Research on Ways to Ameliorate the Degree of People's Euroscepticism after the Brexit Referendum

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Abstract: After the Brexit referendum, some scholars predicted it could have a demonstration effect, leading to increased public skepticism towards the European Union (EU). In response to this challenge, EU countries have implemented a series of reform measures, which have proven to be effective, but with varying degrees of success. Previous research mainly focused on the impact of Brexit on the EU and the countermeasures taken by the EU, without a deeper study of which combination of reform measures is more effective. This paper conducts a "qualitative comparative analysis" of the various reforms implemented by EU member states. The results show that the most effective combination of measures consists of three parallel causal paths: effective promotion of EU citizenship, effective economic policy reform, and reduction of social welfare; effective promotion of EU citizenship, increased awareness of hate speech and other extremist discourse through education, increased support for refugees and ethnic minorities, and strengthened social media regulation; effective promotion of EU citizenship, promotion of cultural understanding through education, increased support for civil society organizations against extremism, and effective economic policy reform. Effective citizenship reform presents to be a necessary condition. The paths to reducing public skepticism towards the EU are diverse, and effective economic policy reform, strengthened social media regulation, and promotion of cultural understanding through education are all more effective in increasing public trust in the EU.

Keywords: Brexit, Euro-skepticism, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

1. Introduction

Political scientist Michael Desch believes that external threats (including war) have promoted the formation of centralized nation-states and enhanced national cohesion throughout history, and this logic also applies to the supranational governance experiment in Europe [1]. However, with the disappearance of war memories, the long peace has led to decreased cohesion within the European Union (EU) and its member states. Economic globalization has intensified competition between countries, and the contradiction between the EU's economic and social model and the inherent logic of economic liberalism has become increasingly apparent. Marginal effects of integration have weakened, the ability to promote economic growth has decreased, and the EU and member state governments have failed to respond effectively. Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz believes that the hasty launch of the euro without the necessary political conditions is the root cause of the EU's crisis. Core countries, especially Germany's political elites, have imposed their integration development blueprint

and political and economic interests on peripheral countries. After the debt crisis, they still failed to learn their lesson and forcefully implemented uniform austerity policies, exacerbating inequality and deepening divisions among member states and social strata [2].

Governments of member states often use the EU as a scapegoat for unpopular economic and social policies they implement, and the influx of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe has heightened concerns among the lower and middle classes in older member states, further destabilizing the foundation of the EU's economic and social model. The increasing division between winners and losers in member states and their societies has provided conditions for the resurgence of nationalism and populism, leading to calls for a return to nationalism and "de-integration" in Europe [3].

On June 23, 2016, a national referendum was held in the UK to decide whether to exit the EU, with a final result of 51.9% in favor of leaving. On March 29, 2017, UK Prime Minister Theresa May formally initiated the Brexit process. After the UK decided to leave the EU, leaders of EU member states expressed their commitment to take action to maintain the internal unity of the EU. European Council President Tusk mentioned that while the EU cannot solve all the existing problems overnight, everyone needs to continue working towards common goals [4].

Against this backdrop, public trust in the EU will likely decline after Brexit. The EU undoubtedly needs to reflect deeply and reform after Brexit. Otherwise, the continued spread of Eurosceptic sentiment will ultimately endanger its existence.

In the 20th century, European integration governance was mainly reflected in an excessive regulation of European affairs, which was a top-down governance approach. After Brexit, the EU paid more attention to citizen participation in politics. In this process, not only have EU member states moved closer to the EU's norms, systems, and institutions to varying degrees, but administrative reform, public service reform, national reform, and administrative management reform have also taken place. At the same time, the EU has strengthened dialogue with citizens at the institutional level. The EU White Paper on Governance emphasizes the need for dialogue channels between the EU and citizens and proposes that citizens and relevant social organizations should be involved in EU policymaking and given feedback channels. The EU hopes citizens can participate in the EU's policy governance system. This all demonstrates that the EU not only recognizes the role of citizens in democratic political decision-making but has also taken substantive action [5].

In response to public Euroscepticism, EU member states have taken several measures to improve public perception of the EU. For example, Germany has launched projects such as the "Cross-Cultural Competence and Anti-Discrimination Development" program, the "Education Makes Us Strong" program, and the "2016 Theme Year - Discrimination Based on Religious or Philosophical Beliefs" [6]. In this context, we have observed a decrease rather than an increase in public Euroscepticism after Brexit. However, most current research focuses on the macro-social impact of Brexit on the EU, and more attention needs to be paid to which governance measures are more effective in addressing public Euroscepticism. Therefore, this article attempts to answer the question of which solutions are more effective for EU member states to address the lack of trust among the public after the Brexit referendum until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

This paper uses Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) as the primary analytical tool to address this issue. Among the 27 EU member states, we have conducted multiple causal analyses from three aspects: strengthening regulation, effective economic and welfare policy reform, and promoting education and cultural understanding, based on the reform policies issued by governments and each country's economic growth data. Through this approach, we aim to identify several most effective paths for improving public trust in the EU.

2.   Hypothesis and Data Analysis

Cross-case studies require a comparative approach, where the most common methods are the Similarity and Dissimilarity Analysis in Mill Five Methods of Searching Causal Connections. However, Mill's method can only identify specific causes of a particular result and cannot assess the multiple causes leading to a phenomenon or the interplay of various factors. Therefore, this research project uses Charles Ragin's Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method.

2.1. The Propose of Analysis

Brexit is undoubtedly a significant crisis for the EU. This is not only because it was the first time a member state sought to leave the EU but also because the UK is a powerful country, and its exit will have a destructive political and economic impact on the EU's status and influence, further fueling public Euroscepticism. [7] This paper speculates that public trust in the EU may have been influenced in several ways following the Brexit referendum.

Firstly, there may have been a decline in the public's identification with European integration and EU citizenship. Historically, the EU has faced significant challenges in the face of the refugee crisis, and the fact that the UK voted to leave the EU instead of standing in solidarity with other member states may have undermined the credibility of the EU, leading to a significant decrease in public identification with EU citizenship and further increasing public Euroscepticism.

Secondly, the influence of far-right parties in various countries has increased. For example, in the 2017 French presidential election, Marine Le Pen, who advocated for France's exit from the Eurozone and Schengen Area, implemented trade protectionism, opposed economic globalization, and called for restrictions on immigration, received only 2% less of the vote than Macron in the first round. In Italy's 2018 election, the right-wing party "Five Star Movement" became the largest single party in parliament and attempted to hold a national referendum on whether to exit the Eurozone, following the example of the UK's referendum. In the following two years, they continued to criticize EU governance. Therefore, the growth of right-wing forces in various countries may lead to an increase in public Euroscepticism.

Thirdly, Brexit may hinder European economic growth. Before Brexit, the UK's economic growth trend was relatively positive, with an annual growth rate higher than the EU average. During the Eurozone debt crisis, the UK contributed significantly to helping the EU emerge from economic difficulties. Therefore, the EU's economic growth may decline after Brexit without the UK's driving force. At the same time, renegotiations between the UK and the EU on economic and trade cooperation, the financial gap left by the UK's departure, and the increase in trade barriers between the UK and EU countries may increase economic pressure on some member states, further slowing down economic development. In addition, Brexit will also trigger adjustments to the EU's labor management structure, and the unknown results of these adjustments may cause public dissatisfaction with the EU.

The main objective of improving public trust in the EU among member states is establishing a sense of identity. Building a sense of identity is a long-term process, and a typical value must be established based on cultural diversity. Establishing identity is not only a process of eliminating differences and contradictions but also a stage of accepting and adapting to multiculturalism. There is, therefore, an urgent need to improve popular Euroscepticism. [8]

Member states of the EU have also launched many policies in response to various aspects, which can be summarized into three aspects: firstly, strengthening regulation and reducing the influence of right-wing forces, including supporting anti-extremist civil society organizations and strengthening regulation of social media; secondly, effective economic and welfare policy reforms, including support for refugees or ethnic minorities, effective economic policy reforms, increased social welfare

spending, and effective employment policies; and thirdly, promoting education and cultural understanding, including raising public awareness of right-wing speech such as hatred through education, promoting mutual understanding of multiculturalism through education, and effective promotion of EU citizenship through organizing activities and promoting European common culture. After sorting out various policies, the author has proposed nine hypotheses based on the specific policies covered by the above three aspects.

1) Hypothesis 1: Increasing support for counter-extremist civil society organizations is the primary way to improve Euroscepticism among the population.

2) Hypothesis 2: Strengthening government regulation of social media is the main way to improve people's Euroscepticism.

3) Hypothesis 3: Strengthening support for refugees, migrants, or minorities is the main way to improve Euroscepticism.

4) Hypothesis 4: Effective economic policy reforms are the main way to improve Euroscepticism among the population.

5) Hypothesis 5: Increasing social welfare spending is the main way to improve Euroscepticism.

6) Hypothesis 6: Effective employment policies are the main way to improve Euroscepticism among the population.

7) Hypothesis 7: Raising public awareness of right-wing rhetoric, such as hatred through education, is the main way to improve public Euroscepticism.

8) Hypothesis 8: Promoting intercultural understanding through education is the main way to improve the level of Euroscepticism among the population.

9) Hypothesis 9: Effective EU citizenship campaigns are the main way to improve Euroscepticism among the population.

2.2. The Assignment of the Variables

Based on the nine hypotheses outlined above, the author has identified nine conditional variables: increased support for civil society organizations, strengthened regulation of social media, increased assistance for refugees, effective economic policy reforms, increased social welfare spending, effective employment policies, heightened citizen awareness, promotion of cultural understanding, and effective promotion of EU citizenship. These variables are assigned Boolean values, measured objectively as either "yes" (=1) or "no" (=0), and compared to the outcome variable (degree of public distrust in the EU). For example, the outcome variable is measured by comparing the percentage of public trust in the EU in each member state in 2019 to the percentage in 2016, based on data from the Eurobarometer surveys. If the percentage has increased, then it indicates a decrease in public distrust in the EU. Most variables are measured using this simple dichotomous method, but some require more detailed measures, such as measuring effective economic policy reforms by the annual per capita GDP growth rate from 2016-2019. The author collected and organized all data for the variables, and specific assignment methods can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Assignment of the variables.

	Name	Variable Assignment (1 or 0)	Resources
Outcome Variable	Outcome	Whether the percentage of people in each Member State trusting the EU is higher in 2019 than in 2016, if "yes" is assigned a value of 1	Standard Eurobarometer 86, Standard Eurobarometer 92

Table 1: (continued).

Conditional Variables	Increase support for NGOs (NGO)	Whether there are policies to increase support for civil society organizations, if "yes" is assigned a value of 1	Calculated by AI EDU
	Strengthen social media regulation (Social Media)	Whether there are policies to strengthen social media regulation, if "yes" is assigned a value of 1	Calculated by AI EDU
	Increase support for refugees (Refugee)	Whether there is a policy to increase support for refugees, if "yes" assigns a value of 1	Calculated by AI EDU
	Gain effective economic policy reform (Economic Reform)	Whether the annual average per capita GDP growth rate for 2013-2016 is lower than the average for 2016-2019, if "yes" is assigned a value of 1	World Bank
	Increase social welfare (Social Welfare)	Whether there is a policy to increase the support of civil society organizations, if "yes" assign a value of 1	United Nations Database
	Gain effective employment policy (Employment)	Whether the average unemployment rate for 2013-2016 is lower than the average for 2016-2019, if "yes" is assigned a value of 1	International Labour Organization Database
	Raise the awareness of citizens (Awareness)	Whether there are policies to raise public awareness of right-wing speech such as hate speech through education, if "yes" is assigned a value of 1	Calculated by AI EDU
	Promote cultural understanding (Culture)	Whether there are policies to promote intercultural understanding through education and cultural exchange, if "yes" is assigned a value of 1	Calculated by AI EDU
	Gain effective EU citizenship promotion (Citizenship)	Whether countries' democratic acceptance of their EU citizenship has increased in 2019 compared to 2016 (by asking the Eurobarometer survey over the years, "For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your own opinion." [9] Results are statistically analyzed), if "yes" is assigned a value of 1	Standard Eurobarometer 86, Standard Eurobarometer 92

After assigning the case selection and variables, we can create the original data matrix, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Basic Data.

Country	Aware-ness	Cult-ure	NGO	Refu-gee	Social Media	Economic Reform	Social Welfare	Citizen-ship	Employ-ment	Outco-me
Belgium	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Bulgaria	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Czechia	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Denmark	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
Germany	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Estonia	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Ireland	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0
Greece	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Spain	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0
France	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Croatia	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Italy	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Republic of Cyprus	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Latvia	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Lithuania	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Luxemb-ourg	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Hungary	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
Malta	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
The Netherla-nds	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Austria	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Poland	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Portugal	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Romania	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Slovenia	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
Slovakia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Finland	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Sweden	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1

It is worth noting that since all assignments of the condition variable "Gain effective employment policy" is 1, the adequacy and necessity of this variable cannot be studied, and it should be excluded in the calculation process.

2.3. Necessary Conditions and Combinations of Conditions

After establishing the original data matrix, a truth table can be run through QCA, and the necessary condition detection and condition combination operation can be carried out. Table 3 shows the tests of necessary conditions.

Table 3: Tests of Necessary Conditions.

Name of Variables	Consistency
Increase support for NGOs (NGO) (=1)	0.6875
Strengthen social media regulation (Social Media) (=1)	0.7500
Increase support for refugees (Refugee) (=0)	0.6875
Gain effective economic policy reform (Economic Reform) (=1)	0.8125
Increase social welfare (Social Welfare) (=1)	0.6875
Raise the awareness of citizens (Awareness) (=1)	0.5000
Promote cultural understanding (Culture) (=1)	0.6250
Gain effective EU citizenship promotion (Citizenship) (=1)	0.9375

It is generally believed that when the degree of fit for a certain condition exceeds 0.9, the condition can be regarded as a necessary condition for the result. In our necessary condition analysis, the variable GMSF, which represents the effective promotion of EU citizenship, has a degree of fit of 1 and can be viewed as a necessary condition for the increase in satisfaction of EU citizens with the EU. Next, a truth table Boolean operation is needed to observe how effective promotion of EU citizenship combines with other factors to lead to different causal paths. In QCA operations, if there is a necessary condition, the operator must first temporarily exclude it before proceeding with Boolean simplification. [10] Table 4 shows the results of the combination analysis of conditions.

Table 4: Results of the combination analysis of conditions.

	raw coverage	unique coverage	consistency
Economic Reform*~Social Welfare	0.2500	0.0625	1.0000
Culture*~Social Media*Social Welfare	0.1250	0.0000	1.0000
Economic Reform*Refugee*Social Media	0.2500	0.1875	1.0000
Culture*NGO*Economic Reform	0.4375	0.3125	0.7778
~ Economic Reform*Culture *~NGO*Social Welfare	0.1250	0.0000	1.0000
Economic Reform*NGO*~Social Media*Economic Reform	0.0625	0.0625	1.0000
Solution Coverage: 0.9375			
Solution Consistency: 0.8824			

Note: * means "and", ~ means "not"

This model adopted the intermediate solution approach to combining causal conditions, because it allows to make reasonable hypotheses about events that have not yet occurred, while still conforming to the facts of cases that have already occurred by incorporating logical residues. Generally, a preliminary raw coverage of over 0.2 is considered sufficient. Therefore, after incorporating the necessary condition, there are three paths that reflect a decrease in public distrust in the EU: (1) Gain effective EU citizenship promotion*Gain effective economic policy reform*Increase social welfare; (2) Gain effective EU citizenship promotion* Raise the awareness of citizens*Increase support for refugees*Strengthen social media regulation; and (3) Gain effective EU citizenship promotion* Promote cultural understanding* Increase support for NGOs*Gain effective economic policy reform.

In this result, the consistency and solution consistency of each path is both greater than or approximately equal to 0.8, indicating that each path serves as a sufficient condition for its outcome, and the combination of causes as a whole also serves as a sufficient condition for the result. In terms

of coverage, the total solution coverage is 0.9375, indicating that the given combination of conditions can explain all cases; the raw coverage of each path indicates the cases that can be covered by the three paths, and the net coverage of each path is lower than its raw coverage, indicating the existence of positive cases that fit multiple causal paths. Therefore, based on the dimensions of consistency and coverage, this computational result can pass robustness tests. [10]

3. Analysis of Conditions Combinations to Reduce the Level of Euroscepticism among the Public

3.1. Path 1: To Gain Effective EU Citizenship Promotion, Effective Economic Policy Reform and Increase Social Welfare

This path covers a quarter of the cases, including Bulgaria, Italy, France, and Hungary. The average per capita GDP growth rate in these four countries is higher than the EU average, and their social welfare spending has decreased after Brexit, contrary to the overall trend in the EU. In Bulgaria, Italy, and France, policies focused on economic policy reforms and weakening the influence of right-wing forces among the public, such as increasing employment opportunities, improving people's living standards, strengthening education against hate speech, regulating social media, and enhancing counter-terrorism measures. Hungary is an exception, as the Hungarian government took controversial measures from 2017 to 2019 that did not weaken the influence of right-wing forces on the public, but rather increased it. These measures included promoting "illiberalism," suppressing the opposition, increasing control over the media, and strengthening border controls. Although these controversial measures have attracted criticism and controversy, Hungary's trust in the EU has increased from 42% to 52%, possibly due to the EU's contribution to Hungary's economic development.

The mechanisms of interaction among these three factors may be as follows: firstly, effective promotion of EU citizenship, such as establishing a European cultural year, promoting education and publicity of European culture, and organizing related activities, can help European citizens better understand the functions and significance of the EU, reduce their doubts and misunderstandings about the EU, and initially enhance their trust and identification with the EU. Based on this trust and identification, EU countries can more easily implement economic policy reforms; and by appropriately reducing social welfare to reduce economic burdens, ease financial pressures, and improve public expenditure efficiency. Through these policies, people's living standards have been improved, thereby further enhancing their trust and support for the EU.

3.2. Path 2: To Gain Effective EU Citizenship Promotion, Raise the Awareness of Citizens, Increase Support for Refugees, and Strengthen Social Media Regulation

This path also covers a quarter of the cases, including Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, and Greece. These four countries have all implemented measures to raise citizens' awareness of extremist speech through education and to increase regulation of extremist speech on social media, effectively reducing the incitement of extremist speech among the public and making them more confident in the collective strength of the EU. In Bulgaria, the main focus is on improving people's livelihoods, namely by strengthening assistance to vulnerable groups in society and reducing social dissatisfaction; Germany, Denmark, and Greece have improved their immigration policies, namely by providing greater support and assistance to refugees and immigrants, reducing social dissatisfaction and the breeding of extremist ideas. It can be seen that the policies of these countries focus on reducing social dissatisfaction by regulating and increasing care for immigrants and refugees, thereby increasing people's trust in the EU and promoting their support for the integration process.

The mechanisms of interaction among these four factors may be as follows: strengthening the regulation of extremist speech on social media and raising citizens' awareness of it can effectively prevent the infiltration of hate and extreme right-wing forces among the public. Meanwhile, effective promotion of EU citizenship can help European citizens better understand the positive significance of European integration, and enhance their trust and identification with the EU. Based on this foundation, increasing support for refugees and immigrants, EU member states can provide better security for their societies through these policies, promote social harmony, and further enhance people's trust and support for the EU.

3.3. Path 3: To Gain Effective EU Citizenship Promotion, Promote Cultural Understanding, Increase Support for NGOs, and Gain Effective Economic Policy Reform

This path covers 43.7% of cases, including France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Austria, and Portugal. What these countries have in common is that their main measures are to promote mutual understanding among different ethnic groups and communities through cultural propaganda and hosting a large number of cultural activities. They also increase support for anti-extremist civil organizations, and, with the growth of national economies, strive to eliminate people's suspicions about Europe in economic and cultural aspects. However, France's main policy is different from most other countries. France not only promotes cultural understanding between citizens through the above cultural activities but also strengthens anti-terrorism and prevention measures by enhancing the enforcement of police and intelligence agencies to combat terrorism and extremism. France also increases public awareness of extremism, hate speech, and racism through education and propaganda to prevent these issues from spreading in society. However, France does not prioritize increasing social welfare spending, and its social welfare has decreased after Brexit in the UK.

The mechanisms of interaction among these four factors may be as follows: promoting cultural understanding among different ethnic groups through education can reduce social friction and conflicts, and effective promotion of EU citizenship can help different ethnic groups better integrate into European society, enhancing their trust and identification with the EU. Based on this trust and identification, the EU can increase support for anti-hate civil organizations, increase people's political participation, and implement economic policy reforms to improve the living standards of European people, further enhancing their trust and support for the EU.

4. Conclusions

This paper reveals three paths (combination of conditions) that the EU can take to reduce Euroscepticism after Brexit, based on the QCA analysis of 27 EU member states. The first combination is gaining effective EU citizenship promotion, effective economic policy reform, and increasing social welfare. The second one is to gain effective EU citizenship promotion, raise the awareness of citizens, increase support for refugees, and strengthen social media regulation. The third one is to gain effective EU citizenship promotion, promote cultural understanding, increase support for NGOs, and gain effective economic policy reform. In summary, all three paths indicate that strengthening the promotion of EU citizenship, implementing effective economic policy reforms, strengthening social media monitoring, and promoting cultural understanding can effectively reduce public doubt and dissatisfaction towards the EU and increase their trust and support. These measures need to be implemented simultaneously and coordinated with each other to achieve the most significant effect. At the same time, it is necessary to respect the cultural differences of each member state and coordinate their interests as much as possible to maintain the overall interests and stability of the EU.

It should be noted that the results of this study are only for reference and are not entirely objective or rigorous. The statistical and qualitative analysis of the five variables - increasing support for non-governmental organizations, strengthening social media monitoring, increasing support for refugees, raising citizen awareness, and promoting cultural understanding - were based on calculations by the big data statistical tool AI EDU, which may not be entirely accurate. Additionally, there is no objective and unified standard for determining the data of these variables for each country, which means that the results of this study may need to be more reliable. However, this study still has a particular value as a reference. Furthermore, the model used in this study cannot conduct rigorous experiments to verify the effectiveness of each path, so its limitations should also be noted.

After 2020, due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and ineffective government control, doubts about the EU may gradually deepen among the people of various countries. Populism, and even hatred, may further expand, posing a threat to social security and the political achievements of European integration. Governing public skepticism towards the EU is a critical issue. Even though European integration still faces significant problems and challenges, it has considerable benefits for promoting democracy and solving globalization issues. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide a reference value for improving public skepticism toward the EU in various countries.

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