

# The Formation of British Attitudes towards the Common Market: 1957–72

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## Abstract

This paper uses an extensive collection of historical surveys that have only recently been made available to researchers to examine the formation of British attitudes towards the then European Economic Community. It demonstrates that – up until 1967 – the demographic predictors of support for UK membership were unstable. Thereafter, coinciding with the second UK application, these attitudes started to stabilise and harden, with support becoming highest among men, the youngest age cohorts, the middle class and those with greater education. The renewed politicization of the issue in 1967 also coincided with Labour voters becoming significantly more likely to support membership. Following the change in the parties' positions, Labour voters subsequently become substantially less supportive than Conservative voters. The paper thus supports existing analyses on the role of elite cues, while providing new, robust evidence of the change in demographic associations over this formative period.

**Keywords:** attitudes; Britain; elites; European Economic Community; public opinion

## Introduction

In this paper, I examine the social and political characteristics that predicted Britons' support for joining the European Economic Community (EEC) over the period 1957–72. We know a lot about the characteristics of support towards European integration since 1973 from pooled analyses of Eurobarometer surveys (Inglehart *et al.*, 1987), as well as from analyses of British-specific time-series data from the British Social Attitudes surveys since 1983 and various British Election Studies (Clements, 2009; Evans and Butt, 2007; Stevens, 2013). However, we know less about the foundations of British public opinion from the 1950s up until Britain joined the bloc. As different individual characteristics have varied over time in both the magnitude and direction of their associations with European integration attitudes since accession (Evans and Butt, 2007), this may have also occurred in the lead up to membership.

Data limitations have been an issue. While the *Political Change in Britain* project collected academic data during their election studies, as Europe was predominantly debated between election campaigns in the period before accession rather than during them (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974, pp. 90–1), these data lack the ability to pinpoint the crystallization of attitudes that may have occurred, their likely causes and how the demographic correlates of support may have altered. Relevant questions were also fielded by various polling companies, with the longest and most regular series collected by Gallup. While the individual-level Gallup data was previously unavailable to the research community, its recent release makes it possible for the first time to model the characteristics of public support for membership from before Britain's first application through to its accession.

My findings support those of previous literature that attitudes towards joining were developed through a top-down, elite-driven process. The associations with political preferences varied according to changing partisan cues, while it was only from 1967 onwards that demographic correlates started to become stable. By including various individual characteristics simultaneously in analysis, I greatly reduce the omitted variable bias that was prevalent in previous studies using bivariate crosstabulations (Clements, 2019; King, 1977). The paper thus addresses an important gap on the formation of attitudes towards the EEC, shedding light on how social cleavages towards the EU that we see today trace their roots much further back in time.

The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, I provide context by detailing the politics of the issue in Britain from the post-war period until accession. Theoretically, we know that when publics have little knowledge of an issue, they are likely to look for cues from trusted sources – such as newspapers or signals from their preferred party – and use these as cognitive shortcuts in the formation of their own attitudes (Zaller, 1992). As joining the EEC was an issue the British public had very little knowledge of or interest in prior to it being brought into public discourse by political elites (Flickenger, 1995), one would expect to be able to link public opinion trends with important political developments. Hence, I outline the evolving political situation on the issue to be able to link such developments with changes in public opinion. Following this, I review existing public opinion evidence from the pre-membership period. I then detail the data I use and present the results, before discussing their importance in the conclusion.

## I. Background and Literature

### *The Post-War Politics of the Common Market in Britain*

In the post-war period, there was no largescale popular mobilization in Britain for pursuing Western European integration (Usherwood, 2018, p. 554), with neither public enthusiasm nor hostility towards it. As Forster (2002, p. 10) remarks ‘What little discussion that took place was confined to the political elite and internalised within the major political parties at Westminster and key Whitehall departments, sometimes reaching the floor of the House of Commons, but rarely aired in the public domain’. While some intra-party disagreements existed, ‘the main reasons why Britain stood aloof from Europe were common to the two major political parties and were not primarily ideological in character’ (King, 1977, p. 4). These included a belief in British exceptionalism, a desire to preserve the importance of the Empire/Commonwealth and concerns over losing parliamentary sovereignty. Moreover, some strands within Labour viewed it with suspicion. They perceived it as a vehicle for European capitalism and were concerned that joining would curtail the party’s ability to implement its domestic socialist agenda (Baker *et al.*, 2008, p. 98/97; Forster, 2002, pp. 13–15; Judt, 2005, pp. 159–61). While successive post-war governments on both sides of the political divide did claim to be pro-European, in practice they found objections to each proposed European integration initiative. Even politicians that advocated unity generally had an intergovernmental rather than a supranational structure in mind (Lieber, 1970, p. 26).

In the late 1950s, there was a rethink that came primarily from the Treasury and the Foreign Office rather than from public demand (Younger, 1964, p. 29). In the immediate

aftermath of the Second World War, the British economy – and in particular that of its exports – was in a far better shape than continental economies and senior British civil servants had considered the risks to signing up to long-term economic co-operation with its European neighbours as being unnecessary and potentially damaging (Judt, 2005, p. 159). However, there was some reconsideration of the economic advantages following the success of the EEC as the member states' economies were performing very strongly in contrast to the 'stop-go' cycle of boom and bust being experienced by the UK's. Furthermore, two key tenets of British foreign policy – its special relationship with the US and the Commonwealth/Empire – were deteriorating, or at the very least altering rapidly. The growing isolation of Britain was arguably a more important reason than the economic factors for British policymakers in their reassessment. Joining the bloc was expected to offer a pathway through which the UK could restore its status as a leading European power and Macmillan himself appeared to be especially sensitive to Britain's reduced capacity to exert independent influence in the world when considering membership (King, 1977, pp. 8–10; Steinnes, 1998).

Even so, Macmillan's announcement to the House of Commons on 31 July 1961 of the Government's plans to instigate a membership application came out of the blue for many. Not anticipating it, Labour took some time to formulate a response, initially taking a 'position of studied neutrality' (King, 1977, p. 11). Between then and autumn 1962, its position hardened into one of opposition and was articulated strongly by Gaitskell at the October 1962 Labour conference at which he said he saw membership as 'the end of Britain as an independent European state ... the end of a thousand years of history' (Baker *et al.*, 2008, p. 95). While anti-Common Market sentiment was clearly present, he did not rule out membership entirely if five key conditions should be met, though his assumption was that the Conservative government would be unable to deliver these (Davis, 2017). Indeed, it was De Gaulle's veto in January 1963 rather than domestic opposition that ended the application.

Also in January 1963, Gaitskell's unexpected death and replacement by Wilson as the Labour leader set the scene for a change in Labour policy. The significance of this was not immediately evident given that Wilson had been against joining during the Macmillan application, and indeed EEC membership was not a Labour policy when the party entered government in 1964. Even as late as the March 1966 General Election campaign, Wilson's public position was very similar to Gaitskell's and in line with the 1966 manifesto pledge that membership could only be possible if 'essential British and Commonwealth interests are safeguarded' (Dale, 2000, p. 149). Behind the scenes however, Wilson was more pragmatic and his views had altered while in office. With it becoming increasingly clear that his preference of deepening Commonwealth connections was not viable, in January 1966 he began to commission secret studies on membership though these, along with advice from the government's economic advisers and the Treasury, advised against it in the near future. The sterling crisis of July 1966 made the pursuit of membership more urgent as a way to address the country's economic woes and international standing, precipitating Wilson's announcement in autumn 1966 to embark on a probe of membership, a tour of Europe in January 1967 to achieve this aim and the decision in May 1967 to formally apply (Cook and Francis, 1979; Parr, 2005, Chapter 1).

In seeking an application hedged with safeguards, he 'shifted the debate away from outright opposition to the nature of terms which might be secured' (Forster, 2002,

p. 14). While many Labour MPs opposed Wilson's application, this disapproval did not lead to significant dissent due to a combination of expectations of a French veto, Wilson's effective party management and increasing economic difficulties (Baker *et al.*, 2008, p. 95). While the Conservative leadership were still in favour of joining, to distance themselves from the Labour application that they considered was likely to fail they attempted to move public attention towards what they portrayed as the economic incompetence of Labour. They thus argued that the domestic situation should be rectified [by a Conservative government] before an application could succeed (Crowson, 2007, p. 35).

In any event, De Gaulle's second veto arrived in November 1967. The membership application was not withdrawn at this stage but left 'on the table' to enable it to be reactivated at a future point in time (Goldsmith and Farrell, 2017). It would not however be until De Gaulle's resignation in April 1969 that a revival of the application could be contemplated (King, 1977, p. 17). The Labour Government were still in favour of negotiations, however the publication of the white paper *Britain and the European Communities: An Economic Assessment* in February 1970 was seen as a blunder as, while containing a large degree of error, its widely published estimates that entry could raise food prices by 25 per cent and put a substantial burden on the country's balance of payments were seized upon by anti-Marketeters (New York Times, 1970). A change of administration came in June with the return of a Conservative government under the prime ministership of Heath, and within 12 days of the General Election membership negotiations had commenced (Crowson, 2007). Yet again, such action was not in response to popular demand but was an almost-entirely elite-driven process (King, 1977, p. 19).

The politization was however much greater during this period. Firstly, those against the proposal within the Conservative party provided more vocal and organized opposition. Secondly, while Labour was formally committed to entry at the start of 1971 if the right terms could be found, the year saw the party's anti-Marketeer group grow considerably in power and influence. Wilson was outmanoeuvred by the National Executive Committee who were firmly opposed to joining – a position echoed among the grassroots (Flickenger, 1995, p. 204) – resulting in a landslide vote against joining at the Labour conference in October 1971 once the terms of the agreement were known (Wheaton, 1972). Though a subsequent House of Commons vote that same month provided resounding support, there were strong intra-party schisms with 39 Conservative MPs voting against membership and 69 Labour MPs voting in favour. Notwithstanding this, up until the country entered the bloc on 1 January 1973, official Conservative and Labour party positions remained opposed to each other.

### *Existing Public Opinion Analyses*

Thus far, I have outlined the political developments in Britain on Western European integration from the post-war period to accession. As discussed, there is a consensus that policy decisions were driven by elites rather than public opinion. In this section, I detail what we know from existing analyses of public opinion.

The first source is a comparative four-country European study carried out by the US Intelligence Agency from 1952 to 1954 which asked Britons if they were in favour of efforts towards uniting Western Europe. At this time, public support was higher in Britain than France or Italy. While the question was changed from 1955 to 1957 with the addition

of ‘including Great Britain’, support remained high at approximately two-thirds. However, between 1957 and the next time-point in 1962, support dropped to less than 50 per cent which was lower than that seen amongst the French and Italian publics (Merritt and Puchala, 1968). As Clements (2019, p. 87) notes, this was against the backdrop of Macmillan’s 1961 application where the issue had become more tangible, though stated opposition was still low and outranked by those without an opinion. Given the five-year time gap, it is unclear whether this drop in support predated Macmillan’s announcement.

Over the coming decade, polling companies would survey public opinion on the issue. The longest time series comes from Gallup whose topline figures were published in various reports (see Gallup, 1972; Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Ltd., 1966). Aggregate analysis shows that opinion was generally favourable in the first part of the decade with plurality or majority support<sup>1</sup> – peaking at 71 per cent in July 1966 – before a gradual decline over the coming years. There was a particularly steep decline between November 1969 and February 1970, with a clear public majority against joining. This somewhat recovered between 1971 and 1972, though not to levels of majority support (For more discussions of these trends, see Clements, 2019; Flickenger, 1995; JCMS, 1967; King, 1977).

Opinion polling carried out by NOP between 1965 and 1973 provides some insight into the relationship with various respondent characteristics. On partisanship, in contrast to the situation at the time of De Gaulle’s first veto when Gallup cross-tabulations showed disapproval was the plurality preference for Labour voters and approval the preference of the majority of Conservative voters (JCMS, 1967, p. 233), in July 1966 – at the high point of approval – both Labour and Conservative voters had net-positive views on joining, with net approval greater among Conservatives. By May 1967, Labour voters still viewed the proposal favourably, though Conservative voters had greater disapproval. Between March and November 1970 is particularly important, as Conservative voters’ approval had become higher than Labour voters (King, 1977, p. 27).

Clements (2019) presents a breakdown of the bivariate relationships between support and demographic characteristics from NOP surveys in the period 1965–66 and 1969–73 by gender, age and social class. He shows that men were generally more supportive than women by a usual margin of 10–15 percentage points. While the 65+ were less supportive in 1965, the age gap with the 16–34 age group had narrowed from 21 percentage points in February 1965 to just 12 percentage points by June 1973. This is in contrast to a widening of class divides from 18 percentage points between the AB and DE classes in February 1965 to a 33 percentage point gap in November 1972 (Clements, 2019, pp. 119–21). Crosstabulations from July 1971 show little evidence of regional variation, though support in Wales/West and Scotland were approximately 5 percentage points lower than the South East (Zakheim, 1972, p. 195).

However, being based only on bivariate analysis, whether and to what extent these relationships hold once one accounts for these individual characteristics concurrently is unknown. Moreover, these surveys miss the first half of the 1960s when the issue first entered into public discourse, and so we cannot know how membership approval and demographic characteristics developed.

<sup>1</sup>As much as 40 per cent answered ‘don’t know’ initially, which decreased substantially by the early 1970s.



The *Political Change in Britain* surveys have been the main source of individual-level academic data on pre-membership attitudes towards the EEC. Between 1963 and 1966, the data showed no consistent gender differences, with support greatest among the youngest cohorts and the higher social classes (Clements, 2019, p. 121). Panel surveys from summer 1963 and autumn 1964 point to a high degree of fluidity in attitudes though. While 38 per cent and 34 per cent respectively had no opinion in each survey, 50 per cent responded 'don't know' in at least one of these timepoints. Moreover, of those who provided a response, over 20 per cent gave a different answer when asked the second time amid stability at the aggregate level with little evidence of these movements representing meaningful change (Butler and Stokes, 1969, pp. 176–7). This points to views being malleable and attitudes not being as-yet fully formed. While opinion was relatively split among those who stated a preference, by 1966 around 75 per cent favoured joining after excluding 'don't knows' (Butler and Stokes, 1969, p. 225) echoing the Gallup trends. The largest shifts in favour of joining were seen among those with the greatest exposure to political information, as measured by whether respondents followed politics/general election campaigns through the television, newspapers, radio and/or private conversation. While among those with the lowest exposure support had risen from 37 per cent in 1964 to 46 per cent in 1966, among those with the highest exposure the magnitude of the increase was greater from 50 per cent in 1964 to 81 per cent in 1966. Such exposure was also related to whether one held an opinion on the issue (Butler and Stokes, 1969, pp. 226–7). This data – especially the panel data – is a rich and valuable resource. However, as Europe was predominantly debated between rather than during election campaigns (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974, pp. 90–1), it lacks the ability to pinpoint the crystallization of attitudes that may have occurred, the likely causes and how such changes may have altered the demographic correlates of support.

## II. Data and Methods

In this paper, I use previously-inaccessible data collected by Gallup in Britain from September 1957 to December 1972 (Jennings *et al.*, 2022). The series thus begins just after the signing of the Treaty of Rome and ends the month before UK accession. The surveys each contain approximately 1000 individuals. Interviews were carried out in-person through a panel of part-time interviewers spread across the country who would typically conduct around 15 interviews each. The process enabled these large-scale surveys to be carried out quickly and economically, and Gallup found that it minimised interviewer bias – given that interviewer differences were likely to cancel each other out – and prevented interviewer fatigue and low morale (Moser and Kalton, 1971, pp. 283–4).

The aggregate results were previously published in a report on British attitudes to Europe (Gallup, 1972) with many of the topline figures having been reported in other publications as already detailed or in *The Telegraph*. However, the individual-level data was unavailable to researchers. The responses had been recorded on punch-cards and stored in antiquated column-binary format. While archived, it is only in recent years that the collection has been converted to a format that is accessible for analysis. Not all of the data in the 1972 report is in the collection and equally the collection contains some datasets that were not documented in the report, but overall there are over 70 timepoints available. Thus, these data provide the opportunity to gain an insight into how Britons'

attitudes towards membership formed and crystalized. In particular, I examine how such attitudes relate to individual-level characteristics and whether such relationships evolved over this period.

I run a multinomial logistic regression for each survey in which support for joining the Common Market (the dependent variable; that is, the variable whose variation I seek to explain) is regressed on the demographic and political variables (the predictor variables, that is the variables I use to predict or explain approval of Common Market membership). This is a statistically appropriate test to carry out when the dependent variable has more than two categorical response options that have no natural ordering. It allows me not only to examine the distinguishing characteristics between those who approved and disapproved of membership, but also between those who approved and responded ‘don’t know’.

To capture support for membership, I use five different questions. All of these were measured with pro-joining, anti-joining and ‘don’t know’ categories and are summarised in Table 1. There are of course differences between them in their framing. An example of the effects of this can be seen in one instance as the February 1965 survey fielded both versions 2 and 3. While almost all of those who thought the country should try to join the Common Market would approve if the Government decided that joining was in the country’s best interest, there was a sizeable minority who thought the country should drop the idea, but would approve if the Government recommended it. For both questions however, the demographic correlates of support were similar (see Supplementary Appendix A). So while the differences need to be kept in mind – especially when looking at breaks between the series – there are good grounds for believing that the correlations between the different questions are high. The structure of the questions are also much more uniform than those used in analyses examining changes in European attitudes from the 1980s onwards which had to bring together questions where both the framing and the number of answer categories varied, but which nonetheless showed high validity<sup>2</sup> (Clements, 2009; Evans and Butt, 2007).

For predictor variables, I focus on key social and political characteristics. I first include sex, age (16–34; 35–49; 50–64; 65+), region (South England; Midlands; North England; Wales; Scotland) and the occupation of the respondent or that of the head of the household/their husband if the respondent does not work (Professionals/directors/managers/administrators; other non-manual; manual). It is also important to account for subjective social class – that is what class respondents perceive themselves to belong to – which may display distinct associations from the objective occupation measure. For instance, Evans *et al.* (2022) demonstrate that, in Britain, occupation is associated with redistribution but not immigration preferences, whereas subjective social class is associated with immigration but not redistribution preferences. I include three categories of subjective social class identity (working; lower-middle class; middle/upper-middle/upper). I then include the party one voted for at the previous general election (Conservative; Labour; Liberal; Other; don’t know; ‘did not vote’).<sup>3</sup> One additional variable of interest is educational attainment.

<sup>2</sup>As per Carmines and Zeller (1979), validity is evidenced by the degree to which a particular indicator measures what it is supposed to – in this case that the questions measure support for British membership of the Common Market/EU – rather than reflecting some other phenomenon.

<sup>3</sup>In Supplementary Appendix A5, this is substituted for vote intention. While there are some differences, the overall patterns are similar given the high correlation between one’s past vote and vote intention.

Table 1: Summary of Common Market Membership Questions

	<i>Question</i>	<i>Time period</i>	<i>Response categories</i>
V1	Taking everything into account, do you think Britain should or should not join the European Common Market scheme?	Sep 1957	1 Should 2 Should not 3 Don't know
V2	If the British Government were to decide that Britain's interest would best be served by joining the European Common Market, would you approve or disapprove? <sup>4</sup>	Jul 1960–Jan 1963 Feb 1965–May 1967	1 Approve 2 Disapprove 3 Don't know
V3	If an opportunity occurs for Britain to join the Common Market, would you like to see us try or drop the idea altogether?	Feb 1963–Feb 1965	1 Try to join 2 Drop the idea 3 Don't know
V4	Do you approve or disapprove of the Government applying for membership of the European Common Market?	Sep 1967–Jun 1971	1 Approve 2 Disapprove 3 Don't know
V5	On the facts as you know them, are you for or against Britain joining the Common Market?	Jul 1971–Dec 1972	1 For 2 Against 3 Don't know

This is measured through the age one finished their education at (15 or under; 16+). As this was not asked for just over two years from the end of 1964, education will be added as a final variable for the subset of datasets for which it is available.

### III. Results

Table 2 provides an overview of the main trends between those who approve and those who disapprove of membership from the regression models when sex, age, region, occupation, subjective class and past vote are all simultaneously included as predictor variables, as well as noting any key differences when age completed education (when it was asked) is added.<sup>5</sup>

Firstly, on distinguishing those who approved from those who disapproved of joining, from 1957 to 1966 there were no consistent predictors of support. Women generally had lower levels of both approval and disapproval than men until 1966 – with women more likely to respond ‘don't know’ – though the gendered differences between approval and disapproval were rarely statistically significant and frequently switched direction. There was a tendency for the over 65s to disapprove more than the 16–34 age group and, less consistently, for those in the South to approve more than some other regions, though there were also occasions where no statistically significant differences could be seen. During the Macmillan application, those in manual occupations and those with a

<sup>4</sup>In May 1967, this was altered to ‘The Government has decided... Do you approve or disapprove’ to reflect the membership application.

<sup>5</sup>In Supplementary Appendix A, a detailed summary of each regression is provided. Here, the models are also built-up slowly in four stages with different predictor variables added in gradually.



Table 2: Summary of Model Patterns for Approving/Disapproving of Common Market Membership

	<i>1957–66</i>	<i>1967–69</i>	<i>1970–72</i>
Sex	No pattern	Approval greater for men	Approval greater for men
Age	Tendency for approval to be lowest among 65+	Approval lowest among 65+	Approval lowest among 65+
Region	Tendency for approval to be higher in South than other regions	No pattern	No pattern
Occupation	Tendency to be lower among manual workers from Oct 1961–Nov 1962; thereafter such a tendency is much less frequent Association reduces further when accounting for education	Tendency to be higher among professional/managerial classes. Association reduces further when accounting for education	Approval higher among professional/managerial classes
Subjective Class	Tendency for approval to be lowest among working class identifiers, 1961–July 1963; thereafter no pattern Association reduces further when accounting for education	No consistent pattern	Tendency for approval to be lowest among working class identifiers
Past Vote	May 1962–Mar 1963: Approval greater among Conservative voters. Otherwise no pattern	Approval greater among Labour voters	Approval greater among Conservative voters
Education	No consistent pattern	No consistent pattern	Approval greater for more educated respondents

working class identity tended to be more likely to disapprove, though for the rest of this period there were rarely any statistically significant class differences.<sup>6</sup> For those nineteen surveys that include the education question in this period, there are largely no significant educational differences. There are only three of these where the more highly educated are significantly more likely to approve.

There is however evidence of partisan elite cues impacting the views of their supporters. In the nine surveys up until February 1962, at only two points are Conservative voters more likely to approve of membership than Labour voters – August and September 1961.<sup>7</sup> This is in the immediate aftermath of Macmillan's surprise announcement that the country would start the membership application process. By October such differences had disappeared. They came into being once more from May–July 1962 as the Labour party began to vocalise its opposition and, though disappearing during August and September, reappeared following Gaitskell's Labour Party conference speech in October. These changes suggest that the interventions of both Macmillan and Gaitskell were perceived by their supporters and – especially on a subject that they were unlikely to have strong

<sup>6</sup>It is worth noting that past vote is also being accounted for. As shown in Supplementary Appendix A which includes summaries for models both with and without past vote, over the course of the first application period the inclusion of past vote explains away much of the association between social class and approval.

<sup>7</sup>There is additionally one survey in July 1960 where Labour voters are more likely to approve than Conservative voters.

prior opinions on whereby such cues are more effective (Zaller, 1992) – resulted in an updating of their preferences. However, such changes were not deep-rooted as following De Gaulle's veto and Gaitskell's death – whereby joining the Community fell rapidly out of public discourse – partisan differences subsided.

While no consistent pattern of association thus emerges for distinguishing those who approved and disapproved of membership from 1957 to 1966, the characteristics of those without an opinion are clearer. Compared to the baseline of those who approve, women, over 65s, manual workers, those who identify as working-class and non-voters were more likely to answer 'don't know'. These were mainly groups with less political knowledge. Moreover, even when there were no consistent differences in approval and disapproval between Labour and Conservative voters, up until early 1965 Labour voters were much more likely to not have made up their minds. It suggests that these voters' attitudes were malleable and there was scope for them to be persuaded in one direction or the other. And for those surveys for which education was asked, those who finished their education at 16 + were less likely than those who finished at 15 or below to respond 'don't know'.

From the beginning of 1967, a change starts to occur and the individual characteristics that predict membership support became more set. This coincides with Wilson's announcement before Christmas 1966 that he was seeking membership, and his January 1967 tour of Europe. Of particular note, political divides return. In January 1967, Labour voters become significantly less likely than Conservative voters to disapprove. In the lead-up to Wilson announcing his intention to formally pursue membership in May 1967, the magnitudes of the differences in support for joining between Labour and Conservative voters had become sizeable.

Turning to the socio-demographic variables, women started to consistently approve less and disapprove more of membership than men. The age gaps mentioned previously were becoming more regular while regional differences were not evident. The results also suggest that class differences started to come into play, with a tendency for approval to be lower among manual workers. This highlights what was a key difficulty for Labour as their voters were more likely to follow the party's cues and approve membership, but manual workers – who Labour appealed to – were less convinced than professional workers. From 1970, in line with Labour voters being more likely to disapprove, the class and educational divides became much more consistent and of a higher magnitude. These would remain this way up until accession.

In Table 3, I display predicted probabilities for sex, age, class and education based on the full December 1972 model to indicate the size of the differences among such groups at the point of accession. Education was particularly important with an 18 percentage point gap in approval between those who finished below 16 and who finished at 16 or older. Occupation also shows sizeable differences with a 14 percentage point gap between manual and professional workers. It is worth pointing out that the occupation gap is of a magnitude of 35 percentage points if one solely examines the bivariate approval-occupation relationship (that is, without taking into account any of the other individual characteristics in the statistical models), and 21 percentage points if one simultaneously accounts for every other variable in the analysis except education. This highlights the weakness of previous analyses that did not account for multiple individual characteristics simultaneously and thus suffered from omitted variable bias.

Table 3: Predicted Probabilities for Approving of Common Market Membership, December 1972 [with 95 per cent Confidence Intervals]

	<i>Probability</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>Probability</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>Probability</i>	<i>CI</i>
	<i>Approval</i>		<i>Disapproval</i>		<i>Don't know</i>	
<i>Gender</i>						
Men	0.45	[0.41–0.48]	0.42	[0.38–0.46]	0.13	[0.10–0.16]
Woman	0.35	[0.31–0.38]	0.48	[0.45–0.52]	0.17	[0.14–0.20]
<i>Age</i>						
16–34	0.46	[0.41–0.50]	0.36	[0.31–0.41]	0.18	[0.14–0.22]
35–49	0.34	[0.29–0.39]	0.53	[0.47–0.58]	0.13	[0.10–0.17]
50–64	0.43	[0.37–0.49]	0.45	[0.39–0.51]	0.12	[0.07–0.16]
65+	0.31	[0.25–0.37]	0.52	[0.45–0.59]	0.17	[0.12–0.22]
<i>Occupation</i>						
Manual	0.34	[0.30–0.38]	0.50	[0.46–0.54]	0.16	[0.13–0.19]
Non-manual (other)	0.47	[0.41–0.53]	0.38	[0.32–0.44]	0.16	[0.11–0.20]
Professional/ Managerial	0.48	[0.40–0.55]	0.42	[0.33–0.50]	0.11	[0.05–0.16]
<i>Subjective Class</i>						
Working	0.38	[0.34–0.42]	0.47	[0.43–0.51]	0.15	[0.12–0.18]
Lower middle	0.40	[0.32–0.48]	0.43	[0.35–0.52]	0.17	[0.10–0.23]
Middle+	0.41	[0.36–0.46]	0.45	[0.40–0.51]	0.13	[0.09–0.17]
<i>Education</i>						
Under 16	0.33	[0.30–0.37]	0.49	[0.45–0.53]	0.18	[0.15–0.20]
16 and over	0.51	[0.45–0.57]	0.39	[0.33–0.45]	0.10	[0.06–0.13]

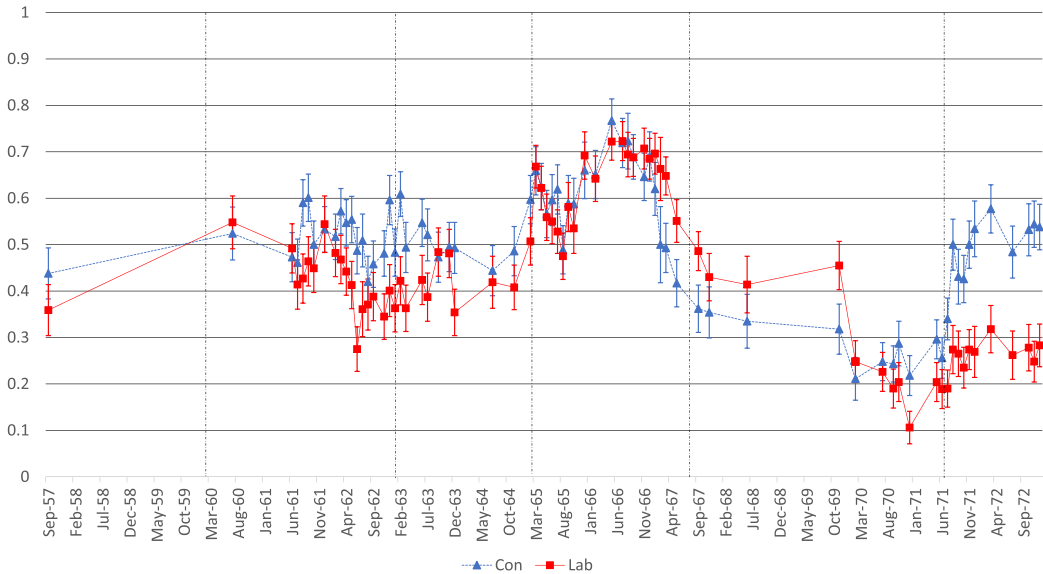
Note: Region and past vote also contained in the models, but coefficients are not displayed.

In contrast to the similar patterns seen in demographic associations, the results point to a narrow period between 1969 and 1970 when partisan allegiances reversed. Following De Gaulle's veto in November 1967, Gallup stopped regularly fielding questions on Common Market views and we know at this point that Conservative voters were generally less enthusiastic about membership than Labour voters. Asked again in June 1968 and November 1969, Conservative voters were still significantly less likely to approve of membership than Labour voters.<sup>8</sup> However in both February and July 1970, these partisan differences had disappeared. The publication of the costs and benefits of entry white paper in February 1970 was likely significant and its publication coincided with a substantial drop of approval from 36 per cent in November 1969 to 22 per cent in February 1970. And by September, with the recently-elected Conservative Government actively pursuing membership, Labour voters had become *less* likely to approve of membership than Conservative voters, a relationship that would hold for the rest of the analysis and would remain strong until the end of the 1980s, at which point it would once again turn (Evans and Butt, 2007). At the same time, the relationship between approval and social class was strengthening, and thus the cues being given by the Labour party had become aligned with their core support base. As the question wording

<sup>8</sup>V3 of the question was fielded in May/June/Sept 1969, but this data is not contained in the surviving collection.

Figure 1: Probability of Approval of Joining 'Common Market' by Past Vote (95 per cent Confidence Intervals)

Note: Vertical lines indicate where question wording changes (see Table 1 for questions). Sex, age, region, occupation and subjective social class are included in the models. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



remained the same between September 1967 and June 1971, this improves the findings' robustness.

Figure 1 displays the overtime predicted probabilities of approving of Common Market membership for both Conservative and Labour voters.<sup>9,10</sup> One sees differences of over 15 percentage points between voters of the two parties in the aftermath of Macmillan's membership application announcement in the summer of 1961, and sizeable differences over 1962. From 1964 until the end of 1966, the views of voters of both parties moved in similar directions and were not significantly different from each other. It was in January 1967 that partisan gaps appear again, with Conservative voters' probability of approval dropping by approximately 15 percentage points between January and February alone. This coincides with Wilson's first round of talks during a tour of member states, as reported on in the British press at the time (Dickie, 1967a, 1967b). With the tour largely proving successful, more public scrutiny turned towards the implications. The Daily Mail for example published an article 'How Europe would put up your food bills' (Holland and Bullen, 1967). The potential implication of higher inflation due to the Common Agricultural Policy was something that politicians of all parties had started to acknowledge from this time, and from 1967 to 1973 this was the main reason individuals gave for disapproving of membership (King, 1977, p. 30).

<sup>9</sup>With sex, age, region and social class also contained in the models. Education is excluded as it was not asked at all time points.

<sup>10</sup>A corresponding figure graphing the overtime predicted probabilities of disapproving of Common Market membership is contained in Supplementary Appendix B.

The few timepoints we have for the rest of 1967 up until 1969 suggest that subsequent declines in support among both Labour and Conservative voters were similar. The decline in approval in the first six months of 1970 was however far greater for Labour voters. Though general support increased from the low point of December 1970, the divide between voters of the two parties increased further. Following the provisional agreement on the conditions of UK accession in June 1971, Conservative voters largely followed the cues of the Heath Government having an over 50 per cent probability of favouring membership by August. Meanwhile the probability of Labour voters approving entry did not rise above 30 per cent. Importantly, in another survey carried out in the same month by NOP, more than half of all respondents perceived that Labour's position on Europe had changed during the previous two years. Over 80 per cent correctly identified the Conservatives as being pro-Europe, while just 20 per cent considered Labour to be in favour with the majority believing them to be against or split (Flickenger, 1995, pp. 202–3; King, 1977, p. 23). This demonstrates that voters were aware of the parties' positions.

For robustness, analysis is run on a further question. Fielded in 1961, 1969 and twice in 1971, respondents were asked whether it would be a good or bad thing for themselves and their family if Britain joined the Common Market, with responses of 'good', 'bad', 'no difference' or 'don't know'. At the aggregate level, while there was only a marginal decrease in those thinking it would be good between 1961 and 1969 (28 per cent to 21 per cent), don't know responses had declined from 33 per cent to 15 per cent and 'bad' responses had increased from 19 per cent to 41 per cent. Running multinomial regressions with this as the dependent variable and the full list of predictor variables (see Supplementary Appendix C), one sees very similar patterns of associations as for the approval variables. Thus, the patterns remain robust.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the association between support for Britain joining the EEC and socio-demographic characteristics/vote choice over the period 1957–72 through the first comprehensive analysis of individual-level survey data covering the full timespan.

My findings provide further evidence of the impact of elite cues and politicization on the public's views, aligning with earlier studies that ascertained that UK attempts to join the EEC were not driven by bottom-up demand but instead by a top-down process (Flickenger, 1995; King, 1977). When both Conservative and Labour party positions were close together or at least not diametrically opposed – especially in 1966 when public approval was at its highest – the extent of public division was low. When substantial numbers of respondents did not initially have an opinion on the issue, opposition was low and there were few social predictors that consistently differentiated those who approved from those who disapproved. From Wilson's announcement of his intent to pursue membership in late 1966 through to the end of the decade, Labour voters were more likely than Conservative voters to approve of membership. As the Conservatives were opposed to Labour's attempt at membership rather than membership per se the divides remained relatively modest. It was only once the Conservatives pursued membership following their 1970 election victory and Labour changed their policy to vigorously oppose this that substantial and sustained partisan divides arose. This aligns with pan-EU research carried out



in the subsequent decades that finds that the more divided the national elite is, the more likely citizens are to oppose further European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2005).

The findings also challenge some previous scholarship. Firstly, up until 1967, there were no consistent social predictors of membership approval. This is in contrast to what King (1977, p. 26) had assumed when he argued that a March 1972 crosstabulation of approval with demographic predictors ‘could have been conducted at almost any time between 1961 and 1973’ and the same relationship would have been seen. As I have showed, this was not the case. The turning points after which patterns of support became set and sticky appear to be Wilson’s tour of Europe in support of membership in January 1967 and furthermore the publication of the 1970 costs and benefits of entry white paper. In line with the numbers of people answering don’t know declining from the start of the 1960s, this points to views being malleable and open to change, and echoes the 1963–1964 *Political Change in Britain* panel study findings (Butler and Stokes, 1979). Although, rather than being completely fluid, my findings suggest that these attitudes had become more fixed from 1967 onwards given the greater predictability of views when given one’s demographic profile.

Being able to model individual attitudes has also greatly reduced the omitted variable bias problem that was a key weakness of previous analyses based on bivariate crosstabulations. This is seen clearly when examining the role of class, whereby at the height of social divisions in December 1972, the magnitude of division between those of different occupations is greatly reduced once one accounts for other characteristics. While class is closely related to education given that higher education is needed to access certain classes while certain class positions are rarely found amongst the highly-educated (Langsæther, 2019, p. 132), I also demonstrate that – along with past vote – educational attainment was a particularly strong predictor of joining. Education is currently one of the strongest predictors of European integration attitudes in Britain and of Brexit identities (Chan *et al.*, 2020; Fieldhouse *et al.*, 2020), and so – at least from 1970 to 1972 – education also played a role in the formation of individuals’ attitudes towards accession. Age shows a similar relationship during this period as it does now. As individuals are more likely to have a more positive view of the EU when they have spent more time there (Shorrocks and de Geus, 2019), this may explain this to some extent as the generations that came afterwards who have spent a higher proportion – if not all – of their life in the union may have become more favourable still towards the European project. British-specific analysis also shows however that the reduction in Euroscepticism associated with generational trends is still opposed by a life-cycle effect by which individuals become less positive towards Europe as they grow older (Fox and Pearce, 2018).

In conclusion, this paper shines a light on the foundations of British attitudes towards the EEC, providing new evidence and insights. During these key formative years, the results thus provide a valuable benchmark to fill in the gaps of the considerable work that has been done in this area since accession.

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The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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### Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

**Appendix S1:** Summary of multinomial logistic regression models predicting approval of British membership of the 'Common Market'

**Appendix S2:** Disapproval of joining 'Common Market' by past vote

**Appendix S3:** Multinomial logistic regression models predicting views on whether 'Common Market' membership would be good or bad for respondent and their family