

# Elite-Mass Linkages in the Preference Formation on Differentiated Integration

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## Abstract

How does the public form preferences about differentiated integration (DI)? The literature on mass-elite linkages offers two perspectives: top-down, political elites cue the public, or bottom-up, political elites react to public preferences. This paper develops expectations based on both perspectives, and presents novel empirical data on citizens, political parties, and governments to test them. We distinguish preferences over differentiated policy integration, like ‘Opt-Outs’, from preferences over polity differentiation, such as ‘Two-Speed Europe’. Although our evidence is observational and therefore cannot establish causal relationships between elites and the mass public, our results are most compatible with the notion of a top-down linkage. This is because DI preferences are generally of low salience, and first revealed at the European level in the context of negotiations. Subsequently, this revelation of DI preferences shapes domestic discussions about DI, especially at the level of political parties. Yet, this mostly pertains to situations when governments do not yet have clear DI preferences of their own, meaning government preferences are not yet formed and revealed in the context of the supranational negotiations. Overall, this study suggests that mass-elite linkage in the preference formation on DI might be more tenuous than either the top-down or bottom-up perspective might assume.

**Keywords:** European Union; differentiated integration; preference formation; mass-elite linkages

## Introduction

Research suggests that differentiation of the European Union’s (EU) primary and secondary law has increased over time (Leuffen *et al.*, 2013; Schimmelfennig and Winzen, 2020). The fact that differentiation in the EU is increasing, however, tells us little about how preferences of political elites and the mass public are formed. Within the burgeoning literature on differentiated integration (DI), it is mostly seen as an instrument for dealing with heterogeneity between Member States and for overcoming decision-making deadlock at the European level (Schimmelfennig and Winzen, 2020). What is more, scholarly work suggests that DI creates representation problems in the European Parliament (Heermann and Leuffen, 2020) and could even contribute to European dis-integration (Leruth *et al.*, 2019). These insights suggest that DI is not necessarily a desirable objective in its own right but rather a strategic tool.

Viewing DI as a strategic tool raises important questions about how governments, political parties and citizens form preferences about DI. Surprisingly, this question has received only scarce scholarly attention (see De Blok and De Vries, 2021; Leuffen *et al.*, 2020). To our knowledge, no scholarly effort to date has been put towards examining mass-elite linkages in the preference formation on DI. This is largely because we currently lack data sources that allow us to jointly examine the preferences of governments,

political parties and citizens when it comes to DI. This study aims to address our current lack of understanding by presenting novel data on DI preferences of governments, political parties and citizens. This allows us to study mass-elite linkages on DI for the first time, albeit only in an observational rather than a causal manner.

Our theoretical starting point is the large and important literature on mass-elite linkages in preference formation on European integration (see Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Steenbergen *et al.*, 2007). This literature assumes that when issues are not very salient to voters and their preferences on these issues are not very clear, voters are more susceptible to taking cues from political elites. We suggest that given the low salience of DI, governments are likely to form preferences only at critical moments of EU bargaining when collective action is seen as crucial. DI serves as a way to overcome decision-making deadlock. Once a government has formed and revealed its DI preferences, DI has the potential to become more contested among political parties and citizens at the national level. We test this top-down understanding of DI preference formation with our unique novel data. While it is difficult to causally assess our expectations, as we cannot randomly assign crises or government preferences, we do uncover empirical patterns in the data on government, parties' and citizens' position-taking on and salience of DI that fit the top-down understanding of mass-elite linkages that we hypothesize, albeit in a weak form. Overall, our evidence suggests that the mass-elite linkage in the preference formation on DI is more tenuous than either the top-down or bottom-up perspective assumes.

Besides bringing to bear novel data to the analysis of DI preference formation, this paper contributes to the existing literature in two distinct ways. First, we revisit the debate of mass-elite linkages on European integration. The current literature largely neglects the multidimensional nature of governments, parties' and citizens' preferences about European integration. Here we consider a specific aspect, namely DI, about which there is presently only limited work. Second, we add to a growing body of work about the politicization of the EU and its consequences for strategic party positioning, also in government. While existing work has looked at the responsiveness of governments to conflict over European integration within the public (for example, Hagemann *et al.*, 2017; Schneider, 2019), we suggest that the reverse process may also exist, namely the extent to which government bargaining at the EU affects subsequent position-taking of political parties and citizens at the national level.

Our study is structured as follows. In a first step, we explain our conceptualization of DI and lay out the theory of mass-elite linkages in preference formation on European integration. Next, we provide an overview of our novel data, and we explain our methodology. In a third step, we present the results of our empirical analyses. In a final step, we discuss our results and highlight avenues for potential future research.

## I. Public and Elite Preferences on Differentiated Integration

Before we discuss the existing work on mass-elite linkages in preference formation about European integration, we provide a short conceptualization of DI. By systematically unpacking the concept of DI, we distinguish between conceptual dimensions which have previously often been conflated in the literature. In doing so, we identify two key legal

mechanisms through which DI is realized: opt-outs and differentiated integration. These distinctions guide our empirical operationalization of DI preferences.

### *Conceptualizing Differentiated Integration*

In legal terms, the EU can be understood as a body of binding rules to which Member States have to comply. These legal rules can be uniform or differentiated. While uniform rules apply to all Member States equally, differentiated rules exempt at least one Member State from applying a specific rule for some time.<sup>1</sup> Differentiated integration (DI) originates from the diversity of integration preferences and capabilities of the Member States to implement policies (Schimmelfennig and Winzen, 2020). At moments of decision-making gridlock at the European level, DI allows willing and able Member States to pursue further integration, while respecting the sovereignty concerns of more reluctant Member States.

Differentiated integration can take various forms<sup>2</sup> and it can be realized in different ways.<sup>3</sup> It is important not to conflate these. Arguably, the best-known form of DI is a ‘Two-Speed’ or ‘Multi-Speed’ Europe. In a ‘Two-Speed Europe’, Member States follow different pathways to integration, but ultimately all Member States are expected to arrive at a uniform state of deeper integration. Here differentiation constitutes a temporary phenomenon. In terms of mechanisms, so-called ‘Opt-Outs’ are the most relevant way through which DI is achieved. An ‘Opt-Out’ signifies that a specific EU rule does not apply to a specific Member State for a specific moment in time.<sup>4</sup> Examples are the Danish Opt-Out from the European Economic and Monetary Union or the Polish Opt-Out from the Charter of Fundamental Rights. In the remainder of this paper, we will focus on preference formation regarding ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’.

### *Mass-Elite Linkages in the Preference Formation about Differentiated Integration*

Despite an increase in DI in practice (see Schimmelfennig and Winzen, 2020), facilitated by EU law, little is known about the preferences of government, parties and voters for DI and how these preferences are formed. A useful lens for understanding the formation of DI preferences is the literature on mass-elite linkages in the preference formation on European integration. This literature distinguishes between a bottom-up and top-down perspective (see also Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Steenbergen *et al.*, 2007). In the following,

<sup>1</sup>This is referred to as *de iure differentiation* and can be analytically distinguished from *de facto differentiation*, which comprises differentiation due to unequal compliance of Member States with EU rules (Tallberg, 2002; Falkner *et al.*, 2005), differences in rule implementation (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010), or informal forms of cooperation among a group of Member States.

<sup>2</sup>Schimmelfennig and Winzen (2020) distinguish between multi-speed, multi-tier and multi-menu differentiation. ‘Multi-Tier Differentiation’ (or Europe of concentric circles/core-periphery) describes the existence of a core of deeply integrated countries, surrounded by one or several tiers of more peripheral Member States. ‘Multi-Menu Differentiation’ (or Europe à la carte) means that the Member States freely pick and choose the policies in which they seek to cooperate, resulting in a patchwork of variegated policy regimes without a clear organizational or membership core.

<sup>3</sup>Bruno de Witte (2018, 2019) discusses a variety of legal mechanisms through which DI can be realized. These include, opt-outs, enhanced cooperation, inter se agreements and association agreements.

<sup>4</sup>Schimmelfennig and Winzen (2014) distinguish between voluntary and discriminatory opt-outs from EU rules. Voluntary opt-outs are seen as rooted in a Member State’s policy integration preferences and usually occur in the context of EU treaty change (deepening integration). Discriminatory opt-outs are rooted in concerns about a Member State lacking the capacity to implement a common rule. They usually occur in the context of EU enlargements (widening integration).

we discuss both perspectives and develop contrasting expectations, both about the salience of DI and about the preference formation of voters, parties and governments.

The *bottom-up perspective* suggests that political parties tailor their electoral programmes to existing voter preferences. Electoral promises then function as a constraint on elected governments when engaging in intergovernmental negotiations at the European level. Hence, in the bottom-up perspective, the DI preferences of governments align with those of a plurality of voters. The crucial assumption which underlies this perspective is that voters care enough about European integration to make it electorally rewarding for political parties to campaign on EU issues. This perspective resonates with recent post-functionalist thinking about European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), which theorizes an emergent ‘constraining dissensus’ about integration rooted in popular concerns about self-determination. From this perspective, we should expect DI to be quite a salient issue for citizens. Moreover, for the bottom-up process to work, voter attitudes need to be stable enough to make it worthwhile for political parties to cater for them. Hence, we would expect that the salience of DI is high and stable and is likely to be increasing over time.

*Expectation 1.1:* (Bottom-up): The salience of ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’ is relatively high and stable among governments, political parties and citizens.

The *top-down perspective* would challenge the assumption that voters care enough about DI to make it worthwhile for political parties to compete on. In this view, governments are relatively unconstrained by public opinion in the formation of their preferences about DI. Research shows that the politicization of European integration remains relatively low at the national level (Hutter *et al.*, 2016; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019; Kriesi, 2016). There are several reasons for this. European integration remains one of the most complex political issues that European mass publics face. It involves a political system with which they lack much direct experience, a political process that is open-ended and constantly in flux, and political deliberations that often focus on highly technical questions that citizens may find difficult to grasp, especially because debates take place in the absence of a truly supranational public sphere (Koopmans, 2007). Recent work suggests that citizens are deeply conflicted about different aspects of the European integration process (De Vries, 2013; De Vries, 2018; De Vries and Steenbergen, 2013; Stoeckel, 2013).

Against this backdrop, forming consistent and informed preferences over DI is particularly complex for ordinary citizens. This is even more likely to be the case because governments and parties are likely to be strategically ambiguous about their DI preferences (Rovny, 2012). As long as DI is not a salient political issue at the national level, political parties and citizens are therefore unlikely to have clear positions on DI. When the salience of DI is low, it would seriously question a bottom-up link between masses and elites.

In addition, from an intergovernmentalist perspective (Moravcsik, 1998), we would expect that increases in the salience of differentiated integration should correspond to moments of intense bargaining between the Member States, such as enlargements, treaty changes or major crises. This would be the case because in such moments, decision-making rules or norms of the EU (that is, unanimity) could preclude agreement between the Member States. In such situations, differentiated integration could become an attractive tool for reaching agreement among a subset of willing and able Member States.

We would expect that this mechanism would be of relevance in the EU after the 2004 enlargement, which considerably increased the number and diversity of Member States.

*Expectation 1.2: (Top-Down):* The salience of ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’ is relatively low among governments, political parties and citizens but increases around major European events.

Besides different expectations regarding the salience of DI, the top-down and bottom-up perspectives also suggest differences when it comes to preferences of voters, parties and governments. Within the top-down perspective, preferences towards DI are first formed by governments and are then picked up by national political parties and citizens. In some respects, the debate about mass-elite linkages reflects more general debates within the study of European integration. The top-down perspective places the primacy of European integration with national governments and bargaining processes which closely follows (liberal) intergovernmental interpretations of European integration (Moravcsik, 1998), while the bottom-up perspective highlights the importance of public contestation over European integration, due to grievances about sovereignty or identity for example, that gets picked up by political elites. This latter perspective mirrors more closely post-functionalist accounts of European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009).

This raises the question of how governments form DI preferences. As suggested above, in moments when collective European action is stalled due to divergent integration preferences, governments may come to view DI as a strategic tool to overcome decision-making gridlock as we suggested earlier. Against this backdrop, we would expect that governments tend to perceive DI in terms of the functional benefits it offers in steering European integration further or in preserving their national interest. These elite cues would likely make supporters of government parties also view DI more positively, while opposition parties and supporters are not under the same functional pressures. As a result, we would see governmental and opposition parties and their supporters diverge when it comes to DI whereby government parties and supporters should view DI more positively due to its functional benefits.

*Expectation 2.1: (Top-down):* Support for ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’ is higher among government parties and supporters than among opposition parties and supporters.

By contrast, if voter preferences matter most for the formation of party and governmental preferences about ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’, we would not necessarily expect that governmental parties and supporters view DI more positively than opposition parties and supporters. This is because positive or negative governmental DI preferences would be determined by the domestic electoral process and ideology, not necessarily the expected functional benefits of DI in overcoming European decision-making gridlock.

*Expectation 2.2: (Bottom-up):* Support for ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’ is not determined by the government/opposition divide amongst political parties and supporters.

Finally, Frank Schimmelfennig and Thomas Winzen (2020) suggest that governments of Member States with a higher share of citizens identifying exclusively with their

national identity should be less integration-seeking than Member States with lower shares of exclusively national-identifying citizens. Opt-Outs can be seen to preserve national interest.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, we would expect public support for ‘Opt-Outs’ to be high in countries with a high share of citizens with an exclusive national identity. Moreover, if mass and elite preferences are linked in a bottom-up fashion, we would expect that governmental preferences would mirror these preferences. While we should not expect a direct correspondence between public and governmental preferences when preference formation is a top-down process, this would more likely be the case if elite preferences were more unconstrained by public opinion.

*Expectation 3.1: (Bottom-up):* Governmental and public support for ‘Opt-Outs’ is higher in Member States with a high share of citizens with an exclusive national identity.

*Expectation 3.2: (Top-Down):* Governmental and public support for ‘Opt-Outs’ are not aligned in Member States with a high share of citizens with an exclusive national identity.

## II. Data and Methods<sup>6</sup>

To examine these expectations, we collected novel data on governments’, parties’ and voters’ position-taking on and salience of DI. We elaborate each of these data sources in this section.

### *Governments*

The data for governments was collected at the Member State level following a standardized approach. For the salience of DI, the country researchers were tasked with counting the frequency of DI-related keywords (see Appendix 1) in parliamentary debates. The underlying assumption is that the more an issue is debated in parliament, the more important it is politically. For governmental preferences about DI, the country researchers were asked to code references to DI keywords by members of the government/governing parties in key documents<sup>7</sup> as either positive, neutral or negative. To capture indirect references to DI, the country researchers were asked to attentively read selected key documents. To obtain an overall assessment, we finally asked the country researchers to complete a survey, using a 5-point ordinal scale as proposed by Leruth (2015) for the study of EU integration preferences.<sup>8</sup> The questionnaire was then completed by the country

<sup>5</sup>Compared to ‘Opt-Outs’, the idea of a ‘Two-Speed’ or ‘Multi-Speed’ Europe is more ambiguous. On the one hand, it can be seen as a way to move integration forward when unanimity is lacking. In this view, support for a ‘Two-Speed Europe’ would be high among Europhiles. On the other hand, it can be seen as a way to preserve national sovereignty. In this view, support for a ‘Two-Speed’ Europe would be high among eurosceptics. For this reason, we cannot develop clear expectations for the preference formation on ‘Two-Speed Europe’ from a bottom-up perspective.

<sup>6</sup>Related datasets and outputs are available on the InDivEU project website, at: <http://indiveu.eui.eu/integrated-database/> (accessed 30 June 2021).

<sup>7</sup>Parliamentary debates, governmental programmes, key speeches by Prime Ministers and Presidents at the national and European level.

<sup>8</sup>The scale reaches from (1) very negative, (2) negative, (3) neutral, (4) positive, to (5) very positive.

researchers and cross-checked with an internal coding of the preferences which was based on the data contained in the 27 country reports which we had received from the country researchers.

### *Political Parties*

The data for political parties was collected in conjunction with euandi2019, a Voting Advice Application (VAA) prepared for the European Parliament elections of 2019. This VAA not only provided citizens with a trustworthy compass to navigate the complexity of party offers during European electoral campaigns, but also constitutes a rich and reliable (da Silva *et al.*, 2021) data source for analysing party politics in a variety of domains, from economic left–right to foreign policy (Cicchi *et al.*, 2020). The implementation of euandi2019 involved more than 100 scholars grouped in country teams, positioning 272 political parties across Europe on 22 policy statements, five of which referred to European integration at large (including, amongst other things, support for EU taxes, stronger security and defence policies, and support for veto power of individual Member States).<sup>9</sup> Expert teams coded party positions and interacted with the parties themselves between March and April 2019. Both sides had to provide supporting evidence for each coded party position. On each issue, parties were placed on a classical 5-point Likert scale,<sup>10</sup> based on their degree of (dis)agreement with the respective statement. In case the party had no discernible position on the statement, it was coded as having ‘No opinion’.

In a subsequent step, a subset ( $N = 57$ ) of these political parties from eight Member States (Croatia, France, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden) have been positioned on three statements related to DI. For the remaining countries we lack data about DI, and this narrows the number of party observations we can analyse. The three statements are the following:

1. The EU should allow countries to integrate at multiple speeds.
2. Member States should be allowed to opt out of specific areas of European integration.
3. All Member States should eventually join the Eurozone.

For the purpose of this analysis, we focus on the first two statements. In addition to these EU and DI-related questions, a number of additional variables from euandi2019 and Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (CHES) are taken into consideration as well.<sup>11</sup> The variables included in the empirical analysis are: the party being in government or not<sup>12</sup>; a dummy variable indicating if the party comes from eastern (0) or western (1) Europe; a 1–7 variable measuring the overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration; three 0–10 variables measuring the relative salience, the degree of dissent and the

<sup>9</sup>The EU integration statements were: ‘The EU should acquire its own tax raising powers’, ‘On foreign policy issues, [such as the relationship with Russia], the EU should speak with one voice’, ‘The European Union should strengthen its security and defence policy’, ‘European integration is a good thing’, and ‘Individual member states of the EU should have less veto power’.

<sup>10</sup>Completely disagree, tend to disagree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to agree, completely agree.

<sup>11</sup>The integrated euandi2019 and CHES expert survey dataset, comprehensive of EU- and DI-related question also for previous waves (2009, 2014) of European election VAAs, is available at <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/69275>

<sup>12</sup>0 = party not in government; 0.5 = party in government for part of the year; 1 = party in government for the entire year.

blurriness of the party's position towards European integration; finally, the 0–10 classical ideological variable measuring economic left–right orientation. More information on the correlation between euandi2019 and CHES EU-related variables can be found in Appendix 4.

### *Citizens*

To investigate citizens' preferences for DI, we compiled a dataset using several waves from the Eurobarometer (EB), the EUI-YouGov survey, and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). We will first discuss the Eurobarometer data and the variables included within this cross-national survey and then elaborate on the EUI-YouGov survey.

The Eurobarometer series contains a single item on DI, which was asked almost every year. For our analysis, we focus on the time period between 2004 and 2018, in which the question was most consistently asked.<sup>13</sup> We retrieved 13 waves from the EB that include our item of interest, with approximately one wave per year.<sup>14</sup> For each wave, the EB draws a multi-stage random sample of 1,000 respondents among the national population (aged 15 and over) in all EU Member States.<sup>15</sup> We merged the samples for West and East Germany, and for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Great Britain, and finally excluded Turkey and the UK from our analysis as they are not (or are no longer) a member of the EU. We use this dataset for descriptive purposes only, that is say to model support for DI across time and across countries. Our key variable of interest here is a binary measure on preferences for a two-speed EU.<sup>16</sup> Here, respondents were also offered the chance to answer “Don't know”.

For our individual-level analysis, in which we examine differences among party supporters and countries, we rely on the EUI-YouGov survey. This data was collected in April 2020 using an online interview administered to a random sample from the more than 800,000 international members of the YouGov panel. Data was collected from 13 countries.<sup>17</sup> The total sample size was 21,779 adults, representative at the country level. As for our variables of interest, this survey contains three questions measuring respondents' preferences for DI: (1) opt-out preferences,<sup>18</sup> (2) two-speed Europe preferences,<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup>The DI question has been asked before in the EB series, at the end of the 1990s, but using a different formulation and very sporadically with years in between the repetition of the question.

<sup>14</sup>We have two gaps in our time-series for the years 2013 and 2016.

<sup>15</sup>For more information on the sampling strategy, please visit the Eurobarometer website: <https://www.gesis.org/en/eurobarometer-data-service/survey-series/standard-special-eb/sampling-and-fieldwork>

<sup>16</sup>The question wording in the EB was: ‘As regards to 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 ... Should do so without having to wait for others’ (coded as 1), or ‘Should wait until all MS of the EU are ready for this’ (coded as 0). The formulation of this question slightly changed from 2007 onwards to ‘When it comes to EU's activities, some Member States are ready to enhance the development of common European policy in certain important areas. Do you think that they should ... Do so without waiting for the other EU Member states’ (coded as 1), or ‘Wait for all the EU Member States to be ready to do it’ (coded as 0).

<sup>17</sup>Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Sweden, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain (here too we excluded the UK from our analyses).

<sup>18</sup>Member states should be allowed to opt out of specific areas of European integration. This means that a member state can negotiate exceptions (“opt-out”) for areas in which it does not wish to cooperate. For example, Denmark has opted out of the common currency, and Poland has opted out of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights’.

<sup>19</sup>‘Please tell us how far you agree or disagree with the following statement: The EU should allow countries to integrate at multiple speeds. This means that all member states aspire to the same levels of integration in the future, but they are allowed to arrive there at different times, creating more flexibility but also more fragmentation.’



and (3) views on whether all Member States should join the Eurozone.<sup>20</sup> These questions mirror the three DI statements on which parties were positioned by the euandi2019 expert teams, but each of them has been elaborated in more detail so as to help survey respondents better understand them. The answer categories also correspond to euandi2019's 5-point Likert scale (1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'). We rely on these items as the dependent variables for our regression analyses.

In these regression analyses, we also employ several control variables on the individual level, that is gender (male is the reference category), age, and the insecurity of one's personal economic situation (captured on a 4-point scale, with 1 meaning 'very secure' and 4 meaning 'very insecure'). In addition, we include party-level characteristics using the CHES, similar to the party-level analysis. We merged the EUI-YouGov data with the CHES using the indicated vote choice for the most recent national elections. From the CHES, we retrieved four variables. First, we include a binary item on whether the party that the respondent voted for was (at the time of the survey) in government or in the opposition. Second, we include an item on the *party's general position on EU integration* captured on a 7-point scale where a high score means that they are strongly opposed (7) and a low score means that they are strongly in favour (1). Third, we also employ an item on the *economic left-right position* of the party captured on an 11-point scale, with 0 meaning left, 5 being labelled as the centre, and 10 indicating the right. Fourth, we also include an item on the GAL-TAN position of a party, which was also measured on an 11-point scale (0 being libertarian/postmaterialist and 10 being traditional/authoritarian). Finally, at the country level, we include the share of the population identifying as '[Nationality] only' (based on Eurobarometer data<sup>21</sup>) to test the impact of national identity on DI preferences.

### III. Results

This section presents the results of our analysis. First, it shows that parliamentary debates on DI cluster around key events at the EU level and that the share of 'don't know' answers decreases for political parties and citizens around these events. Second, we present evidence on the determinants of the DI positions of governments, parties and citizens. We find evidence that governmental positions are shaped at the supranational level and are subsequently contested at the national level. These findings are in line with our top-down understanding of DI preference formation.

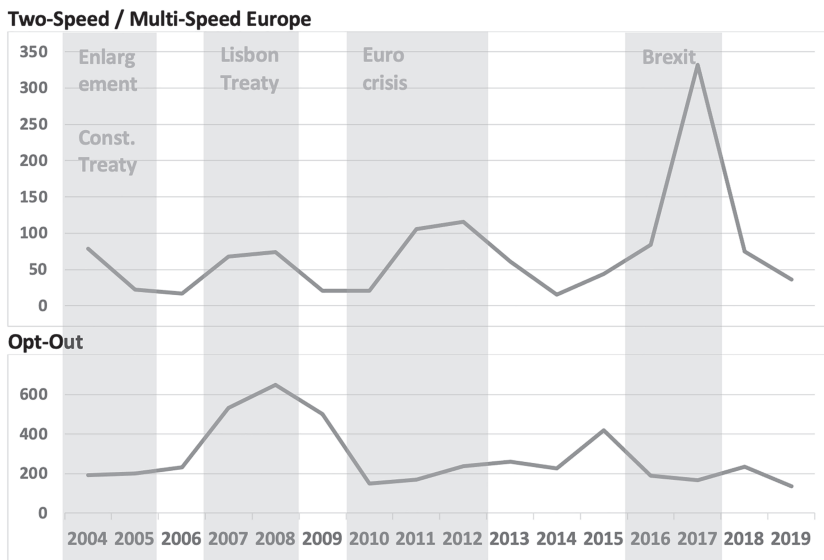
#### *DI Salience*

We begin by testing our expectations about DI salience. While from the bottom-up perspective we would expect that the salience of DI ('Two-Speed Europe' and 'Opt-Outs') is relatively high and stable (*Expectation 1.1*), from the top-down perspective we would expect that the salience of DI is generally low and driven by European events, specifically moments in which there is a perceived need for collective European action (*Expectation 1.2*). Figure 1 provides an aggregate overview of the development of DI salience in 25 EU Member States between 2004 and 2019. The figure depicts the frequency with which

<sup>20</sup>All member states should eventually join the Eurozone.'

<sup>21</sup>See Appendix 4: Eurobarometer\_identity.

Figure 1: Frequency of DI Keywords in Parliamentary Debates



Note: No data available for Malta and Cyprus; Greece: 2008, 2012, 2017–2019; Bulgaria: 2007–2019; Luxembourg: 2005–2019.

references to DI keywords occurred in parliamentary debates. A more detailed breakdown (available in Appendices 2 and 3) shows high cross-country variation. For instance, the salience of opt-outs is comparatively high in Ireland, Denmark and Sweden, but low in virtually all other Member States. The concept of a ‘Two-Speed/Multi-Speed Europe’ was most salient in France and Ireland, but much less so in most other Member States, including Germany. Thus, while opt-outs seem to be more salient in countries which have voluntarily opted out of EU policies, we see no such pattern with regard to the concept of a two- or multi-speed Europe.

Figure 1 provides tentative support for the top-down perspective (*Expectation 1.2*), albeit more so for ‘Two-Speed Europe’ than for ‘Opt-Outs’. Overall, the salience of ‘Two-Speed/Multi-Speed Europe’ is low, but it increases around key European events, which is highlighted in grey in Figure 1. Years of high salience correspond to major European challenges or initiatives: the Constitutional Treaty and Eastern Enlargements (2004), the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2007 and 2008), the eurozone crisis (2010 to 2012), Brexit and the debate on the Future of Europe (2016 and 2017). After each peak, the salience of DI tended to decline again, supporting the view that salience is not domestically driven.

Our findings for ‘Opt-Outs’ are somewhat more mixed. The overall salience of ‘Opt-Outs’ is somewhat higher than that of ‘Two-Speed Europe’. In addition, debates in Ireland, Denmark and Sweden stand out as particularly salient periods of DI – all three countries have formally or informally opted out of major EU policies. At the same time, we can observe that the most significant peak in the salience of ‘Opt-Outs’ occurred

during the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Debates on this treaty were especially pronounced in Ireland (where the first referendum on the Lisbon Treaty had failed in 2008) and in Denmark. The peak in 2015 is explained by a Danish national referendum regarding the Denmark's opt-out from home and justice matters. These developments and the beginning of the renegotiation of the UK's relationship with the EU also triggered debate in Ireland.

Next, we investigate the salience of DI for political parties and citizens. Unfortunately, we do not have time-series data for political parties. Instead, we have data for a limited sample of parties for the year 2019, which was a low-salience year for DI from a governmental perspective. Hence, we would expect that political parties do not pay much attention to DI and do not have clearly formulated DI positions. As Table 1 shows, a high share of the parties contained in the sample have 'no opinion' regarding a 'multi-speed Europe' (44%) and regarding the 'opt-out' mechanism (68%). Albeit only a snapshot, these findings lend further support to the top-down perspective on preference formation about DI.

When it comes to voter positions, we focus on support for a 'Two-Speed Europe' and the question whether these preferences are shaped by positions of political parties or by personal characteristics. Figure 2 plots the percentage of Europeans in favour of a 'Two-Speed EU', and the percentage of Europeans who did not express a preference. Similar to Figure 1, the vertical lines mark key events in EU history: the Lisbon Treaty (2007), the eurozone crisis (2010) and Brexit (2016). The figure shows that the number of respondents stating that they 'don't know' their preference for a 'Two-Speed Europe' decreases in the aftermath of major European events. These results again seem in line with the top-down perspective. Interestingly, increasing public awareness of DI seems to coincide with more favourable views about DI, as we can observe a significant increase in the approval of a 'Two-Speed Europe' between 2004 and 2018.

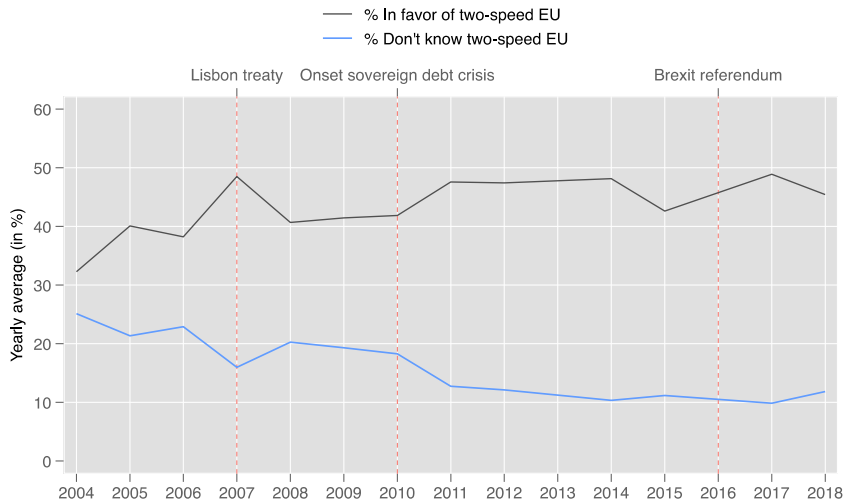
In summary, in this section we have presented evidence in line with the top-down perspective (*Expectation 1.2*), namely that DI is generally not a salient issue for governments, political parties and citizens. The evidence shows that there is generally little debate about DI in national parliaments, and a large share of political parties and (to a decreasing extent) citizens do not have clear positions on DI. We showed that key moments, such as treaty change, the eurozone crisis and Brexit are associated with increased parliamentary attention and greater awareness for DI among political parties and citizens. Due to the temporal pattern of these developments, the evidence seems to fit better with the notion that DI preference formation is a top-down process rather than a bottom-up one. DI preferences are first revealed at the European level by governments and

Table 1: DI Preferences of Political Parties

	<i>DI speed</i>	<i>DI opt-out</i>
Completely disagree	24.6%	7.0%
Tend to disagree	8.8%	8.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	0.0%	0.0%
Tend to agree	12.3%	7.0%
Completely agree	10.5%	8.8%
<b><i>No opinion</i></b>	<b>43.9%</b>	<b>68.4%</b>

Source: euandi2019.

Figure 2: Citizen Support for Two-Speed EU among EU MS across Time. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



Source: EB

Notes: Yearly averages are calculated for the EU-27 Member States. Data is missing for 2013 and 2016. There is unfortunately no data for 2019 and 2020.

subsequently become contested at the national level, leading to a crystallization of preferences among political parties and citizens. In the next step, we analyse our expectations about how governments, parties and voters view DI.

### *Determinants of DI Preferences*

In order to analyse how governments, parties and voters view DI, we run two ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models with the same seven independent variables (already discussed in the ‘methods’ section) and two different dependent variables, namely our DI questions about ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’. Given the low number of observations, we take into consideration also the 90% confidence interval (CI) (indicated by †).

Table 2 shows the results of our party-level analysis. Our results indicate that indeed parties in government are more in favour of multi-speed Europe and opt-outs (99% and 90% CI, respectively) (*Expectation 2.1*). This is in line with the top-down perspective and fits the notion that political parties in government are ‘forced’ to take a position regarding DI. Interestingly, we find no difference between eastern and western countries, with the east–west variable consistently not significant across our three models. This may also suggest that domestic public opinion is less important when it comes to DI than the bottom-up perspective suggests. This is because existing research on public opinion suggests that considerable cross-national variation exists (De Vries, 2018).

The results for the control variables also yield some interesting insights. Pro-EU parties prefer a less differentiated Europe: in the ‘Two-Speed’ model, the EU position

Table 2: Determinants of DI Preferences of Parties

	<i>Two Speed</i>	<i>Opt-Outs</i>
Government party	57.88 (17.57)**	55.39 (28.00)†
East–west	–8.969 (16.00)	–17.22 (27.72)
EU position	–17.28 (6.910)*	–10.66 (9.097)
EU salience	–6.921 (7.276)	–0.302 (14.04)
EU dissent	–2.671 (4.987)	2.562 (11.39)
EU blur	–20.12 (5.833)**	–10.07 (9.798)
Economic L/R	7.433 (3.970)†	13.56 (7.888)
Constant	208.0 (72.64)**	52.20 (141.5)
$R^2$	0.510	0.475
chi2 $F$	2.969	1.035
$N$	28	16

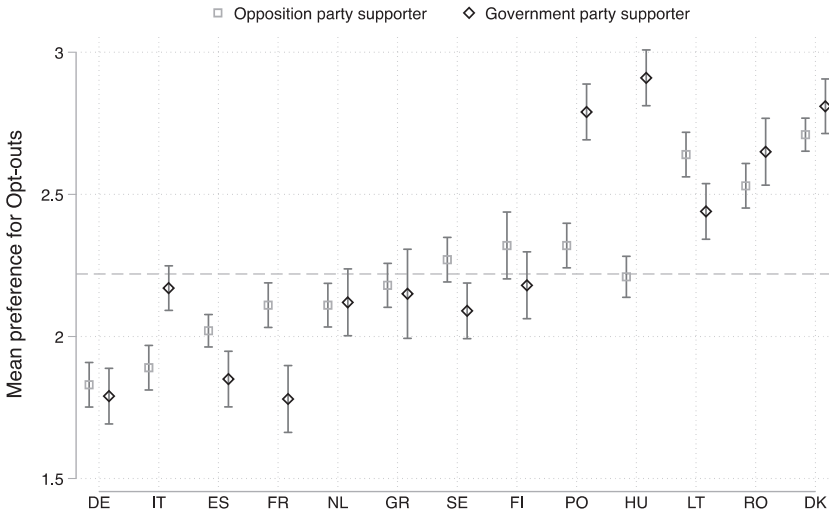
† $P \leq 0.1$ ; \* $P \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $P \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $P \leq 0.001$ .

variable presents negative and statistically significant coefficients (95% CI). In terms of EU salience and EU dissent, we find no statistically significant effects on our two dependent variables. Also, interestingly (yet unsurprisingly), the more a party's position on European integration is blurred, the less it is in favour of multi-speed Europe (99% CI). Finally, the ideological measure seems to have a rather weak positive effect on DI (at 95% CI): parties with right-wing economic stances tend to be associated with positive evaluations of multi-speed Europe. Overall, we find that being a party in governmental has a strong effect on being more positive towards polity DI ('Two-Speed Europe') and DI mechanisms ('Opt-Outs'). These results need to be taken with caution since, as discussed in the previous paragraph, data is available for only a limited number of Member States and there is a large number of missing values leading to a rather small  $N$ . However, this subset is sufficiently diverse, including northern, western, eastern and southern European countries; therefore, it is reasonable to generalize from them.

Next, we move to the within-country differences in citizen support for DI and we link these to party characteristics. Here we employ data from the EUI-YouGov survey. First, we present descriptive statistics in Figures 3 and 4, splitting respondents based on their support for government or opposition parties. In a second step, we model the determinants of these preferences using a multi-level regression model (Table 3). These results help us to further arbitrate between the top-down and bottom-up perspectives. From the top-down perspective, support for DI should be higher among government parties and supporters than among opposition parties and supporters (*Expectation 2.1*). By contrast, from the bottom-up perspective we would expect support for DI is not necessarily shaped by the government/opposition divide (*Expectation 2.1*).

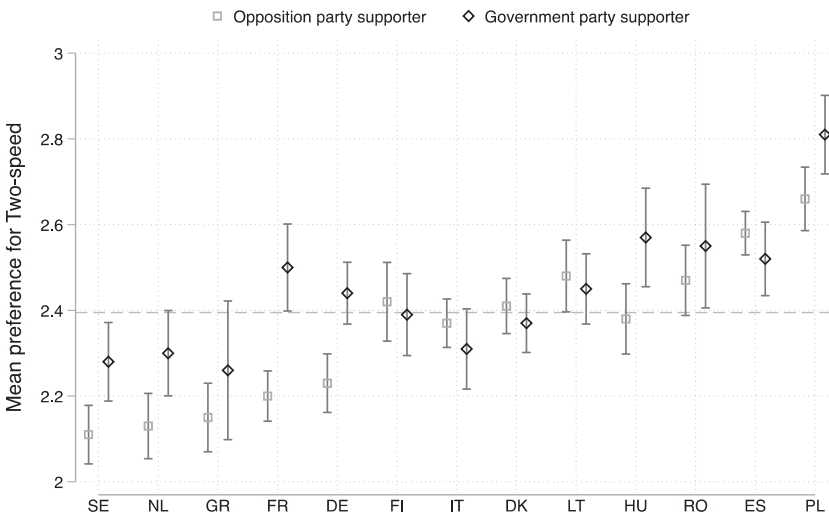
Support for 'Opt-Outs' varies considerably across countries, and there are differences between opposition and government supporters. Interestingly, these are overall more pronounced in countries where the mean Opt-Out support is higher. As shown in Figure 3, with the exception of Latvia, Opt-Out support is higher among government supporters in the countries where mean opt-out support is high. In countries where the mean group of Opt-Out support is low, differences between opposition and government supporters are high in Italy and France, and somewhat in Spain. Alternatively, in countries where

Figure 3: Support for the ‘Opt-Out’ Mechanism among Supporters of Government and Opposition Parties



Source: YouGov 2020. Countries ordered on mean levels of support for optouts. Dashed line = EU average

Figure 4: Support for the ‘Two-Speed EU’ Model among Supporters of Government and Opposition Parties



Source: YouGov 2020. Countries ordered on mean levels of support for twospeed EU. Dashed line = EU average

mean Opt-Out support is generally lower, opposition supporters are more supportive than government supporters with the exception of Italy. Differences between government and opposition supporters are the highest in Hungary and Poland.

Table 3: Determinants of DI Preferences of Citizens

	<i>Two-Speed</i> <i>b/se</i>	<i>Opt-Outs</i> <i>b/se</i>
Government party	0.04 (0.02)†	0.06 (0.02)**
EU position party	-0.05 (0.01)***	0.04 (0.01)***
Economic LR pos. party	-0.01 (0.01)†	-0.01 (0.01)*
GAL-TAN position party	-0.00 (0.01)	0.07 (0.01)***
Gender (male = ref)	0.01 (0.02)	0.20 (0.02)***
Age	-0.05 (0.01)***	-0.07 (0.01)***
Financial worries	-0.11 (0.01)***	-0.01 (0.01)
Constant	3.08 (0.05)***	1.99 (0.06)***
$R^2$ (within)	0.02	0.04
$N$	11,553	12,402
$C$	13	13

Source: YouGov 2020, models are calculated using country fixed effects.

† $P \leq 0.1$ ; \* $P \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $P \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $P \leq 0.001$ .

Overall, we find fewer differences between opposition and government supporters when it comes to ‘Two-Speed Europe’ preferences, although government supporters are overall more supportive of this form of DI (see Figure 4). The mean level of support for ‘Two-Speed Europe’ is the lowest in Sweden and the highest in Poland. Differences between government and opposition are the highest in France, Germany and Sweden, and only statistically significant there.

In the next step, we model the determinants of DI public preferences for DI using multilevel regression analysis with fixed effects at the country level. The results are presented in Table 3. Our models mirror those presented at the party level. We have linked respondents to their vote choice (during the last national election) and have merged the data with the CHES to have party-level information. Our analysis shows that public preferences for DI are strongly correlated with the positions of the parties that these respondents voted for.

The public opinion results are largely in line with the party-level analysis. We find a positive and significant difference between supporters of governance and opposition parties with government supporters being more supportive of both ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’, which fits the top-down perspective (*Expectation 2.1*). For attitudes towards a ‘Two-Speed Europe’, the difference is only marginally significant at 90% certainty ( $p = 0.065$ ).

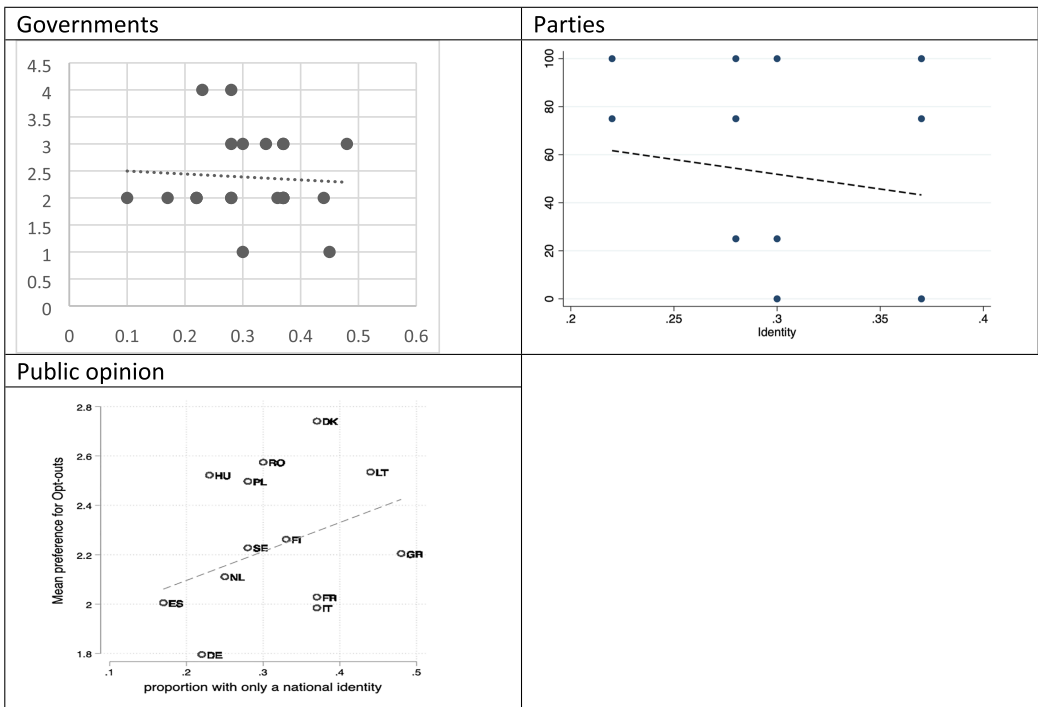
We find that one’s party’s position on the EU is an important predictor of DI support, with supporters of eurosceptic parties being less in favour of a ‘Two-Speed Europe’. This also aligns with our party-level analysis. They are, however, more supportive of giving countries ‘Opt-outs’. On the party level, we did not find a significant difference on ‘Opt-Out’ preferences for eurosceptic and pro-EU parties. In addition, we also find some effects for the economic positions of parties and the GAL-TAN positions. Supporters of economically right parties are less in favour of ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and less in favour of ‘Opt-Outs’ (although the former is only marginally significant). Supporters of TAN parties are more in favour of ‘Opt-Outs’.

Lastly, moving on to the individual-level characteristics, we find that these also shape DI support. In general, citizens who identify as female, are younger and have fewer financial worries are more in favour of DI.

To sum up, so far, we do find support for the expectation that government parties and supporters view ‘Two-Speed Europe’ and ‘Opt-Outs’ more positively than opposition parties and their supporters. However, we observed great variation across different Member States (De Vries, 2018). In addition, we saw that other factors, such as the party’s stance on the EU in general or its economic and ideological stances, matter as well. This suggests that the top-down link between political elites and masses might be more tenuous than assumed in the mass-elite linkage framework.

Still, this does not mean that a strong bottom-up link necessarily exists, as our last analysis of the effects of ‘national identity’ on DI preference formation about ‘Opt-Outs’ demonstrates, shown in Figure 5. This analysis tests our third set of expectations. For public opinion, we find a (weak) positive correlation for the strength of national identity, with countries with a strong national identity being more in favour of ‘Opt-Outs’, on average. At the level of governments, however, we find either a weak negative correlation or no correlation at all. This provides little support for the expectation, based on the bottom-up perspective, that governmental and public support for ‘Opt-Outs’ is higher

Figure 5: Effect of National Identity on Governmental, Party and Citizen’s Preferences about ‘Opt-Outs’. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]





in Member States with a high share of citizens with an exclusive national identity (*Expectation 3.1*).

## Conclusion

This study examined how DI preferences of governments, political parties and citizens are formed. In particular, we investigated the linkages between mass and elite preferences towards DI. The literature on EU preference formation suggests that two perspectives exist that differ in the directionality of the linkage between masses and elites: a bottom-up and a top-down perspective. In this study, we formulated specific expectations based on each perspective and subsequently tested them with novel empirical data.

Our first set of expectations concerned the salience of DI. While the bottom-up perspective would imply a relatively high and stable salience of DI, from the top-down perspective we would expect a low salience which increases around European events. We found that the salience of DI is generally low, as indicated by little parliamentary debate and a high share of parties and citizens without a preference at all. Moreover, our results show that the salience of DI in parliamentary debates increases around key European events, such as treaty changes and economic or political crises. In these moments, the share of citizens who 'Don't Know' how they stand on the issue of a 'Two-Speed Europe' decreases (but eventually tends to go up again until the next European moment). Taken together, this supports the view that political actors do not necessarily care much about DI and, therefore, may not have clear DI preferences.

Our second set of expectations concerned the top-down linkage of DI preferences of governments, parties and the public. Here we argued that if governmental preferences are indeed shaped in intergovernmental bargaining situations and are then picked up at the domestic level (the top-down perspective), we would expect that governmental parties and their supporters view DI more positively than opposition parties and their supporters. Again, we found support for this notion when considering both support for 'Opt-Outs' and 'Two-Speed Europe'. However, the evidence was clearer for political parties than for public opinion, suggesting that the top-down linkage is perhaps more tenuous than often assumed.

Our final set of expectations suggested that in line with the bottom-up perspective, higher shares of citizens with an exclusively national identity should correlate with higher support for 'Opt-Outs'. If governments and political parties are indeed responsive to voter preferences, we would expect to see a similar pattern in these other two levels of analysis as well. However, our findings did not confirm this expectation and, thus, did not constitute sufficient support for this expectation based on the bottom-up perspective.

In sum, while not being able to causally identify the direction of mass-elite linkages, our results lend themselves to the interpretation that while the mass-elite linkage may be generally weak, they seem to fit the top-down perspective better. In the period of observation, governments seem to be relatively unconstrained by public opinion in their DI preferences in intergovernmental negotiations, and parties' preferences towards DI seem shaped mainly by their government or opposition status.

Future research should perhaps employ other methodologies, such as survey experiments, to study in greater depth the nature of mass-elite linkages concerning DI. This study has demonstrated that more fine-grained data on the DI preferences of political

actors is key for understanding the phenomenon of differentiation in the EU. Having said this, we believe that still better data is needed, especially on governmental and party preferences. With regard to citizens, the very low salience of the issue casts doubts on the question of whether citizens are even aware of what DI is and what its potential political implications are. Future research should take this into account.

### *Funding statement*

The research leading to this paper was conducted within the InDivEU project. The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 822304. The funders had no role in the study design, data collection or analysis.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Open Access Funding provided by Universita Bocconi within the CRUI-CARE Agreement.

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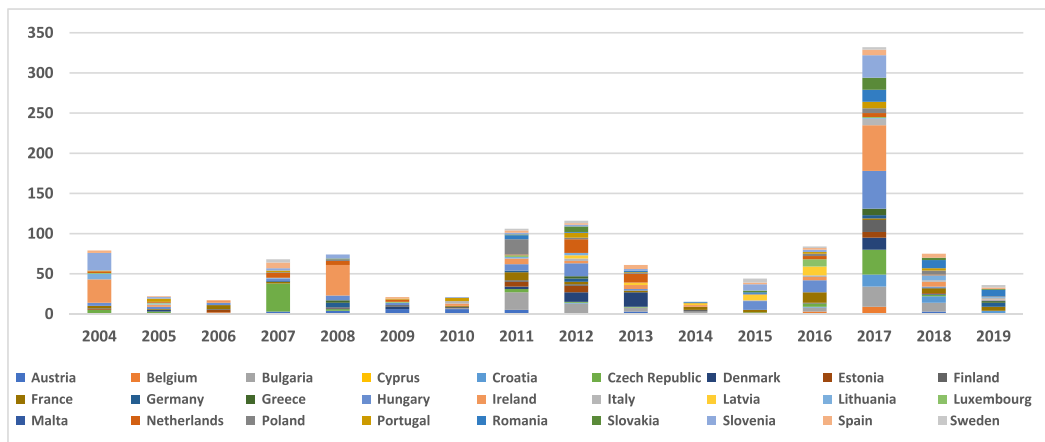
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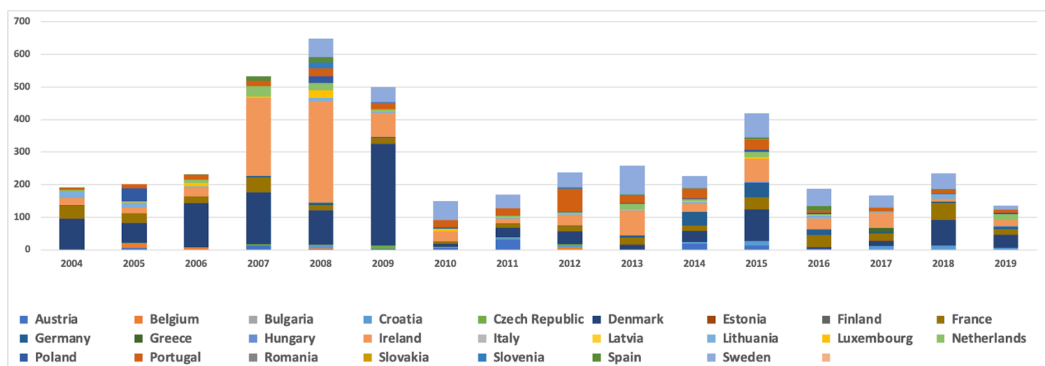
## Appendix 1: Keywords used for DI Mechanisms and Polity DI

<b>DI mechanisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhanced co-operation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opt-out</li> </ul>
<b>Polity DI</b>	<p><b>Model: Multi-speed EU</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>two-speed europe/eu</li> <li>multi-speed europe/eu</li> <li>coalition of the willing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Model: Multi-end EU</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>two-tier europe</li> <li>concentric circles + eu</li> <li>a la carte + eu</li> <li>variable geometry</li> <li>core europe/european core</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Salience of ‘Two-Speed/Multi-Speed Europe’ in Parliamentary Debates



## Appendix 3: Salience of Opt-Outs in Parliamentary Debates



\*Greece: 2008, 2012, 2017–2019, Bulgaria: 2007–2019, Luxembourg: 2005–2019.

**Appendix 4: Correlations between Political Parties' DI and EU Integration Positions**

	euandi										CHES			
	DL_opt	DL_speed	DL_eur	eu_tax	eu_def	eu_voice	eu_good	eu_veto	eu_pos	eu_sal	eu_diss	eu_blur		
euandi	1,000													
DL_optout	0.7926													
DL_speed	-0.4071	1,000												
DL_eurozone	-0.4103	-0.5254	1,000											
eu_tax	-0.4061	-0.1628	0.8614	1,000										
eu_def	-0.4061	-0.1628	0.4569	0.7506	1,000									
eu_voice	-0.4061	-0.1628	0.4569	0.7506	10,000	1,000								
eu_good	-0.4061	-0.4789	0.5129	0.5774	0.2500	0.2500	1,000							
eu_veto	-0.6057	-0.4415	0.5563	0.8141	0.7593	0.7593	0.6779	1,000						
eu_position	-0.2727	-0.4011	0.4298	0.6398	0.4869	0.4869	0.6111	0.7507	1,000					
eu_salience	0.1331	-0.1872	0.5265	0.6377	0.1962	0.1962	0.2904	0.4498	0.5620	1,000				
eu_dissent	-0.1051	0.1819	0.0293	0.0556	0.4793	0.4793	-0.4794	-0.0067	-0.3198	-0.3841	1,000			
eu_blur	-0.1655	-0.2906	-0.1584	-0.5084	-0.5860	-0.5860	-0.2380	-0.3576	-0.1019	-0.2714	-0.1887	1,000		