

Do Citizens Support the Differentiated Integration of Their Country?

Thomas Winzen (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf) and Frank Schimmelfennig (ETH Zurich)

winzen@hhu.de

Abstract

This paper examines the determinants of public opinion on differentiated integration in the European Union (EU). Specifically, it tests a ‘congruence hypothesis’ according to which public opinion is informed by the national experience of opt-outs and exclusions from full participation in EU policies. The study generally finds that support for differentiated integration strongly depends on the mode of differentiation. Even though ‘multi-speed differentiation’ is only temporary, it is evaluated more critically than durable treaty opt-outs establishing ‘multi-tier differentiation’. We suggest that citizens from opt-out countries oppose multi-speed differentiation out of concern that it would render their exemptions temporary, whereas citizens from new member states tend to be critical towards the often involuntary and discriminatory transitional arrangements that were imposed by the old member states.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Differentiated integration has become a constitutive feature of the European Union (EU). Since the 1990s in particular, treaty revisions and the accession of new member states have been accompanied regularly by opt-outs, exemptions and exclusions of individual member states from a variety of EU policies. Whereas most of these differentiations have been temporary (multi-speed differentiation), others have created durable disparities in the European integration of member states (multi-tier differentiation). These disparities are most pronounced in core state policies such as monetary, interior and security policies. Differentiation between Euro and non-Euro area as well as Schengen and non-Schengen area countries are the most prominent examples.

Past research has established several factors that have driven differentiated integration in the course of EU history (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020). In treaty revisions, wealthier member states whose citizens express a more exclusively national identity are more likely to opt out from the integration of core state powers. In EU enlargement, less wealthy new member states are more likely to be exempted or excluded temporarily from full participation in EU policies when they join. Moreover, whereas differentiations originating in accession treaties typically expire after a few years, the differentiated integration of core state powers is path dependent. Further integration in these policies tends to reproduce and widen the gap between participating and non-participating countries.

By contrast, we have little systematic knowledge about public opinion on differentiated integration. What do citizens think about differentiated integration in general and about the differentiated integration of their own country in particular? Earlier research has leveraged public opinion data, especially on collective identity and Euroscepticism, but this data taps into general attitudes toward the EU and integration rather than specific opinions about differentiated integration (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016; Hooghe & Marks, 2005). To some extent, this is because comparative public opinion data on differentiation is scarce. The Eurobarometer has only started to collect data on differentiated integration in the mid-2000s and has done so with large gaps and changes of wording in the time series. Moreover, asking people about differentiated integration is not straightforward. Differentiated integration is an academic concept that most people are unlikely to have heard of or thought about. It is only recently that regular polling on differentiated integration has started in the Eurobarometer and that other surveys of public opinion on the EU have added items on differentiation.

Theoretical expectations are not straightforward either. If differentiated integration in core state policies responds in part to variation in national identities, we should expect that a majority of citizens in countries such as Denmark, Sweden or the UK be satisfied with the instrument of opting out and with the lower level of participation of their countries in EU policies. Especially in Denmark, this choice was driven by and confirmed in a series of referendums. Conversely, citizens of member states with more inclusive national identities are likely to be happy with the uniform integration of their own countries. At the same time, they might be concerned about the special status and ‘cherry-picking’ of member states enjoying generous opt-outs. Finally, citizens of member states that were excluded from full participation in EU policies against their own will, such as new member states barred from the free movement of persons and from equal access to subsidies, may well be dissatisfied not only with the differentiated integration of their own countries, but also with differentiated integration in general.

Published research exploring these conjectures is still rare and recent. Leuffen et al. (2020) test a broad set of variables for their association with support for ‘multi-speed Europe’ using the Eurobarometer surveys. At the individual level, they find that adherents of the economic right tend to support, whereas supporters of the economic left tend to reject, differentiated integration. Differentiated integration chimes well with liberal ideas of freedom of choice but runs against the principle of equality. At the country level, they detect large variation between a differentiation-sceptic European

South and a differentiation-friendly North and East. The article suggests that the experience of the Euro crisis and the perceived lack of European solidarity has caused a deterioration in Southern support for differentiated integration. In another study using the Eurobarometer surveys, de Blok and de Vries (2021) find that citizen preferences on differentiated integration have generally become more crystallized over time and that Eurosceptic citizens are less likely to be in favour of multi-speed integration. Schraff and Schimmelfennig (2020) seek to capture the causal effect of differentiated integration on the perceived legitimacy of the EU in an analysis of the 2015 Danish Justice and Home Affairs referendum. In a quasi-experimental analysis, they show that the public vote preserving the Danish opt-out strengthened the belief of Eurosceptic voters that their voice counts in EU politics, suggesting that differentiation can have a positive effect on the perceived democratic quality of the EU.

Our paper contributes to this emerging research agenda in two ways. First, by including data from a recent survey commissioned by the European University Institute and conducted by YouGov (Genschel et al., 2020), it expands the empirical basis for studying public opinion on differentiated integration. In contrast to the Eurobarometer survey, which asks about ‘multi-speed Europe’ only, the EUI-YouGov survey contains multiple items related to differentiated integration, which allow us to tap into diverse modes and understandings of differentiation. Second, we focus on the association between a country’s level of differentiated integration and citizen support. Earlier studies suggest a positive correlation – after all, the Eastern and Northern member states, and Denmark in particular, exhibit the highest levels of differentiation – but do not examine it explicitly. Congruence between actual differentiation and citizen support would indicate that differentiated integration enjoys democratic legitimacy.

Our study finds, indeed, that there is a systematic relationship between a country’s level of, and public opinion on, differentiated integration. Public opinion varies, however, between different modes of differentiation. Interestingly, even though multi-speed differentiation is only temporary, it is generally evaluated more critically than the durable treaty opt-outs establishing multi-tier differentiation. This holds for respondents from countries with many opt-outs from ‘deepening’ treaty revisions as well as from countries with many exceptions resulting from accession treaties. We suggest that citizens of opt-out countries oppose multi-speed differentiation out of concern that it would render their exemptions temporary, whereas citizens from new member states tend to be critical towards the often-discriminatory transitional arrangements that were imposed by the old member states in the enlargement process. In general, citizens living in countries with a highly differentiated European integration appear to support voluntary but oppose involuntary differentiation. The democratic legitimacy of differentiated integration thus depends on whether it has been the result of national choice. These results hold controlling for the ideological divide that Leuffen et al. (2020) emphasize.

Beyond suggesting that public support for differentiated European integration depends on the modes and origins of differentiation, our comparative use of two surveys also cautions that, in such a rather remote and abstract political domain, the wording and framing of questions may have a non-negligible effect on how respondents evaluate differentiated integration.

The paper is structured as follows. We start with formulating theoretical expectations about congruence between the extent and type of national differentiated integration and citizen support and introduce our control variables. After presenting the data and variables, we show bivariate and multilevel analyses of multi-tier and multi-speed differentiation. The final section offers the conclusions of our analysis on the congruence of public opinion and differentiated integration.

Theoretical expectations

In developing testable expectations on the congruence between actual differentiation and the attitudes of the public, we start from the assumption that citizens' national experience with differentiated integration informs their assessments. Conversely, we suggest that citizens do not only evaluate differentiated integration in the abstract, based on their general political attitudes (Leuffen et al., 2020), nor that they have a systemic, European vantage point. Rather, citizens are most likely to learn about and experience differentiated integration as citizens of a country that is uniformly integrated, opted out of EU policies, or was excluded from participating. This experience shapes their assessment of the merits of differentiated integration.

In its most basic formulation, the congruence hypothesis predicts that support for differentiated integration is systematically correlated with the actual differentiated integration of the country. This correlation could result from diverse causal mechanisms. On the one hand, governments negotiate differentiated integration in line with public opinion. Active demand for differentiation by citizens, which can manifest itself in referendums on EU treaties or in the representation of integration-sceptic parties in the national parliament, puts pressure on the government to secure exemptions and opt-outs in European treaties and legislation (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020). Alternatively, high acceptance of differentiated integration provides the government with sufficient room of manoeuvre to negotiate differentiations as it sees fit. On the other hand, congruence may be an effect of differentiated integration. Citizens extrapolate the level of differentiation of their own country to the entire EU as the normal or desirable state of affairs. In this perspective, citizens of uniformly integrated countries tend to think that all countries ought to be integrated uniformly, and they may be suspicious of differentiated integration as providing other countries with unfair sweet deals and rewarding cherry-picking behaviour and lack of solidarity. Conversely, citizens of differentially integrated countries regard differentiation as the normal state of integration. Moreover, they may think that all member states either should be free to choose from the menu of EU policies or subjected to exclusions, depending on their own national experience.

However, differentiated integration can be voluntary or involuntary. Whereas the differentiated integration of some countries is predominantly the result of active demand and successful bargaining for opt-outs from integration, the differentiated integration of other member states mainly consists of imposed exclusions from full participation in integration (Schneider, 2009). Typically, differentiations originating in treaty revisions are voluntary opt-outs. Because treaty revisions require unanimous agreement among the member states, member states unwilling to integrate further are able to bargain successfully for opt-outs lest they veto the entire treaty revision. By contrast, many differentiations resulting from enlargement are involuntary and discriminatory exclusions. Accession treaties offer old member states the opportunity to exclude new member states from full integration if they are concerned about the consequences of the economic gap between old and new member states (such as labour migration and a shift in allocations from the EU budget) and the capacity of new member states to comply with the requirements of membership (Schneider, 2009; Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020). In this vein, new member states have been excluded temporarily from the freedom of movement of persons across the EU, Eurozone membership and full access to agricultural subsidies. It is plausible to assume that citizens of opt-out countries tend to approve of differentiated integration, whereas citizens of exclusion countries perceive differentiated integration negatively.

Finally, differentiated integration can be 'multi-speed' or 'multi-tier' (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020; Stubb, 1996). In the multi-speed mode, differentiation is temporary and will transform into uniform integration eventually. Member states are exempted or excluded from full integration for a reasonable period. In the multi-tier mode, however, differentiation is durable and results in a permanent division between a fully integrated core and less integrated outer circles or peripheries.

Typically, voluntary differentiation resulting from country opt-outs from treaty revisions tends to produce multi-tier differentiation. Opt-outs are often permanent in legal terms and durable in practice, reflecting deep-seated scepticism toward the supranational integration of core state powers. For instance, opt-outs from the Eurozone or Justice and Home Affairs have not been revoked and lasted for more than twenty years. By contrast, involuntary differentiation resulting from exclusions imposed during the accession process of new member states generally produce multi-speed differentiation. Differentiations originating in accession are temporary in principle and generally expire during the first ten years of membership (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2017).

We conjecture that survey respondents support multi-tier but oppose multi-speed differentiation, but they do so for different reasons depending on the national context. In opt-out countries, characterized by a high level of voluntary multi-tier differentiation, multi-tier differentiation corresponds with the majority will of these countries, whereas multi-speed integration implies that the cherished opt-outs would have to end at some point. In those countries that have experienced a high level of involuntary multi-speed differentiation resulting from the accession process, multi-speed differentiation is critically evaluated because it is associated with discrimination, whereas multi-tier differentiation represents self-determination. We thus propose the following hypothesis:

(H) The more a country's integration in the EU has been differentiated, the higher the support for multi-tier differentiation, but the lower the support for multi-speed DI.

In testing the hypotheses, we include country-level and individual-level controls suggested by the literature. Several factors can be assumed to affect both a country's level of differentiated integration, our independent variable, and public opinion about differentiated integration, our dependent variable. Recent studies found that exclusive national identities have had a positive effect on differentiated integration originating in treaty revisions (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020). At the individual level, we therefore expect more nationalist citizens to be in higher favour of differentiated integration. Moreover, poorer accession countries are more likely to be differentially integrated into the EU. Therefore, we include GDP per capita in the analysis.

In line with the result of Leuffen et al. (2020) that citizens on the (economic) right are more favourable to differentiated integration than those on the left and that the experience of the Eurozone crisis has made citizens of Southern Europe more sceptical of differentiation, we include a measure of individuals' positioning on the economic left-right scale, their preferred purpose of 'Europe', their views on European vs. national social sharing, and their perception of the national economic situation. Moreover, we distinguish ESM program countries from other member states at the country level.

Assuming that supporters of the economic right prioritize freedom, efficiency and merit over solidarity and equality, we expect that economically liberal citizens (as well as adherents of 'Market Europe' and 'welfare nationalism') are more favourable to differentiation than citizens on the left (as well as supporters of 'Protective Europe' and Europe-wide sharing). We further expect that supporters of the economic left, 'Protective Europe' and European sharing express higher support for multi-speed than for multi-tier integration. Finally, citizens who perceive the economic situation of their country as insecure are likely to wish for European solidarity, fear exclusion and therefore oppose differentiated integration, especially of the durable multi-tier variety. By contrast, citizens who rate the national economic situation as secure may be wary of sharing with less fortunate countries and see (durable) differentiated integration as a way out.

Data

To measure public support for differentiated integration we rely on two data sources: the 2020 EUI-YouGov survey on Solidarity in Europe, which surveyed representative samples from 14 countries (Genschel et al., 2020)¹, and the Eurobarometer, which included relevant questions for 2005-2007 and since 2012. The advantage of the EUI survey is that it distinguishes multi-tier and multi-speed differentiation explicitly by asking the following two questions:

Q65. Please tell us how far you agree or disagree with the following statement: Member states should be allowed to opt out of specific areas of European integration. This means that a member state can negotiate exceptions ("opt-out") for areas in which it does not wish to cooperate. For example, Denmark has opted out of the common currency, and Poland has opted out of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Q64. Please tell us how far you agree or disagree with the following statement: The EU should allow countries to integrate at multiple speeds. This means that all member states aspire to the same levels of integration in the future, but they are allowed to arrive there at different times, creating more flexibility but also more fragmentation.

In the original, there are six response options: Strongly agree (1), Agree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (5), Don't know (6). We reduce these responses to the distinction between 'support for differentiation' (strongly agree and agree combined) and 'lack of support' (the other options) but examine alternatives as well.²

The main advantage of the Eurobarometer is that it covers several years. We can thus examine change over time. The downside of the Eurobarometer data is that it only covers multi-speed differentiation and that two questions appear across surveys:

"As regards the idea of a "TWO SPEED EUROPE", which of the following comes closest to your personal preference? Those countries which are ready to intensify the development of a common European policy in certain important areas..." (1 = "Should do so without having to wait for others"; 2 = "Should wait until all MS of the EU are ready for this" 3 = "Don't know).

"When it comes to EU's activities, some Member States are ready to enhance the development of common European policy in certain important areas. Do you think that they should..." (1 = "Do so without waiting for the other EU Member States" 2 = "Wait for all the EU Member States to be ready to do it" Dk = "Don't know").

As previous studies, we combine both questions (de Blok & de Vries, 2021; Leuffen et al., 2020). Our focus is on explaining the "don't wait" and "wait" responses. We interpret the "don't wait" outcome as an indicator of support for multi-speed integration.

What are the benefits of using both the EUI-YouGov and Eurobarometer surveys? First, doing so is a robustness check for the results for multi-speed integration. Second, it is important to note that the EUI formulation of the question is more permissive (countries "are allowed to" take longer) and costs are incurred by the EU rather than by countries ("fragmentation"). The Eurobarometer question instead suggests that member states can be left behind as others can proceed "without waiting" for countries that are not yet "ready for this". These differences are subtle. Yet, they relate to institutional

¹ Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Sweden, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

² This approach enhances simplicity compared to a multi-category outcome. It also reflects that only 20 and 10 percent of respondents disagree with multi-tier and multi-speed differentiation, whereas more are indifferent. Hence, it seems most relevant to understand what might explain agreement compared to other responses.

differences between discriminatory multi-speed integration (transition periods imposed on new member states against their will) and exemptions (transition periods granted to new member states at their request) (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2017). Individual responses to the EUI and Eurobarometer questions might thus differ.

Our main explanatory variable – differentiation – is measured at the country-level and comes from the EUDIFF1 dataset, which captures all instances of differentiation of all member states from the EU treaties (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2014). These data enable us to measure each country’s historical experience with differentiation until a given point in time (the total of differentiations obtained so far) and to distinguish differentiation resulting from reform treaties and enlargement treaties. We could also measure differentiation currently in force, but our preferred measure is the cumulative, historical experience of differentiation. If we limit our attention to the current state, we ignore much of the experience of several member states, in particular with discrimination after enlargement (which expired quickly with few exceptions) (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2017). Bellamy and colleagues (2021), furthermore, provide interview evidence suggesting that differentiation experience shapes party actors’ assessments of differentiation – public opinion might be affected in a similar way.

Table 1. The main variables

Variable	EUI/EB	Operationalization
Support for multi-tier and multi-speed differentiation	Both	1=Support. 0=No support. See main text for the questions and a detailed discussion.
Differentiations	Both	Sum of a country’s differentiations from EU treaties since joining the EU (alternative operationalization: differentiations in force in 2018) based on the EUDIFF1 dataset (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2014).
Opt-outs and discriminatory differentiation	Both	We approximate opt-outs and discrimination as the sum of a country’s differentiation originating in reform treaties/enlargement. Treaty differentiations are never exclusionary; enlargement differentiations often are (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2017).
ESM program country	Both	1=The country has been a program country. 0=Not a program country.
GDP/capita (log)	Both	Log of GDP/capita, based on purchasing power parity, in constant 2017 international \$, World Bank World Development Indicators Database.
Exclusive national identity	EUI	Question: Do you see yourself as...? 1=Citizens responding ‘nationality only’ to the question. 0=Other responses (Nationality and European (2), European and nationality (3), European only (4), none of these (5), Don’t know (6)).
Support for membership	EB	Question: Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)’s membership of the EU is...? 1 A good thing. 2 Neither a good thing nor a bad thing. 3 A bad thing.
Market Europe	EUI	Question: Please tell us in which Europe you would prefer to live. 1=A market Europe that stresses economic integration, market competition and fiscal discipline. 0=Respondents answering ‘A global Europe that acts as a leader on climate, human rights and global peace’ or ‘A protective Europe that defends the European way of life and welfare against internal and external threats’ or neither/don’t know.
European sharing	EUI	Question: Some people think that the member states of the European Union should mostly spend their resources on their own countries and the welfare of their own people. Other people think that the member states of the European Union should pool their resources. Scale: 0-10 with 0 labelled as ‘Spend resources only on own country and own people’ and 10 as ‘Spend resources equally on all countries and all people in the European Union’.
Left-right	Both	EUI Question: Some people talk about ‘left’, ‘right’ and ‘centre’ to describe parties and politicians. With this in mind, where would you place yourself on this scale? Scale: 0-6 (left-right). EB Question: In political matters people talk of ‘the left’ and ‘the right’. How would you place your views on this scale? Scale: 1-10 (left-right).
Economic insecurity	EUI	Question: The economic situation. 1=Very/fairly insecure. 0=Very/fairly secure.
Demographics	Both	0=male. 1=female. Five age groups in EUI and six in EB survey.

We employ further variables as summarized in Table 1. At the country-level, we measure whether countries were part of an ESM program (Leuffen et al., 2020) and GDP/capita. Regarding the individual-level, there is unfortunately little overlap across the EUI and EB surveys. Moreover, in the EB, only few questions have been asked more than once or twice in surveys with the multi-speed items. In our analyses of the EUI survey, we measure a wider range of variables to capture arguments made by Leuffen et al. (2020) and de Blok and de Vries (2021). For the EB surveys, we can include the same demographic variables but otherwise limit ourselves to two broad measures: support for EU membership and left-right position. The former is correlated with a range of ideological, identity, and economic factors (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016; Hooghe & Marks, 2005). The latter is a key summary indicator of individual's political beliefs. Using only these two broad measures enables us to keep six EB surveys from various timepoints in the analysis: 67.2 (2007), 82.4 (2014), 84.1 (2015), 86.1 2016, 87.1 (2017), and 89.2 (2018).

Multi-tier and multi-speed differentiation in the EUI-YouGov survey

We begin with the analysis of the EUI-YouGov survey data. Figure 1 summarizes results from two logistic regression models in which individual agreement with multi-tier and multi-speed differentiation are the respective dependent variables. The models include country-level random intercepts to account for different average support levels across countries. We initially focus on a country's total differentiation experience as main variable of interest and do not distinguish whether differentiation originated in treaties or enlargement.

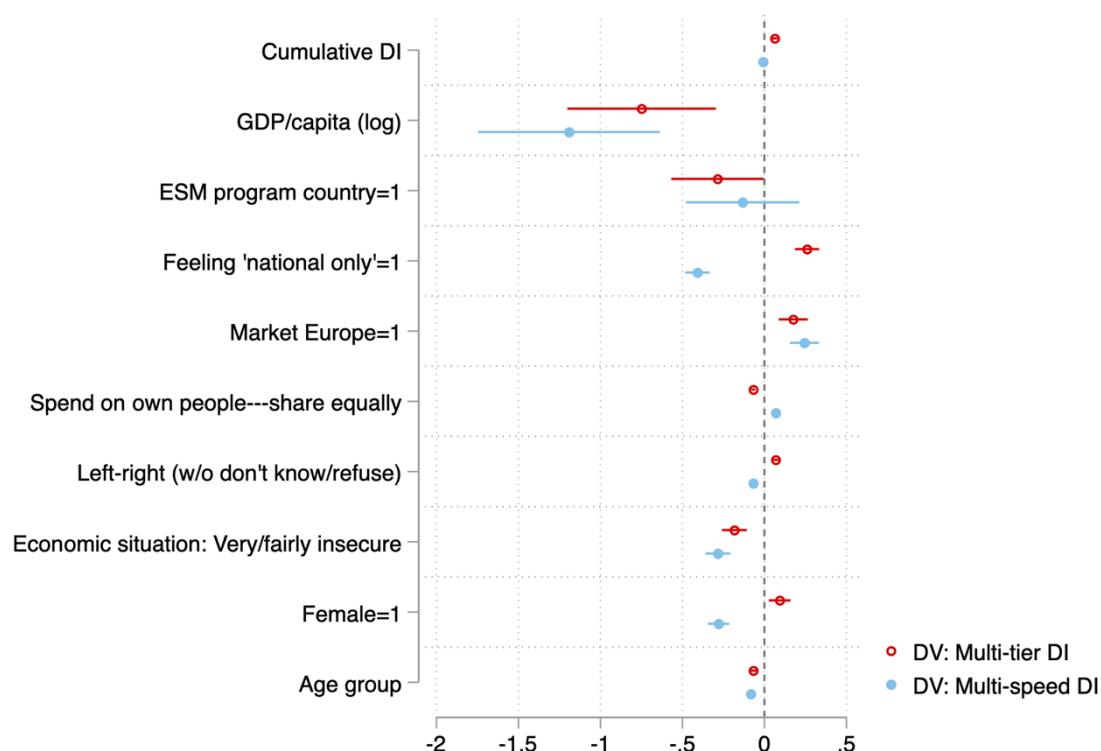


Figure 1. Cumulative differentiation experience and support for differentiation.

Note: The figure shows results from logistic regression models with country-level random intercepts. The global intercept and variance of the country random intercepts have been omitted from the figure (full results available in the replication materials). Observations in both models: 15,750 respondents in 14 countries.

We observe a positive relationship between differentiation and agreement with multi-tier differentiation but not multi-speed differentiation. We also find that citizens from ESM program countries tend to oppose multi-tier and multi-speed DI (although the latter relationship is not statistically significant) (Leuffen et al., 2020). Unexpectedly, support for DI is consistently lower in wealthy countries, in contrast to what Bellamy and colleagues (2021) find at the level of party actors. At the individual-level, we find relationships broadly in line with previous research. Multi-tier differentiation finds support among citizens feeling exclusively national, favouring market Europe, opposing shared resources, and leaning to the right ideologically, and perceiving the economic situation as secure. The correlates of support for multi-speed differentiation differ as regards identity conceptions, resource sharing, and left-right ideology. Thus, at the individual-level, there indeed appears to be an affinity between multi-tier differentiation and the economic and political right, as suggested in the literature (Leuffen et al., 2020), but this pattern does not hold in the case of multi-speed differentiation.

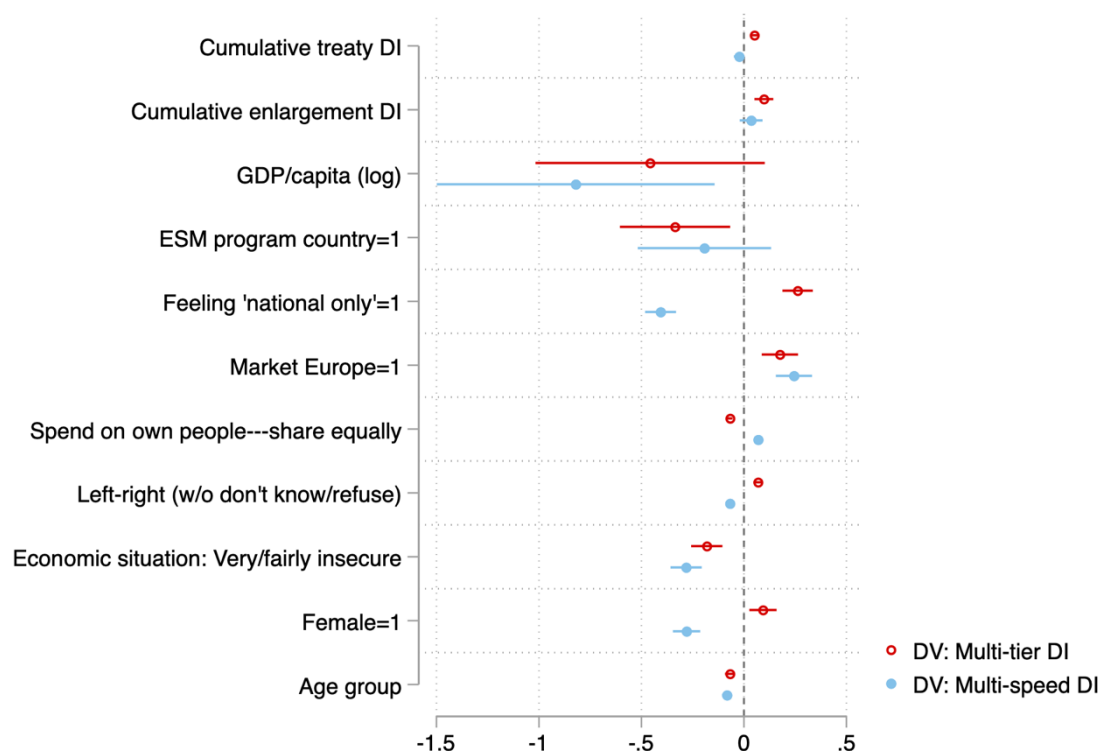


Figure 2. Distinguishing treaty and enlargement differentiation.

Note: The figure shows results from logistic regression models with country-level random intercepts. The global intercept and variance of the country random intercepts have been omitted from the figure (full results available in the replication materials). Observations in both models: 15,750 respondents in 14 countries.

Next, we distinguish differentiation resulting from treaty revisions and enlargements (Figure 2). The results for all control variables remain very similar. Country-level experience with treaty differentiation relates positively to support for multi-tier DI and negatively to support for multi-speed DI. It seems that citizens of countries with permanent treaty opt-outs support this state of affairs and are sceptical of the idea that all member states should converge to the same level of integration over

time. Regarding experience with enlargement differentiation, we find that it also enhances support for multi-tier DI but not (in a statistically significant way) for multi-speed DI. If we analyse the probability of *opposition* to multi-tier and multi-speed DI, the findings mirror those presented so far with few exceptions, but uncertainty is often higher (see Figure A1).

Figure 3 suggests that the observed relationships are substantively important. Focusing on national experience with treaty differentiation, we find that the probability of citizen support for multi-tier DI rises from about .36 to .55 comparing the least to most differentiated member states. The predicted probability of support for multi-speed integration shrinks from .44 to .36. For comparison, the differences in the probability of support for multi-tier differentiation between citizens in countries with or without ESM programs (7 percentage points), with and without exclusive national identity (6 percentage points), for market rather than another Europe (4 percentage points), for equal sharing of resources rather than a focus on fellow nationals (16 percentage points), between right and left citizens (9 percentage points), and those perceiving an insecure economic situation (4 percentage points) are, taken together, similarly substantial but are weaker if considered individually.

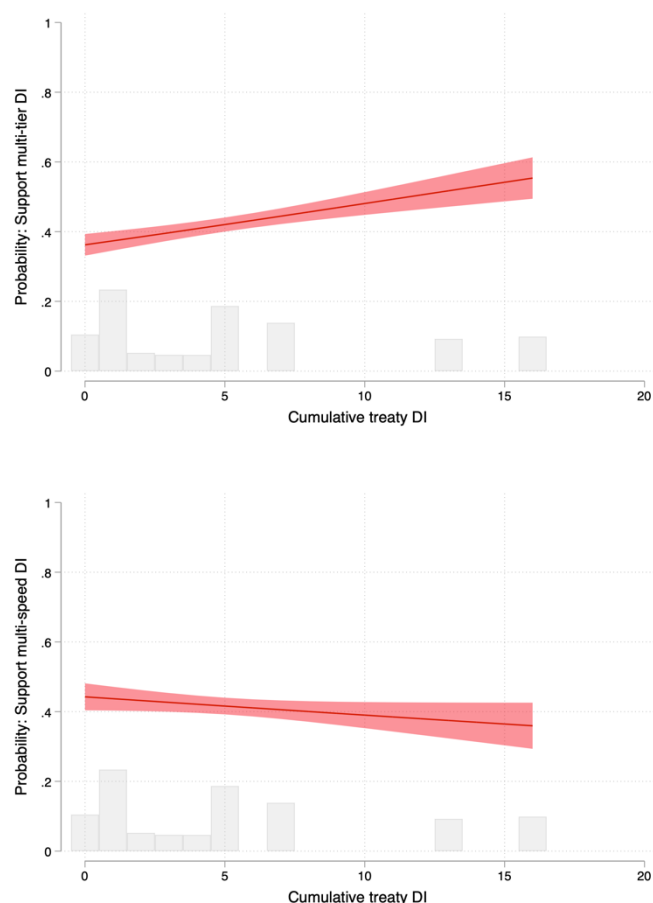


Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of support for multi-tier and multi-speed differentiation.

Note: The figure shows predicted probabilities based on the results for the first model summarized in Figure 2.

Recent studies argue that multilevel models might have incorrect point or error estimates if there are few upper-level units (Elff et al., 2021; Stegmueller, 2013). The EUI-YouGov survey covers only 14 countries and thus raises this issue. However, we re-estimated our models in a fully Bayesian

framework, which is the recommended approach in the aforementioned studies, and obtained very similar results (see Figure A2 and Figure A3).

Summing up, our hypothesis predicting that citizens of countries with higher levels of differentiated are more supportive of multi-tier integration, but more opposed to multi-speed integration, than citizens of more uniformly integrated countries, holds irrespective of whether the country's differentiated integration originated in treaty revisions or enlargement. Even though we cannot test it directly, the findings support our reasoning that opt-out countries oppose multi-speed integration because they are concerned about giving up their exceptions, whereas accession countries oppose it because it is associated with discrimination. Citizens in both groups of high-differentiation countries appear to support opt-outs resulting in multi-tier integration as an expression of national choice. Interestingly, extensive experience with differentiated integration, regardless of whether it is negative or positive, produces similar patterns of support.

Regarding individual-level variables, as Leuffen et al. (2020), we find an important role for economic liberalism and, more broadly, the economic and political right (see also, de Blok & de Vries, 2021). However, we find this effect for multi-tier not multi-speed integration. The latter instead, appears to be favoured by citizens with inclusive identity conceptions, left ideology, and support for European-wide solidarity. Advocates of market Europe welcome, and citizens perceiving economic insecurity oppose, any form of differentiation.

Analyses based on Eurobarometer data

We turn to the analysis of Eurobarometer data to triangulate the findings and obtain a longitudinal perspective. Recall that the Eurobarometer data only measures attitudes towards multi-speed differentiation. We also noted that the survey items seem to allude more strongly to the discriminatory aspect of multi-speed differentiation – i.e., leaving countries behind against their will – compared to the EUI-YouGov items. We thus expect opposition to multi-speed differentiation in accession countries with a high level of differentiated integration to be more pronounced than in the EUI-YouGov survey.

Figure 4 summarizes results from logistic regression models with country-level random intercepts and fixed effects for Eurobarometer waves. It shows that experience with differentiation consistently goes together with opposition to (multi-speed) differentiation. Citizens of countries that have significant treaty differentiation experience are less likely to respond 'don't wait' and more likely to favour waiting. In the case of experience with enlargement differentiation, the results are largely similar, except that they are less certain with respect to the 'don't wait' response.

The Eurobarometer-based results largely correspond to those from the EUI-YouGov survey. Again, experience with treaty differentiation coincides with low support for multi-speed differentiation. In the EUI-YouGov survey, citizens with such experience proved unlikely to support the idea of integration at multiple speeds. In the Eurobarometer survey, they are likely to advocate waiting for member states that are not ready to integrate yet. A possible interpretation could be that citizens in countries with differentiation experience do not wish to be required to reach the same destination as other member states (they favour multi-tier differentiation), but they neither aim to be frontrunners in integration or leave countries behind involuntarily. This complex configuration is compatible with the empirical reality of differentiation, in which countries with treaty opt-outs choose to stay at a lower level of integration permanently.

Second, experience with enlargement differentiation coincides with the demand to wait until all countries are ready to integrate in the Eurobarometer analysis. The statistically significant effect, in contrast to the insignificant effect in the EUI-YouGov survey, could be due to the fact that the Eurobarometer survey highlights discriminatory treatment where certain countries are left behind at a lower level of integration against their will. By contrast, the EUI-YouGov question suggests that multi-speed differentiation could also allow for a preferential treatment in which certain countries are afforded more flexibility and time to converge with the frontrunners.

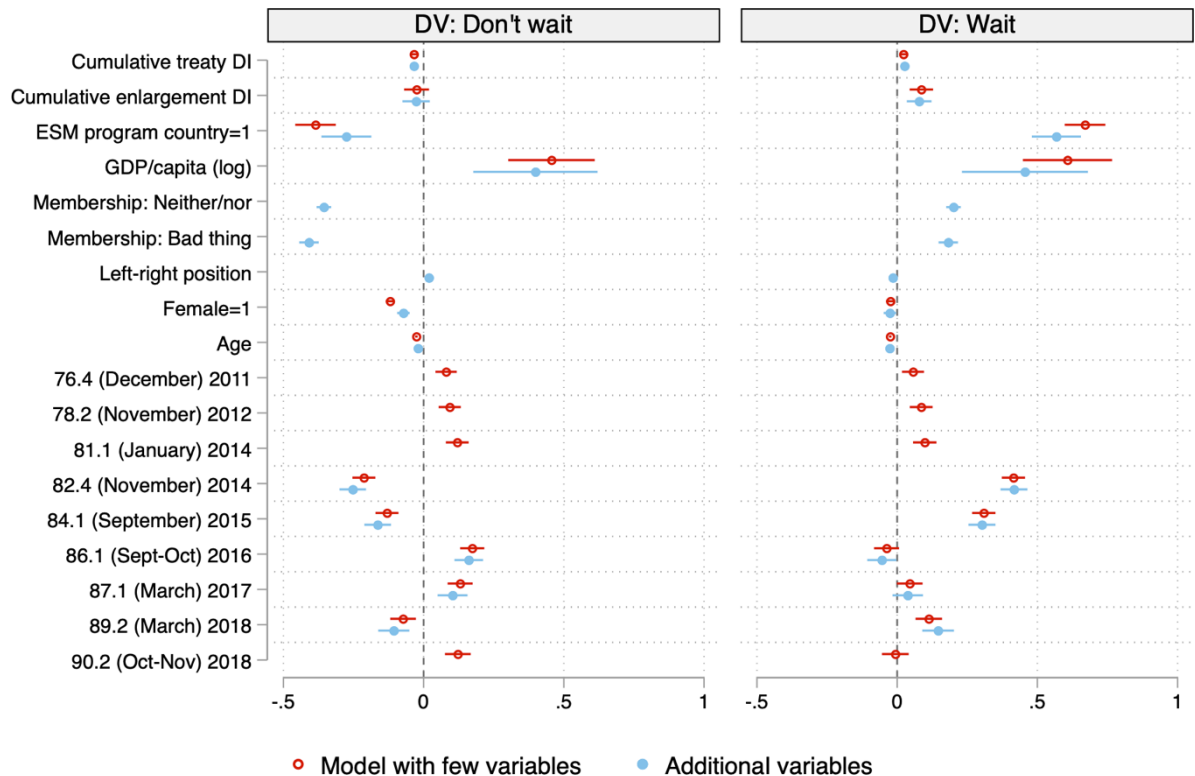


Figure 4. Results of analyses based on the Eurobarometer.

Note: The figure summarizes results of four logistic regression models with country-level random intercepts and fixed effects for Eurobarometer waves. The global intercept and variance of the country random intercepts have been omitted from the figure. The first and third models (red, hollow circles) include only country-level and demographic variables and thus more Eurobarometer waves. The second and fourth models (blue, filled circles) include additional individual-level measures. Observations for the first and third models: 274,424 respondents in 28 countries. Observations for the second and fourth models: 133,402 respondents in 28 countries. The baseline for EU membership support is ‘a good thing’. The baseline Eurobarometer wave is 67.2 (April-May) 2007.

Regarding the other variables, we find plausible relationships. Citizens of ESM program countries demand that member states wait for each other in integration, similar to results in the previous section. As Leuffen et al. (2020), we observe that the ideological right tends to support the ‘don’t wait’ option, as do individuals who regard membership as ‘a good thing’ rather than ‘a bad thing’ or ‘neither/nor’ (de Blok & de Vries, 2021). Interestingly, whereas ideologically right-leaning respondents disapprove of the idea of multi-speed differentiation, in which all countries are meant to reach the same destination (see above), they do not want to oblige ambitious countries to wait until everyone is ready

to integrate further. Again, the emphasis of the question seems to be important. Lastly, GDP/capita increase ‘don’t wait’ and ‘wait’ responses alike, which means that it reduces ‘don’t know’ answers.

Finally, we can employ the Eurobarometer data to analyse temporal dynamics. By examining the Eurobarometer fixed effects in Figure 4, we can already see a tendency that ‘don’t wait’ and ‘wait’ responses have become more likely compared to the 2007 baseline – in six (‘don’t wait’) and seven (‘wait’) out of nine surveys. This is in line with the view that attitudes have become more crystallized (i.e., fewer ‘don’t know’ answers) (de Blok & de Vries, 2021). However, there does not seem to be a consistent trend towards support or opposition as the EU gains experience with differentiation.

To assess further whether citizens adjust their views as they gain experience with differentiation, we focus on the countries that joined the EU since 2004 (Figure 5). These countries faced significant multi-speed differentiation upon joining. Initially, the difference between ‘don’t wait’ and ‘wait’ responses in these countries was 14 percentage points on average (in favor of not waiting). The figure shows for each country, ordered by how much differentiation their respective accession treaties contained, how this balance has changed since the first survey in our data in 2007. Overall (see last panel), there has been little change. Citizens favoring waiting with integration until all countries are ready have gained about three percentage points on average.



Figure 5. Average public opinion on differentiation in post-2004 member states.

Note: The figure shows the difference between the share of ‘don’t wait’ and ‘wait’ responses – for instance, if 40 percent of citizens favor the former and 30 percent the latter, the difference would be +10. The 2007 difference is taken as the baseline. Subsequent observations can be interpreted as change since 2007. Positive values mean that the initial balance has shifted towards not waiting.

However, there is much cross-national variation. The differentiation record of different countries might help explain some of this variation. It is plausible that public opinion in Bulgaria and Romania,

which remain excluded against their will from the Euro and the Schengen area, has turned skeptical of multi-speed integration. This is not the case in Croatia, which also remains excluded from Schengen and the Euro, but has made quick progress towards Schengen accession.³ In the other countries, accession differentiation has largely expired or turned from discriminatory to, at least in part, voluntary (the Euro opt-outs of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2017). In these countries, views of differentiation have fluctuated but have, except for the Czech case, remained relatively unchanged or even become more favorable overall.

These observations for the post-2004 member states are largely in line with trends in the EU15 (Figure A4). The EU15 countries have no (founding members), dated (Northern and Southern enlargement of 1973, 1981, and 1986), or marginal (enlargement of 1995) experience with multi-speed differentiation. Accordingly, notwithstanding fluctuation, public opinion has not changed strongly and has become more positive in some cases. The exception are countries strongly affected by the Euro area crisis and conditionality programs. In Ireland, Greece, Portugal, and Spain, public views of multi-speed differentiation have shifted strongly towards waiting for all countries.

Conclusions

Do citizens agree with the differentiated integration of their country? In this paper, we analyse the relationship between national public opinion on differentiated integration and the extent of differentiation that a country has experienced. Overall, we find a systematic relationship between the country level of differentiation and individual support for differentiated integration. Yet, support depends on the mode of differentiated integration. Whereas citizens of high-differentiation countries are more supportive of multi-tier differentiation than those of more uniformly integrated countries, they are more opposed to multi-speed differentiation. Higher national experience of differentiated integration goes together with more pronounced opinions.

These findings largely hold irrespective of whether high differentiation results from durable treaty opt-outs or temporary exceptions negotiated in accession treaties. We assume that citizens of opt-out countries support multi-tier differentiation because it corresponds to the will of a national majority and safeguards exemptions for as long as this will persists. By contrast, multi-speed integration implies an unpopular obligation to join the more integrated countries at some point. We further assume that citizens of high-differentiation accession countries oppose multi-speed differentiation because discriminatory treatment, even though short-lived in many cases, was imposed on them in the accession process. That longer-lasting discrimination appears to increase opposition against multi-tier differentiation over time fits the picture. By contrast, multi-tier integration appears as a reflection of national choice that was in short supply in the accession process, in which the bargaining power of the old member states was paramount (Schneider, 2007).

Our findings should not be read as implying that multi-tier differentiation enjoys generally higher support than multi-speed differentiation. It rather matters whether differentiation is voluntary or involuntary. We expect counterfactually that the experience of multi-tier differentiation resulting from a permanent discrimination of ‘second-class’ members would be as much opposed as the experience of voluntary multi-speed differentiation, allowing one’s home country more time to adapt, would be supported.

³ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/croatia-can-join-border-free-schengen-area-eu-governments-say/> (accessed 23 January 2022).

Even though our analysis has focused on high-differentiation countries, it has implications for low-differentiation or uniformly integrated member states, too. Respondents in these countries are less in favour of multi-tier differentiation and more in favour of multi-speed differentiation than respondents in high-differentiation countries. This suggests congruence with and support for their countries' high and uniform level of supranational integration. Whereas they have no desire for permanent opt-outs, and may also reject that some member states enjoy this 'privilege', they are comfortable with not having to wait with further integration until unwilling or unable member states change their mind or catch up.

Our study thus suggests that voluntary differentiated integration enjoys public support and democratic legitimacy and may enhance support for membership in the EU. In a 'demoi-cratic perspective' (Bellamy & Kröger, 2017; Nicolaïdis, 2013), the EU is a community of communities, a union of statespeoples (demoi) who retain ultimate sovereignty about constitutional questions of integration. It is therefore up to the member state demoi to consent to the degree and uniformity of their European integration. The congruence between national public support for voluntary differentiation and the actual national depth of European integration is therefore an important indication of the 'demoi-cratic' legitimacy of differentiated integration. By contrast, and again from a normative as well as empirical point of view, differentiated integration loses its democratic legitimacy if it is an expression of supranational 'domination' (Eriksen, 2019; Lord, 2021).

Appendix

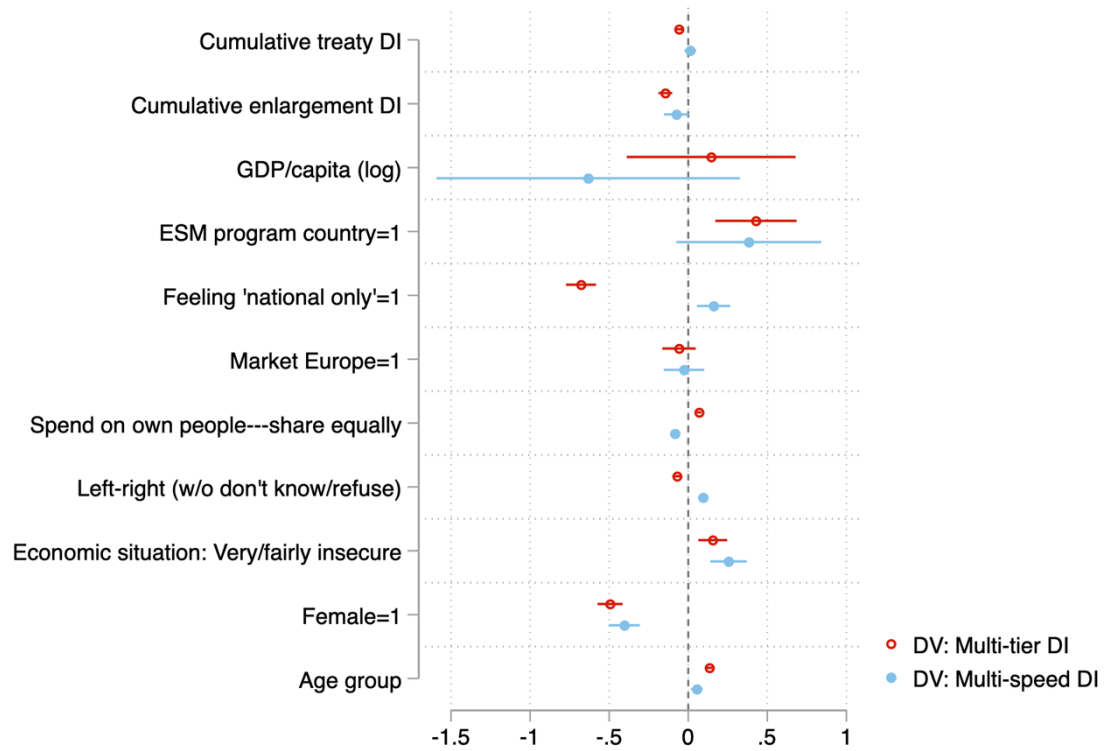


Figure A1. Results with opposition to multi-tier and multi-speed DI as dependent variable.

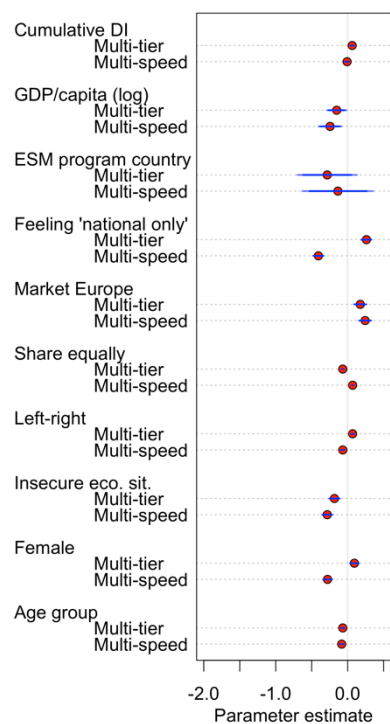


Figure A2. Bayesian analysis: Cumulative differentiation experience and differentiation.

Note: This figure shows results of a fully Bayesian analysis of the models shown in Figure 1. The models were estimated based on MCMC simulations using Stan. The GDP/capita variable was standardized for this analysis. Hence, the point estimate differs in magnitude from the results in the main text.

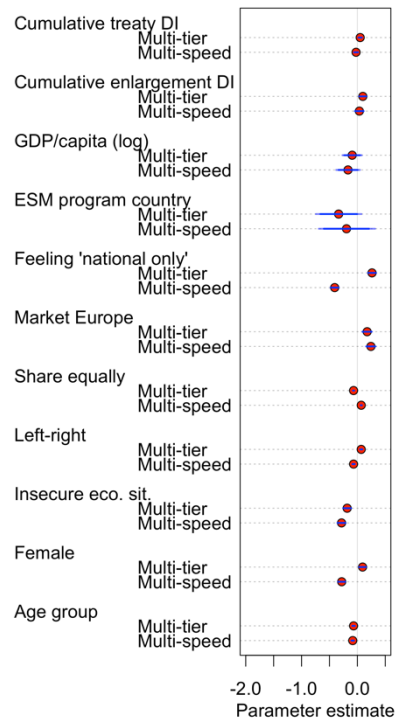


Figure A3. Bayesian analysis: Distinguishing treaty and enlargement differentiation.

Note: This figure shows results of a fully Bayesian analysis of the models shown in Figure 2. . The models were estimated based on MCMC simulations using Stan. The GDP/capita variable was standardized for this analysis. Hence, the point estimate differs in magnitude from the results in the main text.

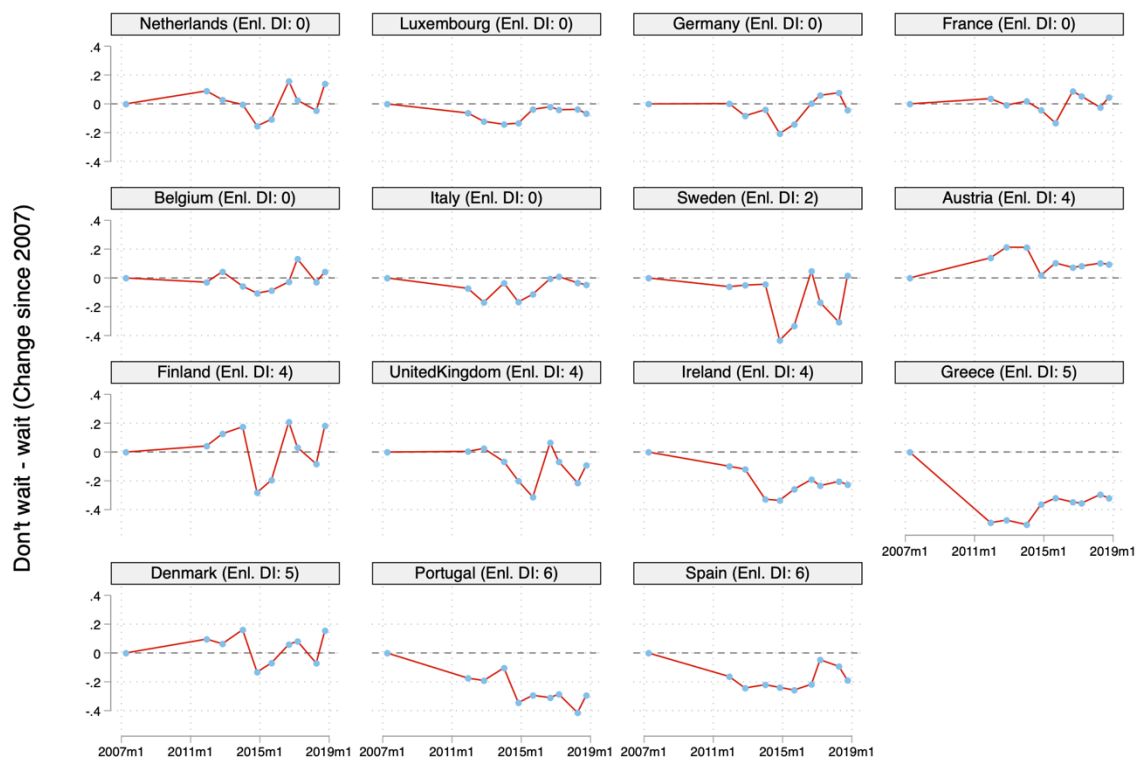


Figure A4. Average public opinion on differentiation in EU15 member states.

Note: The figure shows the difference between the share of 'don't wait' and 'wait' responses – for instance, if 40 percent of citizens favor the former and 30 percent the latter, the difference would be +10. The 2007 difference is taken as the baseline. Subsequent observations can be interpreted as change since 2007. Positive values mean that the initial balance has shifted towards not waiting.

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