Abstract

To date, most accounts of the UK's vote to leave the EU have focussed on explaining variation across individuals and constituencies within the UK. In this article, we attempt to answer a different question, namely 'Why was it the UK that voted to leave, rather than any other member state?' We show that the UK has long been one of the most Eurosceptic countries in the EU, which we argue can be partly explained by Britons' comparatively weak sense of European identity. We also show that existing explanations of the UK's vote to leave cannot account for Britons' long-standing Euroscepticism: the UK scores lower than other member states on measures of inequality/austerity, the 'losers of globalisation' and authoritarian values, and some of these measures are not even correlated with Euroscepticism across member states. In addition, we show that the positive association between national identity and Euroscepticism is stronger in the UK than in almost all other EU countries. Overall, we conclude that Britons' weak sense of European identity was a key contributor to the Brexit vote.

Key words: Brexit; Euroscepticism, European identity; losers of globalisation; UK

> England thus asked in turn to enter, but on her own conditions. This poses without doubt to each of the six states, and poses to England, problems of a very great dimension. England in effect is insular, she is maritime, she is linked through her exchanges, her markets, her supply lines to the most diverse and often the most distant countries; she pursues essentially industrial and commercial activities, and only slight agricultural ones. She has in all her doings very marked and very original habits and traditions. In short, the nature, the structure, the very situation that are England's differ profoundly from those of the continentals.
>
> —Charles de Gaulle, January 1963,
>
> explaining his veto on British membership of the European Economic Community

1. Introduction

Since the United Kingdom's referendum on European Union membership on the 23rd of June 2016, at least four major explanations have been put forward for the vote to leave. The first explanation attributes the result to relatively short-run campaign effects; the second cites economic inequality and fiscal austerity policies; the third invokes the so-called 'losers of globalisation'; and the fourth appeals to Leave voters' authoritarian values. Although several of these explanations offer considerable insight into why individuals voted the way the did, none of them provides an empirically valid account of why the UK, *rather than any other member state*, voted to leave. In this article, we argue that Britons' comparatively weak sense of European identity partly explains why the UK has long been one of the most Eurosceptic countries in the EU. We further argue that, as the EU moved closer toward political union and immigration into the UK increased, the UK's fundamentally less European identity meant that more than 50% of voters opted for Leave in the referendum. Our paper contributes to the burgeoning literature on Brexit (e.g., Hobolt, 2016; Evans & Menon, 2017; Clarke et al., 2017) by providing an all-important comparative perspective. Indeed, whereas most existing accounts of the UK's vote to leave the EU have focussed on explaining variation across individuals and constituencies within the UK, we attempt to answer a different question namely, 'Why was it the UK that voted to leave, rather than any other member state?' By presenting time series of Eurosceptic attitudes, as well evidence from both multi-level models and cross-country analyses, we show that Britons' weak sense of European identity was a key contributor to the Brexit vote.

2. Explaining the Brexit vote

This section describes the other explanations for Brexit, explains why they are insufficient, and introduces our hypothesis that Britons' weak sense of European identity accounts for their long-standing Euroscepticism. One popular explanation for Brexit is that voters were swayed by the misleading arguments and incendiary tone of the Leave campaign. For example, Lewis (2016) contends that the Leave campaign—unfettered by the advertising standards that regulate non-political campaigns—"lied to us" and "won by pretending there are simple answers to our problems". Similarly, Yeung (2016) cites legal arguments promulgated by the academic Michael Dougan, according to whom the Leave campaign used "dishonesty as a primary tool to win votes." Particularly notable in this regard is the Leave campaign's figure of '£350 million per week', which was even criticised by the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority (Norgrove, 2017).

Why is this explanation insufficient? To begin with, it has already been challenged by other scholars. Clarke et al. (2016) applied dynamic factor analysis to the results of 121 Internet and phone polls carried out during 2016 and found that Leave may have had the lead throughout the entire campaign, which suggests that provocative statements made by Leave campaigners (e.g., Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson) are unlikely to have exerted decisive sway over prospective voters. Moreover, as Becker et al. (2017) point out, most of the district-level variation in support for Leave can be explained by demographic and economic variables that are not malleable in the short-term. Indeed, the balance of support for Leave versus Remain changed comparatively little during the two years prior to the referendum; both hovered at around 40% until the summer of 2015, when opinion began to crystallise, and the fraction answering 'don't know' assumed a downward trend (Evans and Prosser, 2016). Finally, this explanation fails to account for the fact that the UK has long been one of the most —if not the *most*—Eurosceptic countries in the EU.

A second explanation posits that the vote to leave was not the expression of Euroscepticism *per se*, but was rather a proxy for voters' frustrations over low living standards, income inequality and cuts to public services. Dorling (2016) states that we should "blame austerity not immigration for the inequality underlying the referendum decision", arguing that deteriorating social spending, coupled with high levels of economic inequality, impelled Britons to opt for Leave. He concludes that "to distract us from these national failings, we have been encouraged to blame immigration and the EU." Similarly, Bernstein (2016) points to the cross-

country correlation between fiscal austerity and rises in unemployment, before concluding that—through the "fiscal malpractice" of budget austerity—the government "played a role in bringing us Brexit." Why is this explanation insufficient? Although poorer areas of the UK were more indeed likely to support Leave (Becker et al., 2017), measures of Euroscepticism show little correlation with measures of inequality and austerity across EU member states—as we show in Section 4. In addition, neither 'austerity' nor 'inequality' was among the most frequently cited reasons given for voting Leave (Lord Ashcroft, 2016; Prosser et al., 2016).

A third explanation focuses on a group that has been dubbed the 'losers of globalisation': older, white, economically disadvantaged individuals who have turned against a political class they regard as privileged and out-of-touch, and who reject recent changes in British society that have left them economically and socially marginalised (Curtice, 2016; Ford, 2016; Clarke et al., 2017, Ch. 7). These individuals, who lack the skills necessary to compete in a global marketplace, ostensibly voted for Brexit as way to protest against the economic consequences of globalisation: post-industrial decline, mass immigration and sweeping cultural change (see Evans and Menon, 2017, Ch. 4). For example, Hobolt (2016) demonstrates that all of the commonly cited characteristics of these 'left behind' voters—older age, less education, lower income, less trust in politicians, more populist political attitudes—were positively associated with voting Leave. She concludes that "anti-immigration and anti-establishment sentiments… produced the referendum outcome". Likewise, Goodwin and Heath (2016) examine correlates of the Leave vote share at the district-level, and conclude that "the vote for Brexit was delivered by the 'left behind'—social groups that are united by a general sense of insecurity, pessimism and marginalisation, who do not feel as though elites… share their values, represent their interests and genuinely empathise with their intense angst".

A fourth explanation lays stress on the authoritarian values of Leave voters, as opposed to the more liberal values of Remain voters. Specifically, Kaufmann (2016) shows that the individual-level correlation between authoritarian social attitudes and voting Leave is higher than the individual-level correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and voting Leave. In direct contrast to the second explanation, he concludes that "all told, the Brexit story is mainly about values, not economic inequality." Likewise, Evans and Menon (2017, Ch. 4) present evidence that both anti-immigration attitudes and voting to Leave were strongly influenced by voters' social conservativism.

Although both the third and fourth explanations provide considerable insight into individual-level voting dynamics, they too are insufficient. The reason being that they purport to explain a national-level phenomenon––the UK's vote to leave—purely with reference to sub-national level variance within the UK itself. As we show in Section 4, when these explanations are tested using cross-national data, they do not receive empirical support: individuals who have lost out from globalisation, as well as those with authoritarian values, can be found in greater numbers in other, less Eurosceptic member states.

We argue instead that the UK's vote to leave stems, at least in part, from Britons' comparatively weak sense of European identity. Scholars have long noted the importance of national (rather than European) identity as a predictor of Eurosceptic attitudes (McLaren, 2004; Hooghe and Marks, 2005). As to the referendum result itself, Dennison and Carl (2016) show that the percentage of the population with an exclusively national self-identity is higher in the UK than in all other EU member states, which they attribute to specific aspects of the country's history and geography (and see Evans et al., 2017). Similarly, Curtice (2017) points out that, "During 40 years of membership, few in Britain have taken the European project to heart, as indicated by their low level of willingness to acknowledge a European identity". He goes on to show that the percentage of Britons identifying as European remained stubbornly low over the 24 years of EU membership spanning 1992 to 2016 (and see Henderson et al., 2017 on specifically English identity).

Why should a weaker sense of European identity lead someone to adopt Eurosceptic attitudes? There appear to be at least two key mechanisms. First, an individual with a weaker sense of European identity will be less likely to perceive *supra*-national EU institutions as legitimate, and hence will be more inclined to oppose the transfers of powers from her own national parliament. Second, that same individual will be less likely to feel solidarity towards other Europeans—individuals who have immigrated from the EU, as well as those living in other EU member states. Consequently, she will be more inclined to oppose the redistribution of funds outside her national community, and will be less inclined to support immigration from other EU member states. For a detailed discussion of the theoretical mechanisms by which weaker European identity leads to Euroscepticism, see Carey (2002), Hooghe and Marks (2005), and Hobolt (2016).

3. British Euroscepticism

This section provides evidence that the UK has long been one of the most—if not *the* most—Eurosceptic countries in the EU. By this, we mean that, over the last 40 years, a higher fraction of the British public, as well as a higher fraction of the British political elite, have held Eurosceptic attitudes than in most or all other member states.[1] The long-standing nature of the UK's relative Euroscepticism arguably suggests that any comprehensive explanation for the Brexit vote would need to invoke similarly long-standing factors.

In social surveys, Britons have consistently ranked among the least favourable towards further EU integration, among the most mistrustful of EU institutions, and among the least sanguine about their country's membership of the EU overall (ORB, 2014; Fitzgerald and Sibley, 2016; Raines et al., 2017). Since 1973, the Eurobarometer has asked EU citizens whether their country's membership is a "bad thing" or a "good thing" (European Commission 2018a; European Parliament, 2018b). **Figure 1** plots net opinion on this question in 27 EU countries from 1973 to 2016 (net opinion was calculated as the percentage saying their country's membership of the EU is a "bad thing" minus the percentage saying it is a "good thing"). The UK is shown in red. Although a few other countries have scored higher than the UK in some years, the UK has the highest average score out of all the countries shown.[2] It's average is -8 percentage points, whereas the next highest average score, for Austria, is -13 percentage points. In a forthcoming paper, Anderson et al. (2018) assemble long-run series of public attitudes to the EU for the UK, France, Germany and Italy, and document that Britons have been consistently less positive toward the EU than citizens of the other three countries.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

Even more compelling evidence for our claim that Britons' Euroscepticism is somewhat exceptional can be found in the 2016 wave of the European Social Survey. Respondents living in seventeen EU member states were asked how they would vote in a (hypothetical) referendum on EU membership (European Social Survey, 2018a). The results are shown in **Table 1**. Whereas 48 per cent of British respondents said they would to leave (which is of course slightly lower than the 52 per cent who ultimately did so), none of the sixteen other EU countries surveyed even comes close to 50%. In the next most Eurosceptic country, the Czech Republic, only 33% of respondents said they would vote to leave.

[1] For a detailed overview of Euroscepticism across the EU, see De Vries (2018).
[2] An important caveat is that trust in European institutions has declined considerably in debtor countries (of which the UK is not one) since the start of the financial crisis in 2007-2008 (Foster & Frieden, 2017).

[TABLE 1 HERE]

Furthermore, the UK has long had an anomalously Eurosceptic political and media elite. Prior to the referendum, 159 out of 650 MPs endorsed Leave—a minority, but likely more than would endorse a vote to leave in many other member states' parliaments. In fact, the UK had the highest proportion of MEPs belonging to Eurosceptic factions in 2015 (Ehrenberg, 2015): 60% of British MEPs belonged to the ECR or EFDD, compared to only 39% of MEPs in the next most Eurosceptic country. (Although it should be noted that not every MEP who belongs to a Eurosceptic faction holds Eurosceptic attitudes.) When in government, British politicians have frequently pursued a non-integrationist European policy, eschewing integration in more areas than any other member state, including the Schengen agreement, the Euro, the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, the Charter of Fundamental rights, and the Fiscal Stability Treaty (Von Ondarza, 2013; Gowland and Turner, 1998, Ch. 15-25; George, 2007).[3] In addition, the UK has for some time had an almost uniquely Eurosceptic press (Grant, 2008). Prior to the referendum, 8 of the 23 most widely read newspapers (including the two most widely read: *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*) endorsed Leave, while 10 of those 23 endorsed Remain. Weighting by circulation, 50% of British national newspapers endorsed Leave, while only 33% endorsed Remain (Ponsford, 2016). It should be noted that the Eurosceptic slant of British newspapers reflects not only the Eurosceptic attitudes of some elite opinion makers, but also the Eurosceptic attitudes of many consumers.

4. Analysis

This section argues that one important reason why Britons tend to be so Eurosceptic is that they have a weaker sense of European identity than their counterparts in other EU member states. By this, we mean that, over the last 40 years, a higher fraction of the British population has identified exclusively with their nationality, and a correspondingly lower fraction has identified as European. While people with an exclusively national self-identity can be found in countries across the EU, there have tended to be more of them in the UK than in most or all other member states.

[3] Hix (2017) shows that, in terms of intra-EU trade, the UK "is less dependent on the EU single market than any other member state". Note that the UK also has the lowest percentage of emigrants living inside the EU of all 28 member states (Dennison and Carl, 2016).

Note that in statistical terms, there are in fact two ways in which the UK could conceivably be different from the other EU countries: first, the UK could have a lower average level of support for the EU (i.e., an 'intercept difference'); and second, factors such as national identity could play out in differently in the UK (i.e., a 'slope difference'). We investigate both of these two possibilities in the analyses that follow.

Since 1992, the Eurobarometer survey has asked EU citizens whether they see themselves more as members of their nationality or more as Europeans (European Commission, 2018a; Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2004; Ormston 2015). Respondents answer on a four point scale: "nationality only", "nationality first, then European", "European first, then nationality", or "European only". **Figure 2** plots the percentage of respondents who identify with their nationality only for all 28 EU member states from 1992 to 2016. Britons have had a consistently weaker sense of European identity than their counterparts in other EU countries.[4] Once again, the UK has the highest average score. Its average is 61 percentage points, whereas the next highest average score, for Greece, is only 50 percentage points.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

Note that Britons' weaker sense of European identity is reflected in the reasons that Remain voters gave for voting Remain. In a poll on the day of the referendum, Remain voters were asked to rank four reasons that may have motivated their voting decisions in order of importance (Lord Ashcroft, 2016). The most important reason, ranked first by 43% of respondents, was: "the risks of voting to leave the EU looked too great when it came to things like the economy, jobs and prices". And by far the least important reason, ranked first by only 9% of respondents, was: "a strong attachment to the EU and its shared history, culture and traditions". These findings were replicated in another survey carried out in the spring of 2018 (see Carl, 2018b).

Overall, it appears that Britons have a weaker sense of European identity than their counterparts in other EU member states, and that this has been the case at least since the early 1990s. We proceed to show that Britons' weaker sense of European identity partly explains why the UK is so Eurosceptic (see Dennison & Carl, 2016; Curtice, 2017). We do this by means of three separate analyses. First, we use UK/non-UK fixed-effects models to show that socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation can explain only 5-

[4] Note that, over the last decade, national identity appears to have sharply increased in the most crisis-stricken countries (Polyakova & Fligstein, 2016).

15% of the gap in Euroscepticism between the UK and other member states, whereas strength of national (rather than European) identity can explain 20-40% of the gap. Second, we use models with cross-level interaction effects, to demonstrate that national identity has a stronger association with Euroscepticism in the UK than in nearly all other EU countries. Third, we use country-level data to confirm that strength of national identity is the only measure that satisfies two criteria necessary for explaining Brexit: first, being correlated with Euroscepticism across EU member states; and second, being a measure on which the UK (the only member state to leave) appears exceptional.

We begin with our UK/non-UK fixed-effects models, which are based on data from the Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2018b). All survey waves from between 2005 and 2014 in which our measures appeared were utilised for analysis. We stopped at 2014 in order to avoid contamination from campaigning effects during the lead up to the EU referendum itself. **Table 2** presents the results. Our independent variable of interest—'non-UK'— is binary indicator, taking the value '0' for the UK and the value '1' for all other EU member states. The coefficient on this variable (columns three, four and five) can be interpreted as the average difference in Euroscepticism between the UK and all other EU member states. Each row in the table corresponds to a different model. The first column gives the survey wave. The second column gives the dependent variable (i.e., the measure of Euroscepticism). The third, fourth and fifth columns give the coefficients on the non-UK dummy variable for different specifications. The third column corresponds to a model with just the non-UK dummy variable; the fourth column corresponds to a model with the non-UK dummy plus socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation; and the fifth column corresponds to a model with the non-UK dummy plus national (rather than European) identity. Finally, the sixth and seventh columns give the percentage of the gap between the UK and other member states that is explained by socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation, and by national (rather than European) identity, respectively.

Our first measure of Euroscepticism is belief about whether the country's EU membership is a bad thing, on a scale from 1 ("good thing") to 3 ("bad thing"). Our second measure of Euroscepticism is belief about whether one's country could better face the future outside the EU, on a scale from 1 ("totally disagree") to 4 ("totally agree"). Both dependent variables were standardised prior to analysis. Hence each value in the third, fourth and fifth columns can be interpreted as the difference in average Euroscepticism (measured in standard deviation

units) between the UK and the other member states. Socio-economic characteristics were: age, gender, education, and employment status. Measures of losing out from globalisation were: trust in political parties, trust in the national parliament, personal job situation, expectations of personal job situation, immigration salience, and belief about whether globalisation represents an opportunity.[5] The reason for including these variables is that previous explanations for the Brexit vote, especially those focussing on the so-called 'losers of globalisation', have assigned a great deal of explanatory importance to them (Curtice, 2016; Ford, 2016; Hobolt, 2016; Goodwin & Heath, 2016). National (rather than European) identity was measured using the four-point scale described above.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Comparing the estimates in the third, fourth and fifth columns allows us to see whether socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation explain more of the gap in Euroscepticism between the UK and other member states, or whether national (rather than European) identity explains more of the gap. In particular, the values in the sixth column were computed by simply taking the difference between the values in the third and fourth columns as a percentage of the value in the third column. Likewise, the values in the seventh column were computed by simply taking the difference between the values in the third and fifth columns as a percentage of the value in the third column. Looking at the sixth and seventh columns, we see that the average coefficient is 5-15% smaller when controlling for socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation, and that it is 20-40% smaller when controlling for national identity. These results imply that—although variables like age, education and trust in politicians can explain why some Britons hold more Eurosceptic attitudes than other Britons—they can only explain a very modest portion of the *gap* in Euroscepticism between the UK and other member states (*i.e.*, the 'intercept difference'). National identity, by contrast, is capable of explaining about a third of this gap.

We now consider the second of the two possibilities mentioned above, namely that national (rather than European) identity has a stronger association with Euroscepticism in the UK than in other member states (i.e., the 'slope difference'). Our data and measures of Euroscepticism are the same as in **Table 2**. This time we treat

[5] Please note that personal job situation and belief about whether globalisation represents an opportunity were not available in the autumn 2005 wave. Measures of inequality/austerity and authoritarian values were not available in the Eurobarometer data. Please see Table 4 for our analysis comparing alternative explanations for Brexit at the cross-country level.

national (rather than European) identity as a binary variable, demarcating those who answered "national identity only" from those who said they had at least some European identity. In addition to national identity, our models include country dummies (using the UK as the reference category), socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation, as well as cross-level interactions between national identity and country dummies. The coefficients of interest are those on the cross-level interactions. **Table 3** presents the results. In each model, most of the estimates are negative (and many are highly significant), which indicates that the association between national identity and Euroscepticism is stronger in the UK than in most other EU countries. This finding is interesting because it suggests that, in addition to helping explain why the UK is more Eurosceptic than other member states, identity issues played a particularly important role in the politics of European integration in the UK.

Finally, we move to the country level. **Table 4** presents cross-country correlations between measures of Euroscepticism and: strength of national identity, measures of losing out from globalisation, measures of inequality/austerity, and measures of authoritarian values. Our first measure is net opinion on whether one's country's "EU membership is a bad thing", computed as the percentage saying "bad thing" minus the percentage saying "good thing". Data for this measure were taken from the 2014 wave of the Parlemeter survey (European Parliament, 2018). Our second measure of Euroscepticism is net opinion on whether one's country "could better face the future outside the EU". Data for this measure were taken from the autumn 2014 wave of the Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2018a). The two measures of Euroscepticism were correlated at r = .80 ($p < 0.001$, $n = 28$). Our measures of losing out from globalisation, our measures of inequality and austerity, and our measures of authoritarian values were taken from the Eurobarometer, Eurostat, the UN and the European Social Survey (see notes below table for more details). Crucially, we also report the UK's rank on each of the explanatory variables.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Strength of national (rather than European) identity is correlated strongly and in the expected direction with both measures of Euroscepticism. **Figure 3** displays scatterplots of these two relationships, confirming that they are not attributable to outliers. None of the four measures of inequality/austerity is strongly correlated with our two measures of Euroscepticism. Moreover, even though the UK is ranked above average on three of the measures,

it is not ranked close to first. Britons cannot be said to have experienced substantially more inequality and austerity than their counterparts in other EU member states. Five of the seven measures of losing out from globalisation are correlated quite strongly and in the expected direction with our second measure of Euroscepticism. Importantly, however, the UK is not ranked close to first on these measures. Britons cannot be said to have lost out more from globalisation than their counterparts in other EU member states. Finally, only one of the three measures of authoritarian values is correlated strongly and in the predicted direction with both measures of Euroscepticism. Once again, however, the UK is not ranked close to first on these measures. Britons cannot be said to harbour substantially more authoritarian values than their counterparts in other EU member states.

[FIGURE 3 & TABLE 4 HERE]

5. Discussion

Building on previous work (Dennison and Carl, 2016; Curtice, 2017), we have attempted to answer the question, 'Why did the UK vote to leave, rather than any other member state?'. Toward this end, we began by providing evidence that the UK has long been one of the most—if not *the* most—Eurosceptic countries in the EU. We then presented results from multi-level models and cross-country analyses, which showed that Britons' weaker sense of European identity can partly account for why the UK is so Eurosceptic, and that alternative explanations are unable to explain the gap in Euroscepticism between the UK and other member states. We also showed that the positive association between national identity and Euroscepticism is stronger in the UK than in almost all other EU countries.

At this point, it is worth speculating on why Britons appear to have such a weak sense of European identity. We would conjecture that the answer lies in specific aspects of their country's history, culture and geography. First, Britain is an island, which has partially isolated it from developments elsewhere in Europe and fostered a perception that "the continent" is remote, distinct and, to some extent, singular (Grant, 2008). Second, England has a common law legal system, in contrast to the civil law system used elsewhere in Europe (Scruton, 2015). In addition, the British system of government is based on an uncodified constitution and the notion of parliamentary sovereignty. Third, because England has an established church, most British Christians have

historically owed their allegiance to a national institution headed by the monarch, rather than to an international institution headed by the Pope (Scherer, 2014). Fourth, the UK has retained relatively strong cultural and political links with much of its former Empire. Indeed, the British monarch is still head of state in the sixteen Commonwealth realms, three of which have large British-descended populations (Canada, Australia and New Zealand). And, fifth, the UK was the only allied European power not occupied by Germany during the Second World War, which may have served to bolster Britons' pride and confidence in their national institutions. Indeed, unlike their counterparts in Germany, Italy Spain and France, Britons have never had a strong reason to renounce their exclusively national self-identities.[6]

By itself, of course, Britons' comparatively weak sense of European identity was not sufficient to take the UK out of the EU. After all, the country had been a member for over 40 years before the referendum was called. As **Figure 1** shows, Euroscepticism rose sharply in the years following the 1975 EU referendum, reaching its peak in around 1980. It then fell continuously during the 1980s, reaching its nadir in around 1991. Euroscepticism then rose rapidly in 1992 and 1993, flattened out during the rest of the 1990s, and then rose again after 2006 (see Curtice and Evans, 2015); it reached a local peak around the time of the European debt crisis in 2010–2012, before falling again in the mid-2010s.[7] Why—by 2016—had Eurosceptic sentiment increased up to the point where more than 50% of voters opted for Leave?

We can only conjecture that four main economic and political developments contributed to the rise in Eurosceptic sentiment. First, the UK's ERM crisis in 1992 highlighted the country's lack of monetary synchrony with Europe's largest economy, Germany—a point that would be repeated by Eurosceptic agitators in future years (Gifford, 2008, Ch. 6; and see Gabel and Whitten, 1997; Andersen & Reichert, 1995). Second, the increasing extent of European political integration, as manifested in the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties, bolstered concerns about the putative threat to British sovereignty, which was one of the two most frequently cited reasons for voting Leave (Lord Ashcroft, 2016; Prosser et al. 2016; and see Franklin et al., 1994;

[6] Note that, of the Western European countries that are not EU members: Iceland is an island, has a state religion and was not occupied by Germany; Norway has a state religion and a degree of geographic isolation; Switzerland has a unique political system that was not interrupted by Nazi occupation or any other form of dictatorship. Note also that, over the 3 years that Norwegians were asked the Eurobarometer question on national versus European identity (from 1992 to 1994), Norway's average percentage with an exclusively national self-identity was second only to the UK's (European Commission, 2016a).

[7] Another indicator that Euroscepticism rose during the 1990s and 2000s is the electoral success of UKIP, whose vote share in general elections increased from 0.3% in 1997 to 12.7% in 2015, and whose vote share in European elections increased from 1% in 1994 to 26.6% in 2014.

Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993). Third, the Eurozone debt crisis, beginning in early 2010, lent credibility to Eurosceptic claims that the failures of monetary integration were symptomatic of fundamental flaws in the European project (*e.g.*, Johnson, 2011; and see Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014). Fourth and most importantly, the influx of labour migrants from Eastern Europe led the crucial issues of immigration and EU membership to become merged in the public's mind (Evans & Mellon, 2016; see also McLaren, 2002).

Furthermore, any explanation for Brexit must explain why there was a referendum on EU membership in the first place. David Cameron's initial promise to hold a referendum was arguably motivated by pressure from Eurosceptic MPs within the governing Conservative party, as well as the growing electoral threat of UKIP—two trends that reflected rising Euroscepticism. Moreover, nearly all major British political parties (the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, UKIP, the BNP, and the Greens) have made a manifesto promise to hold a referendum on EU membership or supported immediate withdrawal at some point over the 43 years of Britain's membership. At the pivotal 2015 general election, the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Greens all promised an in-out referendum, while UKIP promised immediate withdrawal. In short, Cameron's decision was not solely the result of Conservative Party 'infighting': following the precedent set in 1975, all major parties have used the promise of an in-out referendum as a tool to appease their voters' Euroscepticism. In addition, Cameron's decision was remarkably popular: around 70% of the public and more than 75% of businesses supported holding a referendum on EU membership at the time (Clark, 2011; BCC, 2013).

There are several important caveats to our argument, which we should stress at this point. First, we are unable to rule out the possibility of endogeneity, namely that Euroscepticism actually causes weaker European identity, or that both variables are confounded by some third factor. For this reason, our results should be treated as *associational*, rather than causal. Second, we are not claiming that having a weak sense of European identity is *necessary* to take a country out of the EU. It seems highly plausible that a country could leave the EU for largely independent reasons. For example, Greece nearly left the Eurozone in 2011—and could have subsequently left the EU altogether—due to the incompatibility between the monetary policy of the ECB and the rigidities within its own economy (Carl, 2017). Third, we are not claiming that the British population is a single entity, which has the characteristic of being Eurosceptic, nor that the country has a unitary will, which is to leave the European Union. We are simply claiming that, over the last 40 years, a relatively large fraction of the British

population has held Eurosceptic attitudes, and that—since the early 1990s—this fraction increased up to the point where more than 50% of voters opted for Leave.

One major alternative explanation for the UK's long-standing Euroscepticism is the country's Eurosceptic press (Hawkins, 2012; Daddow, 2012; Startin, 2015). In other words, it is possible that Britons have remained relatively Euroscepetic over the years due to continuous negative coverage of the EU in the popular media, rather than because of their weaker sense of European identity. However, there are several reasons to doubt this explanation. First, at the time of the 1975 referendum, the press overwhelmingly backed remaining in the European Community. According to Daddow (2012), influential newspapers like *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph* did not assume a firmly Eurosceptic editorial stance until the late 1980s. Yet as **Figure 1** indicates, the UK was already one of most Eurosceptic countries during the early-to-mid 1980s. Second, although a sizable plurality of newspapers endorsed Leave when weighting by circulation (Ponsford, 2016), it is not necessarily true that the British media as a whole had a pro-Leave skew in the lead up to the 2016 referendum. Circulation has been in decline for decades, meaning that newspapers are much less influential now than they were at the time of the 1975 referendum. Despite being ranked first and second by circulation, *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* are ranked 10th and 13th, respectively, by overall reach in England (Ofcom, 2016). Of course, the reason for this discrepancy is that most people get their news primarily from the TV or Internet. And importantly, non-print news sources tend to provide much more neutral or even pro-Remain coverage (CRCC, 2016; Smith, 2018; and see Carl, 2018b). Finally, while some might argue that the slant of British newspapers represents a largely exogenous influence on public attitudes, economic analyses have found that newspapers respond strongly to consumer preferences (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010).

Finally, what are the broader implications of the arguments we have presented in this paper? First, in order to comprehensively explain a phenomenon like the Brexit vote (i.e., >50% of voters opting to leave the EU in a referendum), it is not sufficient to just analyse differences between individuals and constituencies within the UK; one must also examine the factors that differentiate the UK from all the other countries that have not voted to leave the EU. Second, to the extent that Britons' comparatively weak sense of European identity contributed to the Brexit vote, it is reasonable to conclude that holding a political union together requires a reasonably high degree of common identity among the individuals living within that union, as many scholars have noted over the years (e.g., Haas, 1968; Shore, 2000). And third, given that Britons' relatively deep-rooted sense of national

(rather than European) identity is somewhat unique within the EU, the Brexit referendum is unlikely to exert a contagion effect whereby other countries follow Britain out (Van Kessel, 2017).

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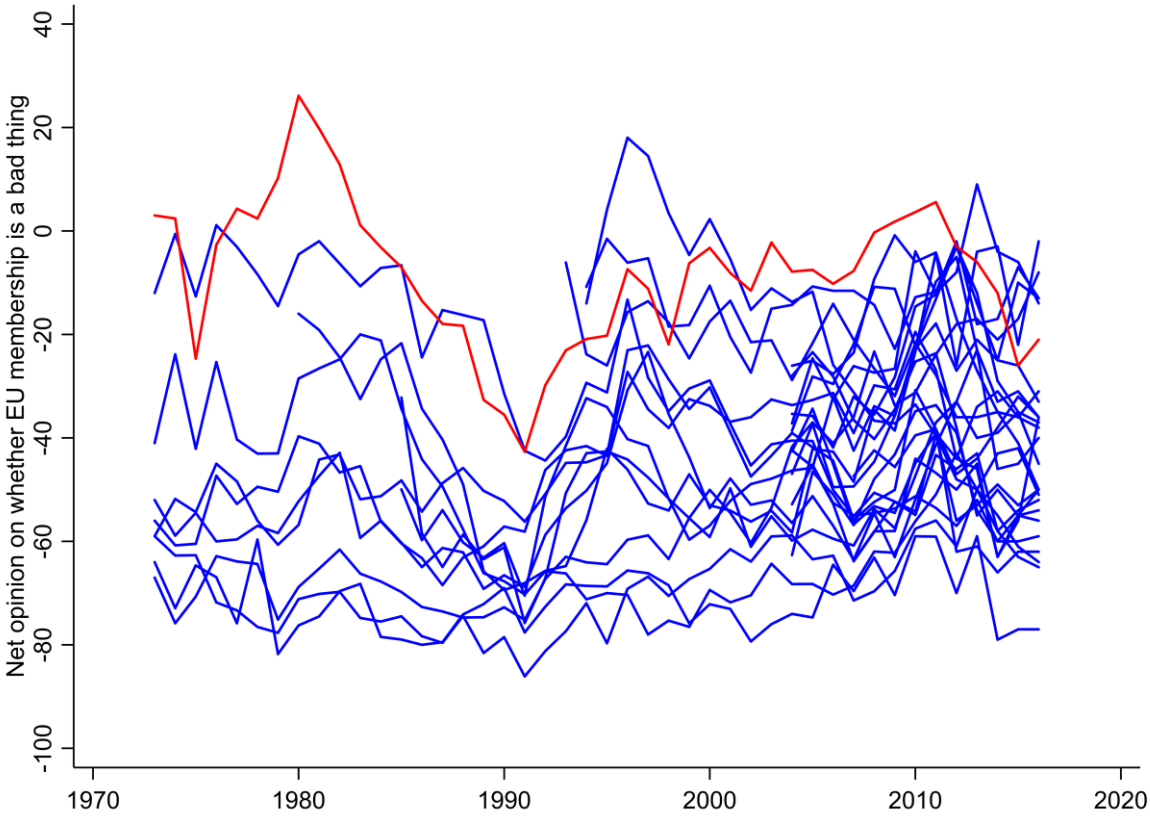
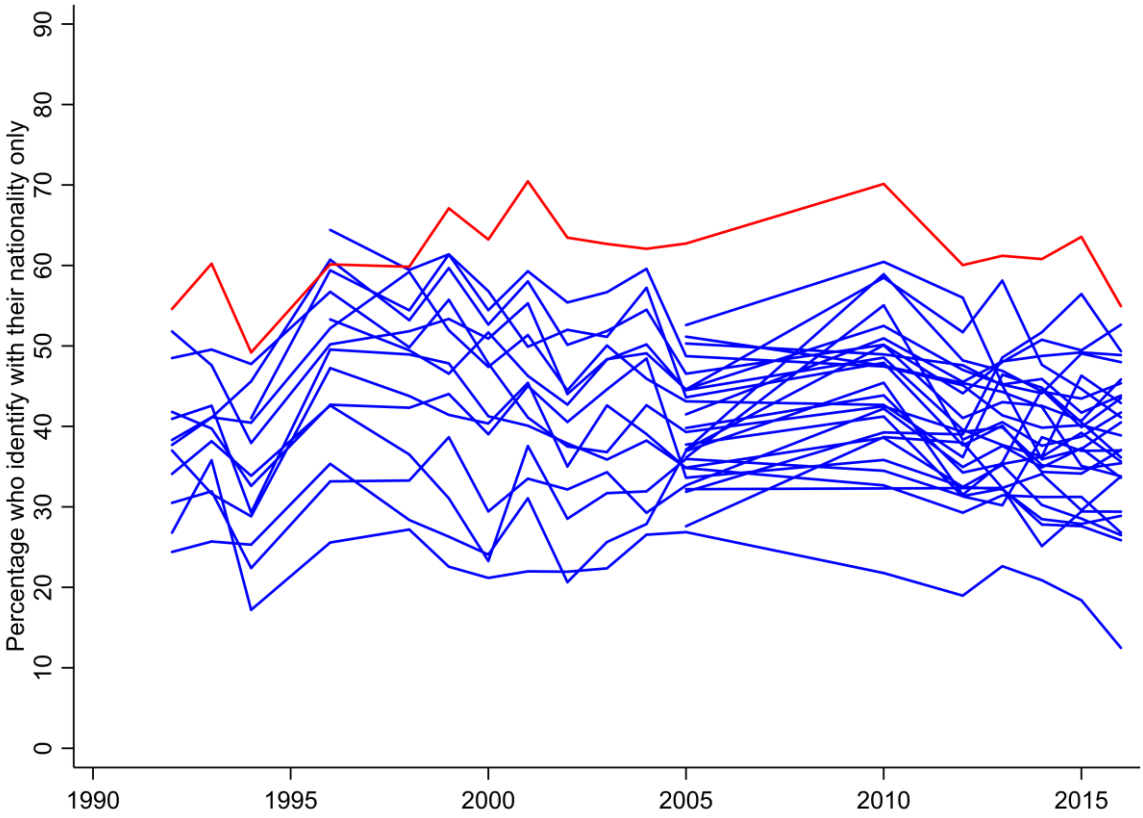
Figure 1. Net opinion on whether EU membership is a "bad thing" in 27 EU countries, 1973–2016.



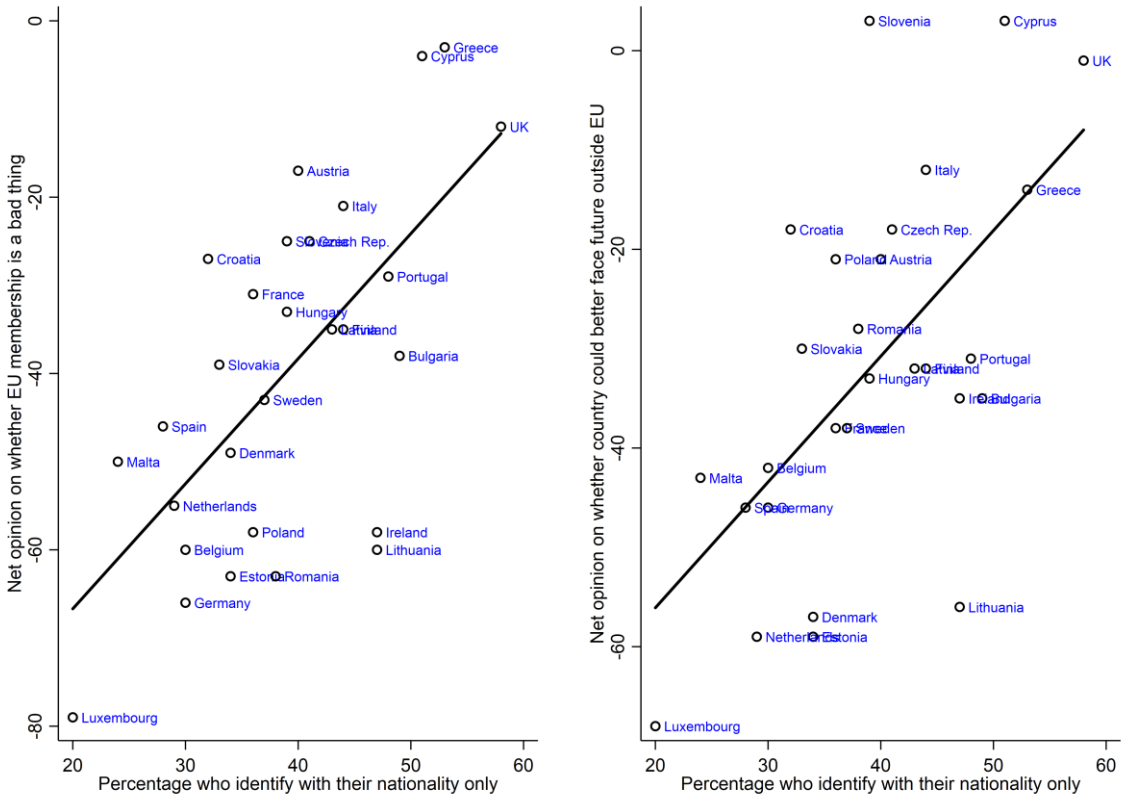
Notes: The UK is shown in red. All other countries are shown in blue. Data are from the Eurobarometer (2018a).

Figure 2. Exclusively national self-identity in all 28 EU countries, 1992–2016.



Notes: The UK is shown in red. All other countries are shown in blue. Data are from the Eurobarometer (2018a).

Figure 3. Scatterplots showing the relationships between measures of Euroscepticism and strength of national identity.



Notes: See text for data sources.

Table 1. Percentages who would vote Remain and Leave in a (hypothetical) referendum on EU membership.

Country	Remain	Leave
UK	52	48
Czech Republic	67	33
Italy	71	29
Finland	72	28
Austria	74	26
Sweden	75	25
France	76	24
Netherlands	78	22
Slovenia	81	19
Hungary	84	16
Belgium	84	16
Portugal	84	16
Germany	88	12
Lithuania	88	12
Ireland	89	11
Poland	91	9
Spain	91	9

Notes: Sample weights were applied. Responses other than 'Remain' or 'Leave' were excluded. Note that the question put to British respondents was not phrased in terms of a 'hypothetical' referendum. Data are from the European Social Survey (2016).

Table 2. Estimates from UK/non-UK fixed-effects models of Euroscepticism.

		Coefficient on non-UK dummy			Percentage of gap explained	
Wave	Dependent variable	Just non-UK dummy	Socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation	National (rather than European) identity	Socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation	National (rather than European) identity
Autumn 2005	EU membership is a bad thing	-0.43***	-0.37***	-0.29***	14	34
Spring 2010	EU membership is a bad thing	-0.40***	-0.34***	-0.26***	13	34
Spring 2013	Could better face future outside EU	-0.48***	-0.41***	-0.38***	15	22
Autumn 2013	Could better face future outside EU	-0.50***	-0.47***	-0.40***	5	20
Spring 2014	Could better face future outside EU	-0.44***	-0.41***	-0.26***	6	40
Autumn 2014	Could better face future outside EU	-0.43***	-0.41***	-0.31***	5	27

Notes: The independent variable of interest is a binary indicator that takes the value '0' for the UK and the value '1' for all other EU member states. Coefficients were estimated via OLS. Sample weights were applied. Moving down the rows, unweighted *n*'s for the six models are: 18,386; 16,084; 17,118; 17,211; 17;387; and 24,878. Data are from the Eurobarometer (2018b). Significance levels: * 5%, ** 1%, *** 0.1%.

Table 3. Cross-level interactions between national identity and country dummies, using UK as the reference category.

	Autumn 2005: EU membership is a bad thing	Spring 2010: EU membership is a bad thing	Spring 2013: Could better face future outside EU	Autumn 2013: Could better face future outside EU	Spring 2014: Could better face future outside EU	Autumn 2014: Could better face future outside EU
France	0.005	0.123	-0.162	-0.006	-0.084	0.145
Belgium	-0.345***	-0.132	-0.505***	-0.158	-0.296**	-0.269**
Netherlands	-0.242*	-0.188	-0.168	-0.133	-0.119	0.055
Germany	-0.150+	0.056	0.108	0.145	0.031	-0.002
Italy	-0.082	-0.317**	-0.503***	-0.361**	-0.362**	-0.402***
Luxembourg	-0.476***	-0.065	-0.186	0.176	-0.136	-0.252+
Denmark	-0.293**	-0.144	-0.269**	-0.091	-0.217*	-0.239*
Ireland	-0.564***	-0.285**	-0.696***	-0.531***	-0.321**	-0.326***
Greece	-0.163+	-0.246*	-0.205*	-0.035	-0.048	-0.172+
Spain	-0.218*	-0.179	-0.114	-0.026	-0.08	-0.297**
Portugal	-0.367***	-0.071	-0.517***	-0.253*	-0.363***	-0.490***
Finland	-0.223*	-0.042	-0.220+	-0.024	-0.248*	-0.134
Sweden	-0.061	-0.103	-0.241*	-0.158	-0.115	-0.258*
Austria	-0.119	-0.076	-0.04	0.213+	0.154	-0.044
Cyprus	0.175	-0.013	-0.158	0.256	0.245+	-0.16
Czech Republic	-0.215*	-0.223*	-0.428***	-0.129	-0.219*	-0.282**
Estonia	-0.382***	-0.288*	-0.688***	-0.479***	-0.375**	-0.403***
Hungary	-0.474***	0.042	-0.399***	-0.531***	-0.517***	-0.362***
Latvia	-0.420***	-0.351**	-0.484***	-0.205+	-0.199+	-0.165+
Lithuania	-0.475***	-0.435***	-0.644***	-0.366***	-0.398***	-0.403***
Malta	-0.275	0.392*	-0.217	-0.016	-0.362+	0.119
Poland	-0.370***	-0.187+	-0.601***	-0.664***	-0.592***	-0.459***
Slovakia	-0.311**	-0.211*	-0.372***	-0.174	-0.333**	-0.243**
Slovenia	-0.282**	-0.269*	-0.490***	-0.468***	-0.392***	-0.376***
Bulgaria		-0.186+	-0.524***	-0.424***	-0.466***	-0.126
Romania		-0.653***	-0.768***	-0.454***	-0.496***	-0.618***
Croatia			-0.582***	-0.336**	-0.259*	-0.420***

Notes: National (rather than European) identity was recoded into a binary variable corresponding to 'national identity only' versus 'at least some European identity'. Those who answered 'none' or 'don't know' were excluded. Each value is the coefficient on the interaction term for national identity × country. Main effects were included in all models, along with socio-economic characteristics and measures of losing out from globalisation. Coefficients were estimated via OLS. Sample weights were applied. Moving across the columns, unweighted *n*'s for the six models are: 18,386; 15,887; 16,931; 16,993; 17;63; and 24,567. Data are from the Eurobarometer (2018b). Significance levels: * 5%, ** 1%, *** 0.1%.

Table 4. Cross-country correlations between measures of Euroscepticism and measures of national identity, inequality/austerity, losing out from globalisation and authoritarian values.

	Correlation with "EU membership is a bad thing"	Correlation with "could better face future outside EU"	UK's rank on measure
Strength of national identity			
National identity only (%)	.65***	.61***	1st
Measures of inequality/austerity			
Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income	.05	.02	11th
80/20 income percentile ratio	.00	.00	12th=
–1 × (% change in government spending per capita 2009–2013)	.30	.17	20th
–1 × (% change in social spending per capita 2009–2013)	.12	.08	14th
Measures of losing out from globalisation			
Negative view of globalisation (%)	.45*	.42*	18th
Bad personal job situation (%)	.42*	.42*	21st
Expecting a worse personal job situation over next year (%)	.40*	.41*	23.5th=
Tend not to trust the national parliament (%)	.34*	.49**	18th
Tend not to trust political parties (%)	.37*	.50**	17.5th=
Log of immigrant fraction	.08	–.13	9th
Log of immigration rate	–.33	–.27	10th
Measures of authoritarian values			
Gays and lesbians should not be free to live as they wish (%)	–.07	.07	22nd
Should not take any non-white immigrants (%)	.47*	.37*	15th
Should not take any immigrants from poor countries (%)	.41*	.26	9th

Notes: National identity only, negative view of globalisation, bad personal job situation, expecting a worse personal job situation over next year, tend not to trust the national parliament, and tend not to trust political parties were taken from the autumn 2014 wave of the Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2018a). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income (in 2014), 80/20 income percentile ratio (in 2014), change in government spending per capita 2009–2013, change in social spending per capita 2009–2013, and immigration rate (in 2014) were taken from Eurostat (2018). Immigrant fraction (in 2015) was taken from the UN (2017). Note that immigration rate was computed as immigrant inflow divided by total population, whereas immigration fraction was computed as immigrant stock divided by total population. 'Gays and lesbians should not be free to live as they wish', 'should not take any non-white immigrants', and 'should not take any immigrants from poor countries' were taken from the European Social Survey (2016); the latest available value for each country was utilised. Percentages were computed after removing 'don't knows'. In the third and fourth columns, $n = 28$ for correlations pertaining to the first 9 measures; and $n = 27$ for correlations pertaining to the last 3 measures (data on Malta were not available for these measures). Significance levels: * 5%, ** 1%, *** 0.1%.