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Abstract

Research on the extent and causes of differentiated integration in the European Union has burgeoned in recent years. However, we still know little about citizens' attitudes towards the phenomenon. In this article, we argue that both country- and individual-level factors should affect support for differentiated integration. Specifically, building on the difference between exemptive and discriminatory differentiation, we expect citizens of Southern member states to stronger oppose and those of Northern and Eastern member states to support the concept of a 'multi-speed Europe'. On the individual level, we expect general attitudes towards politics and society to matter. Survey data largely corroborates our expectations: Support for differentiated integration is indeed much lower in Southern Europe. On the individual level, we find that supporters are highly educated and marked by liberal-conservative attitudes. In contrast to general EU support, we do not find robust correlations with socio-demographic variables.

Keywords

Differentiated Integration | Multi-Speed Europe | Public Opinion

Introduction¹

A political and legal reality at least since the 1990s, differentiated integration (DI) has moved centre stage in the current debate on the future of European integration. For instance, the European Commission's (2017) 'White Paper on the Future of Europe' depicts differentiated integration as one possible option of moving forward. Likewise, in its response to the Commission's White Paper, the European Parliament attempts to 'operationalize differentiated integration [...] within the EU's institutional framework in the best interests of the Union and its citizens' (European Parliament, 2019, emphasis added). But what are those 'best interests'? And who are the supporters of differentiated integration? There is growing research on the causes and, at least partially, on the consequences of DI, both at the levels of primary and secondary law DI (Duttle et al., 2017; Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012; Leuffen, Rittberger, & Schimmelfennig, 2013). However, our knowledge of public opinion on DI remains very limited. This shortcoming is troubling given the EU's democratic aspirations: if more differentiation is a likely scenario for the future development of the EU, public support seems critically important to assure legitimacy. Against this backdrop, this article is an attempt to develop and empirically test a theory of public preferences for DI.²

We argue that support for DI, or opposition to it, should vary across countries and individual citizens. We theorise that citizens' attitudes towards DI should be influenced by their national, but also macro-regional environment, given varying expectations about DI's effects for the different regions constituting the EU. In particular, we expect citizens living in states that are likely to profit from DI to support it; be that because a country profits from exemptive differentiation (Schimmelfennig, 2014) protecting it against perceived dangers of far-ranging integration, or because it profits from the integration enabled by DI. Those that seek protection from integration value the liberal safeguarding of national autonomy (cf. Winzen, 2016). The second pro-DI supporters have an integration-friendly bias. In contrast, countries expecting negative consequences of DI should oppose it. In particular, countries fearing discriminatory forms of differentiation may fear losses imposed by DI and may interpret it as a loss of European solidarity.

We expect that these logics should translate into variegated regional patterns: citizens in the Northern member states are more likely to support DI as compared to the citizens

¹ We presented a previous version of this article at the International Studies Seminar Series, Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Konstanz. We thank all the participants and, in particular, Katharina Holzinger, Gerald Schneider, Christina Zuber, Max Heermann, Gijs Jan Brandsma, Anke Hoeffler, Daniela Kroll, Thomas Malang, Sophia Timmermann and Michael Herrmann for their very helpful comments. Additional very helpful comments were provided by John Erik Fossum and Frank Schimmelfennig. Fabian Tigges provided support in formatting the tables. Work on this article was generously supported by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No 822419 (EU3D).

² We acknowledge that there are important semantic differences between DI and differentiation (cf. Fossum, 2015); our work focuses on the former and narrower concept of DI.

of Southern member states. The latter have traditionally been at the receiving side of EU redistributive politics; a situation intensified in recent years by the Eurozone crisis (cf. Kriesi, 2018). Eastern member states should face cross-pressures between the liberal idea of state autonomy and solidarity concerns, making our predictions for this region less straightforward.

At the individual level, we expect citizens' attitudes on DI to be shaped by such national concerns. In the South, in particular, sociotropic concerns (i.e. concerns about their fellow citizens' economic situation) should affect citizens' assessments of DI. However, citizens' sociodemographic situation and their personal value schemes should also matter. In particular, to some extent mirroring the freedom of choice or autonomy versus solidarity division at the state level, we expect more economically liberal-minded citizens to stronger support DI and equality-oriented citizens to disapprove of it.

In short, we expect 'utilitarian' sociotropic considerations as well as 'identity' factors related to personal value schemes to impact on support for DI (cf. Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). We do not expect support for DI to mirror general support for the EU. The impact of DI on the EU and its member states remains far from obvious, and expectations about its consequences should vary from one citizen to another, as highlighted above.

We test these arguments using cross-national survey data from the Eurobarometer, which taps into support for the idea of a 'two-speed Europe'. At the macro level, we indeed uncover a striking regional gap between Northern and Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and Southern Europe, on the other hand. Citizens in the latter region are as much as 30 per cent less likely to support DI – a finding that holds even if we adjust for an extensive battery of individual-level covariates. In contrast, we find no such gaps using other macro variables. Moreover, this pattern does not resonate with what we know – and find – about general EU membership support. We take this as an indication that DI is indeed perceived as potentially divisive in the countries of the South that have been struck worst by the economic crisis.

At the micro-level, we show that economic variables like class and occurrence of financial problems do not robustly correlate with support for DI. Instead, the prototypical supporter of DI is a general EU supporter, highly educated, and marked by clear liberal-conservative preferences. We find no relationship at all with variables measuring a green-alternative versus traditionalist cleavage (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). This suggests that, on average, DI is perceived independent of egotropic considerations, and is rather connected to values concerning economic liberalism, freedom of choice, and the like. However, the relationship between central variables of interest and support for DI is quite stable across regions. This somewhat qualifies the importance of contextual factors.

Based on our evidence on regional differences and individual-level correlations, we find that identity-based accounts that pay attention to the national context hold promise for understanding DI preferences. In terms of policy relevance, we argue that if future EU reforms are directed towards differentiated integration, it will be essential to consider

the regionally disparate economic impact of such choices or policies, or at least the perceptions thereof, and to pay closer attention to the support for citizens left of the centre.

To our knowledge, our paper presents the first empirical analysis of preferences on DI, and we hope that our theoretical and empirical analyses serve as an inspiration for future studies. More generally, we add to a growing strand of literature on preferences for the EU that goes beyond broadly construed notions of support. Specifically, we complement Hobolt's (2014) analysis of attitudes towards further integration (deepening) and enlargement (widening), McLaren's (2007) study of opposition to Turkey's membership to the EU, Malang's (2017) analysis of desired speeds of integration or Banducci et al.'s (2009) analysis of support for the Euro.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. We start by briefly reviewing the literature on differentiated European integration before we develop several hypotheses on who supports DI, based on both the DI as well as the general EU public opinion literature. After conducting the empirical analysis, we end by summarising our findings and by linking them up with the debate on the future of European integration.

Differentiated integration and differentiated attitudes

Whereas earlier studies assumed that public opinion on EU integration was a negligible factor to political elites (Haas, 1964), newer studies have pointed to the contrary (Carrubba, 2001; Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Most visibly, multiple referenda on the future of the EU in several member states have underlined that public opinion is increasingly important in shaping the Union (Down & Wilson, 2013; Hobolt, 2009). Practical relevance has sparked theoretical interest, and the literature on public opinion on the EU is burgeoning (Anderson & Hecht, 2018; Hobolt & de Vries, 2016).

However, we still know very little about support for differentiated integration. This is surprising given the topic's growing importance, both in academic and public discourse. Largely a taboo – with few exceptions (Dahrendorf, 1979) – up until the 1990s, differentiated integration has become an important part of EU's primary law. For instance, Leuffen et al. (2013) show that almost half of all integrated policy areas contain some form of differentiation in primary law. Moreover, Duttler et al. (2017) underline that differentiated integration has been a part of secondary law since the beginnings of the European Communities. The academic focus, primarily driven by legal perspectives, at first, was on concepts of DI (Stubb, 1996; Tuytschaever, 1999). Over time, with a growing social scientific interest in the topic, the analysis of DI turned more explicitly towards explanatory approaches. Today, our knowledge on states' positioning towards differentiated integration is solid (Duttler, 2016; Leruth et al., 2019; Leuffen et al., 2013) and the reasons for supporting DI (e.g. Scharpf, 2006, p. 860) and for opposing it (e.g. Adler-Nissen, 2014, pp. 25-31; Martinsen & Wessel, 2014) are quite well known on the level of states. However, we still hardly know anything about individual-level attitudes towards DI. At most, public opinion plays a role in theoretical

accounts when explaining the opt-out of single countries, e.g., UK and Denmark opting out from the European Monetary Union (Holzinger & Tosun, 2019, p. 645). This lack of knowledge about citizens' evaluations of DI – extending beyond theoretical accounts on the EU's democratic credentials – is troubling, not least, because the future of European integration hinges on citizens' support (cf. Boomgaarden et al., 2011, p. 242; Hobolt & de Vries, 2016, p. 414; Malang, 2017, p. 17).

At the state-level, heterogeneity, both with respect to interdependence and the politicisation of EU politics, explains patterns of differentiated integration (Schimmelfennig et al., 2015; Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2019). However, one cannot directly infer citizens' support or disapproval of DI from their states' choices to participate or not in specific policy regimes. Most observers agree that differentiated integration offers a way for avoiding heterogeneity-induced gridlocks (Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012; Stubb, 1996, p. 283), but its evaluation should depend on whether national populations expect to win or lose in actual differentiation decisions.

A starting point is Schimmelfennig's (2014, p. 682) distinction of exemptive and discriminatory differentiation. We here generalise these concepts – Schimmelfennig (2014) focusses on enlargement-related differentiation – and consider exemptive differentiation to favour the state which desires an opt-out for whatever reasons (be that to please a Eurosceptic public or because of economic or other concerns). In contrast, discriminatory differentiation excludes a group of actors to profit from the good established through the enactment of a (differentiated) policy.³ An example of such discriminatory differentiation is the so-far unsuccessful attempt of Romania and Bulgaria to join the Schengen zone.⁴ Accordingly, we can expect that countries that fear discrimination should oppose differentiation. They could interpret differentiation as a breach of solidarity, negatively affecting the benefits they expect to receive of integration. In contrast, countries that want to protect their national autonomy, and therefore are likely candidates to profit from exemptive differentiation, should support differentiation. Finally, a third group of countries may consider differentiation unavoidable for moving forward with integration in an ever more heterogeneous EU. Such pro-EU countries should support DI.

In terms of regional distribution, Northern member states should, in line with the above, support DI; albeit for varying reasons: the more reluctant states such as Denmark or the United Kingdom are likely to support differentiated integration as they conceive of it as a way to protect their national autonomy and sovereignty. In contrast, pro-integration states such as Germany should support differentiated integration as they consider it a necessary evil for maintaining the EU's action capacity and its integration impetus. Both groups – the integration laggards as well as the fore-runners – should

³ Discriminatory differentiation is linked to dominance, as specified by Fossum (2019).

⁴ However, it should be noted that in particular Bulgaria in the meanwhile (especially after the so-called migration crisis) has apparently become more reluctant to join 'Schengen'.

consider differentiated integration as a way to promote their national freedoms (defined in more autonomous or integration-friendly ways).

Southern member states have been supporters of European integration in the past. They display little identity-based opposition to deeper integration, participate in all policies but have sought exemptions from costly regulation. At the same time, these states fear being discriminated against because of their weaker economies. In particular, the Eurozone crisis has unveiled their fragility, and discussions about excluding countries like Greece from the Eurozone may likely have made their citizens even more sceptical of DI. Consequently, they might suspect DI to affect European solidarity negatively and to discriminate against countries in need.⁵ Sociotropic considerations could thus lead citizens in Southern member states to oppose DI as a function of the expected economic impact on their nation. Recent research by Hobolt and Wratil (2015) and Gomez (2015) suggests that economic considerations have become increasingly important since the Eurozone crisis, and we argue that DI may be perceived as an issue of economic governance among citizens in nations that were hit hardest by the crisis. Accordingly, citizens in Southern Europe could fear more prosperous and more nationalist member states to form a closed club and gradually abandon solidarity and support for poorer member states. We thus expect citizens in the Southern member states to take a more critical stance towards DI as compared to those in Northern member states, especially so given that our data was collected after the outbreak of the Eurozone crisis.⁶

Our predictions are less clear-cut for the countries that joined the EU during Eastern enlargement. On the one hand, citizens in such states may fear discrimination. As the above example of Bulgaria and Romania and the Schengen zone highlights, discriminatory differentiation has been a reality for these states. However, Schimmelfennig (2014) shows that in terms of the number of differentiation measures, these states received at least as many exemptions as there were instances of discrimination. The migration crisis is only one example that highlights that there currently is still a strong demand for exemptive differentiation in Eastern European member states (cf. e.g. Braun, 2019).⁷ Given these cross-pressures, we remain agnostic about the positioning of Eastern European member states for differentiated integration. In sum, we expect the ordering

⁵ Research has, indeed, highlighted that the Eurozone crisis had a substantive impact on citizens' evaluations of the EU as well as of member state institutions (cf. e.g. Gomez 2015; and Foster and Frieden 2017).

⁶ It is interesting to note that the EP in its resolution on DI makes a similar argument on the danger of 'first- and second-class Member states', with 'political perceptions of differentiated integration varying significantly depending on the national context' (European Parliament 2019). However, it hypothesizes that this is due to the length of a country's membership in the EU instead of the impact of the Euro crisis. Specifically, citizens in older member states – e.g., the 'EU12' – are predicted to show higher support for DI, while those in states that joined more recently are predicted to have lower support. Our data allows testing these competing predictions; as we will show, however, there is little evidence in favour of the EP's expectations.

⁷ More generally on the refugee crisis' impact on public opinion, cf. Hartevelde et al. (2018)

of preferences on DI to be the following: Northern member states should be the strongest supporters. We expect the Southern member states to be the most critical, and Eastern Europeans to be somewhere between North and South.

When moving to the individual level, we must account for a number of factors. Research on support for European integration, more generally, underlines that including socio-demographic attributes is indispensable. For example, education is linked to general EU support, and it may also affect support for DI, given that DI is a quite complex concept and may raise concerns from those who are unsure about its workings. We do not consider age to matter when it comes to explaining support for DI. However, a person's occupation may well have an impact given that higher white-collar workers or self-employed persons may sympathise with the 'economic liberal' elements of DI. This is because DI does not force states to participate but also does not prevent other states from following what seems to be in their interests. Individuals suffering from financial problems, in contrast, may instead consider DI as a breach of solidarity. In sum, one's personal socio-economic situation may affect a person's support for DI.

Related to this, we also expect persons' general attitudes towards politics and society to affect their evaluation of DI. Differentiated integration opens up the possibility to enhance (or at least preserve) national autonomy, which potentially undermines European solidarity. Therefore, a person with strong preferences for social equality should be sceptical vis-à-vis DI. In contrast, respondents supporting freedom of choice, free trade, and a market economy should support DI. Liberal economic attitudes are likely to resonate with persons' self-placements on a left-right scale. We expect centre right citizens to be in favour of DI.

Finally, we control for general EU support. In principle, EU support might not correlate with support for DI because it is unclear from the outset whether DI fosters integration or not. If citizens see DI as a hindrance to integration, EU-sceptics could support it. However, the same citizen could criticise DI if he or she considers DI to promote integration. This logic similarly applies to supporters of EU integration. Therefore, the link of EU support and support for DI is far from straight-forward and should probably vary strongly across contexts.

In general, the interaction of such dispositions with national contexts can be complex. First of all, in dire economic circumstances, utilitarian considerations can become more relevant, making identity considerations or liberal dispositions less relevant (Hobolt & Wrátil, 2015). Second, the relationship between general EU support and support for DI may depend on national context factors. In the South, EU supporters might be critical of DI, as it not only undermines European solidarity but the European project more generally. Fortunately, our data allow us to test these predictions. Specifically, we expect that the relationship between variables measuring identity considerations, such as general EU support and left-right orientation, and DI support to vary across regions. Similarly, the relationship with egotropic utilitarian considerations should vary.

Our theory is broadly in line with the argument put forward by Hobolt (2014), who investigates attitudes towards deepening integration or enlarging the Union. Specifically, she suggests that relationships between independent variables and support depend on the national economic context. Our theory also relates to the call by Hobolt and de Vries (2016) to go beyond examining individual general support for European integration, and towards more specific opinions on EU reform. In this regard, it is crucial to assess whether the independent variables we focus on show similar relationships to general EU support as to DI support.

Methods and data

The following analyses are based on Eurobarometer data comprising surveys from the years 2011 to 2017. Our dependent variable uses the following item: ‘With regards to the idea of a “two speed Europe”, which of the following comes closest to your personal preference? Those ready to intensify the development of a common European policy in certain important areas [...] should do so without having to wait for the others’ (coded as support for DI), or ‘they should wait until all Member States of the EU are ready’ (coded as opposition to DI).

This item is the only survey question related to differentiated integration that has been asked over a longer time-span in multiple countries. By omitting the academic phrase ‘differentiated integration’ and alternatively utilising and explaining the more intuitive concept of a ‘two-speed Europe’, it should be relatively easy to understand for respondents. One potential ambiguity comes from using the phrase ‘being ready’, which could be interpreted either as a national ‘willingness’ or as a ‘capacity’. We also note a relatively large amount of missing data (i.e. respondents omitting a survey question), with 11 per cent over the 2011-2017 time span, compared to 2 per cent for the standard item asking whether one’s country’s membership is ‘a good thing’. We take this as an indication of respondents’ somewhat larger lack of understanding or underdeveloped preferences on DI. At the same time, this finding highlights that respondents do not just equate DI with integration. We return to the issue of adequately measuring DI preferences in the concluding section.

For our descriptive graphs, we apply post-stratification weights for country averages and population weights for the EU average, both of which are provided by Eurobarometer. In our regression analyses, we run a series of linear multi-level models. Our choice of linear models is motivated by the fact that most of our variables are discrete, so that our model is close to being saturated, and because coefficients are then straightforward to interpret. We include random country intercepts to account for correlated errors.

Empirical Analysis

We begin by visually examining fundamental trends in support for DI. Figure 1 shows the average support for DI among all EU citizens (solid line) and the share of respondents stating that their country's membership in the EU is a 'good thing' (dashed line). While general EU-support shows a relatively steady upward trend, starting from just below 50 per cent (indicated by the dotted horizontal line) in 2011 (recall that the Eurozone crisis was at its peak during that time) and reaching almost 60 per cent in 2017, support for DI oscillates stronger around 50 per cent, with a significant dip in 2015. However, we almost always find a slight majority in favour of DI at the aggregated level.

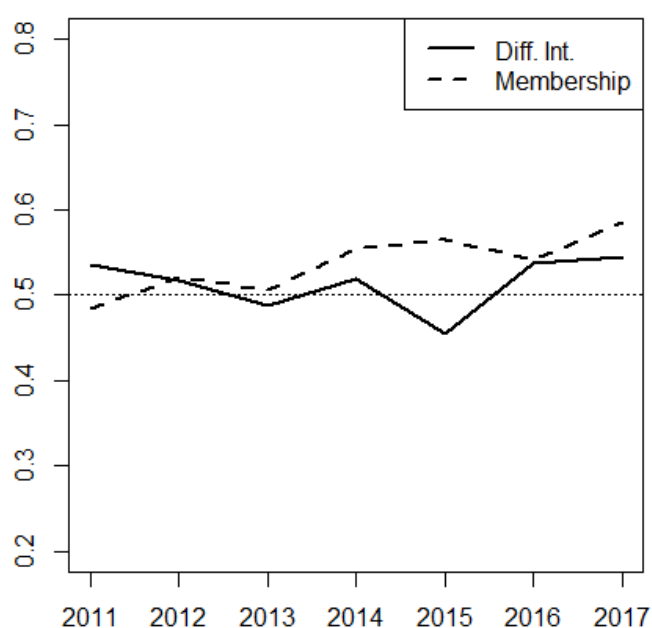


Figure 1: General support for EU membership and DI, 2011–2017 (Based on Eurobarometer data)

In order to further analyse the correlates of support for DI and to contrast them with correlates of general EU support, we now discuss results from a series of regression models. The analysis is based on Eurobarometer 86.1, fielded in September/October 2016. This is the most recent data set which not only contains an item on differentiated integration, but also special items on liberal attitudes that we can exploit.

Table 1: Support for DI across country groups and regions.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> Support for DI			
	(1) β (se)	(2) β (se)	(3) β (se)	(4) β (se)
EU12	-0.037 (0.045)			
EMU		0.015 (0.048)		
Net Contributor			0.102** (0.042)	
East				-0.038 (0.043)
South				-0.178*** (0.049)
Constant	0.580*** (0.030)	0.553*** (0.039)	0.523*** (0.026)	0.619*** (0.030)
Observations	24,647	24,647	24,647	24,647

Note: Coefficients from linear multi-level models with country random effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 1 examines the distribution of DI preferences across various country groups. The analysis strongly supports our expectation that citizens in Southern EU member states are particularly critical vis-à-vis DI (model 4).⁸ The sharpest divide at the macro-level that we find is between Northern (i.e. the reference category) and Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and Southern Europe, on the other hand. Citizens in Southern Europe are close to 18 percentage points less supportive of DI than Northern Europeans (14 percentage points compared to the East), a relative difference of almost 30 percent. As shown in the Appendix (Table A1), we find no similar gap when it comes to general EU support (where both East and South differ from the North). Also, we will show later that these regional differences in DI support are stable when we control for a wide array of individual-level covariates, while they vanish in the case of general EU support.

Moreover, our analysis shows that the data do not support the EP's claim that 'old' (EU12) members states exhibit higher support for DI than 'younger' member states (cf. European Parliament, 2019): We find no significant difference, and the point estimate is actually in the opposite direction (model 1). We also do not find significant differences between states that are part of the currency union and those that are not. We do find significant differences between EU-budget net-contributors and –receivers. The former are ten percentage points more likely to support DI. However, the net contributors are essentially Northern Europe plus Italy and France, which both have relatively high DI support compared to the other Southern member states (see Figure A2 in the Appendix). Therefore, we think that using the regional divisions is more informative, because it highlights the differences between both North and South and East and South.

In the Appendix, we graph the development of average DI support for each region, as well as for each member state over time (Figures A1 and A2). Regional differences do

⁸ Our regional coding follows Hobolt & de Vries (2016). North: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom. South: France, Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta. East: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia. Net EU budget contributors (in 2016): Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, UK.

not change much over time. Throughout, there is a considerable gap between Northern and Southern Europe, so our inference from the preceding regression analysis is robust. Regarding individual countries, there is variation in levels and trends in every region, but the division into North, East, and South still appears to be a useful summary. Specifically, Greece, Spain, and Portugal are, by far, the most DI-sceptic countries.

Having established substantively significant regional differences in DI support, we now explore the role of individual-level covariates. We differentiate between three batches of explanatory variables. The first one includes essential socio-demographic attributes. These include age, gender, education (measured as age when finished one's education), and occupational categories (manual workers, lower white collar, higher white collar, self-employed, students, retired/out of labour force, and reference category unemployed). Finally, we include reports of financial problems ('almost never/never', 'from time to time', 'most of the time') as a proxy for the individual economic situation.

Our second batch includes general attitudes towards politics and society. The first variables are self-placement along a left-right scale (left, centre, right⁹), preferences for social equality, and preferences for free trade and a market economy.¹⁰ We use these items to test our hypothesis that DI support is positively related to liberal attitudes.

Our final set of variables is directly related to the European Union and includes whether a respondent feels that his or her country's membership in the EU is a 'good thing', whether she or he feels well-informed about the European Parliament's activities, and whether she or he feels that her voice is acknowledged in the EU. These items measure a general European identity and can be used to test our hypothesis that such an identity is positively related to DI support.

Throughout, we first examine the unconditional association of these batches of variables with DI support and then combine them to see whether correlations are stable across models. In our final model, we also add the region variable that we have found to correlate strongly with DI preference.

In Table 2, we find relatively weak relationships of DI support with socio-demographic variables. For example, manual workers and lower white collars do not have significantly different opinions (with unemployed being the reference category), nor does the occurrence of financial problems correlate robustly with DI support. However, as expected, white-collar workers show higher support (close to four percentage points). Also, retired citizens, as well as students, show lower support. The lacking support by student underlines that we cannot directly infer support for DI from general support for integration. Education is strongly and positively associated with support for DI; we

⁹ We simplified the 1 to 10 scale so that approximately 50 percent of respondents are at the centre, and 25 percent belong to the left or right, respectively.

¹⁰ Our classification is based on the following item: 'From the following items, which two should our society emphasise in order to face major global challenges?' where we code mentions 'Social Equality and Solidarity' as well as 'Free trade/market economy' as dummy variables.

cannot say for sure whether this is due to a better understanding of DI or related to more liberal or post-material values associated with higher education; we will later look deeper into the role of green/alternative versus nationalist values. Finally, we find no robust gender or age effects.

For attitudinal variables, we find much stronger relationships. Consistent with our argument, supporters of DI are proponents of free markets and trade and value social equality less. Consistent with this, the political right has much higher support than the left or the centre (about five percentage points). Against our initial expectations, variables related to the EU are strongly positively associated with support for DI, regardless of adjustment variables.

Finally, even when one adjusts for a multitude of individual-level covariates, we find the large gap between Northern/Eastern Europe and Southern Europe virtually unchanged. According to model 6, individuals in Southern Europe are about 15 percentage points less likely to support DI, compared to Northern Europeans.

We argue that attitudes towards DI might be different from general attitudes towards the EU. Therefore, we compare our results to regressions with a different outcome variable, preferences for one's country's membership in the EU.¹¹ Table 3 shows results where we code assessments of a country's EU membership as a 'good thing' as 1 (and 0 otherwise).

As is the case for support for DI, we find strong positive correlations with education levels, self-assessment as right-wing, and the two other EU-variables. However, significant differences emerge. First, while correlations of support for DI with occupational categories are often insignificant, and retired citizens, as well as students, oppose it, we here see a clear picture where white-collar workers and students support EU membership while manual workers oppose it. We also find a consistent and robust relationship with self-reported occurrence of financial problems: The less often these occur, the higher the support for the EU in general. Additionally, we find that both supporters of social equality and of free markets support the EU. Finally, we do not find the regional gap we uncovered for DI preferences at all – the region dummies are both substantively and statistically insignificant.

In sum, this suggests that general support for the EU more strongly aligns with standard socio-demographic variables than support for DI, especially in terms of effect sizes. Specifically, we found that white- and blue-collar workers have similar preferences for DI, and that it is unrelated to individuals' financial standing. Instead, differences in support for DI seem to stem more from differing preferences on the social-equality/free-market conflict line.

¹¹ Hobolt (2014) and Malang (2017) follow a similar approach by directly comparing the same regression model with different attitudinal outcomes.

Table 2: Support for DI; own calculations based on Eurobarometer data (2016)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> Support for DI					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	β	β	β	β	β	β
	(se)	(se)	(se)	(se)	(se)	(se)
Socio-Demographics						
Self-employed	0.010 (0.017)		0.010 (0.019)		0.013 (0.019)	0.013 (0.019)
Higher White Collar	0.039** (0.016)		0.036** (0.017)		0.033* (0.017)	0.033* (0.017)
Lower White Collar	0.014 (0.015)		0.009 (0.017)		0.010 (0.017)	0.011 (0.017)
Manual workers	-0.021 (0.014)		-0.022 (0.016)		-0.018 (0.016)	-0.018 (0.016)
Retired/Out of Labour Force	-0.041*** (0.015)		-0.041** (0.017)		-0.038** (0.017)	-0.038** (0.017)
Students	-0.063*** (0.019)		-0.057*** (0.021)		-0.062*** (0.021)	-0.062*** (0.021)
Education	0.032*** (0.005)		0.033*** (0.005)		0.027*** (0.006)	0.027*** (0.006)
Age	0.0005* (0.0003)		0.0004 (0.0003)		0.0003 (0.0003)	0.0003 (0.0003)
Female	0.004 (0.006)		0.010 (0.007)		0.012* (0.007)	0.011* (0.007)
Financial Problems:						
From time to time	0.014 (0.012)		0.015 (0.014)		0.007 (0.014)	0.007 (0.014)
Financial Problems:						
Almost never/never	0.023* (0.012)		0.022* (0.013)		0.010 (0.014)	0.009 (0.014)
Politics and Society						
Support for Equality		-0.022*** (0.007)	-0.021*** (0.007)		-0.020*** (0.007)	-0.020*** (0.007)
Support for Free Trade		0.018** (0.008)	0.019** (0.008)		0.015* (0.008)	0.015* (0.008)
Political Centre		-0.00002 (0.009)	0.001 (0.009)		0.002 (0.009)	0.002 (0.009)
Political Right		0.047*** (0.010)	0.046*** (0.010)		0.046*** (0.010)	0.047*** (0.010)
EU						
Voice acknowledged in EU				0.019*** (0.007)	0.015* (0.008)	0.014* (0.008)
EU Membership a good thing				0.059*** (0.007)	0.058*** (0.007)	0.058*** (0.007)
EU Knowledge				0.023*** (0.007)	0.016** (0.007)	0.016** (0.007)
Regions						
East						-0.028 (0.042)
South						-0.146*** (0.048)
Constant	0.435*** (0.032)	0.561*** (0.024)	0.427*** (0.036)	0.512*** (0.022)	0.410*** (0.036)	0.456*** (0.048)
Observations	23,967	20,749	20,266	23,608	19,641	19,641

Note: Coefficients from linear multi-level models with country random effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3: General support for country membership in the EU; own calculation based on Eurobarometer data.

	Dependent variable: EU Membership a Good Thing					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	β	β	β	β	β	β
	(se)	(se)	(se)	(se)	(se)	(se)
Socio-Demographics						
Self-employed	0.063*** (0.016)		0.029 (0.018)		0.026 (0.018)	0.026 (0.018)
Higher White Collar	0.118*** (0.014)		0.080*** (0.016)		0.068*** (0.016)	0.068*** (0.016)
Lower White Collar	0.064*** (0.014)		0.030* (0.016)		0.021 (0.016)	0.021 (0.016)
Manual workers	-0.001 (0.013)		-0.028* (0.015)		-0.029* (0.015)	-0.029** (0.015)
Retired/Out of Labour Force	0.032** (0.014)		0.003 (0.016)		-0.001 (0.016)	-0.001 (0.016)
Students	0.156*** (0.017)		0.114*** (0.020)		0.093*** (0.020)	0.093*** (0.020)
Education	0.097*** (0.005)		0.093*** (0.005)		0.083*** (0.005)	0.083*** (0.005)
Age	0.001*** (0.0002)		0.001** (0.0003)		0.0003 (0.0003)	0.0003 (0.0003)
Female	-0.026*** (0.006)		-0.015** (0.006)		-0.009 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.006)
Financial Problems:						
From time to time						
Financial Problems:						
Almost never/never		0.197*** (0.012)	0.161*** (0.012)		0.126*** (0.013)	0.126*** (0.013)
Politics and Society						
Support for Equality		0.031*** (0.007)	0.030*** (0.007)		0.029*** (0.007)	0.029*** (0.007)
Support for Free Trade		0.055*** (0.007)	0.053*** (0.007)		0.049*** (0.007)	0.049*** (0.007)
Political Centre		-0.003 (0.008)	0.003 (0.008)		0.005 (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)
Political Right		0.030*** (0.010)	0.035*** (0.010)		0.026*** (0.010)	0.026*** (0.010)
EU						
Voice acknowledged in EU				0.197*** (0.007)		0.173*** (0.007)
EU Knowledge				0.108*** (0.006)		0.079*** (0.007)
Regions						
East						-0.011 (0.045)
South						-0.021 (0.052)
Constant	0.166*** (0.031)	0.375*** (0.024)	0.059* (0.034)	0.402*** (0.021)	0.010 (0.033)	0.019 (0.042)
Observations	26,869	22,211	21,898	26,147	21,247	21,247

Note: Coefficients from linear multi-level models with country random effects. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ T

Our analysis, therefore, suggests that DI is perceived as an issue of economic liberalism. Previous research, however, indicates that the cleavage between ‘green-alternative-libertarians’ (GAL) and ‘traditional-authoritarian-nationalists’ (TAN) has become critical, especially concerning preferences on European integration (Hooghe & Marks 2018). Much of the individual-level evidence for the importance of this dimension is centred on education as an independent variable, with highly-educated citizens being more supportive of environmental protection, immigration, and globalisation (cf. e.g. de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005). As we have shown, support for DI is similarly highly correlated with education. However, in contrast to the strong and consistent correlations of DI support and items measuring economic liberalism, we find absolutely no relationships with items measuring concern for the environment or immigration (see Table A2 in the Appendix), while the relationships with all other variables remain robust.¹² This lends to support to the notion that DI is about support for economic liberalism and more closely aligned with classic left-right cleavages.

As the final step, we investigate the regional divide we have uncovered. We hypothesised that to some citizens, DI might signify an attempt to dilute European solidarity and to divide poorer from more prosperous member states. Possibly, this partly explains why Southern Europeans are much more sceptical towards DI. An indirect test of this conjecture is to examine associations between general EU support (as measured by the ‘membership’ variable) and DI preferences across regions. One potential pattern is that in Southern Europe, general membership supporters are less likely to support DI, because they see it as an inappropriate pathway, while in Northern and Eastern Europe, the opposite is the case.

Figure 2 plots marginal effects based on the specification of model 6, with an additional interaction between the variable indicating that respondents state that their nation’s EU membership is ‘a good thing’ and the regional dummies. The point estimates are consistent with our conjecture: The relationship is weakest in the South, and considerably stronger in the East and North. However, the estimates are not statistically significant from each other.

¹² We use the following items: ‘Which of the following do you think are the main challenges for the EU?’ with answers ‘Environmental issues’ and ‘Migration issues’ coded as dummies, as well as ‘From the following items, which two should our society emphasise in order to face major global challenges?’, with ‘Protecting the environment’ coded as a dummy.

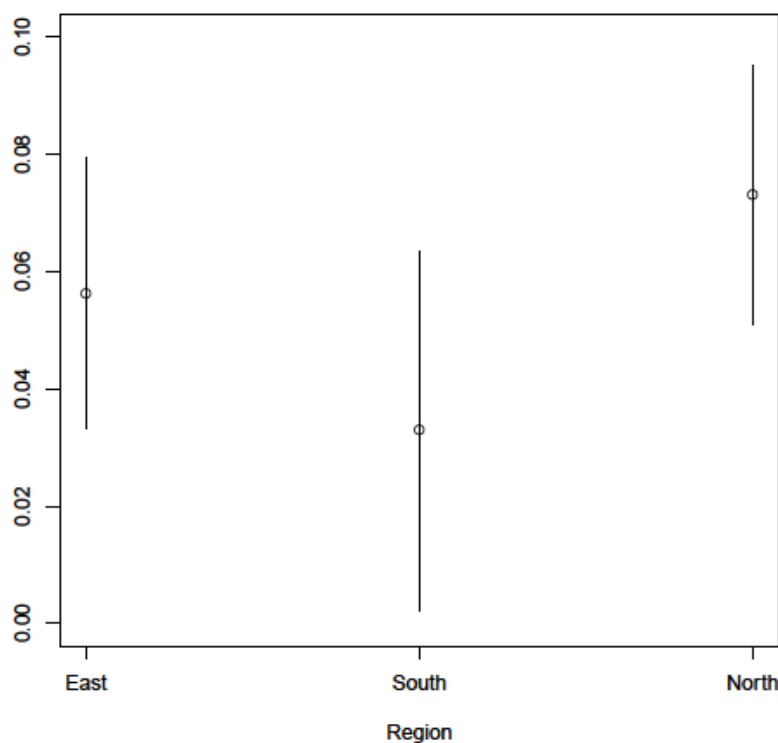


Figure 2: Relationship between EU Membership and DI Support across regions.

We more generally hypothesised that utilitarian considerations and political attitudes might play differing roles, depending on contextual factors. Therefore, we estimate a similar interaction with left-right orientation. Figure 3 shows that a left-right divide only occurs in Southern and Northern Europe, but again the estimates are not statistically significant from each other. Finally, in the Appendix, we show that the relationship between financial problems and DI support is zero in every region (Figure A3). This, together with our earlier results, suggests that sociotropic (regional) factors play a huge role, but egotropic considerations do not.

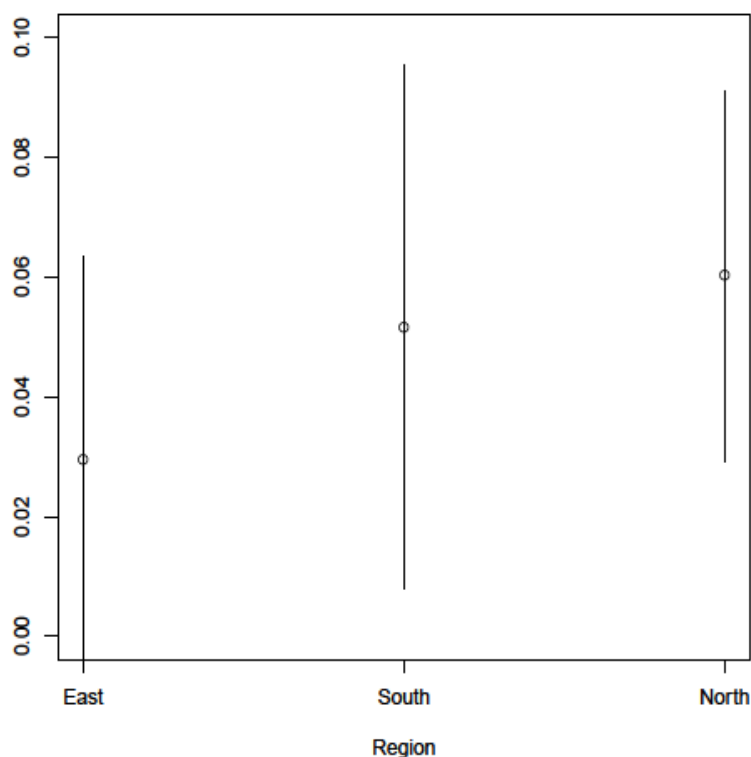


Figure 3: Relationship between Political Left versus Right and DI Support across regions.

Conclusion

Differentiated Integration in the European Union is an empirical reality. However, prior research has not investigated public attitudes toward this phenomenon. In this article, we empirically investigated support for DI. We relied on an item in the Eurobarometer that measures support for a ‘two-speed Europe’. An advantage of this item is that it is relatively short and easy to understand, as it avoids the rather technical or academic term ‘differentiated integration’. Nonetheless, future research should invest more resources into measuring actual knowledge of DI – ideally including policy-specific variation to capture differences between DI concerning regulatory policies or core state powers. Also, eliciting possibly multi-dimensional preferences on, for example, exemptive versus discriminatory DI (Schimmelfennig 2014), seems to be relevant. Such nuanced measurement might also contribute to a better understanding of regional differences in terms of perceptions and evaluations of DI. We revealed significant regional differences, and investigating such contextual factors was more generally recommended by Hobolt and de Vries (2016, p. 414) as an important way forward of studying support for or opposition to European integration. Also, future research should pay closer attention to the wordings of items and the framing of DI, given that frames are likely to impact on respondent’s assessments of integration scenarios, a finding that holds in particular for less informed citizens (cf. Schuck & de Vreese, 2006).

Regarding the sources of DI support, we theorised that national factors should play a significant role and that sociotropic factors should dilute support for DI in countries in the European South. On the individual level, we hypothesised that liberal attitudes and identity factors should matter, with individual-level economic factors being less important.

Regarding our empirical results at the macro level, we find a slight pan-European majority in favour of DI. However, most traditional variables (membership in the EU12 or the EMU) do not correlate with support for DI. Instead, we find a sharp divide between Eastern and Northern Europe, on the one hand, and Southern Europe, on the other hand - the latter being much more sceptical. We take this as support for our hypothesis that DI is a politicised issue whose meaning differs across national contexts: In Southern Europe, it may be understood as an attempt to dilute European solidarity.

At the individual level, we find strong and stable correlations of support for DI with general EU support, preferences for free markets, and conservative political attitudes. We contrast this with the correlates of general EU membership support, which more closely align with classic socio-demographic variables like class and income, and where no residual regional gap exists. We conclude that the typical DI supporter is politically liberal with a right-wing bent and that egotropic economic considerations play less of a role. However, we find that these correlations do not vary much across regions. While the correlation between EU membership support and DI support is somewhat stronger in the North and the East, as suspected, the relationship with left-right orientations appears in both the North and the South, and the relationship between financial problems and DI support is zero throughout. This observation qualifies the importance of contextual variables and suggests that such factors impact populations across different regions rather uniformly. Future research should, therefore, investigate how exactly national contextual variables impact on support for DI. The fact that there is a sizeable residual gap even when adjusting for a broad set of individual-level variables could imply that this works through macroeconomic circumstances and sociotropic mechanisms, or national media frames.

The strong and consistent correlations with 'liberal' values also call for further analysis. The question of further DI is about freedom of choice and solidarity not only conceptually, but also in the minds of ordinary citizens. Therefore, DI presents an opportunity to explicitly investigate individual notions of fairness regarding the EU in a concrete and relevant context. Finally, it seems politically important to consider the economic impact of DI on Southern Europe and to ask why citizens on the left are more reluctant to support it.

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Appendix

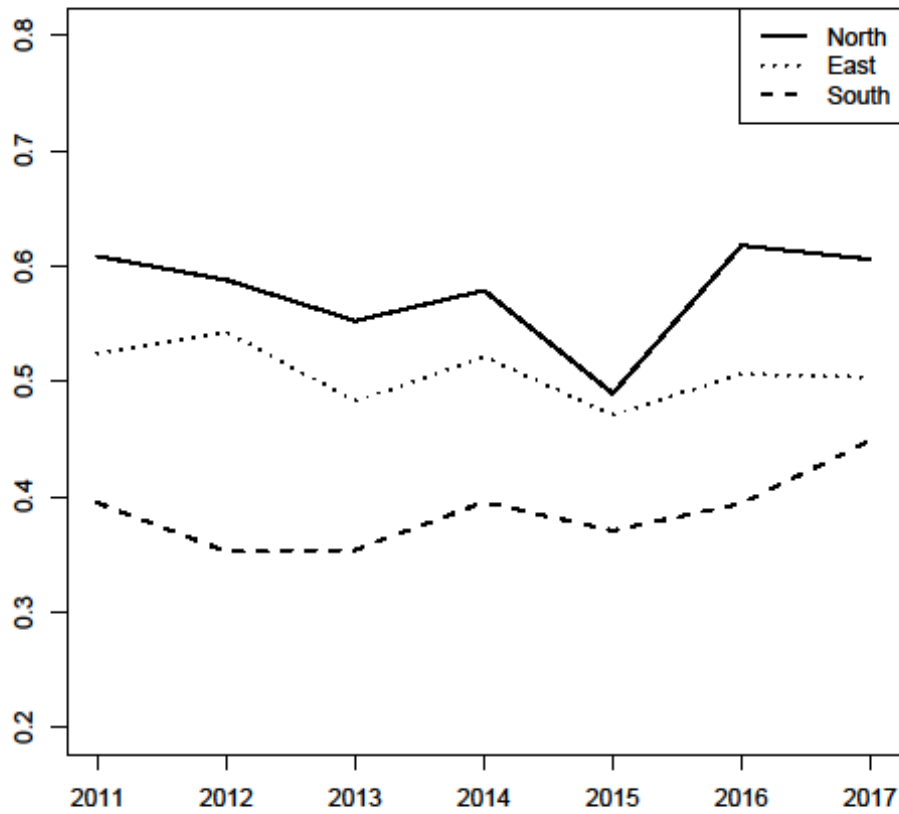


Figure A1: Development of DI Support across Regions, 2011–2017 (based on Eurobarometer data)

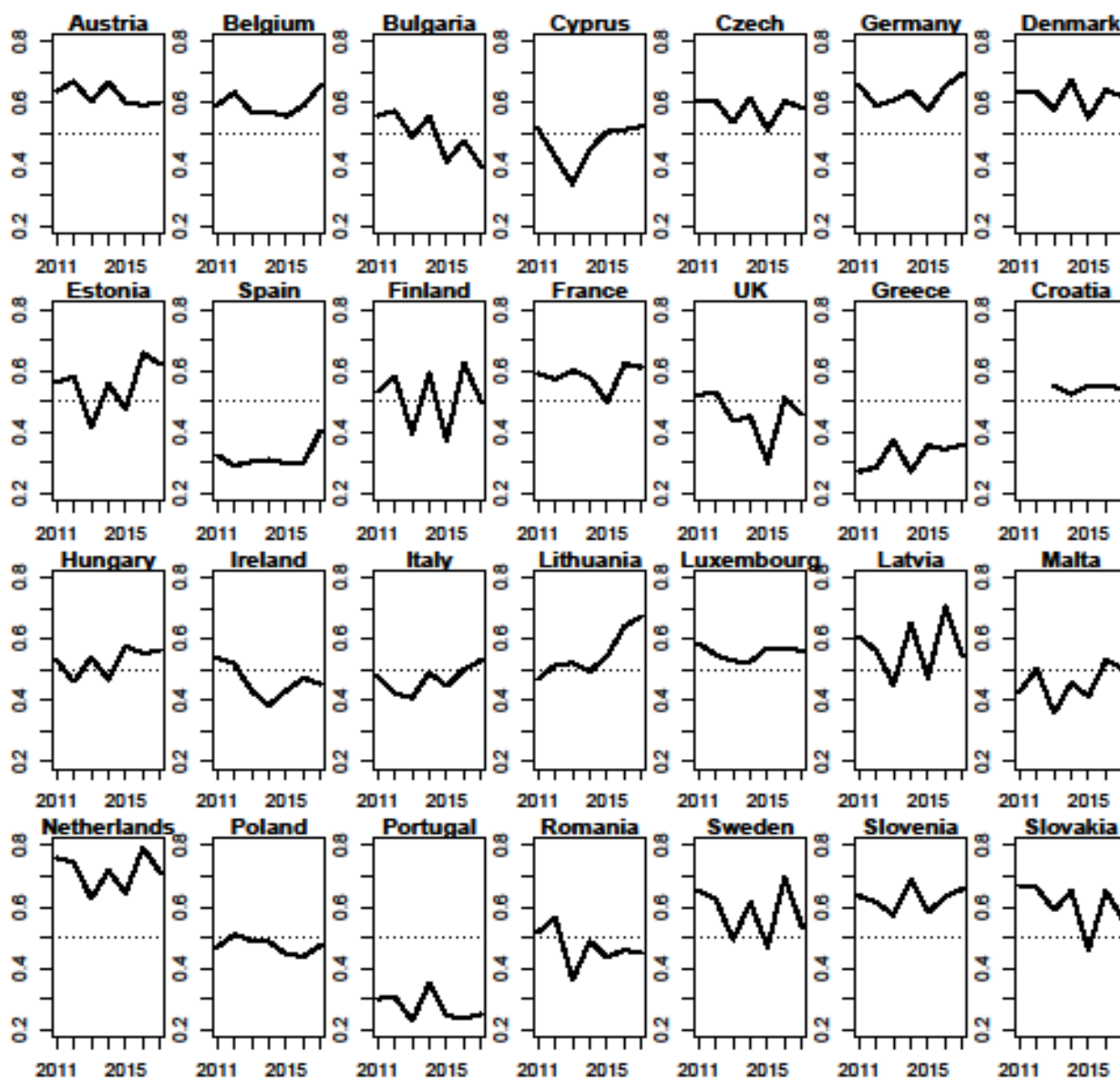


Figure A2: Development of DI Support across EU Member States, 2011–2017 (based on Eurobarometer data).

Table A1: Support for EU Membership across country groups and regions.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i> EU Membership is a Good Thing			
	(1) β (se)	(2) β (se)	(3) β (se)	(4) β (se)
EU12	0.063 (0.046)			
EMU		0.046 (0.050)		
Net Contributor			0.029 (0.048)	
East				-0.106** (0.048)
South				-0.160*** (0.054)
Constant	0.517*** (0.032)	0.516*** (0.041)	0.535*** (0.031)	0.623*** (0.033)
Observations	27,317	27,317	27,317	27,317
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

Table A2: Support for DI – Relationship with GAL-TAN.

	<i>Dependent variable: Support for DI</i>			
	β (1)	β (2)	β (3)	β (4)
GAL-TAN				
Migration is Challenge	0.009 (0.007)	0.005 (0.007)	0.006 (0.007)	0.007 (0.007)
Environmental Protection	-0.005 (0.009)	-0.005 (0.010)	0.001 (0.010)	-0.003 (0.010)
is Challenge				
Society should emphasise	0.008 (0.007)	0.010 (0.007)	0.005 (0.008)	0.002 (0.008)
Environmental Protection				
Socio-Demographics				
Self-employed		0.011 (0.017)	0.010 (0.019)	0.013 (0.019)
Higher White Collar		0.039** (0.016)	0.036** (0.017)	0.033* (0.017)
Lower White Collar		0.014 (0.015)	0.009 (0.017)	0.010 (0.017)
Manual workers		-0.021 (0.014)	-0.022 (0.016)	-0.018 (0.016)
Retired/Out of Labour Force		-0.041*** (0.015)	-0.041** (0.017)	-0.038** (0.017)
Students		-0.063*** (0.019)	-0.057*** (0.021)	-0.062*** (0.021)
Education		0.032*** (0.005)	0.033*** (0.005)	0.027*** (0.006)
Age		0.0004* (0.0003)	0.0004 (0.0003)	0.0003 (0.0003)
Female		0.004 (0.006)	0.010 (0.007)	0.012* (0.007)
Financial Problems:		0.013 (0.012)	0.015 (0.014)	0.007 (0.014)
From time to time				
Financial Problems:		0.022* (0.012)	0.021 (0.013)	0.008 (0.014)
Almost never/never				
Politics and Society				
Support for Equality			-0.020*** (0.007)	-0.020*** (0.007)
Support for Free Trade			0.020** (0.008)	0.015* (0.008)
Political Centre			0.002 (0.009)	0.002 (0.009)
Political Right			0.046*** (0.010)	0.046*** (0.010)
EU				
Voice acknowledged in EU			0.015* (0.008)	0.015* (0.008)
EU Membership is a good thing			0.058*** (0.007)	0.058*** (0.007)
EU Knowledge			0.016** (0.007)	0.016** (0.007)
Regions				
East			-0.028 (0.042)	-0.028 (0.042)
South			-0.146*** (0.048)	-0.146*** (0.048)
Constant	0.558*** (0.022)	0.431*** (0.033)	0.423*** (0.036)	0.454*** (0.042)
Observations	24,647	23,967	20,266	19,641

Note: Coefficients from linear multi-level models with country random effects. Standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

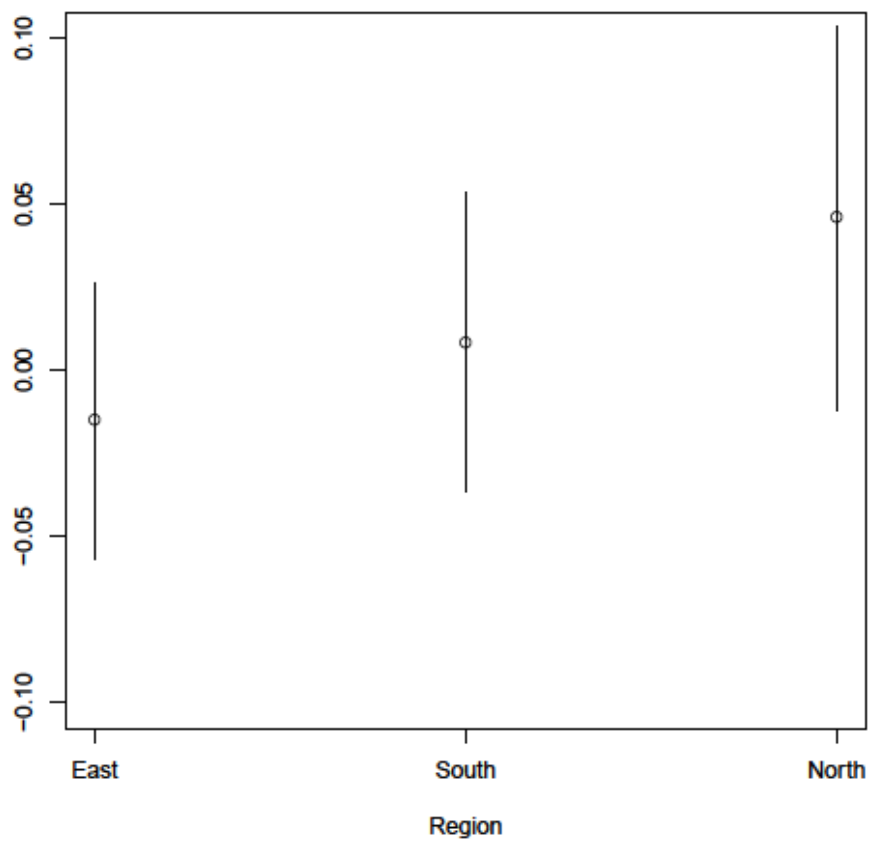


Figure A3: Relationship between Occurrence of Financial Problems and DI Support across regions.

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