

eupinions brief | February 2019

## We'll be fine. How People in the EU27 View Brexit

**The political drama called Brexit leaves observers in London fascinated, appalled or exhausted. Whereas in the UK, the tension seems to intensify with every twist and turn the British take on their way out of the European Union, Europeans on the continent seem to be surprisingly detached. They support their country's membership in the EU in ever greater numbers, and calmly carry on with their daily business. Don't they think that they will be affected by Brexit? We decided to ask them.**

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**Catherine E. de Vries**, Professor of European Politics,  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

**Isabell Hoffmann**, Senior Expert, Bertelsmann Stiftung

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On the 20th of June 2016, just days before the Brexit referendum took place in the United Kingdom (UK), we published a report "[Keep Calm and Carry On](#)" examining how citizens in the remaining 27 member states viewed the possibility of the UK leaving the European Union (EU). The results were clear: a majority of Europeans would like the UK to have remained a member of the EU. At the same, citizens in the EU27 did not think that Brexit would be the end of the EU. Since June 2016 much has happened. Brexit turned out to be a difficult and

lengthy process. While we know that public opinion in the United Kingdom to this day is divided on the topic, of Brexit, what about people in the EU27? In December 2018, we have again polled people in the 27 remaining member states to get a sense of how they view Brexit and how this differs across those who feel close to particular political parties.

Specially, we asked to two questions, one relating to the possible consequences of Brexit for countries within the EU:

1. The British decided to leave the EU in 2019, what do you think best describes the consequences the EU will face, if

any? EU countries will be better off, EU countries will be worse off, or there will not be a significant change. And one question relating to the possible consequences of Brexit for the United Kingdom:

2. The British decided to leave the EU in 2019, what do you think best describes the consequences the United Kingdom will face, if any? The UK will be better off, the UK will be worse off, or there will not be a significant change.

Here we detail the three main findings of our analysis of this data:

- **Like in June 2016, the citizens in the remaining 27 member states think that the EU countries will not be much affected by Brexit.** A majority, 61 per cent, thinks that there will not be a significant change in EU countries because of Brexit. 27 per cent think that EU countries will be worse off, while only 12 per cent EU countries will be better off because of Brexit. **The Dutch and Poles are on average most pessimistic about the consequences of Brexit for EU countries.** 34 and 32 per cent of Dutch and Polish respondents respectively think that EU countries will be worse off, and only 50 and 54 per cent respectively think that the situation will remain the same.
- **Interestingly, citizens in the EU27 are much more split when it comes to how they view the consequences of Brexit for the UK.** 31 per cent of respondents in the EU27 think that there will not be a significant change for the UK, while 44 per cent that the UK will be worse off because of Brexit, and 25 per cent think the UK will be better off. **The German and Spanish respondents are most pessimistic about the consequences of Brexit for the UK.** 58 and 50 per cent of German and Spanish respondents respectively think that the UK will be worse off because of Brexit,

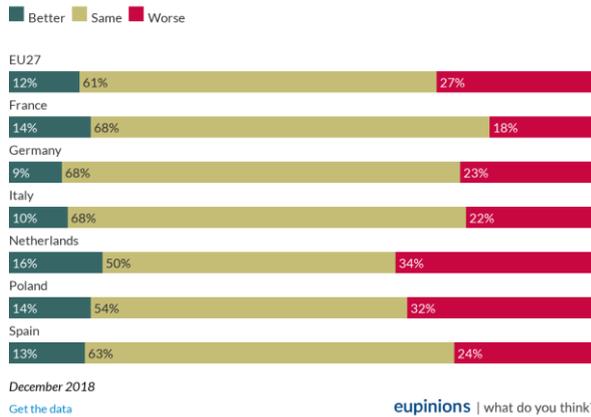
while only 13 and 19 per cent respectively think that the UK will be better off.

- **Finally, our findings show that there is quite some variation across party supporters, especially when it comes to the perceived consequences of Brexit for the UK.** Those who feel close to **far-right or populist-right parties** like the Rassemblement National (former Front National) in France or the Lega in Italy think that the UK will be better off because of Brexit. 59 per cent of those who feel close to Le Pen's Rassemblement National or 52 per cent of those who feel close to Salvini's Lega think that the UK will be better off because of Brexit, while only 10 and 13 per cent respectively think that the UK would be worse off.

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of answers to the question about the consequences of Brexit for EU countries. 61 per cent think of respondents in the EU27 think that there will not be a significant change in EU countries because of Brexit. 27 per cent think that EU countries will be worse off, while only 12 per cent think that EU countries will be better off. The figure highlights interesting variation across countries. The Dutch and Poles are on average most pessimistic about the consequences of Brexit for EU countries: 34 and 32 per cent respectively think that EU countries will be worse off, 16 and 14 per cent think EU countries will be better off, and only 50 and 54 per cent respectively think that the situation will remain the same. In France, Germany and Italy, a large majority of respondents, 68 per cent, thinks that not much will change in EU countries because of Brexit, while 63 per cent of Spanish respondents think the same.

**Figure 1:**

**Will the EU Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?**



**Figure 2:**

**Will the UK Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?**

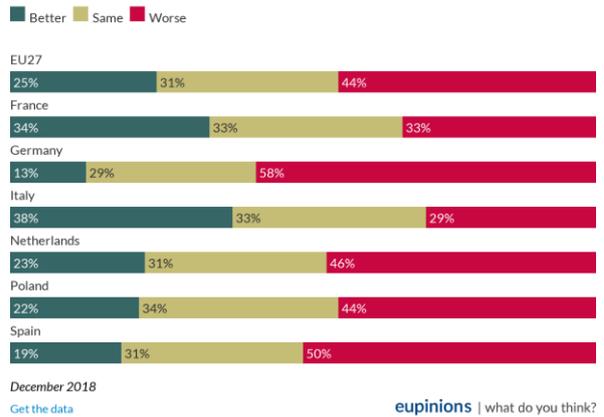
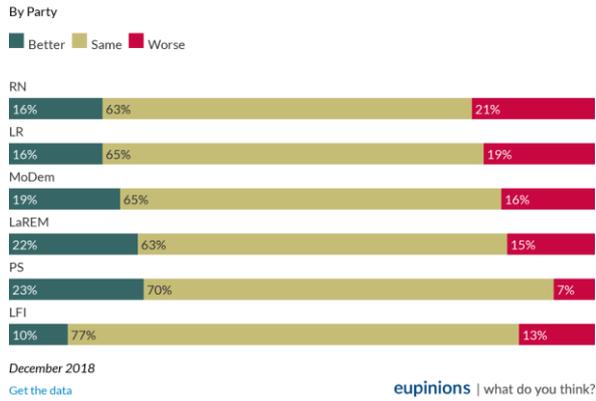


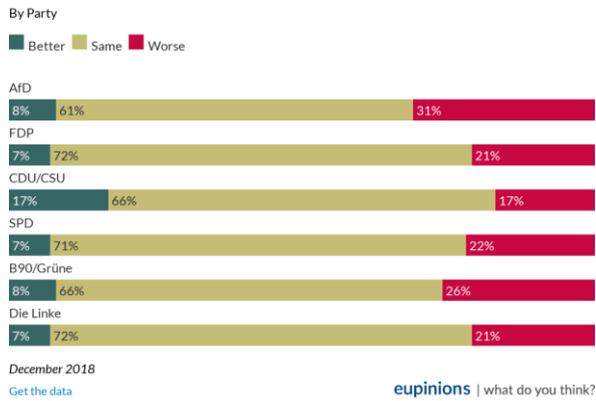
Figure 2 displays the answers of respondents in the EU27 to the question what they think the consequences of Brexit for the UK will be. 31 per cent of respondents in the EU27 think that there will not be a significant change for the UK, while 44 per cent that the UK will be worse off because of Brexit, and 25 per cent think the UK will be better off. In France and Italy, respondents are least likely to think that Brexit will have bad consequences for the UK, 33 and 29 per cent of French and Italian respondents respectively think the UK will be worse off because of Brexit. 33 percent of French and Italian respondents think that there will not be much of a change, while 34 and 38 of French and Italian respondents think that the UK will be better off because of Brexit. The German and Spanish respondents are most pessimistic about the consequences of Brexit for the UK. 58 and 50 per cent of German and Spanish respondents respectively think that the UK will be worse off because of Brexit, while only 13 and 19 per cent respectively think that the UK will be better off.

Figures 3 and 4 present the same information than figures 1 and 2, but now splits the answers by how close people feel to particular political parties in six member states where we conducted more in-depth surveys. The results suggest that those who feel close to far-right or populist right parties are much more likely to think that the UK will be better off because of Brexit, see figure 4. This is perhaps the clearest in France and Italy. Those who feel close to far-right or populist-right parties like the Rassemblement National (former Front National) in France or the Lega in Italy think that the UK will be better off because of Brexit. 59 per cent of those who feel close to Le Pen's Rassemblement National or 52 per cent of those who feel close to Salvini's Lega think that the UK will be better off because of Brexit, while only 10 and 13 per cent respectively think that the UK would be worse off. Also, the majority of those who feel close to the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany and the Partii voor de Vrijheid or Forum voor Democratie in the Netherlands think that Brexit will have good consequences for the UK. 42 per cent of those who feel close to the Alternative für Deutschland think that the UK will be better off because of Brexit, and 45 and 49 of those who feel close to Partii voor de Vrijheid or Forum voor Democratie think the same. A clear majority of those who support centrist parties, like President Macron's Republique en Marche in France (59 per cent) or Chancellor Merkel's Christliche Demokratische Union in Germany, think that the UK will be worse of because of Brexit (63 per cent).

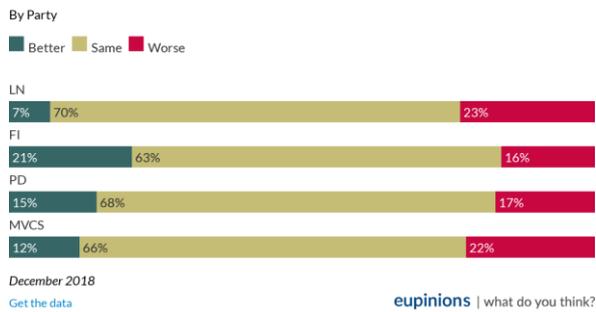
### Figure 3: France: Will the EU Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



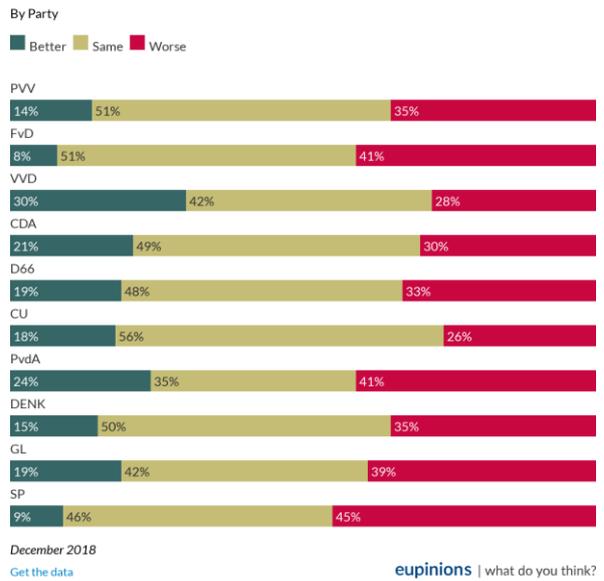
### Germany: Will the EU Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



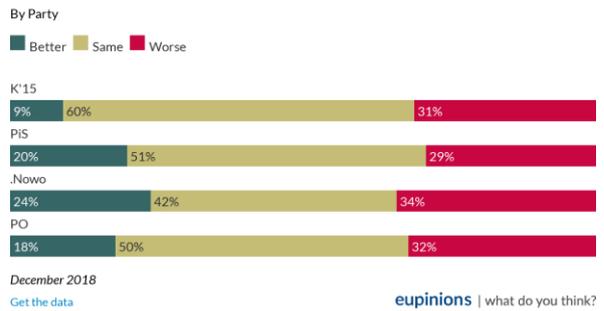
### Italy: Will the EU Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



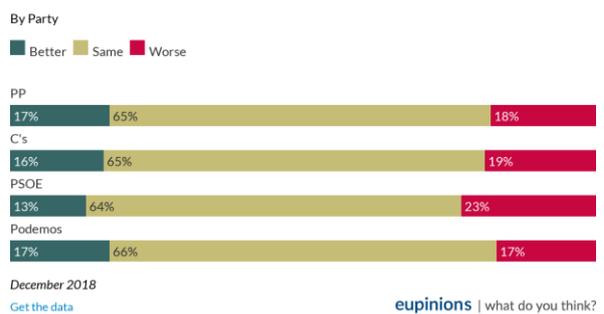
### Netherlands: Will the EU Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



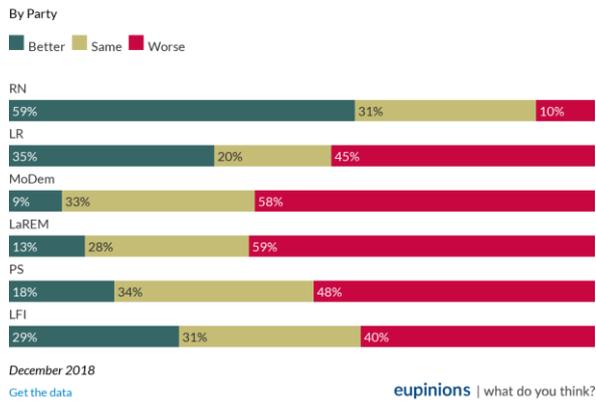
### Poland: Will the EU Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



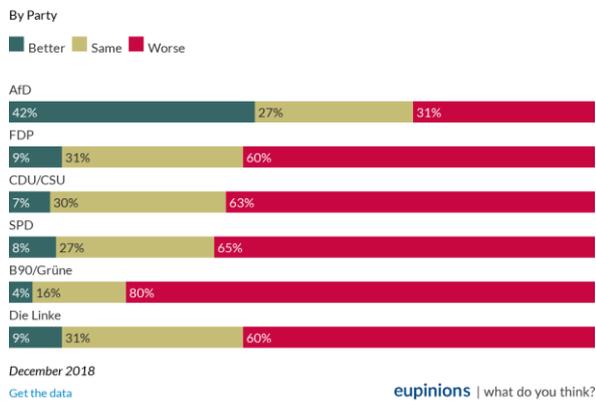
### Spain: Will the EU Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



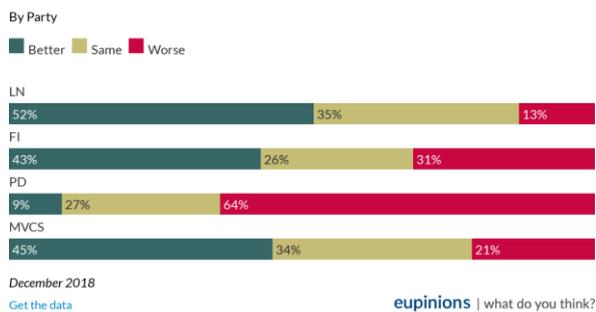
**Figure 4:**  
France: Will the UK Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



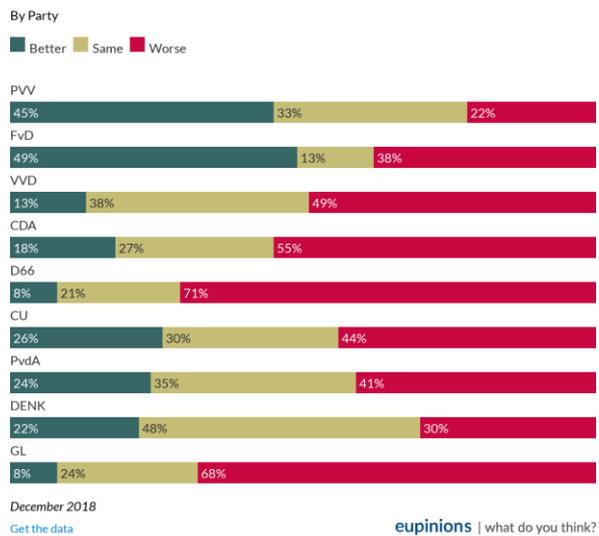
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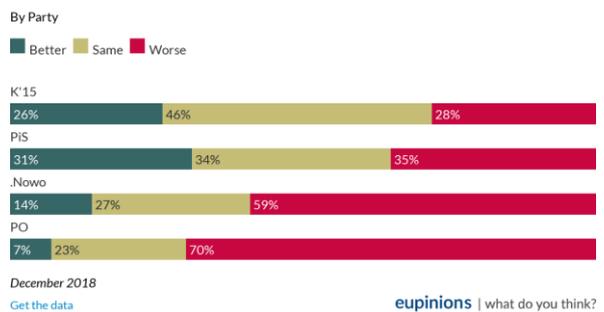
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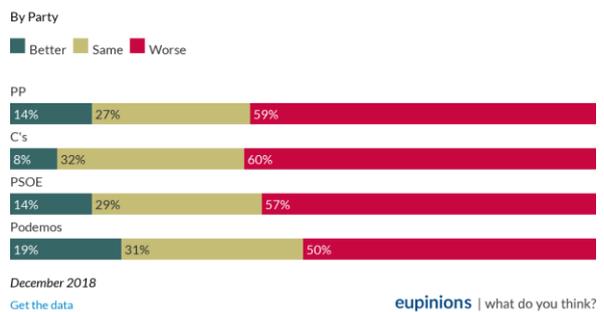
Netherlands: Will the UK Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



Poland: Will the UK Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



Spain: Will the UK Be Better Off, Worse Off, or the Same after Brexit?



Hardly anybody expected the British to vote for Brexit. As a result, analysts and pundits have learned to be more prudent when attempting to predict what will happen next in London. At the same time, continental Europeans have learned to live with these extraordinary events and the associated uncertainty.

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**Data note:**

The sample of n=11.735 was drawn by Dalia Research in December 2018 across all 28 EU Member States, taking into account current population distributions with regard to age (14-65 years), gender and region/country. In order to obtain census representative results, the data were weighted based upon the most recent Eurostat statistics. Calculated for a sample of this size and considering the design-effect, the margin of error would be +/-1.1 % at a confidence level of 95 %.

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Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh  
[www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de)

**Responsible:**

Isabell Hoffmann  
Phone: +49 5241 81 81313  
[isabell.hoffmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de](mailto:isabell.hoffmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de)  
@eupinions