



THE UNIVERSITY  
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## Does knowledge of the EU matter?

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The European Union is a complex institution that is not easy to understand even for those studying or working in it. Asking people questions about complex structures and processes requires engagement with aspects of politics and social life that may not be at the forefront of every respondent's mind on a daily basis. It is therefore worth examining whether the extent of knowledge about the European Union actually matters in people's decision making and attitudes towards the EU and issues of EU politics. In this analysis we will engage with the question whether those who know more about the EU can be differentiated from those who know less regarding their views in our analysis. Some people have suggested that changing people's factual knowledge would result in changes in political attitudes – if that were true, we would expect to find such differences.

### *Approach and country comparison*

In our survey we gave respondents six different statements that we asked them to judge whether they were true or false about different specific situations in the EU. The statements were intentionally designed to have a varying degree of difficulty in order to capture as much variation in knowledge as possible both at the lower, but also higher end of the spectrum. When we used concrete country cases as examples, we did not mention any of the countries respondents were drawn from for this survey, but chose other examples.

The statements (and true or false status) were:

- *When a citizen from Belgium crosses the border to the Netherlands, they usually have to show their passport to a border officer. (false)*
- *Britain receives a discount on its membership payments to the European Union. (true)*
- *If someone from Finland moves to Britain and works there, they have to wait six months before they can receive the same level of state support British workers get. (false)*
- *When a citizen from Italy arrives by plane in Britain, they usually do not have to show their passport to a border officer. (false)*
- *All citizens of any EU country are free to move to any other EU country to live even if they do not want to take up work there. (false)*
- *Citizens of one EU member state who move to another EU country are allowed to vote in European Parliament elections in the new country. (true)*

Table 1 shows the breakdown of correct answers for each question for all respondents and by country. The different degrees of difficulty are reflected well. Around two thirds of respondents were able to answer questions about crossing the border in the Schengen area (71%) and voting rights in European Parliament elections for citizens living in other member states (63%) correctly. Questions related to the UK were answered correctly by about half of respondents, with 52 per cent correctly identifying that you have to show your passport when flying into the UK and 45 per cent knowing that the UK gets a rebate. The most difficult questions about the rights of workers to receive benefits and that freedom of movement does not include free movement of people to live everywhere regardless of the willingness to take up work without any further qualifications were, as expected, answered correctly by a smaller proportion of the sample (35 and 26 per cent respectively).

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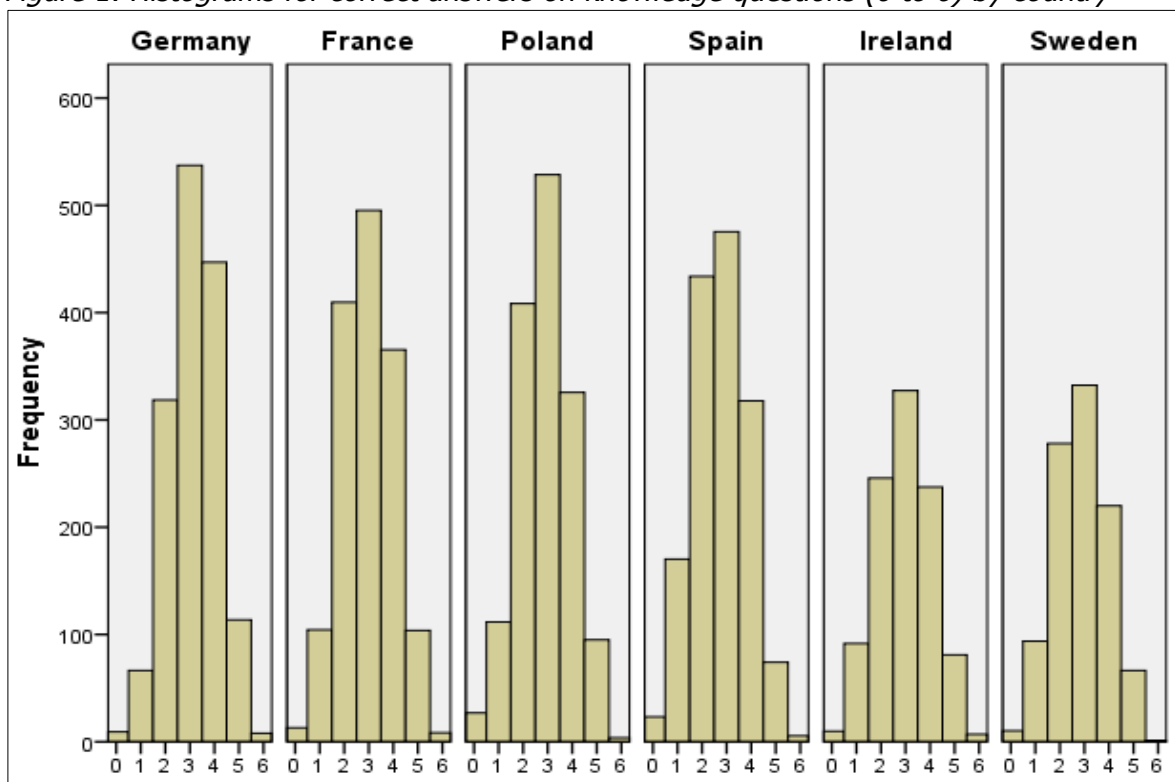
<sup>1</sup> This publication is part of the project "The view from the continent: what people in other member states think about the UK's EU referendum." For details about the project, please refer to its methods note.

*Table 1: Knowledge statements by country (% identifying the statements correctly as true or false)*

	NL-BE Passport	British rebate	Worker benefits	IT-UK passport	Free move- ment of people	Vote in EP elections
Germany N= 1500	82	52	25	53	28	76
France N= 1500	72	50	34	57	25	57
Poland N= 1500	79	41	46	37	22	43
Spain N= 1500	64	40	32	47	34	60
Ireland N= 1000	54	39	46	78	17	62
Sweden N= 1002	69	50	33	49	29	56
All N= 8002	71	45	35	52	26	63

For our further analysis we aggregated the scores as the sum of correct answers an individual has given, ranging from 0 to 6. As figure 1 shows, the distribution of these results are very close to normal distributions in each of our six countries, suggesting that most people were able to correctly answer some questions, but few people were able to get none or all questions right.

*Figure 1: Histograms for correct answers on knowledge questions (0 to 6) by country*



There was some variation between the countries in terms of how much respondents knew (see table 2). German respondents on average gave significantly more correct answers than those from other countries (3.15), followed by France and Ireland (2.96 each), then Poland and Sweden (2.88 and 2.86) and finally Spanish respondents knowing least on average (2.76).

*Table 2: Mean number of correct answers on knowledge questions by country (0 to 6)*

	Mean number	Standard error	95% Confidence Interval
Germany N= 1500	3.15	0.027	3.12 – 3.17
France N= 1500	2.96	0.028	2.93 – 2.99
Poland N= 1500	2.88	0.029	2.85 – 2.90
Spain N= 1500	2.76	0.036	2.73 – 2.79
Ireland N= 1000	2.96	0.034	2.93 – 3.00
Sweden N= 1002	2.86	0.035	2.83 – 2.89

### *Socio-demographic determinants of EU knowledge*

Next we analysed the differences between countries further and wanted to investigate whether the socio-demographic profiles of respondents were the same with regards to knowledge about the EU for all the countries surveyed. As table 3 shows, first of all, the differences between the countries remain statistically significant even when we control for age, sex and education.

There is a consistent pattern across all countries, except Spain (where the relationship was not statistically significant) for sex, where we find that women on average answered fewer questions correctly than men. Except for Spain, we also find a statistically significant relationship between higher education and knowledge of the EU. However, while it is a positive relationship in Germany, France, Ireland and Sweden, it is negative in Poland, meaning that people who have higher levels of education actually know less about the EU on average which may appear peculiar at first. We may have expected to not find a strong relationship as Poland is the country in the sample that most recently joined the EU 12 years ago, however to find the relationship in the reverse to four more longstanding members is somewhat unexpected. The pattern for age is also inconsistent. There are no significant age differences in EU knowledge in Poland, Ireland and Sweden. In Germany and France those aged 55 and above know significantly more on average (about 0.2 questions) than those aged 18-35. In Spain those aged 35-54 on average know significantly more than the younger age group as well.

Crucially, these findings suggest that there is not a singular pattern of EU knowledge across the different countries. It also suggests that when using EU knowledge as a predictor in further analyses we should definitely include these socio-demographic control variables as they are related to knowledge in a variety of ways in the countries we are looking at.

### *The impact of EU knowledge on political attitudes*

Table 4 summarises the effects of our EU knowledge variable on six dependent variables measuring different concepts related to EU reforms, the UK referendum on membership and processes in respondents' own countries, controlling for socio-demographic characteristics and using country dummy variables to take into account unobserved heterogeneity. Apart from the last model measuring the impact of knowledge on whether respondents would vote in a hypothetical referendum in their own country to remain or leave the EU, there was an overall

significant relationship between knowledge and the five variables of interest. Overall, people with greater knowledge of the EU

- Were less likely to wish for reform to reduce EU powers;
- Were less likely to want Britain to remain in the EU;
- Were less likely to allow exceptions for Britain;
- Were less likely to think that their head of government had influence on the renegotiations; and
- Were less likely to want a referendum about EU membership in their own country.

However, looking at these results in the aggregate only masks substantial differences between countries, as the size of the effect for knowledge is not extensive in all cases. In other words, when we run the analyses separately for each country we find that knowledge only has significant effects for certain attitudes in certain countries.

Table 5 summarises these results. Once we break it down by country we see that there was no significant relationship between knowledge of EU structures and processes and any of the outcome variables for Germany and Poland, indicating that for these two countries knowledge matters little or not at all. The country where knowledge seems to matter across most factors was France, where greater knowledge was significantly related to less willingness to grant Britain exceptions, a lower likelihood to want a referendum in France but a greater likelihood to vote to remain inside the EU if such a referendum were held.

Furthermore, French respondents with greater knowledge were also less likely to want reductions of powers for the EU. We find the same for respondents in Spain and Ireland. Similar to the French, Irish respondents with greater knowledge were also slightly less likely to want a referendum of their own. For Spanish respondents we found two additional marginally significant relationships: Those who had more knowledge were less likely to think Britain should remain a member of the EU and less likely to think that their own government had influence on the renegotiations. The latter was also true for Sweden – where the only significant impact of knowledge was found for this question with respondents with greater knowledge thinking their government had less influence.

### *Knowledge and "don't know"*

Finally, we wanted to examine those respondents who answered "don't know" to key questions on EU issues. On a descriptive level, we found that the level of "don't know" responses increased the less formal education a person had completed (see table 6), suggesting that EU policy discussion remains largely on an elite level. For example, on the principle of 'ever closer union', whilst 91 per cent of those educated to tertiary level had a view, one way or another, only 81 per cent of those with primary and lower secondary education had a view. The pattern was similar on the question of strengthening national parliaments and the question about a Core Europe. Whilst there are generally more "don't know" responses, at all education levels, to the question about new decision-making processes to protect the non-Eurozone members and, the same pattern holds: the less formal education you had completed, the more likely you were to reply "don't know".

Table 6: Rate of Don't Know answers on general EU policy options, by level of education (%)

		<b>'Ever closer union'</b>	<b>Stronger national parliaments</b>	<b>Euro countries decision making</b>	<b>Core Europe</b>
		Neither/ nor or Don't Know	Neither/ nor or Don't Know	Don't Know	Don't Know
Total N=8002	Primary and lower secondary education	19	20	34	19
	Upper secondary education	16	16	25	14
	Tertiary education	9	10	18	10
	<b>Total</b>	15	15	25	14

Broken down by countries, however, we see that this relationship between formal education and the proportion of people not having a view on key EU matters is not equally strong throughout Europe (see figure 2). While it is pronounced, e.g., in France and Sweden, we find it less pronounced or even absent for, e.g., Ireland.

Beyond formal education, we analysed whether those who had more knowledge about the EU were more or less likely to answer "don't know". Arguments could be made in both directions: we may expect that those who know more would be less likely to not give a response to a question. But conversely we could also imagine that those who knew more would appreciate the complexities of some of the issues under discussion more and therefore would be less willing to make a choice on the spot. We look at this issue for the question whether Britain should remain a member of the EU or not and four policy suggestions for reforms of the EU.

The results are summarised in table 7. Again we find that the relationships vary between countries and that we cannot formulate a single conclusion for all of them jointly. In Ireland, Spain and Germany those who say don't know to any of these five questions are no more or less likely to have greater knowledge, we therefore do not find any pattern one way or the other for these countries.

In Poland we uniquely find a significantly greater likelihood of saying don't know to the question about a core Europe principle for those with greater knowledge. But given that there are no significant relationships with any of the other variables we cannot formulate any generalising conclusions beyond this.

France and Sweden show slightly more relationships between the likelihood of saying don't know and EU knowledge. In both countries those who have more knowledge are less likely to say don't know to any of the questions – the relationship is significant in both countries for the question of non-Eurozone safeguards and whether Britain should remain in the EU. The effect is more pronounced in Sweden, in particular with regards to the question of Britain's referendum. In addition, Swedish respondents with more knowledge were also marginally significantly less likely to say don't know to the question about strengthening national parliaments.

So while there wasn't a consistent significant relationship between knowledge and whether respondents said "don't know" to all questions, the relationship was most present in Sweden, where for three of five questions respondents with more knowledge were indeed more likely to make a choice. In particular when making the choice about another country (Britain) those who had less knowledge were also less likely to make a choice. The effect was present for French respondents as well to a lesser extent, but for the other countries we could not observe such a relationship.

All these findings support our earlier suggestion that the relationship between knowledge about the EU and political attitudes indeed differs between countries and cannot be generalised for all of them.

Figure 2: Rate of Don't Know answers on commitment to creating an 'ever closer union', wish for stronger role of national parliaments in EU decision making, altering EU decision making processes to address non-Euro members' concerns and on a 'core Europe', by country (%)

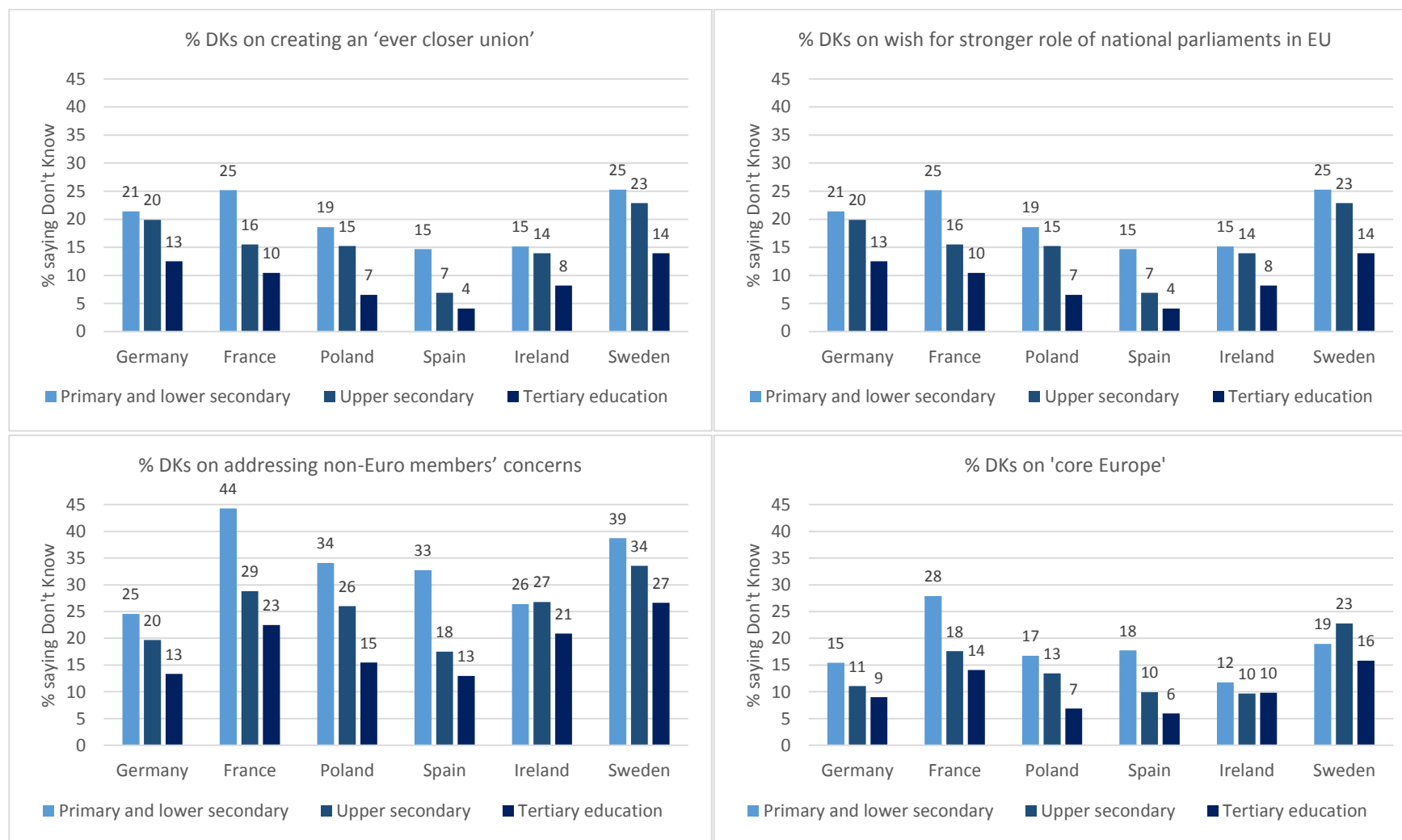




Table 3: Linear regression models for Number of correct knowledge answer questions as dependent variable (socio-demographic comparison)

	All		Germany		France		Poland		Spain		Ireland		Sweden	
	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.
Intercept	3.17	.03	2.97	.09***	2.84	.08***	3.30	.09***	2.63	.08***	2.97	.11***	3.01	.10***
<u>Age: 18-35</u>														
35-54	0.07	.03*	0.03	.07	0.13	.08	-0.03	.07	0.18	.08*	0.12	.09	0.09	.09
55+	0.07	.03*	0.20	.07**	0.18	.07*	-0.12	.07	0.12	.08	0.19	.10	-0.05	.09
Female	-0.22	.03***	-0.23	.05***	-0.19	.06***	-0.18	.06**	-0.08	.06	-0.30	.08***	-0.47	.07***
<u>Educ.: ≤ Lower Sec</u>														
Tertiary education	0.12	.03***	0.29	.08***	0.21	.08**	-0.35	0.09***	0.12	.07	0.25	.10**	0.22	.10*
Upper/Post-Sec.	0.02	.03	0.23	.07***	0.09	.07	-0.32	0.08***	0.09	.08	-0.02	.09	0.01	.09
<u>Country: Germany</u>														
France	-0.19	.04***												
Poland	-0.26	.04***												
Spain	-0.39	.04***												
Ireland	-0.19	.05***												
Sweden	-0.30	.09***												
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.026		0.027		0.014		0.016		0.004		0.030		0.051	
N	7837		1486		1457		1468		1478		965		982	

Displayed are unstandardized coefficients from a linear multivariate regression model with coefficient standard errors and indications of levels of statistical significance.

\*\*\*p≤0.001, \*\*p≤0.01, \*p≤0.05, +p<0.10

Table 4: Regression models for different dependent variables with EU knowledge and socio-demographic controls for all countries

	EU power reduction		Britain remain in EU		Permitting any exceptions for UK		Own head of gov. has influence		Wanting own referendum		Remain in own referendum	
	Lin. Reg.		Log. Reg.		Log. Reg.		Log. Reg.		Log. Reg.		Log. Reg.	
	Coeff.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.
Intercept	1.16	.23***	2.38	.12***	1.99	.11***	2.90	.13***	1.83	.12***	1.27	.13+
Knowledge	-0.18	.05***	0.95	.02*	0.94	.02**	0.93	.03**	0.95	.02*	1.04	.03
Age: 18-35												
35-54	0.12	.13	0.90	.07	0.93	.06	0.77	.07***	1.12	.07	0.88	.07+
55+	-0.38	.13**	1.09	.07	0.99	.06	0.73	.07***	0.59	.07***	1.35	.07***
Female	-0.11	.10	1.27	.05***	0.89	.05*	0.92	.06	1.17	.05**	1.00	.06
Educ.: ≤ Lower Sec												
Tertiary education	-1.13	.13***	1.61	.07***	1.10	.06	1.01	.08	0.55	.07***	2.27	.08***
Upper/Post-Sec.	-0.41	.13***	1.04	.07**	1.09	.06	0.82	.07**	0.89	.07	1.41	.07***
Country: Germany												
France	1.31	.16***	0.46	.08***	1.11	.08	0.22	.09***	1.69	.09***	0.61	.09***
Poland	-0.78	.16***	1.47	.09***	0.86	.08*	0.21	.09***	0.73	.08***	1.47	.09***
Spain	-1.31	.16***	1.65	.10***	0.57	.08***	0.20	.09***	1.02	.08	1.83	.10***
Ireland	-0.44	.18*	1.42	.09***	1.56	.09***	0.14	.11***	0.66	.09***	1.78	.11***
Sweden	-0.39	.18*	0.73	.12***	0.74	.11***	0.09	.12***	1.36	.09***	0.49	.10***
Nagelkerke/Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.053		0.074		0.032		0.158		0.075		0.093	
N	7022		7837		7837		7018		6709		6686	

Displayed are unstandardized coefficients from a linear multivariate regression model or odds ratios from a multivariate logistic regression model with coefficient standard errors and indications of levels of statistical significance.

\*\*\*p≤0.001, \*\*p≤0.01, \*p≤0.05, +p<0.10

Table 5: Regression models for different dependent variables with EU knowledge and socio-demographic controls separately run for each country (displayed are only results for the EU knowledge variable)

	Germany		France		Poland		Spain		Ireland		Sweden	
	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.
	<i>Dependent: EU Power Reduction</i>											
Knowledge	-0.06	.11	-0.38	.11***	0.10	.09	-0.21	.09*	-0.53	.13***	-0.14	.14
	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.
	<i>Dependent: Britain should remain in EU</i>											
Knowledge	0.93	.06	0.93	.05	0.96	.06	0.89	.06 <sup>+</sup>	0.97	.07	1.05	.06
	<i>Dependent: Permitting any exceptions for the UK</i>											
Knowledge	0.97	.05	0.86	.05**	1.01	.05	0.94	.05	0.93	.06	0.91	.06
	<i>Dependent: Own head of government has influence on renegotiations</i>											
Knowledge	1.01	.06	0.93	.06	0.95	.06	0.90	.06 <sup>+</sup>	0.91	.08	0.82	.09*
	<i>Dependent: Wanting referendum for own country</i>											
Knowledge	1.01	.06	0.78	.06***	1.07	.06	1.00	.05	0.88	.06 <sup>+</sup>	0.94	.07
	<i>Dependent: Would vote to remain in EU in own referendum</i>											
Knowledge	1.01	.06	1.14	.06*	0.92	.06	0.96	.06	1.12	.08	1.11	.07

Displayed are unstandardized coefficients from a linear multivariate regression model or odds ratios from a multivariate logistic regression model with coefficient standard errors and indications of levels of statistical significance.

\*\*\*p≤0.001, \*\*p≤0.01, \*p≤0.05, +p<0.10

Table 7: Regression models for don't knows on different dependent variables with EU knowledge and socio-demographic controls separately run for each country (displayed are only results for the EU knowledge variable)

	Germany		France		Poland		Spain		Ireland		Sweden	
	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.	Odds-R.	s.e.
	<i>Dependent: Don't know for UK Brexit question</i>											
Knowledge	1.01	.07	0.88	.06*	1.02	.06	0.99	.06	0.92	.08	0.77	.07***
	<i>Dependent: Don't know for core Europe Suggestion</i>											
Knowledge	1.06	.08	0.98	.06	1.17	.08*	0.94	.07	1.12	.09	0.96	.09
	<i>Dependent: Don't know for national parliament strengthening</i>											
Knowledge	0.99	.08	0.95	.07	1.03	.07	0.93	.08	1.05	.09	0.87	.07 <sup>+</sup>
	<i>Dependent: Don't know for non-Eurozone protection</i>											
Knowledge	1.03	.07	0.89	.06*	0.97	.06	1.02	.06	0.95	.07	0.85	.07*
	<i>Dependent: Don't know for ever closer union</i>											
Knowledge	0.91	.07	0.93	.07	0.95	.07	1.08	.08	0.92	.09	0.93	.08

Displayed are odds ratios from a multivariate logistic regression model with coefficient standard errors and indications of levels of statistical significance.

\*\*\*p≤0.001, \*\*p≤0.01, \*p≤0.05, +p<0.10