

Euroscepticism in the Netherlands

A mediation analysis

Amber Bakker

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Dr. Bram Peper

Dr. Katya Ivanova

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Abstract

Euroscepticism is a well-studied topic, yet little research has looked at its relation with educational attainment directly. Eurosceptic attitudes in the Netherlands have increased through time. This upward trend is expected to continue, yet so is the process of European Integration. Hence, this thesis aims to uncover how educational attainment relates to Euroscepticism in the specific case of the Netherlands. This effect of educational attainment on Euroscepticism is expected to be mediated through various mechanisms on both the cultural, political and economic level. With the use of the European Social Survey round 9, a mediation analysis was performed. The evidence showed that the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is partially mediated by the experience of a cultural or economic threat, by the trust an individual has in the European Parliament and by the perceived state of the Dutch economy.

Keywords: *Euroscepticism, Educational attainment, Cultural threat, Political distrust, Economic threat*

Introduction

European integration has always been an important topic of debate on the political agenda of various political parties. People have questioned the effectivity of the European Union and its effect on the nation state for as long as the European Union exists (March, 2011; Rooduijn, Burgoon, van Elsas, van de Werfhorst, 2017). From the mid-1990s onwards, the support for political parties that publicly question the effectivity of the European Union has been on the rise throughout Western Europe. During the European Parliament Election in 2009, far right-winged parties gained seats in the European parliament through publicly arguing against the European Union (Werts, Scheepers & Lubbers, 2012). In May 2014, radical right-winged parties with sceptical attitudes towards Europe likewise achieved the most success during the election to the European Parliament (Rooduijn, 2015). In the specific case of the Netherlands, this upward trend in Eurosceptic attitudes can be seen as well. In 2019, the FvD, a far right-winged political party from the Netherlands, dominated the most recent Provincial Council elections in the Netherlands (HNL, 2019). An important topic on the agenda of the FvD is the European Union. The political party rejects the European Union and advocates for a referendum to be held which would question the Dutch membership of the European Union (Forum voor Democratie, n.d.). The increase in Eurosceptic attitudes among the Dutch is expected to continue and grow as time continues (Lubbers & Jaspers, 2010).

Previous research into Euroscepticism identified multiple predictors of such attitudes. The European Union allowed the member states to open up their country borders. As a result, the economic and political sphere of the member states increasingly overlap (Rooduijn, 2015). The collaboration and competition on the economic level directly influences the economy and labour market of the nation states. Previous research identified economic factors as important predictors of Eurosceptic attitudes. Over time, the European collaboration intensified beyond the economic level. Various Dutch political parties argue that the European Union is a threat to the sovereignty of the nation state (Werts et al., 2012; PVV, n.d.; FvD, n.d.). Likewise, media headlines frequently wonder whether the Dutch government is losing its autonomy to the European Union (Volkskrant, 2017; Trouw, 2005). The European Union faces cooperation difficulties as the emerging global challenges exceed all country borders. The legislative power of the European Union has been argued to strengthen even more over time (EDC, 2010). Research has identified the amount of trust one has in political institutions to be an important predictor of anti-EU sentiments. The immigration crisis for one left a mark on the perception of the European Union, as the legislative character of the European Union influenced the policy making on the national level. In general, immigration and integration have been identified as prominent topics on the political agenda for both the Dutch political sphere as for the European Parliament. Concerns about immigration and how immigrants have been proven to be a prominent predictor of anti-EU attitudes too (Rooduijn, 2015; Goodwinn & Milazzo, 2017). Various scholars have argued upon national identity and such aspects of immigration processes to explain anti-EU attitudes. Immigration has been argued to remain a rather

salient and a constant topic on the political agenda of political parties. Likewise, Eurosceptic attitudes are expected to remain rather salient and constant too (Rooduijn, 2015; HNL, 2019; Goodwinn, Milazzo, 2017).

Research that studied the theoretical mechanisms on a cultural, political and economic level collectively argue upon the importance of educational attainment. Educational attainment has been argued to predict Eurosceptic attitudes through various ways (Van Klingeren, Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2013; Akkerman, Zaslov & Spruyt, 2017; Bekhuis Lubbers, & Verkuyten, 2014). Citizens with financial security and/or a cosmopolitan worldview have been argued to feel less threatened by the increasing international collaboration and competition that follows from the European Union. Euroscepticism is a well-studied topic, yet little research has looked at its relation with educational attainment directly. Little research has focussed on identifying what aspects of educational attainment cause Euroscepticism.

It is crucial to understand voting behaviour in the Netherlands as voters give their political influence and future to the parties in question (Rooduijn et al., 2017). The political cooperation within the European Union continues to grow. Issues that concede far beyond border lines such as climate change, drugs criminality, unemployment and the refugee crisis require a joint approach (Volkskrant, 2005). The European Union is expected to grow, yet so are Eurosceptic attitudes in the Netherlands (Mudde, 2009). The processes that follow from the strengthened European Union, reinforce Euroscepticism. It is therefore of great significance to understand the mechanisms that contribute to Eurosceptic attitudes. The focus of this study lays on the Netherlands solely, therefore contextual factors can be taken into account to understand the theoretical mechanisms in the specific case of the Netherlands. With the use of the European Social Survey round 9, this study aims to answer the following research question:

How is educational attainment related to Eurosceptic attitudes in the Netherlands?

In order to answer this research question, the theory section in this paper discusses three theoretical mechanisms. Thereafter, the discussed theories are extensively researched with the use of the European Social Survey round 9. In the final chapter, a conclusion is drawn based upon the used data and theory, followed by a discussion about the research presented in this thesis.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

This chapter discusses the theoretical mechanisms that could offer an explanation to the question of how educational attainment is related to Eurosceptic attitudes in the Netherlands. First, the concept of

Euroscepticism is elaborated on. Then, the theoretical mechanisms that explain the bring about of Euroscepticism are discussed.

Euroscepticism

The definition of Euroscepticism as used in this thesis refers to the rejection of the founding ideas of the European Union; the joint sovereignty and the open market (Vollaard, 2006). Through time, the definition of Euroscepticism has broadened. At first, anti-EU attitudes were often based on economic considerations, rather utilitarian in nature. Such grounds for Eurosceptic attitudes are revered to as *hard factors*. As the European Union expanded its grounds beyond economic collaborations, so called *soft factors* became prominent factors in analysing Euroscepticism too. *Soft factors* include more identity and culturally driven arguments for Eurosceptic attitudes (Klingeren, Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2013). The member states of the European Union are part of collaborations on both the economic and political level. Regulations and rules within the EU affect the governance of the nation state. For example, the member states jointly agreed on reducing the emission of greenhouse gases in the European Union with 40% by 2030. Consequently, the Dutch government has to act upon such agreements, affecting the policies and governance of the Netherlands (Global policy forum, 2012; Rijksoverheid, n.d.). The open market serves as a tool to ensure the free movement of citizens and supplies throughout Europe. Borders no longer pose as a barrier, and legislations that could complicate this free movement are eliminated if possible. The open market is therefore often revered to by the European Commission as the Single Market (European Commission, n.d.).

As long as the European Union exists, anti-EU sentiments have been around too. The VVD was the first Dutch political party to openly question the use of the European Union. In the year 1990, the VVD leader Bolkestein expressed his concerns about the growing joint sovereignty and bureaucracy (Vollaard, 2006). Eurosceptic attitudes have remained rather common within the political atmosphere of the Netherlands ever since. Dutch political parties such as the Fvd, PVV and SP openly question whether European integration has gone too far, and argue upon the negative consequences it has for the Dutch nation state (PVV, 2017; SP, n.d.; FvD, n.d.) The amount of support for Eurosceptic political parties has simultaneously grown among the Dutch population. Whereas the Netherlands belonged to one of the least Eurosceptic countries within the EU in the 1990s, such attitudes have significantly increased in 2008 (Lubbers & Jaspers, 2010). Right-winged Eurosceptic political parties gained about a fourth of the seats during the European Parliament selection in 2019, among which the Dutch FvD concurred three seats. Sceptic attitudes towards the European Union has been on the rise and are expected to continue to grow as time goes on (Mudde, 2019).

Theories that aim to explain the ever increasing amount of Eurosceptic attitudes among Europeans, refer to the threats the European Union brings about. The experience of such a threat is

divided into three domains: at the cultural, political and economic level. These domains will be discussed separately in this theory chapter.

Cultural level

Cultural threat

Experiencing a cultural threat refers to the fear of losing the cultural make up of a nation state (McLaren, 2004). For example, Dutch citizens argue that the Dutch culture is in danger as a result of the multicultural society in the Netherlands. The Dutch festive tradition *Sinterklaas* is at stake because the generous man and his helpers, *Black Pete*, have been heavily criticized for its alleged racist character (de Volkskrant, 2014). In order to experience such a threat, one must value the nation state and its culture as important. To elaborate further upon experienced cultural threat, it is important to look at the Social Identity Theory first as this explains the process of identification with the nation state and its culture.

The Social Identity Theory proposes that the behaviour of individuals can be explained by their desire of belonging to a social group (Tajfel and Turner, as cited in Klinger, Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2013). From such social groups, individuals derive an individual identity. Belonging to a specific group influences the attitudes and perceptions held by individuals to a great extent. Individuals have the tendency to maintain a positive image of themselves. In order to realize this, individuals are inclined to apply positive characteristics to their own group, their ingroup, through a process of mental labelling called social identification. At the same time, negative characteristics are applied to other social groups, the outgroup. A negative characteristic among a member of the outgroup can then be generalized to the outgroup as a whole. An individual can however feel part of multiple social groups, and have therefore multiple facets of social identities. The Social Identity Theory therefore argues that the stronger an individual identifies with, and feels emotionally attached to a specific ingroup, the stronger the process of positive ingroup distinctiveness is (Klinger et al., 2013). Lubbers and Coenders (2017) claim that the nation state can be one of these social groups that people identify with. The Dutch nation state is seen as the ingroup, whereas the European Union is considered the outgroup. A process of ingroup distinctiveness could then occur; the Dutch nation state is seen as positive and considered to be better than the European Union.

Drawing on the Social Identity Theory, the Realistic Group Conflict Theory argues that such a division between the in- and outgroup can have severe consequences when both parties compete over the same resources. These resources however have to be scarce in order for competition to arise. The specific case of cultural competition concerns symbolic resources; cultural values and identities (Klinger et al., 2013). The European Union has opened up country borders, and in doing so enabled migration within the European Union too. Extensive research by Klinger et al., found that the number of migrants moving from one EU country to another increases every year (2013). Through time the

number of member states the European Union entails has increased too. The economic collaboration in 1951 started with 6 countries, whereas the European Union now entails 27 member states (Europese Unie, 2020). There are thus 27 countries with citizens who can travel freely throughout Europe, and who can immigrate rather easy too. At the same time, there has been a huge influx of immigrants from outside the European Union. When it comes to policies tackling the migration crisis within the nation state, the member states of the European Union are to some extent restricted by the legislations in the European Union. Guidelines around granting asylum and the reception of immigrants are implemented from the European Union on to the member states (European Union, n.d.). Consequently, this creates different cultural groups within the Dutch society. As a result, drawing on the Realistic Group Conflict theory, a feeling of competition occurs in which the native citizens, the ingroup, compete with immigrants, the outgroup, over identity resources. Immigrants are then seen as a threat to the cultural make-up of the Netherlands. The European Union is often held responsible for the migration as they implement legislations around both immigration from outside and within the European Union. Therefore the European Union is likely to be blamed for the backlash of migration (Klingeren et al., 2013). Not all individuals however experience a, or evenly strong, cultural threat from immigrants.

Education offers an explanation for the degree to which individuals experience a cultural threat. Various studies have reported a negative relationship between educational attainment and ingroup favouritism and negative attitudes against the outgroup. Selznick and Steinberg, as cited in Coenders and Scheepers (2003), propose that appropriate norms, values and behaviours are learned through education. Most importantly, democratic and scientific values are learned. Outgroup derogation is based upon uneducated beliefs. Stereotypes of the outgroup arise as negative characteristics are generalized to the entire outgroup (Coenders & Scheepers, 2003). The understanding of society and individual behaviour are very complex and multi-layered phenomena. Education offers insights into such, while at the same time education broadens an individual's perspective. Rather than just inheriting stereotypes, education offers insights into the norms and values outside of those in your ingroup. Coenders and Scheepers found that such cultural knowledge has a negative effect on outgroup derogation (2013).

Drawing on this theory, it is expected that Dutch citizens with a higher educational attainment are less inclined to hold negative attitudes toward outgroups. Consequently, this would indicate that higher educated Dutch citizens show lower levels of outgroup derogation. As outgroup derogation and ingroup favouritism are one of the main predictors of anti-immigrant attitudes (Scheepers & Coenders, 2003), it is expected that individuals who experience lower levels of ingroup superiority experience less anti-immigrant attitudes too. The cultural practices of immigrants are then too no longer identified as negative, as a threat, but rather the different norms and values are understood. The experience of a competition over cultural resources is then less likely to arise. The European Union is then in turn less likely to experience backlash as a consequence of the migration that resulted from the opening of the

borders, as immigrants are no longer identified as a threat to the cultural make-up of the Dutch nation state.

Emotional attachment

Through research it became apparent that higher educated individuals are in general less nationalistic (Scheepers & Coenders, 2003). The Uncertainty Identity Theory proposes that uncertainties about the self and the world causes an uncomfortable feeling. Individuals rather have a precise understanding of who they are as this allows them to better predict their world, hence people aim to reduce such uncertainties (Bekhuis, Lubbers & Verkuyten, 2014). Drawing upon the Social Identity Theory, it is argued that group identification is very effective in reducing such uncertainties. Through group identification people establish an identity and appropriate attitudes, perceptions and behaviours (Klingeren et al., 2013; Bekhuis et al., 2014).

Higher educated individuals have been argued to have a higher self-esteem and to have a better sense of who they are, therefore higher educated individuals tend to be less uncertain in general. As feelings of uncertainty are often reduced by a strong feeling of group identification, higher educated individuals are argued to attach less importance to their social groups (Bekhuis et al., 2014). In contrast, lower educated individuals tend to be less certain due to the blurring of group boundaries, which is caused by the international connections resulting from the European Union. In order to reduce such uncertainties, people then tend to strengthen their connections with the nation state (Coenders & Scheepers, 2013; Bekhuis et al., 2014). National pride and attachment to the nation state in turn have a significant negative effect on the support and confidence an individual has in the European Union (Hooghe & Marks, 2004).

H₁: Lower educated individuals are more likely to experience a cultural threat from immigrants than higher educated individuals, and are therefore more Eurosceptic.

H₂: Lower educated individuals attach more importance to the nation state than higher educated individuals, and are therefore more Eurosceptic.

Political level

Political distrust

Through time the political cooperation within the European Union has increased. Characterized by changing powers and new global challenges, such as climate change, the lung disease COVID-19 pandemic and the refugee crisis, the need for cooperation on the supranational level increases. Countries well represented in the European Union are expected to make room for the emerging power of the

European Union, as it is expected to grow as a result of globalization. The European Union faces cooperation difficulties as the emerging global challenges exceed all country borders (EDC, 2010).

It became apparent that not all individuals are evenly concerned about the nation state. A mechanism that offers an explanation to the question how educational attainment relates to the experience of political competition, can be found in nationalistic attitudes. As elaborated on in the previous paragraph, nationalistic individuals are resistant to anything that poses as a threat to the nation state (Scheepers & Coenders, 2003). McLaren identified the European Union as a possible threat to the nation state, as the EU is often criticized for changing the nation state (2002). The European Union is a cooperation on both the economic as political level. Policies that were formerly made solely by the nation state, are now influenced and restricted by the European Union. Consequently, the policies and governance of the member states have become more homogenous over time. The European Union poses as a threat to the resources of the nation, as they are no longer restricted solely to the nation state's use (McLaren, 2002). De Master and Le Roy, as argued in McLaren, therefore argued that those individuals that experience a cultural threat from minority groups, such as immigrants, are expected to fear European Integration in politics too as it poses a threat to nation state's uniqueness and resources (2002). As became apparent in the previous paragraph on cultural competition, educational attainment is an important characteristic that offers an explanation to the question why some Europeans experience a threat as a result of the European Union. Lower educated individuals seem to be more likely to be hostile against anything that poses as a threat to the nation state.

The European Parliament has thus often been argued to pose a threat to the nation state. Next to posing a threat to the uniqueness of the nation state through homogenous policies, the European Parliament poses a threat to the sovereignty of the nation state (Werts et al., 2012). Eurosceptic attitudes are characterized by the fear of losing the Dutch autonomy. Among Eurosceptic individuals the question arises to what extent the Dutch government still represents the ordinary Dutch citizens, as their policy making is restricted by the European Union (Krieski et al, 2006). The same question arises on the political agenda of multiple political parties in the Netherlands. The European Parliament is then not trusted to properly represent- and act in favour of the Dutch population. The European Parliament and its institutions are considered to be remote and vague institutions, and often difficult to understand. The distrust individuals have in the European Parliament, as a result of the feeling of underrepresenting, directly results in Eurosceptic attitudes (McLaren, 2007).

McLaren proposes that individuals who learn about politics in general tend to be associated with higher degrees of support for the European Parliament (2002). Drawing upon Inglehart, as cited in McLaren, it seems that those who learn about the European Union experience the political collaboration within the EU to be less threatening (2002). Learning about democratic values has been argued to be a prominent indicator of favourable attitudes towards the European Parliament too. Through education, individuals learn about democratic values, general politics and to some extent the European Union

(Scheepers & Coenders, 2003; McLaren, 2007). Consequently, the European Parliament and its institutions seem less remote and vague. Compared with higher educated individuals, lower educated individuals are then more likely to see the European Union as a threat, based upon the distrust they have in the European Parliament.

H₃: Lower educated individuals are more likely to experience the European Parliament as a threat, and are therefore more Eurosceptic.

Economic level

Dutch economy

Through the process of globalization and the European Union member states opening up their borders, the labour market likewise opened its doors for international competition and cooperation. This enabled businesses throughout the entire European Union to transfer professions, assets and technology out of the country (Bekhuis et al., 2014). Simultaneously, the European Union enabled Europeans to cross country borders to search for jobs. Western European countries experience a higher competition on the job market as a result of this higher movement of people from abroad (Bekhuis et al., 2014).

Within economics, the Rational Choice Theory is often used to explain human action. Coleman, as cited in Klinger et al., argued that individuals base their behaviour upon the most favourable outcome. Behaviours that have a positive payoff are acted upon, as behaviours that have a negative consequence are avoided (2013). The Rational Choice Theory has through time been proven to be able to predict human attitudes outside economics too. Whether an individual is in favour of- or against the European Union is then a calculated decision based upon the consequences that result from European Integration. An important predictor here, is the extent to which an individual anticipates a positive financial future (Klinger et al., 2013). Economic wealth and prosperity provide individuals with the belief of financial security. The open market is then expected to positively affect the economy of the nation state. Yet, when individuals sense their financial future to be rather pessimistic, the open market is seen as a threat. Citizens who believe to be financially vulnerable expect the open trade market to further worsen their uncertain and fickle financial situation (Klinger et al., 2013).

As a result of the open economy and trade market, Western economies hold promise for a widespread knowledge and service economy. Citizens active in higher social strata jobs are then expected to benefit from the open trade market, as the open borders strengthen the knowledge and service sector in which higher educated individuals are often employed. Hence, higher educated individuals would perceive the financial and economic situation of the Netherlands to be promising (Bekhuis et al., 2014; Klinger et al., 2013). However, citizens employed in lower social strata jobs do not directly benefit from the open market. On top of that, lower social strata jobs are outsourced to

cheaper countries, leaving lower educated individuals with the fear of losing their occupations as they often cannot compete in the knowledge sector of an economy (Bekhuis et al., 2014). From 2014 up to 2016, 30 thousand jobs have been outsourced and moved beyond the Dutch borders. Within the industrial sector, 11% of all companies outsourced jobs, whereas only 4% of companies active in other sectors transferred functions to other countries. Most of the jobs that were transferred and outsourced entailed jobs active in logistics, and in the production and delivery of services for the market (CBS, 2018). Lower educated individuals are therefore more likely to foresee the Dutch economy to be rather pessimistic. Individuals in lower social strata jobs could fear the continuity of their work. What does the out scouring of low social strata jobs imply for the availability of their job, are questions that then arise. Lower educated individuals therefore foresee less economic chances and a stable and certain financial future. As the open borders and trade market are a result of the European Union, further European Integration could be considered to be rather positive or negative based upon how people foresee their economic and financial future. How people foresee their economic and financial future in turn depends on the sector of employment.

Economic threat

The European Union thus enabled Europeans to cross country borders to search for jobs. Western European citizens who are employed in lower social strata jobs, experience a higher economic threat as a result of the open market too. That is to say, lower social strata jobs are often comparable to the jobs immigrants and seasonal workers compete for. When it comes to construction workers, one out of five originally comes from Eastern Europe. A total of 180 thousand citizens from Poland are employed in the Netherlands. Jobs in both the construction and farming sector are more than often employed by Middle and Eastern Europeans as they often work through an employment agency (CBS, 2019). Individuals who have jobs in the lower social strata can rather easy be replaced by immigrants (Bekhuis et al., 2014; Klingereren et al., 2013). Consequently, lower educated individuals experience a higher economic threat as they are more likely to work in lower social strata sectors. As the European Union is often to blame for the higher flow of immigrants and seasonal workers, it can therefore be argued that the experience of an economic threat reinforces Eurosceptic attitudes. Lower educated individuals tend to reject the European Union in an attempt to limit the job competition (Klingereren et al., 2013).

H₄: Lower educated individuals are less satisfied with the Dutch economy, and are therefore more Eurosceptic

H₅: Lower educated individuals are more likely to experience an economic threat from immigrants than higher educated individuals, and are therefore more Eurosceptic

Method

Data

The five hypotheses proposed in the theory section of this thesis are tested with the use of data from the European Social Survey round 9, 2018. The 9th round of the European Social Survey was conducted among 30 countries, among those 30 countries 11 countries participated but yet had to release the data. The file then contained data on 19 different countries. However, this is a study into Euroscepticism among the Dutch in particular, and therefore only the data collected in the Netherlands is analysed. 1673 Respondents from the Netherlands filled out the European Social Survey, which makes up for 4,6% of the total amount of respondents. After narrowing the amount of respondents down to those who answered all relevant questions, the total amount of respondents used for the analysis was set at 1477. In the following sections the operationalization of the concepts is elaborated on, after which the results of the analysis will be discussed thoroughly.

Measures

Dependent variable

The specific definition of Euroscepticism as referred to in this thesis, entails the rejection of the founding ideas of the European Union; the increasing joint sovereignty and the open market with its competitive and international character (Vollaard, 2006). Therefore, Eurosceptic attitudes were measured with the question *'Now thinking about the European Union, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. Using this card, what number on the scale best describes your position?'*. Respondents could rank the question from 0 (Unification has already gone too far) up to 10 (Unification should go further).

Independent variable

The educational attainment of the respondents were measured with a country specific question. The individuals were asked about their highest completed level of education. The answers were then categorized according to the International Standard Classification of Education, consisting out of 8 categories; less than lower secondary; lower secondary; lower tier upper secondary; upper tier upper secondary; advanced vocational, sub-degree; lower tertiary education, bachelor level; higher tertiary education, from master level onwards. 955 Out of the total of 1477 respondents possessed a sub-degree at highest. 522 Of the respondents possessed an educational degree at bachelor level or higher at the time the European Social Survey was filled out.

Mediating variables

For the first hypothesis, the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is expected to be mediated for by the experience of a cultural threat from immigrants. The experience of a cultural threat refers to the fear that the Dutch culture is at stake because of the increasing multi-cultural society (McLaren, 2004). The experience of such a cultural threat was measured with the question *'would you say that the Netherlands's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?'* Respondents could rank their answer from 0 (cultural life undermined) up to 10 (cultural life enriched).

The second hypothesis proposes that the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is mediated by the extent to which one attaches importance to the nation state. This was measured with the use of an item measuring the extent to which the respondents indicates to attach emotional significance to the nation state. The item concerned the question *'How emotionally attached do you feel to the Netherlands?'*. Respondents could rank the extent to which they attach emotional significance to the nation state from 0 (not at all emotionally attached) up to 10 (very emotionally attached).

The third hypothesis argues that the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is mediated for by the experience of a political threat; Eurosceptic individuals tend to distrust the European Parliament to properly represent the ordinary Dutch citizens. The extent to which an individual trusts the European Parliament was measured with an item that specifically asked the question *'How much do you trust the European Parliament?'*. The answer categories are ranked from 0 (No trust at all) to 10 (complete trust).

The fourth hypothesis entails the expectation that the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is mediated by the perceived state of the Dutch economy. Important here is not the actual state of the Dutch economy, but rather the experience of the respondent. This was measured with an item that measured the satisfaction of the respondent with the question *'On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in the Netherlands?'*. The answer categories are ranked from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) up to 10 (extremely satisfied).

The fifth hypothesis implies that the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is mediated for by the experience of an economic threat from immigrants. The extent to which the respondents experience an economic threat was measured with the question *'Would you say it is generally bad or good for the Netherlands' economy that people come to live here from other countries?'*. The respondents could rank their answer ranging from 0 (bad for the economy) up to 10 (good for the economy). The perceived effect of immigrants on our economy is expected to be more pessimistic among lower educated individuals. The direct effect of immigrants in the workplace is directly experienced by those occupied in lower social-strata jobs, as those are the jobs immigrants often compete for too.

Control variables

The analysis will control for both age and gender. Older generations tend to hold different political views than younger generations. Likewise, women tend to hold different views on European integration than men. Both younger generations and females tend to be less Eurosceptic (Klingeren et al., 2013). Therefore, the analysis will control for both items. The gender item consists of a dummy item, with the options male (0) and female (1). Among the 1477 respondents, 766 of those were female. The average age among the respondents was 48 years old. The actual age of the respondents ranged from 15 up to 90 years old.

Descriptive results

Table 1 entails descriptive data about the various variables used in the analysis. The total sample size was set at 1477 for all variables. Furthermore, the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of all variables are included in the table.

On average, the Dutch respondents feel quite emotional attached to the Netherlands; the average mean is 7,06. Likewise, with a mean of 6,95, the Dutch respondents are quite satisfied with the state of the Dutch economy. The effect of immigrants on the Dutch economy is evaluated as rather neutral by the Dutch respondents; the average mean is 5,57.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
European Integration	1477	0	10	5,48	2,169
Level of education	1477	1	8	4,46	4,455
Cultural enrichment	1477	0	10	6,30	1,958
Attachment	1477	0	10	7,06	1,917
Trust in European Parliament	1477	0	10	5,32	1,985
Present state economy	1477	0	10	6,95	1,468
Economic effect immigrants	1477	0	10	5,57	1,815
Gender	1477	0	1	0,501	0,500
Age	1477	15	90	48,66	18,817

Source: European Social Survey (2018); own calculations

Analyses

The data of the European Social Survey round 9 was analysed with the use of the PROCESS macro for SPSS. At first, it was tested whether the data met the assumptions of linear regression. The assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and the absence of multicollinearity were all adhered too. Through PROCESS a mediation analysis was then performed, examining the relationship between the independent variable, mediating variables and the dependent variable while controlling for age and gender.

Results

Main mediation analysis

Through PROCESS a mediation analysis was performed. The mediation analysis is analysed through 4 steps. First, the initial relationship between the independent and dependent variable has to be significant. Second, the independent variable has to have a significant effect on the mediator variables. For the third step, the significant effect of mediating variables on the dependent variable has to be confirmed. For the fourth and final step, the direct and indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable has to be analysed. In table 2 the mediation analysis is reported. Each step is elaborated on below.

Table 2. Mediation effects of cultural threat, emotional attachment, trust in the European Parliament, perceived economic state and economic threat on the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism (N=1477)

Regression paths	<i>b</i>		<i>t</i>
<i>Step 1</i>			
Total effect initial IV	0,061	***	4,87
<i>Step 2</i>			
Cultural enrichment	0,035	**	3,09
Attachment	0,016		1,48
Trust in European Parliament	0,033	**	2,98
Present state economy	0,020	*	2,36
Economic effect immigrants	0,034	**	3,22
<i>Step 3</i>			
Cultural enrichment	0,131	***	4,63
Attachment	0,039		1,48
Trust in European Parliament	0,389	***	13,99
Present state economy	0,102	***	2,93
Economic effect immigrants	0,218	***	7,06
<i>Step 4</i>			
Total effect	0,061	***	4,87
Direct effect	0,034	***	3,13
Total indirect effect bootstrapped with (<i>c – c'</i>) bootstrapped			
95% CI	0,028	[0.0147, 0.0521]	
Cultural enrichment	0,005	[0.0015, 0.0112]	
Attachment	0,001	[-0.0005, 0.0027]	
Trust in European Parliament	0,013	[0.0064, 0.0230]	
Present state economy	0,002	[0.0002, 0.0052]	
Economic effect immigrants	0,007	[0.0024, 0.0177]	

Source; European Social Survey (2018); own calculations.

Note: $p < .05$: *; $p < .01$: **; $p < .001$: ***

The first step is thus to confirm the significance of the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism, without the presence of the mediating variables. The total effect of education on Euroscepticism is captured in the first step of the model in table 2; $b = 0,0612$, $t(1473) = 4,8707$, $p =$

$<0,001$. The initial relationship is thus significant. Lower educated individuals thus tend to be more Eurosceptic than higher educated individuals.

Furthermore, as it is expected that the initial relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is mediated through 5 variables, educational attainment should have a significant relationship with those 5 variables. It thus is important that educational attainment is a significant predictor of 1) the extent to which someone experiences a cultural or 2) economic threat, 3) the degree of emotional attachment to the nation state, 4) the amount of trust one has in the European Parliament and 5) of the perception one has of the economic state. The second step in table 2 shows that the relationship between the initial independent variable, thus educational attainment, on the mediator variables is significant for 4 of the 5 mediators. Educational attainment is a significant predictor for experienced cultural and economic threat, amount of trust in the European Parliament and the perceived state of the economy. Yet, educational attainment does not have a significant relationship with the amount of emotional attachment one has to the nation; $b = 0,0162$, $t(1473) = 1,48$, $p = > 0,05$. That is, educational attainment is not a significant predictor of the degree of emotional attachment an individual has to the nation state.

The third step, as portrayed in the third step section in table 2, requires the confirmation of the significance of the relationship between the mediator variables and the dependent variable in the presence of the initial independent variable. Thus, the relationship of the mediating variables on Euroscepticism in the presence of educational attainment. The amount of emotional attachment on the nation is, in line with its relationship with educational attainment, not significant related with Eurosceptic attitudes. The amount of emotional attachment one has to the Netherlands is thus not a significant predictor of Eurosceptic attitudes; $b = 0,0386$, $t(1468) = 1,48$, $p = > 0,05$. The following hypothesis that expected the effect of educational attainment on Euroscepticism is mediated by the degree to which one attaches emotional importance to the nation state is thus rejected:

H₂: Lower educated individuals attach more importance to the nation state than higher educated individuals, and are therefore more Eurosceptic.

However, the other 4 mediators were all significantly related with Euroscepticism. More specifically this implicates that the experience of an economic or cultural threat, the experience of distrust in the European Parliament and a negative perception of the economy all offer an explanation to the question of what causes Eurosceptic attitudes.

It becomes apparent that educational attainment is a significant predictor for 4 out of the 5 mediator variables. Those 4 variables are in turn significant predictors of the dependent variable; Euroscepticism. Yet, the mediation model has to be significant itself too. For full mediation, the relationship between the

initial independent variable and the dependent variable in the presence of the mediator variables should be insignificant. That is, there should be a meaningful reduction in effect in the relationship of education on Euroscepticism once the mediating variables are introduced into the model. In the fourth step, it becomes apparent that the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is still significant in the presence of the mediator variables; $b = 0,0337$, $t(1468) = 3,13$, $p = < 0.05$. The introduction of the mediating variables then did not lead to a significant decrease in the direct effect of educational attainment on Euroscepticism. However, the indirect effect of the mediating variables perceived cultural or economic threat, distrust in the European Parliament and perceived economic state are all significant. That is, the part of the total effect on Euroscepticism that is not a direct effect of educational attainment. The indirect effect of the variable distrust in the European Parliament, with an effect of 0,013, $p = < 0,05$, turned out to be the biggest contributor to the overall indirect effect. However, as the initial relationship remains significant after the introduction of the mediating variables in the model, it can be concluded that the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is partially mediated. Therefore, the following hypotheses are accepted, as the indirect effect of education through the mediating variables has a significant effect on Euroscepticism:

H₁: Lower educated individuals are more likely to experience a cultural threat from immigrants than higher educated individuals, and are therefore more Eurosceptic.

H₃: Lower educated individuals are more likely to experience the European Parliament as a threat, and are therefore more Eurosceptic.

H₄: Lower educated individuals are less satisfied with the Dutch economy, and are therefore more Eurosceptic.

H₅: Lower educated individuals are more likely to experience an economic threat from immigrants than higher educated individuals, and are therefore more Eurosceptic.

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate how educational attainment relates to Euroscepticism. It was expected that this initial relationship was mediated through various variables, that all offer an explanation to Eurosceptic attitudes. Both so called *soft* and *hard* factors were taken into account to answer the research question. The evidence in this study confirms that the effect of educational attainment on Euroscepticism is partially mediated. That is, there is both a significant indirect and direct effect of educational attainment on Euroscepticism.

First off, it was expected that there was a mediation effect of *soft* factors. Lower educated individuals were expected to more easily experience a cultural threat which would result in Eurosceptic

attitudes. The evidence in this study indeed confirms that there is an indirect effect of experiencing a cultural threat on anti-EU sentiments. Lower educated individuals are indeed more likely to experience a cultural threat. Through this mechanism, a lower educational background can lead to Euroscepticism. Furthermore, building on the same theoretical framework, it was expected that individuals who attach importance to the nation state are more likely to hold sceptic attitudes towards the European Union. However, in the analysis it became apparent that there is no evidence in this study to support that claim. As a result the hypothesis was rejected. Furthermore, the evidence showed that the indirect effect of the variable distrust in the European Parliament was the biggest contributor to the total indirect effect. Lower educated individuals tend to distrust the European Parliament more often than higher educated individuals, and this particular mechanism partially explains how education relates to Euroscepticism. In this study, this mechanism seems to be the most prominent predictor of Euroscepticism through educational attainment. Through higher education, individuals seem to obtain certain knowledge or skills that lead to trust in the European Parliament.

For the *hard* factors, this study aimed to investigate how economic factors could pose a mediating mechanism on the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism. The data confirmed that lower educated individuals tend to perceive the economic state of the Netherlands to be more pessimistic, which in turn results in Eurosceptic attitudes. The open trade market and increasing international competition that arises from the European Unification results in the fear of not being able to compete in the economy among those who are employed outside the service and knowledge sector. They are then more likely to foresee the economic state and future to be rather pessimistic. At the same, individuals employed in such lower social-strata jobs, compete with immigrants directly on the job market. Eurosceptic attitudes arise as a result of both the international competition on the market as the direct competition with immigrants in the Netherlands. The evidence in this study confirms both expectations.

The data did not confirm both the claim that lower educated individuals tend to attach more emotional significance to the nation state, as the claim that attaching emotional importance to the nation state is a predictor of Euroscepticism. The latter could be explained by the theoretical understanding that an individual can identify with multiple groups at the same time (Klingeren et al., 2013). Attaching emotional significance to the nation state might then not be enough for Eurosceptic attitudes to arise. Rather, an individual should attach importance to the nation state solely. That is, as individuals can attach importance to- and identify with multiple groups at the same time, one can feel both attached to- and part of the European Union as of the nation state. Then, Eurosceptic attitudes are not likely to arise. Rather than the emotional attachment of an individual to the nation state, it might be promising to investigate the national pride an individual has and how this relates to educational attainment and Eurosceptic attitudes. An individual perhaps can feel emotionally attached to the Netherlands, as this is

their home, yet the experience of a rather extreme emotional attachment is perhaps better captured with the degree of national pride.

For this study, the amount of trust one has in the European Parliament seems to be a prominent predictor of Euroscepticism, through educational attainment. In 2019, the FvD, a far right-winged political party, dominated the most recent Provincial Council elections in the Netherlands. The FvD emphasizes that the Dutch government does not serve the Dutch people properly. The European Parliament is to blame, according to the FvD, as they do not properly represent the wishes and needs of the Dutch population. They argue that the European Union is an outdated governance model (FvD, n.d.). Perhaps the FvD reinforced Euroscepticism through its media campaign that emphasized the failure of the European Parliament. Further research could investigate how the political situation in the nation relates to Euroscepticism. Perhaps there is more to learn about how distrust in institutions in politics relate to Euroscepticism in a more general sense, or how national media campaigns influence Euroscepticism.

Furthermore, as this study used secondary data, the analysis was restricted to the data available. The experience of such a competition with immigrants was therefore measured with a single item that asked the respondents to indicate whether they evaluate the impact of immigrants on the Dutch economy to be good or bad. More ideally, this concept of economic fear of immigrants would have been measured with multiple items, or with an item that asked about economic competition directly. The evidence in this study confirmed the mediating effect of perceived economic competition with immigrants on the relationship between educational attainment and Eurosceptic. However, this effect might be bigger and more substantiate when tested with a better operationalization.

The evidence in this study implies that the relationship between educational attainment and Euroscepticism is mediated by the experience of a cultural or economic threat, through distrust in the European Parliament and through the perception of the economic state. However, as the direct effect of educational attainment on Euroscepticism remains significant and rather big, there are perhaps other variables that were not included in this research but which do offer an explanation to the question of how educational attainment relates to Eurosceptic attitudes. Further research should aim to uncover these mechanisms that explain how a lower educational attainment is likely to lead to a rejection of the European Union.

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Appendix

* Encoding: UTF-8.

*Syntax file thesis CCP Amber Bakker .

Select if cntry='NL'.

frequencies cntry.

*1673 Nederlandse respondenten.

*dependent variable.

frequencies eufft.

descriptives eufft.

*independent variable: educational attainment.

frequencies eiscd.

descriptives eiscd.

*mediator 1; cultural threat.

frequencies imueclt.

descriptives imueclt.

*mediator 2; attachment nl.

Frequencies atchctr.

descriptives atchctr.

*mediator 3; trust in EU parliament.

Frequencies trstep.

descriptives trstep.

*mediator 4; state of nl economy.

frequencies stfeco.

descriptives stfeco.

*mediator 5; economic threat.

frequencies imbgeco.

descriptives imbgeco.

*control variables.

```
frequencies gndr agea.  
descriptives gndr agea.  
RECODE gndr (1=0) (2=1) INTO gndrnew.  
VARIABLE LABELS gndrnew 'gender dummy'.  
EXECUTE.  
descriptives gndrnew agea.
```

```
*n bepalen.  
Select if not missing (eufth).  
select if not missing (eiscd).  
select if not missing (imueclt).  
select if not missing (trstep).  
select if not missing (stfeco).  
select if not missing (imbgeco).  
select if not missing (atchctr).  
select if not missing (agea).  
select if not missing (gndrnew).  
frequencies eufth eiscd imueclt trstep STFECO imbgeco atchctr gndrnew agea.  
descriptives eufth eiscd imueclt trstep STFECO imbgeco atchctr gndrnew agea.
```

```
*assumptions lineare regressie testen.  
REGRESSION  
  /MISSING LISTWISE  
  /STATISTICS COEFF OUTS R ANOVA COLLIN TOL  
  /CRITERIA=PIN(.05) POUT(.10)  
  /NOORIGIN  
  /DEPENDENT eufth  
  /METHOD=ENTER atchctr eiscd imueclt imbgeco STFECO trstep  
  /SCATTERPLOT=(*ZRESID ,*ZPRED)  
  /RESIDUALS NORMPROB(ZRESID).
```

```
GRAPH  
  /SCATTERPLOT(BIVAR)= atchctr WITH eufth  
  /MISSING=LISTWISE.
```

```
GRAPH  
  /SCATTERPLOT(BIVAR)=imueclt WITH eufth
```


/MISSING=LISTWISE.

GRAPH

/SCATTERPLOT(BIVAR)=stfec0 WITH eufth

/MISSING=LISTWISE.

GRAPH

/SCATTERPLOT(BIVAR)=trstep WITH eufth

/MISSING=LISTWISE.

GRAPH

/SCATTERPLOT(BIVAR)=imbgeco WITH eufth

/MISSING=LISTWISE.

*PROCESS.

*process analyse staat niet in de syntax, omdat process niet 'gepaste' kan worden, maar direct de optie 'run' gebruikt moet worden.

*Dit is waarschijnlijk het geval omdat het een extra macro is die extern gedownload moest worden.