

EU-27 Public Opinion on Brexit

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Abstract

Although there has been much interest in British public opinion on Brexit, much less is known about how EU-27 Europeans view the Brexit negotiations. This is surprising, because Brexit confronts the EU-27 with difficult choices. Brexit confronts EU-27 Europeans with a trade-off between limiting the fallout from ending the close relations with the UK and the risk of encouraging further countries to leave the EU. Using original survey data from 39.000 respondents in all EU-27 countries collected between the start of the Brexit negotiations and December 2018, this paper shows It shows that exposure to the economic risks of Brexit makes respondents more willing to accommodate the UK, whereas a positive opinion of the EU decreases willingness to compromise. Moreover, many Europeans face an accommodation dilemma that moderates these preferences. Overall, the EU-27 public seems to rather unsentimentally support a Brexit negotiation line that safeguards their own interests best.

Forthcoming in Journal of Common Market Studies

¹ I would like to thank Théoda Woeffray, Céline Neuenschwander, Reto Mitteregger, and Lisa Rogenmoser for excellent research assistance. This project has received funding from the University of Zurich and the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme grant agreement No 817582 (ERC Consolidator Grant DISINTEGRATION).

With Brexit labelled as “the will of the British people,” research on Brexit-related public opinion is burgeoning. Many studies have examined voting behaviour in the Brexit referendum (Alabrese et al. 2019; Clarke et al. 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Goodwin et al. 2018; Henderson et al. 2017; Hobolt 2016; Vasilopoulou 2016). Others have tried to identify, what kind of Brexit British voters actually want (Hobolt and Leeper 2017; Renwick et al. 2018; Richards et al. 2018), whether knowledge about and perceptions of the EU have changed since the 2016 vote (Grynberg et al. 2019), and how Brexit affects electoral behaviour and public opinion in the UK more generally (e.g., Hobolt 2018; Hobolt et al. 2018). Beyond academia, policymakers, journalists, and think tanks have tried to identify what British voters want or not want from the Brexit process and which types of Brexit arrangements might be acceptable to them.

This detailed attention to British public opinion on Brexit is mirrored by a dearth of research on Brexit-related public opinion in the remaining EU member states. Not even a handful of studies exist (Jurado et al. 2018; De Vries 2017). This is surprising because Brexit is likely to have considerable consequences not just for the British public, but for EU-27 citizens as well. In economic terms, some estimates see the costs of a negotiated, but “hard” Brexit that reimposes considerable trade frictions between the UK and the EU, at about 2.6% in the EU-27’s overall GDP (Chen et al. 2018). Some countries are exposed to a considerably stronger degree, most notably Ireland (where 10.1% of GDP is estimated to be at risk), but also Germany (5.5%), or the Netherlands (4.4%). The fallout from a “no deal Brexit” would be even costlier. It is thus clear that Brexit can have significant negative consequences for voters the EU-27. In political terms, Brexit also has consequences for the future of the EU. Not only is the exit of one of the Union’s biggest members likely to change some of the political balance among the member states and creates open question such as how to address the loss of British contributions to the EU’s budget. Brexit also carries risks of political contagion: the risk that Brexit might embolden eurosceptics in the remaining member states, potentially leading to a proliferation of additional exit attempts among the EU-27 (De Vries 2017; Walter 2020b). Fears of such contagion risks have receded since the

2016 Brexit referendum, as support for the EU has surged and Eurosceptic parties have removed calls for EU-exits of their own countries from their agendas (Chopin and Lequesne 2020; Glencross 2019). However, there is some evidence that suggests that an outcome of the Brexit negotiations that leaves the UK with rather favourable conditions would be likely to reignite support for EU-exit within the remaining member states, as voters benchmark their own country's prospects within the EU against such a positive trajectory of the UK outside (De Vries 2017, 2018; Walter 2020a). Brexit may thus pose a serious threat for the EU as a whole (e.g., Hobolt 2016; Oliver 2016), especially as it comes at a time when European integration has become a heavily contested issue among European voters and elites (Hobolt and de Vries 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2009; De Wilde and Zürn 2012). As a result, national elections have a strong impact on the dynamics of international negotiations (Kleine and Minaudier 2019; Schneider 2020).

The consequences of Brexit for citizens of the EU-27 provide a motivation to look at their Brexit-related concerns and views about how the Brexit negotiations should be handled in its own right. However, exploring EU-27 public opinion also matters because of its potential influence on the Brexit negotiations. Experimental research suggests that policymakers take public opinion into account when taking foreign policy decisions, especially when they fear that the government will pay significant political costs if they fail to heed public opinion (Tomz et al. 2020).² These dynamics also apply to decision-making in the EU Council, where governments have been shown to be responsive to domestic public opinion (Hagemann et al. 2016; Schneider 2018). This responsiveness is particularly strong when integration-related EU Council decisions are taken in a context in which EU-related events increase the salience of integration in the public sphere, such as during the Brexit negotiations (Wratil 2018). Moreover, the literature on two-level games in international negotiations suggests that voters' preferences can enhance governments bargaining power in international negotiations (Caraway et al. 2012; Hug and König 2002; Schneider and Cederman 1994).

² Evidence also suggests that the public penalizes policymakers for backing down in international negotiations and confrontations (e.g., Tomz 2007).

Because national governments are key actors in the Brexit negotiation process, all of this suggests that that EU-27 public opinion is likely to play a role in the Brexit negotiations. After all, it is the member states who, via an EU Council decision on the adoption of negotiation directives, set the Brexit negotiation mandates for the EU Commission-led Brexit negotiation team. The member states also have to ratify the outcomes of the Brexit negotiations jointly with the European Parliament (EP)³. Whereas the Withdrawal Agreement had to be ratified only by the EU Council and the EP, an agreement about the EU's and UK's future relationship may also have to be ratified by each member state separately, thus additionally involving national parliaments.⁴ This suggests that EU-27 public opinion might become even more relevant in this second phase of Brexit negotiations.

This discussion suggests that is important to better understand EU-27 public opinion on Brexit. This paper contributes to this goal by providing insights on voters' views about the Brexit negotiations and the consequences of Brexit. It relies on survey data from about 39.000 EU-27 working-age respondents, which I collected in four survey waves run in 6-month intervals between the start of the negotiations in the summer of 2017 and December 2018. The paper argues that Brexit confronts the EU-27 with a number of difficult choices. A loss of the close cooperative relations between the UK and the EU will be costly not just for the UK, but also for the remaining member states. At the same time, making the UK better off outside the EU raises the risk that additional countries might be encouraged to leave the EU. This creates an *accommodation dilemma* (Jurado et al. 2018; Walter 2020b) for those EU-27 Europeans who are exposed to a fallout from a non-accommodative Brexit-arrangement, but who also care about the long-term stability of the EU. After a brief overview of the survey design and some descriptive evidence, the paper explores in more detail who supports a more accommodating or a less compromising negotiation stance. This analysis suggests that EU-27 Europeans understand that Brexit confronts them with an

³ Moreover, parliamentarians are equally likely to respond to the preferences and views of their voters.

⁴ The exact ratification requirements will depend on the nature of the agreement. National parliaments will have to ratify any agreement that refers to competences that the EU shares with member states.

accommodation dilemma between maintaining the benefits from close cooperation with the UK and the risks of encouraging further disintegrative tendencies elsewhere. The conclusion discusses what these insights on EU-27 public opinion imply for the Brexit process.

1. Brexit spillover risks, the accommodation dilemma, and EU-27 negotiation preferences

Brexit marks a turning point in EU history: For the first time, an EU member state has left the European Union, leading to concern that Brexit might pose a serious threat for the EU as a whole (Laffan 2019). After all, Brexit puts the integrity of the Single Market at risk (Jensen and Kelstrup 2019) and diminishes the EU's global standing (Bulmer and Quaglia 2018). Brexit also carries significant spillover effects in the other EU member states. Two types of spillover effects are particularly important: first, the loss of cooperation gains that disintegration entails, and second, the risk of political contagion. Whether and to which extent these spillover effects materialize, however, depend greatly on the outcome of the Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU. As a result of this, EU-27 Europeans' negotiation preferences will be informed by how exposed they are to these risks, and by how they evaluate these risks.

Spillover effects from Brexit: Cooperation Gains at Risk and Political Contagion Risks

Many cooperation gains at risk from Brexit are economic in nature, such as the potential damage to firms engaged in trade with the UK, and the resulting economic downturn and job losses that are likely to occur if trade ties between the EU and the UK are cut or significantly reduced (Hix 2018). Other costs of Brexit include, among other things, the loss of London's contributions to the EU budget, or the loss of free access to Europe's financial centre. However, many are also social or political in nature, such as when traveling between the UK and the EU-27 is made more cumbersome, the loss of free movement of people to the UK, uncertainty about the future of EU residents living in the UK, or the loss of UK-participation in EU-wide anti-crime or anti-terrorism schemes. If Brexit significantly severs the strong ties between the EU and the UK, it would thus

impose considerable costs on the EU-27 public as well. Nonetheless, the level of these costs is likely to vary significantly among individuals. They are highest for individuals who benefit from a close exchange with the UK, either directly in personal or business terms, or indirectly through their regional economy. For example, for individuals who live in member states that are closely integrated with the UK, the costs of Brexit are likely to be significantly larger than for individuals in countries whose ties with the UK are more limited. This exposure can vary considerably: a “hard Brexit,” for example, is estimated to put less than 0.5% of Slovakia’s and Bulgaria’s, but more than 10% of Irish and more than 5% of German GDP at risk (Chen et al. 2018).⁵ While the potential spillover effects regarding the loss of cooperation gains were already considerable in the negotiations about the Withdrawal Agreement (for example with regard to the rights of EU citizens in the UK or the status of Northern Ireland), they are likely to become even more consequential in the next Brexit phase. But how exactly these spillover effects will play out will depend to a great deal on how the future relationship between the EU and the UK will be ultimately designed.

A second spillover effect is political in nature. A successful Brexit that makes the UK better off outside the EU demonstrates to the citizens of other member states that it is possible for countries to unilaterally improve their position, while still enjoying many of the benefits of membership (Hobolt 2016; De Vries 2017). Research has shown that individuals tend to benchmark their own government’s performance (Kayser and Peress 2012) and the desirability of EU membership (De Vries 2018) across borders, that is they take other countries’ experiences into account in their assessments. By providing a powerful counterfactual that demonstrates that voters abroad no longer support European integration and that allows people to benchmark more accurately to what extent disintegration presents a viable and better alternative for their country to membership in the EU, a successful Brexit is likely to encourage disintegrative tendencies in other member states (Malet 2019; De Vries 2017). This could come in the form of support for further member state withdrawals, but also in the form of increased requests for country-specific EU rules,

⁵ For other estimates of the Brexit-related fallout in the EU-27 see for example Lawless and Morgenroth (2019).

which could over time undermine EU cohesiveness. At the same time, however, observing that the UK is worse-off post-disintegration is likely to deter voters from seeking an exit of their own country. By providing a “reality-check”, Brexit thus also has the potential to make an EU exit less attractive, especially for those voters who tend to expect that they will be able to enjoy both the benefits of international cooperation and regained national sovereignty at the same time⁶. Although the developments since the 2016 Brexit referendum suggest that Brexit so far has had more of a deterrence than an encouragement effect on the EU-27 public (Glencross 2019), this discussion suggests that the ultimate effects of Brexit on political contagion dynamics will depend in no small part on how the UK fares post-Brexit (Walter 2020a).

An accommodation dilemma for the EU-27

The degree to which these two types of spillover effects will manifest themselves depends on the way the UK’s withdrawal process is handled and on the contours of the future relationship between the EU and the UK. This confronts the EU-27 side with a dilemma: On the one hand, cooperation losses will be smaller, the closer the relations between the two remain, creating incentives for the EU-side to salvage as many of the cooperation gains from the existing arrangement as possible by accommodating many of the UK’s requests. This could mean, for example, granting the UK significant access to the Single Market while allowing the UK to restrict the free movement of people or deviate from level playing field provisions, or allowing it to continue participating in common programs such as those on police or research cooperation.⁷ On the other hand, however, the extent and direction of political contagion effects – encouragement or deterrence – will depend on how attractive the UK’s new model will be for other member states. While it may minimize the loss of cooperation gains, an outcome that accommodates many British

⁶ This belief is relatively widespread, see for example Milic (2015); Owen and Walter (2017); Sciarini et al. (2015); Walter et al. (2018).

⁷ These exceptions are likely be costly to the EU as well, because they would change the distribution of cooperation gains between the UK and the EU, even though they are still likely to be less costly in economic terms than a breakdown of the negotiations and a resulting No-Deal-Brexit.

requests and therefore allows the UK to enjoy many of the benefits from EU integration without major strings attached, consequently carries the risk that it may undermine the long-term stability of the EU, both in terms of the integrity of the Single Market, but also in terms of possible additional member state withdrawals. A non-accommodative stance that is uncompromising and makes exit costly for the UK, in contrast, is likely to deter disintegrative tendencies.⁸

As a result, the EU institutions, EU-27 governments and large parts of the EU-27 public face an *accommodation dilemma* (Jurado et al. 2018; Walter 2020b). On the one hand, a hard, non-accommodating negotiation outcome – or even a no deal scenario – would be costly for the remaining member states, even if at a lower scale than for the UK. But, at the same time, making the UK better off outside the EU by allowing it to enjoy the benefits of EU integration without sharing the costs, threatens the long-term stability of the EU.

EU-27 negotiation preferences

I argue that how individuals decide in the face of the accommodation dilemma, how they view the Brexit negotiations, and whether they support a more accommodating or a more hard line negotiation approach by the EU, depends on how exposed they are to the consequences of each of the two types of spillover effects. Overall, individuals should be particularly hawkish when the net costs of non-accommodation are likely to be small for them, but more dovish when the costs of non-accommodation outweigh the benefits of taking a hard negotiating line. This means that individuals who are more exposed to the losses of cooperation gains from a hard Brexit – be it because they have personal ties to the UK or because they live in an economy that is particularly vulnerable to such a Brexit – should be more supportive of a softer, more accommodating Brexit. In contrast, those with little exposure should take a tougher stance. At the same time, those who are most concerned about preserving the long-term stability of the EU should support a more hawkish negotiating stance. The more positively individuals view the EU, the less willing they

⁸ In the negotiations, such a strategy moreover serves to signal resolve and can be used to convince the other side to soften its demands.

should be to accommodate the UK. At the same time, creating an attractive EU-exit blueprint should appeal to eurosceptics, especially if they aspire to an exit of their own country from the EU. I therefore expect more eurosceptic individuals to support a more accommodative stance towards the UK. At the same time, the accommodation dilemma should moderate these relationships: Europhile Europeans concerned about political contagion risks should be particularly uncompromising when their exposure to the fallout from a hard Brexit is low, but should exhibit a more moderate stance when it is high. Eurosceptics, in contrast, face no dilemma: I expect them to support a more accommodative stance across the board.

2. EU-27 public opinion on Brexit: Research design and descriptive evidence

To systematically Brexit-related public opinion in the EU-27, I use survey data from about 39,000 EU-27 working-age respondents collected in four survey waves run in 6-month intervals between the start of the negotiations in the summer of 2017 and December 2018.⁹ The data were collected by placing questions on an EU-wide online survey omnibus (the ‘EuroPulse’), regularly conducted by Dalia Research.¹⁰ In each wave, the sample consists of a census representative sample of between 9000-10000 working-age respondents (ages 18-65). Respondents are drawn across the remaining 27 EU Member States, with sample sizes roughly proportional to their population size.¹¹ In order to obtain census representative results, the data are weighted based upon the most recent Eurostat statistics.¹² For the more detailed regression analyses, I rely on the most recent survey wave from December 2018 because it contains more information about respondents’ location. For

⁹ The surveys thus cover the negotiations about the Withdrawal Agreement, not the future relationship.

¹⁰ This omnibus has been used by other researchers (see e.g., Karstens 2019; De Vries 2017, 2018, 2019). De Vries (2018: 66 (footnote 6)) notes that the demographical background of EuroPulse survey respondents shows very little difference from nationally representative surveys. Additional analysis (see online appendix) show that average country-level EU support in the November 2018 Eurobarometer and the December 2018 EuroPulse survey are correlated, especially for countries with a sample size larger than 300. While the EuroPulse also contains data for the UK, these are omitted in my analyses.

¹¹ Table A1 in the appendix reports the sample sizes by country.

¹² The target weighting variables are age, gender, level of education (as defined by ISCED (2011) levels 0-2, 3-4, and 5-8), and degree of urbanization (rural and urban).

these analyses I use hierarchical three-level models that take account of the nested structure of the data (individuals nested in regions nested in countries).¹³

Negotiating Brexit: Europeans' negotiation preferences

To gauge individuals' preferences regarding the EU's Brexit negotiation strategy, that is whether respondents support an accommodating, softer EU-negotiation stance in the Brexit negotiations or a harder, non-accommodating approach, I directly asked how respondents thought that the EU should approach the exit negotiations with the UK.¹⁴ The question defined a hard (i.e. non-accommodating) line in the Brexit negotiations as one in which the EU insists that the UK pay a large "exit bill" to compensate the EU for the costs of Brexit, guarantee special rights for EU citizens living in the UK, and does not get privileged access to the European Single Market. In contrast, it defined a soft (i.e. accommodating) line as a negotiation position that accepts that the UK pays only a small "exit bill," allows the UK to limit the rights of EU citizens currently living in the UK, and gives the UK privileged access to the European Single Market. Respondents were asked to report their preferred negotiation line on a five-point scale ranging from (1) "very soft line", to (5) "very hard line."¹⁵

Figure 1 presents respondents' Brexit-negotiation preferences over the first two years of Brexit negotiations. It shows that support for a (very) soft, accommodating EU negotiation strategy was always rather low. A good third of respondents would prefer the EU to take a middle position between a soft and a hard line, and this group grew slightly over the course of the Brexit negotiations. Nonetheless, from the start of the negotiations, Europeans have on average preferred a rather hard Brexit-negotiation strategy. Between 42% and 44% of respondents supported a hard or very hard negotiation stance in each of the four survey waves. Only when the difficulties of

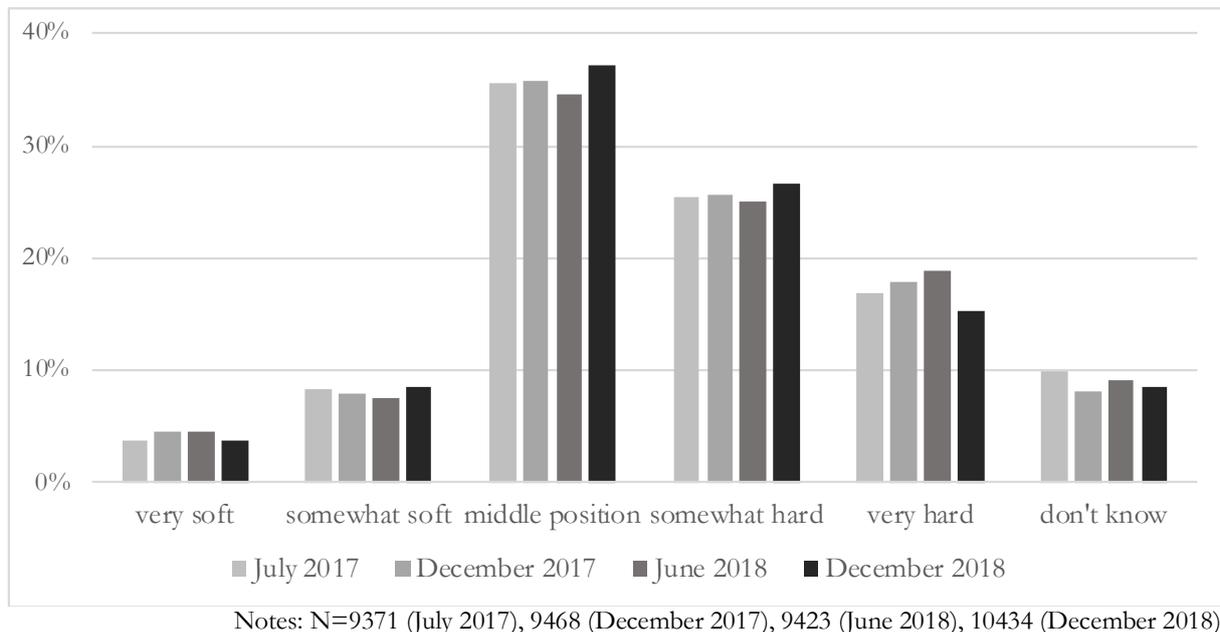
¹³ Intraclass correlations are 2.5% at the country level, and 4.0% at the region level. Results are robust to using an OLS regression model with standard errors clustered at the country level, respectively the regional level.

¹⁴ This question immediately followed upon an introductory question that asked how much attention respondents were paying to Brexit.

¹⁵ The category "Don't know/don't answer" was recoded as missing for most analyses. The issues covered in the question are deliberately broad, covering both issues from the Withdrawal and the future relationship negotiations.

successfully concluding the Withdrawal Agreement increased in December 2018, did respondents slightly move towards a more compromising stance.

Figure 1: Preferred EU-Negotiation Stance, July 2017-December 2018



Overall, this descriptive evidence suggests that – contrary to statements by some UK Brexiters that “lots of Europeans are uneasy at the line the EU Commission is taking on Brexit”¹⁶ – the EU’s rather uncompromising negotiation strategy was supported by many European citizens. In the analyses below, I use this question about the preferred soft or hard negotiation line as dependent variable, with higher values indicating a preference for a harder, non-accommodating negotiation strategy.

Correlates of preferring a hard negotiation line

My argument about the determinants of this willingness suggests that this variation in the willingness to accommodate the UK in the Brexit negotiations should be related to how individual EU-27 Europeans are exposed to the economic and political spillover effects associated with

¹⁶ See for example <https://twitter.com/DanielJHannan/status/1046677612939137024>

different Brexit negotiation outcomes and how they evaluate these effects. To examine the correlates of individuals' support for a hard, non-accommodating Brexit negotiation strategy on part of the EU, I operationalize exposure to the loss of cooperation gains and the concern about Brexit-related contagion risks as follows:

Exposure to loss of cooperation gains. To measure individuals' exposure to Brexit-related loss of cooperation gains, I focus both on subjective and objective exposure. To gauge respondent's subjectively perceived exposure to Brexit, I use respondents' assessment about how Brexit will affect their own country within five years on a five-point scale, where higher values indicate more negative effects on respondents' own country.¹⁷ Figure 2a shows how this variable is distributed and compares respondents' assessment of the effects of Brexit on their own country to those on the UK and the EU. It demonstrates that as late as December 2018, the majority of respondents was rather unconcerned about the effects of Brexit on their own country.¹⁸ More than half (54.6%) do not think that Brexit will affect their own country at all, and 13.3% even think that Brexit will make their country (much) better off. Only 19.2% think that their own country will be somewhat or much worse off because of Brexit. In contrast, 48% expect that Brexit will affect the UK negatively. That said, a quarter of respondents also expects that the UK will be better off post-Brexit, and about a quarter does not expect any effect. Respondents are more optimistic about the effects of Brexit on the EU, although on average they believe that the EU faces slightly more risks than their own country.¹⁹

Given this rather optimistic assessment, I additionally use an objective indicator of the risks that Brexit poses to respondents' regional economy. Chen et al. (2017: table A2) have estimated

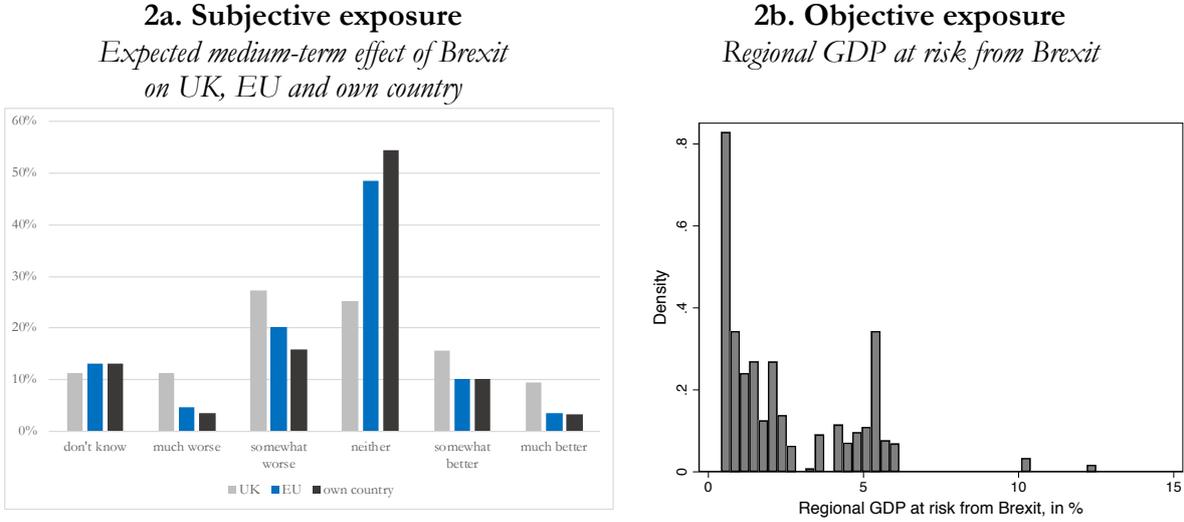
¹⁷ The effect of Brexit will of course depend on the negotiated type of Brexit, so that answers to this question will vary depending on which outcome respondents envision for the Brexit process.

¹⁸ The earlier surveys show a similar picture, with very little movement over the two years of Brexit negotiations.

¹⁹ Note that although those who are more interested in Brexit expect significantly worse consequences for the UK than those who do not follow the news on Brexit a lot, they share the low level of concern about the consequences of Brexit for the UK and the EU.

the degree to which EU regions on the NUTS-2 level are exposed to the negative trade-related consequences of Brexit that arise from the geographically fragmented production processes within the UK, the EU and beyond. I use their estimates of the regional GDP at risk from (a hard) Brexit and match it to the survey data using information about the respondent’s location.²⁰ Figure 2b shows the distribution of Brexit-exposure among the respondents in my sample. Regional exposure to Brexit-related trade losses varies from only .41% of regional GDP at risk in Liguria (Italy) to 10.13% in the Irish border region, Irish midlands, and Western Ireland.²¹ The median exposure of EU-27 respondents in my sample is 1.5% of regional GDP at risk. Since the data is highly skewed, I use the logarithm of this variable in the analyses below.

Figure 2: Distribution of respondents’ exposure to the consequences of Brexit



Note: Data are from December 2018, N=10.432

Note: Data are based on Chen et al. (2018).

Finally, I also look at respondents’ objective direct exposure, using a dummy variable that records whether respondents had personal or business ties (including through their employer) with the UK. While four in five respondents report no ties, 11.5% report personal ties, 4.5% report business ties, and 4% report both personal and business ties.

²⁰ Unfortunately, the authors do not provide any estimates for Croatia, which is why this country is dropped from the analyses that use this objective measure of exposure.

²¹ The results are robust to using regional labor income at risk instead (Chen et al. 2018: table A4).

Concern about Contagion risks. A second type of spillover effects from Brexit consists in the possibility that Brexit may spark political contagion. This is a worrisome prospect for those who value the EU and want to safeguard the European integration project. I therefore expect these individuals to support a harder, non-accommodating negotiation stance. For euroskeptics, however, an outcome that allows the UK's to continue to selectively benefit from the advantages of EU membership post-Brexit is attractive, especially if they see an exit from the EU as a desirable outcome for their own country. They should thus be more willing to accommodate the UK.

I use two variables to capture these considerations. First, at the most basic level, I look at respondents' overall attitude towards the EU, using the question "What is your opinion of the EU?" Answers on the five-point scale ranged from 0 "very negative" to 4 "very positive".²² Second, I look at how respondents said they would vote if a referendum on leaving the EU were to be held in their own country. I create a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if respondents said that they would definitely (10.6%) or probably (13.9%) vote to leave the EU, and 0 otherwise.

Other controls. I additionally control for respondents' level of information, political participation, and sociodemographic controls. Given the multidimensional and complicated nature of Brexit, one would expect more informed respondents to better understand the many dilemmas and trade-offs it creates. It is not clear a priori whether this will result in a more or less accommodating stance towards the UK, however. On the one hand, more information about the difficulties to find a compromise and the risks of a negotiation failure to the EU-27 may increase respondents' willingness to accommodate the UK. On the other hand, more information about the political contagion risks of Brexit for the EU may also lead to a harder stance. I use a variable that measures how much respondents are following the news with regard to Brexit. Only 17.7%

²² 24.6% of respondents had somewhat or very negative opinion, 27.2% neither a positive nor negative, and 48.2% had a somewhat or very positive opinion.

are following Brexit a lot, but 49.9% are following it at least a little. About one quarter does not pay a lot of attention, and 8.2% say that they do not follow Brexit-related news at all.

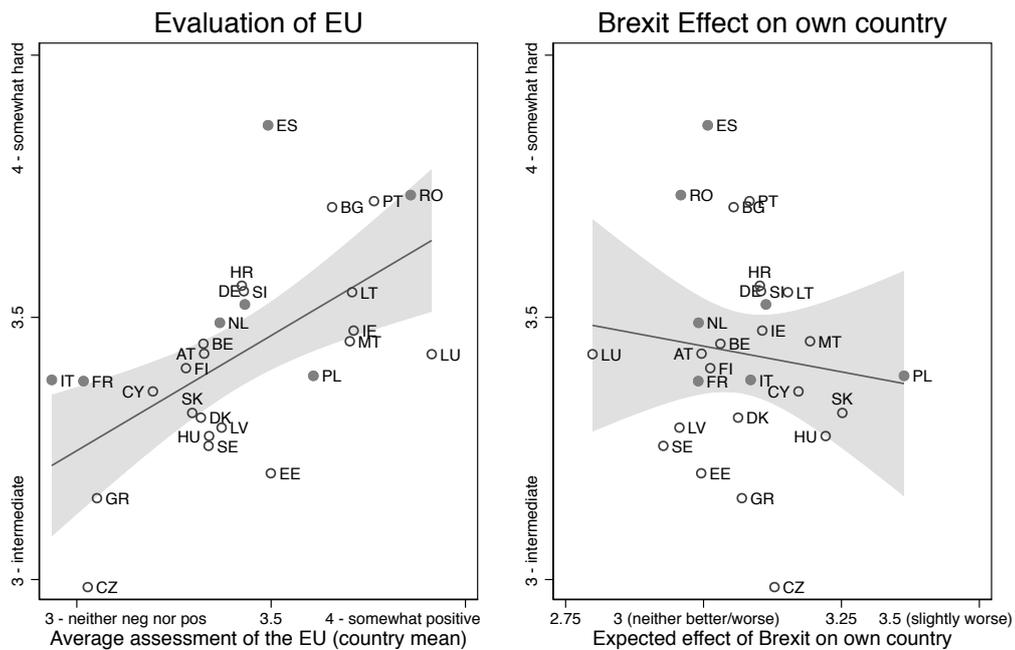
Politicians tend to pay more attention to potential voters, whereas the interests of non-voters are more readily dismissed (Walter 2016). For the Brexit negotiations, this means that the opinions of those EU-27 citizens who are likely to turn out and vote are likely to carry larger political weight than the preferences of the politically uninterested public. To gauge whether more politically active respondents have different Brexit-negotiation preferences than less politically active respondents, I therefore include a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if an individual reports that he/she is certain to vote in the next national election. Finally, I control for sociodemographic variables: age, gender, education, and whether the respondent lives in a rural or urban setting.

3. Why EU-27 Europeans' willingness to accommodate the UK varies: Findings

Why are some EU-27 Europeans more willing to accommodate the UK than others? Figure 3 pools all waves and plots the average preferred EU-Brexit negotiation strategy for each of the remaining EU-27 member states relative to the average evaluation of the EU (left-hand panel) and the average subjective assessment about the medium term consequences of Brexit for respondents' own country (right-hand panel). The graph not only documents significant country-level variation in EU-27 Brexit-negotiation preferences. It also shows that, as suggested by the accommodation dilemma, countries in which respondents view the EU more positively, on average support a more uncompromising approach in the Brexit negotiations. In contrast, a country's vulnerability to the consequences of Brexit is not strongly related to negotiation preferences.

Figure 3: Country-level variation in preferences for a hard EU Brexit-negotiation strategy

Average preferred EU Brexit-negotiation strategy by...



Notes: Coefficient= 0.44 ($p < .001$) $R^2 = 0.351$

Coefficient= -0.20 ($p < .56$) $R^2 = 0.014$
 Full circles denote countries where $N > 1000$

To evaluate these relationships more systematically, table 1 shows the results from a regression analysis of how respondent's exposure to the spillover effects of Brexit are related to their Brexit-negotiation-preferences, using data from the December 2018 wave. The key take-away from the analysis is that as expected, both exposure to the loss of cooperation gains and concern about the stability of the EU are associated with respondents' preferred EU negotiation stance in the Brexit negotiations. Columns 1 and 2 show two unconditional models. These analyses suggest that those who are more exposed to the negative consequences of Brexit, both in subjective and objective terms, are significantly more accommodating towards the UK than those who are less exposed. The one exception are those with personal ties to the UK: These respondents support a significant harder line, possibly because a hard line was defined as including better protection for

the rights of EU citizens in the UK. Somewhat surprisingly, business ties have no statistically significant effect.²³

While concern about the costs of a hard Brexit softens EU-27 Europeans' preferred negotiating stance, the possibility of political contagion effects seems to be also on their mind. The more positively they view the EU, the harder and less accommodating their stance towards the UK becomes. At the same time, those who themselves favour an exit of their own country from the EU are much more accommodating towards the UK. This is not surprising, because Brexit offers an opportunity to establish a precedent favourable towards the leaving state.²⁴

I next examine to which extent the *accommodation dilemma* shapes EU-27 Europeans' Brexit negotiation preferences. This dilemma confronts those Europeans who worry that accommodating the UK may encourage further exits from the EU, but who at the same time are vulnerable to the economic and/or social fallout from a hard Brexit. To explore to which extent a higher exposure to the economic and social fallout from Brexit moderates EU-27 Europeans' concern about political contagion effects, and vice versa, models 3 and 4 include interaction terms between the sociotropic exposure variables and respondents' assessment of the EU.

²³ Note that the effect becomes statistically significant when personal ties are excluded; this is not surprising given that personal and business ties are strongly correlated in my sample.

²⁴ This effect loses significance in the models controlling for objective exposure, but retains statistical significance if the variable on EU opinion, with which the leave dummy is strongly correlated, is omitted.

Table 1: Correlates of Brexit-negotiation preferences (three-level multilevel model)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Exposure to loss of cooperation gains				
Expected Brexit-effect on own country	-0.155*** (0.03)		-0.081 (0.07)	
Regional GDP at risk from Brexit (logged)		-0.097* (0.05)		0.130 (0.09)
Personal ties to UK	0.080** (0.04)	0.100** (0.04)	0.075** (0.04)	0.099** (0.05)
Business ties to UK	0.045 (0.06)	0.090 (0.06)	0.040 (0.06)	0.096 (0.06)
Assessment of political contagion				
General opinion of EU	0.194*** (0.04)	0.253*** (0.04)	0.295*** (0.10)	0.294*** (0.02)
Potential Leave-voter	-0.174*** (0.05)	-0.050 (0.04)	-0.176*** (0.05)	-0.053 (0.04)
Interaction effects				
Exp. Brexit-effect * EU opinion			-0.032 (0.02)	
Regional GDP at risk * EU opinion				-0.093*** (0.02)
Controls				
Attention to Brexit news	0.255*** (0.02)	0.360*** (0.02)	0.254*** (0.02)	0.361*** (0.02)
Certain to vote in next election	0.174*** (0.04)	0.231*** (0.03)	0.174*** (0.04)	0.231*** (0.04)
Age	-0.002 (0.00)	-0.004* (0.00)	-0.002 (0.00)	-0.004* (0.00)
Education	0.050*** (0.02)	0.082*** (0.03)	0.050*** (0.02)	0.083*** (0.03)
Female	-0.096* (0.05)	-0.160*** (0.04)	-0.095* (0.05)	-0.163*** (0.05)
Rural	0.059 (0.04)	0.045 (0.04)	0.060 (0.04)	0.045 (0.04)
Constant	2.471*** (0.18)	1.430*** (0.17)	2.239*** (0.31)	1.328*** (0.14)
<i>Random effects</i>				
Country-level variance	0.022 (0.011)	0.015 (0.006)	0.021 (0.011)	0.013 (0.006)
Region-level variance	0.022 (0.008)	0.023 (0.010)	0.022 (0.008)	0.023 (0.010)
Log likelihood	-13498.9	-16167.5	-13495.3	-16140.662
N(countries)	27	26	27	26
N(regions)	244	243	244	243
N (individuals)	9006	10103	9006	10103

Notes: Dependent variable is five-point measure of preferred EU Brexit-negotiation line, with higher values denoting a preference for a less accommodating stance. Multilevel model using weighted data. Standard errors in parentheses. * < .1 ** < .05 *** .001

The negative interaction terms suggest that EU-27 Europeans do indeed experience an accommodation dilemma. A more positive view of the EU makes respondents significantly less willing to accommodate the UK; yet exposure to the risks of Brexit moderates this effect. The interaction term is statistically significant at the 1% level for the objective exposure measure, and barely misses statistical significance for the subjective measure ($P > 10.2\%$). To facilitate the interpretation of the interaction term, Figure 4a illustrates the effects of holding a more positive opinion of the EU, conditional on exposure to the perceived (left-hand panel) and objective (right-hand panel) exposure of a respondents' economic environment. It shows that as expected, europhile respondents are particularly hawkish when their exposure to the costs of non-accommodating the UK is small. However, they become more dovish when their exposure to the costs of non-accommodation rises. This suggests that those who face less of an accommodation dilemma (because they are Europhile but not exposed) are freer to concentrate on the political spillover effects of Brexit. In contrast, respondents for whom Brexit has potentially significant consequences, need to confront the accommodation dilemma much more directly and therefore exhibit more moderate negotiation preferences. Moreover, figure 4b shows that exposure moderates negotiation preferences only among Europhiles. This suggests that as expected, only europhiles experience an accommodation dilemma, whereas eurosceptics support an accommodating stance irrespective of their exposure.

Figure 4: The Accommodation Dilemma

Figure 4a: Marginal effect of EU opinion, conditional on exposure

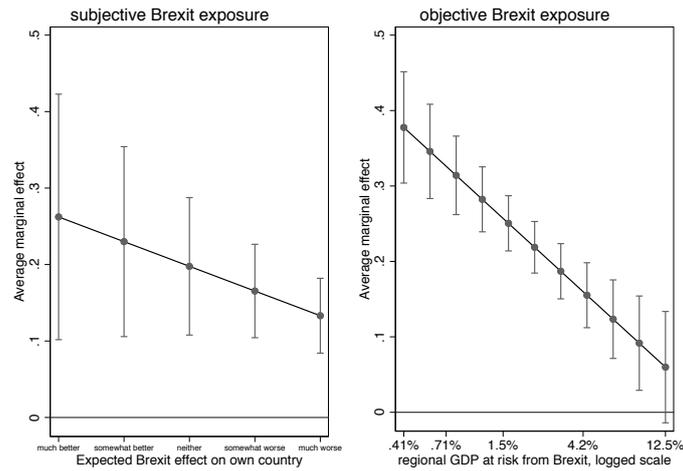
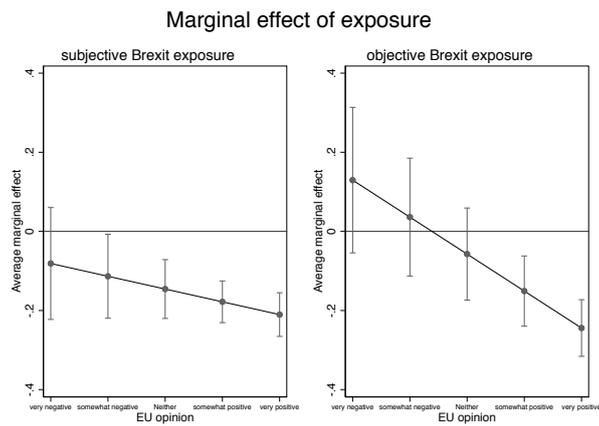


Figure 4b: Marginal effect of exposure, conditional on EU opinion



Finally, the analyses presented in table 1 reveal another noteworthy finding: Politically more active respondents take a particularly hard stance towards the UK. Those who pay more attention to the Brexit process take a significantly more uncompromising stance towards the UK than those who are less informed. Likewise, those who are planning to turn out to vote in the next national election support a harder negotiation line than those who are not sure to vote in the next election. This is potentially bad news for the UK, because it suggests that those EU-27 citizens who are more politically influential are even less willing to accommodate the UK's requests than the average EU-27 citizen. Finally, more educated respondents are less willing and women are more willing to accommodate the UK in the Brexit negotiations.

4. What do EU-27 Europeans' want from the Brexit negotiations?

So far, we have seen that on average, EU-27 Europeans are supporting the relatively hard negotiation line pursued by the EU in the Brexit negotiations so far. To better understand what EU-27 Europeans hope to achieve in these negotiations, I next examine their goals for the Brexit negotiations. In the December 2018 survey wave, I asked respondents to rank five possible goals for the Brexit negotiations. Table 2 lists how often each of these goals was ranked as the most important goal. The first column shows the overall distribution of the answers, whereas the last two columns show how europhiles and euroskeptics, respectively, rank these goals.

Table 2: Percent ranking each goal as the most important Brexit negotiation goal

	<i>All</i>	<i>Europhiles</i>	<i>Euroskeptics</i>
<i>Maintain my country's trade relations with the UK</i>	34.9%	26.6%	30.0%
<i>Avoid that other countries leave the EU in the future</i>	24.2%	39.3%	4.5%
<i>Establish a standard procedure that makes it easier for countries to leave the EU in the future</i>	19.1%	8.9%	50.9%
<i>Avoid a failure of the Brexit negotiations</i>	14.8%	14.2%	9.9%
<i>Punish the United Kingdom for leaving the EU</i>	7.0%	11.0%	4.7%
N	10432	1166	815

Notes: Europhiles (euroskeptics) are operationalized as those who see the EU as very positive (negative).
Data are from December 2018 survey.

The results shown in table 2 confirms that overall, the EU-27 public is indeed concerned about the economic and political spillover effects of Brexit on the EU and their own countries. The goal that respondents most frequently ranked as most important was “maintaining respondents’ countries’ trade relations with the UK.” For one in three respondents, limiting the economic fallout from Brexit is thus the core objective for the Brexit negotiations. The two runners-up focus on political spillovers: avoiding and encouraging political contagion were the second- and third-most frequently top-goals for the Brexit negotiations. Every fourth respondent felt that “avoiding encouraging other countries to follow the British example” was the most important objective, whereas one in five respondents felt that it was most important to “make it easier for countries to leave the EU in the future”. Only 7% of respondents listed “punishing the UK for the decision to leave the UK” as the most important goal.

However, Table 2 also shows that there is considerable variation in what europhiles and euroskeptics want to achieve in the Brexit negotiations. Europhiles listed avoiding that other countries leave the EU most frequently as the most important goal. In contrast, for a majority of euroskeptics (50.1%),²⁵ establishing a blueprint that would make leaving the EU easier in the future was the most important goal. This suggests that fears about the risk of political contagion are not unfounded: Although it has been argued that the contagion risks of Brexit have subsided since the Brexit referendum (Chopin and Lequesne 2020; Glencross 2019), euroskeptical voters were acutely aware that Brexit offers an opportunity to set a favourable precedent that could facilitate exiting in the EU in the future as late as December 2018. This also suggests that a Brexit with a favourable outcome for the UK might indeed encourage euroskeptics in the remaining EU-27 member states to pursue EU-exit plans themselves.

5. Conclusion

In the Brexit withdrawal negotiations, British hopes that the remaining EU countries would be willing to offer the UK better withdrawal terms than the EU Commission have been repeatedly frustrated. Instead, the EU27 governments have been united in rejecting any British attempts at “cherry-picking”, even at the risk that such an uncompromising stance might result in a “No-Deal”-Brexit. This paper has shown that the EU-27 have good reasons to maintain this tough negotiation stance. Not only does the EU-27 side have more bargaining power, because the UK is more vulnerable to a failure to reach a deal (Moravcsik 2018; Schimmelfennig 2018). The EU’s tough line can also be explained with the concern that making it possible for the UK to enjoy the benefits of EU integration without sharing the costs, might encourage disintegrative tendencies to spread among further member states. Because accommodating the UK carries significant risks of political contagion, the EU thus has incentives to make the exit of a member state as unattractive as possible. Against this background, the tough line taken by the EU side comes as less of a surprise.

²⁵ Among those who say that they would probably vote to leave, this share is 34.4%.

This paper has shown that support for the EU's relatively uncompromising negotiation stance in the withdrawal negotiations has not been limited to political elites. Rather, it is supported by the wider EU-27 public. Using evidence from several EU-wide online surveys of EU-27 Europeans, I have shown that the EU-27 public on average supports a somewhat hard negotiation stance. Their most important goal is to maintain their respective country's trade ties with the UK, but they also worry that allowing the UK to "cherry-pick" would threaten the long-term stability of the EU. At the same time, euroskeptics are indeed eager to use the Brexit negotiations to develop a blueprint that makes it easier for countries to leave the EU in the future. Importantly, support for a hard negotiation stance is stronger among respondents who are more likely to turn out to vote. Policymakers responsive to public opinion thus have incentives to continue to pursue a non-accommodating negotiation line.

Moreover, the analyses in this paper show that the EU-27 public seems to recognize the trade-offs inherent in the Brexit negotiations and form their preferences about the negotiations accordingly. The more exposed individuals are to the potential fallout from Brexit, the more likely they are to compromise. The more they care about the viability of the EU, the less accommodating they are in their stance. These goals often also conflict, and the evidence shows that the accommodation dilemma moderates Europeans' Brexit-related preferences. Overall, the evidence paints a picture of an EU-27 public that is well aware of the consequences of Brexit, and rather unsentimentally supports a negotiation line that safeguards their own interests best.

More generally, the evidence shows just how difficult "*mass-based disintegration*" (Walter 2020b) is: Recent successes by nationalist populists at the polls – such as the 2014 Swiss "Against mass immigration"-initiative, the 2015 Greek bailout referendum, or the 2016 election of US President Trump - have often been based on a common narrative: that by being more assertive in international relations and putting the nation's interest first rather than accepting compromise, the country's prosperity, national sovereignty, and democratic quality could be improved. This narrative has usually not survived the test of reality, however, as successes at the domestic polls

have been met with resistance abroad. Renegotiating international agreements has proven difficult, if not impossible, and has sometimes forced populist governments to concede that the status quo is better than what they could achieve if they left such an agreement. Often, voter-based attempts to unilaterally change or withdraw from the rules of international cooperation have not failed because of poor negotiation skills on part of the governments of the withdrawing states, but because voters in other countries have been unwilling to grant special privileges to one state at their own expense.

Appendix

Table A1. Sample composition by country

Country	December 2018 wave	All waves
AT	200	761
BE	239	948
BG	149	618
CY	20	83
CZ	286	950
DE	1784	6585
DK	114	489
EE	27	113
ES	1072	4276
FI	108	453
FR	1311	5190
GR	223	921
HR	91	350
HU	198	827
IE	102	391
IT	1242	4973
LT	55	243
LU	17	58
LV	40	159
MT	10	45
NL*	1035	2061
PL	1087	4200
PT	237	883
RO	408	1628
SE	203	806
SI	48	184
SK	128	501
Total	10434	38696

* In December 2018, Dalia Research increased the Dutch Sample size to over 1000. The weights are adjusted accordingly.

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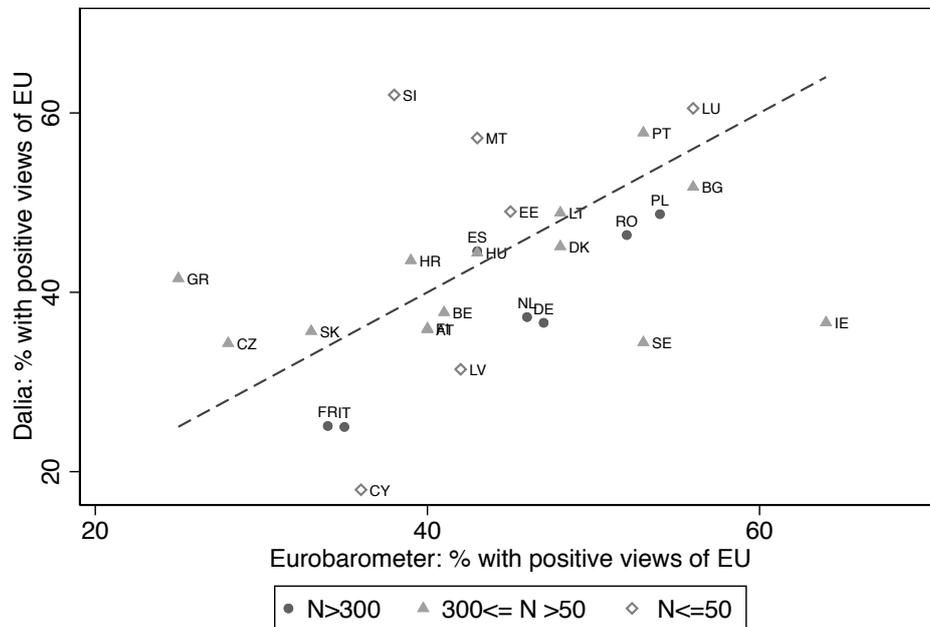
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EU-27 Public Opinion about Brexit

**Supplementary materials
(online appendix)**

S1: Comparison between Dalia and Eurobarometer Samples

Figure S1: Comparison of share of respondents viewing the EU somewhat/very positively between Dalia Sample from December 2018 wave and Eurobarometer November 2018 wave.



Note: Data from November 2018 (Eurobarometer) and December 2018 (Dalia)

Table S1: Correlation coefficients between Dalia and Eurobarometer data

	Pearson's Correlation coefficient	N
Full sample	0.4175	27
Sample excluding countries with N<100	0.4941	19
Sample excluding countries with N<300	0.9091	7

S2: Correlations

	preferred EU Brexit strategy	Expected Brexit effect	Regional GDP at risk (logged)	Personal ties	Business ties	EU opinion	Leaver	Brexit awareness	Certain to vote	age	education	female
preferred EU Brexit strategy	1											
Expected Brexit effect	-0.12	1.00										
Regional GDP at risk (logged)	-0.07	0.00	1.00									
Personal ties	0.07	-0.06	0.00	1.00								
Business ties	0.05	-0.07	0.04	0.25	1.00							
EU opinion	0.28	-0.13	-0.01	0.10	0.07	1.00						
Leaver	-0.20	0.05	0.04	-0.03	0.02	-0.60	1.00					
Brexit awareness	0.23	-0.03	-0.06	0.14	0.10	0.15	-0.05	1.00				
Certain to vote	0.13	0.02	-0.07	-0.03	-0.06	0.08	-0.05	0.26	1.00			
age	0.01	0.01	-0.06	-0.14	-0.14	-0.10	0.06	0.13	0.18	1.00		
education	0.09	0.02	-0.21	0.09	0.04	0.11	-0.10	0.17	0.13	0.03	1.00	
female	-0.06	0.06	0.01	-0.02	-0.08	-0.01	-0.02	-0.10	-0.02	-0.01	0.05	1.00
rural	-0.02	0.01	0.17	-0.04	0.00	-0.05	0.03	-0.06	-0.01	0.03	-0.14	0.02

S3a: Robustness Table 1, using OLS, country fixed effects, SEs clustered at country level

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Exposure to loss of cooperation gains				
Expected Brexit-effect on own country	-0.153*** (0.03)		-0.069 (0.06)	
Regional GDP at risk from Brexit (logged)		-0.419 (0.35)		-0.195 (0.37)
Personal ties to UK	0.080** (0.04)	0.098* (0.05)	0.056 (0.04)	0.097* (0.05)
Business ties to UK	0.037 (0.06)	0.081 (0.06)	0.068* (0.04)	0.087 (0.06)
Assessment of political contagion				
General opinion of EU	0.191*** (0.04)	0.247*** (0.04)	0.283*** (0.07)	0.289*** (0.03)
Potential Leave-voter	-0.185*** (0.05)	-0.058 (0.04)	-0.146*** (0.05)	-0.061 (0.04)
Interaction effects				
Exp. Brexit-effect * EU opinion			-0.023 (0.02)	
Regional exposure * EU opinion				-0.094*** (0.02)
Controls				
Attention to Brexit news	0.255*** (0.02)	0.357*** (0.02)	0.239*** (0.02)	0.359*** (0.02)
Certain to vote in next election	0.172*** (0.04)	0.233*** (0.03)	0.149*** (0.03)	0.233*** (0.04)
Age	-0.002 (0.00)	-0.004* (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)	-0.004** (0.00)
Education	0.050*** (0.02)	0.083*** (0.03)	0.032* (0.02)	0.083*** (0.03)
Female	-0.100* (0.05)	-0.163*** (0.05)	-0.100** (0.05)	-0.166*** (0.05)
Rural	0.068 (0.04)	0.056 (0.05)	0.049 (0.03)	0.055 (0.05)
Constant	2.401*** (0.17)	1.275*** (0.17)	2.183*** (0.21)	1.175*** (0.11)
<hr/>				
R2	0.153	0.180	0.147	0.185
Adjusted R2	0.149	0.177	0.144	0.182
N (individuals)	9006	10103	9006	10103

Note: country fixed effects not reported

Figure S3a: Robustness Figure 4b, based on model S3

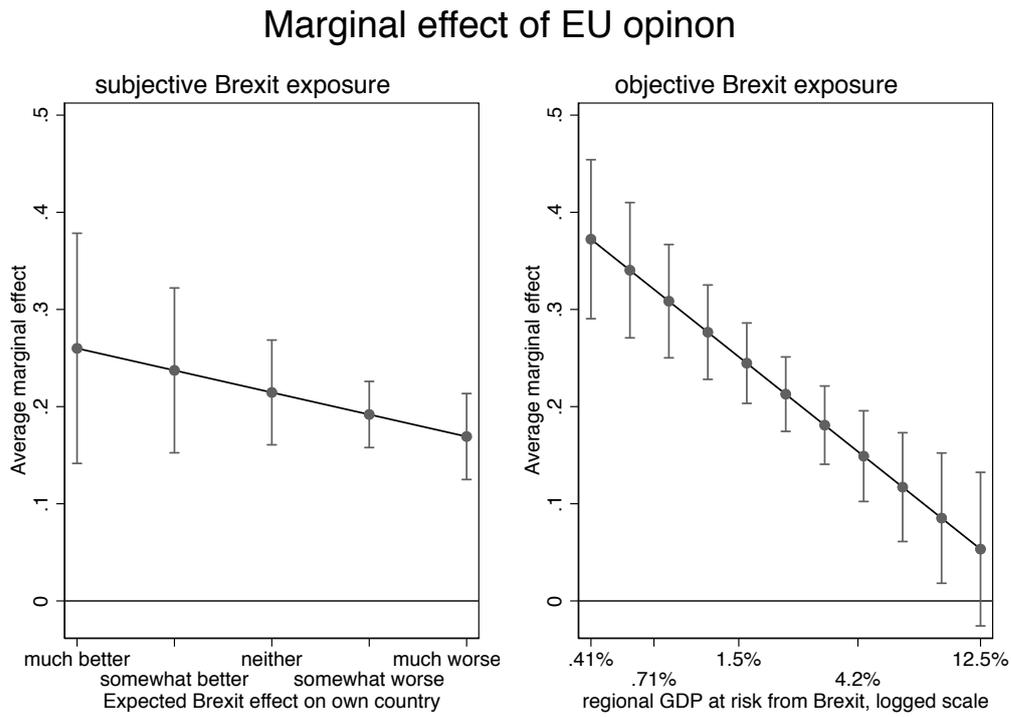
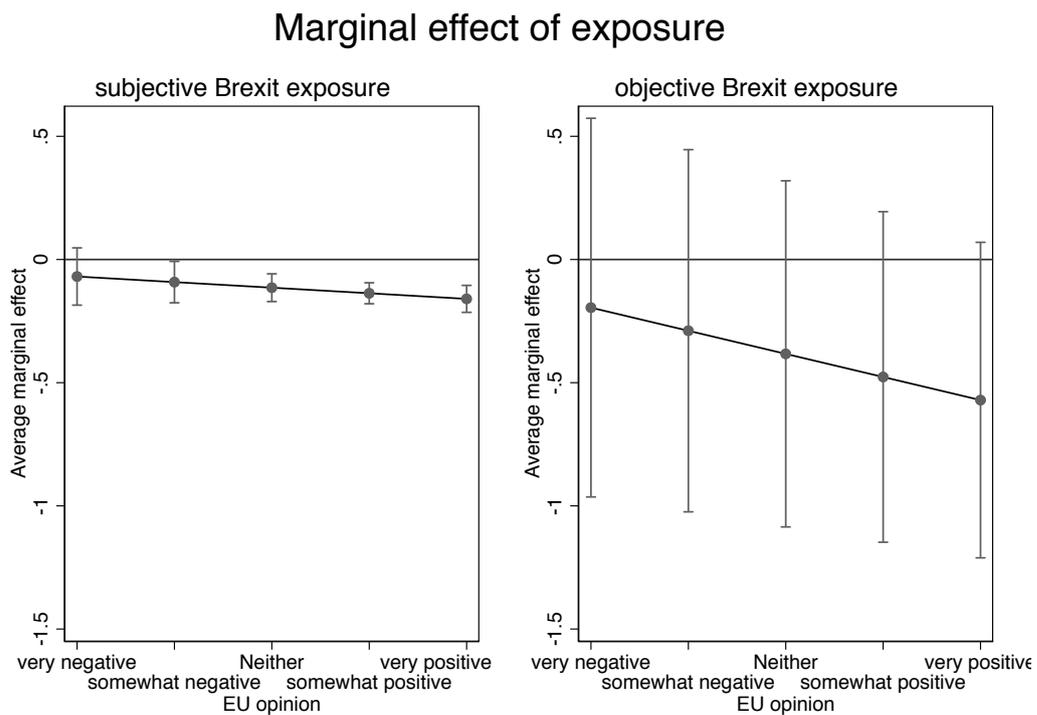


Figure S3b: Robustness Figure 4b, based on model S3



S4a: Robustness Table 1, using OLS, country fixed effects, SEs clustered at regional level

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Exposure to loss of cooperation gains				
Expected Brexit-effect on own country	-0.153*** (0.03)		-0.069 (0.05)	
Regional GDP at risk from Brexit (logged)		-0.419* (0.22)		-0.195 (0.23)
Personal ties to UK	0.080* (0.04)	0.098** (0.04)	0.056 (0.03)	0.097** (0.04)
Business ties to UK	0.037 (0.05)	0.081 (0.05)	0.068* (0.04)	0.087 (0.05)
Assessment of political contagion				
General opinion of EU	0.191*** (0.02)	0.247*** (0.02)	0.283*** (0.05)	0.289*** (0.02)
Potential Leave-voter	-0.185*** (0.05)	-0.058 (0.05)	-0.146*** (0.04)	-0.061 (0.05)
Interaction effects				
Exp. Brexit-effect * EU opinion			-0.023 (0.01)	
Regional exposure * EU opinion				-0.094*** (0.02)
Controls				
Attention to Brexit news	0.255*** (0.02)	0.357*** (0.02)	0.239*** (0.02)	0.359*** (0.02)
Certain to vote in next election	0.172*** (0.04)	0.233*** (0.04)	0.149*** (0.03)	0.233*** (0.04)
Age	-0.002* (0.00)	-0.004*** (0.00)	0.000 (0.00)	-0.004*** (0.00)
Education	0.050** (0.02)	0.083*** (0.02)	0.032* (0.02)	0.083*** (0.02)
Female	-0.100*** (0.03)	-0.163*** (0.04)	-0.100*** (0.03)	-0.166*** (0.04)
Rural	0.068* (0.04)	0.056 (0.04)	0.049* (0.03)	0.055 (0.04)
Constant	2.401*** (0.13)	1.275*** (0.14)	2.183*** (0.19)	1.175*** (0.14)
R2	0.153	0.180	0.147	0.185
Adjusted R2	0.149	0.177	0.144	0.182
N (individuals)	9006	10103	9006	10103

Note: country fixed effects not reported

Figure S4a: Robustness Figure 4a, based on model S4

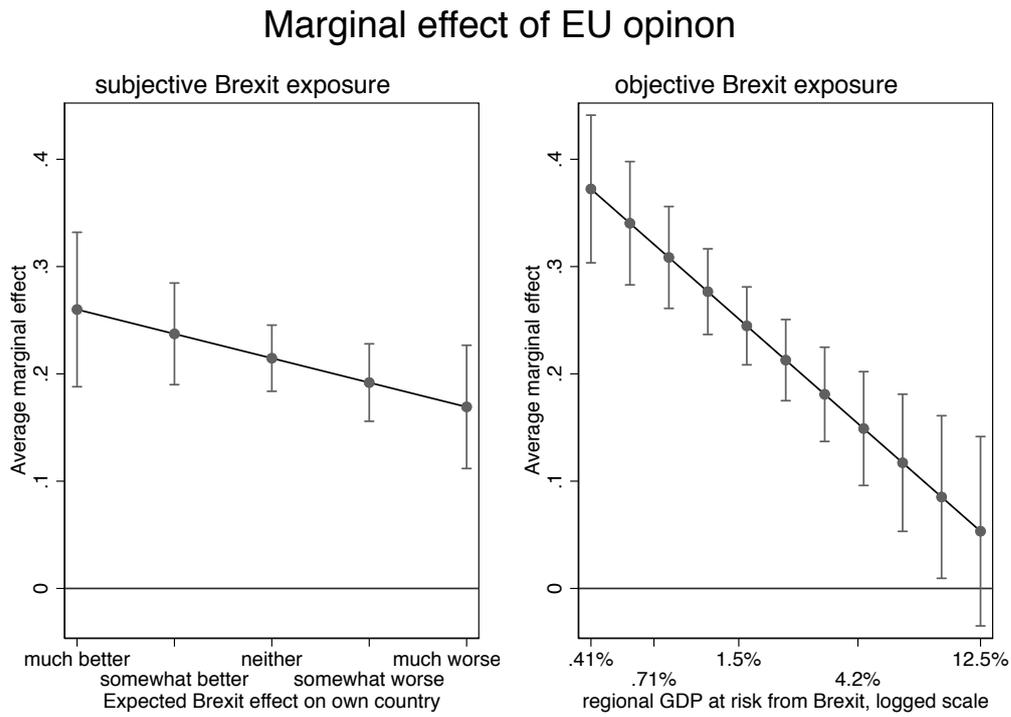


Figure S4b: Robustness Figure 4b, based on model S4

