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Mapping Public Support for the Varieties of Differentiated Integration

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Abstract

This paper attempts to map and explain public support for different types of differentiated integration (DI) in the EU. We examine citizens' preferences for DI using novel survey data from eight EU member states. We find relative majorities for both a 'core' and an 'à la carte' Europe. Factor analyses show that there are two dimensions underpinning these majorities. The first dimension relates to the effect of DI on European integration. The second concerns the safeguarding of national autonomy. Citizens' attitudes on this second dimension vary substantively across countries. General EU support is the most important correlate of DI support, correlating positively with the first and negatively with the second dimension. Overall, our results suggest that citizens have nuanced views about DI.

Keywords

Differentiated integration, public opinion, two-speed Europe, core Europe, multi-menu Europe, factor analysis

Introduction

In debates on the future of the European Union (EU), differentiated integration (DI) is regularly considered as one possible option to overcome heterogeneity-induced gridlock. The introduction to this special issue summarizes the risks and opportunities that the academic literature attributes to DI; however, we still know surprisingly little about public opinion on DI. Even though a variety of DI models and procedures are being discussed, current knowledge about citizens' support for DI remains largely

limited to analyses of a single Eurobarometer item, inquiring about the support of a ‘two-speed’ Europe model of DI (Authors, 2020; CC & DD in this special issue). In this paper, we, therefore, address a series of foundational questions about public support for DI. First, how supportive is the public when it comes to different types of DI? Second, can we identify underlying dimensions along which citizens form their preferences regarding DI? Third, how do different citizens – at the individual and national levels – diverge in their assessments of different types of DI? By shedding light on these questions, the article also seeks to clarify whether we can investigate public support on DI beyond the deceptively simple question about a ‘two-speed’ Europe, yet without the need to analyze each of the various forms of DI completely separately.

We present newly collected survey data from eight EU member states representing close to two-thirds of the EU’s population and report substantive variation concerning the support of different types of DI at the level of individual respondents as well as between member states. Furthermore, our novel ‘Comparative Opinions on Differentiated Integration’ (CODI) dataset allows us to explore which aspects citizens take into account when evaluating DI. We do so in a series of preregistered empirical analyses. To dissect which latent dimensions underlie citizens’ evaluations of DI, we employ exploratory factor analysis. We reveal two latent dimensions which underlie preference formation regarding DI. We interpret these two dimensions as relating to i) EU integration and ii) national autonomy. In other words, when asked to evaluate different types of DI, citizens seem to independently consider how such instruments could affect both EU integration and national autonomy. Across the eight member states in our sample, we find a clear majority for DI models and procedures that can be related to the first dimension (a ‘core Europe’ as well as a requirement for consent for member state opt-outs), whereas there is much more cross-national heterogeneity when it comes to models of DI which are associated with the second, national autonomy dimension, in particular the ‘à la carte’ model. Furthermore, depending on citizens’ dispositions and national context, they diverge in their assessments of the two dimensions of DI. Most prominently, pro-EU citizens positively evaluate integrationist forms of DI but are more skeptical when it comes to using DI to

preserve national autonomy. Thus, assessments of DI are related to more general questions about European integration (cf. CC & DD in this issue). In sum, we argue that the structure of public opinion reflects the fact that, depending on its specific form, DI may be either perceived as a driver or as a stumbling block towards more European integration.

The article is structured as follows. We first summarize the prior literature on support for DI, mostly relating to the ‘two-speed’ model, and explain how public support for other grand models and forms of DI may differ. We then introduce our new CODI dataset and the preregistered research design. The empirical analysis starts by reporting descriptive statistics on public support of DI, first at the aggregate and later at the level of the different countries in our sample. In a second step, we run an exploratory factor analysis over the different DI items of our survey. The factor analysis reveals the two dimensions underlying the issue space outlined above. To explain how individual-level attitudes shape support for different forms of DI, we subsequently present regression analyses covering grand models of DI as well as the two dimensions unpacked by our factor analysis. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings and an outlook on future research. In particular, we argue that more research into public support for DI is indispensable for evidence-based constitutional engineering related to DI.

Theorizing Public Support for the Varieties of DI

Research on DI, defined as an incongruence of ‘the territorial extension of European Union (EU) membership and EU rule validity’ (Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 292), has come a long way, since the early debates on the topic in the 1970s. However, as various reviews of the extant literature (e.g. the introduction to this special issue; but also Gänzle, Leruth, and Trondal (2020)) make clear, there is still a scarcity of studies relating to public opinion on DI. This is troubling, as – especially in times of politicization – the legitimacy of European integration hinges on public support (Hobolt & Vries, 2016), and this should likewise apply to DI.

An obvious challenge to the study of public support for DI consists in the fact that ‘normal’ citizens cannot be expected to have developed strong and stable preferences on the full complexity of possible DI models and procedures. Yet at the same time, they can be expected to care about the efficiency and legitimacy questions of current governance structures (cf. the introduction to this special issue). As DI plays an important role in EU governance (Duttler et al., 2017; Leuffen, Rittberger, & Schimmelfennig, 2022; Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020), it may also, in principle, be of interest to citizens; all the more, as it raises some important normative questions relating to (member state) equality, dominance and autonomy (Bellamy, Kröger, & Lorimer, 2022; Eriksen, 2018; Lord, 2015).¹

In the following, we first review the prior literature on public support of DI. We discuss three basic hypotheses on who should support DI in general that emerge from this literature. We then argue that we need to pay closer attention to public support for specific ‘grand’ DI models. Finally, we describe additional forms of DI and how public preferences may be structured around them.

Contextualizing and Replicating the Prior Literature

The existing literature has largely focused on only one specific model of DI – the idea of a ‘two-speed Europe’ – for which support was measured in Eurobarometer surveys. Using this item, the literature has established that individual dispositions both concerning EU integration and social (in)equality may inform citizens’ attitudes about this particular model of DI. Authors (2020) argue that preferences on DI align with citizens’ dispositions towards societal differentiation. DI is favored by citizens holding a liberal economic ideology, while more equality-oriented citizens tend to oppose DI. Moreover, Authors (2020) reveal large regional differences in support of DI. Citizens in Southern European member states tend to oppose, while Northern and Eastern citizens rather support a two-speed EU. The authors attribute this pattern to the repercussions of the Eurozone crisis and hypothesize that Southern

¹ Schraff (2022) highlights that citizens’ evaluations of EU legitimacy may indeed be driven by fairness consideration.

citizens fear discrimination by economically more powerful states. CC and DD (this issue) argue that more general attitudes towards European integration should also inform citizens' support of DI. In particular, pro-EU citizens should appreciate types of DI that could solve stalemates and allow integration-friendly countries to move forward. However, given the limited measurement of DI preferences in these studies, it is unclear whether and how these findings generalize to better and more extensive measurements of DI preferences.

In fact, the academic literature distinguishes a variety of DI models. Most prominently, Stubb (1996; 2002) differentiates variation over time, space and issue; this distinction is taken up in Schimmelfennig and Winzen's (2020, p. 17) triad of 'multi-speed', 'multi-tier' and 'multi-menu'. The literature also discusses additional forms of DI, including 'internal' and 'external' DI (Leuffen et al., 2022), 'capacity' and 'sovereignty' DI (Winzen, 2016), and 'discriminatory' and 'exemptive' DI (Schimmelfennig, 2014). The different forms of DI will be introduced in more detail below. At this point, it is important to stress that the academic debate acknowledges that these models vary in their impact on the unity of the EU and entail different consequences for the participating and non-participating states. Against this backdrop, it is important to learn whether academic distinctions and understandings of these different models of DI resonate with citizens' evaluations. In other words, which citizens are in support of which kind of DI, and why?

As highlighted above, the existing literature has pointed out alignments of both attitudes on European integration and of social dispositions with support for a 'two-speed' model of DI. In this article, we explore whether such relationships apply to DI in general, as postulated by Authors (2020), or whether they are limited to specific types of DI. In our pre-analysis plan, we, therefore, borrowed three hypotheses from the literature, applied to DI at the general, still unspecified level.

The first hypothesis relates support for DI to attitudes towards European integration (cf. CC & DD, this special issue). Pro-EU citizens might support DI because they consider DI to be an instrument to

overcome heterogeneity-induced gridlock. These citizens should prefer further integration by a subgroup of member states to an integration stalemate at the level of the status quo.

H1: More support for European integration correlates with more support of DI.²

Secondly, Authors (2020) link support for DI to support of liberal economic values, arguing that liberals could support the efficiency-enhancing feature of differentiation; in contrast to more equality-oriented citizens who could consider DI a threat to the EU's unity and possibly solidarity between the member states.

H2: More support of liberal economic values correlates with more support of DI.

Beyond individual-level attitudes, country-level factors may have an impact on citizens' support of DI. Citizens may not only consider the impact of DI on the EU as a whole but recognize that DI affects different member states in different ways. Indeed, Authors (2020) present strong regional variation in support for the 'two-speed' model. Citizens of Southern European member states displayed resentments about this concept, arguably because they fear a risk of being discriminated against. Authors (2020) link this aversion to DI to sociotropic concerns and a fear of being left behind, prevalent in countries heavily affected by the Eurozone crisis.

H3: Citizens in Southern EU member states are less likely to support DI compared to citizens in other regions of the EU.

Public support for different models of DI

The previous hypotheses were related to DI in general. However, different types of DI follow different logics and may have different consequences (cf. the introduction to this special issue). Citizens may

² In the pre-analysis plan, we used the verb 'coincides' for this and the following hypotheses. However, we replace this term with 'correlates' in this article. As kindly pointed out by one reviewer, the previous terminology was misleading and the term 'correlates' corresponds better what we intended to say in the first place.

therefore evaluate them differently. For instance, the ‘multi-speed’ model, defined by Stubb (1996, p. 285) as a ‘[m]ode of differentiated integration according to which the pursuit of common objectives is driven by a core group of Member States which are both able and willing to go further, the underlying assumption being that the others will follow later’, suggests a possibility and desirability of re-establishing EU unity after a temporary period of differentiation. The ‘multi-speed’ model thus makes it possible to overcome gridlocks without abandoning the goal of an ‘ever closer union’. Accordingly, the ‘multi-speed’ model should enjoy greater support from integration-friendly, as compared to Eurosceptic citizens, who should prefer permanent DI.

H4: Citizens who are more supportive of European integration are more likely to support a ‘multi-speed’ model of DI when compared to citizens who are less supportive of integration.³

The same pro-EU-minded citizens, in contrast, could oppose forms of DI which undermine the ties between the EU’s member states. Stubb (1996, p. 285), for instance, links a ‘variable geometry’ conception to a ‘permanent or irreversible separation between a hard core and lesser developed integrative units’. Thus ‘multi-tier’ models like ‘variable geometry’ or ‘core Europe’ may establish permanent forms of differentiation.⁴ An ‘à la carte’ model is usually considered to be the most radical ‘multi-menu’ form of DI granting member states strong freedoms to pick-and-choose from EU policies. Therefore, citizens in support of EU integration may be opposed to such forms of DI.

H5: Citizens who are more supportive of European integration are less likely to support an ‘à la carte’ model of DI when compared to citizens who are less supportive of integration.

Furthermore, picking up on the argument by Authors (2020), citizens with an economically liberal orientation can be expected to embrace flexibility. If choices are one’s own responsibility, any kind of flexibility should be embraced by liberals as autonomy-enhancing. Thus if the citizens of a state would

³ Hypotheses 4 and 5 were not preregistered.

⁴ According to Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012, p. 298) ‘[v]ariable geometry’ allows for cooperation outside the treaty framework; in contrast, a ‘core Europe’ model focuses solely on cooperation inside the treaty framework. In the following, we will therefore mostly employ the ‘core Europe’ concept.

prefer not to participate in specific integration steps, why stop that state? Ralph Dahrendorf's (1979) classic defense of a Europe 'à la carte' makes this position very clear, when he argues that he has 'often been struck by the prevailing view in Community circles that the worst that can happen is any movement towards what is called an Europe à la carte. This is [...] odd for someone who likes to make his own choices [...]'. Accordingly, we hypothesized:

H6: *Citizens who display liberal economic dispositions are more likely to support an 'à la carte model' of DI when compared to citizens who have stronger preferences for equality.*

Additional Forms of DI

So far, we have focused on DI in general as well as grand models of DI such as 'à la carte'. However, the literature has identified other forms of DI for which we also investigate public support. For instance, Leuffen et al. (2022) distinguish 'internal' and 'external' differentiation. The former category applies to intra-EU differentiation – the models discussed above fall in this basket – whereas the latter category refers to a situation in which outside states participate in EU policies. The European Economic Area (EEA) is a paradigmatic case of external differentiation, allowing full access to the Single Market to Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein (for other examples see Leuffen et al. 2022 or Lavenex, 2015). We do not possess strong theories concerning public support of external differentiation and refrain from formulating hypotheses on this topic. However, as it is one prominent subcategory of DI, it seems worthwhile to include it into our analysis of public support for DI.

Furthermore, both internal differentiation among EU member states and external differentiation require procedures and conditions that balance the interests of all states. These may entail, for instance, consent requirements for opt-outs or financial contributions by non-members. Assuming a general aversion to free-riding, we expect citizens to be more critical towards unconditional forms of DI.

Finally, Schimmelfennig (2014) and Schimmelfennig and Winzen (2020, p. 16f.) distinguish ‘exemptive’ and ‘discriminatory’ differentiation. While the former category refers to measures designed to protect member states’ interests, capacities, or national sensitivities which make them reluctant to support specific integration steps and negotiate opt-outs, the latter ‘pertains to the temporary or conditional exclusion of member states from participation in EU policies’ (introduction to this special issue). ‘Discriminatory differentiation’ raises legitimacy concerns, as it may be conceived as a violation of principles of political equality (Leuffen, 2022). However, there may be either ‘good’ or ‘arbitrary reasons’ for excluding member states from integration. ‘Good reasons’ would, for instance, align with the treaty purposes. For example, in December 2020, the EU adopted a so-called ‘rule of law mechanism’ designed to financially sanction those member states that violate principles of the rule of law. An ‘arbitrary reason’ would for instance be a discrimination which is not backed by treaty principles; we will later operationalize this by using the case of discrimination on the basis of national wealth. Obviously, citizens’ assessments of such mechanisms may also be influenced by considerations about their member state’s affectedness of such policies.

What do citizens care about with respect to DI?

The previous discussion suggests that DI may raise concerns for the EU as a whole, for those member states that wish to engage in more intense forms of integration, as well as for member states that desire to opt-out of some areas of integration. In fact, the normative literature on DI argues that DI needs to be fair for those member states who want to integrate further, as well as for those member states which decide not to take part in an integration step (Bellamy et al., 2022; Leuffen, 2022; Lord, 2015). In other words, DI needs to safeguard both the integration project and the autonomy of individual states.

We argue that these two dimensions should also influence citizens’ preference formation regarding DI. This raises the empirical question how citizens evaluate and weigh these dimensions when judging

various models of DI. Are citizens' attitudes towards these dimensions highly correlated, reflecting, for example, their general attitudes towards European integration? Without having formulated prior theoretical expectations, we explore this question through a factor analysis in the empirical section of this article. This approach allows us to map the political space that structures citizens' DI preference formation.

To sum up, we contend that given that the various models of DI are so different from each other, citizens should also assess them differently. In other words, public support of DI should depend on its forms and objectives. If citizens' support is key for establishing legitimacy and DI is an increasingly important component of the EU's political system, it is important to better understand citizens' attitudes regarding different forms of DI. Thus, the task of appropriately measuring support for DI has important real-world implications.

The Comparative Opinions on Differentiated Integration (CODI) dataset

In this section, we describe our original survey data and introduce the measures we designed to investigate support for (different forms of) DI. Our data set is based on an original online survey fielded in February and March 2021 in eight EU member states: Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Poland. The sample includes states that differ by size and by geographical location (East, North, South); together, the selected countries represent close to two-thirds of the EU population. There are around 1,500 respondents in each country yielding a total maximal sample size of around 12,000. We used quota sampling with respect to national marginal distributions of age groups, gender, and sub-national regions. Furthermore, for some of our analyses, we employ weights based on population shares in the EU.

Table 1 lists the battery of survey questions designed to operationalize the key DI concepts and mechanisms outlined above. Our operationalizations aim to cover most of the relevant DI types and procedures, while at the same time keeping formulations simple enough to ensure that respondents can understand them. We developed each item in discussions in a larger research group and pre-tested them to ensure that there were no excessive ‘don’t know’ responses or obvious inconsistencies in response behavior across the items. Support for each statement is measured on a 1 to 5 Likert scale; an exception is the binary ‘two-speed Europe’ item, which we borrowed from the Eurobarometer.

Table 1. Operationalization of DI concepts.

DI grand models	
Core Europe	<i>‘The idea of building a core Europe, bundling the most integration-friendly states, is a good idea.’</i>
À la carte	<i>‘Member states should generally be allowed to pick and choose from EU policies as they desire.’</i>
Two-Speed Europe (Eurobarometer)	<i>‘Countries which are ready to intensify the development of a common European policy in certain important areas (i) should do so without having to wait for the others or (ii) should wait until all Member States of the EU are ready for this’</i>
Opt-out and exclusion procedures	
Consent for opt-outs	<i>‘Member states should be allowed to opt-out of specific policy areas only after receiving the consent of the other member states.’</i>
No Exclusion based on wealth	<i>‘No state should be excluded from common EU policies because it is less wealthy than most other EU member states.’</i>
No Exclusion based on breaching norms	<i>‘No state should be excluded from common EU policies even if it breaches some of the core norms and values of the EU.’</i>
External differentiation	
No external DI	<i>‘Non-EU states should generally be excluded from the participation in EU policies.’</i>
Conditional external DI	<i>‘Non-EU states should be allowed to participate in selected EU policies, if they adequately contribute financially to the EU.’</i>

Preferences for a ‘multi-tier’ (‘core Europe’) conception are measured by support for the item: *‘The idea of building a core Europe, bundling the most integration-friendly states, is a good idea.’* The ‘multi-menu’ (‘à la carte’) conception is captured by the statement: *‘Member states should generally be allowed to pick and choose from EU policies as they desire.’* We have decided not to design a new item for the ‘multi-speed’ model, but to instead replicate the binary Eurobarometer item: *‘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... (i) should do so without having to wait for the others or (ii) should wait until all Member States of the EU are ready for this'. This allows us to not only replicate the findings of previous studies working with the Eurobarometer item but also to validate it in comparison with our own measures (Appendix A5).

In addition to the grand models of DI, we inquired about respondents' support of procedural rules concerning the granting of opt-outs, as well as the exclusion of member states based either on their wealth or their (dis)respect for fundamental EU norms. In particular, we asked the respondents to react to the statement that *'Member states should be allowed to opt-out of specific policy areas only after receiving the consent of the other member states.'* This item addresses support for institutional provisions designed to prevent a 'free-riding' behaviour of opt-out states (cf. Bellamy, 2019, p. 202). In other words, how do citizens trade-off individual states' sovereignty aspirations and community interests in the case of exemptive differentiation? We operationalize discriminatory differentiation with the statement: *'No state should be excluded from common EU policies because it is less wealthy than most other EU member states'*. Moreover, we investigate whether discriminatory differentiation should be used as a tool to sanction norm-violating states by asking about support for the statement: *'No state should be excluded from common EU policies even if it breaches some of the core norms and values of the EU.'* This item relates to the current debate on how the EU should respond to processes of democratic backsliding in member states (Bellamy & Kröger, 2021; Blauburger & Kelemen, 2017).

Finally, two items address external differentiation asking whether non-EU countries should be generally excluded from EU policies (*'Non-EU states should generally be excluded from the participation in EU policies'*) or whether they may participate in selected policies if they contribute financially to the EU budget (*'Non-EU states should be allowed to participate in selected EU policies if they adequately contribute financially to the EU'*). The latter item reflects the arrangements realized in the EEA.

Support for DI across Europe: Descriptive Results

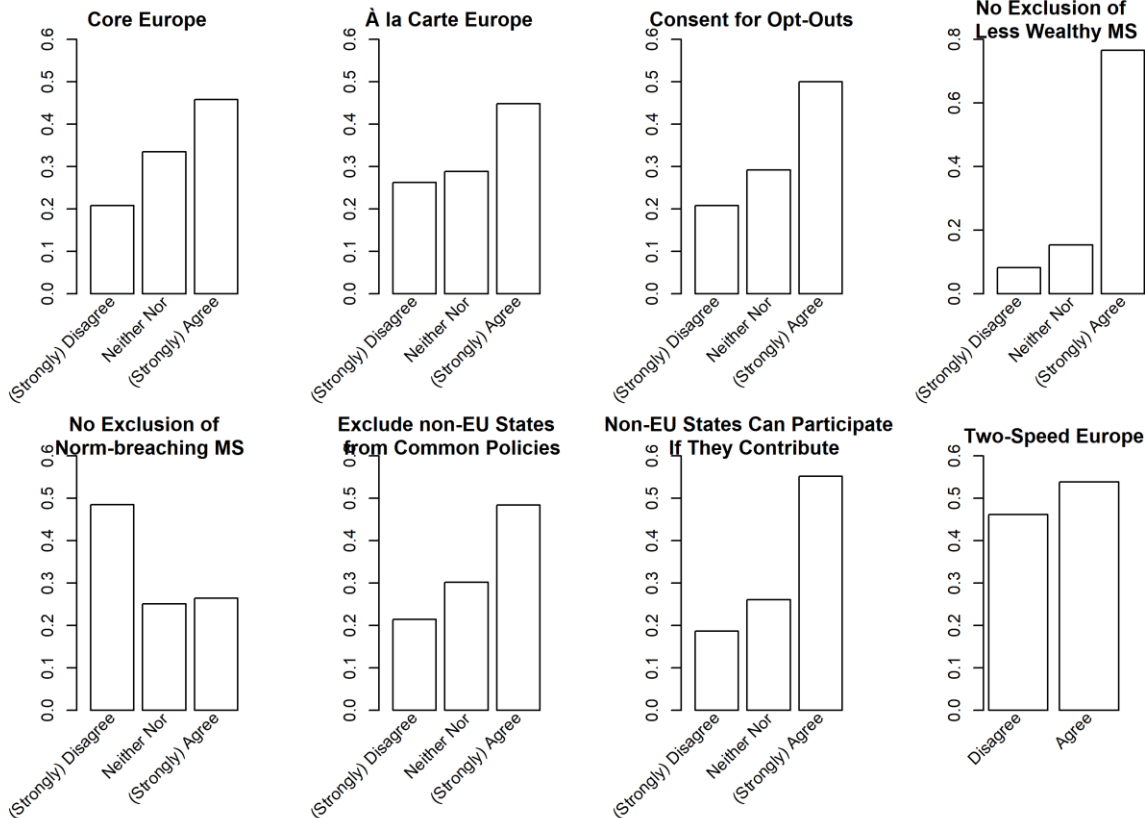


Figure 1. EU-wide support for eight DI types. Based on population-weighted data. N between 11,096 and 11,242. Note the differing y-axis for ‘No Exclusion for Less Wealthy MS’, as well as the adapted particular labeling of the binary ‘Two-Speed Europe’ item.

Having introduced the basic features of our survey data, we now descriptively explore support for the different DI items. Figure 1 shows support for the seven original items in all countries, as well as the ‘two-speed Europe’ item which we borrowed from the Eurobarometer. Here, we simplify the answer scale and collapse respondents who (strongly) agree or disagree, respectively, into one category; note that the ‘two-speed’ item is binary by design. It becomes clear that public preferences for all of these types of DI are relatively pronounced: The modal response is always either (strong) agreement or

disagreement. Furthermore, agreement or disagreement always approaches or exceeds the 50 per cent mark, even though respondents had a 'neither nor' option. This suggests that large portions of the population do not have difficulties forming an opinion on DI as presented by these items. Obviously, this does not preclude that citizens' interpretations of these concepts may diverge from expert assessments. At the same time, we also see that there is just a slight majority for the binary 'two-speed' item (perhaps exactly due to the lack of a middle category).

Overall, we find public support for both an integration-friendly 'core Europe' and an 'à la carte Europe'. Moreover, a majority of respondents supports the idea that opt-outs should only be allowed in case of a consent of the other member states. Specifically, about 45 per cent of our respondents support an 'à la carte' conception of DI while about 27 per cent signal opposition. The quite pronounced majority in favor to this conception surprised us, given that it may be considered as particularly radical (Dahrendorf, 1979), and has been criticized with reference to democratic theory (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020, p. 19). There is extremely strong opposition to excluding member states for arbitrary reasons, namely for their level of wealth. On the other hand, a relative majority of respondents disagrees that member states that breach fundamental norms should *not* be excluded. That is, they seem to be open to the possibility that member states may be excluded from policies when they violate common norms or standards. Finally, while a relative majority of respondents supports generally excluding non-EU states from common policies, there also is clear support for allowing participation of non-EU states if these contribute financially.

In sum, there are pronounced majorities for DI procedures that seem to consistently follow a particular pattern: strict requirements for opt-outs, possible sanctions for norm breaches, participation of non-EU states only if they contribute, but no outright discrimination due to poor national finances. However, the relatively high support for both a 'core' and an 'à la carte' Europe is puzzling. The next section uses factor analysis to understand this puzzle. It suggests that there are two independent profiles behind these relative majorities supporting two different concepts, which we further explore in the subsequent sections.

Along Which Dimensions is Support for DI Structured?

How can there be strong support for both a ‘core’ and an ‘à la carte’ Europe? And how does support for these ‘grand models’ relate to opinions on other more specific DI features? To answer these questions, we here present the results from a factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis is a well-established tool to uncover a structure that parsimoniously summarizes empirical relationships between measured variables. In research on general EU attitudes, Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, and De Vreese (2011) used this tool to suggest that there are as many as five different dimensions of opinion on the EU. In general, factor analysis assumes ‘that the observed (measured) variables are linear combinations of some underlying source variables’ (Kim & Mueller, 1978, p. 8). It is important to emphasize, however, that ‘factor analysis does not tell the researcher what substantive labels or meaning to attach to the factors. This decision must be made by the researcher’ (Kim & Mueller, 1978, p. 56).

We had preregistered to run ‘principal axes’ factor analyses using an ‘oblimin’ rotation assuming one and two factors, respectively. This decision was based on the conjecture that two dimensions, at most, should suffice to adequately summarize the structure of public DI attitude, and that a three-factor model would not be stable, given that we work with only seven observed variables. Indeed, estimating a three-factor model leads to numerical problems that indicate exactly this problem.⁵ Nonetheless, the results, which we report in Appendix A2, are very similar to what we discuss in the following. In Appendix A3, we also closely replicate our results when including the two-speed Europe item directly in the factor analysis, and we provide a series of preregistered tests that cast doubt on the usefulness of the Two-Speed item more generally (Appendix A5). We return to this topic in the conclusion, and for now consider our seven original DI items only.

⁵ Specifically, it leads to an ‘ultra-Heywood case’ with loadings exceeding 1.

Table 2 shows the results from our preregistered factor analysis. We display estimated factor loadings (correlations). Clearly, the estimated factor loadings for the first factor are very similar in both the one-factor and the two-factor model. We, therefore, base our discussion on the two-factor model. We concentrate on items that have a loading of at least 0.3. This choice was not preregistered but reflects a rule of thumb formulated in the methodological literature (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019, p.151).

Table 2: Results from a factor analysis on seven measures of support for DI. Bold entries are factor loadings with an absolute size of at least 0.3. The factors explain 10 (one-factor model) and 19% (two-factor model) of the variance.

	One-Factor Model		Two-Factor Model	
	Factor 1		Factor 1	Factor 2
Core Europe	0.48		0.47	0.04
A la carte Europe	-0.13		-0.19	0.34
Consent for Opt-Outs	0.47		0.48	-0.06
No exclusion of less wealthy MS	0.32		0.32	0.14
No exclusion of Norm-breaching MS	0.06		0.02	0.66
Exclude non-EU States from Common Policies	-0.05		-0.07	0.14
Non-EU States Can Participate if They Contribute	0.36		0.36	0.01
Observations	12,092		12,092	
Corr. b/w factors	NA		0.06	

In the two-factor model, the first factor correlates strongly with (1) support for a ‘core Europe’ of integration-friendly states, (2) support for the requirement that other member states consent to opt-

outs, (3) opposition to excluding member states from common policies because they are poor, and (4) support for allowing non-EU states to participate in common policies if they contribute financially.

In sum, the first factor seems to capture divides about European integration. In particular, respondents seem to care about whether DI strengthens rather than undermines European integration. Specifically, citizens either support or oppose the idea of an integration-friendly 'core Europe', limiting opt-outs and exclusions due to secondary criteria such as wealth, as well as the conditional participation of non-EU states. Perhaps surprisingly, opinions towards the exclusion of norm-breaking member states do not correlate strongly with this first dimension.

However, it is this item – opposition to the exclusion of norm-breaching member states – that correlates most strongly and positively ($r = 0.66$) with the second factor. Support for an 'à la carte Europe' also correlates positively with this second factor. We, therefore, interpret this second factor as capturing opinions towards safeguarding national autonomy or respecting member state diversity. Interestingly, safeguarding national autonomy seems to constitute a second source variable and not the 'negative pole' (Goertz, 2020, p. 81) of support for DI. Apparently, some citizens may very well support a strong 'core Europe' (scoring high on the first factor), but at the same time be concerned about being 'dominated' (Bellamy et al., 2022; Fossum, 2019; Leuffen, 2022) by other EU member states or 'Brussels' (scoring high on the second factor), for example by being excluded from common EU policies. Support for an 'à la carte' model of pick-and-choose naturally corresponds to the concern of being dominated, as it would allow member states to pro-actively avoid EU policies with which they are uncomfortable.

The overall correlation between the two factors is very small ($r = 0.06$). Again, this seems surprising, as one would expect citizens with high scores on the first factor (support for integration-friendly DI) to have low scores on the second factor (support for exemptive DI, safeguarding national autonomy). However, guided by a series of preregistered hypotheses and regression analyses, we later

provide evidence that EU membership support does indeed meaningfully explain positions on both dimensions simultaneously.

The results of the factor analysis are based on unweighted survey data, which are representative with respect to marginal national gender, age, and regional distributions. This is the analysis that we preregistered. However, the analysis does not account for the varying population sizes of the sampled countries. In Appendix A4, we present results with observations weighted by the population shares of their countries. Overall, the results are very similar.

Finally, in further non-preregistered robustness analyses, we looked into potential cross-national heterogeneity in the factor analysis. Separate factor models for each country suffer from numerical fittings problems, but confirm the structure of the first DI dimension. However, loadings are more variable for the second dimension. Appendix A4 describes the results of further ‘multigroup’ factor models that similarly point towards some heterogeneity with respect to the second dimension. We pick up on this in the discussion.

Support for Important DI Dimensions Across Countries

The results in the previous section were motivated by the fact that both a ‘core’ and an ‘à la carte Europe’ enjoy relatively high support among citizens. We established that two different DI support profiles or ‘packages’ lurk behind this pattern, on which there exists disagreement (variance) among the survey respondents. But this does not tell us how support for these two dimensions is distributed across countries. Therefore, guided by the results from our factor analysis, we here concentrate on the cross-national variance in support of DI. In the next section, we then consider preregistered individual-level regressions to show that on the individual level, support of EU membership consistently explains support on both DI dimensions.

The factor analysis suggested four aspects of DI to be most relevant for discriminating between supporters and opponents of DI: support for a ‘core Europe’ and for consents for opt-outs correlate the strongest with the first factor, while support for not excluding norm breaching countries and support for an ‘à la carte Europe’ correlate the strongest with the second factor.

In order to more closely investigate these four aspects, we create a ‘net support’ measure. For every country, we therefore subtract the proportion of respondents who (strongly) disagree with a DI rule from those who (strongly) agree. Regarding the quantitative interpretation of this measure, a net of support of 15 per cent is already quite substantial.⁶ Whenever we report overall net support for the whole EU, this is based on applying population weights.

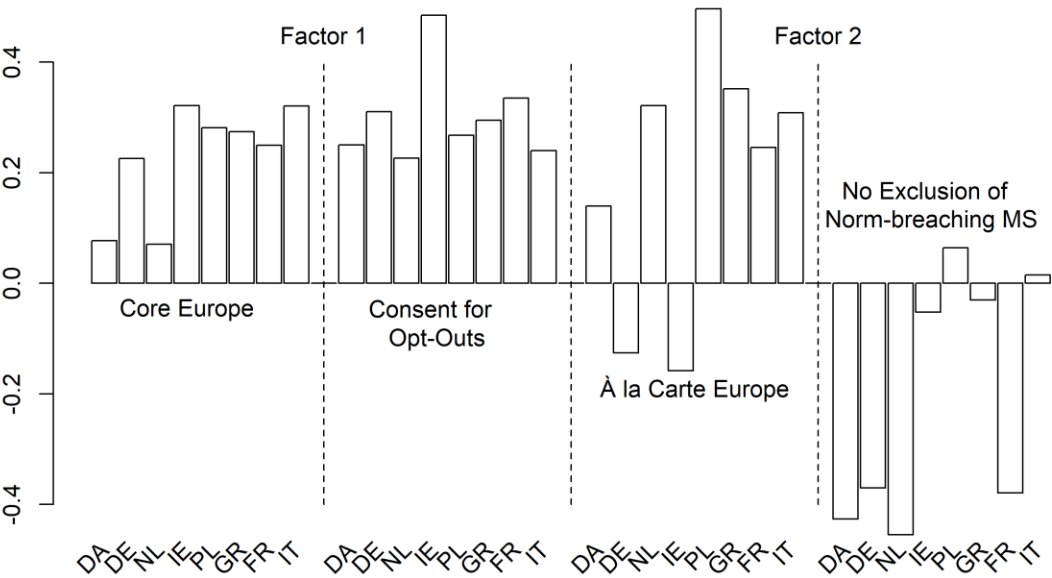


Figure 2. Net support for central items across countries. The first two variables had the highest loadings on the first factor, while the other two variables had highest loadings on the second factor. Countries are ordered according to region (North, East, South).

⁶ E.g., this could refer to a situation where 45% of respondents (strongly) agree with a DI model, while 30% disagree and 25% are indifferent.

Figure 2 plots net support for the selected DI items across the eight countries in our sample. With respect to the first dimension of DI, the picture is remarkably clear. Overall, net support for a ‘core Europe’ is large (25 percentage points) and it is positive in every single country. Support for consent for opt-outs is even larger (29 percentage points), with even less variance across countries. This shows that there is broad net support regarding the first, integration-friendly dimension of DI. Note again that this is consistent with the results from the factor analysis, which, however, just showed how the variance in different items is related to a first factor, and did not tell us anything about absolute support levels.

Regarding the second dimension of DI support, there is strong net support for excluding countries from common policies when they violate fundamental EU norms (22 percentage points more respondents disagree than agree that it should not happen). Here, however, we diagnose heterogeneity across countries. While there is a large majority of respondents in Denmark, Germany, France, and the Netherlands that agrees that countries could be excluded on these grounds, respondents in Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Poland are divided. It is possible that among the latter, respondents fear being excluded due to either breaching the Maastricht criteria or other norms regarding fiscal prudence (Greece, Italy), or due to breaching democratic norms (Poland). While we have no more specific data on exactly these two lines of reasoning, mean opposition to excluding countries because of low wealth is indeed also very high in these four countries (between 65 and 80 per cent). At the same time, the four countries in which majorities support the exclusion of norm-breakers, are all net contributors to the EU budget. Again, both lines of reasoning – the breaching of democratic norms or of fiscal rules – may underlay these responses. In particular, citizens from net-contributing member states may find it difficult to accept that countries breaking democratic norms benefit from their financial contributions through the redistributive schemes of the EU budget.⁷

⁷ Note that both Hungary and Poland, the two member states against which the European Commission has opened proceedings based on Article 7 of the Treaty of the EU to sanction them for breaches of fundamental EU norms, are net-recipients.

Possibly, those citizens may see financial sanctions as a legitimate instrument against norm-breakers (cf. Kelemen, 2020). However, our survey lacks items that directly address this interpretation.

At the same time, we also see relatively strong net support for the idea of an 'à la carte Europe' (19 percentage points). But here again, there is strong variation across countries. While German and Irish respondents on net disagree with this idea, there is strong support for it in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, and especially in Poland (with a net support of just below 50 percentage points) as well as to a somewhat lesser degree in France. Here again, we suspect that country-specific policy or cultural considerations could explain these patterns, although it is not obvious how this particular combination of supporting and opposing national publics would come about. On the side of 'à la carte' opponents, it could be speculated that Germans have a greater normative-cultural preference towards a unified Europe and the Irish may resent the attempted pick-and-choose tactics of the United Kingdom before and after the Brexit vote. On the side of 'à la carte' supporters, some Dutch respondents may prefer to abstain from further steps towards a fiscal union, whereas many conservative Poles might reject common approaches towards migration or minority rights. Taken together, this could explain why the factor models were more variable across countries with respect to the second DI dimension, as mentioned in the previous section.

Most importantly, this analysis shows that there is no clear majority of countries that support the second empirical dimension of DI: an 'à la carte Europe' enjoys relatively high support while including norm-breaching member states does not. The first empirical DI dimension, in contrast, has clear overall net support in terms of its most important items. This again underscores that the factor analysis can only tell us which items can be effectively used to tell DI supporters and opponents apart with respect to the two dimensions, but does not tell us anything about absolute levels of support. Substantively, this shows that there is a surprisingly large majority for an integration-friendly type of DI, while a version of DI concentrated on preserving national autonomy does not enjoy overall support.

Who Supports Which Kind of DI?

We now test our original hypotheses about individual-level correlates of DI support and to specifically explore how the two empirical DI dimensions relate to other important variables. We had hypothesized that general EU support is associated with higher DI support, and especially with a ‘multi-speed’ model, that economic liberals, too, are more likely to support DI, especially an ‘à la carte Europe’, and that Southern Europeans are less likely to support DI. Our results show that a simple one-dimensional conception of DI is limited and that it is worthwhile to distinguish different types of DI. Nevertheless, we also see that general EU support emerges as a central unifying correlate.

Table 4 shows results from linear regressions of various DI measures on these explanatory variables and a set of control variables.⁸ We use heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. Models 2, 3, and 4 were preregistered. We additionally explore support for an ‘à la carte Europe’ and the second empirical DI factor, to complement the regressions with support for ‘core Europe’ and the first DI factor.⁹ In Appendix A6, we also present a series of regressions that vary the set of control variables. These too were preregistered (with the exception of those for the second DI factor). With some minor exceptions mentioned below, the results of these regressions are the same as in Table 4. Therefore, we base our discussion on these five models.

We start by discussing the role of general EU support (H1, H4, H5). We find pronounced support of EU supporters for a ‘multi-tier’ Core Europe conception and a somewhat weaker effect for a ‘multi-speed’ DI model, confirming H4. In contrast, we find a strong negative effect for the ‘à la carte’ model; EU supporters are less likely to support such an option as compared to Eurosceptic citizens, confirming H5. These findings are reflected in the results of models 4 and 5, which employ the DI factors identified in the factor analysis as the dependent variables. The relationship is especially pronounced with the first, ‘inclusive core Europe’ DI factor, where the coefficient translates to an

⁸ Information on the independent variables can be found in Appendix A7.

⁹ The factor ‘scores’ as dependent variables are generated from the factor models. They have mean zero by assumption and a standard deviation of about 0.7.

approximately 0.5 standard deviations higher support. On the other hand, we find a negative effect for the second 'national autonomy DI' factor indicating that EU supporters oppose DI models with a strong focus on this dimension. This corresponds with their opposition to the 'à la carte' model. We can observe a similar pattern when looking at the preferences of respondents with an exclusive national identity, who oppose the first factor but react favourably to the 'à la carte' option.

Taken together, these patterns bolster our interpretation of the first dimension being 'integrationist' and of the second dimension being 'nationalist'. In sum, while there was little overall correlation between these two factors in the original factor model, the regression analyses show that support for different DI models is empirically structured along general EU membership support. In our interpretation, citizens anticipate the effects of different DI models and evaluate these consequences in line with the more general preferences on European integration. Whereas Europhiles embrace the idea of strengthening a core Europe and limiting opt-outs, Eurosceptic respondents consider such a development a threat and instead prefer watering down European integration and preserving national autonomy, to the point of sacrificing fundamental EU norms. Finally, the results underline our (post-hoc) hypotheses 4 and 5 in that EU supporters are sceptical towards a 'multi-menu' ('à la carte'), but positive towards a 'multi-speed' EU:

With respect to our other hypotheses on economic liberalism (H2, H6) as well as regional differences (H3), the results are less clear cut. Economic liberals appreciate a 'core Europe' but show (slightly) less support for a 'two-speed' model, the latter finding stands in direct contrast to the results by Authors (2020). However, hypothesis 6 is clearly confirmed: Economic liberals show considerably higher support for an 'à la carte Europe'. Furthermore, exploratory regressions with the two different factor scores indicate that here, too, economic liberals are DI supporters. This is especially true for the second factor; the relationship with the first factor is less stable across models (see Appendix A6). In sum, the evidence for economic liberals points in the hypothesized direction; the finding also seems to highlight once again that the 'two-speed' item is not an easily generalizable measure of more

general DI preferences (see Appendix A5 for further evidence on the weak validity of the two-speed item).

Table 4. Correlates of Various Measures of DI Support. Entries are unstandardized coefficients from linear models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Support for Core Europe (1)	Support for À la Carte Europe (2)	Support for Two-Speed Europe (3)	DI Factor 1 (4)	DI Factor 2 (5)
EU Membership Support	0.362*** (0.031)	-0.303*** (0.033)	0.041** (0.016)	0.311*** (0.020)	-0.094*** (0.023)
Liberalism	0.041*** (0.011)	0.057*** (0.011)	-0.015*** (0.005)	0.015** (0.007)	0.051*** (0.008)
EU South	0.187*** (0.025)	-0.023 (0.027)	-0.120*** (0.013)	0.090*** (0.017)	0.137*** (0.019)
Trust in EU	0.389*** (0.033)	-0.191*** (0.034)	0.035** (0.016)	0.283*** (0.020)	-0.016 (0.023)
Left-Right	-0.014** (0.006)	0.045*** (0.006)	0.006** (0.003)	-0.018*** (0.004)	0.027*** (0.004)
Migration Support	0.045*** (0.006)	-0.020*** (0.006)	0.004 (0.003)	0.048*** (0.004)	0.008* (0.004)
Growth over Environment	0.004 (0.005)	0.033*** (0.005)	-0.0002 (0.002)	-0.011*** (0.003)	0.026*** (0.004)
DI Knowledge	-0.089*** (0.017)	-0.041** (0.018)	0.002 (0.009)	-0.061*** (0.012)	-0.059*** (0.013)
National Identity	-0.246*** (0.034)	0.145*** (0.037)	-0.033* (0.017)	-0.125*** (0.021)	0.031 (0.025)
Male	0.052** (0.024)	-0.067*** (0.025)	0.014 (0.012)	0.048*** (0.015)	0.042** (0.017)
Other gender	0.030 (0.162)	-0.061 (0.342)	-0.051 (0.150)	-0.354*** (0.126)	-0.069 (0.193)
Age	0.0001 (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	-0.001** (0.0004)	-0.0003 (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
Migration Background	0.016 (0.037)	0.035 (0.039)	-0.013 (0.018)	0.011 (0.024)	0.001 (0.027)
University Degree	0.078*** (0.024)	0.004 (0.025)	0.051*** (0.012)	0.029* (0.015)	0.001 (0.017)

Diff. Paying Bills: Time to time	0.015 (0.041)	0.363*** (0.043)	-0.100*** (0.020)	-0.025 (0.027)	0.196*** (0.030)
Diff. Paying Bills: Almost never	-0.001 (0.042)	0.374*** (0.045)	-0.076*** (0.021)	-0.047* (0.027)	0.196*** (0.031)
Diff. Paying Bills: Never	-0.056 (0.038)	0.316*** (0.040)	0.003 (0.017)	-0.077*** (0.024)	0.057** (0.026)
Constant	2.802* (1.661)	-5.165*** (1.729)	2.261*** (0.842)	0.434 (1.073)	-5.761*** (1.191)
Observations	7,167	7,164	6,895	6,856	6,856
Adjusted R2	0.157	0.104	0.042	0.239	0.072

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

With respect to differences between Northern/Eastern and Southern Europe, model 3 in Table 4 replicates the finding by Authors (2020): Southern Europeans (in our sample the French, Greeks, and Italians) are 12 percentage points less likely to support a ‘two-speed Europe’. This is a very large difference that trumps any other variable’s association with this outcome. On the other hand, Southern Europeans are marginally more likely to support DI as measured by our first DI factor (model 4), but this relationship is not stable across models (see Appendix A6). Exploratory regressions suggest they also show higher support on both the ‘core Europe’ item (model 1) as well as the ‘national autonomy’ factor (model 5), although these relationships are also weak, and that they are no different from other Europeans when it comes to support of an ‘à la carte Europe’ (model 2). Therefore, we would expect that Southern European’s relationship to the ‘national autonomy’ DI factor results from the fear of being excluded based on their countries’ (past) non-compliance with the EU’s fiscal rules.

Therefore, in contrast to the strong and consistent results on general EU membership support, these tests suggest a weaker role for variables based on other political attitudes or regional differences. What remains are the strong regional differences on the ‘two-speed’ Europe item. Authors (2020) had suggested that Southern Europeans, suffering (pre-COVID) from the long shadow of the Eurozone crisis, possibly fear being ‘left behind’ or discriminated against by DI. The Eurobarometer

measure of DI might have accentuated that fear, because it mentions ‘speed’ and operationalizes opposition to DI as ‘waiting until all member states are ready’, possibly evoking ideas of a capacity-related DI. It is likely that the differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – hitting especially Italy earlier and harder – and the political conflict around the ‘Next Generation EU’ recovery fund, which was (as in the Eurozone crisis) structured around a North-South cleavage, has stabilized or rekindled these fears. The alternative DI items in our survey contain no such framing, and the very small or zero differences between Northern/Eastern and Southern Europe with respect to these measures are also consistent with this interpretation. Specifically, these results hint at Southern Europeans’ wish to belong to a ‘core Europe’ and to not be discriminated against due to their economic situation. These questions once again highlight that researchers have to pay cautious attention to possible framing effects in the wording of survey questions if they are interested in (the causes of) cross-national differences in DI support.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explain, empirically map and compare public support for different models of DI. Our novel survey data, including new measures for different types of DI, allowed us to provide, for the first time, insights into the dimensionality of public support for DI. We have argued that, given the variety of DI models proposed in the literature and the various forms of member state exclusions discussed in political debates, it is not possible to assess DI support with a simple, single survey question. Rather, DI preferences are multi-dimensional in nature, support for DI varies across different forms of DI, and it is explained by different factors.

Indeed, a factor analysis suggests that public opinion on DI can be meaningfully summarized using two dimensions. We interpret the two dimensions to represent an ‘integrationist’ and an ‘national autonomy-related’ dimension of DI, respectively. Importantly, while there are relative majorities for central elements of both dimensions, a ‘core Europe’ and an ‘à la carte Europe’, we find that only the

first 'package' of DI measures enjoys a strong support in every country within the sample, whereas the second exhibits conflict lines between countries. Similarly, factor models that allow for heterogeneity between countries also pointed towards differences in this second dimension across countries.

Our interpretation of these findings is that the European public generally favors fair and rule-based differentiation. Support for DI based on the notion of a 'core Europe' is rooted in the idea that differentiation across member states via opt-outs only occurs based on consent and the inclusion of third countries only happens when they contribute financially. Differentiation here is possible, but it should be fairly regulated. When it comes to differentiation based on an 'à la carte Europe', we find less consistent support across countries and a potential for conflict as more Eurosceptic parts of the public view it as a way to safeguard national autonomy. This second approach to DI would potentially lead to a much more unregulated form of DI.

Our results indicate that there is still a lot of variance to explain, especially between countries, when it comes this second dimension of DI. The large cross-national differences here seem unlikely to be explainable by average differences in individual attitudes that we have investigated. Our item on how to treat countries that breach fundamental norms point towards one potential explanation, as this has become a contentious topic especially with respect to Eastern European member states.

More generally, our findings on the multidimensionality of DI preferences support extant claims generated on the basis of Eurobarometer data, while at the same time drawing attention to the need for a careful wording of survey questions related to DI. Importantly, the measurement of DI also raises the question of the reference category against which to compare DI. Do citizens compare DI against uniform integration – and if yes, at which levels of integration (i.e. the lowest common denominator or the positions defended by pro-European elites) – or against other forms of DI? Further research is needed to unpack these questions more systematically.

Notwithstanding these important avenues for future research, this article empirically confirms the intuition that DI is a complex and multidimensional concept and should be treated as such when

investigating public support for DI. Public support depends not just on respondent-specific characteristics such as citizens' home country, attitudes towards EU integration and support for economic liberalism, but also on the characteristics of different models of DI. In other words, citizens notice that DI is differentiated. In their evaluations of different models of DI, citizens seem to take the anticipated effects not just for themselves, but also for their member states into account. For instance, citizens in Southern and Eastern member states seem to oppose forms of DI that they fear could discriminate against their member state, echoing concerns about dominance voiced in the academic literature (Eriksen, 2018).

In political debates about constitutional reform and the future of the EU, DI is frequently proposed as a way forward to overcome preference heterogeneity within the EU. Our findings suggest that it might not be that simple and straight forward as different people in different member states favor quite different forms of DI. This core finding implies that decisions about DI should not focus narrowly on questions of efficient integration, assuming that legitimacy is guaranteed, but that close attention must be paid to the perceived legitimacy of different DI models (cf. introduction to this special issue). Policy-makers need to take citizens' preferences and concerns seriously when choosing between different models of differentiated integration. If they do not, differentiation may increase preference heterogeneity in the EU rather than decrease it.

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