DETERMINANTS OF THE EU'S IMAGE IN POST-BREXIT UK[*]

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Abstract

Since the United Kingdom officially left the European Union in 2020, a series of geopolitical developments, driven by the foreign policy of the Trump administration, have led to a closer relationship between the UK and the EU. Additionally, public opinion regarding Brexit has evolved over time. The most recent Eurobarometer survey indicates that the percentage of UK nationals expressing a positive image of the EU (34.7%) exceeds those with a negative view (22.8%), while the largest proportion remains neutral (42.5%). A key question arises: Have the factors shaping UK public perception of the EU before and after Brexit undergone significant changes? This research aims to address this question by utilizing the most recent Eurobarometer EB 100.2 dataset, testing whether the factors identified prior to Brexit continue to hold relevance.

Keywords: *EU image, Euroscepticism, Brexit, Economic Voting, Identity, Immigration, EU meanings.*

BREXİT SONRASI BİRLEŞİK KRALLIK'TA AB İMAJINI BELİRLEYEN FAKTÖRLER

Öz

Birleşik Krallık'ın 2020 yılında Avrupa Birliği'nden resmi olarak ayrılmasının ardından, Trump yönetiminin dış politikasıyla şekillenen bir dizi jeopolitik gelişme, Birleşik Krallık ile Avrupa Birliği arasındaki ilişkilerin yakınlaşmasına neden olmuştur. Aynı zamanda, kamuoyunun Brexit'e ilişkin görüşleri zaman içerisinde değişim göstermiştir. En güncel Eurobarometer anketine göre, AB'ye yönelik olumlu bir imaja sahip olduğunu belirten Birleşik

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Krallık vatandaşlarının oranı (%34,7), olumsuz görüş bildirenlerin oranını (%22,8) aşarken, en büyük oranı ise tarafsız kalanlar (%42,5) oluşturmaktadır. Bu bağlamda temel bir soru gündeme gelmektedir: Brexit öncesi ve sonrası dönemde Birleşik Krallık kamuoyunda Avrupa Birliği algısını şekillendiren faktörlerde kayda değer bir değişim yaşanmış mıdır? Bu çalışma, en güncel Eurobarometer EB 100.2 verisetinden yararlanarak, Brexit öncesinde belirlenen faktörlerin geçerliliğini koruyup korumadığını test etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *AB imajı, Avrupa şüpheciliği, Brexit, Ekonomik Oy Verme, Kimlik, Göç, AB'nin anlamları.*

Introduction

Since the United Kingdom officially left the European Union in 2020, a series of events have unfolded, particularly the Trump administration's foreign policy, which left Europe vulnerable to Russian influence. This shift has led to a closer relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. In addition to these geopolitical developments, based on various surveys, UK media have frequently reported that public opinion regarding Brexit has evolved over time. The most recent Eurobarometer survey indicates that the percentage of UK nationals expressing a positive image of the EU (34.7%) exceeds those with a negative view (22.8%), while the largest proportion remains neutral (42.5%) (Eurobarometer 100.2, European Commission, Brussels, 2024). A key question arises: Have the factors that shaped UK public perception of the EU before and after Brexit undergone significant changes in the literature? How does the UK public now view the EU, and which reasons are most prominent?

Prior to 2020, a substantial body of research examined public attitudes toward the European Union (EU) within the United Kingdom. However, scholarly attention to this topic has declined considerably in the post-2020 period, with academic interest shifting primarily toward the economic and geopolitical consequences of Brexit. An extensive search conducted in both Web of Science and Scopus using the query "public attitudes towards the EU in the UK" identified only a limited number of studies published after 2020. Those that were available were either insufficiently aligned with the aims of the present analysis or failed to provide novel empirical insights. The paucity of post-2021 research underscores the significance of the current study, which seeks to address this gap by offering an updated assessment of public attitudes as of 2025.

Despite the diminished scholarly focus, examining public perceptions of the EU in the UK remains essential. Such inquiry provides direct insights into lived experiences on both sides of the membership divide—namely, the period within the EU and the subsequent years outside it. Understanding how five years of

Brexit have shaped public perceptions is crucial for evaluating the evolving relationship between the UK and the EU.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. I first review the broader literature on public attitudes toward the EU, before turning to research specifically focused on the UK and discussing the key factors identified prior to 2020. Building on this foundation, the study advances and tests a hypothesis intended to help close the identified gap in the literature.

The Data and Methods section outlines the dataset employed, provides the rationale for the chosen analytical approach, and details the methodological procedures. Following the presentation of empirical results, the findings are discussed in relation to prior scholarship.

This article seeks to address this question by utilizing the most recent Eurobarometer dataset available, with the aim of testing whether the factors identified prior to Brexit still hold relevance. To achieve this, a novel methodological approach will be applied, which, instead of relying on indirect variables, will focus on direct responses to the question "What does the EU mean?" in order to identify the key factors shaping public opinion.

Literature review

Britain's decision to subject its EU membership to a referendum marked another pivotal moment in the study of EU support. Since the 2016 Brexit vote, numerous studies have been dedicated to understanding the dynamics of UK attitudes toward the EU. Brexit also provided other countries with an opportunity to benchmark their relationship with the EU (Hix et al. 2023). Moreover, Chopin and Lequesne (2021) find that, following the Brexit referendum, EU support has increased.

In the context of the European Union, public opinion has become increasingly significant since the Maastricht Treaty. Prior to Maastricht, public attitudes toward the EU was often overlooked (Hellström, 2008). However, Following the Danish referendum rejecting the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, public opinion research on the EU gained momentum. The once elitist integration process has evolved into a system where public opinion now plays a crucial role. The subsequent decline in public support for EU integration has been well-documented. This shift has been accompanied by a decline in trust toward national and EU institutions, with rising support for anti-EU parties (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). The transition from "permissive consensus" to "constraining dissensus" has been a defining feature of EU politics since then (Hobolt & de

Vries, 2016). Initial studies on public attitudes towards the EU primarily focused on EU support, but over time, the literature has shifted to examine EU opposition (Boomgaarden et al. 2011).

The extensive literature identifies several factors influencing attitudes towards the EU, including cognitive mobility and education level (Inglehart, 1970), economic considerations (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Gable & Whitten, 1997), national identity (Carey, 2002), perceived cultural threat (McLaren, 2002), the inclusive and exclusive national identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2004), proxies used in decision-making (Anderson, 1998), news media (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006), political parties (Gabel & Scheve, 2007; Steenbergen et al. 2007), satisfaction with democracy and state institutions (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000), religion (Vollaard, 2006), occupations (Gabel, 1998b), and some demographic factors (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Hooghe and Marks (2005) classify most of these factors as 'calculation,' 'community,' and 'cues'. On the other hand, Hobolt and De Vries (2016) categorize them as 'utilitarian,' 'identity,' and 'cue-taking'.

To begin with, Inglehart's (1970) analysis of five European countries, utilizing two distinct surveys conducted between 1963 and 1968, reveals that formal education and mass communication play a significant role in fostering European Union integration. Higher levels of education lead to greater cognitive mobilization, which, in turn, contributes to support for the integration process. Additionally, higher levels of education are associated with a reduction in Euroscepticism. Hakhverdian et al. (2013) find that individuals with lower levels of education are more likely to exhibit Eurosceptic attitudes towards the EU. What is more, greater political awareness and well-developed job skills help individuals feel more connected to supranational political communities (Jacquier, 2012).

Subsequent research has concentrated on examining the impact of both macroeconomic and microeconomic factors. In these studies, the economic value derived from European integration plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward integration (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Gabel & Whitten, 1997; Gabel, 1998a; Curtice, 2016).

On the one hand, national economic performance is perceived to align with that of the EU. Citizens often believe in a correlation between the two, with support for the EU rising when the economy is performing well. These macroeconomic assessments are referred to as sociotropic voting. On the other hand, Gabel and Whitten (1997). argue that individuals' subjective perceptions of the overall economic situation are more influential. Even when external realities

may suggest otherwise, individuals tend to support integration when they believe, from a subjective perspective, that the economy is improving (retrospective) or will improve (prospective). These personal financial assessments are termed egocentric economic voting. Gabel (1998a) finds that political values and cognitive mobilization have a minimal impact on EU support, while class partisanship and support for the government exert a moderate influence. However, utilitarian factors have the most significant effect. Additionally, Gabel (1998b) argues that occupational differences are significant predictors of support for the EU. Hooghe et al. (2007) find that the impact of occupation varies across countries. Tucker et al. (2002) argue that in post-communist countries, those who benefit from the transition to liberal markets are more likely to support integration than those who experience losses.

Later studies have enriched the literature by highlighting the role of identity in shaping attitudes toward the EU. Since the early 2000s, there has been a growing focus on the significance of identity and cultural factors, as evidenced by empirical data (Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2002, 2007; Hooghe & Marks, 2004). The central argument of these studies is that the impact of identity and culture on attitudes toward European integration is not subordinate to economic cost-benefit considerations. McLaren (2002) finds that individuals are more likely to vote based on general societal fears rather than their personal interests. Hooghe and Marks (2004) compare utilitarian and identity factors and find that identity factors have a stronger influence. Hooghe and Marks (2005) find that an exclusive identity has a stronger influence on opposition to the EU. Religion, as a key component of identity, produces inconsistent results in the context of EU attitudes (Vollaard, 2006; Clements, 2010). De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005) identify immigration as a significant factor on Euroscepticism. Luedtke (2005) suggests that, in the context of immigration, national identity factors often outweigh utilitarian ones.

Beyond the aforementioned factors, a significant portion of the literature focuses on mediating factors such as political parties and the media. A substantial proportion of EU citizens lack comprehensive knowledge of EU institutions, as demonstrated by numerous Eurobarometer surveys. As a result, individuals tend to rely on cues from opinion leaders when they lack information on specific issues, such as the EU. Anderson (1998) characterizes this heuristic behavior as 'proxy cueing' or ‘cue taking.’ Citizens often rely on political parties for cues when acquiring information and forming attitudes on complex issues such as the EU (Gabel & Scheve, 2007a; Vössing, 2015). Moreover, a significant portion of the public identifies the media as the primary source of information regarding the EU (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006).

Divisions within a country's political elite on EU matters and the fragmented messages they convey create an environment in which Euroscepticism can easily gain traction (Hooghe & Marks, 2005). Such elite divisions negatively impact support for the EU (Gabel & Scheve, 2007b). Consequently, the unity of political parties' positions on the EU plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion. However, in situations characterized by significant internal opposition or conflict within a party, individuals are influenced to varying degrees by the conflicting messages emanating from the party (Gabel & Scheve, 2007b). Conversely, when political elites present a unified pro-EU stance, positive effects on politically engaged individuals are observed. Supportive messages from political elites regarding integration contribute to the formation of favorable public opinions on the issue. Steenbergen et al. (2007) conceptualize integration as both a top-down and bottom-up process, in which parties both influence and are influenced by their electorates. While the connection between parties and voters is evident, the direction of causality varies depending on the context. Hellström (2008) finds that the relationship between parties and voter opinions on the EU is not reciprocal. While parties have a limited influence on public opinion, they do not appear to be responsive to voter expectations regarding EU policy.

The media's influence on public opinion has been extensively examined in various studies (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Maier & Rittberger, 2008; Vliegenthart et al. 2008). The media exerts its influence by shaping public opinion, which in turn pressures political elites. However, the way European integration is portrayed in the media—or, using media terminology, how it is framed—plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes toward the EU (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). In this context, the media not only informs the public on what to think but also guides how to think about these issues (Maier & Rittberger, 2008).

Aspirations for institutional and democratic reform may also contribute to support for the EU. Citizens of member states who perceive their national political institutions as inefficient and ineffective are more likely to adopt a pro-EU stance, driven by their belief in the EU's transformative potential (Sancez-Cuenca, 2000). Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) argues that dissatisfaction with the national government's democratic performance, particularly regarding corruption and the welfare system, increases the likelihood of support for the EU. Garry (2014) examines the role of emotions in EU referendums, finding that anxious voters tend to base their decisions on EU-related issues, whereas angry voters are more likely to vote based on domestic political dynamics, following a second-order voting pattern.

A comprehensive literature review is beyond the scope of this paper due to page constraints. For an insightful review of the literature, please refer to Hobolt and De Vries (2016). Overall, there exists a significant inconsistency across the existing literature. This inconsistency can be attributed to two main factors: differences in methodology and variations in the level of analysis. Findings on public support for the EU demonstrate variations over time and across different regional contexts (Reinl & Evans, 2021). Findings may also vary depending on the methodologies employed (Henderson et al., 2020). EU-wide studies may overlook country-specific factors, while methodological differences may further contribute to these discrepancies. Hobolt (2014) emphasizes the importance of national economic and political contexts in shaping attitudes toward integration. Bølstad (2014) examines the divergent trends between core and periphery countries following the 1973 enlargement. Not only are EU citizens heterogeneous, but the countries they inhabit also display significant historical differences. The political, economic, and cultural histories of national systems shape the factors influencing attitudes toward European integration, with these factors varying from one country to another. Certain factors may be more prominent in some countries, while having little or no impact in others. Consequently, research on the factors shaping attitudes toward the EU across all European populations may not necessarily produce reliable results. Thus, examining the factors that influence EU attitudes on a country-specific basis yields more accurate insights.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to contribute to the existing literature on EU support in the UK by utilizing a more direct methodology to identify the most robust determinants of EU support after UK's official exit from the EU. This paper focuses on a country-specific analysis of the UK, employing binary logistic regression due to its strong predictive power.

Studies examining UK attitudes toward the EU have predominantly focused on national sovereignty factors, such as the cultural threat posed by immigration and the democratic deficit within the EU. Research has shown that individuals who identify as English are generally less inclined to support the EU (Carey, 2002). Identifying as English is a significant predictor of supporting the Leave vote, while identifying as Scottish tends to have the opposite effect (Henderson et al., 2020). Also, immigration is widely recognized as a primary driver of Euroscepticism (Chopin & Lequesne, 2021). McLaren and Johnson (2007) argue that the primary motivation behind citizens' desire to limit immigration to the UK is the concern that cultural identity will be undermined. However, Curtice (2016) argues that in the UK, citizens perceive the arrival of low-skilled workers through free movement as a threat to job opportunities and a strain on social welfare systems, highlighting the significant implications of immigration on the national

economy. While cultural concerns are widespread, they are not sufficient on their own; only when combined with economic grievances can they drive a vote to leave Curtice (2016). On the other hand, Pensiero (2020) identifies education and attachment to British national identity as the principal determinants of Brexit-related attitudes. He reports that, in roughly four-fifths of cases, individuals with a university degree are more inclined to support the European Union. Attachment to British identity also proves influential across social strata: among disadvantaged groups, stronger identification with Britishness corresponds with more pro-Brexit orientations, while weaker identification aligns with reduced support. A similar pattern is evident among advantaged classes, where a strong sense of British identity continues to predict pro-Brexit preferences despite greater socioeconomic security. Notably, Pensiero finds no evidence that income exerts a significant independent effect. Henderson et al. (2020) contend that the UK is a multinational state with four distinct subnational electorates, each of which should be studied separately. Their findings suggest that immigration is the key factor driving the Leave vote in England, Scotland, and Wales.

Beyond immigration and identity, other variables have emerged in the literature on the Brexit vote. Norris and Inglehart (2019) find that low income, high unemployment and generational differences played a significant role in the Brexit decision, with younger generations being more pro-EU compared to older generations. Examining how personality characteristics shape political behaviour, Bonomi Bezzo et al. (2024) report that higher levels of agreeableness and openness are linked to a reduced propensity to support Brexit, whereas lower levels of these traits correspond with a greater likelihood of endorsing it. Fowler (2023) explores the gender gap and finds that women under the age of 45 in the UK are less Eurosceptic than their male counterparts.

Aslan (2020) investigates the impact of the aforementioned factors on EU support in the UK using five models derived from five different datasets. His findings indicate that identity, attachment to the country, economic expectations for the national economy, expectations regarding personal job situation, satisfaction with democracy, immigration, EU knowledge, supported political party, and media factors are significant predictors of attitudes toward the EU in the UK, while demographic factors are not relevant in this context.

Building upon the binary logistic regression models used by Aslan (2020), this study seeks to replicate his regression model with a novel approach to variable testing. Instead of relying on the indirect items from the survey data, this study will focus on the EU-related meaning items within the dataset. Although, Teney et al. (2014) incorporate EU meaning variables into their analysis, they

use them in a different analytical model, treating them as part of the dependent variable.

Theoretically, following the lived experience of post-Brexit reality, UK citizens are expected to have developed a more realistic evaluation of the benefits and costs of EU membership in their daily lives. Consequently, I hypothesize that the factors influencing the Brexit vote prior to the referendum have diminished in significance, while more practical and economic considerations have gained prominence.

Thus, the hypothesis of this study is as follows:

H: The pre-Brexit vote factors, such as immigration and identity, have shifted to secondary importance in comparison to more pragmatic economic and practical considerations following the UK's exit from the EU.

The next section will outline the methodology employed to test this hypothesis.

Data and method

For this study, I utilize Eurobarometer 100.2 (European Commission, Brussels, 2024). This dataset is selected because it contains all essential standardized variables previously validated in the literature and, more importantly, it was the only recent dataset providing comprehensive EU-related measures available during the preparation of this study. The information document for the relevant dataset on the official website of the European Commission specifies that the survey population consists of individuals aged 15 years and older. The data collection period for the United Kingdom was from October 23, 2023, to November 12, 2023. In order to include only the UK cases in the dataset, I filtered the UK cases by selecting "Nationality = UK." The total number of UK nationals in the dataset is 939.

Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, a binary logistic regression model is the most appropriate analytical technique. This model estimates the log-odds of the likelihood of the outcome occurring and enables the effect of each predictor to be assessed while accommodating the non-linear relationship between the predictors and the probability of a “yes” versus “no” response. The following section outlines the operationalization of the logistic regression model for the purposes of replication in later studies.

Dependent variable

The Eurobarometer 100.2 dataset features an item “In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?” The original coding for the item is; EU image: “*1= very positive, 2 = fairly positive, 3= neutral, 4 = fairly negative, 5 = very negative, 6 = don’t know*”. In its original coding, the variable is unsuitable for binary logistic regression, as it consists of more than two categories. Therefore, the item is recoded by combining positive responses into one category and negative responses into another, while excluding all "neutral" and "don't know" cases. After excluding 402 missing cases, the recoded item is reordered as; *“EU image: 0= negative, 1= positive”* and contains a total of 537 cases.

Independent variables

To assess the impact of retrospective economic factors, I utilize several variables from the dataset: "national economy situation," "personal job situation," "financial situation," and "employment situation in the country." These variables are coded as follows: 1 = very good, 2 = rather good, 3 = rather bad, 4 = very bad, and 5 = don't know. In addition to retrospective economic evaluations, the dataset also includes variables that capture prospective economic factors, such as "expectations about the national economy," "expectations about the financial situation," "expectations about personal employment," and "expectations about the employment situation in the country." These variables are coded as: 1 = better, 2 = worse, 3 = the same, and 4 = don't know.

To examine the effect of the identity factor, I employ the "attachment to country" variable, which is coded as follows: 1 = very attached, 2 = fairly attached, 3 = not very attached, 4 = not at all attached, and 5 = don't know. For the measure of cultural proximity, I use an item that asks respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statement: "People in the EU have a lot in common." The responses are coded as follows: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Don't know.

For democratic concerns, the model includes the variables "satisfaction with the country's democracy" and "satisfaction with EU democracy." Both variables are coded as follows: 1 = very satisfied, 2 = fairly satisfied, 3 = not very satisfied, 4 = not at all satisfied, and 5 = don't know.

To measure the effect of EU knowledge, I use items that summarize the number of correct responses provided by respondents to objective questions about the EU. These are categorized as follows: "EU Knowledge - 0 correct answers," "EU Knowledge - 2 correct answers," and "EU Knowledge - 3 correct answers."

The meaning attributions that respondents associate with the EU are derived from the question, "What does the European Union mean to you personally?" For each of the following concepts—"peace, economic prosperity, democracy, social protection, travel/study/work abroad, cultural diversity, stronger say in the world, the Euro, unemployment, bureaucracy, waste of money, loss of cultural identity, more crime, not enough frontier control, and quality of life for future generations"—respondents' answers are coded as follows: "EU Meaning, 0 = not mentioned, 1 = mentioned."

To assess the effects of sub-state regions, I utilize the UK region variable, which includes the following regions: North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, London, South East, South West, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Lastly, to control for demographic variables, I include the following measures: age; political orientation (left-right placement: 1 = left, 10 = right); education level, categorized into five groups (1 = up to 15 years, 2 = 16-19 years, 3 = 20+ years, 4 = currently studying, 5 = no full-time education); gender (1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = non-binary); occupation, based on the C14 scale (1 = self-employed, 2 = managers, 3 = other white-collar workers, 4 = manual workers, 5 = homemakers, 6 = unemployed, 7 = retired); type of community (1 = rural, 2 = small town, 3 = large city, 4 = don't know); internet use frequency index (1 = daily, 2 = two to three times a week, 3 = about once a week, 4 = two to three times a month, 5 = less often, 6 = never, 7 = no internet); and social class self-assessment, with five categories (1 = working class, 2 = lower middle class, 3 = middle class, 4 = upper middle class, 5 = upper class, 6 = other, 7 = none, 8 = refusal, 9 = don't know). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the relevant variables in the dataset for the UK nationals.

Table 1: descriptive statistics of relevant variables for the UK

Variable	Total positive (%)	Total negative (%)	Neutrals + DKs (%)
EU imag	34.7	22.8	42.5
Sit. national economy	15.4	53.8	30.8
Sit. job personal	58.6	13.2	28.2
Sit. financial hh	76.5	18.6	5.0
Sit. employment country	35.5	52.9	11.7
Expt. economic situation country	18.1	40.4	41.6
Expt. financial situation hh	19.5	14.1	62.9
Expt. employment in country	13.3	31.2	55.4
Expt. pers job situation	15.9	6.2	77.0
Democracy satisfaction - Country	47.2	37.1	15.7
Democracy satisfaction – EU	45.2	15.0	39.8
Attachment to country	87.1	2.3	10.6
People in EU have a lot in common	58.7	27.9	13.4

EU meaning:	Mentioned (%)	Not mentioned (%)
Peace	23.5	76.5
Economic prosperity	20.8	79.2
Democracy	19.2	80.8
Social protection	12.8	87.2
Travel/study/work abroad	40.4	59.6
Cultural diversity	23.5	76.5
Stronger say in the world	19.6	80.4
Euro	9.1	90.9
Unemployment	4.3	95.7
Bureaucracy	17.3	82.7
Waste of money	15.3	84.7
Loss of cultural identity	11.1	88.9
More crime	5.8	94.2
Not enough frontier control	18.1	81.9
Quality of life future generations	22.5	77.5

Source: Authors' own table based on Eurobarometer Dataset 100.2

To conduct the binary logistic regression, I include all of the aforementioned independent variables in the model. Prior to estimating the logistic regression model, multicollinearity among the independent variables was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics. All predictors exhibited VIF values below 2.1 and tolerance values above 0.49, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in the present analysis. For the categorical variables—education, occupation, and UK region—I select the first category of each as the reference group.

Results

In this section, the findings from the binary logistic regression analysis are presented. Due to the recoding of the dependent variable, the model includes 537 cases, out of a total of 939 cases. The model fit is statistically significant, as indicated by the omnibus test of model coefficients ($\chi^2 = 484.046$, df = 59, $p < .001$). The model's fit is evidenced by a -2 Log Likelihood value of 237,283. The pseudo R^2 (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .804$) reveals that the model explains around 80.4% of the variance in the outcome. The logistic regression model demonstrates a good fit, as evidenced by a non-significant Hosmer and Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 = 5.139$, df = 8, $p = .743$). This test must yield a non-significant result in logistic regression, as it demonstrates that there is no significant difference between observed and expected frequencies across groups, thus validating the model. The model demonstrates an accuracy rate of 89.6% in classifying the cases.

Table 2 provides the binary logistic regression results, incorporating all variables in the model, where the dependent variable is EU image (0 = Negative, 1 = Positive).

Table 2 Binary Logistic Regression Model Results

	Model[a]				
Predictors	*b*	SE	Exp(*b*)[b] (Wald)	95% C.I. Lower	Upper
Retrospective econ.					
Situation of national economy	-,676	,290	,509 (5,437)*	,288	,898
Personal job situation	-,130	,164	,878 (,628)	,636	1,211
Financial situation	,669	,252	1,952 (7,035)*	1,191	3,201
Sit. of employment in the country	,265	,216	1,303 (1,509)	,854	1,989
Prospective econ.					
Expectations about national economy	,290	,289	1,337 (1,008)	,759	2,355
Expectations about financial situation	,056	,247	1,058 (,051)	,652	1,716
Expectations country employment	-,125	,281	,882 (,199)	,509	1,529
Expectations about personal job	-,040	,260	,961 (,024)	,577	1,599
EU Meaning					
Peace	1,005	,548	2,732 (3,369)	,934	7,991
Economic prosperity	2,527	,640	12,521 (15,579)***	3,569	43,922
Democracy	,128	,520	1,136 (,060)	,410	3,146
Social protection	1,708	,753	5,521 (5,142)*	1,261	24,171
Travel/study/work abroad	1,963	,490	7,121 (16,070)***	2,727	18,596
Cultural diversity	-,341	,505	,711 (,456)	,264	1,913
Stronger in the world	2,938	,680	18,873 (18,650)***	4,975	71,590
Euro	2,152	,766	8,603 (7,901)**	1,918	38,583
Unemployment	-,808	,912	,446 (,787)	,075	2,659
Bureaucracy	,331	,527	1,393 (,396)	,496	3,911
Waste of money	-1,800	,591	,165 (9,279)**	,052	,526
Loss of cultural identity	-,193	,594	,825 (,105)	,257	2,643
More crime	,667	,885	1,948 (,568)	,344	11,031
Not enough frontier cont.	-1,953	,483	,142 (16,359)***	,055	,366
Quality of life for future gen.	1,339	,588	3,816 (5,190)*	1,206	12,078
Satisfaction with country democracy	-,648	,255	,523 (6,438)*	,317	,863
Satisfaction with EU democracy	-1,422	,250	,241 (32,401)***	,148	,394
Attachment to country	,815	,263	2,260 (9,643)**	1,351	3,781
People in the EU have a lot in common	-,481	,188	,618 (6,518)*	,427	,894
EU knowledge					
0 correct answer	,557	,543	1,746 (1,051)	,602	5,064
2 correct answers	1,001	,505	2,720 (3,933)*	1,012	7,313
3 correct answers	1,678	,729	5,353 (5,298)*	1,283	22,334

Region_UK (ref: North East)			(29,118)**		
North West	-1,857	1,069	,156 (3,020)	,019	1,268
Yorkshire and Humber	,100	1,075	1,106 (,009)	,134	9,097
East Midlands	-1,877	1,226	,153 (2,342)	,014	1,693
West Midlans	-1,861	1,092	,155 (2,904)	,018	1,322
East of England	-1,362	1,175	,256 (1,343)	,026	2,563
London	-1,096	1,096	,334 (,999)	,039	2,867
South East UK	-,731	1,109	,481 (,435)	,055	4,231
South West	-2,912	1,190	,054 (5,988)*	,005	,560
Wales	,571	1,369	1,770 (,174)	,121	25,881
Scotland	2,084	1,200	8,036 (3,015)	,765	84,454
Northern Ireland	-3,852	1,543	,021 (6,233)*	,001	,437
Demographics					
Age	-,027	,018	,973 (2,404)	,940	1,007
Gender	-,470	,389	,625 (1,458)	,292	1,340
Type of community	,477	,294	1,611 (2,633)	,906	2,867
Netuse	,026	,147	1,026 (,030)	,769	1,368
Social Class	,002	,161	1,002 (,000)	,731	1,372
Left-Right scale	,005	,010	1,005 (,206)	,985	1,025
Education (ref: up to 15)			(4,431)		
16-19	,190	,594	1,209 (,102)	,377	3,876
20+	-,215	,684	,806 (,099)	,211	3,080
Still	-2,366	1,454	,094 (2,649)	,005	1,621
Occupation (ref: self employed)			(8,804)		
Managers	-,845	,975	,430 (,752)	,064	2,902
White collars	-,729	1,123	,482 (,422)	,053	4,357
Manual workers	-1,374	,987	,253 (1,938)	,037	1,751
House person	-,913	1,274	,401 (,514)	,033	4,871
Unemployed	-2,698	1,170	,067 (5,323)*	,007	,666
Retired	-,227	,930	,797 (,060)	,129	4,931
Constant	6,924	2,352	1016,284 (8,669)**		

Models summary	
Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients	p = .000 (Chi-Square χ^2 484,046)
Hosmer and Lemeshow	p >.05 (Chi-Square χ^2 5,139)
Nagelkerke R^2	,804
-2 Log likelihood	237,283
N	537

*p< .05, **p< .005, ***p< .001

a. Dependent variable: EU image: 0 = Negative. 1 = Positive

b. Wald statistics are in the brackets.

Source: Authors' own table based on Eurobarometer Dataset 100.2

In binary logistic regression, the odds ratios (exp(B)) are employed to measure the probability of the outcome event. Meanwhile, the Wald statistics, indicated in parentheses, assess the relative impact of each variable on the outcome within the context of the model. Higher values of the Wald statistic suggest a more significant contribution and increased reliability of the variable.

As shown in Table 2, the following variables are not statistically significant in the model ($p > .05$): "situation of employment in the country," "personal job situation," "expectations about the national economy," "expectations about financial situation," "expectations about country employment," "expectations about personal job," EU meanings ("peace," "democracy," "cultural diversity," "unemployment," "bureaucracy," "loss of cultural identity," "more crime"), EU knowledge ("0 correct answers"), and demographic variables (age, gender, type of community, internet use, social class, left-right scale, and education).

Moving on to interpret the statistically significant variables, the national economy situation and financial situation variables are statistically significant ($p < .05$). These commonly used items in the literature to assess the influence of sociotropic and egocentric economic factors produce somewhat contradictory results here. The findings reveal that the likelihood of having a positive EU image decreases as individuals perceive the national economy to be in poor condition ($\exp(B) = 0.509$; Wald = 5.437). Conversely, the likelihood of a positive EU image increases when respondents describe their personal financial situation as unfavorable ($\exp(B) = 1.952$; Wald = 7.035). This result, however, appears paradoxical. A closer examination of the two variables through crosstabulation reveals that the discrepancy arises from the mismatch between individual economic assessments and macroeconomic evaluations. Specifically, the number of respondents with a pessimistic view of the national economy outweighs those with an optimistic outlook, while individuals are generally more satisfied with their personal financial situation, as evidenced by the frequency distributions in Table 1. These inconsistent results indicate that such indirect items are not particularly reliable for these type of variables.

Continuing with the more direct items of EU meanings, we can see that several EU meaning attributions are statistically significant, with notably higher Wald statistics. Individuals who believe that the EU represents 'economic prosperity' ($p < .001$; $\exp(B) = 12.521$; Wald = 15.579) are 12 times more likely to hold a positive EU image. Other EU meanings valued by UK nationals include 'social protection' ($p < .05$; $\exp(B) = 5.521$; Wald = 5.142), 'travel/study/work abroad' ($p < .001$; $\exp(B) = 7.121$; Wald = 16.070), 'a stronger voice in global affairs' ($p < .001$; $\exp(B) = 18.873$; Wald = 18.650), 'the Euro' ($p < .005$; $\exp(B) = 8.603$; Wald = 7.901), and 'quality of life for future generations' ($p < .05$; $\exp(B) = 3.816$; Wald = 5.190). Conversely, individuals who perceive the EU as a 'waste of money' ($p < .005$; $\exp(B) = 0.165$; Wald = 9.279), or believe that the EU results in 'insufficient border control' ($p < .001$; $\exp(B) = 0.142$; Wald = 16.359), are more likely to have a negative image of the EU.

Democratic concerns produce the expected results. Specifically, as satisfaction with national democracy ($p < .05$; exp(B) = 0.523; Wald = 6.438) and EU democracy ($p < .001$; exp(B) = 0.241; Wald = 32.401) decreases, the likelihood of having a positive EU image also declines.

Regarding ideational factors, individuals with a weaker attachment to their country are more likely to have a positive EU image ($p < .005$; exp(B) = 2.260; Wald = 9.643). Conversely, the less a person agrees that people in the EU have a lot in common ($p < .05$; exp(B) = 0.618; Wald = 6.518), the more likely they are to hold a negative EU image.

As anticipated, possessing knowledge about the EU increases the likelihood of favoring it, as demonstrated by the EU knowledge variables. Specifically, individuals with 2 correct answers ($p < .05$; exp(B) = 2.720; Wald = 3.933) and those with 3 correct answers ($p < .05$; exp(B) = 5.353; Wald = 5.298) are more likely to have a positive EU image.

Although two UK regions appear to be statistically significant—namely, the South West ($p < .05$; exp(B) = 0.054; Wald = 5.988) and Northern Ireland ($p < .05$; exp(B) = 0.021; Wald = 6.233)—the results lack robustness. Cross tabulation reveals inconsistencies in these findings. In the South West, there are 20 respondents with a negative EU image compared to 26 with a positive EU image. Similarly, in Northern Ireland, 10 respondents report a negative EU image while only 4 report a positive EU image. These results suggest that the region in which a respondent resides has some influence on their perception of the EU, though the relationship appears to be weak. The regression analysis indicates that, despite the raw counts from the crosstab suggesting a different trend, when controlling for other variables, residents of the South West and Northern Ireland are less likely to hold a positive view of the EU.

Lastly, only the unemployed category is statistically significant compared to other occupational groups ($p < .05$; exp(B) = 0.067; Wald = 5.323), with unemployed individuals being more likely to have a negative EU image compared to the reference group self-employed.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine whether there were any shifts in the factors influencing public opinion on EU support in the UK following the country's decision to leave the union. Theoretically, it is anticipated that events would be appraised differently with the benefit of hindsight. Therefore, I hypothesized that the UK public would offer a more realistic evaluation of the EU's image after experiencing the post-Brexit conditions.

Previous studies have demonstrated that both economic and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward the EU, with greater emphasis placed on cultural identity factors compared to material economic ones. Has the UK public begun to prioritize more material factors, such as the economy and higher inflation, over cultural factors when assessing the EU after the end of membership? To address this question, I utilized a binary logistic regression model based on the approach employed by Aslan (2020), incorporating a new and more direct set of items for independent variables, specifically the EU meaning variables.

The results of the model indicate that more material and rational factors have increasingly taken precedence over emotional factors following Brexit. In the UK context, the commonly used indirect items in the literature fail to produce meaningful results, as evidenced by the insignificance of the "situation" and "expectations" variables and their inconsistent findings. In contrast, more direct EU meaning items yield more reliable results, effectively measuring the intended constructs. Therefore, the evidence presented here reinforces prior scholarship (Curtice, 2016; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Aslan, 2020) by confirming that economic factors play a pivotal role in shaping attitudes toward EU integration.

The statistical insignificance of EU meaning variables related to emotional factors, such as "loss of cultural identity" and "more crime," suggests that these concerns have diminished in importance. These results suggest that the ideational dimensions highlighted by scholars like McLaren and Johnson (2007), Carey (2002) during the Brexit discussions have experienced a decline in their explanatory relevance after 2020. "Insufficient border control" is statistically significant, indicating that immigration remains a relevant concern. Thus, the evidence may partly align with the findings of Chopin and Lequesne (2021), who argue that immigration constitutes a relevant factor. However, this does not necessarily imply that the concern is more emotional than based on a cost-benefit analysis. This finding lends credence to Curtice's (2016) contention that the influence of immigration and cultural anxieties is contingent upon the presence of economic grievances.

Democratic concerns and inclusive versus exclusive identity also contribute to shaping EU image perception, though to a lesser extent, as evidenced by the variables related to attachment to the country and commonality with the EU. Similarly, these results appear to reinforce Pensiero's (2020) argument that attachment to British identity represents another salient factor.

Also, results further reinforce the argument that demographic variables such as age, gender, type of community, internet use, social class, political ideology, and education are not primary factors in shaping EU image perception. Instead, they appear to be byproducts of other more influential factors. Taken together,

the results appear to corroborate Aslan's (2020) conclusions, yet they diverge from Fowler's (2023) claim that gender plays a meaningful role.

On the other hand, more material and practical factors, such as "a stronger say in the world," "economic prosperity," "travel/study/work abroad," "social protection," and "quality of life for future generations," are statistically significant. The high Wald statistics further highlight their influence in the model, indicating that these factors are more important than others in shaping the EU image for UK nationals. Moreover, with the exception of "a waste of money," other negative evaluations of EU economic performance are statistically insignificant, as shown by the p-values for variables such as "unemployment" and "bureaucracy." This may indicate a shift in the evaluation of EU economic performance within UK public opinion, suggesting that the EU is now perceived as a more economically beneficial union rather than an economically costly one. This also reflects the growing primacy of cost-benefit analysis in post-Brexit perceptions.

Therefore, the results confirm the research hypothesis. It is evident that, in the UK context, the most significant factors influencing attitudes toward the EU are practical ones that directly affect daily life and economic wellbeing. UK nationals tend to hold a more positive view of the EU when they believe it enhances their influence in global affairs, fosters economic prosperity, enables free travel for study or work abroad, and guarantees social protection and a high quality of life for future generations.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the UK provides a compelling example of how economic conditions, material well-being, and standards of living play a critical role in shaping public support for political systems. The findings suggest that while cultural and ideational factors, including nostalgia for the imperial past, may occasionally divert public attention from material realities, economic hardships following Brexit—arising from trade and other restrictions—serve to reorient public perceptions toward tangible economic concerns. If this dynamic persists, and if the UK government is unable to implement effective remedies for post-Brexit economic grievances, discussions regarding potential re-accession to the EU may gain increasing prominence in public discourse.

Limitations and Future Research

This research is based on a secondary dataset from the Eurobarometer, utilizing responses from only 537 respondents. Future studies could benefit from a larger sample size, spanning a broader time frame that covers each year following the UK's departure from the EU. Additionally, a custom-designed survey specifically focused on identifying the factors shaping UK attitudes

toward the EU could provide more tailored insights. For example, future research could examine additional factors such as media influence, political parties, and individual personality traits. These variables were not included in the current dataset, precluding their comparison with the other factors analyzed in this study.

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