



University of Tartu
Johann Skytte Institute of Political Studies
Piret Ehin (PhD)

Final Thesis

EU INTERNAL BORDERS
AND
VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

Date of Submission: January 15, 2024

Kilian Simon
International Relations and Regional Studies
kilian.simon@ut.ee

Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

Word count: 2265

Tartu, 15.01.2024

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several stylized, overlapping loops and lines.

Acknowledgment:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Piret Ehin for her guidance and supervision throughout the entire process of writing this thesis. Her expertise, insights, and support have been instrumental in shaping and refining my research.

A special thanks goes to my brother, Konrad, for his patience and dedication in helping me comprehend the mathematics involved in this thesis. His support was crucial in navigating the complexities of mathematical concepts and applications.

I extend my appreciation to Jakob Preiß, Jakob Schlereth, and their efforts in aiding my understanding of the statistical programs used to create the dataset, which served as the cornerstone for the statistical analysis conducted in this research.

I would also like to acknowledge Felicitas Bitzenhofer who provided valuable support, including proofreading assistance. Her constructive feedback and attention to detail have been instrumental in enhancing the clarity and coherence of this thesis.

This journey would not have been possible without the support and contributions of these individuals, and for that, I am truly grateful.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the impacts of the European Union's open border policy on voting behaviour, focusing on vote choice and turnout rates in European Parliament elections within internal EU border regions. This research contributes to the electoral voting behaviour debates, border studies as well as transactionalism and European identity literature, by analysing how the open border policy influences behaviour in EP elections. Thereby enriching the discourses by integrating a spatial dimension related to proximity to internal EU borders to the debates. The central research question examines potential disparities between EU internal border regions and non-border regions in voter turnout and vote choice during the 2019 European Parliament election. Three hypotheses are proposed and tested employing a multi-level regression analysing election data from 1060 NUTS 3 regions across 19 EU member states. Contrary to expectations, the results do not support any of the hypotheses. Proximity to a border does not significantly impact Europhile or Eurosceptic voting behaviour, challenging assumptions about the influence of border adjacency on voting tendencies. The study also reveals a decreased emphasis on EU affairs in border regions during elections and lower voter participation, challenging assumptions about the prioritization of EU integration as a policy issue. These findings suggest that factors beyond geographic proximity to borders play a more dominant role in shaping voting behaviours in EU border regions.

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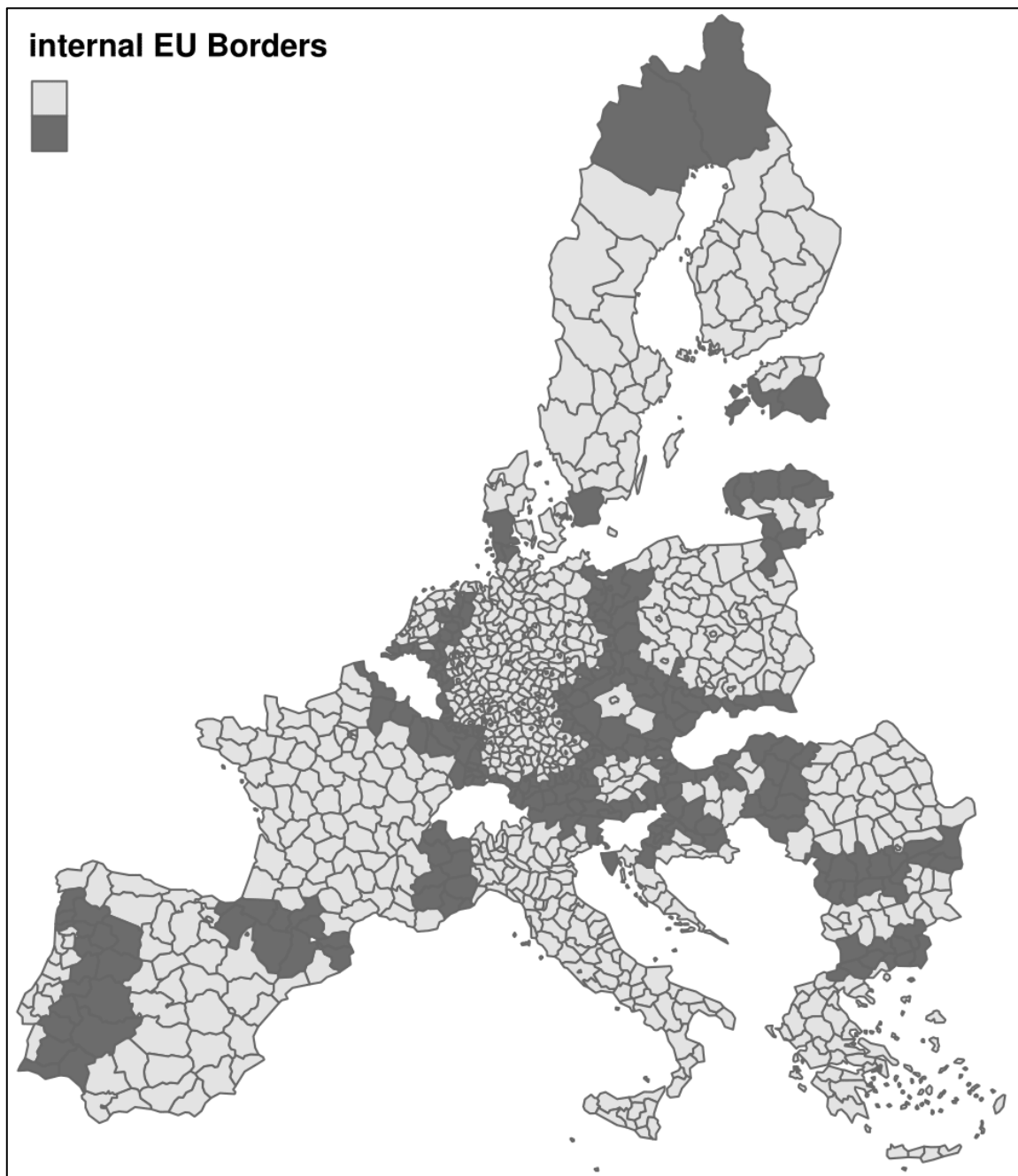
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1 Introduction

Border regions create a unique environment: they are spaces where people from different nations meet and interact with each other. What's more, they represent areas of contact in which international trade takes place, different worldviews meet, and one nation ends and the other begins. Border regions have undergone rapid shifts in the last century, from wars to peace to shared institutions, to the free flow of people and goods. These developments are especially noticeable within the EU and even more so in the regions that have observed these changes first and foremost, i.e., internal EU border regions (Map 1). The creation of the four freedoms of the European Union which guarantee that goods, services, capital, and people may travel freely inside the EU, has meant an increase in the exchange and interaction of Europeans on the entire continent but especially at its former borders. These regions have become spaces in which European politics are more observable as the four freedoms can more easily be taken advantage of. Their effects have a profound impact on European societies, where attitudes and behaviours change with the increased contact between European citizens. While the citizens were able to increase interactions with each other by freely traversing the border, the European Parliament (EP) elections created an opportunity for them to express themselves politically. Since 1979 the election took place nine times and in June 2024 the electorate will have another chance of casting their vote for the 10th legislative period.

The free movement across borders and increased cross-border interactions could lead to the assumption that those experiencing them more often and first-hand, i.e., citizens in internal border regions, would see this as a benefit or advantage and therefore vote more pro-European in EP Elections. However, there is no conclusive evidence for this. In fact, for every internal border region that appreciates the benefits of European Integration (González-Gómez & Gualda 2016), there seems to be one that does not feel the same way about the permeability of the EU's internal borders (Wuhs & McLaughlin 2019). Nevertheless, these regions represent 40% of the Union's territory, produce 30% of the EU's GDP and are the home of 150 million (37,5%) European citizens of which two million commute every day and 1.3 million work across the border (European Commission 2017). This is a significant amount of the European electorate, and it is, therefore, necessary to understand how living in such circumstances might affect the voting behaviour in EP elections, i.e., the one instance where internal border region inhabitants can explicitly express their views on the European Union and its politics.

Map 1: Internal EU border regions used in this thesis.



The objective of the thesis is therefore to identify the impact that the open borders within the EU have had on the voting behaviour in EP elections of those residing in these border regions. This includes vote choice and turnout rates. As such, this thesis adds to ongoing debates; among others to border studies by examining how the European open border policy impacts the way people behave in EP elections, as well as to the debate on voting behaviour in European Parliament elections by adding a spatial component to it which has often been

overlooked in previous studies. Lastly, it contributes to the transactionalism and European identity debate by enhancing the understanding of the effects of European cross-border interactions on attitudes towards the EU expressed in EP elections. This linkage is pertinent as it underscores the complexities involved in ascertaining the definitive impact of border region living on European voting behaviour, thereby highlighting the need for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between geographic context and collective (European) identity formation with electoral choices in EU internal border regions in EP elections.

It has been established above that internal EU border regions, i.e., regions within EU member states which are directly adjacent to another member state, experience EU integration more intensely than others, whether positively or negatively (Kuhn 2012a). This in turn is expected to influence vote choice and turnout rates within these regions. Therefore, this thesis will answer the research question: *To what extent do regions on EU internal borders differ from other regions in terms of voter turnout and vote choice in the 2019 European Parliament election?* The thesis aims to address the research question by scrutinizing the disparities in voter behaviour and turnout between EU internal border regions and non-internal EU border regions¹ in the 2019 EP election, offering critical insights into the influence of spatial proximity to the border on electoral dynamics within the EU.

A large-N approach will be taken to examine the effects of residence in EU internal border regions on the dependent variables of *vote choice* and *turnout*. The study will be using data pooled from over one thousand individual regions from nineteen EU member states. The data was drawn from multiple sources and combined into one dataset to represent each region within the twenty countries. Using a larger amount of data allows, according to Kerlinger (1966), the creation of a good research design to accurately answer the research question by having a high level of control for extraneous independent variables, thereby yielding generalisable results. The method used in this thesis, as opposed to previous studies (e.g. Nasr & Rieger 2023), will employ a calculation of individual regions that can draw upon various

¹ Non-Internal EU border regions in this thesis refer to all sub national regions in the EU that are not directly adjacent to another EU member state (see Map 1)

political parties across the entire political spectrum as opposed to merely the successes of populist or fringe parties. This way, an accurate picture of the voting behaviour regarding voter choice and turnout rates within the individual regions can be created. Additionally, voter choice will be measured through the lens of support for European integration as well as the importance of European integration to the electorate, comprehensively measured by the position towards European integration of the parties voted for in the elections. The 2019 EP election has been chosen as a case since EP elections are the only pan-European elections, which makes a cross-country analysis possible. Additionally, the 2019 EP election is the most recent, has the most available data and is the election that was marked by European issue-related debates in the years before the election, due to the migration crisis and the Brexit referendum.

The thesis will follow the subsequent structure: first, the theoretical part will be divided into three sections, with the first being concerned with the voting behaviour literature from the electoral geography point of view as well as the voting behaviour in EP elections and relating the assumptions within the literature to the research question. The second section will explore the cross-border region's political environment and identify the approaches in the literature on borders, their assumptions about interactions due to EU open border policies and the effects on border region residents and their voting behaviour. The third part will explore the relationship between cross-border interactions and the development of European values caused by them. This will then be put into relation with the internal EU border regions and their environment that encourages interactions between European citizens. Following the theoretical section, the hypotheses with their causal mechanisms and their expectations will be explained. The theoretical section will lead up to potential causal mechanisms that are used to explain how internal EU borders impact the voting behaviour in EP elections and how these impacts are unique to internal EU border regions when compared to the other regions within the nations. The mechanisms used by this thesis are *cross-border interactions*, *opportunities* and *risks*, *objects of identification* and *common (regional) identity*. The empirical section of the paper will thereafter elaborate on the data selection, the methodology and the robustness of the thesis before analysing the results. Lastly, the results will be discussed with their relevance to the research question before the thesis will outline possible future research related to the research question.

2 Cross border interactions and voting behaviour in European elections.

Border regions are distinctive areas within the EU, they are important to the project of European integration and are used by a vast amount of people and businesses in many different ways. Within the EU, internal border regions account for one-third of the EU GDP as well as roughly 140 million EU citizens equal to 30% of the total EU population out of which two million Europeans are considered cross-border commuters (European Commission 2017). As of 2013, the Greater Region of SaarLorLux (Saarland-Lorraine-Luxembourg), being an example of a heavily used cross-border region, hosts over 300.000 daily commuters who cross the border with the trend only increasing over time (Wille & Roos 2020). These individuals not only cross the border more frequently, but they also have a higher share of work-social interactions across the border (Wille 2014). These interactions represent cross-border interactions which are multifaceted and describe processes that involve various aspects of social, cultural, economic, and political exchange between citizens, communities, and regions across state borders (Scott 2016). As such people in the SaarLorLux region are part of a growing European society that makes use of the open border regime of the EU by partaking in cross-border interactions.

The purpose of the theoretical section is to explain and argue what possible effects proximity to an internal EU border might have on border region residents in general and the consequence of proximity to an internal EU border might have on the voting behaviour of people in EP elections in particular. Analysing such an impact, i.e., the effect cross-border interactions and the general proximity have on the electorate, merits different approaches that will be combined to explain how voting behaviour in internal EU border regions might differ from all other regions in the respective member states. One approach taken is electoral geography, which uses a spatial component as an argument to explain deviation in voting patterns and is therefore will be reviewed as the proximity of the border in EU internal border regions represents such a spatial component. Approaches taken from the EP election voting behaviours will be added to the electoral geography arguments as the purpose of the thesis is to analyse the voting difference in the 2019 EP election. To clarify the influence of living in border regions on European citizens' expressions regarding the European integration process, this thesis' theoretical approach further synthesises the aforementioned concepts with open

border policies and cross-border cooperations, as well as transactionalism and European identity, and their respective impact on voting behaviours. Cross-border cooperations in border regions and their perceptions are used to contextualise how European citizens might feel about the open border policy and cooperation with other European nations and what this could tell us about their stance on the project of European integration as expressed in the vote choice EP elections. Finally, transactionalism and collective European identity in internal EU border regions will be used to understand the dynamics of internal EU border regions and the potential development of a European identity that might influence voting behaviour. It is argued that due to the spatial proximity to another EU country, transactionalism and European identity are especially prone to exist and thereby impacting voter choice and turnout rates in the internal EU border regions.

By exploring how spatial proximity to a border might influence voting behaviour, the theoretical section aims to use current approaches to explain potential disparities in voter choice and turnout between internal EU border regions. Where applicable, the synthesis will be fortified by empirical research on, for example, the perception of European citizens in border regions on the EU, voting behaviour in border regions, the impact of geographic context on voting behaviour and the impact of cross-border interactions on European identity. They will encompass the multifaceted aspects that shape individuals' electoral choices in internal EU border regions concerning the European project and their likelihood to turn out and vote. This section will start with the voting behaviour literature on EP Elections from an electoral geography point of view and what it suggests for voting behaviour in internal border regions. It will be followed by an assessment of the institutionalisation of cross-border regions and the possible impact of this process on citizens' perceptions of the EU within these regions as well as the general impact of borders on European attitudes. Finally, transactionalism and collective identity, which explains the impact of interactions on individuals' attitudes towards the EU will be examined through the lens of internal EU border region living.

2.1 Borders, neighbourhoods and voting behaviour in EP elections.

The following subchapter will focus on the voting behaviour literature. It will identify the relevant voting behaviour literature and put its findings and assumptions in relation to the research question. For this, the section will be divided into two parts, where the first deals with

the electoral geography literature and what neighbourhood effects, i.e., the influences that local surroundings have on the political opinions and political behaviour of individuals (Foladare 1968). How could they affect the way border residents exhibit different voting behaviour compared to those from the heartland? It will be argued that borders create a distinct geographical feature, such as they have been identified in the electoral geography literature, which in turn impacts voting behaviour. The second part of the section will explore the voting behaviour literature in EP elections, primarily through the lens of the second-order election theorem and the European issue salience approach. It will take a closer look at the most predominant approaches in the analysis of EP elections. The thesis attempts to combine these two separate debates on electoral geography and voting behaviour in EP elections by arguing that borders as geographic locations have an impact on the issue salience of European politics, thereby creating an environment that would favour issue-related voting as opposed to second-order election patterns. It will thereby add to the ongoing debate on voting behaviour in EP elections by providing an empirical analysis of regions that have been described as the ‘laboratories of European integration’ (Hooper & Kramsch 2004: 3), where the voting behaviours might differ due to the observable and tangible importance of European politics for European citizens in the internal EU border regions.

2.1.1 Electoral geography and borderlands:

The exploration of European internal border regions and their influence on voting behaviour within the context of the 2019 EP election encompasses multiple dimensions that intertwine within electoral geography and the European identity constructs. The next subchapter, which is based on electoral geography, presents a nuanced perspective by investigating the potential influence of geographic context on individual voting behaviour. Laying the groundwork for the following subchapter which will explore the complex interactions of borderland experiences, arguing that living in these regions can potentially cultivate pro-European attitudes through enhanced cross-border interactions.

While the field of electoral geography is large (see Shin 2015), this thesis will explore the impact neighbourhood effects and geographic location can have on individual voting behaviour. Some studies in the field of electoral geography have taken neighbourhoods into account to explain why individuals might deviate from their expected voting behaviour, i.e.,

tracing this deviation to contextual factors such as their geographic location (Johnston 1986, Cutts et al 2012, Gallego et al. 2016). This is part of the theory on contextual geography, which posits that the geographic location of individuals is distinct from each other and therefore has an impact on their attitudes (Books & Prysby 1988, Enos 2017, Ethington & McDaniel 2007). People who are geographically grouped are affected by the election participation or absence of others in that region, which has significant impacts on their own participatory voting behaviour (Cho & Rudolph 2008). A study that analysed regions in the Netherlands which exhibit higher levels of populist and anti-immigrant attitudes found that the residents in those areas have a feeling of being ignored by policymakers and misunderstood by other areas' residents (Huijsmans 2023). Furthermore, higher levels of political resentment are seen in peripheral and low-income areas where there is a strong sense of regional identity (de Lange et al. 2023). This is backed by findings showing that persons in poorer developed local economies which are experiencing industrial loss, decreased employment, and a less educated workforce, are more inclined to vote anti-European (Dijkstra & Rodríguez-Pose 2020). Underscoring the importance of geographic location, neighbourhood effects, and regional identity in shaping individual voting decisions, EU internal border regions, where cross-border interactions and unique borderland experiences exist, could be a neighbourhood as described in the electoral voting behaviour literature and thus significantly influence European, i.e., pro-European or Eurosceptic voting behaviour.

However, the influence of geographic location on voting behaviour might be less pronounced than some scholars have suggested. King (1996) argues that geographical context matters very little in the realm of electoral choices as other factors impact voter choice much more strongly. Research conducted in Britain found some evidence of this, concluding that territorial effects are negligible after accounting for statewide variables of other factors, such as family background, ascribed characteristics, socioeconomic status, and economic lifestyle (McAllister and Studlar 1992). Another example has found that while those who view immigration more positively are often residents in the larger cities, which can be understood as a neighbourhood, their attitudes can be largely explained by a cosmopolitan attribute among the city residents who have proportionally a larger group of highly educated citizens (Maxwell 2019). There is thus not a strong neighbourhood effect which could be attributed to this phenomenon. Following this logic, the impact a border region might have on the voting behaviour of individuals residing next to it might be less impactful than expected. Nevertheless,

it's important to recognize that geographic location may still play a role in internal border regions as cross-border interactions and the specific context of borderland experiences may influence voting behaviour on the individual level and therefore create an aggregated effect of border region living at the regional level.

Because borderlands create a unique environment that often differs greatly from the heartland of a country, voting behaviour regularly deviates in these regions as the individuals' experience of policies diverges from the core of a country (Branton et al. 2007, Adkisson & Peach 1999, Adkisson & Saucedo 2011). In an early study, Adkisson and Peach (1999) demonstrated that, even after adjusting for other variables like ethnicity and economic variables, the voting patterns of the borderlands along the US-Mexico border were distinct from and leaned more towards the Democrat party than the heartlands in the states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. This study was repeated for the 1992-2008 period and came to a similar result, i.e., that the border effect, which favours Democratic candidates, diminishes as the distance from the border grows (Adkisson & Saucedo, 2011). For the US 2016 presidential election, a statistically significant effect of border regions for Trump support was found. However, when border regions were treated as non-homogenous, they were statistically significantly less likely to vote for Trump (Adkisson & Pallares, 2021). This shows that borders are a factor to account for in voting behaviour, where the border could shape the perception of politics and priorities in the political arena.

Fewer studies have been conducted in Europe and the literature on European border regions and voting behaviour is so far mostly limited to national elections. According to the findings of one study, populist parties in Europe were more successful in border regions throughout national and European elections between 1999 and 2021 (Nasr & Rieger 2023). Paiders and Paiders (2013), found that there was no statistically significant effect on the voting behaviour in the 10th Saeima election of the Latvian electorate at the border to Russia and Belarus. Similarly, a study by Zhrinova (2022) demonstrated that, although voting for parties that favour the Russian-speaking community is more common in regions of Latvia that border Russia and Belarus, this is likely due to the high non-Latvian population size in the area. Using a rational choice model, Facchini and François (2010) contend that residents who live near an internal EU border are less reliant on their national government's decisions as they have alternatives for living, investing, shopping, etc. and are therefore less engaged in national

elections. In the case of the former German Democratic Republic regions in Germany, the Eurosceptic party AfD received more votes in areas bordering Poland and the Czech Republic, likely influenced by fears of economic threat from the East (Wuhs & McLaughlin, 2019). In the 2003 EU Referendum in Poland, the region bordering Germany had the highest share of votes in favour of EU accession (83,7-84,5%), while the regions bordering Belarus and Ukraine had the lowest (63,3-68,6%) (Stiller 2003).

As can be seen above, border regions have been at the forefront of the deepening and widening of the EU, as the population in these places was especially exposed to the newfound freedoms of their neighbours in the enlargement processes, causing economic opportunities but also unease among the population. With the EU enlargement to the east, there was a fear that it could cause an economic downturn for some industries in the border regions in Germany due to significantly lower wages on the other side of the border (Forster 2007; Trettin 2010). Others have argued that the border regions have a competitive advantage due to their spatial closeness to the newly admitted members and hence their advantageous access to the new marketplaces (e.g. Brüllhart et al., 2004). Finally, a study on the economic effect of enlargement showed that it had different impacts on the border regions in Austria, Germany and Italy depending on their prior economic performance. Rural regions with higher GDP per capita before the enlargement have been the winners while those with lower GDP per capita rates have been the losers (Wassmann 2016). Considering that the EU's perception and support are usually based on its economic performance (see Eichenberg & Dalton 1993), such studies in border regions have merit when analysing voting behaviour, as the common saying "when you think elections think economics" (Tufte 1978: 65) rings true.

Consequently, with a research focus on EU internal border regions and their potential influence on voting behaviour in the 2019 EP election, this thesis traverses complex terrains merging electoral geography and European identity constructs. Electoral geography posits that neighbourhood effects and geographic context shape voting behaviour, supported by studies elucidating how individuals' attitudes and participation are impacted by geographic location and interactions with their surroundings (Johnston 1986, Cutts et al. 2012, Gallego et al. 2016, Books & Prysby 1988, Enos 2017, Ethington & McDaniel 2007). However, dissenting perspectives, like King (1996), suggest that territorial effects might hold less sway in electoral choices compared to other influential factors. Nonetheless, border regions present unique

environments where voting patterns diverge from the heartland, as demonstrated by studies in the US-Mexico borderlands, showcasing distinct voting tendencies favouring Democratic candidates (Adkisson & Peach 1999, Adkisson & Saucedo 2011). In Europe, studies examining European border regions' voting behaviour, predominantly in national elections, have highlighted various aspects: the increased success of populist parties, variations in voting patterns along borders, and the differential impact of EU enlargement on these regions' economies. Hence the literature points towards an altered voting behaviour in border regions as opposed to non-border regions. The following sections will thus illustrate how exactly the voting behaviours in EU internal border regions might differ.

2.1.2 Voting behaviour in European parliament elections

When it comes to European Elections, there is an ongoing debate about whether European citizens vote alongside European issues (European issue voting) or according to their perception of national issues (second-order election). This thesis will add to this debate by adding a spatial component to it, arguing that location has an impact on a person's experience of the EU which therefore limits the effects of the second-order election theory, as this posits that people have a low salience of EU politics and therefore turnout is lower. The following subchapter will outline these two main approaches to voting behaviour in EP elections and the role internal EU border regions play in creating an environment that favours one (issue voting) over the other (second-order elections). It will then integrate the electoral geography and EP election approaches into an argument in which the neighbourhood effect of border regions influences how residents are anticipated to vote in EP elections.

EU issue voting refers to how people cast their ballots following their opinions on EU policy issues (De Vries 2007). This definition stands in contrast to the second-order election theory which claims that voters are rather influenced by domestic political issues, even in the EP elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). EU-issue voting focuses on attitudes and beliefs as influencing voting behaviour on the European level. Evidence from different EU referenda seems to support the argument that attitudes are responsible for the results of the referenda rather than domestic political motivations (see Garry 2005; Aardal et al. 1998; Siune et al. 1994; Ehin 2001; Hobolt 2016). Nevertheless, second-order elections were able to manifest themselves as the leading approach to EP elections (e.g. Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015; Schmitt,

2004). At the same time, these two concepts do not have to be exclusive and are represented in EU-level voting to various degrees. For example, EU issue voting was found to be more pronounced among those with higher levels of knowledge of the EU (De Vries et. al, 2011). Additionally, compared to the older democracies in Western Europe, East-Central Europe has a higher prevalence of voting on EU issues (De Vries & Tillmann, 2011). Voting for non-mainstream parties might also be related to the discrepancy in the stance towards EU integration between citizens and parties, where mainstream parties are more pro-European than the electorate, causing the electorate to vote for non-mainstream parties in EP elections, hence the electorate considers the stance on European politics of the parties when casting a vote (Hobolt et. al, 2009.)

Nevertheless, most of the voting behaviour in EP elections has been explained by the second-order theory, which posits that the electorate considers the EP elections less important than national elections. Therefore, EP elections are characterised by lower turnout, voters being more likely to support so-called protest parties and losses for national governing parties (see, e.g., Reif & Schmitt 1980; Marsh 1998; Hix & Marsh 2007, 2011). The main political arena for this voting behaviour can be found in the national context, as policies and decisions are more salient and have a stronger effect on the individual than those taken on the European level, thus the voter casts a more sincere vote in line with the individuals' ideological similarities with the national party. This argument suggests that to remove the stigma associated with second-order elections or, at the very least, to diminish their impact, the EP elections must be perceived as more significant for the electorate. In spheres where European politics are more important for the electorate, the effect of second-order elections might already be less visible than in other parts of society. This idea can be directly applied to the internal EU border regions: here European politics should be more visible which could lessen the second-order effect of the EP election.

At the same time, both the EU issue voting and second-order election approach posit that the turnout and the voting behaviour in EP elections are related to the salience of European issues. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that while turnout and issue salience in EP elections might be related, they do not represent the same concept. Nevertheless, there are some important relational aspects to note. While issue salience in elections has been defined as “the relative weight that voters place on each issue, holding constant the positions of parties on

those issues” (Ansolabehere & Puy 2018: 104), higher turnout on the other hand speaks of the election itself being important to the electorate. Here, the turnout levels serve as an indication of political participation (Crewe 1981). These two concepts are related to each other in the sense that lower turnout in EP elections has been explained by the lower level of issue salience in EP elections. Similarly, Moravcsik (2002) argues that the EU mostly represents policy areas that are of low to no interest to the electorate such as banking and economic regulations, while national politics primarily regulates high-salience issues like health care, education, and taxation. This has been picked up by second-order election scholars who have so far posited that EP elections are low-salience contests (Schmitt 2005, Hix & Marsh 2011). Survey data has shown that the salience of EP issues and the likelihood for an individual to turn out for an EP election are correlated with each other (Clark 2014). While voter turnout therefore represents political engagement, issue salience denotes the relative importance of specific concerns to voters, and both are interconnected as lower turnout often correlates with lower perceived salience of European issues compared to more salient national policy matters. For the thesis, this means that while the concepts are related to each other there are certain differences to them and therefore need to be analysed separately.

As geography is expected to influence voting behaviour as discussed in the subchapter on electoral geography, the two prevailing approaches to voting behaviour in EP elections are presumed to be impacted by the EU internal border regions as a neighbourhood. In these regions, where European politics hold greater visibility and significance, the impact of EU issue voting is anticipated to wield a more pronounced influence on voter behaviour, diminishing the prevailing prominence of the second-order election effect. The heightened relevance of EU policies within these border regions is poised to elevate the overall significance of the EP elections, fostering a pivotal shift in the electorate's attention from primarily domestic issues towards key European concerns. Consequently, such a shift in focus is likely to effect not only a change in voting behaviour in terms of vote choice but, additionally, in terms of a fluctuation in the rates of voter turnout within these regions, potentially increasing the turnout. Therefore second-order election effects such as lower voter turnout can be expected to be lessened in border regions, where the increased salience of European politics is in turn expected to increase turnout and impact voter choice.

2.2 Cross-border regions and European perceptions

After the discussion on the electoral voting behaviours in EP elections and geography, the next section will explore the cross-border regions of the EU more closely and explore how people in internal EU border regions perceive cross-border cooperations. The evolving nature of borders, once emblematic of separation and distinction between nations, has undergone significant transformations over time, particularly in the context of Europe's internal borders. The formation of the EU and the subsequent creation of a common European market have redefined these boundaries, making them central hubs for cross-border interactions. This transition signifies the diminishing significance of domestic borders within the EU and their increasing role in fostering a sense of European unity. As the EU has sought to erase domestic boundaries, initiatives like the Schengen Agreement and the Madrid Convention have transformed these borders into spaces of free movement and interaction among European citizens. Consequently, internal border regions have become pivotal sites in understanding European integration and have earned the moniker of “laboratories of European integration” (Hooper & Kramsch 2004: 3). They have become places where the European integration process is more tangible to everyday citizens, as they can directly observe the meaning of it on an everyday basis, in contrast to non-border regions, where European integration is generally more abstract (Kuhn 2011a).

It therefore cannot be emphasised enough that border regions play a pivotal role in the self-understanding of the citizens living in them and their identity, which in turn influences their voting behaviour and choice. Thus, the following section on cross-border cooperation is dedicated to the effect that European cross-border policies have on EU citizens and how border residents evaluate cross-border cooperation. It will have a brief elaboration on the approaches that have been taken within the border studies literature and will then explain how they relate to the research question. The purpose of this section is to give the reader an understanding of the complex nature of border regions, their intricate policies and the latter's impact on border residents. The argument here is that the impact of cross-border cooperations on border citizens is like the impact that the open border policies in general might have on the attitudes of these residents towards the open border and by extension the EU. This could have an impact on the voting behaviour of the citizens in EP elections. The section attempts to bridge the gap between

border studies and voting behaviour by underlining the importance of European policies within border regions and their different impacts.

2.2.1 Institutionalisation of cross-Border regions and transnational behaviour

As was established above, internal border regions within the EU are a unique environment and this certainly extends to their political composition. Understanding the political environment of internal European borders and its institutionalisation is relevant to this thesis because it is necessary to understand the interactions in these regions that are caused by the EU's open border policies and how they relate to this political environment. Additionally, understanding the institutionalisation and its effects on border region residents will be useful to contextualise the impact of European-level policy on the electorate in these regions and thus how it could influence their voting choice and behaviour.

Historically borders have separated countries which has made activities between nationals from both sides of a boundary challenging. The border was therefore a representation of where one's nation starts and the others begin, a space of othering and limiting interactions between people (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen 2002). But borders change and have been in motion for decades since the Second World War, and the meaning and perception of any given border is not stagnant (Konrad 2015). With the creation of the European community, the common European market and the creation of the EU in the last century, these internal borders have increasingly become the forefront of European cross-national interactions. One of the guiding principles of the EU is the abolition of domestic boundaries within the Union. Therefore, the internal border regions represent a fundamental pillar of the EU, with free mobility across European borders serving as an embodiment of European unity and its values (Favell, 2008; Recchi, 2015). State players have partly revised the purpose of national borders due to the Europeanization of borders, where former barriers became spaces of free transit and a sphere for interaction among European citizens (e.g., Madrid Convention, Schengen Agreement) (Kolossoff et al. 2012). Initiatives of the European Union attempt to use these areas by bringing them closer to each other with cross-border funding mechanisms such as EUROREG, and INTERREG, making them increasingly institutionalised. It is therefore no

coincidence that Europe has become a well-studied case in the field of border studies (Scott 2016).

Border regions are complex and have numerous effects on several aspects of all fields of social sciences. As previously mentioned, borders differ greatly from one another, some are more open while some are completely closed. Given this complexity, the impact a border has can be analysed from a multitude of angles. Nevertheless, the approaches have been categorized into three distinct forms by Van Houtum (2000): the *flow approach*, the *cross-border cooperation approach*, and the *people approach*. This thesis is firmly bedded within the scope of the *people approach*, i.e., studying the behaviour and practices of people residing in border regions, with an added focus on the effects the border has on voting behaviour. However, the other approaches help to identify the complexity of analysing the effects of a given border region as the *flow approach* and its focus on economic flows and the *cross-border cooperation approach* and its focus on institutionalisation add needed perspective.

In general, cooperation between border regions has been depicted as successful by the EU as the deepened integration is understood to be beneficial for European citizens (Wassenberg & Reitel 2015). The EU's internal border region indeed provide a range of accomplishments when analysed, however, due to their complexity, they are also still faced with obstacles standing in the way of deeper cooperation among the inhabitants of the two adjacent nations. In fact, multiple authors argue that while physical borders within the EU have become less noticeable, the borders remain a mental barrier (e.g., Donnan 2010, Brym 2011). While policy approaches aim to promote cohesion in designated border regions to counter this and which could make it a pertinent factor in shaping the voting attitudes of residents living near these regions, the effects of institutionalising border regions are uncertain and so is the outcome of the voting behaviour.

This is supported by empirical examples, as research on the effects of institutionalised cross-border cooperation has shown that there has been limited success in promoting sustainable, beneficial cross-border interactions. A study on the Szczecin area at the Poland-Germany border reveals that despite the removal of physical barriers, cross-border linkages vary, earlier development potentials remain unrealized, and the border continues to shape identities and attitudes among local residents and elites, emphasizing its persistent relevance in

various forms (Balogh 2014). Additionally cross border regions such as the “EUROREGIONS”, which are cooperation structures between two adjacent subnational regions within Europe, have been found to have only varying degrees of success in establishing themselves as autonomous entities (Perkmann 2007). Further, the impact of cross-border cooperation can be questioned as the top-down approach could lead to resentment among the population (Mc Call 2013). Borders seem to still be very relevant to the individuals residing next to them as obstacles still exist and come in different forms, e.g., legal and administrative as well as language differences (Svenson & Balogh 2018). Therefore, the current literature seems to indicate that despite attempts to bridge borders and create a common political construct in these regions, the potential for it has so far not been met. This might impact border residents' perceptions of cross-border cooperation and by extension the EU as a nation-bridging entity.

While there are some positive examples of, for instance, increased border interactions in the economic and cultural sphere in the Slovak-Hungarian border region (Balogh & Pete 2018), the vast amount of research seems to indicate that institutionalised cross-border cooperation largely fails as the results are rather thin and do not indicate a strong institutional impact on cross-border cooperation (e.g., Balogh 2014, Perkmann 2007, McCall 2013). This in turn would mean that the institutionalisation of the border regions is neither present nor can it be expected to have a positive impact on Europhile voting. Instead, the EU policies within border regions have failed to mobilise a significant amount of people who are therefore unlikely to deviate in their voting behaviour from non- border regions.

As an expected consequence of the phenomena elaborated upon above, the perception of cross-border cooperation initiatives influences attitudes toward the EU among citizens in border regions. Importantly, this impact is multifaceted and reflects the tensions and challenges inherent in the process of European integration and cross-border cooperation (Scott 2016). Some studies have demonstrated that cross-border cooperation is positively perceived among the population (González-Gómez & Gualda 2016), e.g., when the local population in border regions rate these cooperations, such as the EUROREGIONS, as important for regional development (Howaniec & Lis 2020). Moreover, the perception of cross-border cooperation and the EU is associated with inclusivity (Scott 2016). Hence, the implementation of cross-

border cooperation can impact the attitudes among the citizens towards the EU as a whole, not just for regional development.

While the positive perceptions of cross-border initiatives indicate a more favourable view of the EU, potentially influencing voters to support Europhile parties and candidates, the impact of cross-border cooperation on a positive perception is not easily to link. The inadequate strategic planning and coordination in cross-border efforts might result in a lack of tangible benefits or perceived inclusivity, leading to scepticism or reduced enthusiasm for the EU among voters in those regions (Veemaa 2012). However, when assuming that cross-border initiatives succeed in fostering a sense of shared identity and cooperation, they likely encourage voters to prioritize transnational issues or collaborative approaches, potentially influencing their voting choices towards candidates or parties advocating for stronger European integration or cross-border cooperation. By looking to create greater cohesion that can find solutions to the hurdles observed in cross-border regions, residents are incentivised to support an EU that can foster cohesion between regions on opposite sides of the border. The literature so far seems to be divided on the effects and success of cross-border cooperation in border regions in terms of creating support for the EU. On the one hand citizens in border regions seem to generally support cross-border cooperation (González-Gómez & Gualda 2016), on the other hand these cooperations have lacked behind in terms of their successes. Further cross-border cooperation is a component of European integration since it helps to integrate Europe politically, economically, and culturally at the local and regional levels (Böhm 2023). Considering that cross-border cooperation is an important building block for European integration and that citizens are generally supportive of this, the voting behaviour in internal EU border regions is expected to be influenced by cross border cooperation, which in turn generates Europhile attitudes and a feeling of importance of Europe politics among those exposed to it.

2.2.2 Influence of border regions on Europhile attitudes

What kind of influence do border regions then truly have on EP elections? It can be assumed that border regions influence pro-EU attitudes as the border provides opportunities for increased interaction between Europeans which can have several consequences. One study demonstrated that residents of border regions are less likely to be Eurosceptic than residents of centre regions (Díez Medrano, 2003). These results are supported by Gabel (1998), who

discovered that inhabitants of border regions are considerably less Eurosceptic compared to the rest of the population. Additionally, residents on both sides of the French-German border are more accepting of European integration than the general populace (Schmidberger 1998). Kohli (2000) argues that border regions are especially prone to hybrid identities, European and national, owing to their complex and contradictory territorial ties, which fosters pro-European attitudes. These hybrid identities might be especially noticeable in border regions where individuals not only share a European identity but also a common regional identity that are woven into their identification not just with the larger Europe, but also the smaller cross-border regions. Anderson and Reichert (1995) suggest that living in EU border regions creates a source of opportunity which is expressed in pro-EU attitudes; their finding seems to support this argument by showing that cross-border trade has a positive effect on pro-EU values. Kuhn (2012a) expanded the reasoning behind the positive attitudes towards the EU arguing that there are two causal mechanisms of border region living. The first is the *utilitarian* argument, which holds that people rationally weigh the advantages of the Europeanization process. For instance, if cross-border integration raises the standard of life for residents in border regions, people's attitudes toward the EU will increase. Second, the *identitarian* argument is founded on the notion that connections among border communities lessen biases and encourage the development of transnational collective identities, which in turn entail favourable views of European unity. It needs to be noted though, that the utilitarian argument may also reveal a possibility for Euroscepticism in border regions, i.e., when there are no benefits of open borders for the individual, the individuals will not have pro-EU attitudes.

Consequently, the internal EU borders do not necessarily produce pro-European sentiments among the population. Effects that increase Euroscepticism can also be observed at internal EU borders. At the German-Polish border, EU policies to enhance political cooperation were met with right-wing activism in East German provinces (Döring 2007). Incentives brought forward by local politicians to increase border connectivity between the German-Polish twin city Guben/Gubin was met with citizens' anxieties, resentments, and prejudices towards European integration. The cultural differences become more apparent in border regions which adds to Euroscepticism in these regions (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen 2002). Additionally, the debordering, being the removal of the border as a strictly physical barrier (see Stetter 2005, Bonacker 2006, Albert & Brock 1996), in member states that joined the EU after 2004 has shown individuals the vulnerability of controlling one's borders only thirty years after

achieving it (Bürkner, 2020). Frustration and distrust of their “neighbours”, as well as hostility, were found to be prevalent along the borders of Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Germany, and France (Durand et al. 2020). Moreover, regions with high intensity flows between neighbouring regions do not always exhibit high levels of social trust among the people living there compared to border regions with lower intensity (Decoville & Durand 2019). According to a survey conducted in Switzerland, residents of border municipalities were more likely than non-border residents to declare their support for the limitation initiative, which attempts to end the freedom of migration with the EU (Bernhard & Lauener, 2023). Additional evidence from the Danish-German border suggests that Euroscepticism is more prevalent in the Danish border regions compared to the rest of Denmark (Klatt 2020). With the ongoing debate of whether or not border region living generally increases or decreases European attitudes, no final assessment can be undertaken. However, the literature seems to agree that border region living has a significant effect on perceiving the EU as an important actor, regardless of the pro- or anti-European stand within regions exposed to cross-border interactions. In other words, for border residents, European integration is an important policy issue.

2.3 European transactionalism and collective identity

Finally, the impact of increased interaction within border regions will be discussed and how border regions are places where cross-border interactions between individuals are more easily possible, as long as the boundaries are permeable. As was elaborated above, living in such an area could have a significant influence on voting behaviour in EP elections. It is therefore important to consider the effect such interactions can have on European citizens. This can be explained by Karl Deutsch’s (1957) transactionalism. As it emphasizes cross-border interactions in the creation of Europhile strata, this approach will be applied to border regions where interactions are more likely to occur and draws its conclusion from this and similar approaches on the voting patterns of European citizens in EP elections in border regions and beyond.

The chapter will also provide an overview of the European identity literature, i.e., what it is, how it is formed, how borders can contribute to it and what this means for voting behaviour in elections. Just as geographical location adds to identities that in turn influence national voting behaviour (see Bornschier et al. 2012, Ansolabehere & Puy 2016, Jasiewicz 2009),

internal EU border regions can add to the creation of a European identity, e.g. caused by reciprocal interactions between Europeans from both sides of a border. Similar to the transactional approach, the European identity literature suggests that cross-border interactions ultimately contribute to a pan-European identity which impacts voting behaviour.

2.3.1 Transactionalism and its effect on European values

As mentioned above, one significant theoretical concept in assessing whether regions differ in their voting behaviour is the idea of transactionalism as introduced by Karl W. Deutsch. Having grown up in Czechoslovakia, Deutsch fled Nazi Germany and witnessed the destructive influence of totalitarian regimes, which, in turn, fuelled his deep concern for interactions and transactionalism. He firmly believed that nurturing communication and mutual understanding among nations was crucial to averting conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence. While most of his approaches were centred around the creation of nation-states, his theories can also be expanded to the creation of a common European identity. The concept of transactionalism emphasizes cross-border interactions as a means to deepen connections between states and their citizens. It can be assumed that the more intense these interactions, the more positive the Europhile attitudes of those engaged or exposed to them. This relies on the notion that the discovery of shared values and attitudes across borders contributes to favourable perceptions of the other and can even promote a sense of belonging to one another. This thesis argues that internal border regions, as special places within the EU, have a unique position that promotes cross-border interactions. These interactions may then help to improve the perception of the EU as a champion of shared pan-European ideas and foster a sense of belonging to a European community, which in turn affects election decisions.

While it has been emphasized that interactions between citizens from multiple countries are central to the concept of transactionalism, for Deutsch (1964), these interactions must be institutionalised and intense to be effective. For example, to establish a security community on the European continent, Deutsch et al. (1957; 1964) supported the institutionalisation of increased cross-border interaction among its members by creating networks that foster transnational communication. More specifically, these transactions should encompass multiple aspects of the life of the individuals and not simply economic goods. Deutsch (1969: 102) argues that cross-border interactions: “(...) must cohere in many respects - in many

commodities, in the flow of labour, management, and capital, in economic structure, in education, in culture, in science, in politics, in intermarriages and migration, and in still other ways". He continues that interactions must not only be multifaced but also consistent meaning that the direction of these interactions is not opposed to each other. Certain main values should already be present within the societies that interact with each other so that the citizens that interact with each other are compatible for deepened interactions. Such main values found in 1950s Europe were democracy and constitutionalism (Deutsch, 1957: 123ff).

Another significant part of the interactions is communication, the main process by which people have come to share symbols and a feeling of common destiny. i.e., by communicating and exchanging information with each other over a prolonged period (Deutsch 1953a). Essentially, international interactions, may they be (Sangiovanni, 2006: 29) "(...) communication, migration, mutual services, military cooperation or even tourism, (...)” are processes in which the individual learns of the common values, creates a collective identity, and generates trust between the involved actors. As such, these processes represent the communication as envisioned in Deutsch’s earlier work. The EU lacks communication as the language barrier between citizens is still rather high, however, today’s EU does have an institutional foundation that promotes interactions and communication as envisioned by Deutsch. These include the Erasmus exchange program, interregional policies, especially in the border regions and the trans-European networks of infrastructure, among others.

Transactionalism further theorises that when international interactions between people from different nations exist and are plentiful and consistent, the individuals will discover shared values between them based on the perception that the interactions between them are beneficial (Rosamund 2000: 44). The more interactions take place the more important becomes this relationship between the individuals. The increased trust between the people on the other hand will also increase the interactions between them (Deutsch, 1964: 54). Deutsch et al. (1957) anticipated that these increased interactions would lead not only to a discovery of shared values and beliefs but ultimately form a common identity between the interacting individuals. As Deutsch remained rather vague about the mechanisms that invoke the “we-feeling” other scholars picked up on this approach. Anderson (1991) argues that through interactions across borders, individuals revalue who they consider to be part of their community. Jones and Van der Bijl (Jones & 2004:332) interpreted transactionalism as “the assumption that interaction

breeds familiarity, which in turn promotes the ‘we-feeling’ or attitudinal sympathy that Deutsch believed to be a key to success”. Therefore, cross-border interactions give rise to shared values and beliefs.

Deutsch (1957) extended his theory to explain the creation of a common community, something Deutsch dubbed *Gemeinschaft* after Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). In communities, people are bound to each other via cooperation, emotional bonds, and a sense of belonging whereas in societies people are held together by economic and individualistic aspects of human behaviour (Rosamund 2000: 44). Moreover, in a community, interactions have not just eliminated the possibility of war but have rather created a new environment in which the citizens of two or more states share common values instead. The newfound shared identity between citizens of different nations is caused by the inter-societal communication between them. Deutsch believed that international economic, cultural, and social contacts have an educational impact that fosters a feeling of community among the political leadership as well as the public. Similar values that emerge through cross-border encounters were observed by other early authors as well, who referred to this tendency as "we-feeling," "community," or "loyalty" (Ingelhart, 1977; Lindberg & Scheingold; 1970).

Furthermore, communities can evolve into what Deutsch et al. (1957) called “security communities”, as Deutsch was predisposed to creating settings that create peace. The concept of security communities describes political communities that make war impossible between countries. This is achieved by the advanced level of integration between two or more states on the societal level. A substantial number of transactions is a must for a strong feeling of community according to Deutsch, which produces empathy, loyalty, thoughtfulness, and sensitivity among the citizens of different countries (Deutsch 1969: 122, van Wagenen 1965). The attitude of citizens towards each other is more important in Deutsch’s approach to peace in a security community than the nation states’ decision-making, as he prioritizes interactions between individuals over interactions between the elites. These interactions must take place on a societal level as they are understood to be more sincere than comments made by government representatives. Even though the created security communities can take on a variety of forms, much as the relations of citizens across the nations, the result is the same - armed confrontation is rendered impossible by extensive societal transactions.

However, Deutsch (1953a: 170) pointed out that international interactions are layered in that citizens in the higher social strata will experience more international interactions compared to those in the medium and lower strata. While he made this argument in the context of nation-building, this can also be observed on a European level. Consequently, the impact of such interactions on voting behaviour in EP elections could also be very different depending on the societal standing. A few studies analysed the inequality of cross-border interactions with the EU. The parent's socioeconomic level affects how their child interacts internationally; individuals with greater socioeconomic status engage more often in transnational spaces (Kuhn 2012b). It was also discovered that persons with greater levels of education have a substantially deeper network of transnational attachment than do those with lower levels of education and the former therefore have a stronger attachment to Europe (Deutschmann et. al 2018). Access to study-abroad programmes did not decline in any country between the 2000s and 2010s, however, students with less advanced backgrounds are still less likely to have transnational experiences than other students (di Pietro 2020). In addition to Deutsch's focus on higher social strata, transnational experience also varies by gender: while men are more likely to travel internationally, conduct purchases internationally, and practice foreign languages for entertainment, women on the other hand are more likely to have transnational experiences in the virtual realm (Recchi & Favell 2019). Furthermore, transnational experiences are more likely to occur for younger citizens both physically and virtually as well as for those who know at least one additional language (Recchi & Favell 2019).

However, the internal border regions are likely able to diminish the cost of possible international interactions, e.g. because of proximity and cross-border cooperation and therefore increase cross-border interactions in these places for everybody, regardless of social strata, gender or age. In other words, the idea that interactions are layered caused by the resource cost of interactions can be disregarded in the sense that living close to a border significantly decreases the resource costs to interact with other people, thereby facilitating more frequent and diverse engagements between individuals from neighbouring countries.

Internal border regions in the EU thus diminish the time, financial, and physical constraints typically associated with cross-border interactions. They play a unique role in the concept of transactionalism as they can reduce some obstacles to cross-border interactions between people from different nations when they are open for citizens to freely transfer

between the two nations. As regions which are spatially close to other countries, hurdles to international interactions are expected more easily overcome such as ignorance or lack of knowledge, economic resources, and distance (Kuhn 2012b). Economic resources to interact are also decreased as the border crossing is made easier by the geographical closeness to the border. The time to travel to the other country is decreased as well. Given this, it is fair to assume that interaction between people and cross-border experiences, are more likely to occur at internal EU border regions. In turn their geographical proximity, cultural affinity, and reduced resource costs are expected to create opportunities for individuals to develop pro-European sentiments and contributing to the broader process of European integration. And finally, these developments are expected to have an impact on vote choice and turnout in European elections.

2.3.2 Collective European identity

Lastly, Deutsch's concept of transactionalism has already touched upon the idea of a community based on shared values discovered through interactions and it can be argued that such a community is a vital expression of a collective identity based on these values and interactions. In other words, it may be argued that there is a collective European identity and that it is an integral aspect of the social and political environment of the EU. This has various dimensions and ramifications. Firstly, such an identity is assumed to encompass a shared set of values and norms among citizens, shaping their identification with the EU and its institutions (Kaelbe 2009). While identity itself is complex, it is usually understood to be a construct under which people define themselves in relation to their beliefs, behaviours and attitudes (Samovar et al. 2013: 154). A collective identity delineates itself from personal identity in that it is derived from membership in larger, more impersonal collectives or social categories while personal identity is based on interpersonal relationships and personalized bonds of attachment (Brewer & Gardner 1996)., An example of personal identity would be "I am athletic" while a collective identity would be "I am Christian". Extending on this logic would implicate that people who identify as European fall under the definition of collective identity.

Before further delving into the concept of collective (European) identity, it is imperative to comprehensively examine and grasp the notion of collective identity as a foundational element. Understanding collective identity, which encapsulates shared values, beliefs, and

norms within a community (Shils 1975), lays the groundwork for a nuanced exploration and assessment of the intricate and evolving construct of European collective identity that helps us understand the differentiated voting behaviour in the internal EU border regions. The following section will thus examine collective identity's roots, highlighting its role in shaping European values and citizens' perceptions of the EU. After a short elaboration on European identity and its formation, the relationship between the two and the formation of a collective European identity will then be analysed. Finally, the chapter explores the impact of the permeability of internal EU borders and what it entails for the creation of a collective European identity. Lastly, it will be emphasised how a collective European identity relates to the main focus of this thesis, i.e., different voting behaviour in the internal European border regions, which potentially exists due to continuous cross-border interaction, and the borders as an object of identification as well as a place for European opportunities.

The notion of collective identity emphasizes emotional bonds and shared norms among citizens (Shils 1975). Kohli (2000) outlines that these collective identities draw from various social groups such as gender, ethnicity, and social class, shaping the overarching collective identity. Anderson (1991) adds to this concept, defining it as a sense of belonging among citizens even if they are not personally acquainted. McNamara (2020) contributes three observations: identities are interconnected, dynamic, and socially constructed. Importantly, these identities are not hierarchical and can evolve under different circumstances, integrating into broader social groups. The "marble-cake" model of collective European identity highlights individuals' possession of multiple identities, showcasing their context-dependent salience, challenging the idea that identification with one group negates identification with others, and thereby illustrating the complexity and contextuality of identities (Risse 2000). Despite debates questioning its relevance (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), collective identity remains vital for understanding societal action (Giesen 2002; Eder 2005). It plays a pivotal role in managing deep ethical values within communities (Walzer 2019).

A collective European Identity can be defined as a feeling of belonging among a specific group where there's a perceived legitimacy and credibility in collective decision-making that impacts everyone within that group (Bellamy & Castiglione 1998). This collective decision-making in European identity unveils the attachment to EU institutions and therefore elections, influencing attitudes toward the EU and voting behaviour. It elucidates individuals' affiliations

with European institutions, shedding light on their voting choices and motivations in the EP elections. A collective European identity that arises in the internal European border regions, due to reciprocal interactions and exposure to European policies, as discussed in the previous section, would play a significant role in impacting the voting behaviour of people residing in them. This is due to EP elections creating a singular context in which the collective European identity can be expressed, thereby impacting voter choice and likelihood to turn out and vote.

All in all, however, European identity often mirrors our understanding of national identity, rooted in a community shaped by the political construct of Europe, akin to the collective national identity associated with specific territorial affiliations (Kohli 2000). It is therefore worthwhile to consider the relevant national identity literature which delineates two prevailing forms of national identity: civic and ethnic nationalism. Civic national identity hinges on citizenship and embraces a legal-political system open to all, while ethnic national identity centres on shared cultural, religious, and ancestral ties typically acquired through birth or allegiance (Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010). When it comes to European identity, empirical studies predominantly align this European identity with civic interpretation, characterized by values of peace, tolerance, democracy, and cultural diversity (Green, 2007; Kufer, 2009; Risse, 2015). Nevertheless, Holmes (2009) introduces an ethnic dimension to European identity, contending that right-wing sentiments in Europe stem from a belief that Europeans, sharing Christian values and a common history, should exclude non-EU foreigners and immigrants. This suggests that those with ethnic-based national identities might project similar exclusions onto their European identity. Furthermore, and important to note for the focus of this thesis: while European identities coexist with national identities, uniting individuals and nations under shared values, the European identity often yields to the supremacy of the national identity (Bellow 2010).

While the collective European identity therefore comes in different variations with a more referenced civic form, the formation of a collective European identity is intricately linked to varying levels of exposure and interactions with the EU over which the EU has some agency. According to Bergbauer et al. (2018), the formation of a collective European identity is only possible if Europe itself becomes a category that citizens can identify with. Hence, they argue, Europe must become a tangible object for Europeans to observe and interact with. To achieve this, the EU has two strategies. The first is based on information and posits that the origin of

citizens' European identity can be traced to exposure to elite discourses and communications that construct the EU as an object of identification and a viable category for a collective identity (Fuchs 2011, Zaller, 1992). The second strategy is based on European experiences and posits that where citizens connect with other Europeans and/or European symbols, they will consciously recognise the shared norms, beliefs, and experiences that all Europeans share, thus creating a common European identity (Fuchs, 2011). With the level of information on the EU and the opportunity for interaction varying greatly between European citizens, it is to be expected that identification with the EU varies as well. Additionally, the increased politicisation and polarisation of the EU, since the enlargement to the East, has meant increased contestation with European institutions (Hutter & Grande 2014; Rauh & Zürn 2014; Risse 2015). Therefore, the increase in information and exposure to the EU has not necessarily meant an increased identification with the EU but has perhaps had the opposite effect, which could affect voter choice in EP elections.

It has been established above that individual views on the EU and European identity are influenced by several factors including interactions with people from different EU nations, which contributes to a greater sense of identification with the EU as these cross-national interactions increase. In the models proposed by Zaller (1992) and Fuchs (2011) public opinion and views towards the EU and European identity on the individual level are influenced by political knowledge, political predispositions, and everyday experiences. Everyday experiences with the EU occur when citizens with different nationalities interact with each other, this can be achieved in social, economic and/or cultural settings. These interactions are considered to be transnational as they transcend the state boundaries of nations and are perpetrated by non-state actors. Fuchs (2011) identifies these encounters as connected to the process of European identification based on experience as a determinant of public opinion in the EU. Hence, more European exchange would result in a greater sense of identification with the EU. This is due to individuals becoming increasingly conscious of the shared values, interests, and experiences with other EU citizens as cross-national interaction increases. As such the effect is likely to expand from the mere “we-feeling” of EU citizens into the European institutions where these identities are expressed in elections on the national and European levels. The individuals partake in a sense of belonging to a European community represented by the European Union, caused by European transnational experiences.

Empirical studies were able to examine the causal effects of cross-border interactions and experiences with the creation of a (collective) European identity, which links these transnational experiences of individuals in border regions to the development of European identity that is expected to impact voting behaviour. Transnationalism refers to the “(...) extent to which individuals are involved in cross-border interaction and mobility” (Mau et al. 2008: 2). Some studies attempted to demonstrate that interactions with other EU citizens are a driver for the creation of a common European identity. The most common transnational experiences and most researched are ERASMUS experiences. The analysis of these helps to contextualise how interactions with other Europeans might impact one's European collective Identity. A study on Erasmus students revealed that interactions with Europeans from other nations did moderately foster a stronger European identity, however, this was not the case for the ERASMUS experience itself as it did not increase student's European identity, likely due to a higher number of co-nationals in the host country (Sigalas, 2010). Data from the Eurobarometer, which indicates that persons with higher educational levels are more likely to have a European identification, was utilised by Flingstein (2008) to demonstrate how cross-border activities develop a European identity. Three-wave panel research on Erasmus students revealed that social interactions were a significant factor in the formation of European identity (Stoekel 2016). Another study on Erasmus students suggests that students who opt to participate are already more pro-European, however, former Erasmus students may also be more pro-European than their counterparts (Wilson 2011). Kuhn (2012b) refutes this claim by arguing that while most Erasmus students won't have a stronger connection to Europe following their exchange, this isn't true for those with lower levels of education who have transnational experiences, these tend to have a much stronger increase in European identity afterwards.

Building on everything above, EU internal border regions are thus ultimately paradoxical as they create a bridge of interaction even though borders are barriers by default. The openness of borders, however, plays a significant role in shaping European identities, as they are the institutional setting under which citizens from different nations engage with each other. As borders can be distinguished by their permeability, they have an impact on the creation of a collective identity. In their distinction between active borders which are increasingly permeable and passive borders, which are defined by their communication impermeability, Müller (2023) argues that rather than causing division and rejection, active borders can become platforms for

continuous communication and cooperation. This highlights how differentiation, or the recognition of differences, can be an important part of collective identity formation. In a similar vein, Delanty (2011) states that cultural encounters which do not undermine the distinctiveness from each other can lead to a cultural exchange that emphasises the unifying effect of diversity. Consequently, active borders, as discussed by Eder (2007) and Risse (2015), play an essential role in achieving the integrative function of borders by acting as soft, permeable boundaries. They function as communication networks shaped by shared experiences, remain permeable based on the willingness to engage in discourse and the presence of necessary cultural and institutional prerequisites on both sides, allowing them to enable communication with unfamiliar parties and the flexibility to open or close access points, all determined by the actors' readiness to embrace a shared discursive space and its implications (Müller 2023: 20).

A collective European identity formed in such internal border regions could have an impact on the voting behaviour in EP elections, where the European identity has an impact on party choice and the likelihood of tuning out to vote. Evidence from national collective identity and its forms has shown to have an impact on voting behaviour in national elections, where those that follow a civic collective identity are less likely to vote for a nationalist party while those that share ethnic identity are more likely to vote for a nationalist party (Mader et al. 2021). It is to be expected that this kind of election behaviour is also present in EP elections and with individuals who hold a collective European identity. Those who hold European identities have also been found to be more likely to turn out and vote in EP elections (Frogner 2002). A weak European identity within the United Kingdom has been associated with the outcome of the Brexit referendum, as those that have lower shares of European identity are more likely to vote Eurosceptic (Carl et al. 2019). Cross-border interaction at internal EU border regions that lead to a shared European Identity would therefore affect the voting behaviour of individuals.

The exploration of collective European identity within internal EU border regions unveils a complex interplay between shared values, interactions, and the impact on voting behaviour in European Parliament election. Rooted in the theoretical foundation of Deutsch's transactionalism, the thesis examines into the concept of a collective European identity, emphasizing its significance in the social and political milieu of the EU. The potential voting behaviour differences in internal EU border regions is laid by a complex understanding of collective identity, which includes shared values, beliefs, and customs. Voter choices and the

likelihood of turnout are significantly shaped by the dynamics of identity formation, which are influenced by cross-border interactions and exposure to European policies. Further the paradoxical nature of EU internal border regions, serving as both bridges of interaction and barriers, was illuminated. The permeability of borders, identified as active and fostering continuous communication, plays a vital role in shaping European identities. The formation of a collective European identity in these regions has the potential to impact voting behaviour, influencing party choices and turnout rates in EP elections, by supporting the European integration process (Dennison & Seddig 2020). Drawing parallels with national collective identity, the evidence suggests that a strong collective European identity is associated with pro-European voting tendencies and increased voter turnout (Frognier 2002, Carrillo-López 2018).

3 Hypotheses

The following chapter will delve into the potential mechanisms that are expected to impact voting behaviour within EU internal border regions. In light of the established literature mentioned above, it is understood that people who live in these regions have distinct daily experiences that set them apart from people who live elsewhere in the countries. The chapter formulates three hypotheses, each addressing specific facets of voting behaviour in the context of the 2019 EP election. The first hypothesis (H1) explores the pro-European and Eurosceptic voting tendencies within internal EU border regions, building on five identified mechanisms: *cross-border interactions, opportunities and risks, objects of identification, and collective (regional) identity*. The purpose of this hypothesis is to uncover if internal EU border regions tend to vote either more Europhile or Eurosceptic. The second hypothesis (H2) delves into the salience of European politics in internal EU border regions, investigating whether residents in these areas are more likely to vote for parties that consider EU integration an important policy issue. It will incorporate the causal mechanisms of *cross-border interactions, opportunities and risks, and common regional identity* on the perceived importance of EU politics in voting decisions. The third hypothesis (H3) examines the turnout rates in internal EU border regions compared to other EU regions, postulating that the distinctiveness of border living might translate into higher levels of civic engagement during EP elections. This hypothesis extends the examination to the participatory dimension of voting behaviour. By subdividing voting behaviour into three different variations the thesis is able to more accurately represent the effect of internal EU borders on voting behaviour.

3.1 Europhile voting in border regions:

As established by the literature, EU internal border regions are unique and the everyday experiences of citizens living there differ greatly from inhabitants in the heartland of the countries. Several potential causal mechanisms contribute to the first hypothesis and explain how border regions vote more pro-European than non-border regions. The thesis identified five different mechanisms that, while they might also exist within non-border regions, are more prevalent in border regions. These potential mechanisms are *cross-border interactions, opportunities and risks, objects of identification, and collective (regional) identity*. The hypotheses are based on the theoretical literature identified in the previous chapters and expand

and apply those theories to the spatially unique internal border regions of the European Union. The focus lies on the 2019 EP election for several reasons, as it is the most recent EP election, there was significant politicisation of the EU in the decade before the election and the election took place in all EU member states at roughly the same time (23-26 May 2019).

Individuals cross the border for multiple reasons which inevitably causes interactions between European citizens. As EU internal border regions are spaces of constant cross-border interactions between European citizens, shared values are more likely to be discovered through the residents' *cross-border interactions* are therefore central to much of the discussed literature as they lead to the discovery of such shared values, beliefs, and attitudes. It is to be expected that these discovered values, beliefs, and attitudes are expressed in European elections, where the pro-European values are reflected in Europhile voting behaviour. This is also due to the fact that border residents engage in regular exchanges that promote cultural and social integration which also highlight the tangible benefits of European integration, thereby strengthening their commitment to the European project and encouraging them to support pro-European candidates and policies in EP elections. Therefore, as the common (European) identities are built, the likelihood to vote for anti-EU parties decreases. Taken together, it is assumed that the likelihood for Europeans to vote for a pro-European party increases the more they interact with each other.

Opportunities are caused by the differences between the border regions and can be more effectively utilised by residents at the internal EU borders due to European-level policies of the four freedoms. In fact, cheaper prices and economic opportunities are one of the main motivations for cross-border interactions (Spiering & Van der Velde 2008). For example, border residents experience the benefits of European integration firsthand, as they can freely cross borders for work, study, shopping, or leisure. Moreover, border regions often have a higher level of economic interdependence, with businesses and jobs dependent on cross-border activities (Martinez 2002). As a result, residents are expected to be more inclined to support pro-European policies and candidates who promise to maintain open borders, ensure economic stability, and protect the advantages of EU membership. The tangible benefits of open borders make border residents more receptive to pro-EU narratives and more likely to vote in favour of European integration in elections due to the unique opportunities afforded by open internal EU borders. As the EU makes these opportunities possible, it is assumed that the individuals

identify the EU as responsible for them and will cast a vote that supports the EU on the European level.

Simultaneously, border residents living at internal EU borders are expected to be more likely to cast their votes in favour of pro-European parties and candidates, driven by the profound impact of open borders as an *object of identification*. These open borders symbolize the tangible manifestation of European integration, enabling individuals to traverse national boundaries freely for various purposes, including work, education, and leisure. The open border is shared between the individuals on both sides and European elections are a political event in which citizens from both sides of the border can express their political will. The EU represents not only the integration of the nations that has meant freedoms but also the promotion of common values between the individuals from both sites of the border. The (almost) non-existence of the border therefore creates a symbol that the residents spatially close to it identify with. These open borders become emblematic of shared values such as cooperation, tolerance, and cultural diversity. Consequently, border residents are expected to be more inclined to lend their support to pro-EU politicians and policies that safeguard the advantages of open borders and uphold the principles of European unity. It is assumed that the presence of open borders serves as a poignant reminder of the benefits of EU membership, making border regions particularly fertile ground for the cultivation of pro-European sentiments and corresponding voting behaviours.

Furthermore, border regions exhibit a distinctive feature in the form of *collective (regional) identities* that are intricately woven into the fabric of their local communities. These identities are the result of common traits, which include cultural, religious, and geographic components. They are frequently inextricably linked to the geographic closeness of these places. For instance, border residents who share a natural feature such as a river, forest or mountain range can readily identify common cultural elements associated with it, further reinforcing their sense of shared identity (Paasi 2003, Newmann 2016). Citizens at the Portugues-Spanish border might find themselves linked to each other via the connection of the Atlantic Ocean which serves as a spot for activities such as fishing, sailing and surfing which in turn fosters a beach-centric regional identity. What sets border regions apart is that the cultural differences among their residents tend to be less pronounced compared to those residing in the heartland, as the proximity and continuous interaction between these

communities contribute to cultural convergence (Laven & Baycroft 2008). Consequently, border residents might find a profound sense of identification with each other and the political construct that connects them - the European Union. This heightened sense of regional identity could play a pivotal role in driving pro-European voting patterns within border regions, as residents view the EU as a mechanism that not only recognizes but also celebrates their unique regional identities and promotes cooperation and integration across borders.

Considering these potential mechanisms, the first hypothesis is the following:

H1: Internal EU border regions exhibit higher levels of pro-European voting than other EU regions in the 2019 European Parliament election.

3.2 The salience of European politics in EU internal border regions

While testing the first hypothesis would deepen our knowledge of EU issue-related voting behaviour at the internal EU borders, it only draws part of a picture. Although pro-EU parties might receive more votes at the internal EU borders, this does not necessarily mean that citizens who vote in border regions have EU-related issues in mind when voting. It is therefore important to understand the motivation behind voting choices in internal border regions. The second hypothesis clears up the picture and would allow us to understand if EU integration itself is a policy issue that EU internal border residents consider in their voting decisions. The second hypothesis follows some of the mechanisms mentioned above to explain why border citizens are expected to vote for parties that consider EU politics as more important than the first hypothesis, these being interactions, *opportunities*, and common (regional) *identity*.

As people are more likely to have *interactions* with each other people in border regions, they are more likely to use the four freedoms, and, depending on their experience with people from the other side of the border, they are either in favour or against those freedoms. Either way, they will identify European policies are an important driver for their experience. Similarly, *opportunities* are given to the electorate via the European integration process, which is assumed to make EU policy more salient to the electorate. While *opportunities* would generally foster a pro-European vote, the border also inhabit certain *risks* that are associated with it, they come in fears of the border residents that citizens are left alone in the changing nature of the border (Kollmorgen 2020) as well as a fear of being left behind economically

(Galasiński & Meinhof 2002). Finally, the individual's identity can be challenged by the emergence of a common European space in the border regions, which does not necessarily mean that those exposed to it will identify with the EU – those that are exposed to the EU might also start othering themselves from it. Crucially though, the EU remains the political arena that these identities are challenged by, therefore it is expected that they will vote for a party with a strong EU stance, whether positive or negative.

Consequently, for individuals at the internal EU border, the EU plays an important role in policymaking that affects their lives. The EU's decision-making has a direct impact not only on one's own country, however, but on the directly neighbouring country as well. Therefore, EU politics is expected to have higher levels of salience for the internal EU border population. For non-border residents, national politics are expected to be the primary motivator for decision-making as they are not as exposed to the EU's policies. Specifically, in the national arena, the border populations are not capable of changing much of the politics on the other side of the border. However, citizens in border regions have an interest in their surroundings, and EP elections allow those citizens to have a say in some policy areas. Therefore, the individuals have a rational interest in voting for a party with a strong stance on European politics, be it either pro- EU- integration, anti-EU integration or anything in between. Internal EU borders are also symbolic, as they are the place in which the citizens can freely exercise the rights given to them via the European integration process. This symbolism is also expected to have an impact on the voting behaviour of European citizens as it is assumed that those that are exposed to it are more likely to consider the European integration process as important.

Considering the impact that the border has on the electorate the second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Internal EU border regions exhibit a higher share of votes for parties that consider EU integration an important policy issue compared to other EU regions.

Similarly, to the concept of the salience of European politics, turnout would also be affected by border region living. As European politics are assumed to be more observable and tangible in internal EU border regions the elections themselves which will influence the European politics in these regions become more important. The internal EU border residents are therefore expected to be more aware of this compared to the rest of their countries. This would mean that

the second-order election effect in border regions is less pronounced. Considering that the effects that make EP elections more salient, as described for the potential mechanisms in H2, can also be expanded to the turnout rate of EP elections a third Hypothesis is formulated.

H3: Internal EU border regions exhibit higher turnout rates compared to other EU regions.

To provide a thorough understanding of the complex dynamics at play, voting behaviour in internal EU border regions during the 2019 European Parliament election is analysed using three distinct hypotheses. Each hypothesis delves into distinct facets of voting behaviour, thereby presenting an examination of how residents in these regions engage with the electoral process. The first hypothesis, focusing on voter decisions regarding their position towards the European integration process, addresses the core aspect of Europhile or Eurosceptic tendencies. Thereby creating a foundation to understand voting behaviour in regard to the general attitudes of internal EU border residents towards the EU. The second hypothesis, examining the importance of European politics to the electorate reflected in party choices, adds depth by considering the salience of EU-related matters in the voting decisions of border region residents. This allows to create greater insight into EU internal border residents and the general importance they display in elections when it comes to European integration. Finally, the third hypothesis, centred on voter turnout rates, probes into the participatory dimension, assessing whether internal EU border regions exhibit distinctive levels of civic engagement during EP elections. Collectively, these three hypotheses create a framework for scrutinizing voting behaviour, offering different perspectives that contributes to answering the overarching research question on the extent of differences between regions on EU internal borders and non-border regions in terms of voter turnout and vote choice in the 2019 European Parliament election.

Voting behaviour in European parliament elections being the main dependent variable is thereby defined as the voting behaviour regarding the policy issue of European integration and the likelihood to turn out and vote. The voting behaviour regarding the position of European politics is divided into two underlying areas, the first being the evaluation of the European integration process and to which degree it is seen as a positive or negative development. The second is the importance of European politics to the electorate and the degree to which people consider the European integration process an important policy issue in EP elections. This

distinction is vital as it allows for a more detailed analysis of the voting behaviour regarding European policies. While a person might not vote in favour of European integration, they might do so with a strong urge to directly impact the European integration process, hence considering European integration an important issue, while simultaneously being against European integration.

4 Research design

The method to test the hypotheses is to use a large-N approach that uses sub-national data from as many EU countries as possible to compare the difference in voting behaviour between the internal EU border regions and the other parts of the respective countries. There are three advantages to using large-N models: the results have high external validity and are therefore generalisable, the research design will be able to answer the research question accurately and the approach will have a high level of control over the independent variables, which according to Kerlinger (1966) makes this large-N approaches a suitable research design to accurately answer the research question. Data for this study will be pooled from various sources to calculate the dependent variables of the individual position on European politics for each of the sub-national regions based on the results from the 2019 EP election.

The dependent variables are based on the voting behaviour of sub-national regions and are as follows:

H1: the position towards European integration based on the parties that were voted for in the 2019 EP election within a given region.

H2: the salience of European politics based on the parties that were voted for in the 2019 EP election within a given region.

H3: the turnout levels in the 2019 EP election within a given region.

The independent variables are the location of the regions, meaning that they are either internal EU border regions or not. In addition to the independent variables, the models will include control variables that have been found to impact voting behaviour such as age and education. Using these variables will allow the thesis to explain the differences in voting behaviour based on the geographic component of the border. A separate regression will be run for each of the three hypotheses and thereby answer separate parts of the research question. The sources to operationalise these voting behaviour variables (position towards European integration, salience of European politics of the parties voted for and turnout) will be available election data on a smaller sub-national level from the European NUTS-Level Election Database (EU-NED) and a survey data on the political positions of each of the parties. The section on

operationalisation will expand the collection methods for the dependent variables via a survey and election databases.

The analysis will employ a multi-level research design able to control for country-level differences. Multi-level regression analysis offers several advantages when exploring the differences in voter turnout and vote choice between regions on EU internal borders and non-border regions in the 2019 EP election. Firstly, it accommodates the hierarchical structure of the data, allowing for the inclusion of nested levels within the analysis. As this encompasses regions nested within countries, this method is ideal for handling these nested structures. Additionally, this approach enables the examination of regional-level predictors, offering an understanding of how different factors influence voter behaviour. By incorporating regional characteristics (such as demographics, socio-economic environment, and border region status) a multi-level regression analysis facilitates an examination of the possible factors contributing to variations in voter turnout and vote choice across different regions. Overall, the multi-level regression analysis presents a robust framework for disentangling the complexities underlying voter behaviour across diverse regional contexts in the context of the 2019 EP election.

The selection of the 2019 EP elections as a case to explore the variance in voting behaviour between border and non-border regions is underpinned by several factors. Firstly, EP elections are relevant as they are the only pan-European elections which allow the creation of a comparison across nations, further, the election was held between 23 and 26 May 2019 (four days), which means that all member states were exposed to a similar political background as opposed to using national elections which may be held years apart under completely different circumstances. The 2019 EP election is also the most recent. Moreover, the 2019 EP elections witnessed an intense buildup, with European issues become an important factor due to several crisis such as the Brexit referendum and the migration crisis. Further, the data availability of the 2019 election is larger than that of previous elections. Hence, selecting the 2019 EP elections as a focal point for scrutinizing the voting behaviour in border and non-border regions not only captures the most recent electoral dynamics but also harnesses a wealth of available data, thereby enriching the analytical model and the insights drawn from it.

As proposed above, the analytical framework adopts a multi-level analysis, leveraging the Restricted Maximum Likelihood (REML) methodology to probe variations in voter turnout

and vote choice across EU internal border regions in the 2019 European Parliament election. An REML model, applied in the context of linear mixed-effects models, is a statistical method that not only estimates fixed effects and random effects within a linear framework but also provides unbiased estimates of variance components by considering the likelihood of the observed data while accounting for both fixed and random effects. REML models are one of the most widespread estimators in political science and have some of the superior properties compared to similar estimation models (see Bryan & Jenkins 2016). Since REML estimates the variance components after removing the fixed effects from the model, the results are less biased compared to another widespread method like the Full Maximum Likelihood estimates. Additionally, REML estimates are considered more realistic and less biased compared to FML estimates, as they do not ignore the degrees of freedom lost by estimating the fixed effects (Hox & Schoot 2017: Chapter 3). Importantly REML models provide less biased estimates of variance components, especially when the number of groups is small (Hox & Schoot 2017: Chapter 3 and 6)

This is why REML was chosen for its adeptness in handling smaller level-two datasets as it accommodates substantial dissimilarities among countries, especially in the distribution of regions (see Hox & Schoot 2017). Level-two datasets are datasets in which certain data is nested in the structure of another. In this case of this thesis the level one data are the NUTS 3 regions within the countries, while the level two data are the EU member states. The data used in this thesis does have a smaller level two data frames with 19 countries representing level two. This method proves crucial, since, even when considering the intricate nested data structures and country-specific contexts of the EU, it allows for an exploration of regional dynamics while simultaneously discerning overarching election patterns. REML's application within linear mixed models is paramount, simultaneously estimating variance components and fixed effects parameters. In this case, it elucidates variances within and between countries, accounting for distinct regional dynamics influencing voter behaviour. The thesis employs REML's strength in accommodating unbalanced datasets, vital due to varying internal border region distributions across countries. As the primary focus is on understanding variability across countries, REML's capability to estimate variance components aligns with the research question's intent, augmenting the investigation by considering country-specific influences on electoral behaviour in internal border regions.

4.1 Data and operationalisation of variables

To test the hypotheses, data from multiple sources is used, including election data, ranking of European parties on their EU positions and border region data. The following chapter will introduce the data sources and discuss their reliability and validity. As data is pooled from different sources, not all the available data fits neatly into the chosen subnational levels, i.e., there are certain limitations to the data which will decrease the validity of some of the sources. The next section will therefore address these limitations and how they have been solved. It will explain how the data has been chosen and how the dependent variables of European voting behaviour and the independent variable of internal EU border regions have been operationalised. Additionally, the chapter will focus on the creation of a new dataset that can compare the different positions on European integration between regions while also accounting for a wide spectrum of the cast votes in the 2019 EP election.

Specifically, to be able to run the regressions, a dataset will be created based on different sources and which will serve as the primary tool to test the hypotheses. The data is sourced from the 2019 Chapel-Hill Expert Survey (CHES) on, among others, the European positions of political parties on European integration as well as the importance of European integration as a policy issue. Data is also taken from the EU-NED which provides sub-national election data. These two data sources will be combined to allow for the accurate calculation of the positions on European politics and turnout, which are the main dependent variables. Control variable data will be taken from official statistical releases including Eurostat and the official database of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD.Stat). The data will therefore be comprised of secondary data that has been collected and prepared by others. While the sources are reliable as the method of collection has been consistently captured by the statistical bureaus, there are some limitations due to data availability which decreases the reliability of the data. This will be discussed in the following section and the section on control variables.

Internal EU border regions, which is the independent variable, has been conceptualised as the subnational regions within EU-member states that are directly adjacent to other EU member states and adhere to *Nomenclature des Unités territoriales statistiques* (NUTS). The EU's area is split into three hierarchical geographical categorizations, referred to as NUTS-1,

NUTS-2, and NUTS-3, NUTS-3 level represents the smallest of these categorisations and the population of NUTS-3 regions is generally between 150,000 and 800,000 inhabitants. The EU consists of 1,164 of these regions, which makes cross-border statistical comparisons of EU areas possible (Eurostat 2023), however as data is not available for all countries and regions the dataset has been decreased to 1060 NUTS-3 regions from 19 countries, this will be further explained below.

These border variables will be coded as either an internal EU border region or non-border region, making the border variables dichotomous. It needs to be kept in mind that borders come in very different forms. While the variables include a border between Denmark and Sweden where a bridge has been constructed to connect these two countries, sea borders will not be considered, since the ability to cross to another country is severely limited to water and air travel. On the other hand, enclaves that are coded as NUTS 3 regions and, while not directly adjacent to another EU member state, are surrounded by NUTS 3 regions which border another EU member state, will be coded as border regions, since they often represent the urban centre of the surrounding area and are therefore not distinct in their experience with the border. Such as the city of Cottbus which is located near the German-Polish border, but completely enclaved by the NUTS region of Spree-Neiße meaning it does not border Poland directly, still the city has been coded as an internal EU border- regions (Appendix 1). Given these criteria, out of the 1060 NUTS 3 regions that are used in this thesis, 264 have been coded as internal EU-border regions. Some countries that were excluded from the analysis are therefore Cyprus, Malta, and Ireland since they do not share a land border with another EU country. Further Luxemburg was excluded too as it only has one NUTS-3 region, making the model that compared two or more regions within one country impossible. And similarly, Slovakia and Latvia were removed from the models since they only have NUTS 3 regions, which would be classed as internal EU border regions, making a comparison of border and non-border regions unfeasible.

The election data comes from the EU-NED, which provides the election data for the 2019 EP election. This published data includes the number of votes cast for each party, the number of registered voters/electorates in the region, the number of total votes and the number of valid votes cast in the region. Using this data, the percentage each party received as well as the turnout within a given region can be calculated, making the data useful to test the hypotheses. The data is published on all NUTS levels, with some country exceptions (Schraff et. al, 2022).

It therefore allows for the comparison of the election results among a vast amount of territory, including the internal border regions with which this thesis is concerned. The data EU-NED provides is directly pulled from national publications, which makes it both reliable and valid. Some countries were excluded from the analysis due to data availability issues or due to the operationalisation of internal-Eu border regions. Belgium and Slovenia were excluded as data on the NUTS 3 level from EU-NED was not available for them. With the exclusion of Cyprus, Malta, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Latvia, Belgium and Slovenia, the analysis is left with 19 EU member states.

Finally, data to calculate the stance on European politics of parties, which is used to test the dependent variables of H1 and H2, was collected from the CHES. The survey, conducted by Jolly et al. (2022: 1) "... contains measures of national party positioning on European integration, ideology, and several European Union (EU) and non-EU policies for six waves of the survey, from 1999 to 2019". 421 specialists with expertise in political parties and European politics were questioned on the positions of a total of 277 European parties between February and May 2020. However, this is not an exhaustive list of all European parties. The interviews include the question about the overall position of the EU, with the answers ranging between 1 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly in favour), as well as a question on the salience of the EU party's official position on European integration which ranged between 0 (European Integration is of no importance) and 10 (European Integration is of great importance). The number of experts combined with the questionnaire makes the 2019 CHES a reliable and valid source for the calculation of party positions on European integration and the importance of European integration to the party.

Using the rankings on EU position and EU salience from the CHES of the parties combined with EU-NED data allows for an accurate calculation of the position of each NUTS-3 region with the available data. To calculate the EU positions of the regions, a simple formula was used which combines the ranking of the EU position from the CHES with the share of votes a party received, creating a weighted position on EU integration by the parties that citizens voted for within a given region, as well as the weighted salience on EU integration by the parties in the given region. Since the EP elections are often contested by coalitions between multiple parties, coding was difficult as the Chapel Hill expert survey ranked parties, while the EU-NED dataset displays coalitions.

Coalitions in EP elections consist of multiple parties that are combined on the ballot. To overcome this problem, the biggest party, as well as the main candidate for the election, were chosen to calculate the ranking. This is due to the fact that often, coalitions would consist of parties that have one significantly larger partner, it can be assumed that the voter chooses to be represented by the larger party as it is likely the more prominent factor in voter choice. Additionally, it is to be expected that a coalition of parties is ideologically close to each other and therefore would have an inconsequential impact on the formula used to calculate the position of a NUTS 3 region. While this solution is not perfect, it allows for a broad and still highly accurate calculation of the EU positions. For example, the party Platforma Obywatelska (PO) in Poland was part of the coalition Koalicja Europejska², who jointly appeared on the ballot, however CHES data is not available for the coalition but only for the parties within that coalition, hence the decision had to be made on how to code the party. In this case the coalition Koalicja Europejska was coded according to the party position of the PO. (See Appendix B).

The weighted electoral EU Position of a NUTS 3 region is calculated using the following formula:

$$P_o = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (V_i \cdot P_i)}{\sum_{k=1}^n (V_k)}$$

Where: Po – Weighted electoral EU Position

V – Vote share of party P

P – EU Position of the party taken from the CHES

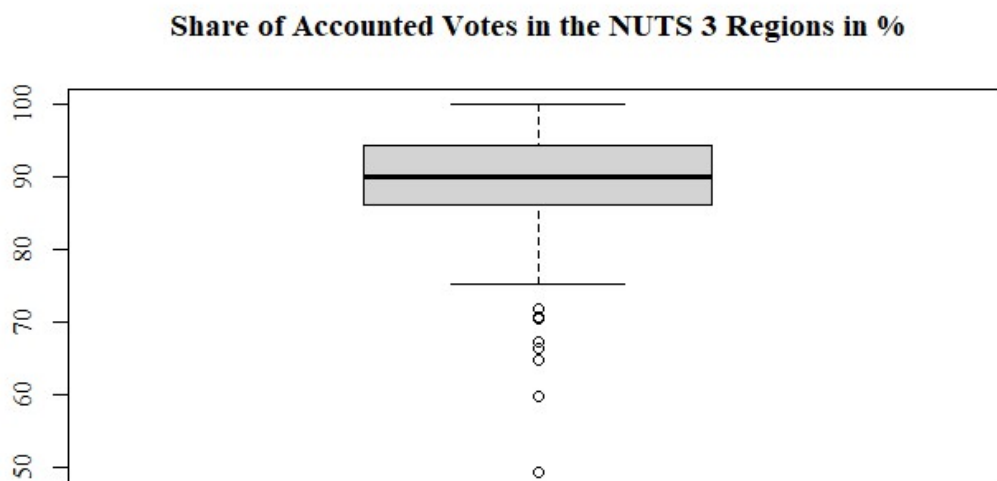
n – number of parties

This calculation offers a comprehensive representation of the region's voting behaviour by including the average voting patterns across parties, in contrast to other methods that focus

² The Coalition consisted of the parties: Platforma Obywatelska, Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, Nowoczesna and Partia Zielon

on specific parties. It therefore provides a more accurate overview of electoral decisions within a given region. Studies on Eurosceptic voting behaviour have often concentrated on populist and Eurosceptic parties (Nasr & Rieger 2023), but this data is limited, and a more thorough understanding of voting behaviour can be achieved by considering all parties. In total an average of 90.22% of votes are accounted for by using this method, therefore creating a good outline of the electorates' decision-making in voter choice and giving a comprehensive overview of the voting behaviour within a NUTS 3 region (Figure 2). Using this method also allows the creation of a continuous variable making it aptly suited for the proposed regression analysis, with all regions having different voting behaviour values.

Figure 1: Share of accounted votes used to calculate the weighted electoral EU Position for the NUTS3 regions (in %).



The calculation for the average position of the parties voted for within a NUTS 3 region is hindered by data availability, more specifically, not all parties that gathered votes are ranked by the CHES. Thus, there is a problem with the votes that are accounted for within the regions, i.e. a lack of data used to ascertain the parties positioning, which in turn reduces the validity of the used data. While for most regions the accounted votes are between 85% and 95%, some regions are outliers and have lower shares of accounted votes (Figure 2). In Greece the Muslim minority party *Party of Friendship, Equality and Peace* was not ranked in the Chapel-Hill expert survey but received significant support in the border regions of Xanthi and Rodopi

where they managed to secure 25.24% and 38% of the votes respectively. In Croatia the independent candidates were also able to secure notable vote shares ranging between 9.94% in Medimurska Zupanija and 21.58% in Sisacko-Moslavacka Zupanija, thus regions in Croatia struggle with the same validity problem. The regions were still included in the analysis as most votes are still accounted for and therefore the validity problem diminished. In Italy, in the region of Valle d'Aosta/Vallee D'aoste, the party *Autonomie per l'Europa* received 13.85% of the votes, the party is regional and was only up for election in that region. As the party had an agreement with the *Partito Democratico* (PD) (Ventrice 2021), this party's ranking was used for the calculation of EU position and salience instead. Additionally, vote shares from overseas regions as well as foreign votes were excluded and only the regions on the European continent are represented in the study. This is because these regions are outliers in their European experiences, and their subsequent voting behaviour. Moreover, their parties are often not ranked by the CHES. Consequently, using this approach allows the focus of the study to be narrower on the difference between core regions and border regions, as overseas territories do not neatly fit into these categories.

Overall, the statistical models employed in this study demonstrate considerable robustness, benefiting from a wealth of data, pertinent control variables, careful data selection, and thus its generalizability. Despite these strengths, certain assumptions within the model present limitations. Most importantly, the statistical models used in this thesis treat all internal EU border regions as equal, this presents a problem as border regions are within the EU differ from one another, for example based on the membership of EU member states in the Schengen agreement. Further certain border characteristics such as border permeability and the intensity of interactions within these regions are ignored. This omission is deliberate, as the hypotheses rely on mechanisms as described like cross-border interactions, opportunities, objects of identification, and shared regional identity, presuming these aspects to be more pronounced in border regions and therefore more impactful. Consequently, the model's design omits specific considerations of border nuances and interaction levels within these delineated areas, focusing instead on contrasting border regions against their non-border counterparts to explore their distinctive voting behaviours.

4.2 Control variables

To better understand the true nature of the effects of the independent variables of European border regions on the dependent variable of voting behaviour in EP elections, an array of control variables was chosen within the REML models. This includes the median age, economic development, population density, education, and the unemployment rate of the NUTS 3 regions. The control variables are presented in this order due to their data availability on the NUTS 3 level. As age has been proven to be a significant factor in voting behaviour (e.g., Bahtti & Hansen 2012, Dassonneville 2017), it will be used as a control variable. and is operationalised as the median age of each NUTS 3 region. The median age was chosen instead of the mean since the mean can be skewed by outliers like centenarians, and the median offers a more reliable overview of a population's age distribution. Since the median age differs between regions, it could therefore have a significant effect on a region's voting behaviour.

Economic development has been proven to have an impact on voting behaviour in EP elections (e.g., Bartkowska & Tiemann 2015), hence this analysis includes it as a control variable as well. It was decided that GDP per capita will be included as a measure of economic development within the regions since it is comparable, reflects the economic status of a region, provides broad socioeconomic context as well and data is available on the NUTS 3 level. GDP per Capita will not be logged, as population density was chosen as a measure for the effects that urban and rural areas might have on voting patterns seeing as these have been shown to have an effect before (e.g., Marcinkiewicz 2018). Population density can measure these effects as it directly connects to the urbanisation of a NUTS3 region. Specifically, NUTS 3 regions are measured on population and not landmass and therefore population density can be used as a measure of urbanisation of a region. This can influence voting behaviour as population density reflects the urban-rural divide. Regions with varying population densities could exhibit distinct cultural and social dynamics, higher population density areas could have different policy priorities and population density could influence the level of social interactions and community engagement. It was therefore used as third control variable alongside age and GDP per capita. Education was added as a control variable as it has been proven to significantly impact voting behaviour across multiple elections (e.g., Inkinen & Saari 2019). Education was operationalised as the percentage of the population that has tertiary education. Further another important socio-economic variable that is included in the models is unemployment, which has

been proven to impact voting behaviour (Kousser 2004), by for example decreasing the likelihood to turn out and vote (Fiorino & Pontarollo 2016). It is operationalised as the percentage of unemployed citizens of the labour force of the 15 to 64-year-olds within a given region.

With all the control variables education and unemployment data available on the NUTS 3 regions was an issue and was resolved by disaggregating the data. Since data on education on the NUTS 3 level is only readily available for Estonia, the NUTS 2 level was used. NUTS 2 level represents a region in Europe with 800,000 to 3 million inhabitants. The data was pooled from the OECD.Stat for most countries besides Romania and some parts of France, here Eurostat data was used. Data on the unemployment rates is available from the OECD.Stat on the NUTS 3 level for the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia and Sweden, the other countries only have data available on the NUTS 2 level and was operationalised as the unemployment rate of the labour force of the 15 to 64-year-olds. Data on the unemployment rates for Denmark, Greece and Croatia were not available on OECD.Stat and was therefore pooled from the Eurostat databank, here the unemployment was coded as the labour force of the 20 to 64-year-olds within a given region. Unfortunately, the data is coded differently which represents a reliability issue, however as 15–20-year-olds represent only a small part of the total population, the impact of this age group is only minimal. Additionally, the models will employ a multi-level analysis which itself already accounts for national differences^{3 4}.

The decision to utilize the limited data available on the NUTS-2 regions as control variables in the thesis stems from multiple considerations. Firstly, extensive prior research has consistently demonstrated a significant impact of these variables on voting behaviour. Omitting them from the regression models would leave a critical gap, rendering the analysis incomplete, skewing the understanding of the influencing factors. Second, given that there are 242 NUTS-2 regions in the EU, NUTS-2 regions still have a good level of regionality to them making them useful for the sub-national analysis. This number of individual regions enables a nuanced

³ The Åland island group in Finland did not have any published data in Eurostat or the OECD and therefore the national average was used.

⁴ For an overview of all variables see Table 1

analysis that captures broader trends, providing valuable insights into the variations influencing voting behaviour across these regions. Moreover, the thesis aspires to construct a comprehensive and robust regression analysis. Incorporating the available NUTS 2 data for control variables aligns with this ambition, allowing for the utilization of as much significant data as possible to create a more meaningful and comprehensive understanding of the determinants of voting behaviour in EP elections. Finally, by leveraging the accessible NUTS 2 data for control variables, the thesis aims to mitigate limitations imposed by data scarcity. This approach optimizes the available resources, maximizing the meaningfulness and depth of the regression analysis despite constraints posed by the limited data availability at the NUTS 3 level.

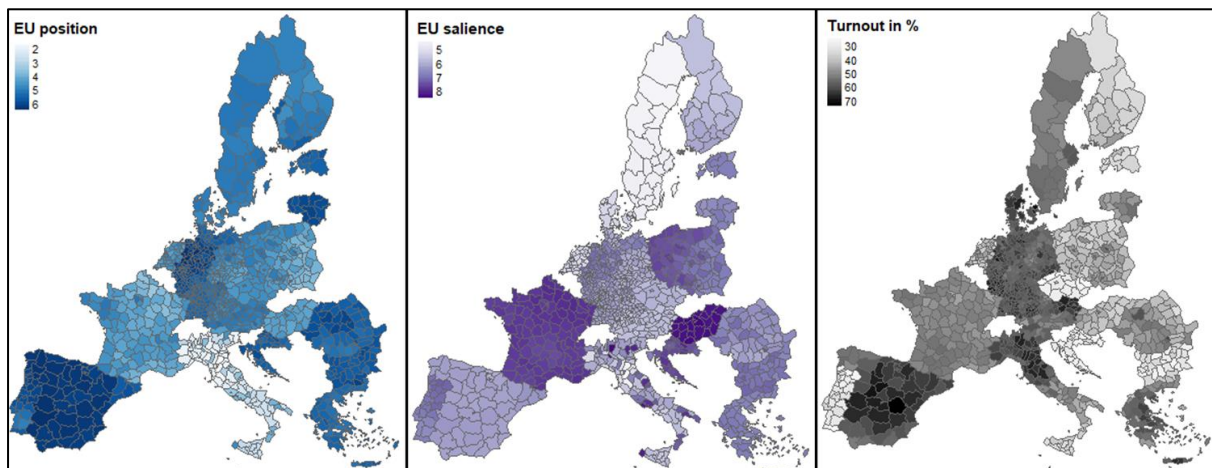
Table 1: Overview of the used variables in regression models 1 to 3

Variable	Measures	Coding	Source	Variable type	Role of Variable
Border regions	Adjacency to another EU member state	0 = not an Internal EU border region 1 = Internal EU border region	By Author	Dichotomous	Independent variable
Position on European integration by parties voted for	Weighted position of NUTS 3 regions	See Formula (page 44)	CHES and EU Ned	Continuous	Dependent variable for Model 1
The policy salience of European integration by parties voted for	Weighted position of NUTS 3 regions	See Formula (page 44)	CHES and EU Ned	Continuous	Dependent variable for Model 2
Turnout	Turnout	% of the electorate that cast a valid vote	EU Ned	Continuous	Dependent variable For Model 3
Age	Median age	Median age	Eurostat	Continuous	Control variable
Economic development	GDP per Capita in Euro	GDP per Capita in Euro	Eurostat	Continuous	Control variable
Population density	Population density	Amount of people per square km	Eurostat	Continuous	Control variable
Education	The population that has received higher education	Percentage of the population that has tertiary education in the age group 25-64	OECD.Stat/Eurostat	Continuous	Control variable
Unemployment	Unemployment rate	Percentage of unemployed citizens of the labour force of the 15 to 64-year-olds	OECD.Stat/Eurostat	Continuous	Control variable

5 Results

To improve the robustness of the statistical models' certain changes to the models and the data had to be made before the results of them could be analysed. Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality on both the original and log-transformed variables were run to see which version of the control variables should be included in the models. The results showed that GDP per capita and unemployment had to be logged (Appendix 3). Hence the logged versions were included in the models. Additionally multiple models were run to see if the goodness of fit could be improved of the model by excluding certain variables (Appendix 4). This was done using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the (BIC) as well as the log-likelihood which are measures of how well a statistical model explains the observed data. A lower BIC and AIC value indicates a better-fitting model. Log likelihood, it quantifies the likelihood of observing the given data under the assumptions of the model. In the context of model comparison, a higher log-likelihood value indicates a better fit to the data.

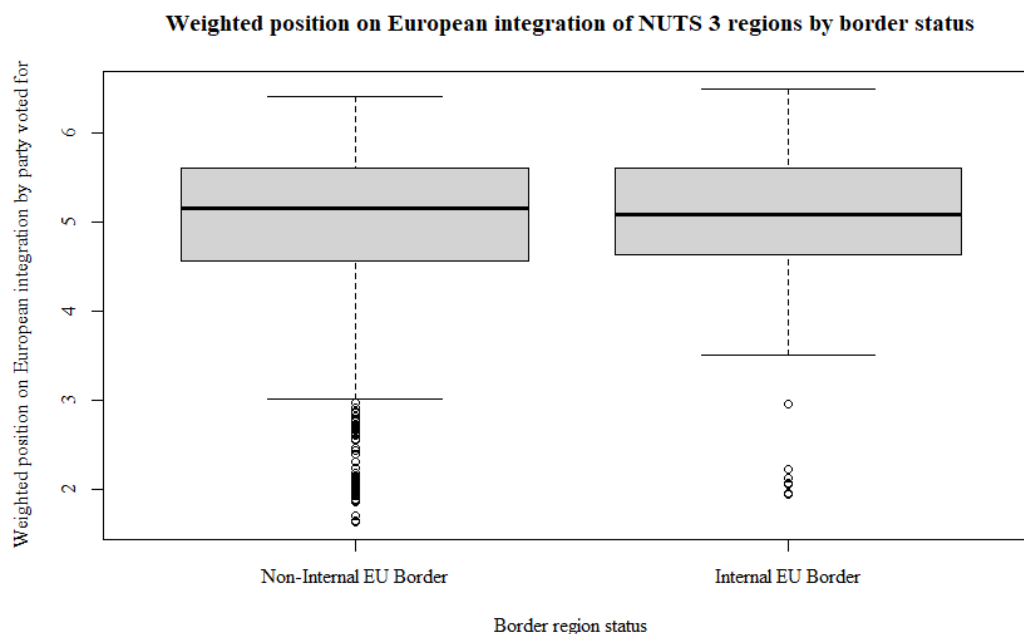
Map 2: NUTS 3 Regions and their voting behaviour in turns of European position, salience of European politics and turnout rates.



For the regression testing if internal EU border has an impact on position of the electoral position towards European integration (H1), the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) of all tested models was roughly the same ranging between 1,319.086 and 1,338.953 (Appendix 4). Similarly, the BIC was in roughly the same range, ranging from 1,383.648 and 1,348.738

(Appendix 4). Also, the log-likelihood was within a similar range (-652.543 to -660.477). Further and more importantly the effects of the border regions on Europhile or Eurosceptic voting behaviour did only become significant in one model become, however this model only included logged GDP per capita as a control variable and thus ignores many aspects that could impact voting behaviour. Therefore, it was decided to use the results of Model 1 as the main point of reference for the hypothesis. For the regression testing if internal EU border exhibits different voting behaviour in terms of the importance of European politics of the parties that were voted for in the elections the AIC and BIC showed a strong preference for Model 2, by being significantly lower than in the other models (Table 3, Appendix 4). Also, the log Likelihood was higher than in the other models, meaning that it is a better fit. Hence Model 2 (Table 3) was chosen as the main point of reference for the hypothesis. Finally for regression three with tested if internal border regions have different turnout levels compared to non-internal EU border regions it was decided to use Model 3, which excludes population density to have a better goodness of fit as measured by AIC and BIC.

Figure 2: Boxplot on the position on European integration



The results of the first REML regression, testing H1, i.e. the impact of border region living on pro-European voting revealed notable insights (Map 2, Table 2, Figure 2). The analysis indicates a negative impact of border region living on Europhile voting behaviour; however,

this effect lacks statistical significance ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that residing in border regions does not significantly influence Europhile nor Eurosceptic voting tendencies. A significant effect is observed for Population Density ($p < 0.05$), indicating that higher population densities are associated with a slight increase in Europhile voting tendencies. The analysis reveals a significant and negative association between Median Age and Europhile voting behaviour ($p < 0.05$). This means that regions with older populations exhibit lower inclinations toward Europhile voting. No significant effect of logged GDP per capita on Europhile voting behaviour is observed in the analysis, the effects however are positive meaning that higher GDP per capita is associated with more Europhile voting. The results demonstrate a small but statistically significant negative effect of tertiary education levels on Europhile voting behaviour ($p < 0.05$). Unemployment while also showing a positive relation with Europhile voting was statistically insignificant. Unemployment rates had a positive impact however the findings were statistically insignificant. These findings suggest that while border regions exhi-

Table 2: Effects of internal EU Borders on the voting behaviour towards the position of European integration

Model 1: European Position	
Intercept	5.983*** (0.711)
Border region	-0.041 (0.032)
Population Density	0.00005*** (0.00001)
Median Age	-0.02*** (0.005)
GDP per Capita logged	0.019 (0.056)
Education	-0.008*** (0.003)
Unemployment rate logged	0.042 (0.046)
AIC	1076.54
BIC	1121.23
Log Likelihood	-529.29
Num obs. (Regions)	1060
Num. groups (Countries)	19

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

bit a negative trend in Europhile voting, this relationship lacks statistical significance. This means that H_1 must be rejected and that H_0 of H_1 accepted, i.e., Internal EU border regions do not exhibit higher levels of pro-European voting than other EU regions.

The regression on H2 examined the impact of the internal EU borders variable on the perceived salience of EU politics in border regions during EP elections and it employed the same technique as in the previous model. The regression analysis revealed distinctive effects (Table 3, Figure 3, Map 3). Border regions exhibited a statistically significant negative impact on the salience of EU politics during EP elections, indicating a lesser consideration of EU affairs in these places. Population density showed a minute positive influence on salience, Capita exhibited a negative effect on salience but lacked statistical significance as well. Tertiary education levels displayed a statistically significant negative impact on salience, suggesting that higher educational attainment correlated with decreased importance placed on EU politics during EP elections. While the unemployment showed a positive effect on salience, it did not attain statistical significance. Median age demonstrated a slight positive effect on salience; however, it did not achieve statistical significance either. GDP per. Logged unemployment rates were negatively associated with the turnout levels, meaning votes for parties that consider EU integration an important policy issue compared to other EU regions. This means that H2 must be rejected and H_0 of H2 accepted, i.e., Internal EU border regions do not exhibit a higher share of votes for parties that consider EU integration an important policy issue compared to other EU regions. The results indicate the opposite, meaning that internal EU border regions instead exhibit a lower share of regions although the effect did not reach statistical significance.

Figure 3: Boxplot of the Salience of European Politics

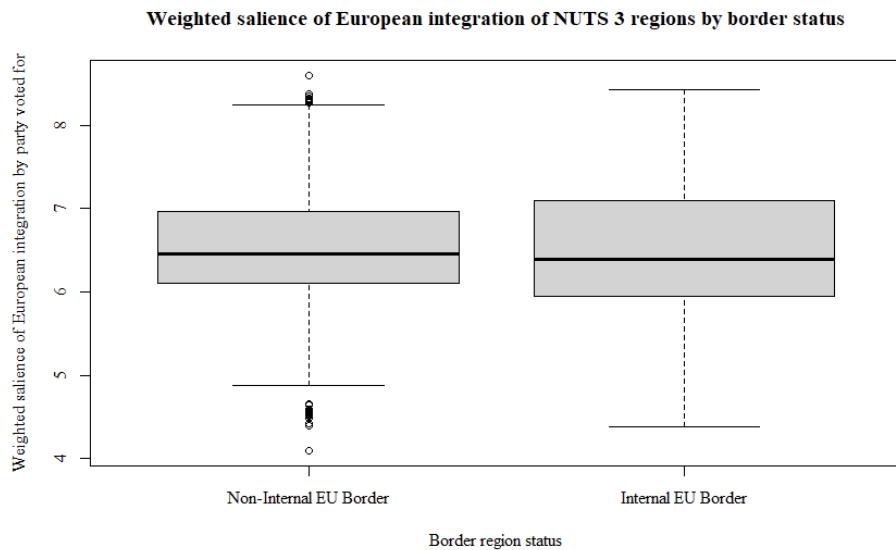


Figure 4: Effects of internal EU Borders on the voting behaviour towards the salience of European integration

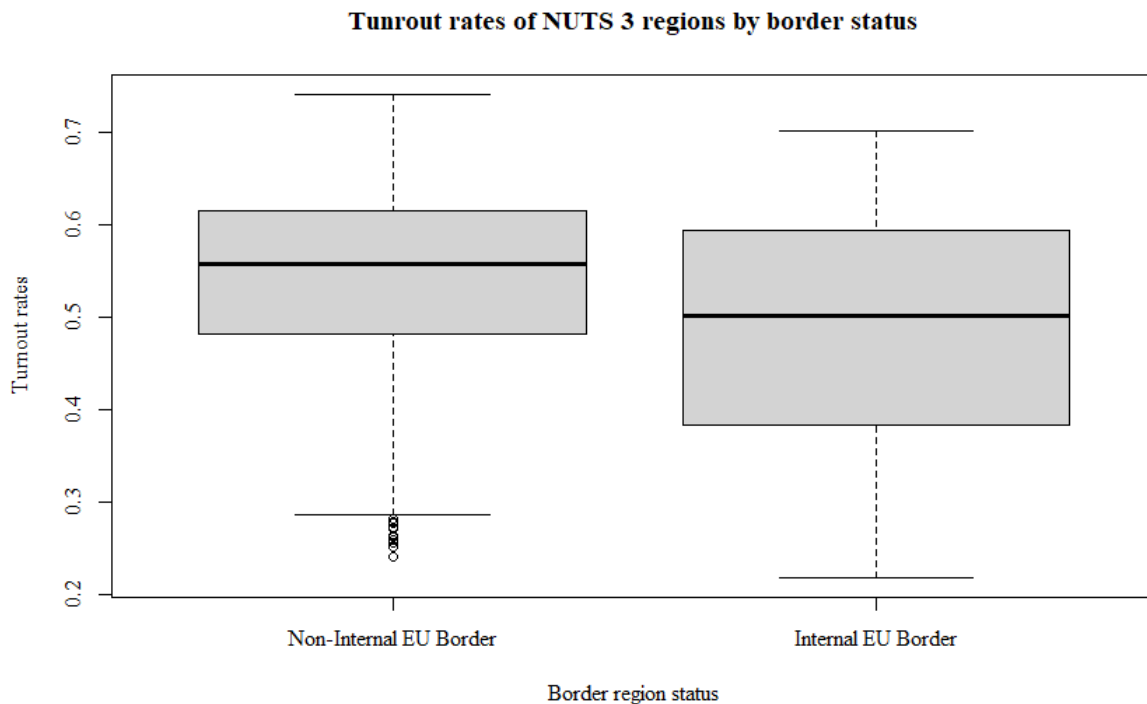
Model 2: Salience of European Integration	
Intercept	6.781*** (0.638)
Border region	-0.056** (0.029)
Population Density	0.00 (0.00)
Median Age	0.00003 (0.0004)
GDP per Capita logged	-0.028 (0.05)
Education	-0.071** (0.00)
Unemployment rate logged	-0.01 (0.00)
AIC	1104.64
BIC	1149.32
Log Likelihood	-543.32
Num obs. (Regions)	1060
Num. groups (Countries)	19

***p< 0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

Finally, a third REML regression was conducted to test the third hypothesis, i.e., that Internal EU border regions are more likely to have higher turnout rates compared to other EU

regions (Table 4, Figure 4, Map 2). The results indicated a notable negative association between border regions and turnout rates, revealing approximately a 0.73% lower voter participation in these areas compared to non-border regions during the 2019 EP election. All variables in Model 3 showed a statistical significance. A positive relationship was shown with the variables log-

Figure 5: Tunrout rates



ged version of GDP per Capita, Age and Education meaning that higher levels of these are associated with higher turnout rates within the specifications of Model 3 (Table 3). The results mean that H0 of H3 must be accepted. Internal border regions do not exhibit higher levels of turnout compared to other EU regions. Like H2 the results reveal not only that turnout rates in border regions are not higher but that they are the opposite – they are in fact lower in border regions.

Table 3: Effects of internal EU borders on turnout rates

Model 3: Turnout	
Intercept	16.060** (7.966)
Border region	-0.729** (0.371)
Median Age	0.160*** (0.056)
GDP per Capita logged	2.857*** (0.646)
Education	0.159*** (0.032)
Unemployment rate logged	-5.357*** (0.00)
AIC	6462.70
BIC	6502.43
Log Likelihood	-3223.35
Num obs. (Regions)	1060
Num. groups (Countries)	19
***p< 0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05	

5.1 Discussion

This thesis aimed to explore whether internal EU border regions displayed higher levels of pro-European voting compared to non-border regions in the 2019 European Parliament election. Contrary to the initial hypothesis (H1), the statistical results did not support the notion that residing in an internal border region led to increased Europhile voting behaviour. These findings are crucial to the thesis because they demonstrate that internal EU border regions do not have an impact on voters' electoral decision, whether they are Europhile or Eurosceptic. These results contribute to King's (1996) assertion that geographical location, as in this case proximity to a border, holds less sway over voting patterns than what scholars of electoral geography studies posit. It suggests that alternative factors might play a more prominent role in elucidating the variance in voting behaviours regarding Europhile or Eurosceptic sentiments, overshadowing the significance of border adjacency. Interestingly, these findings challenge certain assertions from prior literature that proposed border regions tend to exhibit stronger leanings toward either pro-European (Gabel 1998, Schmidberger 1998, Díez Medrano 2003) or Eurosceptic (Nasr & Rieger 2023) stances. Contrary to these assertions, the results suggest that the proximity to a border might not wield as much influence in determining Europhile or Eurosceptic voting tendencies as previously assumed. This calls for a re-evaluation of the

factors driving voting behaviours in EU elections, indicating that factors beyond geographic proximity to borders likely play more substantial roles in shaping these preferences.

The results from testing the hypothesis concerning the influence of internal EU border regions on the share of votes for parties emphasizing EU integration as a vital policy issue (H2) have also revealed a trend contrary to expectations. The model suggests that residing in an internal border region does not lead to a higher share of votes for parties prioritizing EU integration as a policy issue. Instead, the findings indicate a lower share of votes for these parties in internal border regions in comparison to other EU regions. This outcome is significant within the context of the overarching research question probing differences in voter turnout and preferences in the 2019 European Parliament election. It holds substantial weight as it demonstrates a negative correlation between proximity to a European border and voting patterns related to the significance of EU integration as a policy issue. Such a stark contrast challenges the conventional notion that border regions inherently display greater concern or support for EU integration due to their heightened exposure to European politics (Kuhn 2011). These findings therefore contradict established literature that has long championed the significance of internal border regions as spaces where European politics hold more prominence and influence over resident populations, where they have been described as “laboratories of European integration” (Hooper & Kramsch 2004: 3). Moreover, these results raise questions about the effectiveness of internal borders as catalysts for fostering stronger support or engagement with EU integration initiatives and indicate that European politics, even if strongly present, hold less significance to the electorate.

Similarly, to the results from H2, the findings from Model 3 to evaluate the impact of residing in internal EU border regions on voter turnout in the 2019 EP election present a trend contrary to the initial hypothesis. The results indicate that living in an internal border region does not correlate with higher turnout rates; rather, it suggests the opposite effect. Voter turnout in these internal border regions is lower compared to non-border regions. These findings are crucial in the context of the study's subject matter, which is to determine if turnout differs in internal border regions. It suggests that the closeness to a border diminishes the turnout rates, highlighting a noteworthy discrepancy from anticipated trends. This finding is consistent with earlier results from H2, indicating that European politics holds less influence in border regions compared to non-border areas for the electorate. The outcomes of Model 3 prompt a

reconsideration of assumptions about the role of internal EU borders in shaping voter engagement and participation in European elections. The observed lower turnout rates in border regions suggest a divergence from expectations, indicating that the proximity to a border might not inherently foster greater political engagement for the European Union and its institutions, as was assumed before.

These results obtained from testing the hypotheses provide important insights into the voting behaviour of residents in internal EU border regions. Contrary to initial expectations, any presumed impact on voting behaviour due to enhanced interactions, if it exists, might be subtler or manifest differently than anticipated. Furthermore, the influence that internal EU border regions have on the transnational experiences of their inhabitants may be different from that of persons who do not reside near an internal EU border. People who live further away from an EU country might be differently impacted by cross-border interactions. Additionally, the perceived importance of European politics seems lesser in border regions, possibly due to a stronger influence of national politics or a disassociation of the European integration process. This challenges the assumption that border residents prioritize EU-related issues in their voting decisions, highlighting the potential dominance of national-level concerns and of the concept of second-order elections. Lastly, the apparent success of European integration in border regions might explain the lower emphasis on European issues in their voting behaviour. This indicates that while European issues are discussed in these regions, they might impact border residents less significantly than in the heartland of a country, reflecting a different perspective on European integration and its relevance to voting choices.

Exploring alternative interpretations aligned with the existing literature could offer valuable insights into the voting behaviour of border residents. Considering the collective European identity perspective may shed light on these behaviours. While people in internal border regions could exhibit higher levels of European identity this identity could yield to the national identities in EP elections especially when these national and European identities are in conflict caused by the proximity to the border and the EP election as an event. This would potentially explain the unexpected voting behaviour in internal EU border regions. Moreover, the notion that internal borders persist as significant mental barriers, despite their reduced physical prominence, challenges the assumption held in this thesis. These mental borders might wield a more profound influence on shaping voting behaviours than initially considered. The

persistence of these mental barriers could imply that despite physical ease in border crossings, the mental demarcations between nations remain prominent, ultimately impacting voting choices among border residents. Such interpretations underscore the complex interplay between individual identities, national affiliations, and the perceived significance of internal borders, contributing to our understanding of voting behaviours in EU border regions.

Further research on internal border regions and voting behaviour could help to contextualise the results of the current thesis. This could be done by expanding the scope of the elections, by including other EP elections or even national elections. Alternatively, it could be useful to compare the voting patterns in internal EU border regions with those of national elections to see whether voter preferences in border regions genuinely differ more from those in non-adjacent EU member states when compared across elections. Other research methods might also help to link internal EU border living with voting behaviour more accurately by analysing the individuals rather than an aggregate. This could be done by a large-scale survey that questions people about the interactions and perceptions of the adjacent countries and their political affiliation, however, to do so a control group that does not live at the border would also need to be interviewed. Further smaller scale but more in-depth interviews with border regions residents about the cross-border behaviour could shed some light onto the complexities of border region living, by analysing more the nuances of border living. Notwithstanding the method used to analyse the impact of internal EU border living and voting behaviour, future research will have to uncover the complexity of border regions living and its nuanced impact on the individual.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to dissect the impact of the European Union's open border policy on voting behaviour, encompassing vote choice and turnout rates in EP elections within internal EU border regions. The examination of these dynamics contributes significantly to several ongoing debates. It extends the discourse within border studies by scrutinizing how the European open border policy shapes behaviour in EP elections. Furthermore, it augments the discussion on voting behaviour in European Parliament elections by integrating a spatial dimension in the form of proximity to an internal EU border. Notably, this thesis enriches the transactionalism and European identity discourse by enhancing comprehension of the repercussions of European cross-border interactions on attitudes towards the EU as reflected in EP elections. By delving into the intricacies of living in internal EU border regions, this study attempted to unveil the experience of EU integration within these areas and how people react to it in European elections. Such heightened exposure was anticipated to exert considerable influence on voter turnout and voting preferences.

Thus, this thesis responded to the research question - *“To what extent do regions on EU internal borders differ from non-border regions in terms of voter turnout and vote choice in the 2019 European Parliament election?”* - by elucidating the extent of disparities in voter turnout and vote choice between EU internal border regions and non-border regions in the context of the 2019 European Parliament election. To answer the research question, three hypotheses were created, with the first positing that EU internal border regions exhibit higher shares of Europhile voting than non-internal EU border regions., the second that EU internal border regions exhibit higher shares of parties that consider EU politics to be important than non-internal EU border regions. and a third and final hypothesis positing that EU internal border regions show higher turnout levels than non-internal EU border regions. Within these hypotheses, several mechanisms are described that would explain the different behaviours, namely *cross-border interactions, opportunities, objects of identification* and *common (regional) identity* to explain pro-European voting tendencies, the salience of European politics, and increased turnout in internal EU border regions.

To test the hypotheses and thus to provide evidence that internal EU border regions differ in their voting behaviours from non-internal border regions, a large-N approach used

data pooled from the EU-NED and the CHES allowed for an individual observation of each NUTS 3 region within the EU and their position towards European integration as well as their position towards the importance of EU politics as expressed in their voter choice. In total, the analysis encompasses 19 EU member states divided into 1060 NUTS 3 regions out of which 264 were coded as internal EU border regions. The data was, in addition to control variables, used in a REML regression that allowed for an analysis that recognizes that the data of the NUTS 3 regions was nested within the context of the European nations. In total three separate regressions for each hypothesis were run using this method.

The results supported none of the three hypotheses. The first regression sought to examine internal EU border regions exhibiting higher shares of pro-European voting in the 2019 EP elections (H1), but contrary to expectations, proximity to a border did not significantly impact Europhile or even Eurosceptic voting behaviour, challenging the assumption that border adjacency strongly shapes voting tendencies. These results challenge prior notions and suggest that factors beyond geographic proximity to borders might exert more influence on Europhile or Eurosceptic voting patterns in EU elections. The regression analysis for H2 aimed to determine the impact of internal EU borders on the perceived importance of EU politics expressed in party choice during EP elections. However, the results contradicted the hypothesis, revealing that border regions displayed a decreased emphasis on EU affairs during elections, refuting the expectation that these areas would prioritize EU integration as an important policy issue. The third and final regression aimed to assess whether internal EU border regions displayed higher turnout rates in the 2019 EP election (H3), yet the results contradicted the hypothesis, indicating about a 1% lower voter participation compared to non-border regions. These findings showed that not only were turnout rates not higher in border regions, but they were lower.

The thesis' investigation into the impact of the EU's open border policy on voting behaviour in internal EU border regions therefore presents multifaceted outcomes that challenge initial assumptions. Despite expectations, proximity to a border did not significantly influence Europhile voting behaviour, suggesting that factors beyond geographic adjacency might dominate voting tendencies not just in internal EU border regions but the EU as a whole. Additionally, the diminished emphasis on EU affairs during elections in border regions challenges presumptions regarding the prioritization of EU integration as an important policy

issue, indicating a stronger influence of national politics or dissociation from the European integration process. The lower voter participation in border regions suggests a potential fatigue with the EP and the European integration process. Alternative approaches might help to better dissect the impact or non-impact the internal EU border regions have on voting behaviour.

As every scientific work, this thesis faced several limitations by a lack of data availability which meant that aggregated had to be used instead of more fine-grained individual data. Nevertheless, the results are valid and provide important context to the second-largest democratic election in the world and specifically the internal EU border regions that have been championed as the “laboratories of European integration” (Hooper & Kramsch 2004: 3). In conclusion, vote choice and voter turnout in EP elections remains a complex phenomenon. This thesis is a first attempt to disentangle the different factors that arise from living in internal EU border regions and might influence vote choice and turnout, but clearly, much work remains to be done. While the results from this study reveal dynamics contrary to the initial expectations, they do confirm the significance of some of the factors and therefore provide starting point for future research.

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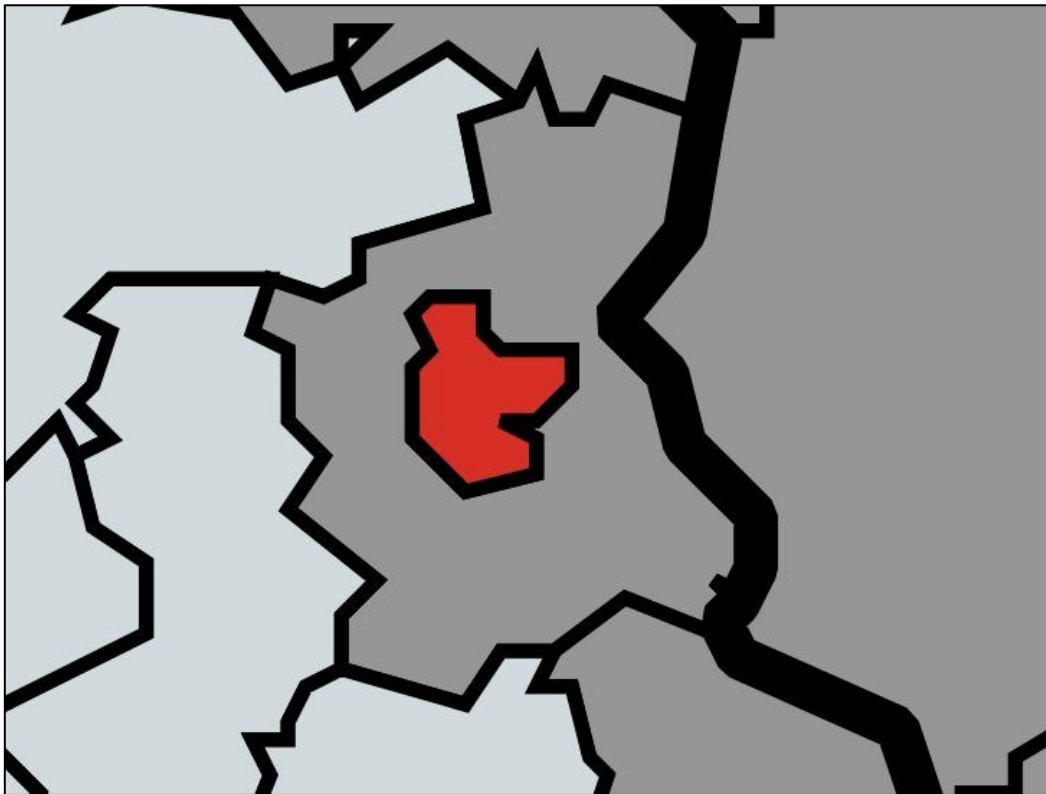
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8 Appendix

Appendix 1: Coding specific regions

The City of Cottbus (red) enclaved by the region Spree-Neiße at the German-Polish border, both regions are coded as internal EU border regions.



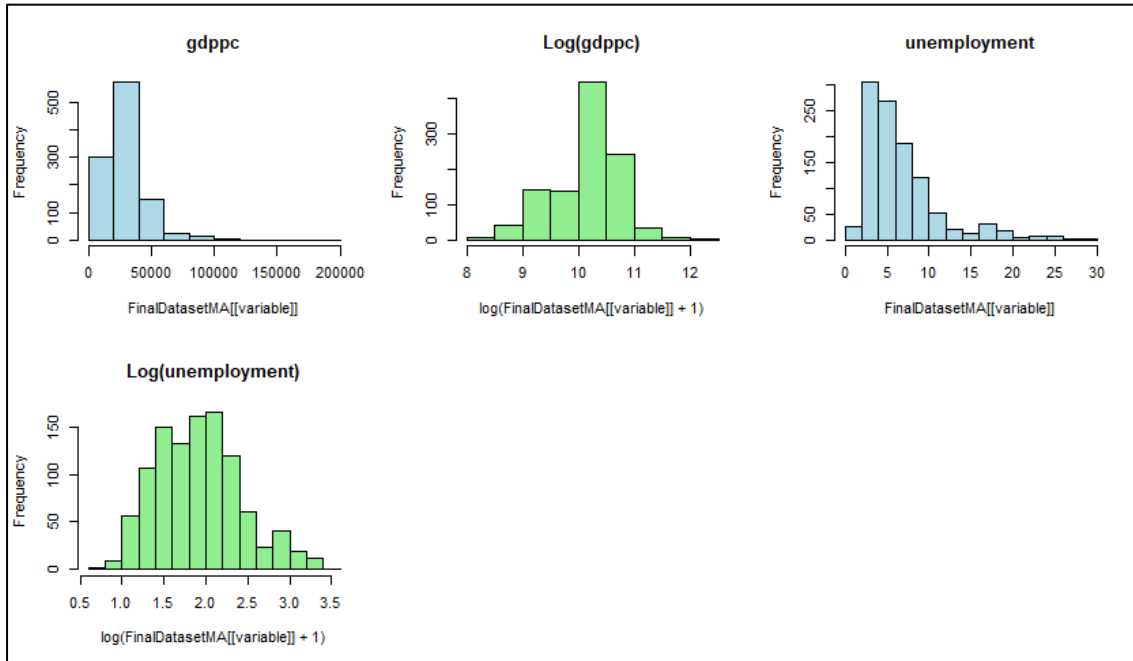
Appendix 2: Coalitions in the 19 countries

Country	Coalition	Parties	CHES 2019 Coding according to party	National Results in the 2019 EP election
Bulgaria	Coalition GERB/ГЕРБ	GERB/ГЕРБ	GERB	31.07%
Croatia	Coalition Hrvatski suverenisti	HRAST - Pokret za uspješnu Hrvatsku + Hrvatska konzervativna stranka - HKS + Hrvatska stranka prava de. Ante Starrčević - HSP AS + Ujedinjeni hrvatski domoljubi - UHD	HKS	8.52%
	Coalition Amsterdamska koalicija	Hrvatski laburisti + Primorsko goranski savez + Hrvatska stranka umirovljenika + Istarski demokratski sabor+ Hrvatska seljačka stranka + Građansko-liberalni savez + Demokrati)	No coding possible	5.19%
	Coal NHR + HSP	Neovisni za Hrvatsku + Hrvatska Stranka Prava	No coding possible	4.37%
	Coalition Zelena ljevica	Možemo! - politička platforma + Nova ljevica + Održivi razvoj Hrvatske - ORaH)	No coding possible	1.79%
	Coalition PAMETNO and UK	Pametno + Unija Kvarnera coalition	No coding possible	1.4%
Czechia	Coalition TOP9 & STAN	STAROSTOVÉ (STAN) s regionálními partnery a TOP 09	TOP 09	11.65%
France	Renaissance soutenue par la republique en marche, le modem et ses partenaires	La Republique En marche! + MoDem + Agir + Mouvement radical, social et libéral	LREM	22.42%
	DLF + CNIP	Debout la France + CNIP	DLF	3.51%
Greece	KINAL/KINAA	ΠΑΣΟΚ + ΔΗΣΥ + ΚΙΔΗΣΟ	ΠΑΣΟΚ/PASOK	7.72%
Hungary	FIDESZ + KDNP	FIDESZ - Magyar Polgári Szövetség + Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt	FIDESZ	52.56%

Appendix 4 – Regression tables for Hypotheses

Italy	Coalition + Europa	Europa - Italia in Comune - Partito Democratico Europeo	Coding not possible	3.11%
	Coalition Federazione dei Verdi	Verdi + Possibile + Green Italia et al	Coding not possible	2.32%
	Coalition La Sinistra	Sinistra italiana + Rifondazione comunista + Altra Europa con Tsipras + Partito del Sud + Transform Itali + Convergenza Socialista	Sinistra Italiana	1.75%
Poland	Coalition Koalicja Europejska	Platforma Obywatelska + Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe + Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej + Nowoczesna + Partia Zielon	Platforma Obywatelska	38.47%
Spain	Coalition Unidas Podemos Cambiar Europa	UP + IU + Catalunya en Comú + Barcelona en Comú	IU	10.17%
	Coalition Ahora Repúblicas	ERC + Bildu + BNG)	ERC	5.64%
	Coalition LLIURES PER EUROPA (JUNTS)	PdCat + JXCa	PdeCat	4.59%
	Coalition por una Europa Solidaria	EAJ-PNV + CC + CxG + Atarrabia Taldea + El Pi + Demòcrates Valencians	PNV	2.85%
	Coalition Compromiso por Europa	Compromís + En Marea + CHA + PCAS + Caballas + NC + Mès + CpM + Iniciativa + Izquierda Andalicista + PvE	No coding possible	1.33%

Appendix 3: Distribution of logged and non-logged Versions of the GDP per Capita and the unemployment variables.



Appendix 4: Regression tables for Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Effects of internal EU borders on the voting behaviour towards the position of European integration						
	Model 1	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Intercept	5.938*** (0.711)	5.280*** (0.683)	5.382*** (0.681)	3.418*** (0.515)	3.967*** (0.480)	5.097*** (0.186)
Border region	-0.041 (0.032)	-0.045 (0.033)	-0.043 (0.033)	-0.053 (0.033)	-0.058* (0.033)	-0.063* (0.033)
Log GDP per Capita	0.019 (0.056)	0.080 (0.053)	0.046 (0.051)	0.145*** (0.046)	0.114** (0.044)	
Log Unemployment	0.042 (0.046)	0.087** (0.044)	0.110*** (0.043)	0.123*** (0.043)		
Median Age	-0.020*** (0.005)	-0.022*** (0.005)	-0.021*** (0.005)			
Education	-0.008*** (0.003)	-0.006** (0.003)				
Population Density	0.00005*** (0.00001)					
AIC	1,338.953	1,326.644	1,319.086	1,326.995	1,328.711	1,328.874
BIC	1,383.648	1,366.373	1,353.848	1,356.791	1,353.541	1,348.738
Log Likelihood	-660.477	-655.322	-652.543	-657.497	-659.355	-660.437
Num obs. (Regions)	1060	1060	1060	1060	1060	1060
Num. (Countries)	19	19	19	19	19	19

***p< 0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

Hypothesis 2

Effects of internal EU borders on the voting behaviour towards the salience of European integration						
	Model 2	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13
Intercept	6.781*** (0.638)	5.280*** (0.683)	5.382*** (0.681)	3.418*** (0.515)	3.967*** (0.480)	5.097*** (0.186)
Border region	-0.056** (0.029)	-0.045 (0.033)	-0.043 (0.033)	-0.053 (0.033)	-0.058* (0.033)	-0.063* (0.033)
Log GDP per Capita	-0.028 (0.050)	0.080 (0.053)	0.046 (0.051)	0.145*** (0.046)	0.114** (0.044)	
Log Unemployment	0.038 (0.041)	0.087** (0.044)	0.110*** (0.043)	0.123*** (0.043)		
Median Age	0.003 (0.004)	-0.022*** (0.005)	-0.021*** (0.005)			
Education	-0.007*** (0.003)	-0.006** (0.003)				
Population Density	0.00001 (0.00001)					
AIC	1,076.574	1,326.644	1,319.086	1,326.995	1,328.711	1,328.874
BIC	1,121.269	1,366.373	1,353.848	1,356.791	1,353.541	1,348.738
Log Likelihood	-529.287	-655.322	-652.543	-657.497	-659.355	-660.437
Num obs. (Regions)	1060	1060	1060	1060	1060	1060
Num. (Countries)	19	19	19	19	19	19

***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

Hypothesis 3

Effects of internal EU borders on turnout rates						
	Model 14	Model 3	Model 15	Model 16	Model 17	Model 18
Intercept	17.647** (8.327)	16.060** (7.966)	13.508* (8.049)	27.481*** (6.159)	-0.177 (5.903)	46.160*** (2.700)
Border region	-0.721* (0.371)	-0.729** (0.371)	-0.792** (0.375)	-0.719* (0.375)	-0.488 (0.402)	-0.687* (0.414)
Log GDP per Capita	2.711*** (0.646)	2.857*** (0.606)	3.768*** (0.585)	3.055*** (0.523)	4.668*** (0.542)	
Log Unemployment	-5.465*** (0.527)	-5.357*** (0.501)	-5.994*** (0.490)	-6.090*** (0.490)		
Median Age	0.164*** (0.057)	0.160*** (0.056)	0.151*** (0.057)			
Education	0.154*** (0.033)	0.159*** (0.032)				
Population Density	0.0001 (0.0002)					
AIC	6,479.795	6,462.698	6,480.576	6,481.756	6,622.917	6,692.943
BIC	6,524.490	6,502.427	6,515.338	6,511.552	6,647.747	6,712.807
Log Likelihood	-3,230.898	-3,223.349	-3,233.288	-3,234.878	-3,306.459	-3,342.471
Num obs. (Regions)	1060	1060	1060	1060	1060	1060
Num. groups (Countries)	19	19	19	19	19	19

***p< 0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

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Kilian Simon

15/01/2024