

**Young People's Engagement with the European Union: The Importance of  
Visions and Worries for the Future of Europe**

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*This is the **Final Draft** of an article published by Hogrefe Publishing in Zeitschrift für Psychologie/Journal of Psychology,, available online at: [https:// https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-57028-004](https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-57028-004)*

Please cite this article as: Strohmeier, D., Barrett, M., Bora, C., Caravita, S. C. S., Donghi, E., Dragoti, E., Fife-Schaw, C., Gómez-López, M., Kapéter, E., Mazzone, A., Rama, R., Roşeanu, G., Ortega-Ruiz, R., Steiner, H., Trip, S., Tenenbaum, H., Uhrhane, D., & Viejo, C. (2017). Young people's engagement with the European Union: The importance of visions and worries for the future of Europe. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 225(4), 313–323. <https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000314>

### **Abstract**

This study investigated whether demographic variables, efficacy beliefs, visions and worries are associated with four different forms of (dis)engagement with the European Union: intended voting in the 2019 EU elections, non-conventional political engagement, psychological engagement, and the wish that one's own country should leave the EU. The sample comprised 3.764 young people aged 16 to 25 years living in seven European countries: Albania, Austria, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain and UK. Economic challenges, human rights and the environment were the most important future visions; unemployment and poverty, climate change, civil unrests and the collapse of the EU were the most important future worries. The four forms of (dis)engagement with the European Union were differentially associated with predictors, although internal efficacy and future vision of economic challenges predicted all forms. Implications for future EU policy are discussed.

## **Young People's Engagement with the European Union: The Importance of Visions and Worries for the Future of Europe**

The European Union (EU) has recently faced several fundamental challenges that have put the question of the future of the European project on the political agenda. There is no doubt that today's young people will shape the future of Europe in the long run – but are their voices being heard today? What visions and worries do young people have for the future of Europe? Do young people think they can influence political decisions on the European level? Do young people's efficacy beliefs, visions and worries translate into engagement with the EU?

The Europe 2038 project<sup>1</sup> was designed to answer these questions, and a large scale PAN-European survey was conducted with youth aged 16 to 25 years. To maximise the generalizability of the findings, seven European countries with differing relationships to the EU participated in this project.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why Young People's Voices are Important**

Political decision-making on a supranational level like the EU is more complex and distant from young people's everyday lives than politics on a local level such as neighbourhoods or cities (Barrett & Zani, 2015b; Serek, Lacinova & Macek, 2012). This is especially true for high stakes decisions (like Brexit) that might have an unforeseeable impact on the future of many people. There are different ways that youth can engage with supranational entities like the EU (Zani & Barrett, 2012), including conventional political participation (e.g., voting in EU elections), non-conventional political participation (e.g., signing petitions to try and influence European institutions, processes or decision-making),

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<sup>1</sup> The Europe 2038 project is a multinational research project funded by the Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020; Strand2: Democratic engagement and civic participation; Action 2.3: Civil society projects; call 2015, project ID 564710. For more info see: <http://www.europe2038.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> The present study comprises two founding member states (Germany and Italy), three countries that joined 1986 (Spain), 1995 (Austria) and 2007 (Romania), one candidate country (Albania), and one country that decided to leave the European Union in 2016 (the UK).

and psychological engagement with the EU (e.g., following the news about European issues or discussing European topics with friends). Young people might also be disengaged, wanting their country to leave the EU. This type of disengagement has been conceptualized as a form of disidentification (Becker & Tausch, 2014), and called "exit" in a recent study (Prodromitis, Chryssochoou & Papastamou, 2017). These four different forms of supranational (dis)engagement are expressions of young people's wish to shape the future of Europe either in the *public* or *private* sphere (Amnå & Ekman, 2015) or by *individual* or *collective* actions (Amnå, 2012; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Listening to young people's voices and understanding the factors associated with different forms of supranational (dis)engagement is also important given the imbalance of power and control in favour of older groups (Albanesi, Mazzoni, Cicognani, & Zani, 2015).

### **Understanding Young People's Engagement with the EU**

To the best of our knowledge, no study to date has investigated these four different forms of young people's (dis)engagement with the EU and no conceptual model has been developed to understand young people's engagement on a supranational political level. However, Cicognani and Zani (2015) proposed a psychosocial model of participation, identifying seven factors associated with engagement and participation: (1) personal and demographic, (2) social construction of participation, (3) motivations and goals, (4) emotions, (5) social identities and sense of belonging, (6) perceived power and influence, and (7) perceived opportunities and barriers. Barrett (2015) also constructed an integrative model of political and civic participation, identifying *different* factors associated with three forms of engagement (i.e., voting, volunteering, and collective action). Thus, to develop the conceptual model for the present study (see Table 1), three sets of factors were taken from the Cicognani and Zani (2015) model; these were expected to predict the four forms of supranational (dis)engagement differently, based on the theorizing of Barrett (2015).

*Demographic variables* (gender, age and immigrant status) were included in the model. Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray and Born (2012) found that men aged 15 to 19 showed higher political interest and internet political participation than women, but they did not find gender differences regarding voting intentions. Eckstein, Noak and Gniewosz (2012) did not find gender differences regarding political engagement among adolescents attending school grades 7 to 11, but demonstrated that longitudinal trajectories differed depending on academic vs. vocational school track. Civic and political engagement increase between late adolescence and early adulthood (e.g., Albanesi et al., 2015). For immigrants, opportunity structures for conventional political engagement are usually constrained, because they are often not citizens in their country of residence even if they were born there (Montgomery, 2015). However, Barrett and Zani (2015) argue that immigrants do have alternative possibilities for engagement even if they have no right to vote in their country of residence. And indeed, immigrants in Italy from Morocco and Albania display higher levels of civic participation compared to their non-immigrant Italian peers (Albanesi et al., 2015), and higher levels of political attentiveness and political participation (excluding voting) are found among Turkish and Moroccan immigrant youth in Belgium than in non-immigrant Belgian youth (Gavray, Born & Fournier, 2015).

*Goals* were conceptualized as visions and worries for the long-term future of Europe instead of investigating *personal* goals as typically done in the literature (Cicognani & Zani, 2015). Because of the novelty of this study, it was necessary to develop a comprehensive and meaningful list of visions and worries.

*Perceived power and influence* were operationalized in terms of internal, external and collective political efficacy. While internal political efficacy was defined as feeling knowledgeable and competent regarding EU issues, external political efficacy was defined as the belief that one's voice is heard and taken seriously by decision-makers at the European level (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna & Mebane, 2009). Collective political efficacy (Bandura,

2000) was defined as the belief that young people as a group can successfully impact the future of Europe and political decisions on the European level. Although previous studies have revealed the importance of all three efficacy beliefs, internal efficacy tends to be the most consistent predictor of political and civic participation (Barrett, 2015; Brunton-Smith & Barrett, 2015).

### **Research Questions**

Data were collected in seven European countries from youth aged 16 to 25 years to answer the following three research questions (RQ):

*RQ 1: What visions and worries do youth living in seven European countries have for the long-term future of Europe?*

Because youths' long-term future visions and worries for Europe have never been investigated systematically before, it was necessary (1) to develop a comprehensive list of relevant topics and (2) to establish the factor structure of the new instrument.

*RQ 2: Are there differences in visions and worries, engagement with the EU and efficacy beliefs depending on gender, age and immigrant status?*

To investigate age differences between late adolescents and emerging adults, the youth were divided into two groups: 16-19 year olds and 20-25 year olds. The cut-off age of 19 was used because this is the average age of university entrance in most of the participating countries. Young people were categorized as first generation immigrants when their country of birth did not match their country of residence. It was hypothesized that age and gender are associated with the different forms of engagement with the EU, because of already documented differences in studies on general political engagement (Albanesi et al., 2015; Cicognani et al., 2012). Because of the novelty of the present study, we did not formulate hypotheses regarding visions, worries and efficacy beliefs.

*RQ3: Do demographic variables, visions and worries and efficacy beliefs predict the four forms of engagement with the EU differently?*

We hypothesized that demographic variables, efficacy beliefs, visions and worries would predict different forms of engagement for the EU differentially (Barrett, 2015). As the data collection took place between April and December 2016, it was possible to split the sample into data collected before and after the Brexit referendum (June 23, 2016) and to control for this macro-level event in the analyses.

## Method

### Study Design

*As a first step*, a qualitative pre-study was conducted with a minimum of five young persons aged 16 to 25 years in each of the seven European countries that were members of the Europe 2038 project<sup>3</sup>. The main goal was to generate as many visions and worries for the future of Europe as possible. The interview guideline consisted of three parts: 1) Short and long-term personal future: hopes and fears, visions and worries; 2) short and long-term future of Europe: hopes and fears, visions and worries; 3) the relation between the personal future and the future of Europe. To capture spontaneous associations, the first interview questions were formulated very broadly and followed by prompts, e.g., *How do you envision the future of Europe in 25 years? Where do you see challenges? Where do you see benefits?* The interviews were conducted in different languages, transcribed and content analysed by the seven country teams. The visions and worries resulting from the country-specific content analyses were back-translated into English. A multi-national sub-team constructed a preliminary list of visions and worries for the future of Europe. The other project members who were not part of this sub-team reviewed this preliminary list, clarified unclear items and deleted redundant items. This procedure resulted in a list of 39 future visions and 31 future worries that were integrated in the quantitative survey.

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<sup>3</sup>For more details see: <http://www.europe2038.eu/survey/pre-study/>

*As a second step*, a quantitative online survey was conducted. Beside the newly developed list of visions and worries for the future of Europe, three multi-national sub-teams selected well-established scales to measure several additional constructs of interest. All selected scales, which were in English, were again reviewed by the other project members to shorten the final survey. The final survey was translated into six languages (in two countries the language was German) and back-translated by two independent bi-lingual team members. The final versions of the survey were available online between April/July (depending on country) and December 2016<sup>4</sup>.

### **Procedure**

All necessary permits to conduct the study were obtained from local and national bodies and ethical committees of the project teams' universities. The goal was to collect data from a minimum of 250 young persons per country, equally divided by gender and age group (16-19 vs. 20-25 years). The sample was intended to ideally match other relevant national characteristics like educational background or immigrant status. Participants were recruited by advertising the online survey on several relevant national webpages, sending the link to teachers, social workers and other professionals, advertising in newspapers, local radio stations, television, and during national events. Moreover, in Austria, Italy and the UK, data were also collected in schools.

### **Measures**

***Demographic information.*** Information regarding gender, age, citizenship, country of birth, and country of residence was obtained. Participants were asked what best describes what they are currently doing: studying at school, studying at (tech) college or university, looking for a job, working full time, working part time, being in an apprenticeship or training

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<sup>4</sup>For more details see: <http://www.europe2038.eu/survey/online-survey/>



scheme, not being in work or training or education, caring for a child or dependent, waiting for the processing of the asylum application, other.

**Visions for Europe 2038.** To assess future visions, the following instruction was given: *Imagine that you are the head of the European Union and you could set priorities for Europe 2038. Which topics are the most important? Please also mark your top 5 priorities.*

The 39 visions were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *very important (5) to not at all important (1)* (see Results section for items).

**Worries about Europe 2038.** To assess future worries, the following instruction was given: *Imagine yourself in 2038, which of the following things are you worried about? Please also indicate for each topic whether this is one of your top 5 worries.* The 31 worries were rated on a 5 point scale ranging from *a lot (5) to not at all (1)* (see Results section for items).

**Engagement with the EU.** Conventional political engagement was measured with one item *“Will you vote in the European Union elections in 2019?”* This item was not part of the survey in Albania and the UK, as Albania is currently a candidate country and data collection in the UK started after the Brexit referendum. Non-conventional political engagement was measured with six items (e.g. *“Have you ever signed a petition about an issue regarding the European Union?”*). Psychological engagement was measured with three items (e.g. *“Do you follow news about the European Union on TV, the radio, or in newspapers?”*). These items were inspired by the PIDOP project (Barrett & Zani, 2015a). Disengagement from the EU was measured with one item *“Do you think your country should remain in the European Union?”* Again, this item was not part of the survey in Albania and was not used for the UK in the present analyses. The answer format of all items was yes or no.

**Efficacy Beliefs.** Internal Efficacy was measured with three items (e.g. *“I know more about European issues than most people of my age”*). Collective Efficacy was measured with three items (e.g. *“By working together young people can successfully influence the future of Europe”*). External Efficacy was measured with three items (e.g. *“The European Union is*

*doing its best to find out about what young people in Europe want*”). These items were inspired by the PIDOP project (Barrett & Zani, 2015a) and were answered on a 5-point rating scale ranging from *strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)*.

All items were presented randomly for each participant to avoid ordering effects.

### **Participants**

After data cleaning, data of 3.764 young people aged 16 to 25 years were analysed. Demographic characteristics are reported in Table 2. 2.361 participants were 16 to 19 years old and 1.403 were 20 to 25 years old. 1.499 were men and 2.252 were women. The sample size in the seven countries varied between 176 (Albania) and 1.385 (Austria). Unfortunately, it was not possible to collect representative data, with all demographic variables differing between the seven countries and for the two age groups. It is important to understand that differences between countries also reflect differences in educational systems. In Austria and Germany, a high proportion of 16-19-year-olds are in apprenticeship or training, while in the UK and Spain many attend college (instead of school). 45.9% of data was collected pre-Brexit and 54.9% post-Brexit, and this variable was included in analyses.

### **Statistical Analyses**

All measures were first tested for construct validity using SPSS. For each construct, we conducted a principal component analysis with oblique rotation. For factor extraction, we used the *Eigenvalue > 1* criterion to find the best interpretable solution. Further, we used *Parallel Analysis* based on minimum rank factor analysis (Timmerman & Lorenzo-Seva, 2011) in R (package psych). To establish cross-country factorial invariance was not necessary, as we did not perform cross-national comparisons. Thus, data of the whole sample was used.

Univariate analyses were then conducted to investigate whether the demographic variables (gender, age, immigrant status) moderated the levels of visions, worries, engagement with the EU and efficacy beliefs.

Finally, for each of the four engagement variables, block-wise (binary logistic) regression models were conducted. Block 1 contained the demographic variables. Block 2 contained the efficacy variables. Block 3 contained the visions for Europe 2038. Block 4 contained the worries for Europe 2038.

## Results

### Construct Validity of the Measures

*Visions for Europe 2038.* Eight factors emerged with an Eigenvalue  $> 1.00$ . Parallel analyses also suggested eight factors. The 8-factor structure was theoretically meaningful and explained 53.12% of the variance. There were no double loadings  $> 0.40$  but eight items with loadings  $< 0.40$  were excluded (art & design, urban development, globalization, freedom, health care, rural development, education, data security). Moreover, based on subsequent reliability analyses, three more three items were excluded (religion, European army, increase number of EU member states). The final eight scales (28 items) that were internally consistent (Cronbach's alpha) were the following: *Technology* (technology, digitalization, communication & media, mobility, 4 items  $\alpha=0.74$ ). *Human Rights* (human rights, women's rights, LGBTQIA's rights, children's rights, inclusion of person with special needs, 5 items,  $\alpha=0.76$ ). *Reduction of the EU* (decrease in the number of member states, return power to national governments, 2 items,  $\alpha=0.62$ ;  $r=0.45$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). *Migration* (immigration, refugees, 2 items,  $\alpha=0.69$ ,  $r=0.52$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). *Economic Challenges* (financial crisis, economy, security, unemployment, 4 items,  $\alpha=0.67$ ). *Social cohesion* (retirement & pensions, family policies, ageing, social cohesion, social welfare, 5 items  $\alpha=0.68$ ). *Environment* (environment, energy, nutrition, natural resources, 4 items,  $\alpha=0.67$ ). *EU policy* (EU policy, increase the power of the European parliament, 2 items,  $\alpha=0.59$ ,  $r=0.43$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

*Worries about Europe 2038.* Six factors emerged with an Eigenvalue  $> 1.00$ . Parallel analyses also suggested six factors. The 6-factor structure was theoretically meaningful and explained 57.07% of the variance. One item (prejudice, discrimination and

racism) had double loadings  $> 0.40$  on two factors and two items had a loading  $< 0.40$  and were excluded (countries going bankrupt, militarization at the European borders). The final six scales (28 items) all were internally consistent and were the following:

*Unemployment and Poverty* (unemployment, poverty, gap between the rich and the poor, injustice, price rises, shortages of social services in Europe, corruption, 7 items,  $\alpha=0.81$ ). *Civil Unrests and Collapse of EU* (religious and/or ethnic conflicts, war outside of Europe, rise of extreme right-wing parties, less solidarity in Europe, nationalism in Europe, civil unrest, collapse of the EU, restrictions and violence at the European borders, 8 items,  $\alpha=0.82$ ). *State Surveillances and Repressions* (rise of state surveillance, state repression, 2 items,  $\alpha=0.62$ ,  $r = 0.36$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). *Influx of Migrants* (influxes of migrants and refugees, rise of extreme left-wing parties,  $\alpha=0.52$ , 2 items,  $r = 0.37$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). *Diseases and Violence* (increase in diseases, unexpected disease epidemics, war in Europe, terrorism, violence and crime, sexual violence, dictatorship, 7 items,  $\alpha=0.84$ ). *Climate Change* (climate change, environmental or natural disasters, 2 items,  $\alpha=0.62$ ,  $r = 0.46$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

*Engagement for the EU.* A principal component analysis with oblique rotation with two fixed factors confirmed the 2-factor structure of the scale. The two emerging factors were theoretically meaningful, explained 45.77% of the variance, and coincided with the two subscales *psychological engagement*, (3 items,  $\alpha=0.55$ ) and *non-conventional political engagement* (6 items,  $\alpha=0.66$ ).

*Efficacy Beliefs.* A principal component analysis with oblique rotation with three fixed factors was conducted for the nine items assessing efficacy. The 3-factor structure was interpretable and theoretically meaningful and explained 62.55% of the variance. Two recoded items had factor loadings  $< 0.40$  and low reliabilities and were excluded from further analyses. Thus, internal efficacy ( $\alpha=0.72$ ,  $r=0.57$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and external efficacy ( $\alpha=0.75$ ,  $r=0.60$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) consisted of two items. Collective efficacy consisted of three items ( $\alpha=0.82$ ).

### **Visions and Worries for the Future of Europe (RQ1)**

As shown in Table 3, gender and age differences (16-19 vs. 20-25 years) regarding the eight visions and six worries emerged. Few differences based on immigrant status were found.

*Visions for Europe 2038.* Women rated human rights, migration, economy and social cohesion as more important than men, who rated technology and the reduction of the EU more important than did women. Sixteen to 19-year-olds rated technology, human rights, reduction of the EU, economy, and EU policy more important than 20- to 25-year-olds, who rated migration and social cohesion as more important than younger youths. First generation immigrants ( $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=0.61$ ) rated economy as less important than did non-immigrants ( $M=4.30$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ,  $t(3133)=2.29$ ,  $p=0.02$ ,  $d=0.15$ ).

*Worries about Europe 2038.* Except for migration where there were no gender differences, women worried more than men. Sixteen to 19-year-olds were more worried about migration, diseases and violence compared with 20- to 25-year-olds who were more worried about civil unrests and the collapse of the EU. First generation immigrants ( $M=2.99$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ) worried less about the influx of migrants compared to non-immigrants ( $M=3.22$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ,  $t(3383)=3.55$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $d=0.23$ ). They ( $M=3.21$ ,  $SD=0.76$ ) also worried less about diseases and violence compared to non-immigrants ( $M=3.37$ ,  $SD=0.72$ ,  $t(3289)=3.46$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $d=0.22$ ).

### **Engagement with the EU and Efficacy Beliefs (RQ2)**

As shown in Table 4, several gender and age differences (16-19 vs. 20-25 years) emerged; few differences based on immigrant status were found.

*Engagement with the EU.* Fewer men than women intended to vote in the 2019 EU election, but more men than women wanted their country to leave the EU. Men also indicated higher non-conventional participation with the EU than did women. Twenty to 25-year-olds indicated higher levels of non-conventional political and psychological engagement than 16- to 19-year-olds, who were more in favour of their country leaving the EU compared to 20-to

25-year-olds. Fewer first generation immigrants (87.8%) intended to vote in the 2019 election compared to non-immigrants (92.5%),  $\chi^2(1)=5.34, p<0.01$ ). However, first generation immigrants ( $M=1.39, SD=1.47$ ) indicated a higher level of non-conventional participatory behaviour than non-immigrants ( $M=1.19, SD=1.42; t(3176)=2.04, p=0.04, d=0.14$ ).

*Efficacy Beliefs.* Men had higher internal and external efficacy beliefs than women who had higher collective efficacy beliefs than men. Sixteen to 19-year-olds had higher levels of collective and external efficacy beliefs than 20- to 25-year-olds. No differences depending on immigrant status were found.

### **Prediction of Engagement with the EU (RQ3)**

The results of the final model (including all four blocks) are presented in Table 5. The explained variance for intended voting was 5.8% but ranged between 16.5 and 20.5% for the other forms of engagement.

**Intended Voting for the 2019 EU Elections.** Block-wise binary logistic regression models were conducted. The block 1 variables explained less than 1%, adding block 2 variables explained 2.8%, adding block 3 variables explained 5.4% and adding block 4 variables explained 5.8% of the variance. Young people who intended to vote in the next EU election took part in the study before Brexit, were more often women, had higher levels of knowledge about the EU (i.e. higher internal efficacy), prioritized economic challenges more, but the reduction of the EU less. They were more worried about civil unrest and the collapse of the EU.

**Non-Conventional Political Engagement.** Block-wise linear regression models were conducted. The block 1 variables explained 5.1%, adding block 2 variables explained 18.2%, adding block 3 variables explained 19.6% and adding block 4 variables explained 20.5% of the variance. Young people with higher levels of non-conventional political participation took part in the study after Brexit, were more likely to be 20- to 25-year-olds, had higher levels of knowledge about the EU, but prioritized economic challenges less than

those with lower levels of non-conventional political participation. Moreover, they were less worried about disease and violence, but more worried about state surveillance and repression.

**Psychological Engagement with EU Issues.** Block-wise linear regression models were conducted. The block 1 variables explained 4.2%, adding block 2 variables explained 14.7%, adding block 3 variables explained 19.1% and adding block 4 variables explained 20.1% of the variance. Young people with higher levels of psychological engagement were more likely to be 20- to 25-year-olds. They had higher levels of knowledge about the EU (i.e. higher internal efficacy), but perceived lower levels of interest by the EU in young people's voice (i.e. lower external efficacy). They prioritized the reduction of the EU less, but the visions of economic challenges and migration more. They were more worried about civil unrests and the collapse of the EU and were less worried about disease and violence.

**Own Country should leave the EU.** Block-wise binary logistic regression models were conducted. The block 1 variables explained 1.6%, adding block 2 variables explained 4.9%, adding block 3 variables explained 13.6% and adding block 4 variables explained 16.5% of the variance. Young people who wanted their own country to leave the EU were more likely to participate in the study before Brexit, were more often men than women, had higher levels of knowledge about the EU, but perceived lower levels of interest by the EU in young people's voice, prioritized the reduction of the EU more, but economic challenges and EU policy less. Furthermore, they worried more about unemployment, poverty and the influx of migrants but less about civil unrest and EU collapse.

### Discussion

The main goals of the present study were (1) to find out which long-term visions and worries young people had for the future of Europe, and (2) to investigate whether demographic variables, visions, worries and efficacy beliefs were associated with engagement with the EU.

### **Young People's Visions and Worries for the Future of Europe**

Economic challenges, human rights and environment emerged as the most important long-term future visions, while unemployment and poverty, climate change, civil unrests and the collapse of the EU were youth's most important long-term future worries. There was a gender gap for human rights, indicating that this topic was more important for women.

Overall, women worried more about the future of Europe compared to men as indicated in their higher levels in five out of six worry scales. This finding might be explained by gender differences in anxiety levels of women compared to men (Duchesne & Ratelle, 2016).

Interestingly, 16- to 19-year-olds scored higher in six out of eight vision scales compared to 20- to 25-year-olds. It is possible that the older youths are more realistic about how difficult it is to realize visions, and were therefore more cautious. Environment was an equally important vision for both age groups, but civil unrest and the collapse of the EU were more worrisome for the 20- to 25-year-olds. It is possible that older youths are more aware of the possible consequences of a collapse of the EU compared with younger ones who might take the existence of the EU for granted. First generation immigrants prioritized economic challenges less and worried less about the influx of migrants and uncontrollable events compared to their non-immigrant peers. These results make sense as first generation immigrants are more aware of the positive sides of immigration compared to their non-immigrant peers. Moreover, they might have already coped with many challenges during migration and therefore might worry less about disease and violence.

### **Levels of Young People's Engagement with the EU**

When looking at the young people's engagement, an interesting pattern emerged. The levels of intended voting and psychological engagement were relatively high, while the levels of non-conventional political engagement and the wish that one's own country should leave the EU were relatively low. In line with the existing literature (Cicognani et al., 2012), men had higher levels of non-conventional political participation with the EU than women.



However, men had lower levels of intended voting in the next EU elections and wanted their country to leave the EU more. We found that, compared to women, men prioritized the reduction of the EU as a future vision for Europe more, and were more disengaged from the EU (see Barrett, 2015). Our analyses revealed that 16- to 19-year-olds had lower levels of psychological and non-conventional political engagement but wanted their country to leave the EU more than 20- to 25-year-olds. Although there were no age differences regarding intended voting, overall 16- to 19-year-olds were more disengaged from the EU than older youths. It is possible that younger people had fewer possibilities to engage, as schools often do not foster political and civic engagement (Eckstein et al., 2015). Consistent with their constraint opportunities as non-EU citizens and with existing studies (Albanesi et al., 2015; Gavray et al., 2015; Montgomery, 2015), first generation immigrants had lower levels of intended voting in the next EU elections, but higher levels of non-conventional political engagement with the EU.

### **Prediction of Young People's Engagement with the EU**

According to the theorizing of Barrett (2015) and our conceptual model, the four different forms of engagement with the EU were predicted differently by demographic variables, visions, worries and efficacy beliefs. Although several visions and worries were predictive for all forms of engagement, our data show that future visions are especially important to better understand conventional political participation and why young people want their country to leave the EU.

Young people who wanted their own country to leave the EU are probably the most interesting group. It is possible that these individuals faced several strains in their lives (e.g., unemployment), and were therefore unable to recognize possible benefits of the EU for themselves or for their country.

Our findings also show that macro-level events like the Brexit referendum are associated with the political engagement of young people and that these effects might work

differently for conventional and non-conventional political engagement. For non-conventional and psychological engagement, internal efficacy (i.e., knowledge about EU) was the strongest predictor indicating that the perceived level of knowledge is important for young people to get active. It is likely that young people who take actions, worry less about disease and violence that might happen in the future (Bandura, 2000).

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Unfortunately, it was not possible to collect longitudinal representative data. Instead, a convenience concurrent sample answered an online-survey resulting in different sample sizes and uneven distributions of all demographic variables. Because the results would be very difficult to interpret, we decided to not perform country-level comparisons. Moreover, some scales had rather low internal consistencies and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Future studies might enlarge the scope of the theoretical model by including more variables at different levels of analysis (Cicognani & Zani, 2015). Moreover, to apply person-centred statistical analyses is highly recommended in future studies to discover differently engaged groups of young people (Amnå & Ekman, 2015).

The present study clearly indicates that the EU needs to listen to the voices of young people, who articulated important visions for the future of Europe. Overall, to combine a strong economy with human rights and environment should be fostered by EU decision-makers even more in the future.

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This study was conducted within the Europe 2038 project (PI: Dagmar Strohmeier), a multinational research project funded by the Europe for Citizens programme 2014-2020; Strand2: Democratic engagement and civic participation; Action 2.3: Civil society projects; call 2015, project ID 564710 between January 2016 and June 2017. For more info see: <http://www.europe2038.eu/>

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Accepted Manuscript

Table 1

*Conceptual Model of the Present Study*

| <i>Sets of Predictors</i>   | <i>Forms of Engagement with the EU</i>                       |
|---|--|
| <b>Macro-Level</b>  |  |
| Data collected before or after Brexit<br>(June 23, 2016)                          |  |
| <b>Demographics</b>   |  |
| Gender  | 1. Intended voting for the 2019<br>EU election               |
| Age group (16-19 years vs. 20-25<br>years)  | 2. Non-conventional political<br>participation for EU issues |
| First generation immigrant status   | 3. Psychological engagement with<br>EU issues                |
| <b>Goals</b>  | 4. Own country should leave the<br>EU                        |
| Visions for Europe 2038   |  |
| Worries for Europe 2038   |  |
| <b>Power and Influence</b>  |  |
| Knowledge about the EU (i.e., internal<br>efficacy)                               |  |
| Perceived interest of the EU in young<br>people's voice (i.e., external efficacy) |  |
| Young people's collective efficacy<br>regarding the EU                            |  |



Table 2

*Demographic Characteristics of the Seven Country Sample (N=3.764)*

| Country of Data Collection                 | 16-19 Year Old Young Persons (N=2.361) |                    |                    |                  |                    |                  |                 | 20-25 Year Old Young Persons (N=1.403) |                    |                    |                  |                   |                  |                 |
|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|--|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|  | Albania<br>(n=108)                     | Austria<br>(n=795) | Germany<br>(n=157) | Italy<br>(n=545) | Romania<br>(n=354) | Spain<br>(n=103) | UK<br>(n=299)   | Albania<br>(n=68)                      | Austria<br>(n=590) | Germany<br>(n=215) | Italy<br>(n=233) | Romania<br>(n=83) | Spain<br>(n=172) | UK<br>(n=42)    |
| % female                                   | 39.8%                                  | 53.3%              | 40.8%              | 56.3%            | 60.2%              | 64.1%            | 63.9%           | 73.5%                                  | 62.2%              | 72.1%              | 76.4%            | 67.5%             | 65.7%            | 59.5%           |
| Age, M (SD)                                | 17.42<br>(1.00)                        | 17.12<br>(1.03)    | 17.51<br>(0.99)    | 17.00<br>(1.04)  | 17.03<br>(0.87)    | 17.80<br>(0.98)  | 16.97<br>(0.82) | 22.32<br>(1.71)                        | 22.59<br>(1.64)    | 22.28<br>(1.56)    | 22.41<br>(1.66)  | 22.59<br>(1.70)   | 22.52<br>(1.68)  | 21.31<br>(1.44) |
| % citizenship of country                   | 99.1%                                  | 91.8%              | 91.1%              | 95.2%            | 98.6%              | 100%             | 92.6%           | 98.5%                                  | 82.7%              | 96.3%              | 97.4%            | 97.6%             | 99.4%            | 88.1%           |
| % born in other country                    | 7.5%                                   | 8.8%               | 8.4%               | 4.5%             | 1.4%               | 2.0%             | 12.0%           | 7.4%                                   | 17.2%              | 8.0%               | 6.6%             | 7.3%              | 3.0%             | 15.4%           |
| % studying at school                       | 87%                                    | 67.7%              | 32.5%              | 93.7%            | 94.9%              | 41.7%            | 21.4%           | 10.3%                                  | 3.4%               | 5.1%               | 1.7%             | 1.2%              | 8.7%             | 0%              |
| % apprenticeship or training scheme        | 1.9%                                   | 28.7%              | 60.5%              | 1.2%             | 0.6%               | 0%               | 0.7%            | 7.4%                                   | 3.9%               | 14.0%              | 3.9%             | 2.4%              | 3.5%             | 2.4%            |
| % studying at (tech) college or university | 9.3%                                   | 5.4%               | 5.1%               | 41.7%            | 4.2%               | 54.4%            | 79.9%           | 39.7%                                  | 79.0%              | 75.3%              | 78.9%            | 73.5%             | 61.6%            | 69.0%           |
| % looking for a job                        | 3.7%                                   | 1.0%               | 7.6%               | 17.2%            | 0.8%               | 2.9%             | 9.7%            | 26.5%                                  | 3.7%               | 1.4%               | 8.2%             | 12.0%             | 17.4%            | 4.8%            |
| % working full time                        | 0%                                     | 6%                 | 4.5%               | 0%               | 1.7%               | 3.9%             | 0.7%            | 16.2%                                  | 13.6%              | 4.7%               | 8.7%             | 33.7%             | 4.7%             | 23.8%           |

Table 3

*Age and Gender Differences of Visions and Worries for Europe 2038*

|   | Whole<br>sample | 16-19<br>years | 20-25<br>years | <i>t(df)</i>        | <i>Cohens<br/>d</i> | Men            | Women          | <i>t(df)</i>       | <i>Cohens<br/>d</i> |
|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Visions</b>                                  |                 |                |                |                     |                     |                |                |                    |                     |
| Technology                                      | 3.65<br>(0.76)  | 3.70<br>(0.75) | 3.55<br>(0.76) | 5.12**              | 0.19                | 3.82<br>(0.74) | 3.53<br>(0.74) | 10.51**            | 0.38                |
| Human Rights                                    | 4.22<br>(0.68)  | 4.26<br>(0.66) | 4.15<br>(0.72) | 4.38**              | 0.16                | 3.95<br>(0.77) | 4.40<br>(0.55) | -18.83**           | 0.69                |
| Reduction of<br>the EU                          | 2.73<br>(1.04)  | 2.89<br>(1.03) | 2.45<br>(0.99) | 11.54**             | 0.43                | 2.78<br>(1.11) | 2.70<br>(0.98) | 2.06*              | 0.07                |
| Migration                                       | 3.89<br>(0.93)  | 3.81<br>(0.95) | 4.03<br>(0.87) | -6.37**             | 0.23                | 3.70<br>(1.01) | 4.02<br>(0.85) | -9.65**            | 0.35                |
| Economic<br>Challenges                          | 4.30<br>(0.59)  | 4.34<br>(0.59) | 4.23<br>(0.60) | 4.62**              | 0.17                | 4.25<br>(0.63) | 4.34<br>(0.56) | -3.86**            | 0.14                |
| Social Cohesion                                 | 3.98<br>(0.62)  | 3.94<br>(0.62) | 4.03<br>(0.60) | -3.76**             | 0.14                | 3.90<br>(0.64) | 4.03<br>(0.59) | -6.14**            | 0.22                |
| Environment                                     | 4.13<br>(0.65)  | 4.15<br>(0.65) | 4.10<br>(0.65) | 1.91 <sup>ns</sup>  | 0.07                | 4.14<br>(0.67) | 4.13<br>(0.64) | 0.30 <sup>ns</sup> | 0.01                |
| EU Policy                                       | 3.36<br>(0.93)  | 3.42<br>(0.91) | 3.25<br>(0.93) | 5.10**              | 0.17                | 3.39<br>(1.02) | 3.35<br>(0.86) | 1.09 <sup>ns</sup> | 0.04                |
| <b>Worries</b>                                  |                 |                |                |                     |                     |                |                |                    |                     |
| Unemployment<br>and Poverty                     | 3.88<br>(0.69)  | 3.90<br>(0.67) | 3.86<br>(0.72) | 1.40 <sup>ns</sup>  | 0.19                | 3.78<br>(0.74) | 3.96<br>(0.64) | -7.55**            | 0.27                |
| Civil Unrests<br>and Collapse of<br>EU<br>State | 3.69<br>(0.74)  | 3.64<br>(0.75) | 3.77<br>(0.73) | -4.85**             | 0.05                | 3.51<br>(0.82) | 3.81<br>(0.66) | -11.51**           | 0.41                |
| Surveillances<br>and Repressions                | 3.61<br>(0.87)  | 3.60<br>(0.86) | 3.61<br>(0.90) | -0.13 <sup>ns</sup> | 0.18                | 3.56<br>(0.92) | 3.63<br>(0.84) | -2.37*             | 0.08                |
| Influx of<br>Migrants                           | 3.19<br>(1.05)  | 3.29<br>(1.04) | 3.02<br>(1.05) | 7.32**              | 0.00                | 3.21<br>(1.11) | 3.18<br>(1.01) | 0.63 <sup>ns</sup> | 0.02                |
| Diseases and<br>Violence                        | 3.35<br>(0.72)  | 3.43<br>(0.70) | 3.23<br>(0.75) | 7.48**              | 0.26                | 3.16<br>(0.77) | 3.48<br>(0.66) | -13.02**           | 0.46                |
| Climate Change                                  | 3.88<br>(0.93)  | 3.86<br>(0.92) | 3.91<br>(0.94) | -1.60 <sup>ns</sup> | 0.06                | 3.71<br>(0.99) | 3.98<br>(0.86) | -8.51**            | 0.30                |

Note. Theoretical range of the answers: 1-5. Because of varying sample size per item *df* ranged between 3451 and 3127. \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \* =  $p < 0.05$ , *ns* =  $p > 0.051$

Table 4

*Engagement with the EU and Efficacy Beliefs*

|  | Whole sample   | 16-19 years    | 20-25 years    | <i>t</i> (df)<br>$\chi^2$ (df) | <i>Cohens d</i> | Men            | Women          | <i>t</i> (df)<br>$\chi^2$ (df) <sup>2</sup> | <i>Cohens d</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|---|-----------------|
| <b>Engagement with the EU</b>                          |                |                |                |                                |                 |                |                |   |                 |
| Intended   | 92.2%          | 91.4%          | 93.5%          | 3.66(1) <sup>ns</sup>          | -               | 89.4%          | 94%            | 18.89**                                     | -               |
| Voting for the 2019 EU election (%)                    |                |                |                |                                |                 |                |                |   |                 |
| Non-Conventional Political Participation for EU Issues | 1.22<br>(1.43) | 1.09<br>(1.40) | 1.47<br>(1.44) | -7.14**                        | 0.27            | 1.38<br>(1.58) | 1.10<br>(1.29) | 5.56**                                      | 0.20            |
| M (SD)   |                |                |                |                                |                 |                |                |   |                 |
| Psychological Engagement with EU Issues                | 2.10<br>(0.98) | 1.96<br>(1.01) | 2.37<br>(0.83) | -11.73**                       | 0.44            | 2.06<br>(1.04) | 2.12<br>(0.93) | -1.64 <sup>ns</sup>                         | 0.06            |
| Own Country should leave the EU (%)                    | 13.9%          | 14.9%          | 12.1%          | 3.91(1)*                       | -               | 17.8%          | 11.1%          | 24.18**                                     | -               |
| <b>Efficacy Beliefs</b>                                |                |                |                |                                |                 |                |                |   |                 |
| Young People’s Knowledge about the EU                  | 3.21<br>(0.97) | 3.21<br>(0.97) | 3.22<br>(0.97) | -0.35 <sup>ns</sup>            | 0.01            | 3.44<br>(0.97) | 3.05<br>(0.94) | 11.53**                                     | 0.41            |
| Young People’s Collective Efficacy                     | 3.67<br>(0.91) | 3.70<br>(0.89) | 3.61<br>(0.94) | 2.70**                         | 0.10            | 3.63<br>(0.97) | 3.70<br>(0.86) | -2.11*                                      | 0.08            |
| Perceived Interest of EU in Young People’s Voice       | 2.81<br>(0.96) | 2.94<br>(0.96) | 2.54<br>(0.90) | 11.67**                        | 0.43            | 2.90<br>(1.04) | 2.75<br>(0.90) | 4.41**                                      | 0.16            |

*Note. Theoretical range of the answers: Non-conventional political participation 0-6; psychological engagement with EU issues 0-3; efficacy beliefs 1-5. Because of varying sample size per item df ranged between 3232 and 3210. \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \* =  $p < 0.05$ , ns =  $p > 0.051$*

Table 5

*Prediction of Young People's Engagement with the EU*

| Model                                     | $R^2$ | Predictors                                       | $\beta$ | $t$ ,<br><i>Wald</i> | $p$    |
|---|-------|--|---------|----------------------|--------|
| Intended Voting for the 2019 EU Elections | 5.8%  | Data collected after Brexit                      | 0.529   | 5.634                | 0.018  |
|   |       | Gender female                                    | 0.514   | 5.126                | 0.024  |
|   |       | Knowledge about EU                               | 0.465   | 16.526               | <0.001 |
|   |       | Vision Reduction of EU                           | -0.436  | 12.807               | <0.001 |
|   |       | Vision Economy Challenges                        | 0.680   | 10.301               | <0.001 |
|   |       | Worry Civil Unrest and Collapse of EU            | 0.462   | 5.177                | 0.023  |
| Non-Conventional Political Engagement     | 20.5% | Data collected after Brexit                      | 0.132   | 6.042                | <0.001 |
|   |       | Age 20-25 years                                  | 0.147   | 7.045                | <0.001 |
|   |       | Knowledge about EU                               | 0.334   | 15.776               | <0.001 |
|   |       | Vision Economic Challenges                       | -0.109  | -4.211               | <0.001 |
|   |       | Worry State Surveillance and Repression          | 0.062   | 2.416                | 0.016  |
|   |       | Worry Disease and Violence                       | -0.097  | -3.241               | <0.001 |
| Psychological Engagement with EU Issues   | 20.1% | Age 20-25 years                                  | 0.111   | 5.324                | <0.001 |
|   |       | Knowledge about EU                               | 0.305   | 14.351               | <0.001 |
|   |       | Perceived Interest of EU in Young People's Voice | -0.134  | -6.053               | <0.001 |
|   |       | Vision Reduction of EU                           | -0.118  | -5.009               | <0.001 |
|   |       | Vision Migration                                 | 0.109   | 4.969                | <0.001 |
|   |       | Vision Economic Challenges                       | 0.085   | 3.245                | 0.001  |
|   |       | Worry Civil Unrests and Collapse of EU           | 0.083   | 2.824                | 0.005  |

|                                 |       |  |        |        |        |
|---------------------------------|-------|--|--------|--------|--------|
|                                 |       | Worry Uncontrollable Events                      | -0.094 | -3.126 | 0.002  |
| Own Country should leave the EU | 16.5% | Data collected after Brexit                      | -0.476 | 7.589  | 0.006  |
|                                 |       | Gender female                                    | -0.523 | 8.621  | 0.003  |
|                                 |       | Knowledge about EU                               | 0.219  | 6.402  | 0.011  |
|                                 |       | Perceived Interest of EU in Young People's Voice | -0.373 | 16.009 | <0.001 |
|                                 |       | Vision Reduction of EU                           | 0.650  | 43.935 | <0.001 |
|                                 |       | Vision Economic Challenges                       | -0.506 | 8.057  | 0.005  |
|                                 |       | Vision EU Policy                                 | -0.541 | 26.103 | <0.001 |
|                                 |       | Worry Unemployment and Poverty                   | 0.483  | 7.286  | 0.007  |
|                                 |       | Worry Civil Unrests and Collapse of EU           | -0.909 | 30.987 | <0.001 |
|                                 |       | Worry Influx of Migrants                         | 0.414  | 20.255 | <0.001 |

*Note: Results of the final model including all four blocks. Only significant standardized  $\beta$  coefficients are displayed. Dummy variables: Data collected after Brexit (reference group: Data collected before Brexit); Age (reference group: 16-19 years); Gender (reference group: males); First generation immigrant (reference group: non-immigrant).*