

The Spread of Political Ideas: Eurosceptic Contagion and Its Electoral Impact

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Abstract

Do eurosceptic ideas spread among European Union countries? While previous research has explored the national sources of euroscepticism, we examine whether eurosceptic ideas emerge as the result of transnational diffusion. We focus on three potential avenues of diffusion: between societies at the citizen level, between political parties at the elite level, and because of EP election results. To explore these questions, we have compiled a dataset of public opinion, party manifesto, and electoral results data from 1979 to 2019. We find that eurosceptic ideas spread among members of the public but primarily among countries with cultural and geographic proximity. Yet, these types of proximity don't matter for the spread of eurosceptic ideas among parties. Instead, party family accounts significantly for party platform similarity. Lastly, EP elections have a surprising effect: eurosceptic results in one country are associated with more europhile reactions in other countries. Hence, paradoxically, the rise of eurosceptic parties in EP elections in one country leads to more euroenthusiasm elsewhere.

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INTRODUCTION

Is euroscepticism contagious? Most of the existing literature on what drives euroscepticism tends to focus on conditions that spark eurosceptic ideas inside the distinct national “bubbles” of EU member-states. Our goal with this paper is to complement this literature by exploring whether and to what extent euroscepticism is also the result of transnational contagion. To this effect, we ask three distinct but related questions. First, do eurosceptic ideas travel from society to society at the citizen level? Second, at the elite level, do political parties in one country copy eurosceptic ideas from parties in other countries? And, third, do European Parliament (EP) elections, the most visible instance of European Union (EU) democracy, matter for the diffusion of eurosceptic ideas, and, if so, how do they matter?

These are salient questions. We know that euroscepticism is a persistent phenomenon in the national polities of the EU member-states. It permeates all aspects of political life, including political parties across the ideological spectrum, the media, think tanks, and the wider public (Usherwood and Startin, 2013; Vasilopoulou, 2013). Additionally, euroscepticism is a regular feature of politics at the EU level, with eurosceptic forces represented in the European Council, the Council of the EU (because of successes at the national level), and in the EP, in the elections for which eurosceptic parties tend to do better than in most national elections (Hix and Marsh, 2011), a phenomenon that reached a high water mark with the 2014 EP elections (Nielsen and Franklin, 2017).

And we also know that eurosceptic ideas matter. There is of course Brexit, the best known and most dramatic consequence of eurosceptic ideas. But at a more mundane level, eurosceptic ideas create new sources of political contestation inside countries (Kriesi, 2007; Gabel, 2000), and they cause friction at the EU level, as the examples of the rule of law

disputes between the European Commission and the eurosceptic governments of Hungary and Poland illustrate (Closa, 2019).

Our understanding of euroscepticism is informed by Taggart's (1998: 366) well known definition as the "idea of *contingent* or *qualified* opposition, as well as incorporating *outright* and *unqualified* opposition to the process of European integration" (emphasis added). This definition, we find, works well both at the elite and citizen level. For party-based euroscepticism more specifically, our analysis takes into account Szerbiak and Taggart's (2008) distinction between hard and soft euroscepticism. Hard euroscepticism is found in parties that have a principled opposition to the EU, which leads some of them to push for withdrawal from the Union, and soft euroscepticism in parties that generally accept the EU but have concerns about certain aspects of its activity, for example, some EU policies or the certain restrictions to national sovereignty. We adopt a broad perspective and include both soft and hard eurosceptic parties in our analysis.

Our research shows that eurosceptic ideas do indeed spread between countries, but also that the effect of contagion is limited. On the citizen level, eurosceptic ideas spread among countries that are geographically close and culturally similar. On the party level, we find that parties in the same ideological family display a significant degree of similarity in terms of their positions on the EU, thus confirming previous findings in the literature about ideological contagion among parties more generally. Interestingly, geographic proximity and cultural affinity don't matter for political parties. Regarding EP elections, we find that their second order status is confirmed. EP election results in one country don't generally affect results in other countries and that public attitudes on the EU don't affect party platforms. But, surprisingly, we find some evidence that EP results in one country are negatively correlated with attitudes toward the EU in other countries, which suggests that the success

of eurosceptic parties in one country in one EP election in fact leads to more euroenthusiasm in the public opinion elsewhere.

LITERATURE REVIEW

National Sources of Euroscepticism

We make three contributions to the EU literature. The first is to the scholarship about the sources of euroscepticism. Most existing publications examine national level factors, which are located either at the citizen or at the elite level. Let us begin on the citizen front, where the sources of discontent have changed over time along with citizens' perceptions of the EU, as Hooghe and Marks (2007) point out in the introduction of a special issue of the journal *Acta Politica* on this matter. Specifically, as the EU's emphasis has shifted over the decades from macroeconomic to political competences, and even to identity development, so have eurosceptic grievances. Hence, the special issue identifies exclusive national identities as well as a sense of economic loss as sources of eurosceptic attitudes. Interestingly, it also finds that generalized political discontent and institutional distrust at the *national* level, as well as citizen dissatisfaction with *national* government performance, can fuel euroscepticism, suggesting a knock-on effect of attitudes toward national governments to the EU.

Zooming in on identity and culture, Lauren McLaren (2002) has argued that euroscepticism is caused by cultural threat and antipathy to other cultures based on nationalist statements. In fact, she argues that people don't see the EU as a threat to their own lives but rather to the nation-state. That is not to say that economic concerns no longer fuel euroscepticism. Recently, Algan et al. (2017) found a robust relationship between grievances about immigration, combined with dissatisfaction about the handling of EU economic troubles in EU member-states between 2007-2015, and increased support for

populist parties, one significant subset among which is eurosceptic parties. Nicoli and Reinl (2020) come to similar conclusions by connecting eurosceptic grievances with economic performance by governments at the regional, national, and the EU levels.

Van Elsas et al. (2016) provide a useful conceptual map of citizen attitudes toward the EU on the left-right ideological dimension. They find that eurosceptic attitudes sit primarily at the fringes, thus mirroring the U curve shape of elite euroscepticism previously identified by Hooghe et al. (2002) at the elite level. They also find that the sources differ between right and left, with euroscepticism on the far left being fueled mainly by economic concerns and on the far right by identity concerns. For eurosceptics on the right the concern is loss of national sovereignty to the EU and for eurosceptics on the left the concern is the “neoliberal” EU preventing their government from doing enough for redistribution and social welfare. These findings correspond with earlier research by Marks and Wilson (2000), who argued that eurosceptic attitudes have been absorbed into existing social cleavages, even though there is also evidence to suggest that attitudes toward the EU (including euroscepticism) constitute in fact a new cleavage in European societies, which has an effect on voting behavior that is independent from the more traditional economic left-right and cultural GAL-TAN² cleavages (Kriesi, 2007; Gabel, 2000).

It is interesting to note again, after having reviewed the literature on citizens’ eurosceptic attitudes, that contagion between publics is not a cause that has been explored. We can draw a similar conclusion about the literature on elite positions. The exception is a very recent article by Düpont and Rachuj (2022). Drawing on Castles’ (1993; 1999) work on family on nations, they find that political parties are more likely to emulate eurosceptic

² GAL stands for Green/Alternative/Libertarian and TAN for Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist

positions from parties in other countries that belong to the same cultural family (say, Scandinavian countries), but also from other members of the same party group in the EP and parties that belong to the same transnational organizations.

Hence, just like the literature on citizen eurosceptic attitudes, the scholarly exploration of elite ideology has also focused on national level causes. A large part of that literature examines the ideological underpinnings of eurosceptic positions held by political parties, which is juxtaposed with strategic considerations (Halkiopoulou et al., 2012; Kopecký and Mudde, 2002), an alternative source that we will discuss later. First though, it is worth noting that the significance of EU issues for national electoral campaigns is well established in the literature. There is an extensive literature on EU issue voting, which refers to the phenomenon of parties competing in national elections by adopting stances on EU issues in order to attract voters (e.g. Tillman, 2004; De Vries and Tillman, 2011; De Vries, 2007; De Vries, 2010).

Let us now take a closer look at the literature about the importance of euroscepticism more specifically in national politics. As we noted earlier, Hooghe et al. (2002) find that eurosceptic political parties, just like citizens, can be found primarily on the fringes of the ideological spectrum. More specifically, it is extreme left-wing parties (e.g., Communist parties) on the economic left-right dimension, and extreme TAN parties (e.g., ethno-populist parties) on the GAL/TAN dimension. Interestingly, economic conservative parties and GAL parties tend to be generally europhile. Hence, euroscepticism in political parties is also caused by economic and cultural concerns, appropriately mirroring the citizen attitudes we examined previously. Halkiopoulou et al. (2012) dig deeper into those differences, and they find nationalism to be a surprising common ideological denominator in ethno-populist and far left parties. While this is expected in the case of nationalist parties of the right, it is also

unexpectedly true in the case of economic far left parties, which, contrary to their official rhetoric, also adopt nationalist stances by equating the working class with the nation in their manifestos and deriding the national exploitation from international capitalists.

Furthermore, Sofia Vasilopoulou (2011) paints a more fine-grained picture of euroscepticism on the far right, an issue that has received a lot of attention in the public and the scholarly discourse. She finds that not all far right eurosceptics are made equal. Some are more extreme than others and the intensity of their opposition depends on their specific positions on a variety of cultural and economic issues, some of which are more philosophical in nature and some more policy specific.

And lastly, Eitan Tzelgov (2014) provides an interesting insight into why euroscepticism is relatively difficult to take hold of more established mass parties positioned in the middle of the ideological spectrum, where it is present but rarely dominant. By examining the behavior of British political parties in the House of Commons before Brexit, he finds that the nationalistic, sovereignty and fiscal aspects of Europeanization appeal differently to different factions of those parties. That makes taking a general positive or negative stance on European integration difficult. These inter-party splits were particularly evident in the opposition, which found it particularly difficult to take a strong eurosceptic stance in Parliament.

In addition to the ideological underpinnings of party-based euroscepticism discussed so far, a separate strand of the literature examines strategic considerations of parties in national elections as the primary cause of euroscepticism. In a well-known study adopting this perspective, Nick Sitter (2001) argued that the use of eurosceptic positions in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark is correlated with a party's belonging to the parliamentary opposition.

Opposition parties adopt eurosceptic stances, which they would otherwise not adopt, to win votes. Hence, their euroscepticism is more strategic than principled.

In a similar vein, Taggart and Szcserbiak (2013) explain the effect of eurosceptic parties on the general ideological orientation of a coalition government by looking at the size and the placement of the party in the ideological spectrum. Smaller fringe parties moderate their eurosceptic rhetoric to become more attractive coalition partners, and as a result the coalition does not become as eurosceptic as one would expect. By contrast, bigger establishment parties with eurosceptic positions do not face the same strategic considerations, and as result they are able to take the coalition in a more eurosceptic direction. Hence, according to Taggart and Szcserbiak, the intensity of a party's euroscepticism is the result of strategic realignment than genuine conviction.

Our goal is to complement these debates by examining not national but transnational sources of euroskepticism both at the citizen and at the elite level. As we saw, there is strong evidence that euroscepticism has a concrete foundation in the specific circumstances of national polities. We just want to examine if a contagion effect, both at the citizen and at the elite level, is also at work.

Ideological Contagion

There is a big gap in the debate about the ideological vs. strategic causes of party-based euroscepticism that we covered above: the role of ideological contagion among eurosceptic political parties has remained largely unexplored. With the exception of the study by Düpont and Rachuj (2022) we discussed earlier, the literature is silent on this matter. This is surprising, given the recent surge of interest in ideological diffusion among political parties, which is generally understood as the result of strategic considerations, and more specifically

as a mechanism for electoral success. Hence, our second contribution to the literature is further connecting the literatures on ideological contagion and euroscepticism, which rarely interact with each other.

The seminal work on ideological/policy diffusion is an article by Böhmelt et al. (2016), which explores how the policy ideas of successful political parties in one country, meaning parties that participate in a government coalition after an election, are adopted by political parties in other countries. More specifically, they show that a policy shift on the left to right scale for a party in a government coalition is mirrored by parties in other countries. Hence, transnational diffusion of party policies occurs when specific policies are perceived to be employed successfully elsewhere. Furthermore, Juhl and Williams (2022) find a similar contagion effect with regard to the strategic emphasis on valence issues by parties: those that enjoy electoral success in one country by emphasizing or deemphasizing certain valence issues are imitated by political parties of the same ideological family in other countries. So, an issue, say immigration or unemployment, that becomes salient in party A's manifesto in a certain country at time $t-1$ then becomes prominent in the manifestos of other countries at time t if party A is perceived as successful.

Additional research by Schleiter et al. (2021) has provided further insights into this contagion effect in Europe by showing that it has family-specific variations, with social democrats imitating counterparts in other countries more than Christian democrats and Conservatives. In a similar vein, Senninger et al. (2022) find that transnational linkages are important for transnational imitation. They find that political parties belonging to the same ideological family, as defined by party group in the EP, are more likely to imitate each other than third parties.

All the literature cited above focuses on the role of incumbent parties as transnational role models. These tend to be relatively moderate mainstream parties. But does the same logic of electoral success also apply to smaller fringe parties, like the ones that predominantly espouse eurosceptic ideas? Interestingly, Düpont and Rachuj's (2022) study on eurosceptic contagion finds that electoral success does not matter. Instead, it is cultural and linguistic similarities between parties in different countries that facilitate the spreading of ideas, even if those ideas don't contribute to electoral success. Hence, the Finns Party is more likely to imitate the policy options of the Sweden Democrats, which have not participated in government, rather than the Brothers of Italy, which is leading a governing coalition. Our objective is to find out if eurosceptic parties imitate each other's position, and if they do so, whether that is the part of a strategy for electoral success or if there is some other reason behind this practice, such as the geographic proximity or the cultural affinity of the party that serves as role model.

European Parliament Elections

Our third contribution is to the literature on the role of EP elections as mechanisms for spreading eurosceptic ideas. Previous research has looked at the inclusion of EU issues (including eurosceptic ideas) in party platforms for EP election campaigns. De Vries et al. (2011) have extended the research on EU issue voting from the context of national elections that we cited previously to the EP elections and find that EU issue voting is present in EP elections as well. More specifically, EU issues play a more important role for voting in EP elections when the voter is sophisticated and has access to related information. Hobolt et al. (2008) and Hobolt and Spoon (2012) concur that EU concerns matter alongside national concerns in EP elections when EU issues are salient in national political discourses. They also

find that, in EP elections, voters defect from the parties for which they voted in the last national election, because they are less enthusiastic about the EU than those parties. Hence, when they are given the opportunity to vote sincerely in EP elections, rather than strategically, as in national elections, they vote for parties that are as enthusiastic about the EU as they truly are. This suggests that EU concerns co-exist with national concerns in voters' minds at EP elections.

These studies respond to the conventional understanding of EP elections as second order contests (e.g. Hix and Marsh, 2011; Hix and Marsh, 2007; Ehin and Talving, 2021; Reif, 1984; Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Nielsen and Franklin, 2017). This means that EP elections are not really about EU issues. They serve as mid-term opportunities for voters to punish national incumbent political parties for their performance in national politics, and hence their election campaigns are focused on national issues. Additionally, because the support for a new executive is not at stake, turnout tends to be low, and smaller fringe parties tend to do better than bigger and more established ones, because voters tend to vote with their heart rather than strategically. In a variation of this approach, Eijk et al. (1996) and Gabel (2000) argue that EP elections serve as "marker" elections when taking place shortly before national elections, because voters signal to political parties how they intend to vote in the following national elections.

Both the proponents of EU issue voting in EP elections and the proponents of the second order thesis share an understanding that issues bubble up in EP elections because of what happens at the national level. There is, in other words, a bottom-up approach to understanding the inclusion of ideas about the EU in EP election platforms, which flows from the understanding that the sources of euroscepticism exist at the national level, as we saw earlier.

Our approach is different. Our goal is to uncover if EP elections have an independent effect on euroskeptic contagion. Put differently, we want to find out if EP elections help euroskeptic ideas spread regardless of what happens in national elections – and to examine if perhaps they have an impact on national elections.

DATA

Our dataset consists of three distinct sets of information. The first is election returns in the European and national elections of the EU member states between 1979 and 2019. These data have been obtained from the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP)³ and the Euromanifesto Study Database⁴. Apart from the election data, these databases provide quantitative measures regarding parties' policy positions across different dimensions (e.g., what is the ideological position of a party at the left-right political spectrum). Using the variables that correspond to the positive and negative references towards the European Community/Union, we build two different euroscepticism indices. We describe the construction of these variables in the methodology section. Additionally, the Euromanifesto Database provides us with information regarding the affiliation of each party to a political group at the European level (EP group).

The second major source of data is the Eurobarometer Survey Data. This is a public opinion survey which is conducted at least twice a year by the European Commission. The questionnaire covers a wide range of questions that are related to EU, socio-cultural and socio-political issues. The survey is typically conducted in all EU members, the candidate countries and some additional countries and territories. For this study, we appended and

³ <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>

⁴ <http://europeanelectionstudies.net/ees-study-components/euromanifesto-study>

merged the available Eurobarometer surveys from 1979 to 2021. Since the Eurobarometer data is a series of cross-sectional surveys, we aggregated the desired variables on country level for each year. Thus, we constructed a unique cumulative dataset that covers a long period since the first European election for all the EU members.

The third set of data involves variables that help us measure the affinity across countries. The major social variable we use is the excess propensity of country i to award points to country j 's song in the Eurovision Song Contest. The contest is a major event followed by a big part of the population. A key component of the contest is the voting for the best song, which is taking place at the national level. The voting includes a vote by "experts" and a vote by the public. Public votes are cast via telephone calls and incur a fee. Because of the cost involved, they are a credible indicator of the public's views. Though songs that have broad appeal (or which have a strong appeal to a narrower part of the public) obtain the most votes, there is a well-recognized tendency of the public of some countries to vote for songs of some specific other countries. This tendency is reflective of the affinity that some countries have for others, and has been recognized as a summary proxy for it by a number of authors (Clerides and Stengos, 2012; Ginsburgh and Noury, 2008).⁵ Importantly, this measure is unidirectional, i.e., a country i may exhibit strong affinity for country j , while j may not exhibit a similarly strong affinity for country i . Finally, as a second measure of cross-country affinity, we follow the spatial analysis literature and also include as a catch-all variable the geographical distance between countries. For each pair of countries, we calculate their

⁵ Yair (2019) provides a review of the broader academic literature on Eurovision, with an emphasis on cultural issues and cross-country social linkages, while Wolther (2012) provides a systematic categorization of all aspects of the Eurovision Song Contest. The cross-country linkages in determining Eurovision voting have been recognized and studied by physical scientists (e.g., see Fenn et al., 2006).

distance based on the Euclidean distance formula using the coordinates of the centroid of each country.

METHODOLOGY

We begin our empirical strategy by calculating the spatial correlation of countries within the EU. Our procedure consists of two stages. Firstly, we regress public opinions on national parliament and EU, as expressed in the Eurobarometer Survey, on country and year fixed effects. In that way we control for continent-wide shocks and time-invariant country characteristics.

Empirically we estimate:

$$Trust_{i,t} = a_0 + a_i + v_t + \eta_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

where $Trust_{i,t}$ is the trust in national Parliament or the trust in the EU for country i according to the Eurobarometer survey at time t , a_i and v_t are the country and year fixed effects respectively, and $\eta_{i,t}$ is the heteroskedastic disturbance term.

The second stage includes the residuals of specification (1). More specifically, we calculate the cross-product residuals $e_{ij,t}$ for each pair of countries i and j , where $e_{ij,t} = \widehat{\eta}_{i,t} * \widehat{\eta}_{j,t}$, and we regress them on the social affinity and distance for each pair of countries. That regression gives us the cross-country correlation weight matrix. More specifically, we estimate:

$$e_{ij,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Distance_{i,j} + \beta_2 Affinity_{i,j} + \varepsilon_{i,j,t} \quad (2)$$

$Distance_{i,j}$ is the distance between countries i and j calculated by the Euclidean distance formula using the coordinates of the centroid of each country. $Affinity_{i,j}$ is the social affinity between countries i and j which is calculated as the excess propensity to give

points to each other according to the Eurovision Song Contest. More specifically, for each annual contest, we calculate the average score that country i receives from a typical country (e.g., if Italy received 30 points and there were 21 contestants in that year, then the average score that Italy received was $30/20 = 1.5$). Then we compute the difference between the actual points that country j gave to country i and the average score that country i received in that contest. Taking the average of this difference over all the years, we calculate the affinity of country j for country i .

Having calculated the cross-country correlation, we move forward to our main analysis, where we firstly investigate the spatial correlation of political platforms and whether there are cross-country spillover effects.

Empirically, we estimate:

$$ESPS_{p_i,t} = \alpha_p + \beta_x X_{i,T} + \sum_{p_j: j \neq i} \omega_{p_j \rightarrow p_i} (\mathcal{Z}_{p_j \rightarrow p_i} | \gamma) ESPS_{p_j,t} + v_t + \varepsilon_{p_i,t} \quad (3)$$

where $ESPS_{p_i,t}$ is the eurosceptic score for party p_i in country i and the European Election held in year t . Regarding the eurosceptic score, we use two different measures. The first one is the raw EU preference index according to the Manifesto Data⁶. The value of it ranges from -100 (against EU) to 100 (in favor of EU). For the second measure we truncate all the europhile parties (those with a non-negative EU Preference index) at zero and we use the score of the eurosceptic parties. The value of it ranges from -100 to 0. For both measures we use both their raw values and their vote-share in EP weighted values. In the above specification we include year-specific shocks, v_t , and party fixed effects denoted by α_p . The term $X_{i,T}$ includes

⁶ This is the “pro_anti_EU” variable that can be found in the Euromanifesto Dataset. It is the summation of the codes which are in favor of European integration minus the sum of the codes which are against the European integration.

country public opinions as expressed at the Eurobarometer survey held at time T , which is the closest time before a European election. The spatial lag term in the summation expresses the linkage between the eurosceptic party score of parties p_j in other countries, $ESPS_{p_j,t}$, and that of party p_i , where $\omega_{p_j \rightarrow p_i}(\mathcal{Z}_{p_j \rightarrow p_i} | \gamma)$ is a set of directional and non-directional weights that depend on set of variables that relate parties p_j and p_i (or countries i and j) and a set of parameters to be estimated γ . More specifically, we use three different sets of weights. The first set is based on whether parties p_i and p_j belong to the same EP group, while the second one is based on the absolute distance between the parties in the right-left ideological spectrum. The third set of weights relates countries i and j based on their public opinions, social affinity, and distance as described in the first part of this section.

Next, we investigate whether the electoral outcomes are spatially correlated. Following again a generalized spatial lag framework we estimate:

$$ESCI_{i,t} = a_i + \sum_{j \neq i} w_{j \rightarrow i}(\mathcal{Z}_{j \rightarrow i} | c) ESCI_{j,t} + u_t + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (4)$$

where $ESCI_{i,t}$ is the vote share weighted euroscepticism score of country i . For the euroscepticism score we either use the raw EU preference index or the truncated euroscepticism score as aforementioned. The remaining terms consist of country and year fixed effects and the heteroskedastic disturbance term $\epsilon_{i,t}$. We additionally estimate the above specification using $EUOP_{j,T}$ instead of $ESCI_{j,t}$. $EUOP_{j,T}$ is the percentage of respondents who believe that the EU membership is good for their country j at time T . Time T is when the last Eurobarometer survey was held for country j before a European Election at time t . We additionally complement the above empirical strategy running a simple

regression of the weighted euroscepticism Score on public opinions at country level. In particular, we estimate:

$$ESCI_{i,t} = a_i + a_1 EUOP_{j,T} + v_t + e_{i,t} \quad (5)$$

The last part of our analysis investigates whether the electoral outcomes affect public opinions. The specification we run is the following:

$$EUOP_{i,T} = a_i + bX_{i,t} + \sum_{j \neq i} w_{j \rightarrow i}(Z_{j \rightarrow i}|c) ESCI_{j,t} + u_t + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (6)$$

where $EUOP_{i,T}$ is the percentage of respondents who believe that the EU membership is good for their country i at time T which is the closest Eurobarometer survey after a European election that held at time t . $ESCI_{j,t}$ is the vote share weighted euroscepticism score of country j . In the above specification we additionally account for country and year fixed effects, a_i and u_t respectively. The weight $w_{j \rightarrow i}(Z_{j \rightarrow i}|c)$ indicates the degree to which the euroscepticism in country j , $ESCI_{j,t}$, affects the public opinions in country i . As aforementioned, this weight is the cross-country correlation which is a function of directional and non-directional Z variables, such as the Euclidean distance from country j to i , and the Eurovision Score from country j to i which is a proxy for the social affinity for each pair of countries. Finally, we include a set of country characteristics $X_{i,t}$, such as the public opinions for country i before the European Election at time t , and an heteroskedastic disturbance term $\epsilon_{i,t}$.

STATISCAL ANALYSIS RESULTS

The first set of results is shown in Table 1. (All tables are available in the Appendix at the end of the paper). Panel A of Table 1 presents the results after estimating equation (1), while Panel B shows us the correlation coefficients β_1 and β_2 of equation (2). These results indicate that

public opinions for political institutions are spatially correlated in a predictable way. More specifically, the views on national parliament and the European Union, after controlling common continent-wide shocks and permanent country tendencies (i.e., time and country fixed effects; Panel A), are spatially dependent. The correlation is stronger between countries that have higher social affinity (positive β_1 estimate) and countries that are geographically closer to each other (negative β_2 estimate). Both estimates are statistically significant at the 1% significance level.

The second step of our empirical strategy is to examine the possible spatial correlation of political platforms. Table 2 presents the estimates of the specification (2). The first four columns present the results of estimating (2) including both party and year fixed effects while the last four columns include only the year fixed effects. In general, there seems to be a consistent correlation in platforms of parties that are similar in the left-right ideological spectrum, even after accounting for continent-wide shocks to all party platforms. The corresponding coefficient ranges consistently from -0.0002 to -0.0004 and is robustly significant at least at the 5% significant level. Additionally, there seem to be some tenuous effects for association in platforms within parties in the same EP group, which are present only when we include year fixed effects (columns (5) and (6)). On the other hand, physical distance and social affinity between countries plays no role. Regarding the influence of public opinions to party platforms within a country, the evidence is very tenuous. The corresponding coefficient of the public opinion variable in columns (1) and (2) is statistically insignificant, showing that variations in party platforms from year to year do not respond to public opinion from the current year or the year before. This could be indicative that each party responds to the political views of a particular segment of the public, and not the views of the “average voter.” However, when we look at the level of party platforms rather than their variation

around their mean (i.e., when we do not use party fixed effects), we do find them to be responsive to public opinion. More specifically, we find a positive and statistically significant coefficient which ranges between 0.13 and 0.16. Because both public opinion and party platforms are quite persistent across years, the interpretation of this finding is that countries where the public is generally eurosceptic tend to have parties with eurosceptic platforms, which is not a surprise. As Table 3 indicates, we have similar results when we weight the euroscepticism score of other party platforms with their electoral outcomes in EP.

Next, we present the results of the spatial correlation of electoral outcomes at the country level. Table 4 presents the estimates of equation (4). It is clearly shown that there is no association between electoral outcomes across countries. Both estimates of columns (1) and (3) are statistically insignificant at any significance level. When we replace the electoral outcomes of other countries with their public opinions about the EU membership (columns (2) and (4)) we find a positive and significant estimate when we include only country fixed effects (column (4)), which becomes insignificant when we control for both country and year fixed effects (column (2)). Interestingly, we find the same pattern when we estimate specification (5). Results are shown in columns (5) and (6) of Table 4. This change in significance, depending on the inclusion of different fixed effects indicate that there are Europe-wide significant swings.

Finally, we present the results of the spatial correlation between electoral outcomes and public opinions in Table 5. Interestingly, we find that the electoral outcomes affect public views in a negative way across countries, but they do not play any role within the countries. The fact that the cross-country correlation is negative suggests that residents in one country re-evaluate in a positive manner their views on Europe in light of manifested opposition to

Europe in other countries. Results are robust even if we account for the population weight of the countries (columns (3) and (4)).

FINDINGS: HOW DOES EUROSCEPTICISM SPREAD?

In this section, we would like to systematically present how the results of our statistical analysis help us answer the three questions we posed in the beginning of the paper. Specifically, we asked whether euroscepticism travels between societies at the citizen level, between political parties in different countries, and as a result of EP elections.

Starting with the question about contagion at the citizen level, we found that views about political institutions are spatially correlated in a predictable way both at the national and at the EU levels. Views on national parliament and the EU, after controlling common continent-wide shocks and permanent country tendencies (i.e., time and country fixed effects) are spatially dependent. The correlation is stronger between countries that have higher social affinity and countries that are geographically closer to each other. Our interpretation is that proximate countries may be subject to the same economic forces and thus driven to similar views on national and European institutions. Cultural proximity, after controlling for distance, is less likely to be driven by correlated shocks and more likely driven by spillovers of national shocks through shared news, language, travel, and immigrant communities. Hence, we have evidence that eurosceptic ideas travel between the publics of some countries. Their sources are not exclusively national.

Moving on to the question about elite/party contagion, the results here are more mixed. Political parties imitate ideas from parties in other countries in some ways but not in others. There seems to be a consistent correlation in platforms of parties that are similar in the left-right ideological spectrum, even after accounting for continent-wide shocks to all

party platforms. But there seem to be some tenuous effects for association in platforms within parties in the same European Parliamentary group. Interestingly, physical distance between and social affinity between countries plays no role. The absence of an effect within parliamentary group is not a surprise, given that we already account for position in the left-right spectrum. There is only limited variation among members of the same parliamentary group after controlling for general ideological political position. The strong correlation within parties with small differences in political position, and the absence of such correlation with respect to social affinity, is suggestive that parties are less responsive to public opinion and more responsive to other parties.

Our analysis further attested that public opinion influences party platforms within a country very marginally. Variations in party platforms from year to year do not respond to public opinion from the current year or the year before. This could be indicative that each party responds to the political views of a particular segment of the public, and not the views of the “average voter.” However, when we look at the level of party platforms rather than their variation around their mean (i.e., when we do not use party fixed effects), we do find them to be responsive to public opinion. Because both public opinion and party platforms are quite persistent across years, the interpretation of this finding is that countries where the public is generally eurosceptic tend to have parties with eurosceptic platforms, which is not a surprise.

Regarding the effect of EP elections, we found that electoral outcomes are not spatially correlated. There is a weak (and in fact negative) association, but it is not robust. Our interpretation is that electoral outcomes are not only dependent on public opinion on European issues, but also on public views on many topics, because a party’s platform has multiple dimensions. Additionally, as we have mentioned earlier, public opinion has limited

effects on party platforms. Therefore, it is quite possible that the spatial correlation of electoral outcomes differs from the spatial correlation of public opinion. Indeed, this seems to be the case. Public opinion seems to be spatially correlated, but electoral outcomes seem not to be or be negatively correlated. These results are not meaningfully different when we look at the influence of foreign public opinion on domestic electoral outcomes. When we dug deeper into the effect of public opinion on electoral outcomes, we found that the effect is very tenuous and generally not statistically significant. Importantly, it is positive within country and negative across countries.

However, the opposite is true about the effect of EP elections on public opinion, but in a surprising way. EP results in one country affect public opinion in other countries, and that effect is, interestingly, negative. This suggests that voters in one country re-evaluate in a positive manner their views on Europe considering manifested opposition to Europe in other countries. The response may be driven by an underlying zero-sum perception of the effects of EU membership of the sort “If Europe is bad for those in another country, perhaps it is not so bad for us.” Or it might be that voters may recoil from the observation that there is a broad anti-Europe movement which may imperil Europe. In this second interpretation, citizens may be expressing anti-Europe sentiment while not actually wanting this to result in a dissolution of the EU.

CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude that euroscepticism is somewhat contagious. Or, more accurately, it is contagious but with restrictions. Contagion is not the main source of eurosceptic ideas in the nations of the EU. Our research, therefore, complements the previous literature on the sources of euroscepticism by adding an additional layer of explanation. People in one country

can adopt eurosceptic ideas when those ideas become prominent in other countries that are close by or are culturally similar. Political parties also adopt eurosceptic ideas from parties in other countries, but mainly when those ideas originate in parties that are ideologically similar. It is therefore unlikely that the surge of euroscepticism in a German far right party will make French Socialists more eurosceptic. This confirms previous findings in the literature about the importance of ideological families for the adoption of similar ideas (Senninger et al., 2022; Schleiter et al., 2021). But contrary to that literature, we did not find any evidence that electoral success is the deciding factor for contagion. In this regard, we agree with Juhl and Williams (2022), who came to a similar conclusion with us about electoral success. But our results differ from theirs because we find that cultural affinity doesn't matter. The disconnect we identified between the causes of contagion at the citizen and elite levels sets the stage for our final conclusion. The success of eurosceptic parties in EP elections in one country appears to have no effect on voting behavior or party platforms elsewhere. It therefore appears as if other concerns dominate in voters' and parties' considerations. This finding adds more confirmation to the notion that EP elections continue to be second order. But they do at least contribute to a transnational surge of euroenthusiasm in public opinion, even if it doesn't translate to tangible electoral results for pro-EU parties both in EP and national elections.

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Table 1: Spatial Correlation of Public Opinions for Political Institutions

<i>Panel A</i>	(1)	(2)
	Trust in EU	Trust in Parliament
a_0	51.49*** (0.234)	51.49*** (0.254)
\sqrt{MSE}	7.993	8.701
R^2	0.677	0.802
<i>Fixed-effects</i>		
Year	Yes	Yes
Country	Yes	Yes
<i>Panel B</i>		
Dependent Variables:		
<i>Variables</i>		
β_0	7.1945*** (0.5603)	
Distance	-0.4798*** (0.0351)	
Cultural Affinity	3.1878*** (0.2156)	
<i>Fit statistics</i>		
Observations	58,244	
R^2	0.01163	
Adjusted R^2	0.01160	

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Table 2: Spatial Correlation of Political Platforms

Dependent Variable: Model:	EU Preference Index							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Variables</i>								
$W_{group}ESPS$	0.0012 (0.0056)		0.0017 (0.0049)		0.0499*** (0.0048)		0.0476*** (0.0050)	
$W_{rile}ESPS$	-0.0002** (0.0001)	-0.0002** (0.0001)		-0.0002** (0.0001)	-0.0002 (0.0001)	-0.0004*** (0.0001)		-0.0004** (0.0001)
$W_{corr}ESPS$	0.0001 (0.0005)	0.0001 (0.0005)	-0.0002 (0.0005)	-0.0003 (0.0005)	0.0002 (0.0004)	0.0001 (0.0005)	0.0001 (0.0004)	0.0001 (0.0004)
EUgood (before election)	0.0079 (0.0531)	0.0078 (0.0531)			0.1297** (0.0440)	0.1551*** (0.0401)		
<i>Fixed-effects</i>								
Party	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>								
Observations	804	804	865	865	804	804	865	865
R ²	0.75965	0.75962	0.74989	0.75234	0.24331	0.05616	0.20676	0.03370
Within R ²	0.00958	0.00948	0.00050	0.01028	0.23098	0.04078	0.19435	0.01857

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

We estimate the following equation:

$$ESPS_{pi,t} = \alpha_p + v_t + \beta_x X_{i,t} + \sum_{pj:j \neq i} W_{pj \rightarrow pi}(\zeta_{pj \rightarrow pi} | \gamma) ESPS_{pj,t} + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

$ESPS_{pi,t}$: EU Preference Index party p_i in country i in year t according to the Manifesto Data. The raw value of it ranges from -100 (antiEU) to 100 (proEU)

α_p : party fixed effects

v_t : time fixed effects

$X_{i,t}$: set of country characteristics. For these specifications we use the Eurobarometer opinions before the EU elections.

W_{corr} : this weight matrix is the result of calculating the correlation of each country pair over the years based on Eurobarometer opinions. This matrix is calculated based on the Trust in EU and Trust in National Parliament opinions.

W_{group} : whether the political parties across countries belong to the same political european group in the European Parliament

W_{rile} : this weight matrix is the result of calculating the absolute value of the right-left distance index between parties

Table 3: Spatial Correlation of Political Platforms including electoral outcomes

Dependent Variable: Model:	EU Preference Index							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Variables</i>								
$W_{group}ESPS_{wtd}$	0.00024 (0.00020)		0.00026 (0.00019)		0.00215*** (0.00018)		0.00203*** (0.00016)	
$W_{rile}ESPS_{wtd}$	-0.00001* (0.00000)	-0.00001* (0.00001)		-0.00001** (0.00001)	-0.00001* (0.00000)	-0.00002*** (0.00000)		-0.00002*** (0.00000)
$W_{corr}ESPS_{wtd}$	-0.00001 (0.00003)	-0.00001 (0.00003)	-0.00001 (0.00003)	-0.00002 (0.00003)	0.00001 (0.00002)	0.00001 (0.00002)	0.00001 (0.00002)	0.00001 (0.00002)
EUgood (before election)	0.00282 (0.05289)	0.00308 (0.05283)			0.13631*** (0.03757)	0.15784*** (0.04010)		
<i>Fixed-effects</i>								
Party	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>								
Observations	804	804	865	865	804	804	865	865
R ²	0.75959	0.75976	0.75048	0.75169	0.19609	0.05112	0.16541	0.02834
Within R ²	0.00934	0.01003	0.00284	0.00768	0.18299	0.03566	0.15235	0.01313

Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1

We estimate the following equation:

$$ESPS_{pi,t} = \alpha_p + v_t + \beta_x X_{i,t} + \sum_{pj:j \neq i} W_{pj \rightarrow pi} (\zeta_{pj \rightarrow pi} | \gamma) ESPS_{pj,t} + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (2)$$

$ESPS_{pi,t}$: EU Preference Index party p_i in country i in year t according to the Manifesto Data. The raw value of it ranges from -100 (antiEU) to 100 (proEU). We additionally include the vote share weighted measure of it.

α_p : party fixed effects

v_t : time fixed effects

$X_{i,t}$: set of country characteristics. For these specifications we use the Eurobarometer opinions before the EU elections.

W_{corr} : this weight matrix is the result of calculating the correlation of each country pair over the years based on Eurobarometer opinions. This matrix is calculated based on the Trust in EU and Trust in National Parliament opinions.

W_{group} : whether the political parties across countries belong to the same political european group in the European Parliament

W_{rile} : this weight matrix is the result of calculating the absolute value of the right-left distance index between parties

Table 4: Spatial correlation of electoral outcomes

Dependent Variable: Model:	EUSK					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
$W_{corr}EUSK$	0.0007 (0.0033)		0.0009 (0.0021)			
$W_{corr}EUgood$		-0.0002 (0.0005)		0.0007** (0.0003)		
EUgood (before election)	0.0329 (0.0611)	0.0248 (0.0613)	0.0545 (0.0478)	0.0117 (0.0608)	0.0280 (0.0490)	0.0896** (0.0374)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>						
Year	Yes	Yes			Yes	
Country	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	100	100	118	100	128	128
R ²	0.54994	0.55040	0.43562	0.46466	0.47644	0.33143
Within R ²	0.00401	0.00504	0.01717	0.04088	0.00307	0.03795

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard-errors in parentheses

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

We estimate the following equation:

$$EUSK_{i,t} = \alpha_i + \sum_{j:j \neq i} W_{corr,j,i} EUgood_{j,t} + v_t + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (3)$$

$EUGOOD_{i,t}$: EU Membership is good according to the Eurobarometer at time t .

α_i : country fixed effects

v_t : time fixed effects

W_{corr} : this weight matrix is the result of calculating the correlation of each country pair over the years based on Eurobarometer opinions. This matrix is calculated based on the Trust in EU and Trust in National Parliament opinions. For the calculation of this matrix, we have two variations, including both country and year fixed effects (W_{corr}), and including only country fixed effects ($W_{corr,countryFE}$).

$EUSK$: Euroscepticism Score weighted by the vote shares according to the Manifesto Data. The raw value of it ranges from -100 (antiEU) to 100 (proEU)

$EUSK_{trunc}$: Truncated Euroscepticism Score weighted by the vote shares according to the Manifesto Data. Parties with a non-negative EU Preference Index are truncated to zero. The raw value of it ranges from -100 to 0. The lower the score, the more Eurosceptic the party is.

Table 5: Eurobarometer opinions after the EU elections

Dependent Variable: Model:	EU Membership is GOOD					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Variables</i>						
$W_{corr}EUSK$	-0.0024 (0.0040)	-0.0048** (0.0018)	-0.0034 (0.0036)	-0.0042** (0.0019)	-0.0134** (0.0046)	-0.0057 (0.0048)
$EUSK$	-0.0260 (0.0856)	0.0471 (0.0860)	-0.0715 (0.1234)	0.0116 (0.0955)	0.1158 (0.2606)	0.2608 (0.1560)
EUgood (before election)	0.8075*** (0.0657)	0.7443*** (0.0442)	0.7809*** (0.0656)	0.7574*** (0.0518)		
<i>Fixed-effects</i>						
Year	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Country	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>						
Observations	128	128	128	128	138	138
R ²	0.71783	0.90743	0.92016	0.89096	0.71871	0.67656
Within R ²	0.07025	0.71761	0.75157	0.75484	0.07312	0.03810

Robust standard-errors in parentheses

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

We estimate the following equation:

$$EUgood_{i,t} = \alpha_i + \beta_x X_{i,t} + \sum_{j:j \neq i} W_{corr_{j,i}} ESPS_{j,T} + v_t + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (4)$$

$EUGOOD_{i,t}$: EU Membership is good according to the Eurobarometer at time t . Time t is the closest Eurobarometer survey after a European Election

$ESPS_{i,T}$: Euroscepticism Score weighted by the vote shares in European Elections based on Manifesto Data.

$EUSK$: Euroscepticism Score weighted by the vote shares according to the Manifesto Data. The raw value of it ranges from -100 (antiEU) to 100 (proEU)

α_i : country fixed effects

v_t : time fixed effects

$X_{i,t}$: set of country characteristics. For these specifications we use the Eurobarometer opinions before the EU elections.

W_{corr} : this weight matrix is the result of calculating the correlation of each country pair over the years based on Eurobarometer opinions. This matrix is calculated based on the Trust in EU and Trust in National Parliament opinions. For all the specifications we multiply this matrix with weighted Euroscepticism score.