

# DO INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS MATTER? SOCIALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL BUREAUCRATS<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract:

*A key component of (neo)functionalist and constructivist approaches to the study of international organizations concerns staff socialization. Existing analyses of how, or indeed whether, staff develop more pro-internationalist attitudes over time draw predominantly on cross-sectional data. Yet, such data cannot address (self-)selection issues or capture the inherently temporal nature of attitude change. This article proposes an innovative approach to the study of international socialization using an explicitly longitudinal design. Analyzing two waves of a large-scale survey conducted within the European Commission in 2008 and 2014, it examines the beliefs and values of the same individuals over time and exploits exogenous organizational changes to identify causal effects. Furthermore, the article theorizes and assesses specified scope conditions affecting socialization processes. Showing that international institutions do in fact influence value acquisition by individual bureaucrats, our results contest the widely held view that international organizations are not a socializing environment. Our analysis also demonstrates that age at entry and gender significantly affect the intensity of such value change.*

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## Introduction

International Relations (IR) scholars studying Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) have mainly been preoccupied with the conditions underlying the emergence, proliferation and autonomy of those institutions.<sup>1</sup> Still, how, and indeed whether, IGOs shape the values of the people who work for them is no less important. As functionalist scholars including Ernst B. Haas and James Sewell first asserted, the extent to which individuals acquire internationalist attitudes while working for an IGO contributes to that organization's capacity to establish its independence from member state principals (Haas, 1964; Sewell, 1966; Wolf, 1973; Checkel, 2005). The experience, expertise, and values of IGO staff are therefore fundamental, and identifying the conditions under which individuals acquire internationalist values as well as the factors that affect their acquisition is an important undertaking with significant implications.<sup>2</sup>

Previous empirical studies of value acquisition by IGO staff have provided decidedly mixed results (see, e.g., Gheciu, 2005 and Lewis, 2005 versus Beyers, 2005 and Hooghe, 2005).<sup>3</sup> Yet, if the values of personnel affect the capacity of IGOs to fulfil their missions, the absence of a clear understanding of value acquisition is a serious gap. Drawing on individual-level data and employing a longitudinal research design appropriate to the analysis of socialization as a diachronic process, this article revisits the socializing power of IGOs and aims to advance its understanding. It also takes up the challenge of testing and refining the scope conditions under which IGOs can be expected to trigger socialization effects. Scope conditions are singled out since they provide an opportunity to better understand the often weak and ambiguous socialization effects observed in previous studies (Wolf, 1973; Johnston, 2005; Zürn and Checkel, 2005). Our empirical analysis thereby takes the European

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent critical discussion, see Gruber (2000). In sharp contrast, the internal structures, processes and operation of IGOs have received much less attention. Auderfuhren-Biget et al. (2012: 270), for instance, poignantly observe that "reviews of the IO literature (...) barely touch on the issue of how IOs function internally".

<sup>2</sup> How individuals acquire their values – i.e. from the workplace environment, self-selection and recruitment, or cultural background – has long been of key interest across the social sciences (e.g., Chatman, 1991; Gleibs et al., 2008; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen, 2013). Defined as the process through which individuals acquire values and "adapt their (...) behavioural practices, norms about appropriateness and preferences about outcomes" (Beyers, 2010), socialization has thereby been closely examined by sociologists, psychologists, and political scientists.

<sup>3</sup> Wolf (1973) presents a review of earlier studies with similarly mixed findings.

Commission as a critical case.<sup>4</sup> Matching information across two surveys of individuals' values and attitudes conducted six years apart – in 2008 and 2014 – our results demonstrate that IGOs are indeed “social environments” that shape the values of international bureaucrats (Johnston, 2001).

### **Socialization and international bureaucrats: the state of the literature and beyond**

A 2005 special issue of *International Organization* on “International Institutions and Socialization in Europe” offered the first systematic attempt to examine value acquisition by IGO staff. Although contributors to the volume fell on both sides of the debate, interpretation of the findings by subsequent IR scholarship has been less equivocal. The special issue is routinely referenced as the *locus classicus* of a demonstration that there is no evidence of international socialization.<sup>5</sup> Whichever way the special issue is read, the contributions to it share two generic shortcomings of analyses of international socialization in the IR literature that derive ultimately from limitations of the data available to scholars at the time.

#### *Socialization as a diachronic process*

The first shortcoming is methodological. Socialization is a diachronic process that concerns the acquisition or change in values over time. Nevertheless, virtually all existing studies of socialization in IGOs depend on cross-sectional datasets (see, e.g., Beyers, 2005; Hooghe, 2005; Lewis, 2005; Suvarierol et al., 2013). Possible socialization effects are typically inferred from “the number of years someone was involved in a particular venue” (Beyers, 2010: 914). Yet, an analysis of the values held at one point in time by individuals who have worked in the organization for periods of differing length cannot resolve potential (self-)selection issues or capture the temporal nature of socialization processes (Martin and Simmons,

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<sup>4</sup> Like Hooghe (2005: 861) and Checkel (2005), we believe that the Commission is “a crucial case for examining socialization within an international organization” because it occupies a central position in the world’s most encompassing supranational regime. The Commission is also of particular methodological and theoretical interest, since it witnessed several structural reorganizations in 2010-2011 as well as senior managerial staff rotations over the 2009-2014 period. As these changes did not affect all Commission staff equally, they can be exploited in a difference-in-differences identification strategy (see below). Such an approach explicitly builds on a longitudinal analysis, and allows stronger causal inferences compared to cross-sectional analyses (Bertrand et al. 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Hooghe (2005) is thereby most frequently cited, and has come to be regarded as the dominant wisdom (e.g., Avant et al., 2010; Linos, 2011; Ege and Bauer, 2013).

1998; Beyers, 2010). It necessarily involves either inferring changes in values stated at time  $t$  or the correct recollection of values reported at the time of recruitment. Hence, the validity of such an approach is questionable, and it certainly does not allow causal inferences about individual-level socialization. A single cross-section has severe and inherent limitations.

In contrast, this article employs a longitudinal two-wave survey research design that is inspired by the use of longitudinal data in private-sector settings and (sub)national public administrations in the organizational socialization literature (Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Gleibs et al., 2008; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen, 2013; Hatmaker and Park, 2014). To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to apply a similar approach to the study of IGOs. This is possible due to the availability of data from two projects on the European Commission – “The European Commission in Question” and “European Commission: Facing the Future” (more details below) – which collected detailed information on staff backgrounds, beliefs and values. The surveys were administered six years apart – in 2008 and 2014 respectively – so as to permit investigation of changes over time. Since protecting the anonymity of staff was a condition for gaining access, it was necessary to develop a technique that links the two samples and makes inter-temporal comparisons possible without revealing individual identities. We present and employ this technique below to evaluate attitude change in the *same* individuals over time.

### *Socialization scope conditions*

A second widely observed shortcoming of IR scholarship on socialization is theoretical. The institutional and individual scope conditions that can facilitate or impede processes of value acquisition are often unspecified or, where they are specified, not submitted to rigorous testing (Zürn and Checkel, 2005; Ashforth et al., 2007). The nature of our sample (discussed in detail below) makes it possible to refine the scope conditions under which IGOs can be expected to trigger socialization effects. We focus on three elements.

First, we test whether socialization processes are impeded when institutions are in flux, because such processes are by their very nature “highly contingent and potentially shaped by exogenous and sudden events” impacting upon individuals’ exposure to an organization (Beyers, 2010: 917; see also Hooghe, 2005). This takes a step towards addressing the limited

empirical research “on the contextual factors that facilitate and constrain socialization practices and outcomes” (Ashforth et al., 2007: 31).<sup>6</sup> Second, intensified gender equality policies in many IGOs imply that women are set to make up a larger share of staff in coming years (Ban, 2013), which raises the question whether gender is one of “the characteristics of individual agents (...) [that] retard or propel the socialization process” (Johnston, 2001: 506). Such differences between men and women can arise for a number of reasons, and we evaluate whether gender affects individuals’ openness to changing their attitudes towards those of the organization. Finally, our third scope condition relates to age at entry in the IGO, which is directly linked to the oft-stated impact of previous socialization experiences (Hooghe, 2005; Checkel, 2005; Cohen, 2017). Individuals’ values are arguably most malleable early in life, such that entering an IGO at an earlier age implies fewer “cognitive priors that might block a socialization message” (Checkel, 2017: 597).

### **Theoretical framework and hypotheses**

In the early functionalist approach to international organization, experience of working for an IGO was believed to produce a “transfer away from identification with national units and toward the adoption of an internationalist outlook” (Wolf, 1973: 354). A similar idea is also central to more recent constructivist scholarship in IR. This approach views IGOs as “triggers” of socialization mechanisms inducing individual actors to shift their allegiance toward the international level (Checkel, 2005). Several causal mechanisms underlying this process of attitude change have been proposed, including strategic calculation, role playing, normative suasion, mimicking, and so on (Checkel, 2005; Johnston, 2005; Zürn and Checkel, 2005).<sup>7</sup> Though recognizing the importance of such mechanisms, we leave aside their investigation to focus on the more general expectation raised in both theoretical approaches that “the organizational setting might account for an individual actor’s

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<sup>6</sup> This first scope condition is closely linked to the burgeoning public administration literature examining how reform processes influence workforce motivation (e.g., Franco et al., 2002) and employee’s normative commitment to the organization (Yang and Pandey, 2009). While reforms are often shown to be detrimental to workforce motivation and commitment in this literature, they may also have positive effects on employee commitment if they improve goal clarity and undermine the routinization and centralization of work processes (Yang and Pandey, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Proposed theoretical mechanisms most often rely on a process involving either *arguing* (i.e. changing beliefs by reference to valid and truthful empirical and normative statements) or *bargaining* (i.e. changing beliefs following credible threats and promises) (Zürn and Checkel, 2005; Johnston, 2001, 2005). Much of these discussions are conducted at a high degree of abstraction, and lack elaboration of clear empirical counterparts.

allegiance and preference formation” (Zürn and Checkel, 2005: 1054). The baseline hypothesis thus is that individual-level attitude change via a process of socialization occurs in IGOs.

H1: Experience in IGOs leads civil servants to develop internationalist attitudes.

An important tacit assumption in the foregoing literature is that attitude change occurs progressively over time. Most previous work takes length of service as the main independent variable (Wolf, 1973; Beyers, 2005, 2010; Hooghe, 2005), with the implication that each additional year within the IGO has a similar effect on attitude change. Of course, this assumption requires “a more or less stable set of forces that steadily push and pull on [staff members]” – which is implausible in most real-world settings (Ashforth et al., 2007: 6). Nonetheless, as acknowledged across disciplinary boundaries, organizational socialization processes require that individuals’ involvement within a given environment is continuous and consistent over time (Cook, 1985; Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Beyers, 2010).

This requirement of temporal consistency implies that an individual’s socialization depends on the absence of disruptive events on their experience within the organization. Such changes in the contextual setting, which might include structural reorganizations due to divisional mergers or separations, or changes in leadership, could impede the socialization process and lead to “socialization turning points” (Bullis and Bach, 1989: 273; Ashforth et al., 2007: 6). On the one hand, changes in organizational context create heightened uncertainty and stress even when staff retain the same job, office, and immediate colleagues (Kavanagh and Ashkanasy, 2006; Bellou, 2007; de Jong et al., 2016). Organizational changes are often also perceived by staff as a breach of the psychological contract between employers and employees (Burke and Leiter, 2000; Bellou, 2007). The extensive literatures on psychological contract violations and unmet expectations suggest that “unpleasant surprises” of this sort can easily “turn one against the job, sub-unit, and/or organization” (Ashforth et al., 2007: 46; Burke and Leiter, 2000).

On the other hand, organizational changes affect social interactions and relational ties between individuals. This is important because social networks play a key role in both

(neo)functionalist and constructivist accounts of socialization into organizational values (Wolf, 1973; Zürn and Checkel, 2005). If social ties matter for attitude change, then *changes* in such ties will also matter. The effect might be even more powerful in organizations – such as the European Commission – where there are low levels of horizontal mobility between departments (Kassim et al., 2013; Connolly and Kassim, 2015). In such settings, organizational change disrupts established networks. In summary, organizational changes that suspend the temporal consistency of an individual’s (work) environment can be expected to interrupt – or even disrupt and reverse – any ongoing process of attitude change. This line of argument shapes our second hypothesis. It implies also that exogenous shocks in the form of organizational changes can help in identifying socialization processes – a point to which we return in the discussion of our empirical strategy.

H2: The socialization of individuals into international attitudes is disrupted – and possibly reversed – when they experience organizational change.<sup>8</sup>

It is important, however, to distinguish between unexpected and expected change. In the organizational socialization literature, one of the prime inhibiting conditions for the socialization process is *unexpected* and *unpredictable* change (Ashforth et al., 2007). In other words, to the extent that interruptions in the socialization process linked to organizational change are driven by uncertainty, stress and perceptions of psychological contract breach, increasing the predictability of – and/or information about – impending reorganizations should work to reduce such negative implications. This argument is also consistent with the idea that surprises are particularly likely to prompt sense-making activities – i.e. a thinking process in which individuals interpret and impute meaning to their surroundings via the alteration of available cognitive scripts (Louis, 1980). In our setting, such sense-making activities can be expected to induce a readjustment of staff expectations regarding their organization and of their position towards its norms and values. Hypothesis H2 can be reformulated as follows to capture this more detailed specification:

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<sup>8</sup> This is *not* to say that individuals experiencing profound changes in their lives are not open to socialization processes. They most definitely are. Yet, clearly, the deeply social and group-based process of socialization will almost by definition be sensitive to surprises in individuals’ social environment.

H3: The socialization of individuals into international attitudes is disrupted – and possibly reversed – when they experience *unexpected* organizational change.

It is important, however, to further refine the scope conditions under which IGOs are most likely to trigger socialization effects. While length and intensity of participation as well as the strength of prior (inter/nationalist) attitudes have been argued to affect the likelihood of attitude change (Louis, 1980; Beyers, 2005; Hooghe, 2005), little is known “about the properties of the actors and structures that trigger socialization” (Zürn and Checkel, 2005: 1055; see also Wolf, 1973; Johnston, 2005; Ashforth et al., 2007). Building on insights from previous socialization research in other organizational settings as well as broader social-psychological research, we argue that agents’ gender and age at entry into the organization constitute two critical scope conditions.

Starting with the former, there are two lines of argument suggesting gender-related differences in the socializing influence of international organization. First, social-psychological evidence suggests that “relationships are more central to females’ than males’ sense of self”, with the result that women “demonstrate more concern about social evaluation” (Rudolph and Conley, 2005: 116). This can have important implications for the way women and men respond to socialization, which is fundamentally a group process. A tendency towards “socio-evaluative concerns” in women could make them “particularly attuned to their interpersonal environments”, and more open to positive as well as negative socializing influences within IGOs (Rudolph and Conley, 2005: 119; Draper, 1985; Rose and Rudolph, 2006). Second, despite many efforts at gender equality in the workplace, women often still have to “overcome greater obstacles than men to achieve a given level of organizational success” (Lefkowitz, 1994: 344; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). Hence, the investment put into reaching a certain position tends to be higher. As such investments are generally unrecoverable, women can be expected to “value their membership [in any given organization] more than men” (Aven et al., 2003: 65). This may again increase the openness of women to positive, as well as negative, socializing influences in IGOs.

H4: Women respond more strongly to (unexpected) organizational changes interrupting their socialization into internationalist attitudes.

Age at entry into an IGO matters for socialization processes because “new experiences stick best when a person has few relevant prior experiences” (Hooghe, 2005: 866; Checkel, 2005, 2017; Cohen, 2017). Such “blank slates” have “few cognitive priors that might block a socialization message”, and should thus be more susceptible to socialization when they enter a new social setting (Checkel, 2017: 597; Johnston, 2001; Hooghe, 2005; Gheciu, 2005). In contrast, the strong(er) cognitive priors of individuals with earlier relevant socialization experiences may enhance or prolong their ability to resist social pressures in a new setting. Hence, one would expect faster and deeper socialization among individuals entering as blank slates, and thus also more persistent values and attitudes in the face of subsequent contextual shocks. For individuals entering an IGO at a later age, the socialization process might rather be more gradual and lead to less deep internalization – if it occurs at all. Such individuals may then also remain more responsive to (unexpected) organizational changes interrupting their socialization into internationalist attitudes. This leads to our fifth and final hypothesis:

H5: Individuals entering an IGO at a later age experience a more gradual socialization process, and remain more responsive to (unexpected) organizational changes interrupting their socialization into internationalist attitudes.

## **Empirical analysis**

### *Case selection*

Our empirical analysis focuses on the permanent, administrative (AD-level) staff of the European Commission. The reasons for this choice are practical and methodological. To start with the latter, the European institutions – and particularly the Commission – are among the most institutionalized organizations in the world’s most advanced supranational polity. This is important for our purpose since these institutions are more likely than other IOs to demonstrate an “ability to imbue (...) participants with organizational values” (Keohane, 1969: 861). The EU can thus be viewed as a site of significant socializing potential (Hooghe, 2005; Zürn and Checkel, 2005; Suvarierol et al., 2013; Bes, 2017). The European Commission also has a strong and commonly acknowledged supranational identity (Hooghe, 2005; Suvarierol et al., 2013). This is critical as in the absence of a clear and coherent

identity “the socialization effects of the institution will be diluted, or indeed non-existent” (Johnston, 2005: 1020). Furthermore, the Commission spends considerable resources on influencing staff towards its supranational mission. Its staff regulations, for instance, require that “an official shall carry out (...) the duties assigned to him objectively, impartially and in keeping with his duty of loyalty to the Communities” (European Communities, 2004: Art. 11). This strengthens any potential for attitude change since such processes become more likely “the more rigorously an organization attempts to influence its members” (Chatman, 1991: 462).

From a practical standpoint, the European Commission went through a number of structural and leadership changes in the period 2009-2014, which is highly significant in the light of hypotheses H2 and H3. It currently consists of 28 Directorates-General (DGs) alongside a number of executive Offices (e.g., *European Anti-Fraud Office*, and *Publications Office*) and Agencies (e.g., *Internal Audit Service*, and *Legal Service*). Five of these DGs underwent substantial restructuring in 2010-2011. Three were divided into smaller, more specialized DGs. Thus, energy and transport competencies were reorganized into separate DGs (*DG ENER* and *DG MOVE*), a new *DG Climate Action* was created separate from *DG Environment*, and the DG dealing with internal affairs and justice competencies was divided into two: a DG focused on migration and home affairs (*DG HOME*) and a DG responsible for justice and consumers (*DG JUST*). Several DGs were also affected by the creation of the European External Action Service in 2010. As part of the reorganization, all remaining Commission competencies in international cooperation and development were brought together into one new DG (*DG DEVCO*). At the same time, the DGs for neighborhood policy and enlargement issues were combined into the new *DG ELARG* (now *DG NEAR*). An overview of structural changes over the period under analysis is included in the supplementary appendix.

In light of hypothesis H3, it should be noted that structural changes within the Commission are initiated and engineered by the Commission’s political leadership. They are imposed from above without much opportunity for staff in the affected departments to provide input into the process (Commission staff member, personal communication, May 2016). The splitting up of the three departments outlined above were viewed by many in the affected

DGs as hostile separations (Commission HR staff member, personal communication, June 2016). As such, they can be viewed as exogenous and largely unpredictable interventions from the perspective of most AD-level Commission staff – except, possibly, those in top leadership positions.<sup>9</sup>

Leadership changes in the Commission take two main forms: political and administrative. While the former are linked to Commissioners' fixed term of office, the principle of rotating senior managerial staff (including Directors-General) was introduced in March 2000 following the downfall of the Santer Commission (Schön-Quinlivan, 2011). Although these leadership changes involve a regular internal rotation of managerial staff, they do *not* always occur simultaneously in various parts of the Commission – a fact that can be exploited for identification purposes in our analysis (more details below).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, since these leadership changes have been written into Commission rules, they have a high degree of predictability – which is important from the perspective of hypothesis H3. Still, it should be noted that leadership changes higher up the Commission hierarchy affect the style of management, but do not necessarily disrupt routine ways of working. For an overwhelming majority of staff, the most important person in setting the tone of the working environment is the Head of Unit – a middle management position. Hence, the leadership changes under analysis affect the organizational context rather than the immediate working environment of staff. A complete overview of all relevant leadership changes in the period 2009-2014 is again included in the supplementary appendix.

#### *Dataset and dependent variable*

Our dataset combines two main sources of information. First, we collected information on all substantive organizational changes in the Commission over the period 2009-2014. This

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<sup>9</sup> Murdoch (2012) cites several sources indicating that even the leadership of Commission DGs immediately affected by the construction of the EEAS failed to have much involvement and influence in this process.

<sup>10</sup> Since *all* Commissioners were replaced with the change from Barroso I to Barroso II in 2009, this shift affected all Commission employees at the same time and to the same extent. Hence, it does not affect our ability to obtain valid inferences on the remaining structural and leadership changes (since we rely on differences in developments among groups of staff members over time; more details below). Any effects observed below thus arise independent of this Commission replacement. A similar argument holds for other developments that could have affected all staff members equally over the period under analysis (such as, for instance, the onset of the financial crisis, changes in staff regulations, or any learning experiences regarding the efficiency or legitimacy of supranationalism as such).

was assembled from official Commission documents, press releases, and media coverage, and provided data on the nature of each reorganization, as well as its timing. Information on leadership changes was compiled from the official directories of the European Union for the years 2008 to 2014, Commission press releases about new appointments, as well as publicly available CVs of senior Commission staff. We collected the name, gender and nationality of every Commissioner and Director-General (or Directors in the case of executive Offices and Agencies), along with information about their exact period in office. This first set of data allows us to specify several key independent variables in our analysis (i.e. organizational and leadership changes).

Second, information on Commission officials' background characteristics and internationalist attitudes was collected from two large-scale surveys conducted within the European Commission in September-November 2008 (N=1901; response rate=13.6%) and March-April 2014 (N=2209; response rate=20.8%).<sup>11</sup> Both of the retrieved samples are representative of the AD-level staff of the Commission along key dimensions (Kassim et al., 2013). Since stringent anonymity requirements were imposed on the survey design and no individual identifiers are available, the data from the surveys do not constitute a panel dataset. We can nonetheless exploit the longitudinal dimension of the data by matching individuals with the same socio-demographic background characteristics in both surveys. We use Stata's "*duplicates*" command to generate this panel, and find a perfect match for 165 respondents or approximately 9% of the sample covered in the first survey wave. We define a perfect match as someone with the same age, gender, nationality (in terms of primary nationality *and* presence/absence of a second nationality) and education (in terms of level, field *and* international study experience), working in the *same* Directorate-General, who also reports having entered the Commission in the same year in both surveys.<sup>12</sup> Given this range of background characteristics, we can have high confidence that we are capturing

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<sup>11</sup> While the first survey was limited to permanent administrative (AD-level) staff, the second survey was circulated to every employee in all staff categories. As our analysis is restricted to AD staff, the response rates are expressed as a percentage of ADs in both cases. Response rates are mitigated by the high workload of our target population.

<sup>12</sup> We exclude individuals moving to another Directorate-General between both survey waves for two reasons. First, such moves may be a choice by the staff member, which introduces self-selection concerns. Second, from a practical perspective, it becomes more difficult to ascertain whether it really concerns the same individual in both survey rounds.

the same respondent in both datasets. This is confirmed by the fact that we *never* find more than one perfect match for any given individual.<sup>13</sup> In a robustness check, we allowed for small deviations in respondents' answers to at most one of the matching characteristics (excluding basic demographics such as age, gender, nationality, and education field). This accounts for the possibility that some respondents might "misremember" their starting year in the Commission or how long they studied abroad, as well as for mismatches induced by the answer categories provided in the survey. Such "near-perfect" matches occur for up to 48 additional respondents, and all findings reported below remain qualitatively unchanged when using this extended sample (although they become less precise due to the increased "noise" in the matching process – full details in appendix A).

The two surveys took a similar approach and five of the seven researchers who undertook the first study, including the PI, also conducted the second. Both covered a significant range of socio-demographic characteristics (which are critical for generating the matches between both samples; see above), as well as questions regarding Commission officials' internationalist attitudes – our main dependent variable. To operationalize this dependent variable, we rely on two statements about where power should reside in the European Union: i) "The College of Commissioners should become the government of the European Union", and ii) "The member states – not the Commission or European Parliament – should be the central players in the European Union". Responses were recorded on a five-point scale from (1) "strongly agree" to (5) "strongly disagree". We reverse the coding for the first proposition to obtain a scale where higher numbers reflect officials' support for an internationalist rather than a national power orientation in the European Union, and average every respondent's answer on both propositions throughout the analysis (henceforth referred to as the variable "*Commission role in Europe*"). Similar measures of Commission officials' internationalist attitudes have been extensively employed in previous studies (Hooghe, 2003, 2005, 2012; Schafer, 2014; Bes, 2017). Given the European Commission's strong supra-national identity, a change over time in such internationalist

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<sup>13</sup> Note that we are *not* matching an individual respondent in 2008 to other *sufficiently similar* individual(s) in 2014. By imposing perfect overlap in a broad set of characteristics, we effectively link individuals in 2008 to *themselves* in 2014 – thus creating a panel dataset. Using terminology from matching analysis, our approach imposes that the 'propensity score' accounting for all background characteristics equals 1 for each of our perfect matches.

attitudes can be viewed as reflecting the result of a socialization process where “actors adopt the norms and rules of a given community” (Checkel, 2017: 592; Cohen, 2017).

Summary statistics for the dependent variable as well as a set of background characteristics are provided in Table 1 of the supplementary appendix. This indicates that the matched respondent sample shows an under-representation of cabinet members (3.5% versus 0.6%;  $p < 0.05$ ), which reflects that cabinet members tend to change with the appointment of a new Commissioner. The matched sample is also somewhat more likely to be male (76% versus 67%;  $p < 0.05$ ), and to work in DGs witnessing structural changes in the period under analysis (26% versus 17%;  $p < 0.01$ ). No significant differences are observed between the two groups in terms of year of birth (on average 1964), time of entry in the Commission (on average 1997), age at entry (on average 33), educational background, country of origin, Directorate-General, reason for joining the Commission, and pre-Commission career. (The last four comparisons are not reported in Table 1, but are available upon request). Crucially, the same holds for our dependent variable, which is important to assuage potential concerns over sample selection. Overall, the matched sample is representative of our target population, including internationalist attitudes at the initial point of measurement.

Before turning to the empirical approach and results, it is important to recall that the second survey was fielded just under six years after the first (and less than three years after the structural changes under analysis). Although socialization theories fail to specify the time interval within which to expect attitudinal changes, socialization processes are often characterized by rapid initial change – particularly if the process is intensely experienced – followed by a consolidation period of relative stability (Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Ashforth et al., 2007; Cohen, 2017). Our two time-points could therefore be viewed as two punctuated equilibria in individual-level attitudes. Even so, one might debate the usefulness of surveys to study socialization, rather than qualitative methods including interviews, life histories and ethnographic studies (Cook, 1985; Sigel, 1995). We strongly believe that *repeated* surveys can capture changes in individuals’ values and beliefs, and thus are informative for analysing the observable implications of socialization processes where ‘actors adopt the norms and rules of a given community’ (see above). Evidently, surveys are less able to reveal the endpoint of socialization, which is the internalization of new attitudes and values. As such,

our results arguably relate more to what Checkel (2017: 597) refers to as Type I socialization – where individuals’ “beliefs (...) do not replace earlier values, but are ‘superimposed’ on them; they are entirely dependent on continuing membership in the group” – rather than Type II socialization where full internalization takes place. Given the technical, methodological and ethical obstacles to direct real-time observation of value acquisition, this effectively holds for most socialization research to date.

### *Empirical approach*

Our analysis proceeds in two stages. First, we perform difference-in-means t-tests on the *average* position of Commission officials’ internationalist attitudes among individuals with/without exposure to organizational changes before/after these changes took place. The null hypothesis is that (shifts in) attitudes across both groups are the same, while the alternative hypothesis is that there exists a significant difference. Still, *average* responses within particular groups of respondents arguably fail to account for potential (un)observed heterogeneity across respondents that might affect their answers within and across survey waves. Hence, in the second stage of our analysis, we estimate a difference-in-differences regression model with individual-level fixed effects. With subscript  $i$  representing individual respondents and subscript  $t$  designating time, this can be written as:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 Wave2014_t + \beta_2 Change_i + \beta_3 Wave2014_t * Change_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Our dependent variable ( $Y_{it}$ ) measures Commission officials’ internationalist attitudes, whereas the set of independent variables includes two indicator variables as well as their interaction. The first indicator variable ( $Wave2014_t$ ) is 1 for responses in the 2014 wave of the survey (0 for responses in the 2008 wave). The second indicator variable ( $Change_i$ ) is equal to 1 for individuals that experience a structural or leadership change in the period between both survey waves (0 otherwise). The interaction between both dummies (i.e.  $Wave2014_t * Change_i$ ) is our key variable of interest. It captures whether individuals experiencing a structural or leadership change develop *differently* between the first and second wave of the survey compared to individuals experiencing no structural or leadership change. In light of hypothesis H2, we expect  $\beta_3 < 0$ . Since a statistically significant estimate of  $\beta_3$  would indicate that at least some Commission officials adjust their internationalist

attitudes over time, it also provides evidence in favor of hypothesis H1. We treat structural and leadership changes separately throughout the analysis (and thus have two distinct *Change* variables) to assess heterogeneity in the effects of “unpredictable” structural reorganizations compared to “predictable” leadership rotations (hypothesis H3). We also perform separate analyses for women and men as well as those entering the Commission before/after age 30 to test hypotheses H4 and H5.

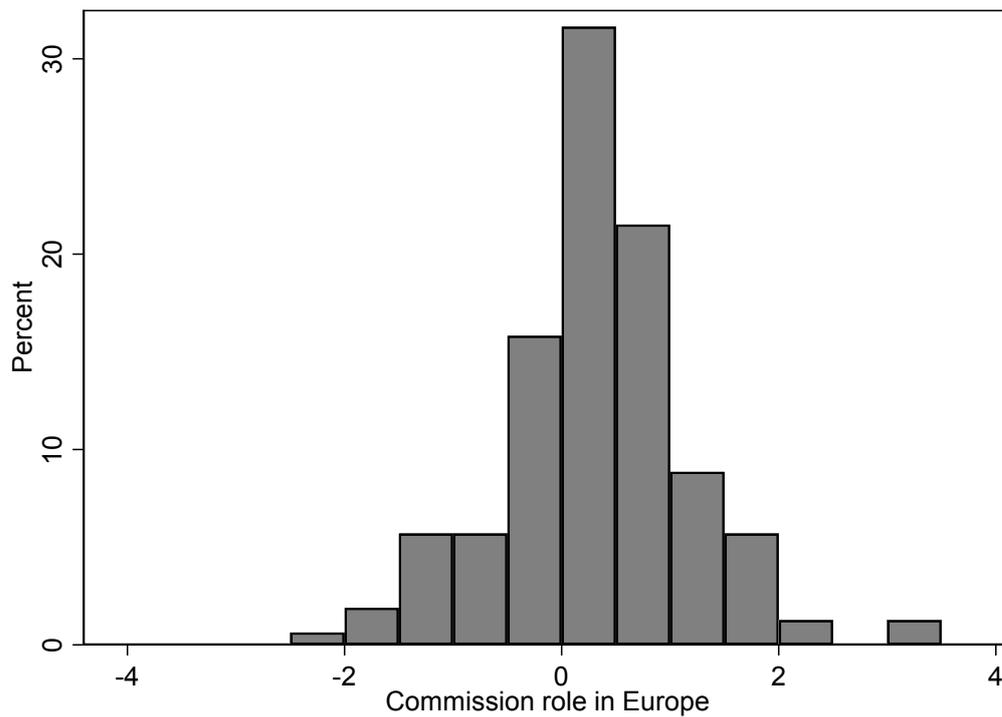
Equation (1) includes a full set of respondent fixed effects ( $\alpha_i$ ), which capture all time-invariant differences across respondents (for instance, related to their gender, start of service in the IGO, strength of prior nationalist and internationalist attitudes, and so on). This allows us to control for a range of observed and unobserved elements characterizing individual respondents, and implies that we derive our inferences exclusively from variation over time *within a given respondent*. Since these fixed effects are perfectly collinear with  $Change_i$  – which represents an individual-level characteristic of respondents experiencing (or not) a structural or leadership change – this variable drops out of the final regression model. We cluster standard errors at the level of our observations (i.e. individual respondents) to avoid biased inferences on the variables of interest (Bertrand et al., 2004).

## **Results**

### *Organizational change and internationalist attitudes*

To get an initial sense of the amount of attitude change in the dataset, figure 1 presents the distribution of changes in internationalist attitudes between both survey waves – defined as individual  $i$ 's internationalist attitude in 2014 minus that in 2008. A first observation from figure 1 is that attitude changes for most respondents tend to be small. Given that the average respondent in our sample had served in the Commission for more than ten years (see Table 1), this is not unexpected. A second observation concerns the slight skew in the distribution towards positive numbers. Although this is consistent with socialization towards more internationalist attitudes over time (hypothesis H1), the tendency is very weak.

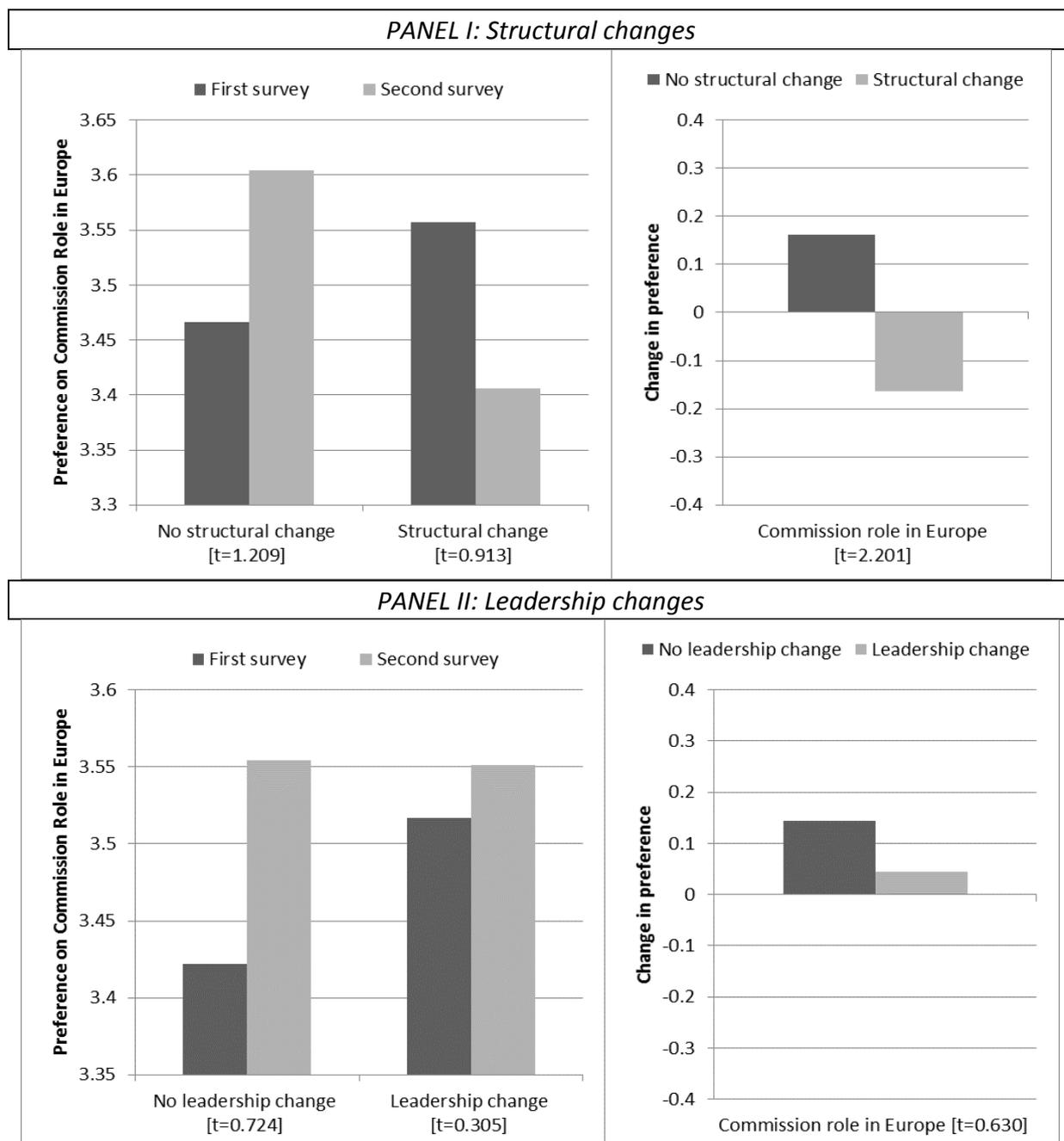
**Figure 1: Internationalist attitudes among Commission staff**



Note: The histogram depicts the *change* in respondents' internationalist attitudes between both surveys using our panel of perfectly matched individuals (N=165).

Figure 2 assesses hypotheses H2 and H3 by depicting changes in the *average* position of Commission officials' internationalist orientation *depending on* whether or not respondents witnessed a structural or leadership change in their workplace between both survey waves. On the left-hand side, we present the mean response during the 2008 survey (dark-grey bars) and the 2014 survey (light-grey bars) among respondents in DGs without and with an organizational change between 2008 and 2014. On the right-hand side, the dark-grey bar reflects the average change between both survey rounds among respondents in DGs without an organizational change, while the light-grey bar reflects the average change among respondents in DGs with an organizational change. The top panel studies the effect of exogenously imposed unpredictable *structural* changes in the Commission whereas the bottom panel evaluates the role of more predictable *leadership* rotations.

**Figure 2: Change in preferences about role of the Commission in Europe**



Note: The figure presents changes between both survey waves in respondents' views about the College of Commissioners – rather than the Member States or European Parliament – being the key player in the EU. Answers are recorded on a scale from 1 (“Strongly agree”) to 5 (“Strongly disagree”). On the left-hand side, we present the mean response during the 2008 survey (dark-grey bars) and the 2014 survey (light-grey bars) among respondents in DGs without and with an organizational change between 2008 and 2014. On the right-hand side, the dark-grey bar reflects the average change between both survey waves among respondents in DGs without an organizational change between 2008 and 2014, while the light-grey bar reflects the average change among respondents in DGs with an organizational change. In all cases, t-values derive from a parametric difference-in-means t-test between both groups presented in the respective panels.

As figure 2 illustrates, respondents with no structural or leadership changes in their Directorate-General, executive office, or agency develop towards a more positive view about the College of Commissioners – rather than the Member States or European Parliament – being the key player in the EU. This shift towards a more internationalist position is much weaker for respondents who do witness a leadership change, and is even reversed for respondents subjected to a structural change between both survey waves. As might be expected, all changes observed on the left-hand side of figure 2 remain fairly small, and none of the observed shifts in average attitudes reaches statistical significance at conventional levels (as illustrated by the t-values at the bottom of both panels).

Nonetheless, and crucially, the right-hand side of figure 2 illustrates that the average change among respondents in DGs *without* a structural change is positive (0.161), while it is negative among respondents in DGs *with* a structural change (-0.163). The difference between both changes is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Moreover, the effect size of 0.324 is substantively meaningful, since it reflects approximately 35% of the standard deviation of attitudinal changes in the sample (0.906). In similar vein, the average shift toward a more internationalist orientation is much weaker for respondents in DGs *with* a leadership change (0.044) compared to those *without* a leadership change (0.144) – although this difference remains statistically insignificant. The latter observation is in line with hypothesis H3, which argues that socialization into internationalist attitudes is particularly likely to be disrupted under *unexpected* changes. Due to the rotation scheme for managerial staff Commission staff are used to leadership changes, which mitigates the effect of such changes on staff socialization processes.

Taking the two results together provides substantial supportive evidence for the notion that socialization in IGOs is conditional upon the absence of organizational changes (hypothesis H2). Such disruptive events have an important impact upon the nature or intensity of individuals' exposure to organizational values, particularly when they are unexpected and unpredictable. In the latter case, the process of socialization is disrupted and development towards internationalist values can come to a halt – and might even go into reverse (hypothesis H3).

### *Gender and age at entry as scope conditions*

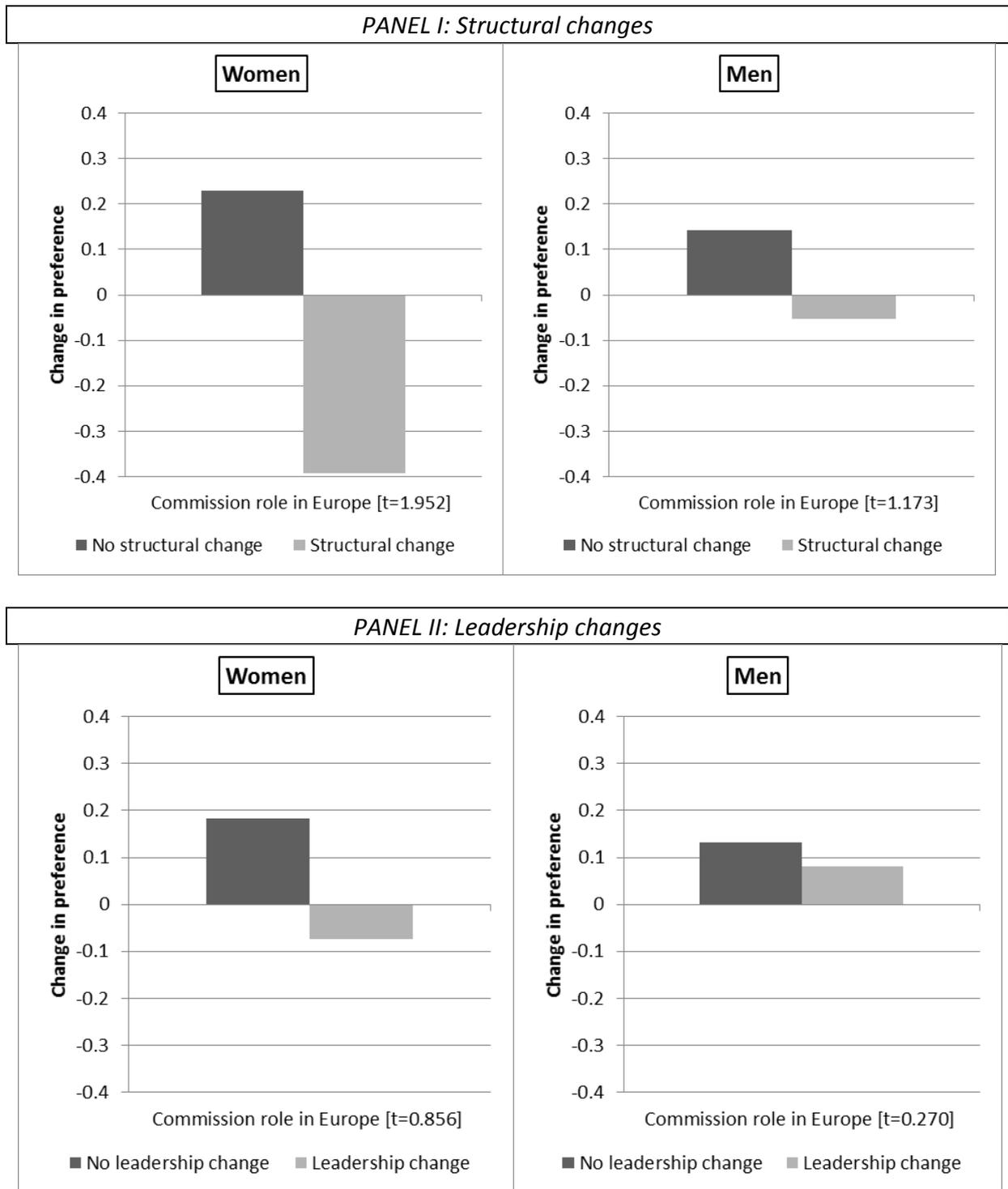
Figure 3 provides a separate analysis for female (left-hand side) and male (right-hand side) Commission officials. Figure 4 does the same for people entering the Commission at age 30 or younger (left-hand side) or after age 30 (right-hand side), which we refer to as ‘novices’ and ‘established’ at the time of entry, respectively.<sup>14</sup> We focus on how the change in respondents’ internationalist attitudes differs *depending on* whether or not they witnessed a structural or leadership change in their workplace between both survey waves (i.e. analysis on the right-hand side of figure 2).

Several observations stand out in figures 3 and 4. First, women and men as well as individuals entering before/after age 30 show only marginal differences in attitude change between both surveys when they are *not* subject to organizational changes (the dark grey bars). Second, and more importantly, the average attitudinal change among women and those entering after age 30 in DGs *without* a structural change is positive (i.e. 0.229 and 0.178, respectively), while it is negative for these same groups in DGs *with* a structural change (i.e. -0.393 and -0.231, respectively). The difference between both attitudinal shifts is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. While similar movements are observed for men and those entering at age 30 or younger, these changes are smaller and not statistically significant. The bottom panels of figures 3 and 4 provide a very similar picture, but, as before, the effects of leadership changes are always substantively weak and statistically insignificant.

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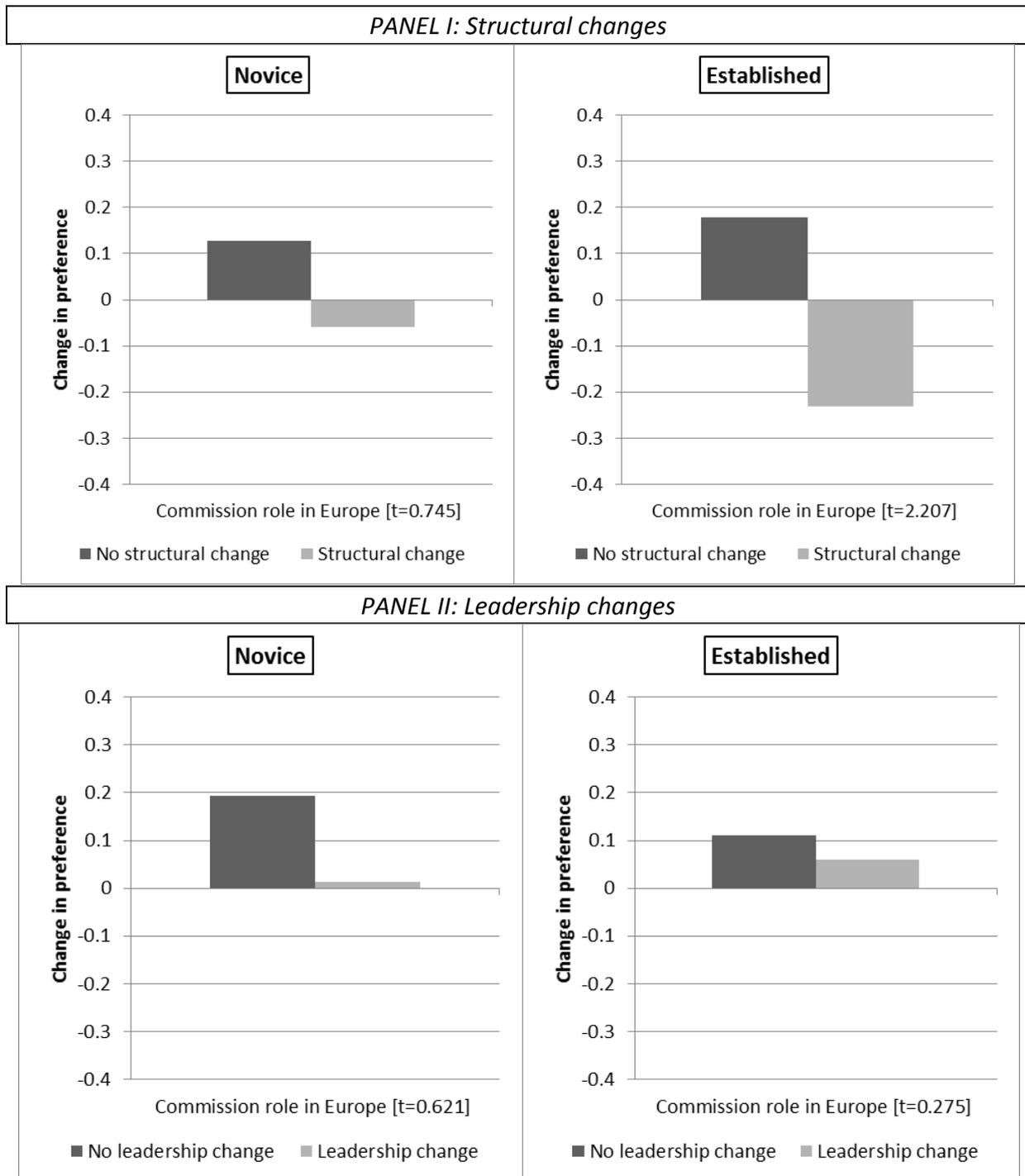
<sup>14</sup> This cut-off is also imposed in Hooghe (2005). In total, 59 individuals in our panel of perfect matches (35.76%) entered the Commission at age 30 or younger, which is exactly equivalent to the percentage cited in Hooghe (2005) for all top employees in the institution.

**Figure 3: The mediating effect of respondent gender**



Note: The figure presents changes between both survey waves in respondents' views about the College of Commissioners – rather than the Member States or European Parliament – being the key player in the EU. Answers are recorded on a scale from 1 (“Strongly agree”) to 5 (“Strongly disagree”). On the left-hand side, we present changes documented among women in the sample, while the right-hand side focuses on male respondents. In both cases, the dark-grey bar reflects the average change between both survey waves among respondents in DGs without an organizational change between 2008 and 2014, while the light-grey bar reflects the average change among respondents in DGs with an organizational change. In all cases, t-values derive from a parametric difference-in-means t-test between both groups presented in the respective panels.

**Figure 4: The mediating effect of respondent age at entry**



Note: The figure presents changes between both survey waves in respondents' views about the College of Commissioners – rather than the Member States or European Parliament – being the key player in the EU. Answers are recorded on a scale from 1 (“Strongly agree”) to 5 (“Strongly disagree”). On the left-hand side, we present changes documented among novices upon entry (i.e. age at entry 30 or younger), while the right-hand side focuses on established staff upon entry (i.e. age at entry over 30 years). In both cases, the dark-grey bar reflects the average change between both survey waves among respondents in DGs without an organizational change between 2008 and 2014, while the light-grey bar reflects the average change among respondents in DGs with an organizational change. In all cases, t-values derive from a parametric difference-in-means t-test between both groups presented in the respective panels.

Overall, figures 3 and 4 show that the effects of structural changes on the observed outcomes of socialization processes in figure 2 are driven by *female* respondents and individuals entering the Commission *after* age 30. The former finding is consistent with the notion – advanced in hypothesis H4 – that women’s higher socio-evaluative concerns increase their openness to positive and negative socializing influences within IGOs. The latter finding is in line with the idea that individuals having entered the Commission with fewer cognitive priors tend to have the Commission’s internationalist position more firmly ingrained (Hooghe, 2005; Cohen, 2017). These values thereby become less sensitive to subsequent (unexpected) organizational changes – as posited in Hypothesis H5.

*Robustness analysis: Difference-in-differences regression estimates*

Our analysis thus far has concentrated on comparisons of group averages, and does not test for potentially (un)observed heterogeneity across respondents. Table 1 reports results from estimating a set of difference-in-differences regression models with individual-level fixed effects, which explicitly focuses on within-respondent changes in attitudes over time (see above). Column (1) includes all respondents in the matched sample, whereas columns (2) and (3) limit the sample to male and female respondents, respectively, and column (4) and (5) limit the sample to individuals entering the Commission before/after age 30.<sup>15</sup>

The results in table 1 confirm those in the previous section. Focusing first on the top panel, we find that staff who experience a structural change in their immediate work environment develop *less* towards an internationalist orientation between both survey waves compared to individuals *not* experiencing a structural change. Columns (2) and (3) highlight that this overall effect is driven by the women in the sample, whereas column (4) and (5) confirm the strong mediating role of individuals’ age at entry in the IGO. The bottom panel of table 1 replicates this pattern in the results, but reiterates that none of the attitudinal shifts induced by leadership changes are statistically significant at conventional levels. On the whole, we thus again find that structural changes in the Commission have stronger implications for socialization processes than leadership changes (hypothesis H3), and that

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<sup>15</sup> Similar results are obtained when we add a three-way interaction between  $Wave2014_t$ ,  $Change_i$  and the gender or novice/established character of respondents to the analysis in Column (1) (see Tables A.2 and A.3 in the supplementary appendix).

such structural alterations in the organizational environment particularly disrupt the socialization of female officials (hypothesis H4) and those entering the Commission as established staff (hypothesis H5).<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1: Difference-in-differences regression results**

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	All	Men	Women	Age at entry 30 or less	Age at entry over 30
Structural change (dummy)	-	-	-	-	-
Wave2014 (dummy)	0.161 * (1.88)	0.143 (1.57)	0.229 (1.00)	0.128 (0.76)	0.178 * (1.82)
Structural change * Wave2014	-0.324 ** (-2.21)	-0.195 (-1.18)	-0.622 ** (-1.96)	-0.187 (-0.75)	-0.408 ** (-2.22)
N	323	245	78	115	208
R <sup>2</sup>	0.033	0.023	0.083	0.010	0.004
Leadership change (dummy)	-	-	-	-	-
Wave2014 (dummy)	0.144 (1.07)	0.132 (0.79)	0.182 (0.96)	0.194 (0.79)	0.111 (0.72)
Leadership change * Wave2014	-0.100 (-0.63)	-0.051 (-0.27)	-0.256 (-0.86)	-0.181 (-0.63)	-0.051 (-0.28)
N	323	245	78	115	208
R <sup>2</sup>	0.009	0.014	0.013	0.000	0.002

Note: The dependent variable – “*Commission role in Europe*” – represents respondents’ views about the College of Commissioners – rather than the Member States or European Parliament – being the key player in the EU. Answers are recorded on a scale from 1 (“Strongly agree”) to 5 (“Strongly disagree”). “*Structural change*” and “*Leadership change*” are indicator variables equal to 1 for respondents in DGs with a structural or leadership change, respectively, between 2008 and 2014 (0 otherwise). “*Wave2014*” is an indicator variable equal to 1 for the second wave of the survey in 2014 (0 for the first wave in 2008). Column (1) includes all respondents in the matched sample, whereas columns (2) and (3) limit the sample to male and female respondents, respectively. Columns (4) and (5) limit the sample to respondents entering the Commission before/after age 30, respectively. t-values based on heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors between brackets. \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.1.

One final comment is necessary. Our matched sample is somewhat more likely to be male and to work in DGs witnessing structural changes in the period under analysis. This might be driving at least part of the results described above if (female) bureaucrats unhappy with the (structural) reorganizations are more likely to complete the second wave of the survey

<sup>16</sup> Based on suggestions by an anonymous referee, we also experimented with (inter)national education as an additional conditioning variable. The results show that our key findings appear strongest among individuals with at least some international education experience (full details in table A.4 in the supplementary appendix).

(after having been randomly selected into the first wave). If so, this would imply that our results reflect an upper bound of the hypothesized socialization effects – since individuals with less pronounced attitudinal shifts would be under-represented in our sample. We cannot exclude this possibility based on the data available, and future research needs to verify this result using repeated observations from a randomly selected sample of IGO staff.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, such selection issues mainly restrict the ability to generalize our findings to the Commission as a whole. They do *not* invalidate the conclusion that substantively meaningful attitudinal changes can occur in IGOs for specific staff contingents (particularly women and those older at entry). We view these observations as the more critical insights from our analysis.

### *Discussion*

The six-year period between the two surveys is not long enough to allow us to assess claims concerning the causal mechanisms underlying value acquisition made by neo-functionalist and constructivist scholars (Checkel, 2005; Johnston, 2005; Zürn and Checkel, 2005). We are unable, for example, to test whether new attitudes and values have been fully internalized (i.e. Type II socialization), or to adjudicate on the presence or absence of normative suasion as a socializing mechanism. However, the evaluation of these claims was not our primary purpose.

Although we are unable to contribute significantly to the debate about mechanisms, our findings on scope conditions do provide some potential insights concerning the likely importance of strategic calculation, role playing and mimicking. The latter differs from strategic adaptation since there is no means-end calculation involved, and from role-playing by not being solely driven by institutional structures (Johnston, 2005; Murdoch and Geys, 2012). Specifically, Hooghe (2005: 871) convincingly argues that instrumental rationality kicks in predominantly “when an individual’s career chances are at stake” (i.e. for younger individuals). This would suggest that respondents entering the Commission at a younger age are more likely to adjust for, at least in part, instrumental reasons. Psychological research

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<sup>17</sup> Note that a similar issue does *not* arise for our results regarding those entering after age 30 since no significant differences exist in age, year of entry and age at entry between our matched sample and the complete survey samples.

has furthermore argued that instrumentality may be a more typically masculine than feminine trait (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993, and references therein). Since the attitudinal changes we observe are strongest among *women* and staff with a *higher* age at entry, these lines of argument suggest that mechanisms including role playing or mimicking might be particularly relevant within our setting. One speculation is that gender imbalances in staff composition and the absence of female role models may result in greater use of role-playing or mimicking on the part of women. This interpretation is further strengthened when considering that we exploit organizational changes to identify causal effects in our analysis. The reason is that role playing as a mechanism underlying attitudinal change is often linked to organizational structures inducing individuals to enact organization-specific roles (Murdoch and Geys, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

Despite the importance of the issue, the IR literature has hitherto been unable to deliver an authoritative answer on whether IGOs shape the values of the people who work for them. Since IGOs have become a near ubiquitous presence and exert influence on virtually every area of life (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; Costa and Jorgensen, 2012), this is a serious limitation. Although IR schools of thought ranging from neo-functionalism to constructivism have clear theoretical expectations regarding the acquisition of values in IGOs, empirical scholarship thus far betrays significant shortcomings. Lack of access to longitudinal data in particular has imposed important constraints on the validity and robustness of the claims existing studies can support (Martin and Simmons, 1998; Beyers, 2010), as well as the range of hypotheses that could be tested. Drawing on unique new data from two surveys within the European Commission in 2008 and 2014, this article advanced understanding of international socialization in three ways.

First, this article has identified and addressed two central weaknesses in IR scholarship on international socialization: a methodological shortcoming whereby scholars have depended on cross-sectional data to analyze an essentially dynamic process, and a theoretical shortcoming whereby datasets based on narrow staff strata restricted the possibilities for theorizing and empirically evaluating scope conditions. In response to the first, our analysis builds on a two-wave survey design to examine socialization as a diachronic process in

longitudinal terms – using repeated observations from the *same* person over time. In response to the second shortcoming, this article sought explicitly to theorize the institutional and individual scope conditions that trigger socialization effects within IGOs. Our examination of the impact of exogenously imposed changes in an individual's organizational environment in particular breaks new ground.

Second, our findings demonstrate that international institutions can and do shape the values of policy officers. It is also clear that our results offer a qualified “yes” to the question whether IGOs trigger socialization effects. Organizational change, gender and age at entry are crucial scope conditions affecting the socialization process. We should also note here that our findings do *not* imply that supranational socialization is unaffected by, for instance, the nature of supranational attitudes or learning about the efficiency/legitimacy of supranational organizations. In fact, we very strongly believe that these elements do play a role as well. Yet, such factors arguably impact upon all individuals in the Commission equally and are independent of experiencing organizational (in)stability. As such, we cannot identify their relevance in our analysis, and – as we note in footnote 11 – their potential presence does not affect our ability to address the effect of individuals experiencing organizational (in)stability.

Third, insofar as they have engaged with the socializing power of IGOs, IR scholars have directed their attention mainly at the institutional level (Waltz, 1979; Keohane, 1984; Abbott et al., 2016). Our approach is innovative in undertaking analysis at the level of individual members of staff. By offering new insights into IGOs as social environments (Johnston, 2001), our research demonstrates the value of individual-level analyses. It also suggests new avenues of enquiry – for example, on investigating the working of staff selection and integration policies, the role of leadership, and the impact of administrative reforms on staff performance. More broadly, it may be that individual-level analysis offers the most promising route for identifying the causal mechanisms – either arguing or bargaining (see also footnote 7; Johnston, 2001, 2005; Zürn and Checkel, 2005) – that scholars claim are in operation at different stages of the socialization process. This would be an important step towards understanding not only *whether* certain groups of individuals

witness attitudinal changes in IGOs under certain contextual settings – as we illustrate in our analysis – but also *why* and *how* such changes arise.

Our findings are based on a case study of a single critical institution, but they suggest at least four possible lines of future research. First, the discussion in this article has focused on policy officers. It may be that they are particularly susceptible to the acquisition of pro-internationalist values. Extending the analysis to other staff categories or comparing value acquisition among sub-categories of policy officers – for example, between managers and staff in non-management positions – may reveal additional scope conditions. Similarly, broadening the analysis to a representative sample of the entire workforce would make it possible to test a wider range of scope conditions – a second potential line of enquiry. Candidates include location (since there may be an ‘HQ effect’), educational background, nationality, or previous employment. A third possibility involves comparison of the European Commission with other parts of the EU administration or other international institutions. The aim would be to examine the extent to which different institutions exert different levels of socializing influence on their staff, and what institutional or organizational properties account for any such difference. Finally, the limited number of observations in our final panel dataset precluded evaluating whether – and, if so, to what extent – particularly policy fields within the Commission show more openness to international socialization. This would be interesting to consider in future research as employees in different policy fields not only have different ways of working, but also vary in terms of the internal prestige of their direct work environment. All four possibilities would require data of greater scope and scale than hitherto available, but, as the above discussion has demonstrated, that is the cost for further advancing the understanding of international institutions as socializing environments.

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