

EU Decision-making on Membership Eligibility: A Statistical Analysis

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Abstract: One of the most important determinants of the European Union's role in international affairs is the community's own definition of the border between states eligible for membership and states that are not eligible. Contrary to what one hears in official pronouncements, this definition has been repeatedly contested and changed significantly since the founding of the community. Prior research (Thomas 2017) has established that contestation from domestic and supranational forces within the community has changed the normative definition of the limits of Europe three times since the 1950s. This paper introduces a new database of all fifty EU decisions on membership eligibility of aspirant states from 1957 through 2017, some positive, some negative, and some reversing an earlier decision. It then uses three analytical techniques – cross-tabulation, regression, and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) -- to evaluate the relative contribution of these changing membership norms, as compared to other legal, political and economic factors, to the EU decision-making in these fifty cases. All three methods indicate that membership norms exert a powerful effect on EU decisions that cannot be attributed to other factors.

One of the causes of the trial and error and reversals of the European idea [has been] the changing conceptions, according to political currents, of the appropriate geographical area of a united Europe.

-- Pierre Werner, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, 1966¹

I. Introduction

Is EU decision-making on the membership eligibility of applicant states shaped by the fit between the membership norm prevailing within the community and the character of the applicant state, or do other factors appear to have a stronger effect on EU decisions? This chapter offers various empirical tests of competing arguments regarding the factors that shape a regional community's decision-making on the membership eligibility of non-member states. As discussed in the first two chapters, the relative explanatory strength of these arguments should be evident in the pattern of the community's decisions (i.e., which states are deemed eligible and which are not, over time) and in the decision-making process (which arguments and which conditions shaped particular decisions). The second measure, requiring detailed evidence of the EU's decision-making *process*, is the focus of later chapters.

This chapter assesses the first measure by testing the fit between the six theories' expectations regarding EU decisions on membership eligibility and outcomes in each of the 50 cases where the EU (including its predecessors, the EEC and the EC) made such a decision between 1957 and 2017. Part II presents the parameters of the dataset of EU decisions, including criteria for case selection, sources and coding, and introduces the three analytical methods – cross tabulation, logistic regression analysis, and qualitative comparative analysis -- used to assess the explanatory power of the various theoretical approaches. Part III examines each theoretical argument in turn, including a brief summary of its logic, an explanation of how its key concept(s) are converted into measurable variables, and the cross-tabulation results showing the proportion of cases whose outcomes fit the theory's expectations. Part IV discusses the significance and limitations of the cross-tabulation analysis. Part V lays out the design and results of two robustness checks on the preceding findings – one using logistic regression analysis and the second using qualitative comparative analysis. Finally, Part VI summarises the results and transitions to the chapters that follow.

II. Data and Methods

Working with a variety of primary and secondary sources, we have identified 50 cases during the period 1957-2017 in which the EU took a position on the membership eligibility of a non-member state, including 39 cases where the state was deemed eligible for membership and 11 cases where it was deemed ineligible. Notwithstanding the nuances of each decision, these outcomes are reduced to a binary variable (eligible-ineligible) in order to facilitate comparison of the various arguments. A few cases where the EU took an ambiguous position are coded as ineligible. Some but not all of the states deemed eligible have now completed the accession process and joined the Union.

All 50 cases are summarised below in Table 1 and presented more fully in the book's Appendix. Most states on the list only appear once but some appear several times, either because they were declared ineligible and later re-applied or because they were declared eligible but subsequent events led the EU to revisit its position. It is therefore possible to assess whether variation in the indicators associated with the six explanations fit the observed pattern of decision-making on membership eligibility.

¹ Pierre Werner (1966). *Aspects de l'évolution récente de la construction européenne. Exposé devant l'American Common Market Club. Bruxelles, 5 juin 1966*, at: <http://aei.pitt.edu/13675/>. Translation by DT.

Table 1: EU positions on the membership eligibility of aspirant states

Aspirant state	Year	Eligibility: 1=yes, 2=no
Greece	1959	1
Turkey	1959	1
Spain	1960	1
United Kingdom	1961	1
Denmark	1961	1
Norway	1962	1
Spain	1962	2
Ireland	1962	1
United Kingdom	1963	2
Greece	1967	2
United Kingdom	1967	2
United Kingdom	1970	1
Greece	1976	1
Spain	1977	1
Portugal	1978	1
Morocco	1987	2
Turkey	1989	2
Czechoslovakia	1990	1
Poland	1990	1
Hungary	1990	1
Bulgaria	1991	1
Austria	1992	1
Finland	1992	1
Sweden	1992	1
Romania	1992	1
Slovak Republic	1993	1
Czech Republic	1993	1
Cyprus	1993	1
Estonia	1994	1
Latvia	1994	1
Lithuania	1994	1
Slovenia	1995	1
Malta	1995	1
Slovak Republic	1997	2
Slovak Republic	1999	1
Turkey	1999	1
FYR Macedonia	2000	1
Croatia	2000	1
Albania	2003	1
Serbia & Montenegro	2005	1
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2005	1
Ukraine	2005	2
Serbia & Montenegro	2006	2
Montenegro	2006	1
Serbia	2007	1
Turkey	2007	2
Iceland	2010	1
Ukraine	2011	2
Kosovo	2013	1
Turkey	2013	1

Some of the 50 cases are well known to scholars and EU observers, while others are virtually unknown despite their contribution to the course of European integration. This mapping of EU decision-making differs considerably from conventional accounts of EU enlargement, which typically present cases in terms of regional ‘waves’ of accession: the northern enlargement in the 1970s (Denmark, Ireland, UK), the southern enlargement in

the 1980s (Greece, Portugal and Spain), the neutrals enlargement in the 1990s (Austria, Finland, Sweden), the eastern enlargement in the early-mid 2000s (former Communist states plus Cyprus and Malta), followed by Croatia in 2013. Notwithstanding their significance in other regards, these waves reflect when accession treaties were concluded and thus tell us little about decision-making on the membership *eligibility* of particular applicants.

Several situations where the government of a non-member state declared its interest in accession are also not included in the dataset, either because the government soon reversed its position (Switzerland 1992) or the community's member states were distracted by unrelated events from making a collective decision on eligibility and the government subsequently clarified that it was only seeking to develop commercial ties (Portugal 1962/1969). The most ambiguous of the cases not included in the dataset is that of Cape Verde, whose Prime Minister José Maria Neves spoke openly starting in early 2005 about his interest in pursuing EU membership for his country.² During a visit to Lisbon in May of that year, he declared his plan to “go as far as possible” in cooperation with the EU and indicated that he would not be satisfied with “associate status.” The following month, Cape Verde's parliament debated the possibility of EU membership.³ On the other hand, according to two leading Portuguese media sources, Cape Verde was only seeking “a special status from the European Union” and “the hypothesis of membership was never officially assumed by the Portuguese and Cape Verdean governments, who always favored the more consensual option of a special strategic partnership.”⁴ Consistent with these interpretations, Cape Verde inquired in late 2005 about possible participation in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Despite a supportive resolution by the European Parliament in January 2006, which recognised Cape Verde's “geographical proximity, cultural and historical affinity” to Europe, the country's inclusion in ENP was later denied by the EU on geographic grounds.⁵ One could imagine, given Neves' previous rhetoric, that the EU may have viewed the ENP application as a first step toward accession, in which case the community's negative reply would be *de facto* a negative decision on membership eligibility. However, there is no evidence in Council or Coreper records that consideration of Cape Verde's ENP application was in any way linked to the possibility of accession, so the 2006 decision is not included in the dataset.⁶

It is also important to note that Table 1 does not include situations where the EU has quietly sustained (i.e., not reversed) its earlier acceptance or rejection of an applicant state's eligibility. For example, after the EEC accepted Turkey's eligibility in 1959, it could have but did not reverse that decision after the military takeover and political repression in Ankara the following year. More recently, after the EU rebuffed Ukraine's pursuit of a membership perspective in 2011, it could have but did not reverse that decision following the ‘Euromaidan’ revolt of 2013-14. Such non-events (like Sherlock Holmes' famous dog that didn't bark) are notoriously difficult to pin down, but they can play an important role in counter-factual hypothesis testing when viewed in light of theories that suggest a different outcome (Fearon 1991). So while they do not appear in Table 1, some situations of this sort are clearly relevant to testing competing explanations of how the EU decides on membership eligibility and are referenced as such in the empirical analysis.

Data on the outcome in each case comes from a variety of official EU documents and pronouncements, supplemented by contemporary media accounts, scholarly sources and interviews. Variations over time in the membership norms themselves are drawn from Thomas (2017). Data on each aspirant state's status with regard to the various explanatory variables are explained below in part V.

To test the explanatory power of the various theoretical arguments, we analyse the dataset using three distinct empirical methodologies: cross tabulation, logistic regression, and crisp set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA). First, we evaluate each case to determine whether the outcome fits the expectations derived from the

² Alena Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira and Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira (2009). The European Union-Cape Verde Special Relationship: The Role of Portugal. *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs* No.1, Spring, pp.42-50

³ Cabo Verde poderá apresentar proposta de adesão à UE ainda este ano – PM, www.rtp.pt, 6 May 2005; Cabo Verde vai pedir adesão à UE, www.cmjournal.pt, 7 May 2005; Parlamento de Cabo Verde debatirá “adhesión” a la Unión Europea, *Afrol News*, 10 June 2005.

⁴ Cabo Verde poderá apresentar proposta de adesão à UE ainda este ano – PM, www.rtp.pt, 6 May 2005; Cabo Verde ganha estatuto especial com União Europeia. *Publico.pt*, 26 October 2007.

⁵ Authors' email correspondence with EU Council officials, July 2017.

⁶ Authors' email correspondence with EU Council officials, July 2017.

various hypotheses in light of the relevant values on their respective explanatory variables. Then, for each argument, the correlations between explanatory variable and outcomes are presented in cross-tab or contingency table format. Although correlation is not equivalent to causation, a strong correlation between variables with a plausible relationship in theory would indicate the possible presence of a causal or constitutive relationship that merits further investigation, while a low correlation indicates that a significant relationship between the variables is unlikely. A strong correlation is thus necessary but not sufficient evidence of a causal or constitutive relationship and a valuable step toward explaining EU decisions over time in this important and under-studied area. Comparing the empirical fit of the five arguments thus provides an initial assessment of their relative explanatory power.

We then ran two types of robustness check on this initial finding – one using logistic regression and one using csQCA. These three methods rely on different logics of causation, but we have chosen to use them together to increase our confidence that whatever pattern, if any, we observe in the data is indeed indicative of a causal relationship. And if we observe no pattern in the data, the triple methodology will increase our confidence that we have not overlooked something important. Cross-tabulations and logistic regression define causation in terms of the degree of correlation between explanatory variables and the outcome variables; they are typically used to assess the relative power of competing explanations. In contrast, csQCA relies on a conjunctural logic better suited to capturing independent multivariate causal pathways to the same outcome. The point here is not to debate ontological or epistemological claims regarding causation but to increase our confidence in the project's empirical findings by subjecting the data to multiple analytical methods.

III. Theoretical Expectations

As previewed in chapter 1 and elaborated in chapter 2, there are at least six distinctive explanations for variation in EU decision-making on membership eligibility: membership norms, geography, treaty rules, regime type, commercial interests, and geopolitical interests. We compare these arguments' explanatory fit to that of a baseline assumption that all states seeking to join the community will be welcomed and thus considered eligible for membership.

Baseline: Open door

For analytical purposes, the baseline expectation is that the EU will not distinguish between states seeking to join the community: instead, it will grant membership eligibility to all aspirant states. This expectation is consistent with at least two theoretical logics. The first, based on neoclassical economics' theory of gains-from-trade, indicates that expanded markets yield greater welfare for all and therefore that states should seek to eliminate tariffs and regulatory barriers between them. Welcoming additional states into an existing 'common market' or 'single market' would accomplish this goal more efficiently than negotiating bilateral reductions in trade barriers, so all aspirant states should be considered eligible for membership. The second possible explanation for the baseline expectation, based on realist balance-of-power theory, is that the members of a regional community may view it as a collective response to their individual vulnerability in a world of more powerful states or coalitions, so all aspirant states would be welcomed as means to improve the community's relative power position.

Membership norms

The principal argument proposed and tested in this book is that EU decisions on the membership eligibility of states seeking accession are shaped by the outsider's conformity with membership norms prevailing within the Union – namely, among member states' governments and senior supranational officials. In empirical terms, the expectation is that non-member states seeking accession that fit the norm will be recognised as eligible for membership, while those that do not fit the norm will be considered ineligible. Furthermore, applicant states that are considered eligible for membership in one period may be judged ineligible in a later period, or vice versa, depending on changes in the fit between prevailing membership norms and the characteristics of the applicant state.

Geography

Geographic explanations of membership eligibility suggest that if a regional community aims to integrate or govern a particular geographic space, then any state located fully or even partly within this space would be considered eligible for membership, and states located elsewhere would be ineligible. Two slightly different relationships are suggested by this logic – one focused on an applicant state's location with a certain limited area and the other on closeness to others. To test this argument, we consider here three distinct propositions, focused respectively on conventional geography, institutionally recognized geography, and geographic proximity.

Treaty rules

The argument that rules in a regional community's governing treaty determine its decisions-making on applicant states is consistent with two possible causal mechanisms: either the governments of member states are persuaded by the prescriptive content of the treaty rule or they value the credibility of the community as a whole and the integrity of its decision-making process above their own preferences regarding particular membership applicants and above whatever norms may prevail within the community. In either case, this argument yields the following testable expectation (hyp.4): *a regional community will recognize the membership eligibility of non-member states that fit the substantive rule on memberships established by the community's treaty, and reject others.*

Regime type

States vary widely in their domestic structures and governance norms and this variation may determine whether or not a regional community considers them eligible for membership. In particular, we hypothesize that a regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose regime types are similar to that of member states and treat others as ineligible. In the EU context, both during and after the Cold War, such variation has most often been conceived in terms of a state's degree of liberal democracy.

Commercial interests

In addition to the baseline expectation introduced above, there are two distinct ways that a regional community's decisions on membership eligibility may be shaped by the commercial interests of its member states. Although their empirical expectations are mirror opposites of each other, their distinctive logics merit separate presentations. One possibility (hypothesis 5a) is that the economic opportunities created by integrating new states with strong regulatory capacities into a common market area would motivate the community to accord membership eligibility to all aspirants whose regulatory capacity is similar or superior to that of the current member states. Another possibility (hypothesis 5b) posits the opposite relationship between GDP and membership eligibility – namely, that the members of a regional community will see states with lower levels of economic development as attractive markets for their goods and investment capital and thus welcome their eventual integration into the community's common market area while rejecting wealthier states whose own exports could threaten domestic producers and workers.

Geopolitics

In contrast to the geographical explanations explored above, which focus on the physical location of an applicant state, geopolitics explanations focus on the likely implications of enlargement for the geopolitical security of the community. Put simply, they suggest that a regional community will welcome a non-member state whose accession would reduce member states' exposure to geopolitical threats or improve their capability for resisting geopolitical threats, and reject those whose accession would have the opposite effect. There are at least two ways to conceptualize how the members of a regional community understand the link between enlargement and security – one focused on the risk of conflict and the other on alliance credibility

IV. Cross-tabulation Results

Baseline: Open door

Looking at the 50 cases in the historical record, we see that this expectation of an unconditional granting of membership eligibility status is not met. Of the 50 decisions, only 39 were positive. This indicates either that EC/EU member states do not consistently equate the possibility of enlargement with economic or geopolitical gain, or these prospects do not consistently override other objections. Overall, the baseline expectation's 78% predictive accuracy is relatively high but not high enough to justify an *a priori* dismissal of alternative explanations.

Membership norms

The explanatory variable here is the fit between the prevailing EU membership norm and the character of the state seeking membership in the year that the latter expresses its interest in accession. As discussed in the previous chapter, the EU's membership norms have evolved through four identifiable normative periods. During the first three periods, the norms applicable to membership eligibility indicated that states holding or seeking membership should be a non-communist European state (1957-1961), a European parliamentary democracy (1962-1969), and a European liberal democracy (1970-2005). The liberal democracy norm broke down in late 2005 but the governments of the member states have not converged on an alternative definition of membership eligibility, so the norms hypothesis becomes indeterminate at that point. As a result, this hypothesis can only be tested with 42 of the 50 cases; eight post-2005 cases are excluded.

In order to assess various states' conformity with the non-Communist norm during the first period, we relied on membership in the leading military and economic organizations of the Soviet bloc: the Warsaw Pact and the Council on Mutual Economic Assistance. Both organizations had identical memberships in this period: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. To this list, we added Yugoslavia, which was non-aligned but explicitly socialist in ideology. Given the non-Communist norm prevailing in 1957-1961, we would expect any of these states would be considered ineligible for membership in the European Community, while any other European state would be considered eligible.

In order to assess a country's status as a parliamentary democracy (the second normative period) or liberal democracy (the third period), we rely on the categories and data provided by Freedom House (FH). The FH dataset includes a clearly defined 'electoral democracy' category that corresponds closely to the 'parliamentary democracy' norm and a more stringent 'Free' category limited to states that "can be considered both electoral and liberal democracies," meaning that they also ensure respect for civil liberties, including freedoms of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy (Freedom House 2014). These are preferable for two reasons to leading alternative indexes. The Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem) places states on various 1-10 scales without over-arching categories (Lindberg et al. 2014) while Polity IV uses a 20-point scale divided into three categories (autocracy -10 to -6, anocracy -5 to +5, and democracy +6 to +10) that obscure the distinction between parliamentary and liberal democracies

However, in order to measure a non-member state's conformity with the 'parliamentary democracy' norm using FH's 'electoral democracy' category or its conformity with the 'liberal democracy' norm using FH's 'Free' category, we had to overcome the FH dataset's limited temporal coverage, which extends back only to 1989 for the electoral democracy indicator and to 1972 for the Free/Not Free distinction. As a result of this limited range, none of the cases of countries wanting to start membership negotiations during the period of the 'parliamentary democracy' norm are covered by FH's electoral democracy indicator, while one case (the UK in 1970) covered by the 'liberal democracy' norm precedes FH's Free/Not Free categorization. To solve this problem, we use V-Dem data that covers the full post-1945 period to impute missing country scores on the FH variables. For discussion of this technique, see the Appendix.

As shown in the table below, of the 42 cases of EC/EU decision-making on the membership eligibility of a non-member state that occurred while the EU had determinate membership norms, 33 or 78% of the cases resulted

in decisions that fit the prevailing norm, including cases of eligibility when the non-member state fit the norm and cases of ineligibility when it did not fit the norm; only 9 cases or 21% fell outside the hypothesized pattern. The membership norms argument does not predict a particular outcome for the 8 cases that occurred when the EC/EU lacked a determinate norm; instead, it simply expects that such decisions will be shaped by hard, interest-based bargaining rather than by normative constraints.

Hyp. 1: Membership norms – 33/42 or 78% fit

	Fits membership norm	Does not fit membership norm
Eligible	28/42 = 67%	1/42 = 2%
Not eligible	8/42 = 19%	5/42 = 11%

This evidence of a strong relationship between the content of EU membership norms and the outcome of EU decisions on membership eligibility suggests that the former may play an important role in regional community decision-making. However, we cannot really assess its significance before comparing it to evidence of how other possible explanatory variables relate to the same outcomes.

Geography

The first of these (hypothesis 2a) focuses on a conventional geographic definition of Europe: *The European Community/European Union will accord membership eligibility to non-member states whose territory is located physically within the geographic space conventionally identified as Europe, and reject others.* To test this expectation we first use Encyclopædia Britannica’s definition of the European continent: “Geographically, Europe is the Western peninsula of Eurasia, conventionally delimited by the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and the Caucasus Mountains in the South, the Atlantic Ocean in the West, the Arctic Ocean in the North, and the Urals and the Caspian Sea in the East” (cited in Schimmelfennig 2016: 178-9). By this definition, small parts of Kazakhstan and Turkey and a large part of Russia lie within the furthest eastern and southeastern reaches of Europe, but most of Turkey, all of Cyprus and North Africa lie beyond Europe.

This test suggests a strong relationship between conventional understandings of Europe and EU decisions on membership eligibility. If we assume that the approximately 5% of Turkish territory that lies north of the Bosphorus qualifies the entire country as lying within the conventional geographic limits of Europe, then thirty-eight of fifty cases lie within conventional Europe and were judged eligible for EU membership while one case lies outside the Europe and was considered ineligible, meaning that thirty-nine of fifty or 78% of the cases fit the hypothesis. On the other hand, ten of fifty lie within conventional Europe but were judged ineligible while one lies outside conventional Europe but was considered eligible for membership, meaning that 22% defy the hypothesis.

Hyp. 2a, test 1: Encyclopædia Britannica’s ‘Europe’ – 39/50 or 78% fit

	Within ‘Europe’	Beyond ‘Europe’
Eligible	38/50 = 76%	1/50 = 2%
Not eligible	10/50 = 20%	1/50 = 2%

It is also possible to test this hypothesis using a definition of Europe’s geographic limits accepted by another authoritative international institution. To this end, we considered two different regional classifications used by the United Nations. One, the U.N. General Assembly’s regional voting bloc ‘West European and Others Group’, is too clearly political to be useful here: Australia, Canada, Israel and New Zealand are permanent members and the United States has Observer status. Instead, we used the regional codes developed “for statistical processing purposes” by the United Nations’ Statistics Division, whose ‘Europe’ category includes 53 countries and areas including micro-states like Andorra and Monaco and autonomous sub-state units like the *Åland Islands and Gibraltar*.⁷

When tested against the fifty cases of EU membership (in)eligibility, this test supported the conventional geography hypothesis about as strongly as the Encyclopædia Britannica test: thirty-five of fifty cases lie within this U.N. definition of Europe and were judged eligible for EU membership while three cases lie outside the U.N. definition and were considered ineligible, meaning that thirty-eight of fifty or 76% of the cases fit the hypothesis. On the other hand, eight of fifty lie within the U.N. definition of Europe but were judged ineligible while four lies outside the U.N.’s ‘Europe’ but were considered eligible for membership, meaning that 24% defy the hypothesis.

Hyp. 2a, test 2: The U.N.’s ‘Europe’ – 38/50 or 76% fit

	Within ‘Europe’	Beyond ‘Europe’
Eligible	35/50 = 70%	4/50 = 8%
Not eligible	8/50 = 16%	3/50 = 6%

An alternative version of the geographic argument focuses not on an *a priori* definition of the region’s limits but on the non-member state’s geographic proximity to the community’s current external frontier. The expectation (hypothesis 2b) would be as follows: *The European Union will accord membership eligibility to non-member states whose territory is contiguous to that of a current member state, and reject others.* To test this expectation, we define ‘contiguous’ to mean sharing a land border with an EU member state or separated from the territory of a member state by no more than 50 miles (80 km) of sea. Some studies of membership in international organizations use a higher measure of separation by sea, but given our focus on a regional organization, the 50-mile measure (also used by Mansfield and Pevehouse 2013) seemed most appropriate. By this logic, geography determines the zone of potential membership eligibility but as long as the community’s external border keeps expanding, there is no ultimate frontier of eligibility.

When tested against the fifty cases of EU membership (in)eligibility, this hypothesis proved far weaker than the preceding conventional geography hypotheses: twenty-two of fifty cases were contiguous to a member state and were judged eligible for EU membership while four cases were non-contiguous and were considered ineligible, meaning that only twenty-six or 52% of the cases fit the hypothesis. On the other hand, eleven of fifty were contiguous but not accorded eligibility while thirteen were accorded eligibility despite being non-contiguous, meaning that 48% defy the hypothesis.

Hyp. 2b: Geographic contiguity – 26/50 or 52% fit

	Contiguous	Not contiguous
Eligible	22/50 = 44%	13/50 = 26%

⁷ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>

Not eligible	11/50 = 22%	4/50 = 8%
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Treaty rules

According to Article 237 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, “Any European State may apply to become a member of the Community... The conditions of admission and the adjustments to this Treaty necessitated thereby shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State.” A literal reading of this rule indicates that only “European” states may be considered for membership but not necessarily that all “European” states would be deemed eligible. However, the founding member states could have included a more stringent definition of eligibility in the treaty, and the treaty’s *travaux préparatoires* reveal that this option was indeed considered (see chapter 3). It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the Treaty of Rome deemed all “European” states minimally eligible for membership. We use Encyclopædia Britannica’s version of the conventional geographic definition of ‘Europe’ (see above) to test this requirement, which remained in effect for decades.

In fact, there are two ways to interpret when the EU treaty rules on membership eligibility changed, so we test them both. By one reading, the 1986 Single European Act (SEA) did not modify the Treaty of Rome’s indication that “All European states may apply...” but the multiple and explicit statements of the community’s commitment to democracy, fundamental human rights and the rule of law contained in its Preamble removed any doubt that these factors had become treaty requirements. By this reading (hypothesis 4, test 1), the treaty rule hypothesis would expect the community to accord membership eligibility to all “European” applicant states (measured by the Encyclopædia Britannica definition) in the years prior to 1986, and only to European liberal democracies (measured by the Freedom House ‘free’ category) in the years since 1986. This test yields an explanatory fit of 70%.

Hyp.4, test 1: Treaty rules change 1986 – 35/50 or 70% fit

	Fits treaty rules 1957-1986, 1987-2015	Does not fit treaty rules 1957-1986, 1987-2015
Eligible	29/50 = 58%	10/50 = 20%
Not eligible	5/50 = 10%	6/50 = 12%

Alternatively, a reading that focuses on the treaties’ articles rather than their preambular text would conclude that EU treaty rules on membership eligibility did not change until the 1992 (Maastricht) Treaty on European Union, which retained the “All European states may apply” formula but added that the Member States’ governments are “founded on the principles of democracy” and constitutionally committed to respect fundamental rights. By this reading (hypothesis 4, test 2), the treaty rule hypothesis would expect all “European” applicant states (measured by the Encyclopædia Britannica definition) to be accorded membership eligibility prior to 1992, and only European liberal democracies (measured by the Freedom House ‘free’ category) in the years since 1992. This test yields an explanatory fit of 68%, just two points below the first test.

Hyp.4, test 2: Treaty rules change 1992 – 34/50 or 68% fit

	Fits treaty rules 1957-1992, 1993-2015	Does not fit treaty rules 1957-1992, 1993-2015
Eligible	29/50 = 58%	10/50 = 20%

Not eligible	6/50 = 12%	5/50 = 10%

Regime type

States vary widely in their domestic structures and governance norms and this variation may determine whether or not a regional community considers them eligible for membership. In particular, we hypothesize that a regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose regime types are similar to that of member states and treat others as ineligible. In the EU context, both during and after the Cold War, such variation has most often been conceived in terms of a state's degree of liberal democracy. To test this hypothesis, we test the effect of regime similarity in two ways: first we test whether the EU only accords membership eligibility to aspirant states whose liberal democracy score is equal to or greater than that of the *lowest-scoring* member state, and then we test whether it limits eligibility to aspirant states whose score is equal to or greater than the *mean* score of all member states. For both tests, we use the V-Dem scoring of liberal democracy since 1900, which includes all our 50 cases except Slovakia 1993, which had just become independent, and Malta 1995, which is too small. As shown below, the community-minimum test yields an explanatory fit of 60% and the community-mean test yields a fit of just 44%.

Hyp.4: Regime type, test 1: 29/48 or 60% fit

	V-Dem Score \geq EU minimum	V-Dem Score $<$ EU minimum
EU position: Eligible	20/48 = 42%	17/48 = 35%
EU position: Not eligible	2/48 = 4%	9/48 = 19%

Hyp.4: Regime type, test 2: 21/48 or 44% fit

	V-Dem Score \geq mean in EU	V-Dem Score $<$ mean in EU
EU position: Eligible	12/48 = 25%	25/48 = 52%
EU position: Not eligible	2/48 = 4%	9/48 = 19%

Regime type is a poor predictor of membership eligibility. The 'liberal democracy' score of aspirant states, whether tested in comparison to the member states mean or to the lowest-scoring member state, does not correlate consistently with EU decisions. In short, the EU has not required that aspirant states exhibit a level of liberal democracy equal or greater than of states already belonging to the community. It is also interesting to note that the two correlations associated with this variable (44% and 60%) are inconsistent with the opposite hypothesis, that the EU prioritises aspirant states with a poor score on liberal democracy. This does not mean that regime type is irrelevant to EU decision-making – it clearly plays a role in the membership norms and treaty rules explanations (see results above and discussion below) – but as a stand-alone variable, it is remarkably weak.

Commercial interests

In addition to the baseline expectation introduced above, there are two distinct ways that a regional community's decisions on membership eligibility may be shaped by the commercial interests of its member states. Although their empirical expectations are mirror opposites of each other, their distinctive logics merit separate presentations.

One possibility (hypothesis 5a) is that the economic opportunities created by integrating new states with strong regulatory capacities into a common market area would motivate the community to accord membership eligibility to all aspirants whose regulatory capacity is similar or superior to that of the current member states. Given that any member state may block consensus on membership eligibility, testing this hypothesis requires evidence of the regulatory capacity of each aspirant state and that of the member states in the same year. Unfortunately, the time scopes of the two standard sources of such data – the World Bank's Governance Indicators⁸ and its Doing Business Data⁹ -- are far too limited in historical scope to be useful here: the first begins in 1996 and the second in 2003. We therefore rely on GDP per capita as a proxy for regulatory capacity, using data in current US\$ available from the World Bank (2017) and OECD (2017).¹⁰ The hypothesis thus leads us to expect that that the EU will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose GDP per capita (proxy for regulatory capacity) is equal to or higher than that of the worst performing member state, and deny it to others.

Hyp.5a: Well-regulated markets – 20/50 or 40% fit

	Equal or higher GDP per capita	Lower GDP per capita
EU position: Eligible	12/50 = 24%	27/50 = 54%
EU position: Not eligible	3/50 = 6%	8/50 = 16%

Another possibility (hypothesis 5b) posits the opposite relationship between GDP and membership eligibility – namely, that the members of a regional community will see states with lower levels of economic development as attractive markets for their goods and investment capital and thus welcome their eventual integration into the community's common market area while rejecting wealthier states whose own exports could threaten domestic producers and workers. This hypothesis leads us to expect that that the EU will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose GDP per capita is lower than that of the worst performing member state, and deny it to others, which we test using the aforementioned World Bank and OECD data.

Hyp.5b: Non-competitive markets –30/50 or 60% fit

	Lower GDP per capita	Equal or higher GDP per capita
EU position: Eligible	27/50 = 54%	12/50 = 24%
EU position: Not eligible	8/50 = 16%	3/50 = 6%

⁸ <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/#home>

⁹ <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data>

¹⁰ GDP data is unavailable for Greece 1959 and Turkey 1959 because both precede World Bank and OECD coverage. In order not to lose observations, we coded both countries based on their 1960 scores. Given the large difference in terms of economic performance between the two cases and the economically weakest EC member state in 1960 (Italy), we are confident in coding both as performing inferior.

Overall, these commercial or economic explanations are strikingly weak. The hypothesis that the EU will favor more prosperous aspirants because their well-regulated markets are more attractive for investment correlates with actual EU decisions in only 38% of the cases. The alternative hypothesis that the community will favor less prosperous aspirants because they offer more lucrative investment opportunities and less risk of disruptive competition fares better at 62%, but this still leaves a substantial share of cases unexplained. In sum, commercial motives do not appear to have had a major influence on EU decision-making on the membership eligibility of aspirant states.

Geopolitics

In contrast to the geographical explanations explored above, which focus on the physical location of an applicant state, geopolitics explanations focus on the likely implications of enlargement for the geopolitical security of the community. Put simply, they suggest that a regional community will welcome a non-member state whose accession would reduce member states' exposure to geopolitical threats or improve their capability for resisting geopolitical threats, and reject those whose accession would have the opposite effect. There are at least two ways to conceptualize how the members of a regional community understand the link between enlargement and security – one focused on the risk of conflict and the other on alliance credibility -- and each can be tested empirically in several ways.

In the risk-of-conflict conceptualization, decisions on membership eligibility are based upon the apparent probability of an applicant state's "involvement in an international militarized conflict... based on key elements of [its] internal characteristics and its external security environment" (Donno et al 2015:253,255). By this logic (hypothesis 6a), *a regional community will accord membership eligibility to non-member states that pose a low risk of involvement in inter-state conflict, and deny it to others.* To test this possible determinant, we rely on Nordhaus, Oneal and Russett's (2012) global ranking of states' risk of involvement in international conflict, whose time boundaries exclude 13 of the 50 cases in our universe of EU decisions on membership eligibility. We subject the remaining 37 cases to four distinct tests.

Our first test defines 'low risk' as states falling into the bottom 50% of the global ranking, so a low-risk state is one that in a given year is less at risk than the median country of that year. The results of this first test support the hypothesis in 49% of the cases:

Hyp.6a, test 1: Low risk states (bottom 50% of global ranking) – 18/37 or 49% fit

	Low risk	High risk
EU position: Eligible	14/37 = 38%	16/37 = 43%
EU position: Not eligible	3/37 = 8%	4/37 = 11%

This finding could give rise to several objections. To start, being among the fifty percent of states less at risk than the other half might not satisfy the security demands of a regional community such as the EU. In other words, a country just slightly less risky than the median country in a given year might still be perceived as an unacceptable security risk, so the community might be more demanding on conflict risk when evaluating the membership eligibility of aspirant states. But lowering the bar to cover only the bottom 25% of states has the unintended effect of excluding every aspirant state in the global pool. In a second test of hypothesis 6a, we therefore lower the bar less dramatically, defining 'very low risk' as states falling into the bottom 25% of the yearly global ranking, which lowers the hypothesis' empirical fit to 19%.

Hyp.6a, test 2: Very low risk states (bottom 25% of global ranking) – 7/37 or 19% fit

	Very low risk	Higher risk
EU position: Eligible	0/37 = 0%	30/37 = 81%
EU position: Not eligible	0/37 = 0%	7/37 = 19%

On the other hand, one might object that the global ranking is not the most relevant benchmark for regional communities to assess potential members' risk of conflict. Instead, they might base their membership eligibility decisions on a comparison to other states in their geographic region. In other words, when compared to other states in one's own geographic region, does a potential member pose a low or high risk of conflict? In tests 3 and 4, to limit our analysis to states in the EU's region, we rely on the aforementioned UN Statistics Division's measure of Europe and define low risk and very low risk as states falling into the bottom 50% and 25% of the regional yearly ranking. Neither of these tests indicates a strong relationship between apparent conflict risk and membership eligibility.

Hyp. 6a, test 3: Low risk states (bottom 50% of European states) – 17/37 or 46% fit

	Low risk	High risk
EU position: Eligible	12/37 = 32%	18/37 = 49%
EU position: Not eligible	2/37 = 5%	5/37 = 14%

Hyp. 6a, test 4: Very Low risk states (bottom 25% of European states) – 9/37 or 24%

	Very low risk	Higher risk
EU position: Eligible	2/37 = 5%	28/37 = 76%
EU position: Not eligible	0/37 = 0%	7/37 = 19%

A second version of the geopolitics explanation posits that a regional community's decisions on an applicant state's eligibility for membership in are linked to the members' interest in reinforcing the credibility of a security alliance to which they also belong. By this logic (hypothesis 6b), *a regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states that are or soon will be members of the security alliance to which most of the community's members already belong, and deny it to others.* In the case of the EU, this concerns membership in NATO, the security alliance to which most members of the community also belong.

In particular, we consider the impact of two concentric indicators of closeness to NATO: states that are full members of the alliance, and states with a clear path to achieving NATO membership. The first test measures the fit between NATO membership and EU membership eligibility at the time of the latter's decision. The results are quite weak: only 34% of the cases fit the expectation that NATO members would be granted EU membership eligibility while non-members would be considered ineligible.

Hyp.6b, test 1: NATO membership – 17/50 or 34% fit

	NATO member	Not NATO member
Eligible	11/50 = 22%	28/50 = 56%
Not eligible	5/50 = 10%	6/50 = 12%

It is also possible that the EU would also grant eligibility to applicant states that have a clear prospect of NATO membership in addition to those that already belong. The best indicators of such a prospect are formal recognition as a future member by the NATO Council or after April 1999 by signature of a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). According to NATO, agreement on a MAP “does not guarantee membership, but is a key preparation mechanism.”¹¹ (In contrast, NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) is not designed as a stepping-stone to NATO accession and does not strengthen the alliance’s defensive capabilities, so PfP participation does not indicate a membership prospect.) As shown below, the results here are also rather weak: only 42% of the cases fit the hypothesized relationship.

Hyp.6b, test 2: NATO membership or prospective membership – 21/50 or 42% fit

	Current or prospective NATO member	Not current or prospective NATO member
Eligible	15/50 = 30%	24/50 = 48%
Not eligible	5/50 = 10%	6/50 = 12%

Overall, the two geopolitical explanations – conflict risk and alliance credibility -- do not co-vary with EU decisions on membership eligibility in the hypothesized manner. The two tests of a possible alliance credibility motive only fit that hypothesis in 34% and 42% of the cases, while the two tests of conflict risk only fit the hypothesis in 19% and 49% of the cases compared to all states depending on the risk threshold, and 24% and 46% of the cases compared just to European states depending on the risk threshold.¹² Interestingly, on conflict risk, there is almost no difference between the tests using global and European benchmarks but lowering the risk threshold from 50% to 25% does produce a major reduction in explanatory fit in both global and European tests. In fact, the very weak correlations (19% global and 24% European) with the lower risk threshold seems to indicate that the EU is biased *against* very low-risk states when deciding on membership eligibility -- the opposite of the hypothesis! It is certainly plausible that the community might try to use accession as a means to stabilize risky states in its neighbourhood, but this conclusion is belied by the fact that all European states during the Cold War (plus states in south-eastern Europe after the Cold War) were exposed to a relatively high risk of conflict, so there were almost no very low-risk states seeking accession. It is nonetheless apparent that aspirant states whose conflict risk makes them “the most costly to integrate” (Donno et al. 2015: 253) are frequently deemed eligible for integration. In the end, it

¹¹ http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-enlargement-eng.pdf, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37356.htm, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49212.htm#

¹² To ensure that these low correlations are not an artifact of our 25% threshold for very-low risk, we re-analyzed the data with a 33% threshold and found that this has no major effect on the explanatory fit, which rises from 19% (global comparison) and 24% (Europe comparison) to just 27% in both comparisons.

appears that EC/EU decision-making on membership eligibility since 1957 has not been shaped very strongly by geopolitical pressures.

V. Discussion of cross-tabulations

The preceding section of this chapter tested the correlation between empirical indicators of various possible determinants of EU decisions on the eligibility of non-member states seeking accession and the outcomes observed in all identifiable cases of such decisions since the birth of the community in 1957, and compared these results to a baseline expectation that the EU would consider all aspirant states eligible for membership. As summarized in Table 2 below, the empirical expectations associated with some explanations showed a strong fit with the positive and negative outcomes in the 50 cases while others showed a far weaker fit. (As shown in the far-right column of the table, limiting the analysis to pre-2006 cases, when all the hypotheses can be tested equally, does not significantly affect their relative explanatory power.) It is striking how poorly well-established theories of EU decision-making focused on regime type, commercial and security interests seem to fit the pattern of EU decisions on membership eligibility. The analysis shows weak correlations for territorial contiguity (57%), regime similarity (43%, 60%), commercial variables (40%, 60%), conflict risk (49%, 19%, 46%, 24%) and alliance credibility (34%, 42%), which suggest that these variables had little causal or constitutive effect across the universe of cases.

To be clear, though, these findings relate only to the pattern of decisions on membership eligibility. The weak impact of regime type, commercial and security interests on eligibility decisions reveals nothing about their possible influence on subsequent decision-making regarding whether a particular candidate state is ready for accession or the conditions that the community may set for its accession: these decisions occur at a different stage in the pre-accession process and have different consequences, so they could well be shaped by different considerations. In contrast, the baseline expectation, as well as hypotheses focused on membership norms, treaty rules, and regional location all correlate with the outcomes in approximately 70-80% of the cases. These strong findings are suggestive of a significant causal or constitutive effect on EU decisions, which we discuss below in more detail.

Table 2: Summary of cross-tabulation analysis

Explanation	Hypothesis	Test variable(s)	Fit (max. scope)	Fit (pre-2006)
Baseline	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to all aspirant states.	N/A	39/50 = 78%	34/42 = 81%
Membership norms	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states that fit the community's membership norm, and deny it to others.	Membership norms 1957-1961, 1962-1969, 1970-2005, (2006-2015)	33/42 = 79%	33/42 = 79%
Regional location	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose territory lies within the geographic space conventionally identified with the region, and deny it to others.	'Europe' - Encyclopædia Britannica	39/50 = 78%	34/42 = 81%
		'Europe' - United Nations	38/50 = 76%	33/42 = 79%
Territorial contiguity	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose territory is contiguous to that of a current member state, and reject others.	Territorial contiguity	26/50 = 52%	24/42 = 57%

Treaty rules	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to non-member states that fit the substantive rule on memberships established by the community's treaty, and reject others.	Treaty rules 1957-1986, 1987-2015	35/50 = 70%	32/42 = 76%
		Treaty rules 1957-1992, 1993-2015	34/50 = 68%	33/42 = 79%
Regime similarity	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose regime type is similar to that of the member states, and reject those that are dissimilar.	V-Dem 'liberal' of aspirant vs. mean member state	21/48 = 44%	17/40 = 43%
		V-Dem 'liberal' of aspirant vs. least 'liberal' member state	29/48 = 60%	24/40 = 60%
Well-regulated markets	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose regulatory capacity is equal or superior to that of member states.	Aspirant's GDP per capita >= GDP per capita of the poorest member state	20/50 = 40%	16/42 = 38%
Non-competitive markets	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states whose level of economic development is below that of member states.	Aspirant's GDP per capita < member states' GDP per capita	30/50 = 60%	26/42 = 62%
Conflict risk	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states that pose a low risk of involvement in inter-state conflict, and deny it to others.	50% least risky, global	18/37 = 49%	N/A
		25% least risky, global	7/37 = 19%	
		50% least risky, Europe	17/37 = 46%	
		25% least risky, Europe	9/37 = 24%	
Alliance credibility	A regional community will accord membership eligibility to aspirant states that belong to the security alliance to which its members already belong, and deny it to others.	NATO membership	17/50 = 34%	11/42 = 26%
		NATO membership or prospect of membership	21/50 = 42%	17/42 = 40%

The 78% predictive accuracy of the baseline 'open door' expectation is impressive but nonetheless of limited utility. On the one hand, it seems to support the public impression, especially in Eurosceptic circles, that the EU has an 'open door' reflex in response to non-member states seeking to join the club. Yet more than one-fifth of the cases do not fit the baseline expectation, and all EU observers know that member states often disagree intensely on the eligibility of particular applicant states. In recent years, these disputes over eligibility have repeatedly spilled into public view and some have even become the focus of national elections and referenda. In addition, the 50 cases studied here include many situations where the community reconsidered an aspirant state whose eligibility it had already decided, sometimes more than once, and there is nothing in either of the baseline expectation's two possible logics that would explain such reconsiderations. We thus have good reason to doubt the explanatory power of a prediction that the community will welcome all applicants, even if it correlates highly with outcomes. As long as there are strong alternatives, the presumption of a constant preference will never be a compelling explanation for a series of hotly contested and highly variable decisions.

The analysis also shows strong support for geographic explanations. The territorial contiguity hypothesis clearly has very limited explanatory power (52% fit), but the two tests of applicant states' location within 'Europe' (78% and 76% fit) suggest that conventional understandings of geography do matter. This is not surprising, given that the EC was created explicitly to ensure peace and freedom in Europe and the Treaty of Rome invited all "European states" (and implicitly, only them) to apply for membership. In that context, the EC's 1987 rejection of

Morocco's quest for accession was rather predictable. That said, these strong results are due partly to the absence, other than Morocco, of expressions of interest in accession from states lying clearly beyond the conventional geographic limits of Europe.

In any case, looking beyond the statistical tests, it is clear that conceiving of 'European' as a reference simply to physical location is seriously misleading. For example, the EU never questioned the eligibility of Cyprus, whose territory is far closer to Southwest Asia than to the bulk of Europe, but it did not hesitate in earlier decades to declare Greece and Spain ineligible. Or, consider the Urals and the Bosphorus, which are often cited as the eastern frontiers of Europe. The size and proportion of Kazakhstan's territory that lies west of the Ural Mountains and Ural River is far larger than the size or proportion of Turkish territory that lies north of the Bosphorus, yet Turkey is recognized as a candidate for membership while Kazakhstan is covered by the EU's Regional Strategy Paper for Central Asia and never mentioned as a possible member.

Conceiving of regional geography simply in terms of physical location thus cannot provide a satisfactory explanation of a state's eligibility to join a regional organization. As John Gerard Ruggie (1999:235) recognized, "space is not given in nature. It is a social construct that people, somehow, invent." The expectation that the EU would consider all European states eligible for membership thus has very limited explanatory power unless one includes variables that cannot be reduced to physical location. For example, when pressed five decades after the Treaty of Rome to define "European," the European Commission conceded that its meaning had always been multi-dimensional: "The term 'European' combines geographical, historical and cultural elements which all contribute to European identity ...[which] is subject to review by each succeeding generation."¹³ If political actors in Europe hold similar conceptions of the physical limits of their region at particular moments in time, and make membership decisions accordingly, their actions are being shaped by shared ideas and not physical location. This is why fewer and fewer scholars today treat regions "simply as abstractions or as a priori spatial givens, but instead as the results of social processes that reflect and shape particular ideas about how the world is or should be organized" (Murphy 1991: 24).

This brings us back to membership norms. The results summarized above show striking support for the hypothesis that EU decisions on membership eligibility are shaped by membership norms prevailing amongst the community's member states and supranational institutions. In fact, the correlation for membership norms (79%) is significantly higher than that found for other, more traditional explanations of EU decision-making such as commercial and geopolitical incentives. On the other hand, the membership norms argument is weakened by its inability to explain decisions made when the community's member states and supranational institutions do not converge on a shared definition of eligibility. Instead, the theory states clearly that decisions in such situations will be based upon hard bargaining among member states whose final choices are not determined by membership norms. For example, EU member states seem to agree in the post-2005 period that all states seeking membership must be 'European' but they did not agree on what criteria are sufficient for membership eligibility. Given that no states located beyond the conventional geographic boundaries of 'Europe' sought EU membership after 2005, membership norms cannot explain the eight decisions on eligibility that the community nonetheless made in this period. However, for the 42 cases included in the test of the membership norms hypothesis, geographic location is covered because the community's membership norm always required that states seeking accession must be 'European' in addition to other criteria.

In sum, the cross-tabs reveal a strikingly high correlation between EU membership norms prevailing in particular periods and the EU's decisions on the membership eligibility of aspirant states. The fact that this correlation is far stronger for membership norms than for many other, more conventional explanations of EU decision-making, and is not exceeded by any competing explanation, provides strong support for the argument that the EU's decisions on its geographic limits as a political community cannot be understood without serious attention to the role of membership norms.

VI. Robustness checks

¹³ Andrew Rettman, "Israel takes bashing in EU foreign relations audit," 23.04.2009, www.euobserver.com/24/27994/

The aforementioned conclusion regarding the explanatory power of membership norms is also supported by two additional robustness checks using distinct empirical methods. As summarised below, analysis using logistic regression shows that our findings hold even when we control for the impact of the other potential explanatory factors. A final check using crisp set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) yields similar conclusions with regard to the importance of membership norms even if we adopt a conjunctural (rather than correlational) logic of causation open to the possibility of independent multivariate causal pathways to the same outcome. The fact that both of these checks confirmed the importance of norms for explaining decisions on EU membership eligibility makes us confident with regard to the internal validity of the claims we have made.

Logistic regression analysis

As a first check on our findings from the cross-tab analysis, we ran a range of logistic regression models predicting EU membership eligibility. We did so despite two reasons for being skeptical about the utility of this method: first, the number of observations (50) is lower than normally recommended for statistical regression; and second, the assumption of independent observations is violated within our data – some countries appear multiple times and the individual outcomes on these cases are probably related to one another, while decisions on some countries might well have been influenced by other cases. However, since the 50 decisions on EU eligibility in our dataset constitute the whole population of cases, and the clustering of observations is limited (i.e. most countries appear only once), we concluded that checking our previous findings by means of logistic regression analysis is an appropriate way to increase the confidence in our earlier conclusions.

To that end, Table X reports a range of multivariate logistic regression models. All models were estimated using R. To make use of the full amount of empirical information, the regime type, economic, and risk variables are continuous measures of the underlying theoretical concepts, rather than the binary variables we used earlier. For example, the regime type variable now displays the difference between a country's V-Dem liberal democracy score and the respective minimum within the EU, etc. The models confirm our earlier findings: membership norms turn out to be meaningful predictors of EU membership eligibility. Even when controlling for other factors, applicants that meet the normative requirements held by the EU member states have a higher likelihood of being granted membership eligibility.

Table X. Predicting EU membership eligibility

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	EU eligibility (1 = eligible)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Membership norms (1= norms are met)	3.734** (1.860)	3.315** (1.301)			
Regional location (1= within Europe according to Encyclopedia Britannica)	1.602 (2.053)	1.365 (1.949)	.321 (1.869)	.810 (1.782)	1.002 (1.707)
Treaty rules (1= treaty rules with change in 1986 are met)			.976 (1.274)	1.296 (1.256)	
Regime similarity (difference to minimum V-Dem score in EU in given year)	-1.253 (3.685)		3.412 (2.559)		3.625 (2.483)
Market regulation (difference to gdp p.c. of least developed member state)	-.0001 (.0001)	-.0001 (.0001)	-.0001 (.0001)	-.00005 (.0001)	-.00004 (.0001)

Conflict risk	-6.354	-5.078	-2.645	-7.702	-2.195
(based on Nordhaus, Oneal and Russett 2012)	(7.494)	(6.493)	(6.890)	(5.576)	(6.923)
Intercept	-1.037	-.732	1.473	1.585	1.487
	(2.633)	(2.437)	(1.921)	(1.845)	(1.953)
Observations	37	37	37	37	37
Log Likelihood	-12.034	-12.094	-14.782	-15.786	-15.075
AIC	36.069	34.187	41.565	41.572	40.150

Note: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01. Entries are logit coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

Both models 1 and 2 estimate a significant effect of the membership norms variable, while no other coefficient reaches acceptable levels of significance in any of the models.¹⁴ Since membership norms are highly correlated with the regime type and the treaty variable, and the latter includes itself a measure of norms, we estimate models containing all possible combinations of these three factors. This exercise adds further support to the conclusion that membership norms matter.

Crisp set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA)

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is a valuable as a way to check for causal patterns that could be missed by cross-tab correlations or logistic regression analysis. Its promise lies in its fit with a conjunctural understanding of causation, whereby multiple configurations of variables ('conditions' in QCA parlance) may lead to a given outcome (for a good introduction to QCA, see Schneider & Wagemann 2012). We have not previously formulated our theoretical expectations in terms of causal heterogeneity and we do not to do so here. However, we have recognised multiple plausible explanations of membership eligibility and we can imagine a number of plausible configurations leading to membership (in)eligibility. Moreover, our dataset is very well suited to the requirements of csQCA: it includes a rather small number of observations (n=50), the independent and dependent variables are dichotomized, and each observation is placed in a mutually exclusive subset of cases. For instance, cases belong either to the group of countries that were deemed eligible or to the group of those that were not; they either lie within Europe or not, have a competitive market or not, and are at a high risk of interstate conflict or not. This permits us to use QCA inductively to re-check the robustness of our initial finding that EU membership norms play an important role in the community's decision-making.

To do so, we start by excluding all post-2005 cases from the dataset, as we have missing information for a range of variables for these cases. To capture the conditions that potentially form part of the path leading to membership eligibility, we include one factor for each of the theoretical arguments developed above. When multiple operationalizations are available for the same test, we used the one with the greatest explanatory power in the main analysis. We then constructed a truth table that displays the configurations of conditions and outcomes as observed in our data (Table Y). For this, we removed all rows of configurations of conditions and outcomes that were not empirically observed at least once. In addition, as we have a large number of observations (by QCA standards), quite precise and strong theoretical expectations, and a high confidence in our coding of the data, we set 0.8 as the

¹⁴ The effects of membership norms remain significant at the same level of confidence when we calculate robust standard errors instead of normal ones.

consistency cut-off value. This means that rows in our truth table for which at least 80% of the cases contained exhibit the expected outcome are identified as sufficient configurations for membership eligibility.¹⁵

Table Y. QCA truth table

EU eligible	Membership norms	Part of Europe (Encyclopedia Britannica definition)	Fit with treaty rules (1986 change)	Regime similarity (comparison to least democratic member state)	Well-regulated market (GDP p.c. is higher than min. in EU in given year)	Country is among the bottom half of global risk ranking	Number of cases per configuration	Consistency (proportion of cases exhibiting the outcome)
1	1	1	1	1	0	1	6	1
1	1	1	1	1	0	0	4	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	1
1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	0	0	0	8	0.875
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	0.75
0	0	1	0	0	0	0	11	0.727273
0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	0.5
0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0

Logical minimization identifies four parsimonious configurations of conditions that lead to EU eligibility (Table Z). The consistency of each of the four configurations, just as that of the solution as a whole, are high, meaning that almost all cases sharing a particular configuration of conditions also share the same outcome. Most noteworthy, membership norms feature in three of the four identified configurations: meeting the membership norms and not being among the bottom half of the global risk ranking, meeting the norms and not having a well-regulated market, or meeting the norms but not having a sufficiently similar regime type all lead to EU membership eligibility. On the other hand, being geographically located on the European continent (according to Encyclopedia Britannica) but not meeting the formal treaty requirements and not being among the bottom half of the global risk ranking is also a configuration that leads to EU membership eligibility. These QCA results support our previous conclusion that membership norms need to be taken seriously in explanations of EU membership eligibility.

Table Z. Analysis of causal configurations leading to EU membership eligibility

Configuration	Country meets membership norms AND country is not among the bottom half of global risk ranking	Country meets membership norms AND Country does not have a well-regulated market	Country meets membership norms AND does not have a sufficiently similar regime	Country is in Europe AND does not meet the treaty rules AND is not among the bottom half of global risk ranking

¹⁵ If we use .75 as a cut-off value instead, slightly different configurations appear to be important, but membership norms continue to be a relevant condition for membership eligibility.

Raw Coverage	0.411765	0.529412	0.264706	0.176471
Unique Coverage	0.0588235	0.176471	0.0294118	0.176471
Consistency	0.933333	0.947368	0.9	0.857143
Cases covered by solution	Greece 1959, Turkey 1959, Spain 1960, Denmark 1961, Greece 1976, Spain 1977, Czechoslovakia 1990, Bulgaria 1991, Estonia 1994, Latvia 1994, Lithuania 1994, Malta 1995, Croatia 2000, Serbia and Montenegro 2005, Ukraine 2005	Greece 1959, Turkey 1959, Spain 1960, Ireland 1962, Portugal 1978, Czechoslovakia 1990, Hungary 1990, Poland 1990, Bulgaria 1991, Czech Republic 1993, Estonia 1994, Latvia 1994, Lithuania 1994, Malta 1995, Slovenia 1995, Slovak Republic 1999, Croatia 2000, Serbia and Montenegro 2005, Ukraine 2005	Greece 1959, Turkey 1959, Spain 1960, Spain 1977, Bulgaria 1991, Cyprus 1993, Slovak Republic 1999, Croatia 2000, Serbia and Montenegro 2005, Ukraine 2005	Turkey 1989 , Romania 1992, Slovak Republic 1993, Turkey 1999, Macedonia FYR 2000, Albania 2003, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2005
Solution Consistency: .933 Solution Coverage: .824 Uncovered cases: UK 1961, 1963, 1970, NOR 1962, ESP 1962, GRE 1967, MOR 1987, AUT 1992, FIN 1992, SWE 1992, SVK 1997, TRK 1999				
Cases in bold are inconsistent: they exhibit the configuration of conditions but do not share the expected outcome.				

VII. Conclusions

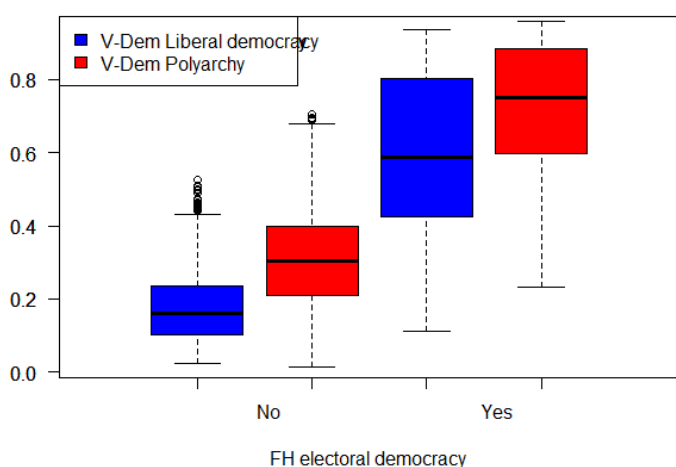
This chapter has used three distinct empirical methods – cross-tab correlations, logistic regression analysis, and qualitative comparative analysis – to assess the impact of EU membership norms on the community’s decisions regarding the eligibility of states seeking membership. All three methods support the same conclusion: membership norms are a powerful (though not all-determining) factor in EU decision-making. This finding is particularly notable given the widespread tendency to assume that EU decision-making is dominated by economic and/or security concerns, the novelty of the membership norms argument, and the effort made here to distinguish these norms conceptually and empirically from treaty rules and various indicators of state interests. Moving beyond statistics, the following three chapters provide rich evidence of membership norm dynamics from detailed process tracing of EC/EU decision-making on the eligibility of Greece (1959, 1967, 1976), Spain (1960, 1962, 1977), and (Turkey (1959, 1989, 1999, 2007, 2013).

Appendix: Imputing missing Freedom House data from V-Dem data

For our test of the membership norms argument we used Freedom House’s (FH) ‘electoral democracy’ and ‘freedom’ scores, as they provide a clear criterion for assessing a country’s fit with the membership norm prevalent at the time of decision-making. However, since FH does not include all our cases due to limited temporal coverage, we decided to impute missing scores based on V-Dem data. In this section we briefly describe the analytical steps we took in order to accomplish this task.

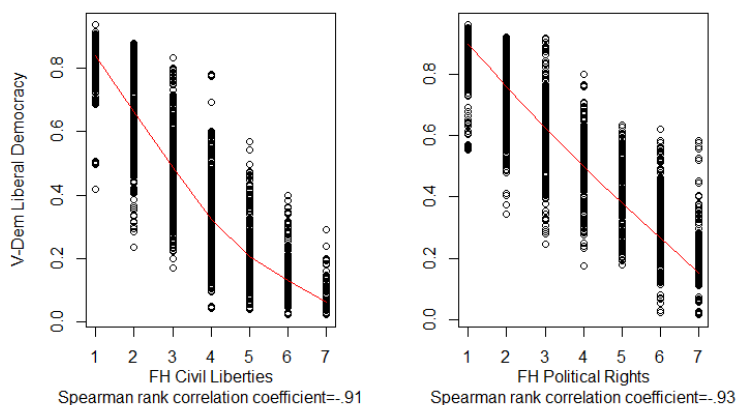
First of all, it is noteworthy that V-Dem data is highly predictive of FH’s ‘electoral democracy’ indicator. As shown below in Figure 2a, FH electoral democracies form clusters of high-scoring countries on both relevant V-Dem variables (‘liberal democracy’ and ‘polyarchy’) and have significantly higher mean scores as compared to countries without electoral democratic institutions and practices ($t=-75.8$, $p<.01$ for the V-Dem polyarchy Index; $t=-77.3$, $p<.01$ for the V-Dem Liberal Democracy index).

Figure 1: Comparison of Freedom House and V-Dem country-year scores



The correlations related to liberal democracy are similarly high. Teorell and colleagues (2016, 29) have shown that V-Dem’s ‘Polyarchy’ index is highly correlated with FH’s ‘civil liberties’ and ‘political rights’ scores, and as shown below in Figure 2b, we find strikingly similar patterns with regard to the relationship between V-Dem’s ‘liberal democracy’ index and FH scores.

Figure 2: Correlations between country-year scores in Freedom House and V-Dem datasets



With this in mind, we use simple (logistic) regression models to predict a country’s FH scores based on all country-year observations available in both FH and V-Dem. Employing V-Dem’s ‘polyarchy’ and ‘liberal democracy’

indices as dependent variables, as well as including country dummies (fixed effects), we predict a country's freedom rating, i.e. its mean value on civil liberties and political rights in a given year, using OLS. Countries are coded as liberal democracies when their predicted value is no higher than 2.5. For a country's classification as electoral democracy, we estimate a logistic regression model including the same predictor variables, and count countries as electoral democracies when their predicted probability to belong to this category was higher than 0.5. The predicted scores were calculated as follows:

$$Freedom = \alpha + VDem\ Lib.Dem.* \beta_1 + VDem\ Polyarchy * \beta_2 + Country\ fixed\ effect;$$

and

$$P(Electoral\ Democracy = 1) = \frac{e^{\alpha + VDem\ Lib.Dem.*\beta_1 + VDem\ Polyarchy*\beta_2 + Country\ fixed\ effect}}{1 + e^{\alpha + VDem\ Lib.Dem.*\beta_1 + VDem\ Polyarchy*\beta_2 + Country\ fixed\ effect}};$$

where α and β stand for the estimated coefficients.

Both models fit the data reasonably well with 94% of variance being explained by the OLS model, and 90% of correct classifications and a reduction of prediction error by 74% by the logistic regression model. Nonetheless, in order to increase our confidence in the predicted scores we ran a number of robustness checks, including slightly different model specifications, comparable models based on Polity IV data, models including Polity IV and V-Dem predictors, and models for European countries only. All these robustness checks provided substantially similar results. In sum, the advantage of having a clear and discriminating classification scheme for different regime types, as provided by FH data, far outweighs the minor uncertainty introduced by this imputation procedure.

Using the estimated regression equations, we imputed the following scores for regime characteristics in country-years not included in the FH dataset (Table Y):

Table Y: Imputed regime scores for country-years not covered by Freedom House data

Country (Year)	Parliamentary Democracy (1=yes; 0=no)	Liberal Democracy (scores 1-7, with 1.0 – 2.5 signifying liberal democracy)
Ireland (1962)	1	Not relevant for eligibility
Norway (1962)	1	
Spain (1962)	0	
United Kingdom (1963)	1	
Greece (1967)	0	
United Kingdom (1967)	1	
United Kingdom (1970)	1	
Serbia and Montenegro (2006)		2
Kosovo (2013)	1	4