

United in Diversity? The Convergence of Cultural Values among EU Member States and Candidates

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ABSTRACT. The European Union (EU) is considered a unique economic and political union that integrates most European countries. This article focuses on the cultural aspect of European integration, which has been increasingly debated over the course of deepening and widening integration and in the context of the legitimation crisis of the EU. Among the main goals of the EU is to promote certain values, which raises the question of whether it has been efficient in (or enabled) reducing cultural value gaps among the participating countries. World polity and institutional isomorphism theories suggest that cultural values may trickle down in a vertical manner from the institutions of the EU to its member states and candidates. Furthermore, hybridization theory postulates that values diffuse horizontally through intensified interactions enabled by the EU. These two perspectives imply the possibility of cultural convergence among countries associated with the EU. By contrast, the culture clash thesis assumes that differences in cultural identity prevent value convergence across countries; growing awareness of such differences may even increase the pre-existing cultural value distances. To test these different scenarios, I compare distances in emancipative and secular values across pairs of countries (Welzel 2013) using combined repeated cross-sectional data from the EVS and WVS gathered between 1992 and 2011. I find that the longer a country has been part of the EU, the more closely its values approximate those of the EU founding countries, which in turn are the most homogenous. Initial cultural distance to the founders' average values appears irrelevant to acquiring membership or candidacy status. However, new member states experienced substantial cultural convergence with old member states after 1992, as did current candidates between 2001 and 2008. Since 1992, nations not participating in the integration process have diverged substantially from EU members, essentially leading to cultural polarization in Europe. The findings are independent of (changes in) economic disparities and suggest the importance of cultural diffusion as one of the fundamental mechanisms of cultural change. This empirical study contributes to the literature on European integration, political and sociological theories of globalization, and cross-cultural theories of societal value change.

Keywords: European Union, Culture, Values, Diffusion, Cultural Change

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is thankful for valuable comments from Torkild Lyngstad, Christian Welzel, Michael Minkov, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Arne Mastekaasa, Joseph Hien, Cathrine Holst, Eduard Ponarin, and two anonymous reviewers. The paper was presented in different forms and improved after receiving feedback at several PhD seminars at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, UiO; IACCP European Congress "From a Cross-Cultural Perspectives: Conflict and Cooperation in Shaping the Future of Europe", July 2017 in Warsaw, Poland; Ph.D. and Post-Doc

Seminar and Conference 'Global and Cross-Cultural Organizational Research', June 2017 in Maastricht, Netherlands; WAPOR Regional Conference “Survey Research and the Study of Social and Cultural Change”, November 2016 in Moscow, Russia; Congress of IACCP “Honoring Traditions and Creating the Future”, August 2016 in Nagoya, Japan. Participation in WAPOR conference was funded by the Russian Academic Excellence Project '5-100'. Any opinions expressed are those of the author alone.

INTRODUCTION

Seven decades after the start of European integration, geopolitical, migratory and economic challenges are threatening the cohesion of the EU. To successfully respond to these problems and achieve further integration, the congruence of cultural values may be essential (Guiso et al. 2016). Among current EU member states, value differences rooted in each of Europe’s three main religious traditions—Protestantism, Catholicism and Orthodoxy—are considered to be the roots of misunderstandings impeding collective action needed to address the Euro crisis (Hien 2017). A key debate in recent decades has been fuelled by the so-called no-demos thesis (Weiler 1995), which concerns the question of whether transnational political integration requires common cultural values and identities. According to Habermas (2012), the legitimacy crisis of the EU can be solved as long as participating countries commit to the same democratic values. This study investigates the extent to which the process of EU integration brings the cultural values of the participating nations closer together.

Evidently, European countries’ cultural values differ considerably, and each EU expansion further increases the diversity of the EU (Gerhards 2007). Such cross-national cultural differences are associated with a wide range of social differences, most significantly the quality of democracy, effective governance, civic activism and generalized trust (Welzel 2013). Cultural distances between nations are important for the EU’s institutional integration (Guiso et al. 2016) and serve as predictors of economic exchange (Guiso et al. 2009; Tadesse & White 2010), interstate conflict (Bove & Gokmen 2016) and interstate mobility (Belot & Ederveen 2012). Indeed, the large cultural differences between among old, new and candidate states have been described as a barrier to European integration (Gerhards 2007). Particularly, the EU’s expansion to the East exacerbates the problem of shared political values as a requirement for EU legitimisation (Fuchs & Klingemann 2002). Internalization of the EU’s values are not only obligatory for any member state or potential candidate (Toggenburg & Grimheden 2016), but cultural compatibility has been a central concern in public debates about EU enlargement. For example, 68.9% of European respondents (N=22,744) worry that “The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow it to join the EU,” and 93.6% (N=23,609) agree that “To join EU, Turkey will have to systematically respect human rights (Eurobarometer data, calculated in Gerhards & Hans 2011).

Researchers consider cultural values to be relatively stable societal characteristics (e.g., Inglehart & Baker 2000; Schwartz 2006). However, it is worth investigating whether the considerable societal transformations that have occurred since the early 1990s—related to the deepening and widening of European integration—have allowed a certain amount of plasticity in societal cultures. The EU has proven to be transformative regarding national economies and political institutions, but we do not know whether it has the potential to gradually reduce the cultural gaps between its member states. Some scholars claim that culture has become the focus of the “third wave” of European integration, which aims to strengthen European identity and increase legitimacy by transcending the idea of shared values and a common cultural heritage (Lahdesmaki 2016). The binding force of EU legislation and the enormous budget at the Union’s disposal have the potential to exert a considerable influence on the European continent’s cultural development. As emphasized by Gerhards et al. (2009), “The EU not only has an interest to further this congruence, but is also in a unique position to do so” (p. 517).

Despite its significance for the future of the European project, the question of whether the process of European integration brings the cultures of participating countries closer together over time remains empirically untested. Previous cross-sectional studies indicate pronounced cultural differences between EU members and non-members (Akaliyski 2017; Gerhards 2007, 2008, 2010; Gerhards & Hoelscher 2003; Gerhards & Lengfeld 2006; Gerhards et al. 2009), but we know little about the dynamics of those differences over time and the nature of the causal relationship. This paper fills this gap by comparing cultural value distances across the vast majority of European nations using dyadic regressions on repeated cross-sectional data gathered between 1992 and 2011 from the European Values Study (EVS) and the World Values Survey (WVS) (Inglehart et al. 2014). The analysis dissects cross-sectional patterns of value similarities and inspects temporal processes of cultural convergence and divergence between countries according to their level of involvement in the EU. Considering the political and geopolitical significance of the EU, whether participation in European integration leads to value convergence is an important empirical question. Answering this question leads to testing the credibility of highly influential (and often controversial) speculations regarding globalization’s cultural effects; that is, whether an increased frequency of cultural interactions cause cultural convergence or divergence. Additionally, this paper contributes to the debate about the factors that determine cross-national value differences and similarities. The theoretical debate is dominated by proponents of the supremacy of historical legacies (e.g., Huntington 1996) and modernization theorists who emphasize the importance of socioeconomic development (Inglehart & Baker 2000). Although some empirical studies have considered the possibility that values can diffuse across national borders (Bonikowski 2010; Deutsch & Welzel 2016), this study is the first to empirically test the convergence and divergence hypotheses with a large number of nations. The paper follows a standard structure for an empirical study: the next section outlines the theoretical framework, after which I describe the data and research design, followed by the results section. In the last section, I discuss the findings in relation to the theoretical and practical considerations of EU integration.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I elaborate on the mechanisms that may lead to three different outcomes of cultural transformation in Europe: (1) cultural convergence, (2) cultural divergence and (3) cultural polarization.

Cultural convergence and divergence describe, respectively, any significant reduction or increase in cultural distance between groups of countries. I adhere to the conventional conceptualization of culture as the aggregate configuration of societal values most typical for the population of a country (Hofstede 1991; Schwartz 2006). I also follow convention in presuming that—although significant cultural differences exist within countries—the nation is still, by far, the most powerful aggregate force shaping societal values (Welzel 2013). Hence, cross-national societal value differences outsize those attached to intra-national cleavages by a large magnitude (Minkov & Hofstede 2012; Inglehart & Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013). Accordingly, I compute cultural value distances between European national populations. To do so, I use Welzel's (2013) framework of emancipative and secular values because these two sets of values are indicative of cross-cultural differences most relevant to the countries' economic productivity, regulatory quality and democratic performance.

Cultural convergence

In the context of European integration, I claim that cultural convergence may occur via three main mechanisms: (1) vertical diffusion (trickle down) of values, (2) horizontal diffusion of values, either directed or undirected (hybridization theory), and (3) convergence of standards of living.

Institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983) and world polity theories (Meyer et al. 1997) form the theoretical foundation for the process of vertical diffusion. Both conceptual frameworks assume the homogenization of institutions, practices and culture toward one or a few legitimate references perceived as rational and universalistic. The process of becoming similar to one another (isomorphism) operates via three mechanisms: coercion, mimicry and normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Meyer et al.'s (1997) metaphor of newly discovered island societies quickly acquiring all elements and characteristics of contemporary nation states applies to the southern and eastern European societies that emerged from totalitarian regimes. The discrediting of communist and other totalitarian ideologies and the lifting of coercive constraints imposed by the Soviet Union in CEE countries left few viable alternatives except for a reorientation toward the more prosperous north-western European countries and the restructuring of societies and economies according to those role models. Thus, the EU assumed an active role and became a transformative authority in the CEE countries (Schimmelfennig 2000).

Some literatures characterize the EU as a *value entrepreneur* that has developed and seeks to implement a particular image of the ideal European society among both its member states and its candidates (Gerhards 2008, 2010; Gerhards & Lengfeld 2006; Gerhards et al. 2009). The EU is considered a *normative power* upholding and promoting certain political principles and values such as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, peace and tolerance (Manners 2002). Previous studies theoretically and empirically link EU membership to higher acceptance of the values embedded in the EU's normative script, including gender equality and sexual liberalism (Gerhards 2010; Gerhards et al. 2009; Zapryanova & Surzhko-Harned 2016), family and gender roles (Gerhards & Hoelscher 2003), environmental attitudes (Gerhards & Lengfeld 2006), acceptance of free movement and non-discrimination (Gerhards 2008), religious and family values, gender roles, sexuality norms, economic and political values and attitudes toward the welfare state (Gerhards 2007). EU legislation explicitly implements these values. For example, Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU [2007] 2012:17) states that:

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

Article 7 of the Treaty regulates the member states' compliance with the values described above, while Article 49 applies to candidate states: "Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union" (TEU [2007] 2012:43). The *conditionality principle* obliges candidates to implement the accumulated EU legislation known as the *acquis communautaire* in order to become member states. EU conditionality and legislative coercion after membership stimulate a profound process of societal empowerment (Noutcheva 2016) through which political elites in domestic governmental institutions and nongovernmental advocacy networks adopt the normative scripts (and the values they embody) created by EU institutions and spread them via domestic media discourses (Vasilev 2016). Finally, the population at the grassroots level is exposed to the media and thus internalizes these norms and values. With regard to the CEE countries, the impact is also long-lasting, as the incentives offered before membership are later replaced by an "alternative leverage and linkage mechanism, including greater dependence on EU aid and trade and greater exposure to the West for both elites and ordinary citizens" (Levitz & Pop-Eleches 2010:457). Other inter-governmental organizations originating in Western democracies may also contribute to the spread of universal values through the mechanisms of institutional isomorphism (Bonikowski 2010). The Council of Europe, for example, is such an organization whose main goal is to promote the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Brummer 2014). The legislation of such organizations, however, lacks the binding force of EU legislation, which may lead to political

elites only superficially implementing these democratic norms without enforcing any profound societal transformations (Tesser 2003).

Furthermore, the EU creates the conditions in which a horizontal cultural diffusion—either directed or undirected—can occur between societies. The four freedoms of movement—of goods, workers, services and capital—are among the fundamental principles of the EU, and compliance with these freedoms entails lifting institutional barriers to close economic and social interactions. Moreover, the EU comprises a “network of transnational attachment” whereby member states demonstrate a high level of mutual sympathy and loyalty, thus forging a shared sense of community belonging (Deutschmann et al. 2018). Under such conditions, European nations presumably blend their cultures, thus becoming more similar over time. Cultural and educational initiatives, such as the Erasmus program, have been facilitating cultural exchange among member states for decades. International migration within the EU may have a major impact in terms of both mechanical and ideational cultural blending. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, more than 20 million people emigrated from former eastern bloc countries, approximately 85% of whom moved to Western Europe and 9% to the USA (Atoyan et al. 2016). Because these people constitute a sizable share of the populations of many Western European countries, they also make up nontrivial fractions of the nationally representative samples of the WVS and EVS, thus adjusting these countries’ average scores. Intercultural interactions may also lead to the diffusion of some cultural traits of Eastern European migrants into local cultures. As members of transnational communities who maintain relationships with their sending countries’ social networks, migrants in Western European countries can also serve as transmitters of cultural values in the opposite direction—back to their country of origin. Theoretical models addressing the cultural effects of globalization, namely hybridization theory (Holton 2000; Kraidy 2002; Pieterse 1994), argue that societies spread and borrow culture from each other regardless of their economic, authority and power status; this implies unidirectional diffusion. Conversely, the mimicry mechanism of isomorphism supposes the presence of a role model, or a normative authority, from which other societies learn—intentionally or unintentionally (Dimaggio & Powell 1983). Given the high international status and superior standard of living of north-western European countries, it can be assumed that more peripheral societies would be net importers of values and norms (directional diffusion).

Bridging differences between national economies could also lead to value convergence. The change to a market economy and the widening of trade opportunities for CEE nations, combined with financial support from the EU, triggered an economic catch-up by the newly accessed and associated states (Goedeme & Collado 2016). As values are strongly dependent on the availability of physical resources (Welzel et al. 2003), an equalization of economic development would imply a convergence of values among EU members. The mechanisms through which socioeconomic modernization leads to cultural change have been well elaborated and empirically tested in a number of previous studies (e.g., Inglehart & Baker 2000, Inglehart & Welzel 2005, Welzel 2013). Therefore, further analysis of economic modernization is unlikely to provide any new insights.

Accordingly, in this analysis, I focus on those processes of cultural diffusion that are independent of changes in the economic differences between European states.

Cultural divergence

Convergence is conditional on the speed of change within each group of countries: old, new and prospective member states. According to modernization theory, societies change their values as they develop economically (Inglehart & Baker 2000), and even the most developed and long-term member states fail to comply fully with the EU's cultural blueprint. Therefore, if societies develop in the same direction culturally, the speed of change among the developing new members and the candidates must be faster than the original member states for a cultural converge to occur. Previous research, however, shows that cultural zones change culturally at different speeds, thus leading to divergence over time (Norris & Inglehart 2002).

Furthermore, studies suggest that "as they diffuse, norms, ideas, and practices often change in form and content;" thus, the final outcome is not necessarily convergence (Klingler-Vidra & Schleifer 2014). Focusing on the process of Europeanization, Börzel and Risse (2012) outline four scope conditions moderating the degree of institutional diffusion: domestic incentives, degrees of (limited) statehood, democracy vs. autocracy, and power (a)symmetries. As Western European and former communist states differ on many of those conditions, we may expect an uneven degree of compliance with official EU norms, which may lead to divergence. Different geopolitical alliances, divergent patterns of cooperation (e.g., trade) within and outside of Europe, and strong ties to former colonies are other reasons why European nations may take opposing cultural pathways. A crucial factor that can facilitate or impede the transformative impact of the EU is the degree of political elites' identification with the EU (Vasilev 2016). Because the EU does not coerce non-members, local authoritarian leaders are able to instil traditional values through governmentally controlled media channels in pursuit of their own political agendas. Persuasive discourse is likely to have a more profound influence in societies identifying closely with the EU due to their shared historical background. The EU's geopolitical rival Russia, whose leaders often outline their nation's distinctive civilizational identity, has decisively challenged Brussels's moral authority (Headley 2015). By rejecting any notions of the EU's moral superiority and accusing the West of double standards (Headley 2015), Russia creates unfavourable conditions for ideational diffusion within its society. Moreover, the hostility between societies with different cultural identities may escalate, in Huntington's terms, to civilizational clashes, resulting in the reinforcement of traditional local culture and, therefore, further divergence (Huntington 1996).

Cultural polarization

Based on the above, we can assume that forces of both convergence and divergence can pull European societies in different directions simultaneously, but one can prevail over the other in

some cases. Convergence is likely among EU member states because they are continuously exposed to the EU's normative script, and their shared identity facilitates diffusional processes. On the other hand, non-EU members do not share the same institutional framework, and identity differences may lead to a rejection of the values promoted by Brussels. In this analysis, I treat EU membership as an indication of a shared identity among populations (or political elites, if incongruence exists), and I hypothesize that this is a decisive dividing force in the cultural development of Europe at large. I expect that the continent is becoming more polarized, with shrinking cultural distances between EU members and growing cultural gaps between members and non-members.

DATA AND METHODS

Data

The sample for this analysis is restricted to European countries, as defined by the official website of the EU. Data availability imposed a further restriction, as the dataset must consist of countries surveyed consistently with the same items over the same period. To construct the dataset, I combined all survey waves of EVS and WVS conducted between 1981 and 2014. Each of the four EVS and six WVS waves consists of nationally representative surveys of typically between 1000 and 2000 respondents from 10 to 57 nations around the world.

To maximize the sample size at the country-year level without making strong assumptions about value trends over long periods, I linearly interpolated the data of my selected value-related items only for the years between any two conducted surveys. Thus, I did not extrapolate data before the first or after the last survey measurement,ⁱ as we cannot be certain about the trend's direction without making untestable assumptions (for a similar procedure, see Spaiser et al. 2014). Thus, for most countries, the data for the specific year used in the analysis were either from an actual survey or from within a few years of one. For a detailed description of the survey years and the interpolated data for each country, see Figure S1 in the supplementary material.

To assess the change over time, I compare the same exact countries at the beginning and the end of a specified period. Considering the tradeoff between the number of countries and the time coverage, I use four different datasets. For a cross-sectional analysis as of 2008 (Figure 1), I use data for 46 European countries. The longest longitudinal dataset includes 30 European countries followed up between 1992 and 2008. Because no candidate country was surveyed as early as 1992 except for Turkey, I conducted an additional analysis, encompassing 44 nations, for the period between 2001 and 2008. Lastly, I analysed the change in values between 2008 and 2011 with a smaller dataset of 16 European countries. Consistent data before 1990 are available only for a handful of Western European countries, which prevents any robust analysis of cultural change prior to that year.

Operationalization of variables

The dependent variable is a formative additive index of value distance based on Welzel's (2013) two value indices: obedient-emancipative (in short emancipative values) and sacred-secular (in short secular values). The emancipative value index consists of four components (sub-indices): autonomy, equality, choice and voice. It emphasizes both freedom of choice and equality of opportunities. The secular value index, which also comprises four subindices—defiance, agnosticism, relativism and scepticism—describes the level of dissociation from external, quasi-sacred sources of authority such as religion, the nation and group norms (Welzel 2013). As values are the central and most fundamental elements of culture (Hofstede 1991; Schwartz 2006), these value indices intend to measure culture in a more general sense. The value indices differ between different cultural-historical zones, and they change with economic development (Welzel 2013), similarly to national cultures operationalized by other cultural value frameworks (e.g., Inglehart & Baker 2000, Schwartz 2006). I thus use “values,” “cultural values” and “culture” interchangeably throughout the text. This is a convention within the cross-cultural research field regardless of the different operationalisations of cultural values (for a comparison of the frameworks, see Maleki & de Jong 2014).

Aléman and Woods (2016) have raised concerns regarding the internal convergence of these value indices at the individual level, yet Welzel and Inglehart (2016) defend them as meaningful constructs at the aggregate level, as used here, and validate them by external linkage: as powerful predictors of a wide range of social phenomena. Aggregate-level national culture has been shown to be a meaningful analytical concept (Minkov & Hofstede 2012), and European countries demonstrate a high level of cultural homogeneity when regional differences within countries are considered (Minkov & Hofstede 2014).

I computed the value indices following the instructions in Welzel's (2013) online appendix and adapted them to a dyadic analysis with repeated cross-sectional data. Two of the items for the equality, voice and defiance sub-indices were unavailable in many survey years, and thus I computed these components based on only one item. Nevertheless, I weighted each component equally in the computation of the two indices. The total value distance between pairs of countries (dyads), used as the dependent variable in this analysis, is the average combined distance on the emancipative and secular value indices.ⁱⁱ The maximum possible distance in a dyad is 1.0 and the minimum is 0. These hypothetical scale endpoints are empirically implausible, however, because reaching them would mean all individual respondents in two nations would have to take either exactly the same or exactly opposite positions on a total of 20 survey items. For summary statistics of the dependent variable for each data set, see Table 1.

(Table 1 about here)

Formal membership in the EU and official candidacy status are the key explanatory variables for this analysis. Data were obtained from the EU's official website. Member states were categorized following a conventionally used classification into (1) founding states, (2) old member states that joined the EU before 1996, (3) new member states that joined between 2004 and 2013, (4) Schengen area non-EU nations, (5) official candidates and (6) non-candidates. I place Schengen area non-EU nations in a separate category because they are qualitatively different from other non-members due to their participation in the free movement.

Difference in economic development was measured as the ratio of GDP per capita between two countries (the GDP/capita of the country with the smaller GDP/capita divided by that of the country with the higher GDP/capita). Data on Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia were missing before 1995; to include these countries in the analysis, I assumed they preserved the same economic output between 1992 and 1995. This is a reasonable assumption considering the economic stagnation during this period.

Methods

I use undirected dyadic data regressions to assess the cultural distances between European nations and their temporal change. This means all units of analysis are unique pairs of countries, and the variables denote how (dis)similar the pairs are with regard to their values and economic development, as well as whether they have any attributes in common, such as being EU-founding members. This method offers the possibility of computing and assessing the total cultural distance between nations, including both cultural dimensions, to test the hypotheses for convergence and divergence. However, this comes at the expense of information on the direction of change in cultural distance. We can assess whether the average distance has become smaller or larger, but an additional analysis is required to conclude how specific countries changed their values.

In dyadic data, countries appear multiple times within country pairs, for example Austria-Belgium, Austria-Belarus, Belgium-Belarus and so on, which leads to a correlation of error terms (Aronow et al. 2015). I correct this by computing two-way cluster-robust standard errors, which is a common approach to addressing this problem (Cameron et al. 2011).

I also analyse change in cultural distances within and between groups of countries in (dyadic) fixed-effects regression (Alison 2009) based on their membership status. As values change slowly, I focus on the cumulative change from the beginning to the end of the period. Comparing the change in cultural distance between EU founders, on the one hand, and new members versus non-members, on the other, is similar to the difference-in-difference approach. This is the case even though the *treatment*, namely joining the EU, is not randomly assigned. I use the same approach with countries that have commenced negotiations with the EU as with those that have not. I also compare the change in average value distances among and between countries that did not change

their membership status by using interaction terms between a categorical variable denoting groups of countries based on their status, on the one hand, and the time variable, on the other. Thus, I am able to estimate the long-term change associated with EU membership compared to changes occurring in countries not participating in European integration.

Causality considerations

The analysis relies on identifying both cross-sectional and temporal patterns to draw conclusions about any possible EU influence on cultural similarities among countries. As data before 1992 are limited, we cannot assess the EU's role during the earlier integration stages. Identifying cross-sectional difference based on EU membership might imply a causal effect, but other association sources, including reverse causality, cannot be excluded. Reverse causality would mean that nations having more similar values because of their common historical background and similar levels of economic development formed the EU and that further enlargements are based on cultural compatibility. This is a viable hypothesis given that the Treaty of EU sets forth the condition of compliance with the EU's shared values as an essential condition for initiating negotiations and bringing them to fruition.

The question of causality can hardly be answered conclusively in the absence of experimental control, and such an endeavour at the scale of nations is conceivably impossible. An association between European integration (A) and cultural similarity (B) can emerge from three different mechanisms: (1) A causes B, (2) B causes A or (3) a third variable C causes both A and B (Dietz & Kalof 2009).

Using longitudinal data allows the exclusion of possibilities 2 and 3 with some degree of confidence. Reverse causality (possibility 2) can be rejected in two cases: first, if cultural convergence occurs among member states but not among non-member states, and second, if countries that joined the EU initially had distances from the core EU countries similar to the distances of non-members but converged culturally through integration. The problem of omitted variables can also be better addressed using longitudinal data (Alison 2009). Similarities with regard to national characteristics such as population, spoken language, predominant religion, historical background, climate and geographic location, which are strongly associated with value similarities (Akaliyski 2017), are fixed or relatively stable. Such characteristics can explain cross-sectional patterns of value distances quite well, but not changes in cultural distances, which are more likely to occur due to changes over time in other characteristics, such as EU membership and economic development.

Convergence in standards of living may well be another outcome of EU integration, thus serving as a mechanism along the causal pathway between European integration and cultural convergence. However, this convergence may also be completely independent of EU integration and therefore

constitute a spurious relationship. As a result, by controlling for the change in GDP/capita differences, I exclude the most likely alternative explanation for any changes in cultural distance, even if that may lead to attenuation of the real effect by overcontrolling. If a strict temporal order and adequate controls for alternative explanations exist, then it would be plausible to assume that any associations are causal. Other endogeneity sources, however, cannot be completely ruled out. Cultural exchange, economic and political cooperation, and migration are not only European but also global processes. Consequently, the consolidation of values among EU countries may be driven not only by ideals emanating from Brussels but also by adherence to an emerging global cultural script. However, this argument is undermined by the fact that most cultural frameworks depict Western Europe as the leader in cultural change, followed by (English-speaking) non-European Western societies (e.g., Inglehart & Baker 2000; Welzel 2013).

Apparently, a geographic pattern also exists: Newly accessed member states situate closer to old members than do states remaining outside; therefore, one can argue that any convergence is due to geographic proximity instead of EU membership. This explanation, however, does not contradict the theoretical argument made here, namely that change in cultural values can largely be attributed to ideational diffusion across borders. The CEE countries have not changed their geographical locations since 1991; what has changed is their geopolitical orientation. Some nations turned decisively toward Brussels, while others had different priorities. The Western Balkan countries, for example, are geographically closer to the rest of the EU, but the Eastern Balkan nations of Bulgaria and Romania were more successful in joining the EU.

RESULTS

The results section is divided into five parts. The first part examines the cross-sectional patterns of value distances by comparing the average cultural distance between groups of countries. The second, third and fourth parts provide formal tests of the differences in cultural distance between groups of countries using dyadic regressions as well as analysis of the change over time. The second part compares cultural distances between old and new member states, the third part extends the scope to candidate states, while the fourth part looks at cultural changes over a more recent time period. The last part identifies the direction of cultural change in order to conclude by affirming a specific theoretical perspective.

EU membership and value similarities in 2008

Figure 1 presents a comparison of average value distance between groups of EU members. Evidently, the EU founders are the most homogenous group, with an average value distance of .078. Adding other groups of countries increases the cultural heterogeneity corresponding to their level of integration into the EU. The average cultural diversity is approximately 30% larger among old members than among the founders, and it increases by 42% if we include the eastern

enlargements. The value heterogeneity in the EU in 2008 could have increased by 56% if the current candidates had become members, but that is still less than the total value heterogeneity for Europe, which is nearly two times larger than the average for EU founders. The inclusion of the three non-EU Schengen area members (Norway, Iceland and Switzerland) would not lead to a significant increase in cultural diversity.

(Figure 1 about here)

Development over time (1992-2008)

The cross-sectional patterns in 2008, presented above, suggest a linear relationship between the degree of involvement with the EU and cultural homogeneity. By moving to a longitudinal design, I will now attempt to conclude between two viable possibilities: (1) countries similar to each other initiated the EU, and value compatibility determined consecutive enlargements and (2) EU integration is associated with value convergence regardless of the original cultural distance. Figure 2 provides evidence in favour of the latter interpretation. In 1992, the average value distance between current EU members was practically the same as three other distances: between member states and non-member states, among all European countries, and even among all countries around the world. As the model's R^2 shows, EU membership does not explain any variability in cultural distances in Europe or the world immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Members and non-members seemed to take different cultural development paths—EU members toward convergence and non-members in the opposite direction. Between 1992 and 2008, the cultural distance between EU members decreased by 22% (.024), while during the same period, the distance between EU members and non-members in Europe increased by 67% (-.063 points or nearly 2 SDs-within). As those two opposing tendencies cancel each other out, the average value differences for the whole sample remain virtually unchanged between 1992 and 2008. In reality, however, the continent has become more fragmented culturally. Furthermore, I tested an alternative hypothesis that the EU's cultural convergence is a part of a larger, global process of cultural unification. Given the trends in cultural change on the right side of Figure 2, this notion can be rejected. Evidently, the world as a whole is becoming neither a smaller nor a larger place in terms of culture—countries around the world have maintained, on average, the same value distances. The process of convergence is uniquely European in nature and even marks a departure from the rest of the world, as the total value distance between EU countries and all other countries has apparently increased slightly between 1992 and 2008.

(Figure 2 about here)

Table 2 presents further evidence for the EU's role in consolidating cultural values. Models I and II display estimated margins of average cultural distances (similar to raw scores), first between the founders and then between the founders and groups of countries with different relationships to the

EU. The founders appear most homogenous, and distances increase to those groups of countries less associated with the EU. This pattern remains similar when controlling for GDP/capita differences. Notably, new members (non-candidates at that time) and current non-members are approximately equidistant from the EU founders, even after controlling for differences in GDP/capita. This implies that cultural compatibility is not a criterion for initiating negotiations for membership.

Model III presents results from a dyadic fixed-effects regression, taking into account only the change over time, with 1992 and 2008 as the two selected time points. During this timeframe, the cultural distance between the founders and both the old and new members decreased significantly and substantially. Meanwhile, the cultural gap between EU founders and non-members increased by .066 points (exactly 2 SDs). Significant cultural disintegration also occurred among the founders and the non-EU Schengen area members, as well as among the three non-members in the dataset. Notably, Turkey is among the non-members that experienced a profound divergence from the EU founders, even while negotiating for membership for over two decades. Most coefficients become even stronger in Model IV, where I control for the change in the differences in GDP/capita. Furthermore, I repeated these analyses with emancipative and secular values separately to demonstrate that the same patterns can be identified with regard to both value indices (the results are presented in Tables S2.A and S2.B in the supplementary material).

(Table 2 about here)

Candidates and non-candidates: cultural change between 2001 and 2008

Next, I explore whether EU integration is associated with cultural convergence even before formal membership. Models I and II, shown in Table 3, present results using the old EU members as the reference category, which allowed me to increase the number of cases in the comparisons. The old member states are approximately equidistant culturally to the candidates and to the non-candidates, both with and without control for GDP/capita differences. This indicates again that the conditions for commencing negotiations for accession exclude initial cultural similarity. Model III reveals temporal patterns similar to those shown in Table 2. During the short eight-year period, the newly accepted member states significantly minimized the cultural gap between themselves and the old members by more than a whole SD-within. Conspicuously, the official EU candidates significantly shortened their value distance to old members by two SDs-within, while during the same period, non-candidates diverged slightly (marginally statistically significant). The convergence rate becomes even larger when controlling for GDP/capita ratio in Model IV. Again, I repeated these analyses for the two value dimensions separately (Tables S3.A and S3.B), and the patterns were similar. However, they are much more pronounced and consistent with respect to emancipative values.

(Table 3 about here)

Figure 3 further explores the rate of cultural change between the old member states and the current candidates. The pattern of convergence is evidently not uniform. All candidates have achieved a remarkable reduction in cultural distance from Western Europe, except for Turkey, which stands as a noticeable outlier considering its large and even slightly growing distance.

(Figure 3 about here)

Cultural change after 2008

In Table 4, I explore whether these processes continued after 2008, i.e., during the financial crisis. Although the data are too limited to make firm conclusions, there is no evidence that the old and new members disintegrated culturally. Concurrent with this development, non-members continued to diverge at a remarkable pace during a four-year period. Although I used different samples in each analysis, it should be noted that the R^2 for the unadjusted model in Table 4 is .40, compared to .26 for the model in 2001 and .02 in 1992. This implies that the deepening of European integration has contributed to the emergence of significant cultural differences in Europe since the early 1990s.

(Table 4 about here)

Direction of convergence

An additional analysis explores the direction of convergence between old and new member states to shed light on the world-polity and hybridization theories' comparative relevance. Table 5 demonstrates a clear convergence pattern from the new member states to the old ones. When the old member states' values were held constant for the year 1992, the cultural distance decreased by .035 points—which is larger than the actual convergence rate (-.031)—due to the change in values occurring in new member states between 1992 and 2008. Conversely, when the new member states' values were fixed at their 1992 levels, the two groups of countries increased their value distance by .05 points. These findings support the notion of the EU's normative authority, which implies borrowing of cultural values by the new member states.

(Table 5 about here)

DISCUSSION

The impact of this empirical study lies in three main areas: First, it contributes to the literature on European integration, particularly the no-demos thesis and the debates on the relevance of cultural value similarity for EU integration. Second, it contributes to political and sociological theories of globalization, such as world polity theory, hybridization theory and the Clash of Civilizations thesis. Third, it adds to cross-cultural research on societal value change, strengthening diffusion theories in addition to modernization and culturalist theories (e.g., Clash of Civilizations).

The increasing cultural homogeneity within the EU provides empirical evidence that the third wave of European integration—a cultural one—is already underway (Lahdesmaki 2016), regardless of whether it results from EU institutions' efforts or is simply a by-product of integration in other spheres. The direction of convergence is clearly from new member states toward old member states, which supports the notion of vertical diffusion based on world-polity (Meyer et al. 1997) and institutional isomorphism theories (Dimaggio & Powell 1983), as well as directional cultural diffusion. Conceivably, the old members dominate the discourse in EU institutions, which is why cultural scripts likely trickle down vertically into the new member states' populations. However, another possibility is that diffusion happens horizontally: Populations in new member states may consider those in the old ones to be role models—studies show that the network of transnational attachment in Europe is highly asymmetrical, as a few large Western European countries receive most of the attachment of the other EU countries (Deutschmann et al. 2018). As a result, signal flow via the media and other channels is more extensive from old to new member states, which explains the direction of convergence. This finding contradicts hybridization theory, which would suppose a convergence toward a middle ground. Nevertheless, some cultural influence may go in the opposite direction, too—not least mechanically through large-scale migration from Eastern to Western Europe—but is clearly outweighed by cultural influence in the opposite direction. Hybridization may also be more applicable regarding value homogenization among old member states, where cultural authority is not as clearly defined.

This study makes an important contribution to the debates about whether cultural compatibility is a necessary condition for candidates' membership suitability. Evidently, after the fall of the Berlin wall, CEE countries were equally distant culturally from the EU, but the decisive Western foreign political reorientation of the prospective members triggered a convergence, in contrast to countries that did not take the “road to Brussels” at that time. The same applies to current candidates, which—a few years before their recognition as ready to begin negotiations—were equally culturally distant as those countries whose membership is unconceivable even in the distant future. The commitment of their political elites, backed by popular support, and combined with the green light from Brussels, were apparently the conditions conducive to considerable cultural transformation.

The findings from this study provide robust evidence that the EU has undergone a process of cultural integration among member states and of differentiation from the rest of Europe. That is, the European continent has not become more homogenous overall but rather more polarized

between EU members and countries aspiring to membership, on the one hand, and those remaining unaffiliated, on the other. This polarization confirms that differences in identities, namely the lack of orientation toward the EU, can hinder cultural diffusion (Vasilev 2016) and lead to cultural development in the opposite direction (Headley 2015). This process both resembles and contradicts the predictions made by Huntington (1996) regarding the cultural transformations of Europe. In line with his thesis, the continent has evidently undergone a profound cultural regrouping, with EU expansion setting new lines of demarcation. However, EU integration goes somewhat beyond the boundaries of Western civilization set by Huntington, for whom “Europe ends where Western Christianity [Protestantism and Catholicism] ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin” (p. 158). The EU currently encompasses four predominantly Orthodox countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Romania) and is negotiating with three other predominantly Orthodox (Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) and two predominantly Muslim nations (Albania and Turkey). The analysis suggests that the EU might have the potential to integrate culturally countries having supposedly different cultural-historical backgrounds. Apparently, however, this potential is limited and Turkey’s development exemplifies that even a long process of negotiations can fail to create cultural closeness. It is debatable whether a large cultural gap impeded the process of negotiation or whether the uncertain prospects of EU membership in the near future (for other political reasons) contributed to the cultural backlash in Turkey.

Another major contribution of this paper is finding evidence for the importance of cultural diffusion as a major mechanism of cultural change, independent of the effect of socioeconomic development. The economic disparities between (north-)western Europe and the rest of the continent originated several centuries before the idea of a unified Europe was born (Welzel 2013) and can hardly be overcome by the much more recent and relatively short period of economic prosperity in other corners of the continent. Conversely, cultural diffusion appears to be highly effective in transforming national cultures and bringing them closer together, even over a relatively short time. This observation supports previous findings by Bonikowski (2010), who points to the political cooperation between nations as the mechanism promoting value diffusion.

With regard to the EU’s democratic legitimation crisis resulting from the lack of a European demos (Weiler 1995), as well as the challenges inherent in cultural value differences over the course of integration (e.g., Gerhards 2007, Guiso et al. 2016, Hien 2017), this study provides an optimistic account of recent cultural processes concerning EU integration. The European demos is not provided *per se* but is created through integrational efforts in other spheres and the intensified interactions between European public actors and common citizens. This evaluation aligns with another optimistic finding by Klingemann and Weldon (2013), who show that mutual trust between EU states has been rising since the very beginning of the project. This process has turned Germany and France, archenemies until 1945, into Europe’s core allies. The authors explain this with the EU’s institutional structure, which allows for increased levels of interaction and

interconnectedness between member states. Such studies indicate that the EU has emerged as a powerful force, transforming the continent slowly but profoundly.

Questions remain regarding how much value congruency is necessary, which particular values are essential and whether this congruency has already been achieved. Recent political tensions in the CEE indicate that the core democratic values promoted by the EU may not be sufficiently embedded in some former socialist societies that joined in 2004. Another question deserving more consideration in future research is the relationship between cultural values and identities. This analysis demonstrates that Western European countries that meet the requirements for membership but lack their populations' support diverge culturally from the core EU members (albeit in a direction of much stronger democratic values). This finding can serve as a preliminary indication of the cultural development of the UK after its prospective withdrawal from the EU, which can be examined empirically when new data become available.

It should be acknowledged that the particular mechanisms leading to value convergence were not the focus of—and cannot be determined based on—this analysis. Intensified social interactions between member societies, intentional efforts of EU actors to promote certain value schemes, or plausibly all of these factors could be linked to value homogenization. The mechanisms leading to convergence as well as divergence should be a topic for further research. Furthermore, the analysis depicts general macroscopic trends without focusing on particular cases. Another limitation of this analysis is its short time span. The analysis identified substantive cultural transformations, which indicates the plasticity of national cultures but also implies that changes in the reverse direction are also possible. The period after the collapse of communism created a vacuum in the CEE when no viable alternatives to the Western path of development were present. Anti-establishment, Eurosceptic right-wing parties were also less significant in Europe at the time, and the financial crisis had not yet tested members' solidarity. Consequently, the period from 1992 to 2008 may have been especially favourable to such value transformations. Further analysis utilizing upcoming WVS/EVS waves can reveal the long-term processes of European cultural integration.

Despite its motto of “United in diversity,” a more culturally homogenous European Union is emerging. This analysis demonstrates that the EU may have remarkable potential to quickly integrate the values of old, new and prospective member states. If unrestricted by incompatible identities, this process may strengthen the legitimacy of the EU and provide momentum for further integration.

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TABLES AND GRAPHS

Table 1 Description of datasets and summary statistics of dependent variable

Dataset	1992-2008	2001-2008	2008	2008-2011
Number of years	17	8	1	4
Number of time points	2	2	1	2
Number of dyads at each time point	435	946	1035	120
Number of countries	30	44	46	16
Number of current EU members	25	28	28	9
Mean value distance	.137	.143	.147	.187
Standard deviation between	.088	.089	.090	.109
Standard deviation within	.033	.025	N/A	.025
Min	.000	.002	.002	.006
Max	.506	.506	.506	.511

Table 2 Total dyadic value distance regressed on EU membership and change from 1992 to 2008

Group of countries	Average value distance (estimated margins from OLS)		Change in average value distance (unstandardized coeff. from FE)		Number of dyads in group	Number of countries in group
	Model I 1992	Model II 1992	Model III 1992-2008	Model IV 1992-2008		
Among EU founders (ref. for Models I and II)	.089 (.014)	.054 (.035)	-.001 (.016)	.006 (.017)	10	5
Founders and old members	.117 (.008)	.095+ (.021)	-.016* (.007)	-.019* (.008)	45	14
Founders and new members	.127+ (.019)	.151 (.062)	-.032** (.007)	-.05** (.011)	55	16
Founders and Schengen area	.124 (.019)	.097+ (.031)	.042* (.016)	.057** (.018)	10	7
Founders and non-members	.136+ (.020)	.165+ (.033)	.066** (.013)	.057** (.014)	15	8
Among non-members	.113 (.035)	.098 (.036)	.058+ (.030)	.057+ (.030)	3	3
Control for GDP/capita	No	Yes	No	Yes	Total: 138	Total: 30
R ²	.02	.03				
R ² (within)			.31	.32		

Notes: Two-way cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses. ** p<0.01, *p<0.05 +p<0.1. Significance tests in models I and II refer to the difference compared to the reference category. In models III and IV, it shows whether the change over time within this group of countries is statistically significant. OLS – ordinary least-squared regression. FE – fixed-effects regression. The groups of countries include only dyads where one country belongs to the first groups and the other to the second group. E.g., “Founders and old members” includes pairs of one founder and one old member but not two founders or two old members.

EU memberships as of 2016. Non-EU members exclude non-EU Schengen area countries. EU Founders: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Netherlands. Old Members: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Great Britain. Schengen area (non-EU): Iceland and

Norway. New members: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Non-members (excluding non-EU Schengen area): Belarus, Russia and Turkey.

Table 3 Total dyadic value distance regressed on EU membership and change from 2001 to 2008

Group of countries	Average value distance (estimated margins from OLS)		Change in average value distance (unstandardized coeff. from FE)		Number of dyads in group	Number of countries in group
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV		
	2001	2001	2001-2008	2001-2008		
Among Old EU members (ref. for Models I and II)	.097 (.005)	.098 (.011)	.003 (.003)	.003 (.003)	119	16
Old EU members and new members	.137** (.006)	.137** (.006)	-.027** (.003)	-.037** (.004)	176	27
Old EU members and candidates	.213** (.010)	.213** (.011)	-.050** (.004)	-.055** (.005)	80	21
Old EU members and non-candidates	.204** (.006)	.204** (.009)	.007+ (.003)	.001 (.004)	128	25
Among non-members (non-candidates)	.100 (.009)	.101 (.011)	-.003 (.008)	-.002 (.008)	28	8
Control for GDP/capita	No	Yes	No	Yes	Total: 532	Total: 40
R ²	.26	.26				
R ² (within)			.25	.27		

Old EU members: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. New members: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Candidates: Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. Non-candidates: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

Table 4 Dyadic distance in total value distance regressed on EU membership and change from 2008 to 2011

Group of countries	Average value distance (estimated margins from OLS)		Change in average value distance (unstandardized coeff. from FE)		Number of dyads in group	Number of countries in group
	Model I 2008	Model II 2008	Model III 2008-2011	Model IV 2008-2011		
Among old EU members (ref. for Models I and II)	.105 (.025)	.091 (.035)	-.017 (.017)	-.010 (.017)	6	4
Old EU members and new members	.174* (.023)	.172+ (.022)	-.000 (.009)	.001 (.009)	20	9
Old EU members and non- members	.286** (.019)	.295** (.025)	.030** (.008)	.028** (.008)	28	11
Among non-members	.125 (.014)	.118 (.016)	.000 (.009)	.002 (.009)	21	7
Control for GDP/capita	No	Yes	No	Yes	Total: 75	Total: 17
R ²	.40					
R ² (within)			.16	.19		

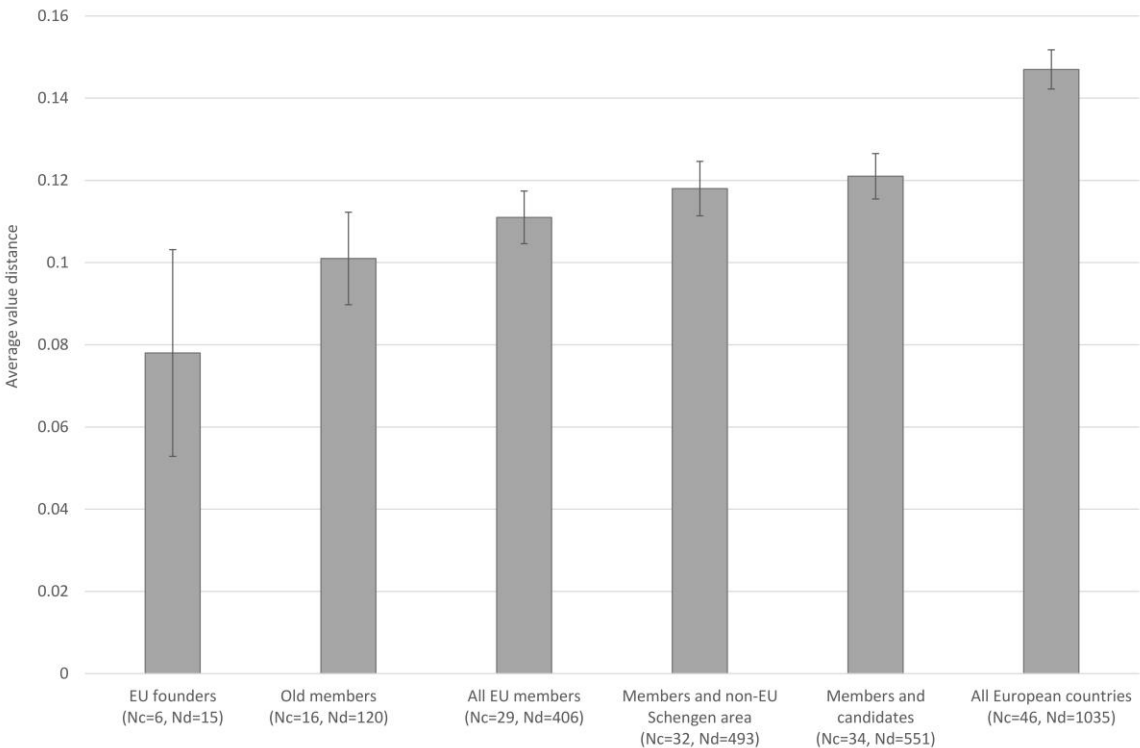
Old EU members: Germany, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. New members: Cyprus, Estonia, Poland, Romania and Slovenia. Non-members: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine.

Table 5 Direction of convergence between old and new member states from 1992 to 2008

<i>Change in value distance:</i>	Coefficient	S.E.	R ²
Between old and new member states	-.031**	.004	.21
From new toward old members (holding old members' values constant at 1992)	-.035**	.007	.14
From old toward new members (holding new members' values constant at 1992)	.050**	.003	.62

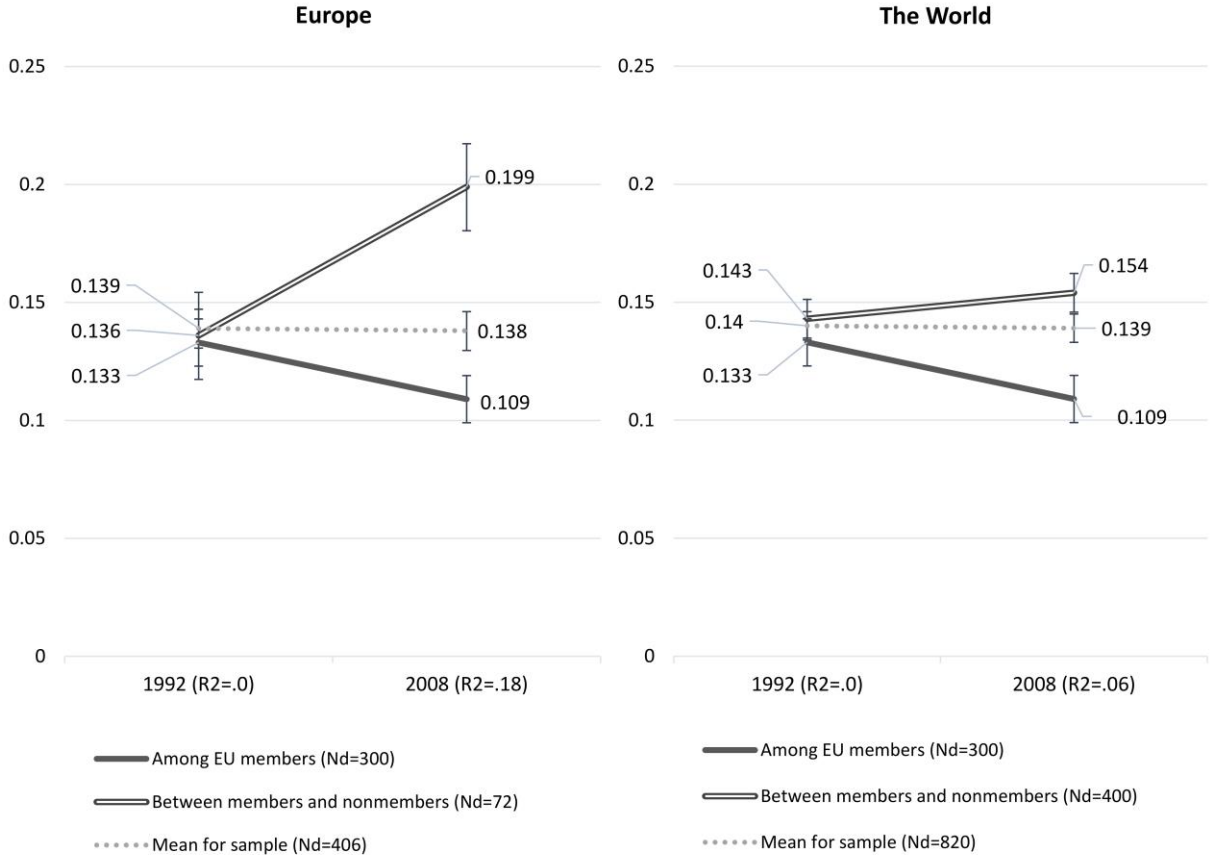
Note: Number of dyads = 154.

Figure 1 Average value distance by EU integration in 2008 for 46 European nations with 95% confidence intervals



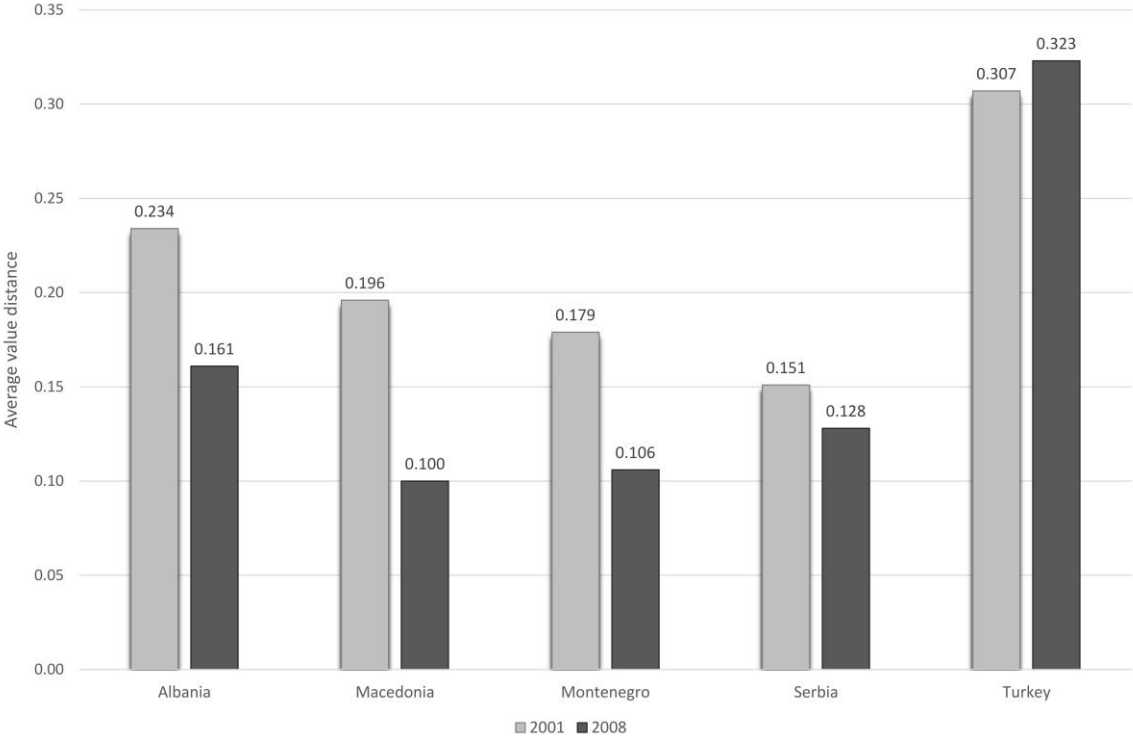
Notes: Nc = number of countries, Nd = number of dyads. Great Britain and Northern Ireland were surveyed separately.

Figure 2 Change in average value distance in Europe and the world by EU membership between 1992 and 2008 with 95% confidence intervals



Notes: EU membership is as of 2016. Non-EU members do not include Schengen area nations.

Figure 3 Change in average value distance between old member states and candidates



ⁱ The only exception is Romania, which was first surveyed in 1993, but the entry was changed to 1992.
ⁱⁱ Alternatively, I computed the distance as the average on each of the individual items and also as the average distance on each of the eight sub-indices, which relaxes the assumptions about the internal structure of the value indices—this produced similar findings.