



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Revisiting the urban/rural divide: The case of Euroscepticism in European Union candidate states

Noorman, Axel

Citation

Noorman, A. (2021). *Revisiting the urban/rural divide: The case of Euroscepticism in European Union candidate states*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master thesis in the Leiden University Student Repository](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3239922>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

**Revisiting the urban/rural divide. The case of Euroscepticism in European Union
candidate states.**

Thesis for Thesis Seminar 'International Organizations'

Author: Axel Noorman - 2051087

Leiden University

Political Science: International Politics, Block 4

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Gjovalin Macaj

Second Reader: Dr. Wouter Veenendaal

8563 words (excl. Table of Content)

Abstract

Scholars have argued over time whether geographical indicators play an explanatory role in Eurosceptic voter behavior. This paper revisits the investigation of geographical indicators, focusing on the urban/rural divide in Eurosceptic behavior. Scholars have not fully agreed whether the urban/rural divide could play an explanatory role in Eurosceptic voter behavior, where different scholars either state that such a divide matters, where others say the contrary. Using theoretical narratives from a variety of scholarly literature, this paper reinvestigates the urban rural divide in Euroscepticism. Using the European Values Survey, this study quantitatively assesses the impact of the urban/rural divide in Eurosceptic views among respondents in the candidate countries of the European Union. The candidate countries were chosen for the analysis as it offers a fresh new insight into the discussion, as quantitative research on these countries has not been conducted in the past. Statistical analysis has shown that in the candidate countries, the urban/rural divide does not play a significant explanatory role in Eurosceptic views among respondents. It is thus recommended that other explanations are treated with a higher level of importance in Eurosceptic voting behavior rather than the urban/rural divide.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Literature Review	2
<i>Concepts</i>	5
<i>Theories</i>	6
Research Design	9
Results	12
Conclusion.....	18
References	20

Introduction

In March of 2021, general elections took place in the Netherlands. The election constituted a major victory for the progressive, pro-European party D66, who went from 19 to 24 seats (Kiesraad, 2021). An interesting observation from this event came from the results of the election itself: D66 seemed to have performed excellent in major cities across the Netherlands, even coming out on top in most of them (Kiesraad, 2021). An official explanation for this is not given, however one could speculate. Do progressive parties perform better in more urbanized areas? Some research does seem to point in this direction. In the United States, scholars have deduced that in major cities, the Democratic party (considered a progressive party) does perform better in these major cities opposed to more rural areas where the Republican party performs better (Scala & Johnson, 2017). If one is to assume that being supportive of the European Union is a rather progressive stance (Mamonova & Franquesa, 2020), this in turn begs another question: do pro-European parties perform better in more urbanized areas? The Dutch elections of 2021 seem to imply justification to investigate such a phenomenon. This phenomenon would be closely related to the urban/rural divide in politics. This divide holds the assertion that socio-cultural differences in urban and rural areas will lead to a difference in voter behavior. What is being asked in this paper is whether this difference in voter behavior regarding the Eurosceptic vote is an actual empirical event or not, and what would explain such voting behavior. In other words: *to what degree is difference in support for the European Union explained by the differences between urban and rural areas?*

The literature on the subject is quite diverse but holds some issues. There seems to be a clear conflict of evidence as to regards whether an urban/rural divide holds any explanatory power for Eurosceptic voter behavior. Some authors disagree with the notion (Schoene, 2019), whereas other authors are more optimistic (De Dominicis et al., 2020). Furthermore, there exists work on the subject focusing on states outside of the European Union, where it is implied that rural areas are more Eurosceptic (Skinner 2012; Skinner 2013). Scholars thus seem to disagree as to whether an urban/rural divide indeed holds any explanatory power in Eurosceptic behavior. Thus, this debate will once again be revisited and the question in place will be quantitatively analyzed. The selected cases focus on the candidate countries of the European Union, as this will provide additional insight because it focuses on cases that have not been previously investigated. This paper will contribute to the existing literature by providing additional building blocks towards the explanatory theory of Eurosceptic voter

behavior, where the results of the research conducted for this paper shall determine whether geographical indicators play an actual important role in the explanatory theory of Euroscepticism.

This thesis is divided into multiple sections. First it opens with a literature review, where the issues discussed in the previous paragraph are discussed in more depth. This is followed by a theoretical framework. This section is divided into two sub-sections, where one dives into the conceptualization of Euroscepticism and the urban/rural divide. The other sub-section focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of this research, where it is argued why urban areas are expected to be more supportive of the European Union, whereas rural areas are expected to be more Eurosceptic. This section also includes the central hypothesis of this paper. This is followed by an explanation of the research design, which dives into the chosen dataset, the method of analysis and the operationalization of the variables, including the control variables. This is followed by the result section, where it is determined that in urban areas there is indeed a significant higher chance for individuals to vote in favor of the European Union. However, for rural areas there is no evidence that indicates lower chances of voting against the European Union. In the conclusion, the findings are again summarized, the conclusion is drawn that the urban/rural divide has little explanatory power for Eurosceptic voter behavior, limitations of the research conducted are discussed, and recommendations for future research are made.

Literature Review

The literature on the topic of Euroscepticism in the candidate countries of the European Union appears to mostly be internally focused. For instance, Euroscepticism in Serbia has mostly been attributed to a feeling of mistrust towards the European Union in regards its affairs and intervention in the Balkan region (Antonić, 2012). Furthermore, Serbia's ties between two larger regions plays a role. Serbia has ties to both these regions and joining one could weaken or strain the ties with the other (Petsinis, 2020). This narrative of mistrust towards the European Union is one that has been recorded in other countries as well. In the case of Turkey, Euroscepticism has been recorded to mostly be a mistrust towards Western-Europe (Yilmaz, 2011). However, it has also been argued that the European perspective and viewpoints are not the issue for the cause for Eurosceptic behavior in the Balkan region, but rather the issue lies with the methods and timing of the integration process (Belloni, 2016). These examples provide interesting and important insights, however more overarching theories seem to have been researched less. One such example is the urban/rural

divide in Euroscepticism. Damjanovski et al. (2020) researched the causes of Euroscepticism in the Balkans, where residence of respondents was taken into account, but any explanation of why this specific variable was used in the first place is not given. More importantly were religious factors as an explanation for Euroscepticism in these cases (Damjanovski et al., 2020).

Given the scarcity of research regarding the urban/rural divide in connection to the candidate countries, a broader viewpoint is desired. The urban/rural divide has quite a broad definition, but in this research, it is treated as a theory of voter behavior. The concept itself will be discussed more in the theoretical section of this paper. Several scholars have argued that the urban/rural divide plays an explanatory role in citizens' voter behavior. In the case of the United States, it has been determined that such a divide can indeed exist; voters from urban and rural areas vote differently based on such a divide (Kelly & Lobao, 2019). Such a difference of voter behavior is not only explained through the difference in culture that urban and rural voters live in, but also on the basis that citizens in the United States consciously choose to live in neighborhoods where their neighbours have political and societal views that align with their own (McKee, 2008, p. 106). In a study focusing on the case of Poland, Marcinkiewicz (2018) concluded that in fact a percentage of urban population would be a better explanation of why a certain party gained or lost support rather than taking economic hardship as an explanation (p. 711). Multiple papers have focused on how the urban/rural divide has played a role in voting behavior in the United States. Scala and Johnson (2017) concluded in their paper that democratic candidates performed better in urban, densely populated areas than in rural areas. Democratic parties would perform not as well in rural areas of the United States, where the population is considered to be more conservative (Gimpel & Karnes, 2006). Furthermore, cleavage forming between urban and rural areas could occur in the United States as a result of a lacking interaction between the two areas (Gimpel et al., 2020). These articles provide a further insight into how an urban/rural divide could lead to a difference in voting behavior, but they are focused only the United States. What about European states? Or narrower even: what about the European Union?

When discussing the urban/rural divide on voting behavior in European countries, the topic can be linked to Euroscepticism. Is the Eurosceptic vote caused by such a divide? Researchers seem to be divided on this subject. During Brexit, it has been argued that Eurosceptic parties supporting the leave vote (the most notable party being UKIP) capitalized on the rural areas with their populist rhetoric to gain supporters for the leave vote (Brooks, 2020). This would imply that such a divide could exist, but it does not equate hard evidence.

Schoene (2019) conducted a quantitative study on the matter in every member state of the European Union, found that there was not a lot of explanatory power to the urban/rural theory, and that Euroscepticism can be better understood as a cultural backlash which includes economic, political, and geographical determinants (p. 361). The case of Poland seems to reaffirm these results. An article written by Surwillo et al. (2010) points to the fact that Polish farmers seemed to behave in a Eurosceptic manner before the country's ascension to the European Union, but afterwards they seem to have become more supportive of the institution. There are other sides to the debate, however. A study conducted by De Dominicis, Dijkstra, and Pontarollo (2020) demonstrated that, despite controlling for socio-economic, economic, and local characteristics, rural voters still appeared to be more Eurosceptic than urban voters. The example of Brexit mentioned earlier also provides more conflict into the narrative. A study conducted by Lindell and Ibrahim (2020) shows that a clear boundary between those that voted in favor and against the Brexit referendum exists in a rural and urban divide. Furthermore, the case of Norway showed potential for what is called rural skepticism. Rural areas tended to be less in favor in ascension to the European Union as a result of this ascension being a threat to rural culture (Skinner, 2012). This pattern is not only noted in Norway, but also in countries such as Iceland and Switzerland (Skinner, 2013). Elgün and Tillman (2007) also established that in the case of Turkey, the urban/rural divide could be a driver for Eurosceptic behavior. A clear conflict of evidence is present, as it is not entirely clear whether the urban/rural divide actually plays a significant role.

Why does this matter? As said, the urban/rural divide has been considered in the past as a given explanation of Eurosceptic voter behavior (De Dominicis, 2020). Schoene (2019) rejected an urban/rural divide as a potential explanation of Eurosceptic voter behavior. In other words, geographical indicators play less of a role in the debate. However, this conclusion can be considered shaky given the conflicting evidence mentioned earlier. Thus, conducting further research on the urban/rural divide would actually provide more insight into this debate. Do geographical indicators, such as living in a certain area, actually play a role in Eurosceptic voter behavior? If confirmed, it would steer the narrative more towards explanatory factors where geographical indicators are to be taken into account when conducting research on the topic of Euroscepticism. If not, then conclusions of such research would align with the conclusion drawn by Schoene (2019), where geographical explanations are abandoned in favor for more empirically stronger explanations.

Theoretical Framework

Concepts

Before diving into the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, the concepts that it deals with must be explored in greater detail. The concepts that require further discussion are Euroscepticism and the urban/rural divide. One could put forward a very simple and straightforward definition of Euroscepticism, stating that Euroscepticism is the idea of questioning the European Union as an institution and the benefits it delivers. It is often associated with party politics and voter behavior. This adds a further dimension to it, which essentially demonstrates why the concept is not as straightforward as one could put it. Questioning the institution that is the European Union is not a simple dichotomy either. There are more approaches beyond a simple ‘‘I support the European Union’’, or ‘‘I do not support the European Union’’. A better dichotomy can be made focusing on Soft Eurosceptics and Hard Eurosceptics. Soft Eurosceptics question certain aspects or policy conducted by the European Union, but still believe that leaving the European Union would be a step too far, whereas Hard Eurosceptics believe that leaving the European Union is the better alternative (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004). Other dimensions that can be connected to this dichotomy focuses on the dimension of policy and regime skepticism. Policy skepticism refers to one questioning the policy conducted by the European Union, whereas regime skepticism refers to one questioning the institution as a whole (De Vries, 2018). Both regime and policy skepticism can be connected to Hard and Soft Euroscepticism. One could dislike the policy or the regime but still wish their country remained in the EU, by changing the policy or reforming the regime. Naturally, Hard Euroscepticism can also be connected to this dimension. Euroscepticism is thus more than a simple yes or no to the question of support for the European Union. Why an individual or a party does not support the European Union can depend on several factors. Furthermore, how they see the role of their country within the European Union can also be based on different approaches. These dimensions serve an important part of research design, which will be mentioned later on.

The urban/rural divide can be defined as the divide between the urban and rural regions of a country. This division is often marked by economic and cultural factors (Davoudi & Stead, 2002). Urban/rural divisions have been around since the beginning of the industrial revolution, an event that was followed by a period of urbanization in many European countries. This in itself lead to two different ways of life, breading a division between urban and rural culture (Davoudi & Stead, 2002). This division was marked with support for both ways of life, where a pro-urban views held that urbanization was an inherent progressive

process, and pro-rural views were described as seeing urbanization as a threat to rural culture. This division is therefore marked as one between progressive and conservative stances. The narrative that urbanization holds more progressive views is linked to the exposure of a multitude of cultures and ideas (Scala & Johnson, 2017), whereas in a rural setting this is less likely. Economic factors, as mentioned, also play a role in this division. Individuals from urban areas tend to have a higher income than individuals from rural areas (Scott et al., 2007). In sum, the urban/rural divide can be marked by a stark division between rural and urban areas, where these divisions are based on economic and cultural factors.

What, however, constitutes a rural area, and what constitutes an urban area? One could simply argue that the urban areas are cities and that rural areas equates the countryside. There are more dimensions to the concepts than simple binary differences. Furthermore, what is classified as urban and rural has been noted by scholars to have become increasingly difficult. In a study conducted by Johnson and Scala (2021) reveals that for the United States it has become more sensible to use an urban-rural continuum rather than a simple dichotomy. This research, however, is more focused on Europe rather than the United States, and as the literature on Europe has not extensively discussed an urban-rural continuum, the dichotomy is more valuable (for the research design, however, this continuum will be mentioned again). Urban areas can be classified as having a secondary and tertiary economy, high education levels, employment in manufacturing, construction, and the service industry, a low sense of community, more liberal-oriented political views, and a general high, net-in level of migration (Scott et al., 2007, p. 4). Rural areas, on the other hand, are classified as having a primary industry sector with most employment in agriculture, lower levels of education, a high sense of community, more conservative-oriented political views, and a low, general net-out level of migration (Scott et al., 2007, p. 4). Applying a scale to urbanization, or rather, what can be classified as urban or rural is not an easy task, however. Dahly and Adair (2007) mentioned how differences in environment and regions can lead to one region having urban characteristics than other regions (p. 1417). Nevertheless, we can make the different distinction at best based on the characteristics mentioned earlier by Scott et al. (2017).

Theories

As mentioned, the urban/rural divide presents a divide between cultural and economic factors. But how do these factors influence voter behavior? One can argue that living in an urbanized setting can lead to more progressive views. Being exposed to more diverse cultures, political, and societal views, would lead to one having a more progressive stance on political

issues, as was researched in the United States by Scala and Johnson (2017). Furthermore, living in an urban setting can be correlated to a higher degree of income (Sørensen, 2014). Inhabitants of urban areas are also more likely to have a higher degree of education than inhabitants of rural areas (Scott et al., 2017). What is also notable is that far-right parties, who are often Eurosceptic (Mamonova & Franquesa, 2020), perform poorly in urban areas, where there is little outgoing migration and access to public services is not limited as much as it would be in rural areas (Rickardsson, 2021). These theories can be connected to Eurosceptic voter behavior. It has been argued that individuals with higher incomes are more likely to vote in favor of parties that are supportive of the European Union (Gabel, 1998). Higher levels of education amongst individuals also tend to correlate more supportive stances towards the European Union (Gabel, 1998). Furthermore, voting for the European Union can be considered a rather progressive idea (Mamonova & Franquesa, 2020). There are of course cases of more conservative parties that are supportive of the European Union, but these are considered to be exceptional cases given that these parties are not considered to be progressive. Statistical tests have also shown that more progressive parties (left-leaning parties) perform significantly better in urban areas than in rural areas (Knutson, 2017, p. 147). This in turn would suggest that voters supportive of the European Union would be concentrated in urbanized areas, rather than rural areas as, in sum, urban voters are more likely to have progressive views due to living in an environment with a multitude of cultures, having better access to public services than in rural areas, and the fact that urban voters tend to be more economically affluent than rural voters. As a matter of fact, rural areas can be considered more prone to rightwing populist views, which leads to the argument that Eurosceptic voters are more likely to be concentrated in these regions. Furthermore, empirical analysis in Poland seems to confirm these theories, where it is argued that socially progressive voters are more concentrated in the cities, and socially conservative, rightwing voters are more concentrated in the countryside (Marcinkiewicz, 2018). Another significant factors that increase this difference of voter behavior between the two demographic areas simply focuses on the distance between the two areas, where lack of interaction would lead to separate spheres (Gimpel et al., 2020). This is comparable, if not the same as, political cleavages. This divide is also more directly present in Eurosceptic theory. For the Brexit vote, rural voters were considered to be the losers of globalization, where individuals seem to be worried about increasing multiculturalism and mass-immigration (Hobolt, 2016). A concept that one can bring forward focuses on rural skepticism. Rural skepticism is a most notable factor in Norwegian politics, where it has played a role in the question of Norway's ascension to the

European Union, where rural skepticism was one of the contributing factors that reinforced the “no” vote in the referenda’s held in the country (Skinner, 2012). Skinner (2012) argued that the rural anti-EU vote came from the perceived threat from the EU that the institution would have on the demographic distribution in the rural parts of the country (pp. 434-435). The concept has also been applied in several other countries outside of the EU where it was found to have a similar influence over the anti-EU vote (Skinner, 2013). Rural skepticism brings in another angle. One significant driver of Euroscepticism that has been mentioned in past research focuses on perceived cultural threats, where it is argued that the European Union itself delivers a threat originating from foreign cultures (McLaren, 2002). This stands in connection with the argument that Skinner (2013) brought forward, where rural skepticism is underpinned by, amongst others, protection of cultural landscapes (p. 132). Given the established correlation between perceived cultural threat and Euroscepticism (McLaren, 2002), one could argue that individuals with such perceived cultural threat are more likely to be concentrated in rural areas, rather than urban areas. This is in line with the argument made by Manomova and Franquesca (2020), as right-wing populist parties (noted for both anti-EU stances and anti-immigration stances) would be able to gain more ground in rural areas rather than urban areas. Furthermore, the perceived cultural threat argument works less for urban areas, as individuals in those areas are exposed to a multitude of cultures and ideas already, leading to a more progressive vote (Scala & Johnson, 2017). In sum, rural areas are more likely to be prone to Eurosceptic voting behavior, given that there is an increased threat-based perception from outside cultures. This perception is strengthened by a lack of interaction between the rural and urban cleavages (Gimpel et al., 2020), where in the latter, as mentioned, interactions with other cultures is considered to be more likely.

When examining the theories given in this section, one could argue that the urban/rural divide is more a compacted version of mainstream Eurosceptic theories. For instance, Gabel’s (1998) theory of individuals with a higher income being more likely to support the European Union in combination with the idea that higher income individuals are more likely to live in urbanized areas (Sørensen, 2014). One could argue that this undermines potential implications of this paper as it practically would investigate similar, more well-known explanations of Euroscepticism. It is important to emphasize however that these theories tell us little as to where these voters would be geographically located. Furthermore, it also tells us little as to whether living in a certain environment can affect one’s stance on the European Union. When taking into account the theoretical arguments outlined in this section, the principal hypothesis of this paper can be described as followed:

H1: Holding all other factors constant, it is expected that urban voters are more supportive of the European Union than rural voters in the candidate countries of the European Union.

If voters from rural areas are indeed more prone to vote for Eurosceptic parties, a given implications that can be expected from this hypothesis would indicate that countries with a higher rural population are more prone to Eurosceptic voter behavior as a result. The theories will be tested in a statistical manner, described in the research design section, which follows next.

Research Design

In order to figure out the effect of an urban or rural setting on Euroscepticism in the candidate states, a quantitative, statistical approach seems most appropriate. To achieve this, this project makes use of the European Values Survey of 2017 (European Values Survey, 2021). This study seems appropriate given that it contains all the information required (with the exception of the case of Turkey) and is a better alternative than other datasets. The Eurobarometer dataset has been avoided as it has issues with data reliability (Höpner & Jurczyk, 2015). Another potential option for a dataset is the European Social Survey used by Schoene (2019). This dataset has its strengths opposed to the dataset this research is using, as it includes variables that focus on population density and allows respondents themselves to determine in what sort of area of residency they live. The former will be discussed in the paragraph tackling the independent variable. Regarding having respondents select themselves in what sort of area they live, this is something that should be discouraged. A respondent could, for instance, consider themselves having a rural identity whereas they may actually not live in a rural area (Nemerever & Rogers, 2021). It is better to stick to objective standards and sizes rather than resort to categories that are not backed by empirical data. Following respondents' answers in this case is something that is preferred to be avoided.

Regarding the case selection, a couple of comments can be made. As mentioned in the literature review, one of the reasoning for focusing on the candidate countries of the European Union is that specific research regarding the urban/rural divide in connection to support for the European Union has not been research yet at great extent. Naturally, there are other reasons. More importantly, however, is that the fact that Eurosceptic theories can be applied to these cases, given the fact that European integration is a topic on the political agenda as a consequence of their status of membership. Hence, these cases have been selected for

analysis. That being said, the dataset includes all candidate countries that hold such a status at the time of writing, these being Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. These cases will be included as control variables as well, which will be discussed below. As said, Turkey is not included in the case analysis, but this is an acceptable loss given the number of cases that are included.

The dependent variable shall measure the individual respondent's support for the European Union. What is crucial is that this is not operationalized as a dichotomous variable. Recall that in the theoretical section it was outlined that support for the European Union is not a simple black or white case. The dataset does contain such a variable which takes into account the diverse stances one can take regarding European integration. This variable is a survey question that asks the respondent:

Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all: The European Union (European Values Survey, 2021, p. 360).

Respondents have a multitude of options to answer the question with. This then would be in line with the conceptualization that has been mentioned earlier. In the dataset, this variable has been recoded to mirror the responses for personal preference (from a negative to a positive scale, this doesn't affect the results). The variable appears to have a scale-like nature, however the number of responses (only four) mean that it would rather be defined as a categorical variable. This means that an ordered logit (or ordinal logistic) regression analysis is the most appropriate form of analysis. This statistical method allows for a scale-like nature (negative to positive) to be taken into account, but still treats the dependent variable as categorical (Murad et al., 2003).

The independent variable focuses on the place of residence of the respondent. Does this person live in a rural or urban area? The dataset includes a variable that records the size of the respondent's place of residence. This variable includes several categories, those being: under 5000, 5000-20.000, 20.000-100.000, 100.000-500.000, 500.000 and more (European Values Survey, 2021). This variable presents a similar issue as mentioned in the conceptualization earlier. A clear boundary between urban and rural areas are not given. This was mentioned by other papers, where some authors even spoke of an urban-rural continuum rather than a divide (Scala, 2021). Plus, what is considered urban in one country could differ in another. One could especially argue that the middle category presents issues, as it is not

only quite broad, but could fall in both the urban and rural dichotomy. As a result, it is argued that the best course of action is to treat the lowest two categories as rural areas, and the two highest categories as urban. The middle category will still be taken into account in the analysis, but due to its broad boundary, it is considered to be the continuum variable rather than the binary division variable. This, however, also means that drawing conclusions from this variable is hardly possible. There are other researchers that have used population density as an additional variable to take into account geographical spacing (as mentioned earlier: Schoene, 2019). The dataset unfortunately does not include a variable that takes population density into account; however, it is argued that this is not a big problem for the analysis. The survey question implies that every respondent is located in some form of populated area. Especially for larger towns and cities, one could assume that these areas already constitute a high density of population vis-à-vis smaller populated towns. And even for smaller towns there should not be an issue given that there is still some form of density given the fact that this fits the definition of what constitutes a town.

In order to rule out other potential explanations, the model will include several control variables. Most of these variables are based on classic explanations of Eurosceptic literature. As was mentioned earlier in this paper, income was mentioned to be an important explanation of Eurosceptic behavior. An individual with a higher income is more likely to vote in favor of the European Union than an individual with a lower income (Gabel, 1998). In order to operationalize this variable, the choice was made to include household monthly income corrected for purchasing power parity. This specific variable was chosen as purchasing power would more accurately affect one's income than simply taking into account income without any expenditures. Education is also a primary explanation. The higher one's level of education, the more likely they are to be supportive of the European Union (Gabel, 1998). The dataset includes an education variable that includes a multitude of options for respondents, ranging from primary education to a doctoral/PhD level of education (European Values Survey, 2021). Age is also taken as a variable in the model. It is argued that the older a respondent is, the less likely they are to be supportive of the European Union in comparison to younger respondents (Rohrschneider, 2002, p. 471). Age is a variable that is included in the dataset and does not require recoding beyond dismissing the missing categories. Life satisfaction is also included. It is argued that individuals with a higher degree of life satisfaction are more likely to be supportive of the European Union (Helliwell et al., 2019). This variable is coded in the dataset as a scale ranging from most dissatisfied to most satisfied. As is similar with age, this variable required no special recoding. National identity is

argued to be an important factor in Eurosceptic voting behavior. The more an individual finds national identity to be important, or the more they are proud of their country, the less likely they are to be supportive of the European Union (Abts et al., 2008). To operationalize this variable, a proxy variable focusing on the amount of pride a respondent has for their country has been chosen. This variable is coded in the dataset with four distinct categories, and due to this, this variable has been recoded into several dummy variables. Slightly related, it is also argued that confidence in government can correlate with support for the European Union. The more someone has confidence in their government, the more likely they are to support the European Union (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014). This variable is similarly coded as the previous one and is equally similarly recoded. Gender is also included, as it is argued women are more supportive of the European Union than men (Liebert, 1999). This variable has been recoded into a dummy variable. Lastly, following the example of Schoene (2019), every country analyzed has been included into the model. The reasoning for doing this is to account for contextual factors (factors that are more likely to occur in one country rather than the other) that could influence Eurosceptic voter behavior. Hence, every country taken in the analysis has been transformed into a dummy variable. Having discussed the set-up of the analysis, what follows is the actual execution of said analysis.

Results

Table 1.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Size of Town					
500.000 and more	5054	0	1	0.00198	0.0444
100.000 – 500.000	5054	0	1	0.207	0.405
20.000 – 100.000	5054	0	1	0.339	0.473

	5.000 – 20.000	5054	0	1	0.291	0.454
	Under 5000	5054	0	1	0.162	0.368
Income controlling for PPP		5054	-2.00	6.18	0.672	1.32
Education		5028	0	8	3.51	1.62
Age		4992	18	82	45.6	16.6
Life Satisfaction		5021	1	10	7.24	2.26
National Pride						
	Not proud at all	4858	0	1	0.0333	0.180
	Not very proud	4858	0	1	0.0928	0.290
	Quite proud	4858	0	1	0.404	0.491
	Very proud	4858	0	1	0.470	0.499
Confidence in government	No confidence at all	4907	0	1	0.411	0.492

	Not very much	4907	0	1	0.340	0.474
	Quite a lot	4907	0	1	0.199	0.399
	A great deal	4907	0	1	0.0495	0.217
Gender		5048	0	1	0.549	0.457
Country	Albania	5054	0	1	0.284	0.451
	Serbia	5054	0	1	0.297	0.457
	North Macedonia	5054	0	1	0.221	0.415
	Montenegro	5054	0	1	0.198	0.399

Table 2.

		Model 1	Model 2
Size of Town			
(ref. = Under 5.000)			
	500.000 and more	0.446 (0.5268)	1.56298** (0.59731)
	100.000 – 500.000	0.388*** (0.0864)	0.26719** (0.10073)
	20.000 – 100.000	0.416*** (0.0799)	0.08036 (0.08908)
	5.000 – 20.000	0.838*** (0.0827)	0.03653 (0.10233)
Income controlling for PPP			-0.02988 (0.02211)
Education			0.00806 (0.01877)
Age			-0.00550** (0.00180)
Life Satisfaction			-0.02025 (0.00531)
National Pride			
(ref. = Not proud at all)			
	Not very proud		0.59544** (0.19051)
	Quite proud		0.63649*** (0.17456)
	Very proud		0.41632* (0.17678)
Confidence in government			0.85587*** (0.06749)
(ref. = No confidence at all)			

	Quite a lot		1.62188*** (0.08248)
	A great deal		2.80900*** (0.14769)
Gender (ref. = male)			0.01416 (0.05644)
Country (ref. = Albania)	Serbia		-2.61615*** (0.09683)
	North Macedonia		-1.24072*** (0.10008)
	Montenegro		-1.38127*** (0.09699)
Deviance		12742	10568
Cox & Snell's R ²		0.00569	0.0765
Nagelkerke's R ²		0.0117	0.157
N		5054	4858

Note: binary logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets.
***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Table 1 contains the descriptives of the variables used in order to give an overview of the values included. Table 2 shows the results of the ordered logit regression analysis. The analysis is split in two blocks to show the effect of the control variables on the preliminary model. Block 1 only includes the independent variables, whereas block 2 includes the independent variables and the control variables. Assumption checks have been conducted on the model as well. There is no serious case for multicollinearity. In all cases the VIF is below ten, with only two categories of national pride showing a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 8 and 9 (rounded off). Furthermore, all tolerance levels are below one. The assumption of the linearity of the logit was also checked. The results from this assumption check shows that it is violated in the case of the education and income variable. Thus, the results need to be treated with some caution. Furthermore, the data has been checked to see if there were any outliers in the continuous variables that could influence the results. Boxplots of the income variable do show some extreme values, meaning that there are some outliers that could influence the results. These cases are not filtered out however as there are no theoretical grounds for doing so. The results from both models show interesting differences between the independent

variables. In the first model, only the first category appears to be statistically insignificant. For the second model, only the two highest categories appear to be significant. Given the fact that this model includes the control variables, it holds the primary focus of the analysis. The measure fit statistic of Nagelkerke's R-square delivers a number of 0.157, which is not a high number and would question how well the model fits the data. However, interpreting this statistic is a difficult task. The ANOVA however does appear to deliver a highly significant result, which means that model fit is not an overall problem. The highest category of 500.000 and more citizens has a coefficient of 1.56298, implying a positive relationship between the variables. What this essentially means is that there is a higher chance that someone living in a town with more than 500.000 has a higher chance of having a favorable opinion than in the baseline category of towns with less than 5000 inhabitants. Furthermore, this variable is highly significant. This would align with the theoretical prediction that living in an urbanized setting would increase the likelihood of being in favor for the European Union. The conclusions drawn for this category also apply to the 100.000-500.000 category, with the exception being that the b-coefficient appears to be quite smaller than the previous category. Nevertheless, the relationship is still positive. From there onwards, however, the situation gets a bit trickier. The last two categories each show a decreasing effect in relation to one another. Whilst still positive, the effect gets weaker as the category becomes smaller. This aligns somewhat with the main hypothesis. The issue is that the effect is mostly positive, meaning that rural supporters are still more likely to vote in favor for the European Union, albeit to a lower degree than the more highly populated town and cities (the highest categories having a b-coefficient of respectively 1.56298 and 0.26719 compared against the lowest two categories having respectively a b-coefficient of 0.08036 and 0.03653). Furthermore, the lower categories appear to be statistically insignificant, meaning no conclusions can be drawn from this. In other words, there is no empirical correlation between support for the European Union and the lower categories of the variable measuring the respondent's hometown. Whilst there is some evidence for the hypothesis, it is not substantial enough to accept the hypothesis with confidence. This means that the hypothesis is to be rejected. There is some evidence that suggest urban voters are more likely to be in favor of the European Union, however no conclusions can be drawn for rural areas.

Another interesting finding arises. As mentioned, the control variables included constitute important and previous used explanations of Eurosceptic behavior. However, some of these explanations do not seem to hold in the cases analyzed. Income for instance has a negative coefficient, meaning the higher an individual's income, the less likely they are to

support the European Union. This stands in complete contrast with the theories mentioned in the research design section to back up the control variables. This cannot be concluded however, given the fact that this relationship seems to be insignificant. Education does seem to follow the theoretical narrative more, with the coefficient of this variable implying a positive relationship. However, this variable too appears to be insignificant. Similar comments are applied for gender. National pride seems to be highly significant, but interestingly enough seems to hold a positive relationship, meaning that as one become prouder of their country, they are more likely to support the European Union. This is an equally interesting outcome given the fact that the original expectation of this variable, as laid out in the theoretical framework, was a negative correlation between national pride and support for the European Union. The other control variables seem to follow the theoretical narrative. An explanation for these results is not given, however the country control variables all seem to hold high statistical significance. This means that country-context explanations could in fact trump more traditional explanations of Euroscepticism. But this is only speculation. Further discussion of these curious outcome and the main findings will be discussed in the concluding section of this paper, which will follow next.

Conclusion

This paper sought out to investigate whether the urban-rural divide plays a role in Eurosceptic voter behavior. Based on the gaps and theoretical narratives, this paper opted to choose to analyze candidate countries rather than member states of the European Union. However, the results show, however, that an urban-rural divide does not play a major explanatory role in Eurosceptic voter behavior. In urban areas, voters do tend to be more supportive of the European, as the analysis showed that living in an area with a high number of residents correlates positively with showing support for the European Union. However, no evidence could be deduced from rural areas, given that not only the effect of the area of residence in relation to support for the European Union seemed to counteract the theoretical predictions used in this research, but also given the lack of statistical significance in said effect. The central hypothesis as stated in the theoretical section was thus rejected. Arguably, the conclusion of this paper would align with Schoene (2019). Other explanation of Eurosceptic voting behavior are more likely to have more explanatory power than geographical explanatory factors such as the urban/rural divide.

These other explanations, however, need to be taken lightly. The results of this paper's research have shown that some of the more general explanations of Eurosceptic voter

behavior do not hold in the candidate countries. This brings to light the question as to how universal the more general explanations of Eurosceptic voter behavior actually are. Are contextual explanations, as taken account into the model, of more relevance in certain cases? This is something that future research could jump on. As mentioned, there already exists some research on contextual factors, but this paper has shown that expansion on this topic is required. There should be more statistical testing on the more common general explanations of Euroscepticism in countries outside of the European Union but that are in one way or the other connected to the institution. This would not only include candidate countries, but also countries like Norway and Switzerland, which are two cases that have been researched already to some extent, but not in a quantitative manner.

As for the urban-rural divide, it is best that this concept is not used to a significant degree in explanatory research for Euroscepticism. Naturally, I am not implying that geographical indicators are to be abandoned completely, as the results still have shown that living in an urban area will lead to a significantly higher chance to be in favor for the European Union. Rather, they should not be tested as the main explanations. When it comes to the subject, however, more research should dive into why the European Union holds support in urban areas. This research only accessed the tip of the iceberg on the subject, as the theoretical narratives were mostly limited to explanations in the United States. Research limited to urban areas focusing solely on the European Union scarcely exists. However, it has been determined that urban voters would be more supportive of the European Union. Pro-European parties could capitalize on this finding by campaigning intensively in urbanized area to further their pro-EU agenda.

Like most papers, however, this research has its limitations. First, as mentioned, Turkey was omitted from the analysis due to lack of data. Whilst this is not the biggest issue, given that its only one case and that a small degree of prior research on this case exists (see literature review), it is nevertheless unclear how the inclusion of such a case would have influenced the final results. Recommendations are thus made that future research take the case of Turkey into account when investigating the same variables. Similarly, other states that have a connection to the European Union but are not a formal member of the organization, such as Norway and Iceland, to draw on the literary examples mentioned earlier (Skinner 2012; Skinner 2013), have not been investigated either. Research focused on these examples have mostly taken a qualitative approach, whereas quantitative methods are not used. This is advised, as it could gain more insight on the research conducted. Another implication focuses on the fact that the urban rural dichotomy is not perfectly operationalized in this research.

Recall that one of the categories has a broad boundary of the size of the respondent's residence. Drawing conclusions from this certain category was therefore also not possible. As mentioned, defining this boundary is not an easy task. Future research should perhaps focus on an urban rural continuum as applied in research focusing on the United States (Scala, 2021), as mentioned earlier. Naturally, despite the issues laid out in the research design, it is unclear whether a continuum would be applicable for European countries, given that research that focused on such a continuum mostly limited itself to the United States (Scala, 2021; Scala & Johnson, 2017), where European cities could potentially have a different composition than American cities. Future research however could touch upon this.

References

- Abts, K., Heerwegh, D., & Swyngedouw, M. (2008). Sources of Euroscepticism: Utilitarian interest, social distrust, national identity and institutional distrust. *Res Publica*, 50(4), 357–381.
- Antonić, S. (2012). Euroscepticism in Serbia. *Serbian Political Thought*, 5(1), 67–96.
<https://doi.org/10.22182/spt.512012.4>
- Armingeon, K., & Ceka, B. (2014). The loss of trust in the European Union during the great recession since 2007: The role of heuristics from the national political system. *European Union Politics*, 15(1), 82–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116513495595>
- Belloni, R. (2016). The European Union Blowback? Euroscepticism and its Consequences in the Western Balkans. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 10(4), 530–547.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2016.1211387>
- Brooks, S. (2020). Brexit and the Politics of the Rural. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 60(4), 790–809.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12281>
- Dahly, D. L., & Adair, L. S. (2007). Quantifying the urban environment: A scale measure of urbanicity outperforms the urban–rural dichotomy. *Social Science & Medicine*, 64(7), 1407–1419. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.11.019>

- Damjanovski, I., Lavrič, M., & Naterer, A. (2020). Predictors of Euroscepticism in six Western Balkan countries. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 20(2), 327–348.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2020.1744091>
- Davoudi, S., & Stead, D. (2002). Urban-Rural Relationships: An introduction and a brief history. *Built Environment*, 28(4), 269–277.
- de Dominicis, L., Dijkstra, L., & Pontarollo, N. (2020). *The urban-rural divide in the anti-EU vote*.
https://iris.unibs.it/retrieve/handle/11379/536743/126292/discontent_urban_rural_2020.pdf
- De Vries, C. E. (2018). *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*. Oxford University Press.
- Elgün, Ö., & Tillman, E. R. (2007). Exposure to European Union Policies and Support for Membership in the Candidate Countries. *Political Research Quarterly*, 60(3), 391–400.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907305684>
- European Values Survey. (2017). *Joint European Values Survey and World Values Survey* [Data file] Retrieved from <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/joint-evs-wvs-2017-2021-dataset/>
- Gabel, M. J. (1998). *Interests and Integration: Market Liberalization, Public Opinion, and European Union*. University of Michigan Press.
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fMzEwMDMwX19BTg2?sid=96c2e92e-708c-4393-ae91-f1de77f61bfe@pdc-v-sessmgr01&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>
- Gimpel, J. G., & Karnes, K. A. (2006). The Rural Side of the Urban-Rural Gap. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 39(3), 467–472.
- Gimpel, J. G., Lovin, N., Moy, B., & Reeves, A. (2020). The Urban–Rural Gulf in American Political Behavior. *Political Behavior*, 42(4), 1343–1368. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09601-w>

- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. D. (2019). *World Happiness Report 2019*.
https://www.mondi.nl/upload/ps/785_WHR19.pdf#page=49
- Hobolt, S. B. (2016). The Brexit vote: A divided nation, a divided continent. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23(9), 1259–1277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1225785>
- Höpner, M., & Jurczyk, B. (2015). How the Eurobarometer Blurs the Line between Research and Propaganda. *PifG Discussion Paper*, 15(6), 27.
- Johnson, K. M., & Scala, D. J. (2021). The Rural-Urban Continuum of Polarization: Understanding the Geography of the 2018 Midterms. *The Forum*, 18(4), 607–626.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2020-2102>
- Kelly, P., & Lobao, L. (2019). The Social Bases of Rural-Urban Political Divides: Social Status, Work, and Sociocultural Beliefs. *Rural Sociology*, 84(4), 669–705.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12256>
- Kiesraad. (2021). *Overzicht uitslagen per gemeente Tweede Kamerverkiezing 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.kiesraad.nl/verkiezingen/tweede-kamer/uitslagen/uitslagen-per-gemeente-tweede-kamer>
- Knutsen, O. (2017). *Social structure, value orientations and party choice in Western Europe*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Liebert, U. (1999). Gender politics in the European Union. *European Societies*, 1(2), 197–239.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.1999.10749932>
- Lindell, J., & Ibrahim, J. (2020). Something ‘Old’, Something ‘New’? The UK Space of Political Attitudes After the Brexit Referendum. *Sociological Research Online*, 136078042096598.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780420965982>
- Mamonova, N., & Franquesa, J. (2020). Populism, Neoliberalism and Agrarian Movements in Europe. Understanding Rural Support for Right-Wing Politics and Looking for Progressive Solutions. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 60(4), 710–731. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12291>

- Marcinkiewicz, K. (2018). The Economy or an Urban–Rural Divide? Explaining Spatial Patterns of Voting Behaviour in Poland. *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures*, 32(4), 693–719. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325417739955>
- McKee, S. C. (2008). Rural Voters and the Polarization of American Presidential Elections. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 41(1), 101–108.
- McLaren, L. M. (2002). Public support for the European Union: Cost/benefit analysis or perceived cultural threat? *The Journal of Politics*, 64(2), 551–566. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2508.00139>
- Murad, H., Fleischman, A., Sadetzki, S., Geyer, O., & Freedman, L. S. (2003). Small Samples and Ordered Logistic Regression: Does it Help to Collapse Categories of Outcome? *The American Statistician*, 57(3), 155–160.
- Nemerever, Z., & Rogers, M. (2021). Measuring the Rural Continuum in Political Science. *Political Analysis*, 29(3), 267–286. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2020.47>
- Petsinis, V. (2020). Converging or diverging patterns of Euroscepticism among political parties in Croatia and Serbia. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 28(2), 139–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2019.1686345>
- Rickardsson, J. (2021). The urban–rural divide in radical right populist support: The role of resident’s characteristics, urbanization trends and public service supply. *The Annals of Regional Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00168-021-01046-1>
- Rohrschneider, R. (2002). The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for an EU-Wide Government. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), 463. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3088389>
- Scala, D. J., & Johnson, K. M. (2017). Political Polarization along the Rural-Urban Continuum? The Geography of the Presidential Vote, 2000–2016. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 672(1), 162–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716217712696>

Schoene, M. (2019). European disintegration? Euroscepticism and Europe's rural/urban divide.

European Politics and Society, 20(3), 348–364.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1542768>

Scott, A., Gilbert, A., & Gelan, A. (n.d.). *The urban-rural divide: Myth or reality?* (No. 2).

Macaulay Institute.

https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/51293974/SERP_20PB2_Final.pdf?1484110476=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DThe_Urban_Rural_Divide_Myth_or_Reality.pdf&Expires=1619264079&Signature=Uyv4Y~2u9uG8neng-ioP0Q5seYDczjuDtke0y4I-aD3e9~2j9gPryaWeVcBP~jNIm2GZ2ixA4GxbN2nrjrtYvAQXTXue1kETcOsHfDC~tvydk-3pCa0djlPNtDWtJC7Gc7ED9oI52fTd1ppodsZ0E7Vn0eYo7ECxkqNUWQztis7fo~v7P5blchVUFEMJQuXPPB~MYwojGIGlDBkiRg64gPsu~~tglFIkJL2Jg72jTrhmrz8yjJHVwMm29fjfgvKgxgGl5RfYFf3VLGcbKohngohJ~9IXfWkYHhxO2Ru8xcWs~ghvYL0CnfOAhRNnZW1CsMvJqChzqCNaU811tEUw__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA

Skinner, M. S. (2012). Norwegian Euroscepticism: Values, Identity or Interest*: Norwegian

Euroscepticism. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50(3), 422–440.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2012.02245.x>

Skinner, M. S. (2013). Different Varieties of Euroscepticism? Conceptualizing and Explaining

Euroscepticism in Western European Non-Member States: Different varieties of

Euroscepticism? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(1), 122–139.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2012.02305.x>

Sørensen, J. F. L. (2014). Rural–Urban Differences in Life Satisfaction: Evidence from the

European Union. *Regional Studies*, 48(9), 1451–1466.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.753142>

Surwillo, I., Henderson, K., & Lazaridis, G. (2010). Between Euroscepticism and Eurosupport: The Attitudes of Urban and Rural Populations in Poland 2000–2008. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62(9), 1503–1525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2010.515796>

Taggart, P., & Szcerbiak, A. (2004). Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00143.x>

Yilmaz, H. (2011). Euroscepticism in Turkey: Parties, Elites, and Public Opinion. *South European Society and Politics*, 16(1), 185–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608741003594353>