with lower income are slightly more likely to be in TC1 / Statist than people with higher income. But again, the effect of income was not found in the remaining four countries. In summation, there is no clear pattern present in at least a majority of the studied countries.

**Conclusion: Thought communities and support for the EU’s polity formation**

The EU is an unsettled political order and this paper addressed the conditions for popular support for a particular constitutional model of the EU in the member states. We argue that to unpack the ways citizens think about the EU, it is useful to identify ‘thought communities’ in a given society. These are communities of citizens sharing a particular ‘style of thinking’ about a particular domain of social interaction (Goldberg 2011). Mapping these helps us establish which or to what extent the possible polity forms in the EU would resonate and find support among the population in the six EU member states.
Using RCA, we identified two such thought communities – statists and pragmatists – in all the six countries under study. Each of the thought communities features members on different sides of the respective spectrum, ranging from nation-state statists to federalist statists in TC1, and from nation-state pragmatists to supranational pragmatists in TC2. Several conclusions regarding public support for different polity models in the EU can be drawn from the current findings.

First, intergovernmentalism (and its possible republican version) would likely find support among the nation-state statists in TC1 and among nation-state pragmatists in TC2. Given the size of both TCs and the share of people leaning towards nation-state preferences, intergovernmentalism has the largest support among the constitutional polity models. The polity model of the EU as a federal Union would likely be supported by the federal statists in TC1, which makes it the model with the least popular support. Finally, if there is any group among whom the polity model of the EU as a cosmopolitan Union would find support, it would be among the supranational pragmatists. However, this attempt to match our findings to theoretical models of the EU introduced in the first section of the paper should be read with caution. As the EU remains a highly ambiguous political entity with institutional features that can be interpreted in various ways, it remains difficult to make unambiguous connections between theoretical models of the EU and thinking styles present among communities of EU citizens.

A further possible reason for connecting our findings on though communities to the models of the EU pertains to what we referred to above as the researchers’ need to ‘stretch’ constitutional models in order to capture key features of the EU. Such stretching also comes with a cost, namely to further complicate citizens’ imagining of the EU. The size of the pragmatist community in the six countries we studied indicates that there may, in fact, be a mismatch between political science concepts and the ways citizens think about policies and polities. However, this gap cannot be filled by researchers coming up with ever-better concepts and descriptions but requires clarification from those in charge of the EU.

Second, the consistency of the presence of TC1 in all six member states suggests that the nation state as a key unit of political organization is not withering away, and a considerable portion of the population (about 20%) continue to think about politics and cooperation in Europe based on the model of the state. At the same time, the size of the pragmatist TC2 indicates that in the six member states studied here, there is room for innovative non-state-centric arrangements in organizing relations between policymaking and polity-form.

Third, the relative weakness of the EU-federalist statists (around 7-10% of the respondents) indicates that there is a relative lack of support for the idea of developing the EU into a federal state. The only exception from the six countries studied may be Germany, as its supranational
pragmatists in TC2 associate building federal governance structures directly with policy outputs such as security, peace, democracy and cooperation. There, support for a federal EU would thus reach the level of about 50-60% of respondents.

Fourth, there are notable differences in how the TC2 is constituted between the member states. This suggests that besides the relatively consistent statist thought community present in all member states, there are nationally specific social structures at play influencing how people think about the EU. Hypothetically, this might have to do with the specifics of the evolution of the respective state, and the associated effects its institutional setting might have upon how the society views key questions of political governance. Our findings thus support Steinmo’s (2010) view that specific national, social, historical and political contexts do play a significant role in the development of national governance institutions and, we might add, also of national collective imagination.

Finally, our findings indicate that further comparative studies including all EU member states would be useful. The EU has 27 member states as well as associated countries like the UK or Norway and it would be most interesting to explore the constellations of thought communities across the Union and beyond its borders.
References


Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

https://ssrn.com/abstract=3859225


Appendix 1: List of items used for Relational Class Analysis

- EU should have a federal ministry of foreign affairs, finance, an army/border guard.
- EU should have a directly elected President, who would compete in all-European election and lead the EC as government.
- EU should continue pushing for lower taxes, more productivity and more competition in our country and in other EU member states.
- EU should push for an absolute freedom of movement, including digital services and manual workers.
- We should share secret intelligence and police information with other EU members extensively.
- Government should take the interest of other EU members into account, even if it sometimes means concessions and compromises at our own costs.
- Democratic politics should work on the EU level, e.g., as a system of European political parties.
- The EU should promote democracy in the neighbouring countries, including financial support of the civil society abroad.
- EU is bringing us peace and it should remain its main purpose.
- Breakdown of the EU would immensely increase the probability of new war in Europe.
Appendix 2: Multinomial Logistic Regression Coefficients (in form of relative risk ratio).

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Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

Source: Authors
Appendix 3: Network Diagrams

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Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states
Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states
Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

Appendix 3: Heatmaps

Germany, TC1 Statists:

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Germany, TC2 Pragmatists:

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Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

France, TC1 Statists:

France, TC2 Pragmatists:
Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

Italy, TC1 Statists:

Italy, TC2 Pragmatists:
Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

Slovakia, TC1 Statists:

Slovakia, TC2 Pragmatists:
Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

Poland, TC1 Statists:

Poland, TC2 Pragmatists:
Thought communities and pre-conditions for polity formation in the European Union: Evidence from six EU member states

Hungary, TC1 Statists:

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<tr>
<td>Promote democracy in the neighbouring countries, including financial support of...</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>EU is bringing us peace and it should remain its main purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue pushing for lower taxes, more productivity and more competition</td>
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<td>Breakdown of the EU would immensely increase the probability of new war in...</td>
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Hungary, TC2 Pragmatists:

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<th>EU should (have) ...</th>
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<td>Promote democracy in the neighbouring countries, including financial support of...</td>
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<td>Democratic policies should work on the EU level, e.g. as a system of European parties to push for an absolute freedom of movement, including digital services and fees.</td>
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About the authors: Jozef Bátora is Professor of Political Science at Comenius University and EU3D work package leader. Pavol Baboš is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Comenius University.

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