

Getting Ready for the 2019 EP elections

March 2019

News flash from the EUROPINIONS project, funded by the European Research Council (ERC), project #647316

In only a few months, electorates across the European Union will have the opportunity to vote in the European Parliament elections. In a large scale, comparative study, funded by an ERC grant and with additional support from the University of Amsterdam, we are investigating the nature, origins and consequences of citizens' EU attitudes.

The team consists of:

Claes H. de Vreese, Professor of Political Communication and Principal Investigator. He has published more than 150 articles on EU public opinion, media effects, journalism, and electoral behavior. T: [@claesdevreese](https://twitter.com/claesdevreese)



Franziska Marquart, postdoctoral researcher (PhD Communication Science, University of Vienna, 2015). Her research interests focus on political communication effects, experimental methods, and the impact of visual communication in various mediated contexts.

T: [@FranziMarquart](https://twitter.com/FranziMarquart)



Anna Brosius, PhD Candidate in Political Communication. Her research focuses on institutional trust in the European Union and how it is changed by media information.

T: [@AnnaBrosius](https://twitter.com/AnnaBrosius)



Andreas Goldberg, postdoctoral researcher (PhD Political Science, University of Geneva, 2015). His research interests include political behavior, EU attitudes, campaign effects and survey research. T: [@andigole](https://twitter.com/andigole) W: andreascgoldberg.com



Erika van Elsas, postdoctoral researcher (PhD Political Science, University of Amsterdam, 2017). Her research interests include EU attitudes, political trust and electoral behavior. T: [@erikavanelsas](https://twitter.com/erikavanelsas)



About the project

EUROPINIONS focuses on the nature and composition of citizens' EU attitudes. It investigates the causes of these attitudes, their development over time, and their effects. The project is cross-national and comparative. It focuses in particular on the role of the media as a key antecedent of change. Understanding citizens' attitudes towards the EU is one of the key aspects of understanding contemporary politics. From a scientific point of view, understanding the dynamics and consequences of public opinion change is one of today's most important challenges.

We collect dynamic and detailed cross-national public opinion data – including flash surveys and panel components – and link these rich data up with media content data, meanwhile offering a comprehensive multidimensional perspective on EU attitudes, which is all well beyond the current state of the art. We expect to offer a new understanding of the causes and consequences of EU attitudes and develop a dynamic model of public opinion change.

NEWS

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We collect survey data, across time, in multiple European countries. This is done using online panel surveys and includes also 'flash surveys' administrated by cell phones. This allows for a more timely and dynamic tracking of public opinion while only needing to contact the respondent briefly. This approach will allow us to assess the nature, extent and scope of short term fluctuations in opinions. This is a novel feature in the study of EU attitudes which have not previously included such dynamic elements in the design.

We analyse the changes in opinion in part as a function of the news and information environment. This is assessed by an analysis of major news sources in the different countries. It allows for investigation of the extent to which opinion fluctuations are a response to changes in the news environment.

Our analysis of EU attitudes is also novel in terms of the measurement of these attitudes. Previous studies have typically focused on limited or imprecise definitions of these attitudes and we aim to develop a more comprehensive overview of the different dimensions of EU attitudes to establish which ones are more, or less, stable over time.

The project is in the middle of the main data collection phase. After initial instrument development, pre-testing, and a pilot survey, data collection is now in full swing in one country (the Netherlands). Data collection commenced in Fall 2018 in Denmark, Germany, Spain and Hungary, and will expand in Spring 2019 to France, Greece, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Sweden.



Milestones achieved

- Conceptual review, pilot survey, instrument development
- Panel survey up and running in the Netherlands, four waves completed (Wave 1 September 2017, Wave 4 December 2018).
- Data collected from first flash survey (Spring 2018).
- Content analysis (NL) in progress (2018)
- First experiments conducted (2017, 2018)
- Compilation and analysis of an extensive dataset of 17 years of newspaper coverage of the European Union in 15 European Countries (Spring 2018)
- First wave of cross-national extension of survey in Denmark, Germany, Spain and Hungary completed (December 2018/January 2019)
- Content analysis (DE, DK, ES, HU) started (Fall 2018)
- In Spring 2019, data collection will additionally happen in France, Greece, Poland, Czech Republic, and Sweden.

Project events, updates, conference participation etc. is communicated via social media (each team member has a Twitter handle). Major milestones are listed via this website: <https://www.polcomm.org/research/erc-europinions/>

Project members are frequently featured as speakers in the news or at public events and seminars. The project was also featured in the 2018 edition Gala Evening of Science and Society.

Left: Gala Evening of Science and Society, October 8, 2018.
Right: Claes de Vreese at EuroPCOM Conference, November, 2018
Below: Claes de Vreese at Nieuwsuur, May 2018



Exemplary key findings

Marquart, F., Goldberg, A. C., van Elsas, E. J., Brosius A., de Vreese, C. H. (2018).

Knowing is not loving. Media effects on knowledge about and attitudes towards the EU. *Journal of European Integration*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/07036337.2018.1546302

A panel survey assessed the relationship between exposure to media content, event-related knowledge gains, and changes in attitudes towards the European Union. Results show that when attending to news about an EU summit, citizens attain event-related knowledge, which negatively affects EU performance evaluations.

Marquart, F., Goldberg, A. C., van Elsas, E. J., Brosius, A., de Vreese, C. H. (2018). It's EUr choice: Selective exposure to and effects of media coverage on European Union attitudes. Under review at *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (Dec 2018).

We draw on three-wave panel data from the Netherlands and test whether citizens' domain-specific attitudes towards the European Union influence their selective exposure to different media outlets. We also examine the consequences of these selections for media effects, and we identify slightly more selection than media effects, and find both to be more prevalent for some EU attitudes compared to others.

Van Elsas, E. J., Goldberg, A. C., de Vreese, C. H. (2018). *EU issue voting and the 2014 European Parliament elections: a dynamic perspective*. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*.

Using four-wave panel data, we tested whether the effect of EU attitudes on EP vote preferences becomes catalyzed as EP elections draw closer. While differentiating between party groups (pro, anti, mixed) and five EU attitude dimensions, we find that EU issue voting occurs for both anti- and pro-EU parties, but only increases for the latter. Overall, we find surprising stability in the sense that EU attitudes form a consistent part of EP voting motivations even outside EP election times.

Goldberg, A.C., de Vreese, C.H. (2018). The Dynamics of EU attitudes and their effects on Voting. *Acta Politica* 53(4): 542-568.

In the context of the Dutch Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement referendum, we tested the dynamics of EU attitudes during the campaign and their impact on the referendum vote. Our results show significant campaign-induced changes of EU attitudes. Both strengthening and especially emotional attitudes further play significant roles for the voting decision in the referendum.

Marquart, F., Brosius, A., de Vreese, C. H. (2018). United feelings: The mediating role of emotions in social media campaigns on EU attitudes and behavioural Intentions. Under Review at *Journal of Political Marketing* (Dec 2018).

Using an experimental design, we test whether political parties' 1) positive or negative EU-related 2) emotional or non-emotional political messages influence citizens' emotions towards the EU, whether these emotions affect politically relevant outcomes, and whether the effects differ for citizens with varying political ideologies, and find that positive emotions in particular affect almost all outcome variables.

Brosius, A., van Elsas, E. J., de Vreese, C. H. (2018). Trust in the European Union. Effects of the Information Environment. *European Journal of Communication*.

This article focuses on the question whether citizens rely less on cues from national politics for the formation of their political trust in the European Union if EU media coverage changes. Using a combination of Eurobarometer survey data and a media content analysis, we find that changes in the EU media environment can in fact influence the extent to which cue taking takes place.

Publications

- Brosius, A., van Elsas, E. J., de Vreese, C. H. (2018). Trust in the European Union. Effects of the Information Environment. *European Journal of Communication*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323118810843>
- Goldberg, A.C., de Vreese, C.H. (2018). The Dynamics of EU attitudes and their effects on Voting. *Acta Politica* 53(4): 542-568.
- Marquart, F., Goldberg, A. C., van Elsas, E. J., Brosius A., de Vreese, C. H. (2018). *Knowing is not loving. Media effects on knowledge about and attitudes towards the EU*. *Journal of European Integration*.
- Matthes, J., Marquart, F., von Sikorski, C. (2018). Likeminded and Cross-Cutting Talk, Network Characteristics, and Political Participation Online and Offline. A Panel Study. Under review at *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*.
- van Elsas, E. J., Goldberg, A. C., de Vreese, C. H. (2018). *EU issue voting and the 2014 European Parliament elections: a dynamic perspective*. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*.
- van Elsas, E.J. (2017). Appealing to the 'losers'? The electorates of left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties compared, 1989-2014. *Electoral Studies* 50, 68-79.