

# Shared Collective Experiences and Group Identity: The Effect of the Eurovision Song Contest on European Union Identity\*

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## Abstract

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# 1 Introduction

In May 2022, thanks to a record number of votes received by European audience, Ukraine won the 66th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest, an annual song contest held in Europe since 1956 that primarily features European countries. This victory – portrayed by the press as a show of European unity and solidarity with Ukraine in the wake of the war with Russia<sup>1</sup> – raised the question of how collective shared experience can affect supra-national identity between different nations and interact with national group identity.

This paper investigates the question by studying how participation and victory at the Eurovision Song Contest (hereafter, Eurovision) can affect European identity, and national identity as well. The contest brings together participants from 52 countries who perform an original song representing their country. Viewers are then invited to vote for their favorite song but cannot vote for their own country. Their votes comprise 50% of the final result, the remaining 50% represent the views of a jury of music industry professionals from each country. The Eurovision has established itself as a major cultural event, attracting each year tens of millions audience (e.g., 186 million viewers in 2018 against 165 million viewers for the 2018 UEFA Champions’ League final; [Wellings and Kalman, 2019](#)). Moreover, the show, branded and designed as a European event, aims at celebrating and promoting Europeanness ([Yair, 2019](#)). It therefore provides an ideal case study to examine the effect of shared collective cultural experience across countries on group identities such as European or national identities.

We measure European identity by using individual-level survey data from the Eurobarometer. Specifically, we leverage the overlap that may exist in some years between the Eurovision final and the Eurobarometer to compare respondents surveyed in the days leading up to the final with respondents from the same country but surveyed in the days following the final. We find that individuals interviewed in the days following their country’s participation in the Eurovision final are more likely to report a higher sense of European identity. On the contrary, respondents display a higher sense of national identity following

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<sup>1</sup>See for example <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-wins-eurovision-song-contest-2022-war-russia-invasion-solidarity-mariupol/>, <https://inews.co.uk/culture/music/eurovision-2022-review-ukraine-kalush-orchestra-winner-uk-sam-ryder-1631217>, and <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-wins-eurovision-as-european-voters-show-song-contest-solidarity/>

a victory of their country.

We then further explore the mechanisms that can explain our main findings. We show that, in the days following their country’s participation, respondents were more likely to have a positive view of the European Union and to find solidarity and the respect of other cultures to be important European values.

Overall, the present paper contributes to several strands of literature. The first contribution is to the recent and growing literature on the factors that can cause changes in group identity. [Depetris-Chauvin et al. \(2020\)](#) document that national football teams’ victories increase national identity in Sub-Saharan African countries. [Fouka \(2019\)](#) shows that forced assimilation policies aimed at integrating an immigrant group increase the identity of that group. [Dehdari and Gehring \(2022\)](#) find that repressive measures targeted at a group strengthen the identity of that group. We complement this literature by examining how shared collective cultural experience across nations, such as the Eurovision, can foster shared group identity across those different nations.

The second strand of literature to which we contribute is the literature on European identity ([Buscha et al., 2017](#), [Guiso et al., 2006](#)). For instance, [Dehdari and Gehring \(2022\)](#) find that the passage of Alsace-Lorraine between France and Germany seems to have increased support for Europe. [Gehring \(2021\)](#) shows evidence that Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine increased European identity. However, while the current literature has grown by documenting the role of institutions and political actions in creating a European identity, it has so far overlooked the potential role played by shared collective experiences at the European level. Our results suggest that such collective experiences can help strengthening European identity and foster the values it promotes.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides background information on the history and functioning of the Eurovision Song Contest. Section 3 introduces the data and the identification strategy. Section 4 presents the results. Section 5 concludes.

## 2 The Eurovision Song Contest in a Nutshell

TBA

## 3 Empirical Framework

### 3.1 Data

Information on individual attitudes come from the Standard Eurobarometer, a representative individual-level opinion survey conducted twice a year and covering European countries. As our empirical approach relies on comparing individuals interviewed before and after the Eurovision final, our dataset includes all the waves of the Eurobarometer that overlap with the Eurovision. We thus observe six editions and 34 countries.

#### *Countries' Eurovision Performances*

We collected information on countries' Eurovision performances by using the official archives of the show<sup>2</sup>. For each country of the dataset, we observe if it participated or not in the final of the Eurovision, and if so, the number of points received, the countries that voted for it, and the final ranking.

There are on average 25 countries taking part each year in the Eurovision final and a country receives on average 83 points.

#### *European Identity and Other Individual Attitudes*

Our main outcome of interest is an individual's sense of European identity. Following existing literature (e.g., see Gehring, 2021, Buscha et al., 2017, and Kuhn, 2012), we measure European identity by using the "Moreno" question. The question has been introduced in the Eurobarometer in 1992 and aims at measuring the relationship between national and European identity. Specifically, the "Moreno" question asks respondents the following: "In the near future do you see yourself as (1) [nationality] only; (2) [nationality] and European; (3) European and [nationality]; or (4) European only." The 'Moreno' question provides a compelling way of measuring European identity as it is regularly asked and its wording has remained practically unchanged since its introduction in the Eurobarometer.

To further explore potential mechanisms, we collected data on additional individual attitudes. First, we use a measure of respondents' image of the European Union ("In general, does the EU conjure up for you a (1) very positive, (2) fairly positive, (3) neutral, (4) fairly negative or (5) very negative image?"). We construct a 3-point scale measure by

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<sup>2</sup>See <https://eurovision.tv/history>.

merging very positive (negative) and fairly positive (negative) into one category. Second, to assess how the Eurovision affects the social values associated with the European Union, we use a question asking respondents the values that represent best the European Union (“Which value best represent the European Union: Peace, Equality, Solidarity, Tolerance, and Respect for other cultures.”)

### 3.2 Identification Strategy

To identify the impact of a country’s Eurovision performances on individuals’ feeling of European identity, we estimate the following regression:

$$y_{i,c,e} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PostParticipation_{i,c,e} + \beta_2 PostVictory_{i,c,e} + \beta_3' X_i + \lambda_{c,e} + \epsilon_{i,c,e}, \quad (1)$$

where  $y_{i,c,e}$  is one of our attitudinal variables for individual  $i$  living in country  $c$  and interviewed during the survey wave overlapping with the Eurovision edition  $e$ . The two variables of interest,  $PostParticipation_{i,c,e}$  and  $PostVictory_{i,c,e}$ , are dummies equal to one if an individual is interviewed after a participation or a victory of her country in Eurovision. The term  $X_i$  is a vector of individual characteristics (age, gender, and unemployment status) and  $\lambda_{c,e}$  are country×edition fixed effects. To account for the nested structure of the data, we cluster standards errors at the country×edition level.

Following [Depetris-Chauvin et al. \(2020\)](#), our identification strategy relies on the use of country×edition fixed effects, which allow us to compare individuals surveyed in the days before a given edition of the Eurovision with individuals from the same country but surveyed in the days following the event. In doing so, we rule out any country-level unobserved heterogeneity that could have biased the results if not accounted for. In our baseline, we use a 15-day window around the final but make it vary in some robustness checks to assess the sensitivity of our results. Under the assumption that the implementation of the survey in a country is independent from the holding of the Eurovision, as well as the country’s performances,  $\beta_2$  and  $\beta_3$  identify the causal impact on individual attitudes of a country’s participation and victory, respectively. Given the preparation and logistics needed to conduct large-scale surveys such as the Eurobarometer, we believe this assumption to be plausible.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 The Impact of the Eurovision on European Identity

The results from Equation (1) are presented in Table 1. Column (1) begins by quantifying the impact an Eurovision victory on European identity. The coefficient is negative and statistically significant at conventional levels, meaning that winning the Eurovision increases national identity to the expenses of European identity.

In Column (2), we investigate the impact of participation in the Eurovision. The coefficient is positive and statistically significant beyond the one-percent level, meaning that respondents are more likely to report a higher sense of European identity after a participation of their country in the Eurovision.

Finally, Column (3) jointly study the effect of participation and victory, while Column (4) adds control variables. The results remain similar.

Table 1: The Impact of Eurovision Performances on European Identity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Outcome: European identity			
Post victory	-0.0144* (0.00809)		-0.0455*** (0.0137)	-0.0511*** (0.0136)
Post participation		0.0316*** (0.0114)	0.0338*** (0.0118)	0.0250** (0.0117)
Country $\times$ edition FE	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual controls	N	N	N	Y
Adj R-squared	0.0597	0.0600	0.0600	0.0756
Observation	37,733	37,733	37,733	37,711

*Notes:* Column (4) controls for respondents' age, gender, and unemployment status. Standard errors clustered at the country $\times$ edition level are reported in parentheses. \*\*\*Significant at 1% level; \*\*significant at 5% level; \*significant at 10% level.

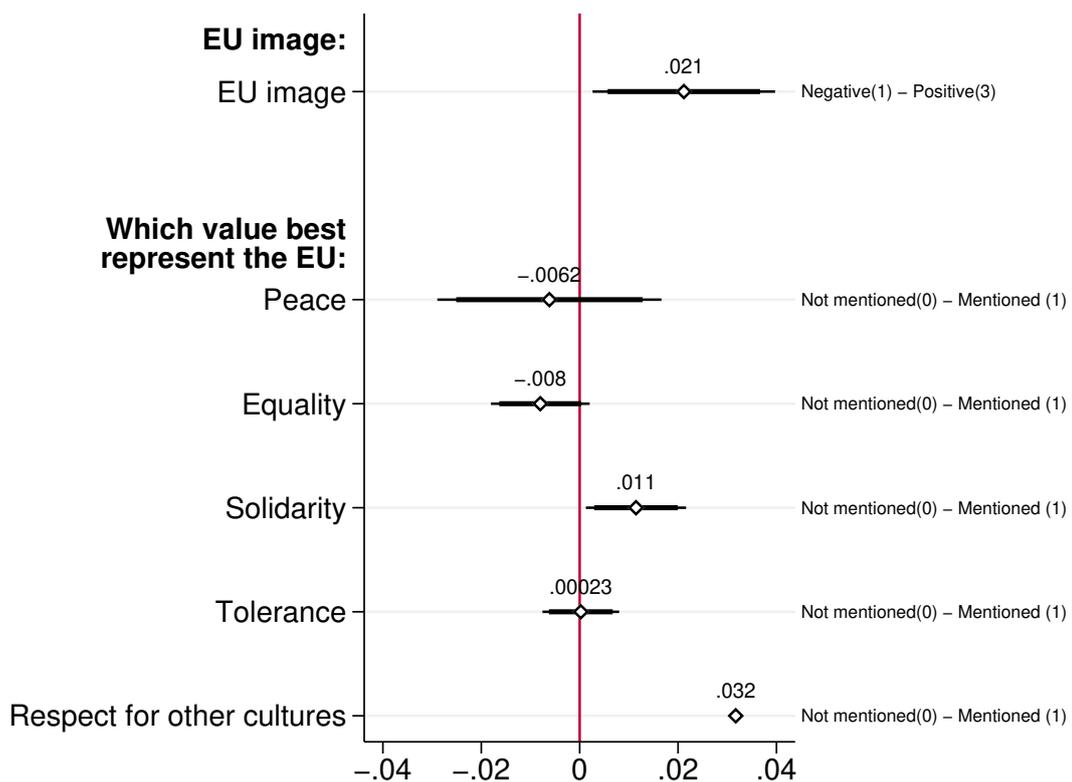
The results of Table 1 sketch an ambiguous picture: While participation at the Eurovision fosters European identity, this increase is offset in winning countries, where respondents report a lower sense of European identity and a stronger sense of national identity.

## 4.2 Mechanisms

To explore the mechanisms that may explain our main findings, Figure 1 assesses the impact of participation in the Eurovision on several individual attitudes. We first focus on respondents' image of the European Union. We observe that respondents interviewed after a participation of their country in the Eurovision are more likely to have a positive image of the EU.

We then turn to respondents' views on European values: Peace, Equality, Solidarity, Tolerance, and Respect for other cultures. Participation makes respondents more likely to find solidarity and the respect of other cultures to be important European values.

Figure 1: Mechanisms



## 5 Conclusion

# Appendix

In the Appendix, we provide supplementary information about our study.

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