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# National Differentiation Experience and Citizen Support for Differentiated Integration

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## Abstract

This article examines the determinants of public opinion on differentiated integration (DI) in the European Union (EU). Specifically, it tests whether citizen attitudes are informed by the national experience of opt-outs and exclusions from full participation in EU policies. The study generally finds that support for DI strongly depends on the mode of DI. Even though ‘multi-speed DI’ is only temporary, it is evaluated more critically than durable treaty opt-outs establishing ‘multi-tier DI’. We suggest that citizens from opt-out countries oppose multi-speed DI 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.

**Keywords:** differentiated European integration; multi-speed integration; multi-tier integration; public opinion

## Introduction

Differentiated integration (DI) 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. Early work on DI was mainly conceptual and prescriptive, seeking to distinguish modes of differentiation and advocate DI as a strategy to promote further or better European integration (see Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012 for an overview and Stubb 1996 for an influential categorization). More recently, research has engaged in large-scale data collection, empirical mapping and explanation of patterns and trends in DI (Duttie et al. 2017; Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2020). At the same time, the literature has probed further into the normative foundations of fair, just and democratic DI (Bellamy and Kröger 2021; Eriksen 2019; Lord 2015; Lord 2021). Yet most analyses, both normative and empirical, remain at the EU or country level.

By contrast, systematic research about the public opinion on DI has only started recently. Whereas earlier research has leveraged public opinion data, especially on collective identity and Euroscepticism, these data tap into general attitudes towards the EU and integration rather than specific opinions about DI (Hobolt and de Vries 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2005). To some extent, this is because comparative public opinion data on DI are still scarce. The Eurobarometer has only started to collect data on DI in the mid-2000s and has done so with large gaps and changes of wording in the time-series. Moreover, asking people about DI is not straightforward. ‘Differentiated integration’ is an academic concept that most people are unlikely to have heard of or thought about.

For three major reasons, this is a problematic research gap. First, given that DI has become a constitutive feature of the EU polity, it is important to learn how citizens assess its differentiated nature, above and beyond their general attitudes towards European integration. Second, the increased mobilization and polarization of public opinion on the EU, and its constraining influence on EU-level decisions (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Schneider 2018), affects DI, too. DI resulting from negative referendums – as in the Danish Maastricht opt-outs or the Swedish vote against the adoption of the euro – constitutes the most visible effect, but permissive and constraining public opinion is likely to have a general, and largely unexplored, impact on intergovernmental negotiations about opt-outs, exemptions and exclusions. Finally, the study of public opinion on DI can complement normative analysis. Whereas normative legitimacy is independent in principle from empirical support, it is interesting to see whether citizens' perceptions of DI correspond to the justifications and fairness criteria discussed in the normative literature.

Published research seeking to fill this gap is still rare and recent. Leuffen et al. (2022) 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 DI, whereas supporters of the economic left tend to be opposed. DI 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 DI. Two further studies find that support for DI is largely shaped by general ideological predispositions towards the EU and varies between modes of DI: pro-EU citizens tend to support temporary 'multi-speed' DI rather than 'à la carte' integration or durable opt-outs, which find stronger support amongst Eurosceptic citizens (de Blok and de Vries 2022; Schüssler et al. 2022).

Our article 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 DI (see also de Blok and de Vries 2022). In contrast to the Eurobarometer survey, which asks about 'multi-speed Europe' only, the EUI-YouGov survey contains multiple items related to DI, which allow us to tap into diverse modes and understandings of DI. Second, we focus on the association between a country's actual level of DI and citizen support, a factor that has not been systematically tested in other studies. We assume that citizens' current perceptions of DI are shaped largely by their national exposure to and experience with DI – above and beyond general ideological orientations towards the EU. In addition, the amount of congruence between actual national DI and citizen support allows us to assess the democratic legitimacy of different modes of DI.

Our study finds, indeed, that there is a systematic relationship between a country's level of, and public opinion on, DI. Public opinion varies, however, between different modes of DI. Interestingly, even though multi-speed DI is only temporary, it is generally evaluated more critically than the durable treaty opt-outs establishing multi-tier DI. 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 DI out of concern that

it would render their favoured 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 empirical legitimacy of DI thus depends strongly on whether it has been the result of national choice. These results hold controlling for the ideological divides that the emerging literature on the public opinion of DI emphasizes. Beyond suggesting that public support depends on the modes and origins of national DI, 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 DI.

We start with a brief conceptualization of modes of DI, focusing on the distinction between multi-speed and multi-tier DI that pervades both the general literature on DI and the existing public opinion surveys. We then develop our hypothesis claiming that extensive national exposure to DI increases support for multi-tier DI but decreases support for multi-speed DI. After presenting the data and variables, we show bivariate and multilevel analyses.

## **I. Theoretical Expectations: Modes of DI, National Experience and Citizen Support**

In contrast to uniform integration, DI refers to the incongruence of EU membership and EU policy integration (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012), that is, a situation in which member states do not participate in certain EU policies (internal differentiation) or individual non-member states selectively participate in EU policies (external differentiation). The internal DI, which we examine here, comes in two major varieties: instrumental multi-speed DI and constitutional multi-tier DI (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2014; Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2020).

Multi-speed DI is temporary. It either comes with a pre-set expiration date or is expected to end after certain conditions are met. For instance, initial restrictions to the freedom of movement of labour from new states are typically legally limited to a maximum of 7 years; and admission to the Eurozone is conditional on fulfilling the ‘convergence criteria’. Multi-speed DI mostly originates in EU enlargement and in policies related to the internal market. It is motivated by concerns of the old member states about costs of enlargement and the administrative, economic, and fiscal capacity of new member states. Temporary differentiations serve to mitigate such costs and give new member states time to adapt and build capacity. Correspondingly, less wealthy new member states are more likely to be exempted or excluded temporarily from full participation in EU policies. By contrast, multi-tier DI consists in durable disparities in the European integration of member states. These durable disparities are most pronounced in core state policies such as monetary, interior and security policies. In treaty revisions strengthening core state power integration, wealthier member states with stronger exclusive national identities are more likely to seek and obtain ‘opt-outs’ to safeguard their sovereignty. For these reasons, multi-speed DI has been labelled ‘instrumental’ or ‘capacity’ DI, whereas multi-tier DI qualifies as ‘constitutional’ or ‘sovereignty’ DI (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2014; Winzen 2016).

In developing testable expectations on the congruence between the actual DI of member states and the public opinion on DI, we start from the assumption that citizens’

national experience with DI informs their assessments. As an abstract concept, DI is hardly a salient political issue for most citizens. Nevertheless, existing research suggests that public opinion on DI has systematic features. We can think of three major ways, in which such structured opinions develop. First, citizens draw on general attitudes towards the EU based on ideological left–right or pro–anti–integration orientations. Most existing studies have followed and corroborated this intuition (de Blok and de Vries 2022; Leuffen et al. 2022; Schüssler et al. 2022). Alternatively, citizens may form their opinions through elite cueing. In a situation of low salience and knowledge, they follow national governments or their preferred national parties in assessing DI (Telle et al. 2022; see also Belamy et al. 2021). We pursue a third potential mechanism here. Whereas citizens are unlikely to think of DI in the abstract or have general knowledge about DI, they can be assumed to be aware of, and have an opinion on, the DI of their own country.

Opt-outs causing durable multi-tier DI are typically highly politicized. The Danish opt-outs have resulted from a negative referendum on the Maastricht Treaty and are regularly put to a popular vote. In 2015, Danes voted (negatively) on the termination of the Justice and Home Affairs opt-out; in 2022, they voted (positively) on the end of the CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) opt-out. (Non-) Participation in the Eurozone, the most internally differentiated policy domain of the EU, is not only highly salient but also results in tangible effects for citizens. There are also important cases of visible and contested multi-speed DI, especially when citizens experience discriminatory exclusion from benefits of integration – such as restrictions to the free movement of labour or passport-free travel in the Schengen area. Quasi-experimental studies demonstrate that decisions and events affecting the DI of member states have systematic effects on the support of its citizens for European integration (Schraff and Schimmelfennig 2020; Vergioglou and Hegewald 2022).

We thus hypothesize that citizen support for DI is systematically correlated with the actual DI of their country. We further expect public support for DI to depend on the mode of DI that shapes the national DI experience: instrumental multi-speed DI or constitutional multi-tier DI. The most important distinction between these two modes of DI regarding public support is their involuntary or voluntary nature. Multi-speed DI typically originates in accession negotiations and treaties. They 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 and 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. Thus, even though multi-speed DI is temporary, it consists predominantly in involuntary and discriminatory exclusions from full participation in the rights and benefits of integration. It is therefore plausible to assume that citizens of countries that have experienced numerous differentiations resulting from the accession process perceive multi-speed DI negatively.

By contrast, multi-tier DI typically originates in treaty revisions extending the tasks of the EU to core state policies. Because treaty revisions require unanimous agreement amongst the member states, member states unwilling to integrate further are able to bargain successfully for opt-outs lest they veto the entire treaty revision. This is, for instance,

how Denmark and the UK obtained a legal exemption from introducing the euro. Alternatively, they can force the other member states to conclude an intergovernmental agreement outside the EU framework, as in the Schengen agreements or the Fiscal Compact. In these cases, differentiations are voluntary and serve the interest of the differentially integrated states to protect their sovereignty. They are often permanent in legal terms and durable in practice, giving rise to durable divides or tiers amongst the member states (hence, multi-tier DI). For these reasons, we suggest that citizens of opt-out countries tend to approve of multi-tier DI because of their experience of DI as a voluntary and beneficial instrument.

In sum, we conjecture that survey respondents tend to support multi-tier but oppose multi-speed DI, but do so for different reasons depending on the national context. In opt-out countries, multi-tier DI corresponds with the majority will of the population, whereas multi-speed DI would imply that cherished opt-outs would have to end at some point. In those countries that have experienced a high level of involuntary multi-speed DI resulting from the accession process, this mode of DI is critically evaluated because it is associated with exclusion and discrimination, whereas multi-tier DI stands for the self-determination that these countries have not been able to realize. The more the citizens of a country have experienced DI in either mode, the more salient DI is for them and the more strongly they feel about the benefits of voluntary multi-tier DI and the disadvantages of multi-speed DI. 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 DI, but the lower the support for multi-speed DI.

In testing the hypothesis, 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 DI, our independent variable, and public opinion on DI, our dependent variable. Most importantly, the causal arrow may be assumed to run from public support for DI to the national extent of DI rather than the other way around, or the correlation may be driven by a common factor: Euroscepticism. For one, governments negotiate DI in line with public opinion. Active demand for DI 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. In addition, high acceptance of DI provides the government with sufficient room of manoeuvre to negotiate DI as it sees fit. With the available data (see below), we cannot fully assess the direction of the causal relationship, although we provide some tentative analyses on developments in citizens' views over time. We can address the role of Euroscepticism to some extent by including relevant variables: Euroscepticism and exclusive national identities. Recent studies found that exclusive national identities have had a positive effect on DI originating in treaty revisions (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2020). At the individual level, we therefore expect more nationalist citizens to be more in favour of multi-tier DI (Schüssler et al. 2022).

In line with the result of Leuffen et al. (2022) that citizens on the (economic) right are more favourable to DI than those on the left and that the experience of the Eurozone crisis has made citizens of Southern Europe more sceptical of DI, we include a measure of individuals' positioning on the economic left–right scale, their preferred purpose of 'Europe', their views on European versus national social sharing and their perception of



the national economic situation. Moreover, we distinguish programme countries (that received financial support through the EU's bailout instruments during the Eurozone crisis) 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 DI than citizens on the left (as well as supporters of 'Protective Europe' and Europe-wide social 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 DI, 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) DI as a way out. Finally, poorer accession countries are more likely to be differentially integrated into the EU (involuntarily via instrumental multi-speed DI) and wealthier countries are more likely to experience multi-tier DI. Therefore, we include GDP/capita in the analysis.

## II. Data

To measure public support for DI, 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),<sup>1</sup> 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 DI 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) and don't know (6). We reduce these responses to the distinction between 'support for DI' (strongly agree and agree combined) and 'lack of support' (the other options) but examine alternatives as well.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Sweden, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and the UK.

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

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 DI 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 and de Vries 2022; Leuffen et al. 2022). 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 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 and Winzen 2017). Individual responses to the EUI and Eurobarometer questions might thus differ.

In general, it is likely that, when it comes to abstract questions about a specialized institutional phenomenon such as DI, respondents might not have strong views. Their answers might follow general ideological orientations (Leuffen et al. 2022) or cues taken from the question itself. We consider some such effects below – e.g., whether Danish and Polish respondents, which are mentioned explicitly in the EUI-YouGov question, respond differently and whether Eurobarometer results differ. Whether national differentiation experiences, such as being excluded from the Schengen area or being confronted with the question of whether to join the Euro area eventually, matter additionally is an open question.

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 and Winzen 2014). These data enable us to measure each country’s historical experience with DI until a given point in time (the total of differentiations obtained so far) and to distinguish differentiations resulting from reform treaties and enlargement treaties. We could also measure differentiations currently in force, but our preferred measure is the cumulative, historical experience of DI. 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. Bellamy



et al. (2021), furthermore, provide interview evidence suggesting that DI experience shapes party actors' assessments of DI – public opinion might be affected in a similar way.

One conceptual complication is to decide whether the opt-outs that post-2004 member states obtained from the reforms of the Euro area and banking union since 2010 should be considered enlargement related. This is clearly the case for the ESM Treaty, which does not envisage membership for countries outside of the Euro area and thus excludes countries that have not yet been allowed to participate in the Euro by default. In contrast, the Fiscal Compact and Banking Union allow voluntary participation by countries without the Euro – Romania joined the Fiscal Compact and Bulgaria the Banking Union, for example. For countries that joined the EU in 2004 (and remained excluded from the Euro), we thus considered the Fiscal Compact and Banking Union, but not the ESM Treaty, as new differentiations.

We employ further variables as summarized in Table 1. At the country level, we measure whether countries were part of an ESM programme (Leuffen et al. 2022) 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. (2022) and de Blok and de Vries (2022). 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 and de Vries 2016; Hooghe and 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).

### III. Multi-tier and Multi-speed Integration in the EUI-YouGov Survey

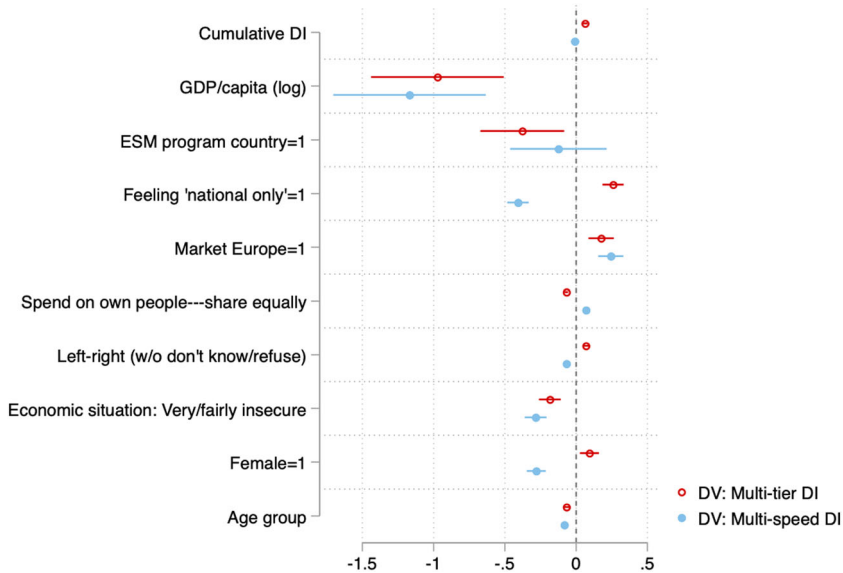
We begin with the analysis of the EUI-YouGov survey data. Figure 1 summarizes results from two logistic regression models in which individual agreement with multi-tier and multi-speed integration are the respective dependent variables. The models include country-level random intercepts to account for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

We observe a positive relationship between DI and agreement with multi-tier DI but not multi-speed DI. We also find that citizens from ESM programme countries tend to oppose multi-tier and multi-speed DI (although the latter relationship is not statistically significant) (Leuffen et al. 2022). Unexpectedly, support for DI is consistently lower in wealthy countries, in contrast to what Bellamy et al. (2021) find at the level of party actors. At the individual level, we find relationships broadly in line with previous research. Multi-tier DI finds support amongst citizens feeling exclusively national, favouring market Europe, opposing shared resources, leaning to the right ideologically, and perceiving the economic situation as secure. The correlates of support for multi-speed DI differ as regards identity conceptions, resource sharing and left–right ideology. Thus, at the

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 and Winzen 2014).   |
| Opt-outs and discriminatory differentiation            | Both   | We approximate opt-outs and discrimination as the sum of a country's differentiations originating in reform treaties/enlargement.  |
| ESM programme country                                  | Both   | 1 = The country has been a programme country. 0 = Not a programme 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    | <b>Question:</b> Do you see yourself as ...?<br>1 = Citizens responding 'nationality only' to the question.<br>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     | <b>Question:</b> Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the EU is ...?<br>1 = A good thing. 2 = Neither a good thing nor a bad thing. 3 = A bad thing.  |
| Market Europe  | EUI    | <b>Question:</b> Please tell us in which Europe you would prefer to live.<br>1 = A market Europe that stresses economic integration, market competition and fiscal discipline.<br>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    | <b>Question:</b> 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.<br>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   | <b>EUI question:</b> 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?<br>Scale: 0–6 (left–right).<br><b>EB question:</b> In political matters, people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. How would you place your views on this scale?<br>Scale: 1–10 (left–right).  |
| Economic insecurity                                    | EUI    | <b>Question:</b> The economic situation.<br>1 = Very/fairly insecure. 0 = Very/fairly secure.  |
| Demographics   | Both   | 0 = Male. 1 = Female. Five age groups in EUI and six in EB survey.   |

Figure 1: Cumulative DI Experience and Support for DI. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



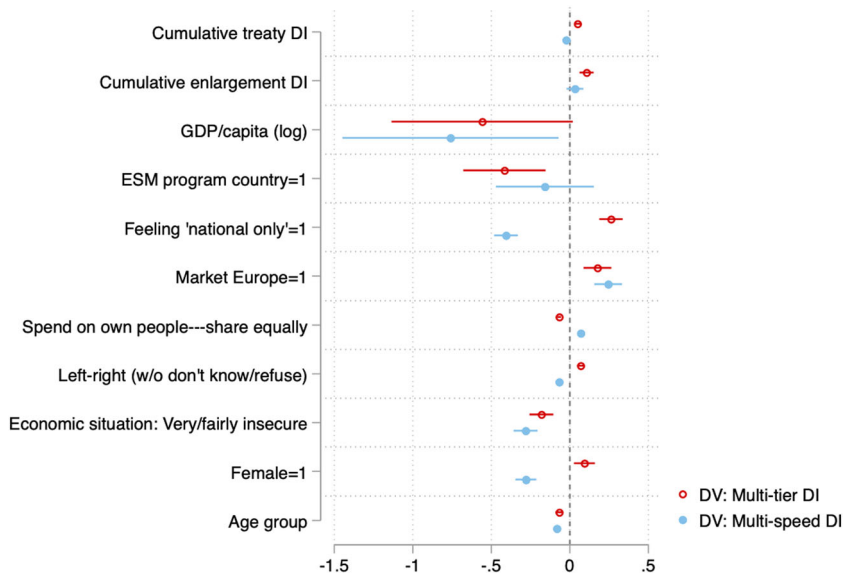
Note: The figure shows results from logistic regression models with country-level random intercepts. The global intercept and variance of the country random intercepts have been omitted from the figure (full results available in the replication materials). Observations in both models: 15,750 respondents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

individual level, there indeed appears to be an affinity between multi-tier DI and the economic and political right, as suggested in the literature (Leuffen et al. 2022), but this pattern does not hold in the case of multi-speed DI.

Next, we distinguish differentiations resulting from treaty revisions and enlargements (Figure 2). The results for all control variables remain very similar. Country-level experience with treaty differentiations relates positively to support for multi-tier DI and, with more uncertainty ( $p < 0.1$ ), 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 differentiations, 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 differentiations, we find that the probability of citizen support for multi-tier DI rises from about 0.36 to 0.55 comparing the least to most differentiated member states. The predicted probability of support for multi-speed integration shrinks from 0.44 to 0.36. For comparison, the differences in the probability of support for multi-tier DI between citizens in countries with or without ESM programmes (7 percentage points), with and without exclusive national identity (6 percentage points), for

Figure 2: Distinguishing Treaty and Enlargement Differentiations. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



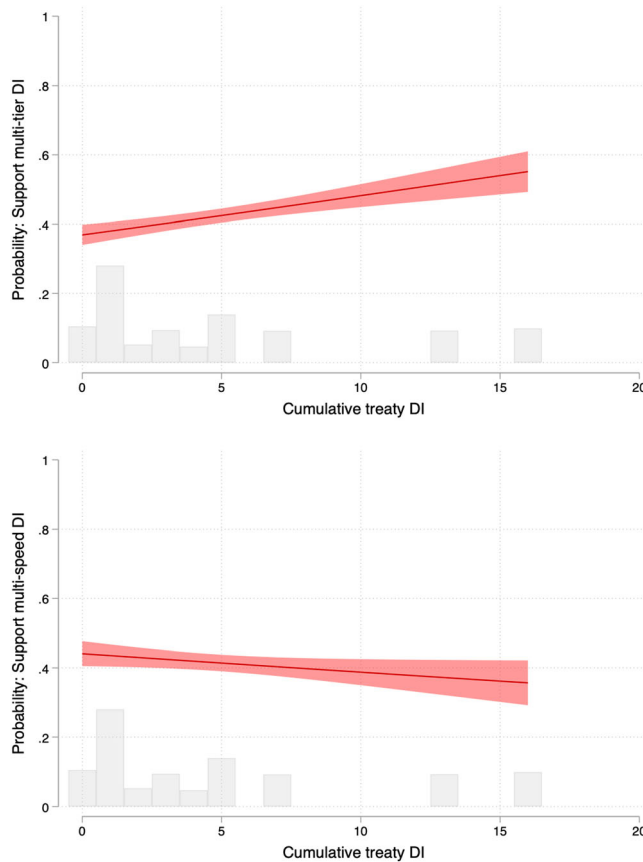
Note: The figure shows results from logistic regression models with country-level random intercepts. The global intercept and variance of the country random intercepts have been omitted from the figure (full results available in the replication materials). Observations in both models: 15,750 respondents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

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.

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 Figures A2 and A3).

One might also ask whether Euroscepticism, which is not included as a variable in the EUI-YouGov survey, could be an omitted variable. On the other hand, the analysis already includes a crucial predictor of individual-level Euroscepticism, exclusive identity conceptions (Hooghe and Marks 2005). Nevertheless, we add a country-level measure of Euroscepticism from Eurobarometer 92.1 (October 2019), the share of respondents considering the EU membership of their country ‘a bad thing’. As Figure A4 shows, there is no significant relationship between country-level Euroscepticism and our dependent variables. Yet, we continue to find that any DI experience relates positively to support for multi-tier DI. Regarding support for multi-speed DI, the previously significant, negative relationship with treaty differentiations remains negative but turns insignificant.

Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities of Support for Multi-tier and Multi-speed DI. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

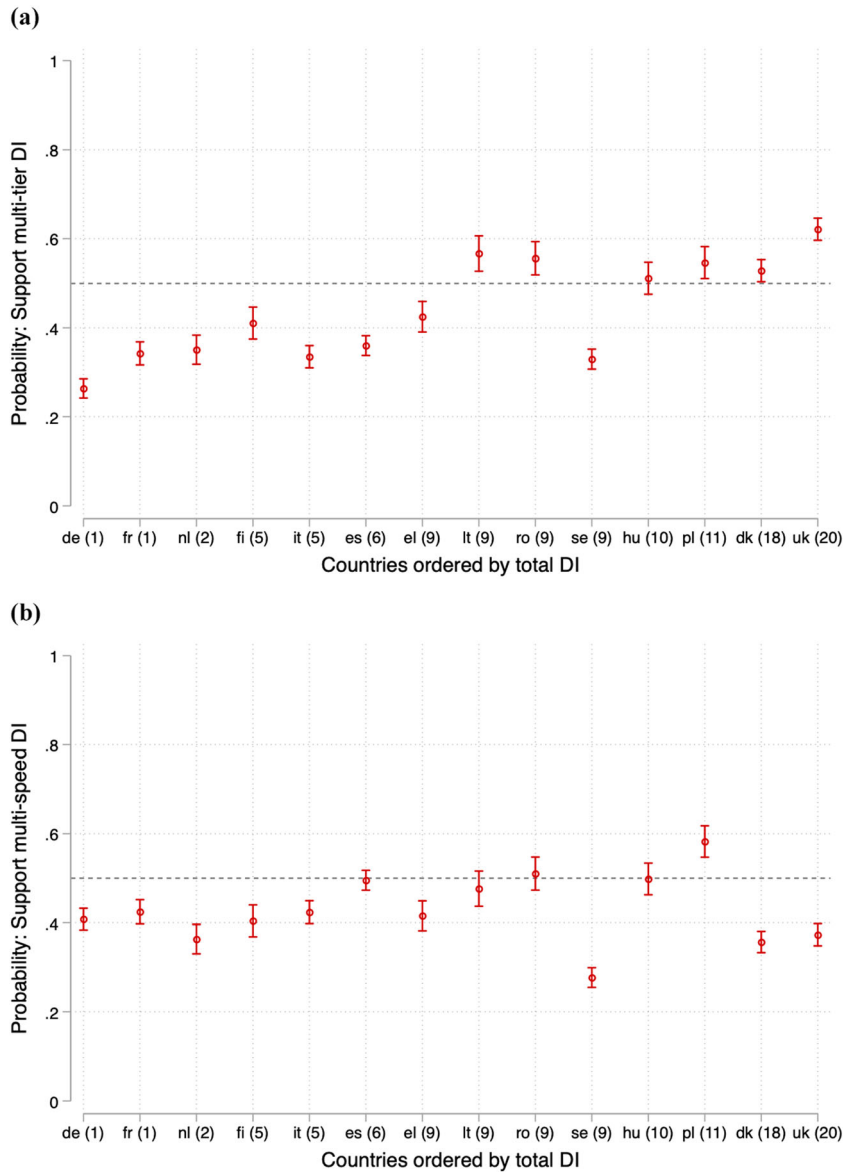


Note: The figure shows predicted probabilities based on the results for the first model summarized in Figure 2. DI, differentiated integration

In further tests, we excluded the UK from the analysis since it left the EU on 31 January 2020 (see Figure A5). This renders the negative relationship between treaty differentiations and support for multi-speed DI more uncertain ( $p < 0.1$ ). These and the results in the previous paragraph warrant some doubt as to the robustness of this relationship. The remaining results remain stable. We also added a variable indicating whether a country was mentioned explicitly in the survey question, which was the case for Denmark and Poland, finding no change in the results (not shown).

Finally, we assess in more depth whether the patterns might be driven by any individual country or groups of countries (Figure 4). We re-estimated the models without the country-level variables, but with country-fixed effects, which capture the average probability of a country's citizen to agree to multi-tier or multi-speed integration. This prevents us from including DI experience as a variable but enables us to assess if countries differ clearly from the patterns found so far. This does not seem to be the case. We generally observe higher support for multi-tier integration in countries with significant DI

Figure 4: Probability of Agreement with DI in Different Countries. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



Note: We re-estimated the main model (see Figure 1) without the country-level variables, but with country-fixed effects, which capture the probability of a country's citizen to agree to multi-tier or multi-speed integration. The figure shows this probability. The number of cumulative differentiations of each country is provided in parentheses. (a) Multi-tier integration. (b) Multi-speed integration. DI, differentiated integration



experiences. Only Sweden deviates notably from the pattern. Whether differentiation results from enlargement treaties primarily, as in some post-2004 member states, from reform treaties, as in Denmark and the UK, or a mix, as is increasingly true for Hungary and Poland, does not seem to distinguish groups of countries. Generally, multi-tier integration is not exceedingly popular. Only in the UK, which has now left the EU, is the probability for agreement above 0.6. However, it is very unpopular in many countries with little DI experiences of their own, first and foremost the founding member states. In contrast, the reason that we find no or possibly even a negative relationship between differentiations and support for multi-speed DI seems to be that support levels are less variable and more balanced overall, higher in the (low-differentiation) founding member states, and lower in some but not all high-differentiation countries.

Summing up, our hypothesis predicting that citizens of countries with higher levels of differentiation are more supportive of multi-tier integration, but more opposed to multi-speed integration, than citizens of more uniformly integrated countries, largely holds irrespective of whether the country's DI originated in treaty revisions or enlargement. The results as to the relationship between differentiation experience and support for multi-speed DI are less robust, however. The analysis of Eurobarometer data in the following section allows us to test these relationships further.

Even though we cannot test it directly, the findings support our reasoning that citizens of high-differentiation countries support opt-outs resulting in multi-tier integration as an expression of national choice. In countries with numerous opt-outs from reform treaties, they might oppose multi-speed integration because they are concerned about giving up their exceptions, whereas citizens from post-2004 accession countries oppose it because it is associated with discrimination. Interestingly, extensive experience with DI, regardless of whether it is negative or positive, produces similar patterns of support. Importantly, as discussed further in the conclusion, the results are driven not only by high-DI countries but also by the founding member states and others with little DI experience. These low-DI countries tend to oppose multi-tier DI, in particular.

Regarding individual-level variables, as Leuffen et al. (2022), we find an important role for economic liberalism and, more broadly, the economic and political right (see also, de Blok and de Vries 2022). 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 DI.

#### IV. 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 measure attitudes towards multi-speed DI. We also noted that the survey items seem to allude more strongly to the discriminatory aspect of multi-speed DI – i.e., leaving countries behind against their will – compared with the EUI-YouGov items. We thus expect opposition to multi-speed DI in accession countries with a high level of DI 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

differentiations consistently goes together with opposition to (multi-speed) DI. 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 differentiations, the results are largely similar, except that they are less certain with respect to the 'don't wait' response.

The Eurobarometer-based results correspond with and strengthen our confidence in those from the EUI-YouGov survey. We observe more clearly than in the EUI-YouGov survey that experience with treaty differentiations coincides with low support for multi-speed DI. In the EUI-YouGov survey, citizens with such experience proved unlikely to support the idea of integration at multiple speeds, but the robustness of the relationship proved ambiguous. 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 DI experience do not wish to be required to reach the same destination as other member states (they favour multi-tier DI), but they neither aim to be frontrunners in integration or leave countries behind involuntarily. This complex configuration is compatible with the empirical reality of DI, in which countries with treaty opt-outs choose to stay at a lower level of integration permanently.

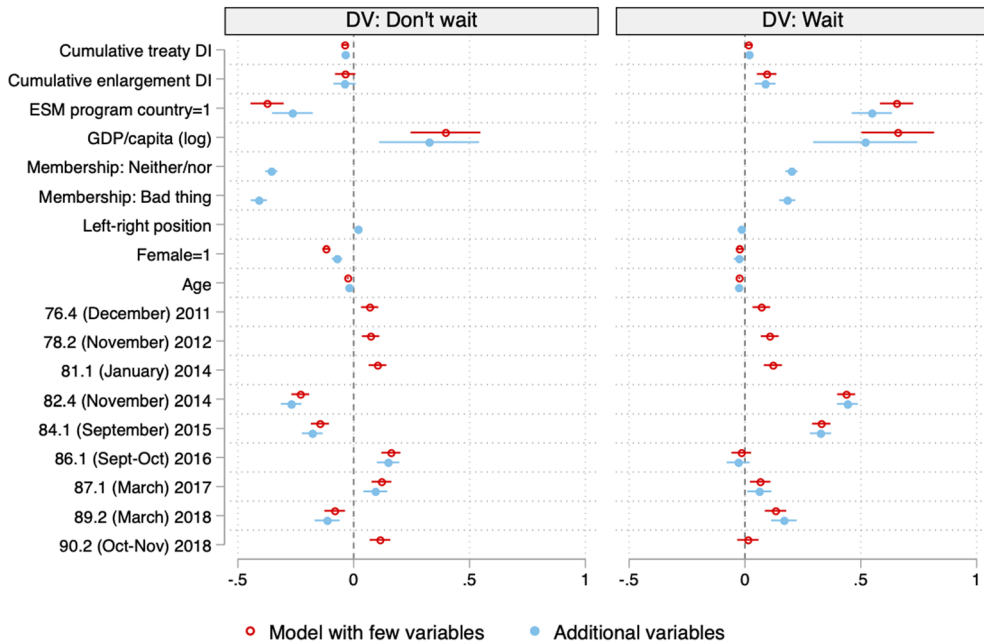
Second, experience with enlargement differentiations coincides with the demand to wait until all countries are ready to integrate. The statistically significant effect, in contrast to the insignificant effect in the EUI-YouGov survey, could be due to the fact that the Eurobarometer survey highlights 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 DI could also allow for a preferential treatment in which certain countries are afforded more flexibility and time to converge with the frontrunners.

Regarding the other variables, we find plausible relationships. Citizens of ESM programme countries demand that member states wait for each other in integration, similar to results in the previous section. As Leuffen et al. (2022), 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 and de Vries 2022). Interestingly, whereas ideologically right-leaning respondents disapprove of the idea of multi-speed DI, 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 increases '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 with 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 and de Vries 2022). However, there does not seem to be a consistent trend towards support or opposition as the EU gains experience with DI.

To assess further whether citizens adjust their views as their countries' accession-based differentiation develops, we focus on the countries that joined the EU since 2004 (Figure 5). These countries faced significant multi-speed DI upon joining. Initially, the difference between 'don't wait' and 'wait' responses in these countries was 14 percentage

Figure 5: Results of Analyses Based on the Eurobarometer. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



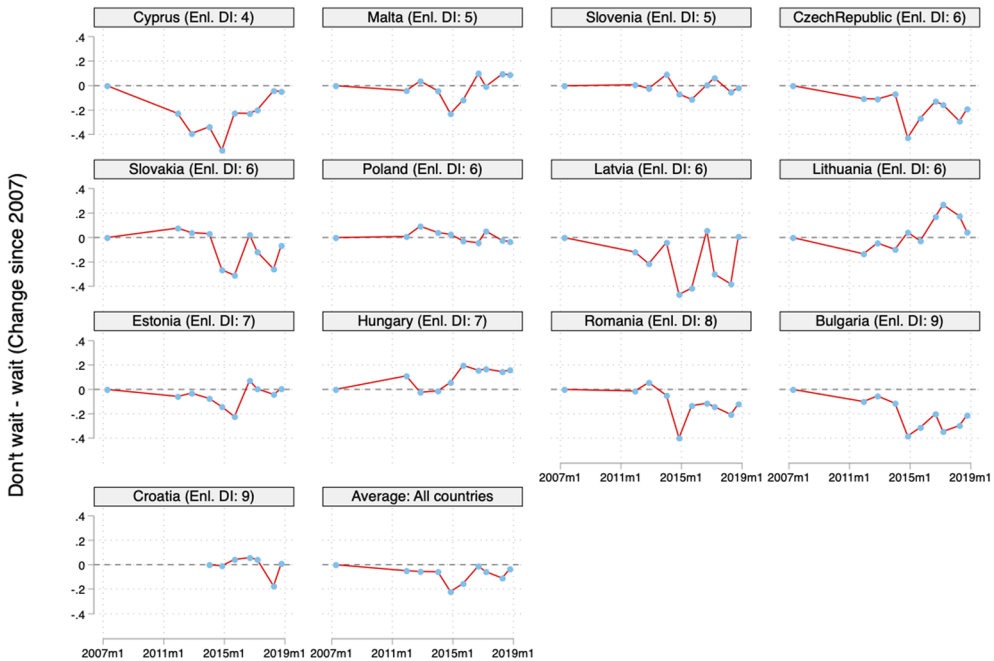
Note: The figure summarizes results of four logistic regression models with country-level random intercepts and fixed effects for Eurobarometer waves. The global intercept and variance of the country random intercepts have been omitted from the figure. The first and third models (red, hollow circles) 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. DI, differentiated integration; DV, dependent variable

points on average (in favour of not waiting). Figure 6 shows for each country, ordered by how many differentiations 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 favouring waiting with integration until all countries are ready have gained about 3 percentage points on average.

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 sceptical of multi-speed integration. This is not the case in Croatia, which has made quick progress towards Schengen accession and has been admitted to the Euro area.<sup>3</sup> In the other countries, accession differentiation has largely

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

Figure 6: Average Public Opinion on DI in Post-2004 Member States. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



Note: Based on Eurobarometer data, the figure shows the difference between the share of ‘don’t wait’ and ‘wait’ responses – for instance, if 40% of citizens favour the former and 30% 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. DI, differentiated integration

expired or turned from discriminatory to, at least in part, voluntary (the Euro opt-outs of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2017). In these countries, views of DI have fluctuated but have, except for the Czech case, remained relatively unchanged or even become more favourable overall.

These observations for the post-2004 member states are largely in line with trends in the EU15 (Figure A6). 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 DI. 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 programmes. In Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain, public views of multi-speed DI have shifted strongly towards waiting for all countries.

In sum, the analysis of the Eurobarometer adds further evidence on the relationship between differentiation experience and citizen support for multi-speed DI. Specifically, the relationship between enlargement differentiation and citizens’ views had remained ambiguous in the analysis of the EUI-YouGov data. Consistent with the theoretical argument,

we find that any differentiation experience coincides with scepticism of multi-speed DI. Citizens rather advocate waiting with the development of new EU policies until all countries are ready. However, as a note of caution, variation in the question wording between the Eurobarometer and EUI-YouGov surveys leaves some uncertainty as to the extent to which the results depend on the survey items.

## Conclusions

Is support for DI shaped by familiarity? In this article, we analyse the relationship between national public opinion on DI and the extent of differentiation that a country has experienced. Overall, we find a systematic relationship between the country level of differentiations and individual support for DI. Yet, support depends on the mode of DI. Whereas citizens of high-differentiation countries are more supportive of multi-tier DI than those of more uniformly integrated countries, they are more opposed to multi-speed DI. Higher national experience of DI 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 DI 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 DI because discriminatory treatment, even though short-lived in many cases, was imposed on them in the accession process. This relationship proved less robust across analyses and sensitive to question wording, however. Possibly, this could reflect that some differentiation in the accession process was designed to help countries adapt to new obligations (e.g., in competition law) rather than exclude them from membership benefits. That longer lasting discrimination appears to increase opposition against multi-speed DI 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 DI enjoys generally higher support than multi-speed DI. It rather matters whether DI is voluntary or involuntary. We expect counterfactually that the experience of multi-tier DI resulting from a permanent discrimination of 'second-class' members would be as much opposed as the experience of voluntary multi-speed DI, allowing one's home country more time to adapt, would be supported.

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 DI and more in favour of multi-speed DI 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 DI enjoys public support and democratic legitimacy and may enhance support for membership in the EU. In a ‘demoi-cratic perspective’ (Bellamy and 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 DI and the actual national depth of European integration is therefore an important indication of the ‘demoi-cratic’ legitimacy of DI. By contrast, and again from a normative as well as empirical point of view, DI loses its democratic legitimacy if it is an expression of supranational ‘domination’ (Eriksen 2019; Lord 2021).

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## Appendix A

Winzen, Thomas and Frank Schimmelfennig. 'National Differentiation Experience and Citizen Support for Differentiated Integration.' *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2022.

Figure A1: Results with Opposition to Multi-tier and Multi-speed DI as Dependent Variable. DI, differentiated integration; DV, dependent variable [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

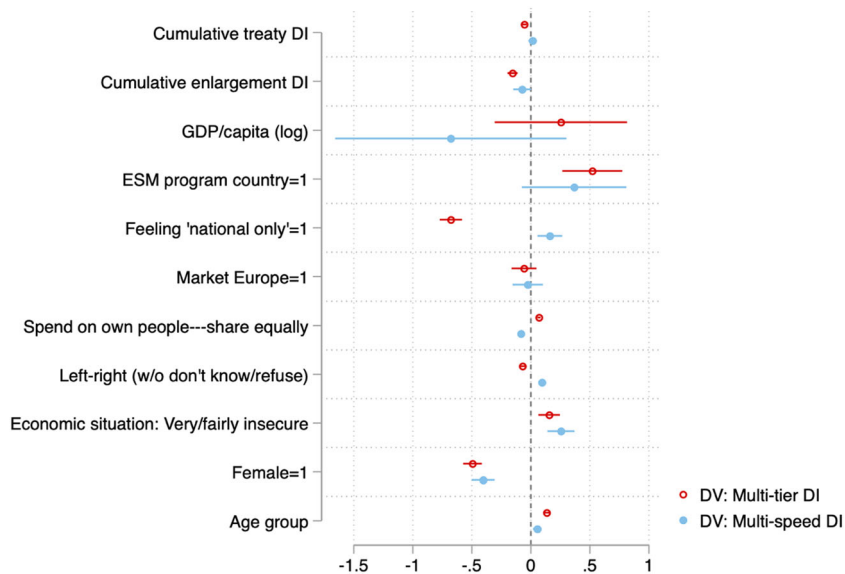
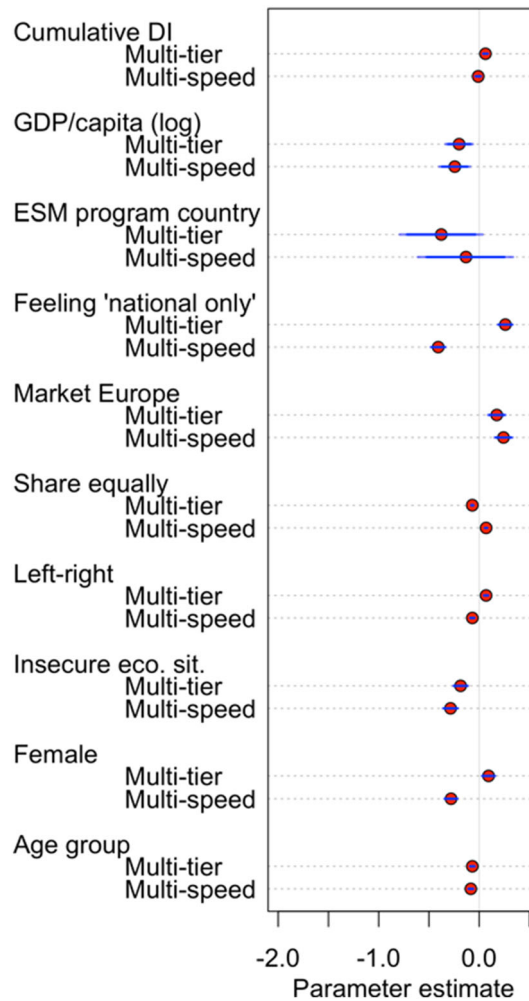
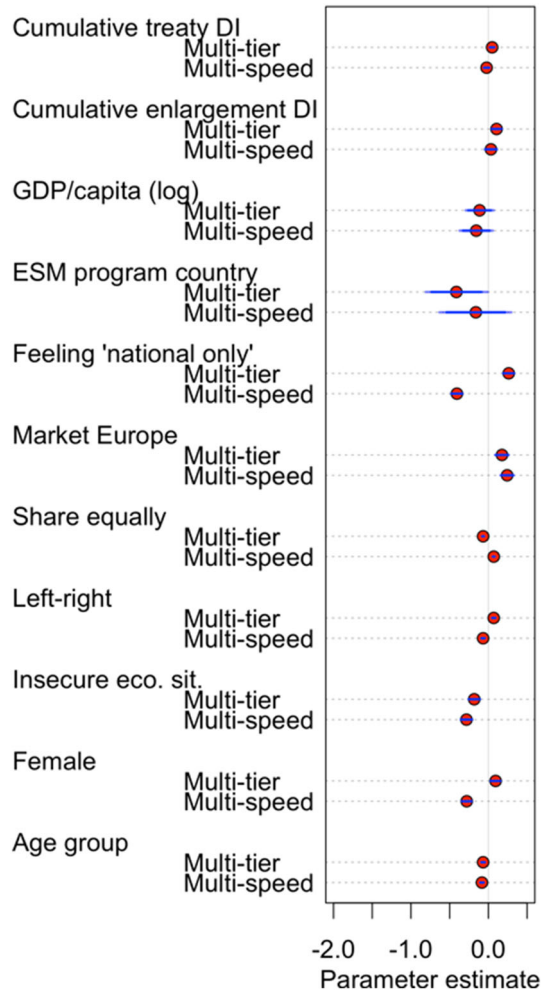


Figure A2: Bayesian Analysis: Cumulative Differentiation Experience and Differentiation. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



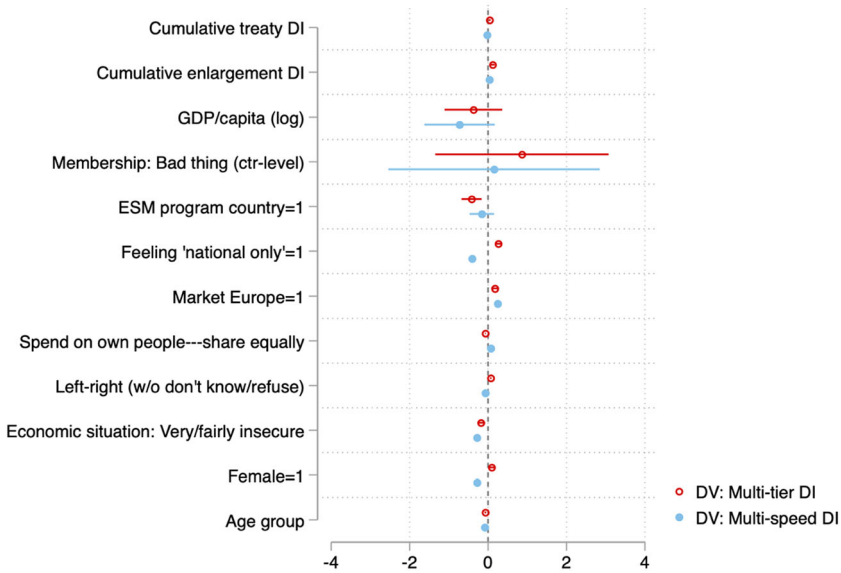
Note: This figure shows results of a fully Bayesian analysis of the models shown in Figure 1. The models were estimated based on MCMC simulations using Stan. The GDP/capita variable was standardized for this analysis. Hence, the point estimate differs in magnitude from the results in the main text. DI,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

Figure A3: Bayesian Analysis: Distinguishing Treaty and Enlargement Differentiation. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



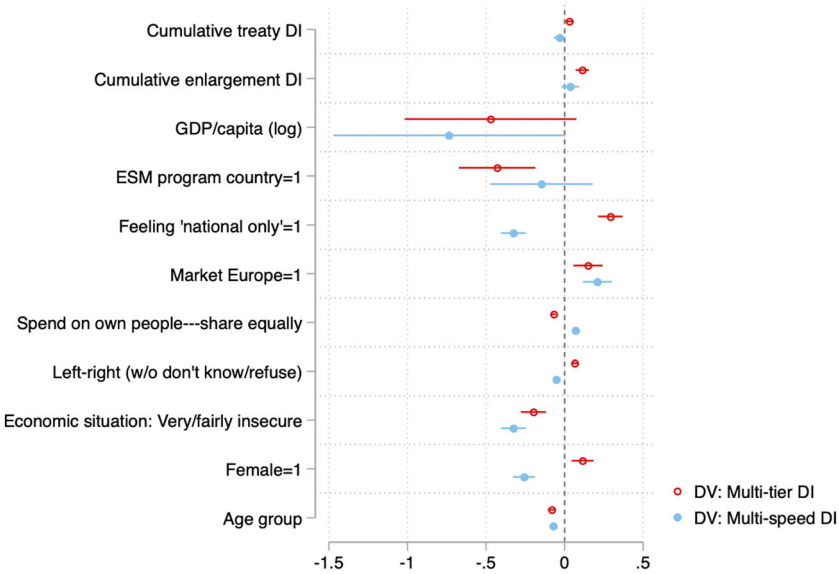
Note: This figure shows results of a fully Bayesian analysis of the models shown in Figure 2. The models were estimated based on MCMC simulations using Stan. The GDP/capita variable was standardized for this analysis. Hence, the point estimate differs in magnitude from the results in the main text. DI,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

Figure A4: Results Including a Country-Level Euroscepticism Variable. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



Note: The underlying regression model is the same as in Figure 2 except that it includes a country-level measure of Euroscepticism based on Eurobarometer 92.1 (October 2019). Note the difference x-axis scale in comparison to in Figure 2, due to the addition of the Euroscepticism variable. Euroscepticism is measured as the share of respondents considering the EU membership of their country 'a bad thing'. DI, differentiated integration; DV, dependent variable

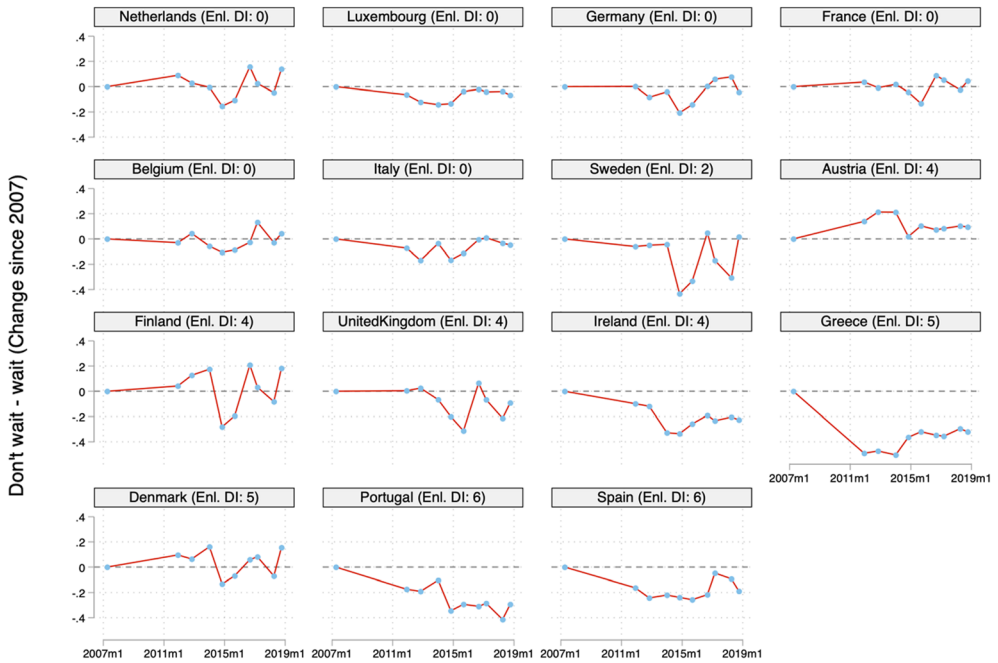
Figure A5: Results Excluding the UK. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]



Note: The underlying regression model is the same as in Figure 2 except that it excludes observation from the UK, which left the EU on 31 January 2020. DI, differentiated integration; DV, dependent variable



Figure A6: Average Public Opinion on Differentiation in EU15 Member States. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



Note: The figure shows the difference between the share of ‘don’t wait’ and ‘wait’ responses – for instance, if 40% of citizens favour the former and 30% 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. DI, differentiated integration