

The role of public opinion in EU integration:

Assessing the relationship between elites

and the public during the refugee crisis

Introduction

In 2015, both the Southern and Eastern regions of Europe experienced what the former EU Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos termed ‘the worst refugee crisis since World War II’.¹ In that year, more than one million extra-EU migrants entered EU member states. The scale of arrivals generated significant repercussions both within the affected states and on the EU as a whole. While the EU was completing its slow recovery following the Great Recession, this powerful phenomenon re-emphasised the weakness of EU institutions and their incapacity to respond to external pressures. The refugee crisis demonstrated, as the Euro crisis did only a few years before for common currency policies, the structural deficiencies of the common immigration policies, as well as the systems of entry and border checks (Thym, 2016; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2018; Baubock, 2018).

Parallels between the Euro and the refugee crises have been noted in a range of empirical and theoretical studies. Scholars have emphasised similarities between the two crises in the EU’s response, citing a lack of coordination and integration (see among others Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2018; Börzel and Risse, 2018). At the same time, others have observed that the outcomes of the two crises have been quite different, since the Great Recession generated a common reaction from EU institutions and member states in promoting integration through supranational regulation, while the refugee crisis was characterised by a deadlock between EU institutions and member countries that were sceptical about the reform of the Dublin system (Biermann et al., 2019; Börzel and Risse, 2018; Niemann and Zaun, 2018).

¹ See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5498_en.htm. Last accessed August 2019.

The reasons for this discrepancy have been debated within the context of the grand theories of EU integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2019). Some authors emphasise the particular circumstances of the crisis (Börzel and Risse, 2018), stating that it promoted polarisation, while others refer to liberal intergovernmentalism to demonstrate how differences of positions among EU member states blocked reform (Biermann et al., 2019; Zaun, 2018; Ripoll Servent, 2018). Although these perspectives reconstruct the dynamics of the missed opportunity for integration by linking them to the grand theories of EU integration, they underestimate the role of political elites and do not test for the influence of public opinion.

During the 2000s, scholars finally included EU citizens' attitudes among the recognised influences on the integration process. Post-functionalists (Hooghe and Marks, 2009) acknowledged the role of public opinion within the theoretical models that explained EU integration, while, empirically, the referendums of the 1990s and the recent UK EU Membership Referendum showed how public opinion can be crucial for determining the extent of integration (or disintegration) with the EU. Despite the evidence provided, however, public attitudes within the integration process are still underestimated (or simply not considered) by different theoretical approaches to EU integration.

This paper addresses the following questions. If public opinion favoured 'constraining' EU integration, how would it deal with extra-EU migrants' access and relocation? Can public concern over the refugee crisis prompt political elites to stand against a regulative solution that would replace the Dublin system? How do these trends align with the grand theories of EU integration?

By observing the relationships between the general public and political elites across time, we aim to reconstruct the input-arena-output process that engendered unsuccessful attempts by some EU member states and institutions to push for further integration on immigration policy. Our study uses surveys of elites, the general public and experts conducted both before and during the refugee crisis by the European Social Survey (ESS) and the Horizon 2020 project [XXXX_omitted]. The analysis shows a relationship between public rejection of extra-EU migrants² and the political elite preference for a nationally determined decision regarding acceptance rather than an EU-determined decision.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we briefly present the dynamics of the EU's reaction to the refugee crisis, focusing on the barriers to EU integration and coordination. Section three frames the relationships between the

² We are aware of the different meanings of *refugee* (as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention), *asylum seeker* (someone who faces an immediate risk to life in the country of citizenship and travels to gain the status of refugee in another country) and *migrant/immigrant* (someone moving from one country to another in a long-term perspective). The first two terms are, however, part of the general concept of migrant/immigrant. As a result, this broad category (migrant/immigrant) includes the others. Moreover, the majority of people who have entered EU borders since 2015 (i.e. immigrants within EU member states) are extra-EU immigrants and asylum seekers. Based on this conceptual and effective overlap (in the public's and elites' perceptions), especially during the refugee crisis, we mostly refer to the general concept of migrants and immigrants (and the phenomenon of immigration). The questions in the surveys used for the analyses consistently use the terms *immigration/immigrants* to ascertain both the public's and elites' attitudes as well as party positions. Therefore, we cannot distinguish orientations towards refugees and asylum seekers specifically in a higher, fine-grained analysis. The use of *refugee* and *asylum seekers* is thus limited to the contextualisation of the crisis that has occurred since 2015.

general public and political elites in a highly politicised context and outlines the hypotheses. Section four presents the data and the methods used in the analysis. Section five provides the results of the analysis and determines the relevance of our hypotheses. Finally, section six concludes by summarising the findings and framing them within the theoretical debate on EU integration.

Differentiated integration on immigration and asylum policies during the refugee crisis

The public have been highly critical of the EU's response to the refugee crisis, with many highlighting the institution's failure to cooperate on immigration policy. As a result, the EU has often been depicted as deeply divided and incapable of dealing with this crucial issue. However, this image is partially misleading and, if considered alone, may misrepresent the effectiveness of EU integration. Despite a more marginal role as compared to economic matters, the progression of European integration on immigration and asylum policies has been substantial, particularly since the free movement of EU citizens could imply new rules and principles at the regional level. The Schengen Agreement, and its successive implementations,³ represented the most integrated system of free movement at the regional level and established the preconditions for a common immigration and asylum policy under the open borders system. Since EU countries renounced a core prerogative of the modern nation-state, the EU's initiative on immigration and asylum policies was expanded. The Council of

³ See the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement in the Treaty of Amsterdam 1999/435/EC.

the European Union and the European Parliament (EP) passed directives regulating entrance from third countries for work purposes and family reasons⁴ and managing illegal immigration and criminal activities connected to human trafficking.⁵ Both the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Treaty of Lisbon strengthened the EU's role over asylum and immigration policies. The latter, in particular, specified a central role for the EP in granting a co-legislative role alongside the Council (under ordinary legislative procedure), established a base for the common system of asylum and gave the Court of Justice full jurisdiction over immigration and asylum. The EU has also acted to create migration funds, promote mechanisms of relocation and prevent migrant deflection to other member states through policy harmonisation (Thielemann, 2018).

Moreover, European institutions have pursued integration over asylum and immigration policies following the refugee crisis of 2015. Specifically, the EU a) produced new rules that superseded the Dublin system, including rules regarding refugee access; b) established border security missions (such as TRITON and EU NAVFOR's Operation Sophia); c) established a system of hotspots (including the EU Regional Task Force) for entrance and further regulated entrance conditions, including emergency resettlement quotas; d) recognised safe third countries and

⁴ See Directive 2009/50/EC; the Single Permit Directive 2011/98/EU; Directive 2014/36/EU; Directive 2014/66/EU; Directive (EU) 2016/801; and Directive 2003/109/EC for work reasons and Directive 2003/86/EC for family reasons.

⁵ See Directive 2002/90/EC; Directive 2004/81/EC; Directive 2009/52/EC; Directive 2011/36/EU; the EU Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling 2015–2020; and the 'Returns Directive' 2008/115/EC and its implementations.

conducted both bilateral agreements (such as the EU–Turkey Migration Agreement) and financial assistance to frontline countries and e) created the European Coast Guard (Frontex) and provided the institution with significant resources.⁶

Both member states and EU institutions have pooled unprecedented financial resources for dedicated funds, missions and bilateral agreements, amongst other mechanisms for responding to the migrant crisis (for an overview see Carrera et al., 2015 and Niemann and Zaun, 2018). Despite these efforts, the EU member states and institutions failed to unanimously address the most controversial problem regarding the redistribution of immigrants (and refugees). The Commission proposed a ‘fair mechanism’ of redistribution based on specific capacity (and mandatory) quotas per each EU member that was blocked by the opposition of some member states (Zaun, 2018), while the EU presidency in 2018 discarded the idea of fixed quotas, thus reaffirming states’ prerogatives within the Council (see Lavenex, 2018). The mainstream position held within the literature is that the failure of the Dublin system was structural and had been inevitable since its inception. It relied on weak binding forces and left EU members with significant scope for avoiding compliance. EU countries were also incapable of resolving states’ weaknesses in the administration and implementation of the Dublin system and providing practical support to states suffering under heavy flows of refugees, which were pushing reception structures to their limits (Thym, 2016). Accordingly, member states violated EU norms on immigration and asylum, changing their domestic positions as the context changed.

⁶ Although during the refugee crisis the EU’s resources for coastal patrols peaked, Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2018) highlight that they were relatively scarce compared to those established by nations like Germany due to the length of EU coastline.

This was the case for Germany in August 2015, when the country did not uphold the Dublin system for Syrian refugees, as well as for Italy and Greece, which have been cautioned several times for housing refugees in poor conditions and for sub-standard treatment. In sum, the coordinated aspect of EU migration and asylum policy was unable to bind member states and manage weaknesses because it was lopsided and lacking a balance mechanism of solidarity.

This perspective may reasonably explain why the Dublin system collapsed during the refugee crisis of 2015, but it does not explain why EU integration stagnated, neither growing nor regressing following the crisis. In other words, doubts persist about why the Dublin system has not been replaced by a more efficient and integrated system and why EU countries failed to push for more integration on the issue of refugee settlement.

Public opinion and politicisation in national political spaces

The perfect storm

Hooghe and Marks' (2009) study on 'constraining dissensus' over European integration broke academic resistance over including public opinion within grand theories of EU integration. Refuting the ideas of neo-functionalists and intergovernmentalists, they showed that public opinion on European integration is structured, influential on national voting patterns and connected to the basic dimensions of political contestation in Europe. Within this perspective, the UK EU Membership Referendum of 2016 could be considered a milestone, since it clearly showed that national referendums may even bring to end EU membership.

Hooghe and Marks' framework of the integration process describes politicisation within national political spaces through five phases. The phases are *reform impetus*, 'arising from a mismatch between functional efficiency and jurisdictional form' (p. 8), *issue creation*, *arena choice*, *arena rules* and the *conflict structure*. As neo-functionalists such as Schmitter (2002) emphasise, political crises are strong triggering impetuses. When politicisation rises, driven by increased saliency, polarisation and mobilisation, responses to a crisis may be selected in the mass arena or in the interest group arena. According to recent studies (e.g. Biermann et al., 2019; Börzel and Risse, 2018), the Euro crisis was debated in the interest group arena, as the regulation of technical policies prevailed over mass politicisation and saved the Eurozone from international speculation by making progressive steps towards integration on monetary policy. Conversely, in the case of the refugee crisis, politicisation has remained high in the years that have followed.⁷ Although the issues of the EU's role as a 'shield' (Conti et al., 2019), humanitarian rescue and the securitisation of borders have not been uncontroversial, the relocation of extra-EU immigrants (and refugees) has represented the greatest obstacle to the reform of the Dublin system. In this case, politicisation has been nurtured by political entrepreneurs that identified an opportunity to shift the consensus and gain more votes. These parties, mainly on the conservative traditional/authoritarian/nationalist (TAN) and extreme right of the political spectrum, control the issue by suggesting radical solutions such as refugee rejections and blocking frontiers (Yılmaz, 2012),

⁷ See among others the contributions in the Krzyżanowski's et al. Special Issue 'The Mediatization and the Politicization of the "Refugee Crisis" in Europe' in *Journal of Immigrants and Refugee Studies*, 2018, Issue 1-2.

affirming the prioritisation of national citizens and the preservation of national resources to reassure a public concerned by large immigration flows (Wodak, 2015). They have acquired a growing space within the debate, presenting themselves as the clear choice to solve the problem. Therefore, anti-immigration parties gained votes as the politicisation of the immigration issue continued (Dinas et al., 2019). Due to their nationalist positions, these parties combine anti-immigrant arguments with opposition to the EU to form their nationalistic and anti-globalist perspective (Conti et al., 2018). They also consider supranational coordination and integration as externally issued decrees that undermine the sovereign right to police national borders.

This 'perfect storm' restrained pro-EU integration actors, as they feared losing voters and political capital. Past studies on elites' and public attitudes regarding EU integration have traditionally shown some gaps between the two (Gabel and Scheve, 2007). Political elites are usually more pro-EU than the general public, although results differ in different policy areas and initiatives (Basile and Olmastroni, 2019; Hooghe, 2003). Public–elite convergence on EU integration has been considered unimportant during the era of 'permissive consensus'. As a 'constraining dissensus' era emerged, a mismatch between elites' and public positions was tolerated until politicisation rose. In the last case, the presence of political entrepreneurs fuels politicisation, generating adverse consequences for both governments and mainstream parties. Under electoral pressure (Carrubba, 2001) due to the politicisation of the immigration issue, different parties in some contexts have co-opted anti-immigrant TAN parties (Di Mauro and Verzichelli, 2019; Van Spanje, 2010). Accordingly, we expect co-optation at the entire EU level as well and a tendency of

the elite⁸ to prefer national decision-making over EU decision-making regarding who should be in charge of deciding immigrant quotas when public rejection of immigrants rises. The next section explains these mechanisms in detail.

- Hypotheses

In order to test the key arguments of the theoretical framework explained above, we formulate specific hypotheses.

We first test whether the refugee crisis relates to higher levels of public rejection of immigrants (including refugees) at the individual level in different national contexts. As a growing bulk of multidisciplinary literature shows, there are multiple reasons behind natives' rejection, and they relate to culture, the economy, race, welfare and types of contacts both at the sociotropic and individual level (for an overview see Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). A comprehensive review of these theoretical arguments is not within the realm of the present work. The tests of which explanatory factors have a triggering effect on individual rejections are also beyond the scope of this study. Instead, the main issue here is whether the massive flow of the refugee crisis relates to natives' rejection of migrants. Hangartner et al. (2019) empirically demonstrated that, during the refugee crisis, the massive arrivals on some Greek islands generated sentiments of hostility and rejection towards extra-EU migrants. Despite the robustness of these findings, it may be difficult to generalise them when

⁸ We keep the concepts of political elites (MPs) and parties separate since they clearly indicate two different subjects. However, we consider elites' positions to be strongly related to the parties to which they belong.

one moves from a specific affected place, such as the small islands of the Aegean Sea, to EU countries. Pre-existing characteristics – such as the number of residing immigrants, the distinction between destination and transit countries, the welfare system, the condition of contacts (Allport, 1954) and the labour market – may increase or mitigate the impact of the crisis.

At the same time, based on the arguments of Hangartner et al. (2019), we expect that at the individual level the refugee crisis, amplified by the media (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018), activates emotional triggers that relate to higher levels of rejection for two main reasons. First, it gives impetus to pre-existing ‘latent’ hostility due to both instrumental and cultural beliefs (see among others Valentino et al., 2019). Second, it occurs in a scenario of high uncertainty where common EU borders fail to reassure about entrance, relocation and integration (Dennison and Geddes, 2018). In this chaotic context where repercussions are unpredictable (due to the unprecedented flow of this magnitude) and control is limited (due to both the multinational nature of frontiers and actors involved), the individual reactions tend to be of rejection. Despite different ideological positions and contact occurrence (Hangartner et al., 2019), individuals will tend to fill in the uncertainty gap by raising barriers. Accordingly, we hypothesise that:

H1: The refugee crisis positively relates to sentiments of public rejection towards people arriving from outside the EU.

If supported by our testing, this relationship would represent a powerful factor that could impact both the balance of opinion and positions taken within national political spaces. The rising saliency of the issue, as well as polarisation, mobilisation and a

general shift towards anti-immigrant attitudes, could be deemed relevant to political elites' and parties' positions on the issue. Since parties scarcely influence public saliency and are not often able to de-activate politicisation, they have basically three main options: 1) co-opt the positions of the rising competitors (namely rejectionists anti-immigration parties), 2) hold their previous positions for consistency with their ideological and programmatic profile (Bale et al., 2010) or 3) opt for a mixed strategy by selecting specific policy positions to co-opt and others to hold (Akkerman, 2015). Within the refugee crisis scenario, both options one and three imply some change to contain the mass of arrivals. Option two (hold previous positions) seems, in contrast, very unlikely since, from a competition perspective (Downs, 1957), it would represent a drain of support towards parties reassuring the public of strong measures to block treating the effects of the crisis. This argument leads us to hypothesise a general party shift towards rejection during the crisis. Their levels of co-optation will be different⁹ but, on the whole, their positions will change during the crisis. Moreover, since the GAL (green, alternative, libertarian)–TAN (~~transnational~~) cleavage tends to prevail in identity issues such as immigration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), we expect that left–right ideology will have a weak impact on changes. Our second and third hypotheses may be formulated as follow:

H2a: Most parties have changed their positions on migrants, moving towards policies of rejection during the crisis.

⁹ We are unable here to produce as fine-grained an analysis of party change on specific policies concerning immigration as Akkerman (2015) because data do not present that level of detail.

H2b: Ideological positions had a limited effect such that both centre-right and centre-left parties adopted more rejectionist positions during the crisis.

As the issue becomes highly politicised, the capacity of anti-immigrant parties to generate co-optation may also spread to complementary aspects highly related to the acceptance or rejection of immigrants. In other words, if the politicisation of the refugee crisis – and the related growing support for right-wing anti-immigration parties (Dinas et al., 2019) – is able to move the political spectrum towards rejection, it will also affect parties' positions on the ways to deal with the crisis and restrict extra-EU immigrants' presence. Within the multi-level governance system on immigration built among the EU members, the Union acquires, then, a central role. Anti-immigrant parties have clear ideas about the issue. They blame the EU for ineffective measures to address the crisis, stressing the weakening effect of the Dublin system on the national sovereignty power to control national borders. Within their political discourse, the identity dimension, expressed through the protection of native prerogatives and exclusive nationalism, deals with Euroscepticism and the limitation of EU sovereignty in favour of national sovereignty. This narrative seems to be related to a growing Euroscepticism and opposition towards governments during the crisis (Harteveld et al., 2018; Ripoll Servent, 2019).

Overwhelmed by the wave of public rejection of extra-EU immigrants and pressured by electoral competition with emerging forces challenging their positions and gaining popular support, political elites will accordingly tend to co-opt extreme TAN positions, favouring national decision-making regarding the number of extra-EU immigrants to accept. Our third hypothesis is thus formulated as follows:

H3a: The higher the percentages of people rejecting immigrants coming from outside the EU, the greater the elite-led support for the national management of the refugee issue (as opposed to management by the EU).

Moreover, the above-mentioned argument brings us to also hypothesise a direct relationship between the perceived majority position and the elite-favoured one on the level of government that should decide the number of immigrants to accept. Accordingly:

H3b: The more elites perceive the majority of public opinion as supporting the national management of immigrants (versus EU management), the more they seek to sustain domestic management.

It is worth mentioning that our hypotheses do not necessarily imply a growing party Euroscepticism and/or an increase in public opposition to EU integration. Support for the EU may be resilient both at the political elite and general public level. Rather, we want to contribute to shedding light on the public–elite relationships when EU integration is politicised and political entrepreneurs strongly act to raise the level of competition.

Data and methods

In order to test the formulated hypotheses, we run different regression models using surveys of the general public, elites and experts. The main data source is represented by the Horizon 2020 project [XXX_omitted]. It focuses on ten EU countries and

includes the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) of 2017 and an *ad hoc* survey of political elites conducted in the same year. We integrated this data at a mass level through the European Social Survey.¹⁰ The sample of ESS includes all the countries surveyed by the project, except for Greece. In order to maintain a consistent group of countries in which hypotheses about the general public, parties and elites are tested, we decided to exclude Greece from the analysis and focus on the remaining nine nations. They are the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. These countries comprise more than 70 per cent of the entire EU population and account for many of the differences present at the EU level (i.e. geographical, political-institutional, historical and linguistic differences). The three surveys analysed (ESS – general public, CHES – party positions and the [xxx_omitted] – political elite) contain specific questions on the dimensions we want to explain and provide sufficient data to test the formulated hypotheses. Moreover, the ESS and CHES have both pre-crisis and crisis waves, enabling us to test for the effect of the most acute phase of the refugee crisis.

Variables originating from the ESS reflect questions related to immigration and political orientations.¹¹ The dependent variable measures attitudes towards the level of acceptance of immigrants from ‘poorer countries outside of Europe’ on an ordinal scale, including ‘allow many’, ‘some’, ‘few’ and ‘none’. By analysing the sum of people who selected ‘few’ or ‘none’, it is clear that anti-immigration responses in some cases

¹⁰ For the complete documentation see <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>. It is worth mentioning that the [xxx project] has a panel mass survey as well, but it does not contain a specific question on the acceptance of extra-EU migrants’ like the ESS.

¹¹ See Table A1 in the online appendix for a complete list of these questions and coding standards.

form the majority (e.g. the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom in 2013 and 2015), while in other countries they are well below 50 per cent (e.g. Germany, as shown in Figure 1). There are clear differences between the temporal dimensions from before 2012–13, the crisis period peak (2014–15) and 2016–17. Most of the countries show higher percentages in both 2014–15 and 2016–17 than in the pre-crisis period. Although the peak of the crisis was surpassed in 2017, the increase in rejection persists in Poland, the Czech Republic and Italy. Percentages remain relatively stable in Spain, while Portugal shows higher hostility in 2013. In Portugal, the refugee crisis has not produced massive flows like in other southern EU member nations,¹² while the effects of the Great Recession seem to have increased rejection (see Fonseca and McGarringle, 2014).

¹² According to Eurostat, the number of total permanent immigrants was below 30,000 in both 2015 and 2016 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>).

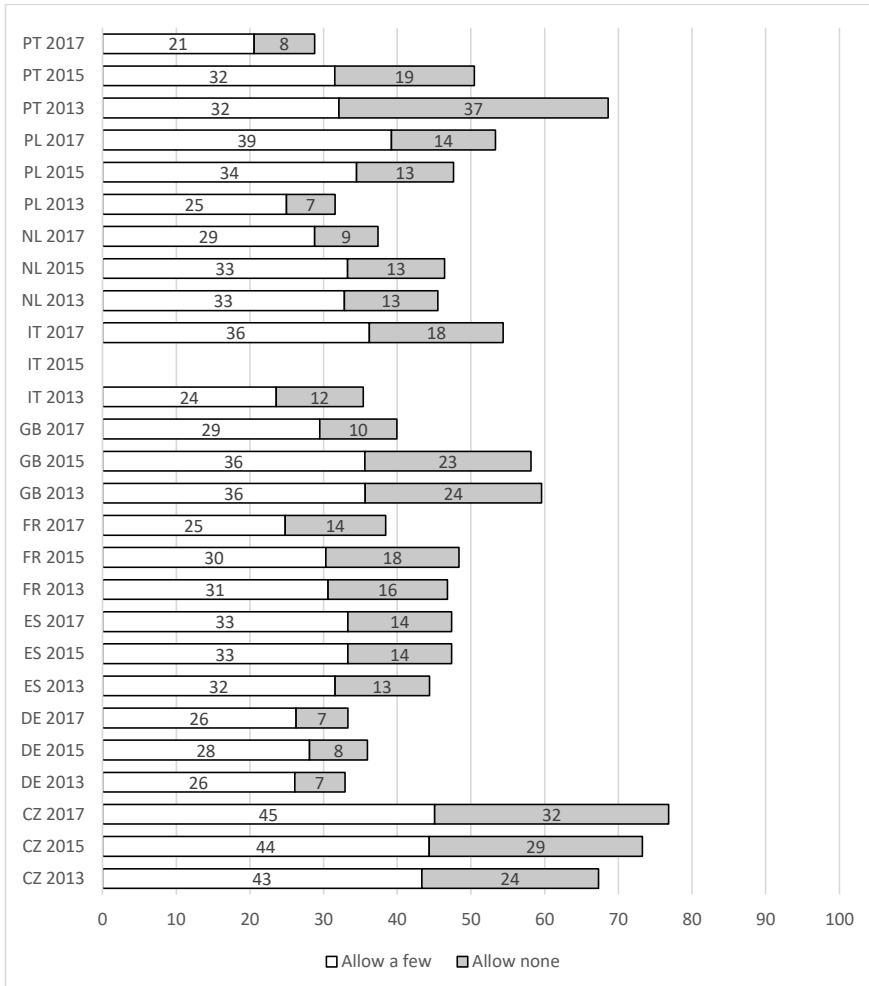


Figure 1. Percentages of respondents allowing 'a few' and 'none' of immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe. Source: ESS wave 6, 7 and 8. Unweighted samples.

The main independent variable is binary and distinguishes between the pre-crisis and crisis periods. We also include control variables representing common indicators of approaches, providing both individual- and context-level explanations of attitudes towards immigrants. Particularly,

among the theoretical explanations, and considering data availability in the selected survey, we focused on *cultural marginality*, *human capital*, *political affiliation*, *economic orientations/interests* and *solidarity* as approaches appearing in multiple source tests of anti-immigrant attitudes (see Rustenbach, 2010; Sides and Citrin, 2007). They are not intended to provide the most extensive list of indicators within the entire literature on the topic, but rather to control for crucial explanatory factors that recur in the literature.

Accordingly, the model includes ideology (left–right), satisfaction with the economic situation, equalitarian orientations, religion, discriminated group membership, GAL–TAN orientations, income perceptions and socio-demographic variables (such as gender, education and age). Consistently with previous findings, we expect right-wing, TAN and lower-income individuals to be more prone to reject immigrants coming from outside of the EU. People with religious affiliation, equalitarian orientation, satisfaction with the state of the national economy, discriminated group membership and higher education levels should tend to accept immigrants. We also add to this dataset aggregate variables concerning economic performance (GDP per capita) and two measures of immigration presence: the number of immigrants residing in a country and the number of asylum seekers.¹³ We expect that countries with a higher GDP and numbers of residing immigrants and asylum seekers will tend to reject more immigrants from outside the EU because people in these countries expect a further rise in the number of immigrants. The analyses of public opinion employ logistic regressions since the dependent variable has been recorded in a

¹³ Source: World Bank for GDP per capita data; Eurostat for number of asylum seekers [and immigrants residing](#) by country.

binary form, indicating acceptance ('allow') of 'a few', 'some' or 'many' immigrants from outside Europe (equal to 1) and 'none' (equal to 0).¹⁴

Similarly, we examine the longitudinal effect of the crisis period on party positions in order to test H2a and H2b. Accordingly, we use CHES results from 2014 and 2017.¹⁵

The dependent variable summarises parties' positions on immigration policy and ranges from 0 (*fully opposed to a restrictive policy on immigration*) to 10 (*fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration*). Figure 2 shows average values by country for the parties included in the CHES in 2014 and 2017. The Czech Republic and Poland show the highest average values (i.e. favouring restrictive policies on immigration) in the two years, with both experiencing a slight increase in values. Among the affected Western countries, however, the Netherlands, Italy, France and Germany show a tendency towards restrictive policies. German parties moved from an average of 4.86 in 2014 to 5.91 in 2017, and many of the parties surveyed shifted their position significantly. In 2014, 60 per cent scored less than 4 (i.e. generally opposing restrictive policies), while in 2017, 57 per cent scored more than 6 (i.e. generally favouring restrictive policies).

¹⁴ We [also](#) tested whether the dichotomy of 'none' versus other categories may inflate the positive category by also running the model on a binary variable where 'none' and 'few' are recoded as 0 and 'some' and 'many' as 1. Results do not show any particular difference from the model adopted. Table 3A in the online appendix reports the test.

¹⁵ We selected CHES data from 2014 and 2017 for the nine countries under analysis, producing 132 parties for each year. Since the period between the two surveys is quite short – about three years – the parties considered in the two waves almost completely overlap (74.2 per cent of them completely overlap). Accordingly, we consider the sample used quite similar to a panel survey where cases (parties) are almost the same in the two waves.

We select two main independent variables: a dummy for the crisis period (0 for 2014 and 1 for 2017) and the party family.¹⁶ The control variables inserted into the models are a left–right ideological scale,¹⁷ the position on the GAL–TAN continuum¹⁸ and the country where the party operates. The analysis is conducted using different ordinary least squares regression models and uses a combined dataset of two CHESs conducted in 2014 and 2017.

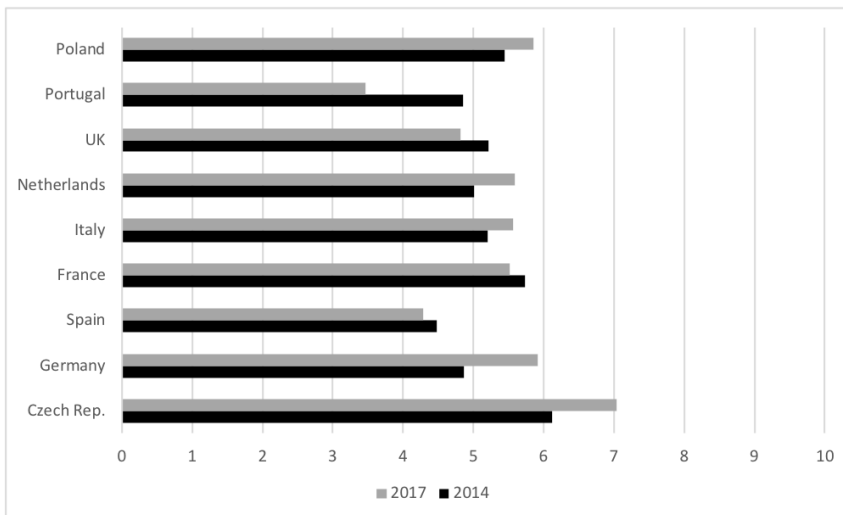


Figure 2. Average values of parties by country on the 0 to 10 scale describing opposition towards restrictive policies on immigration versus favour of restrictive policies. Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 2014 and 2017.

¹⁶ This is a categorial variable, with 11 modalities, based on Derksen’s classification. See page 8 of the CHES codebook at <https://www.chesdata.eu/s/CHES-2017-Codebook.pdf>.

¹⁷ This is the position of the party in terms of its overall ideological stance. It is coded as follows: 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right).

¹⁸ This is the position of the party in terms of their views on democratic freedoms and rights. It is coded as follows: 0 (libertarian/postmaterialist) to 10 (traditional/authoritarian).

We use the [XXX_omitted] project expert survey of 2016 (first wave), consisting of 696 interviews of political representatives,¹⁹ in order to test H3a and H3b. The questions asked in this survey concern attitudes towards Europe and political issues (mainly immigration, the economy and foreign policy), as well as preferences regarding policy measures related to these issues. We focus on the section related to immigration and use the favoured level of governance (national versus EU) as the dependent variable. The survey ranks respondents' positions on a 10-point scale where 0 represents the opinion that one's 'own country should decide for itself how many immigrants to accept each year' and 10 indicates that 'the European Union should decide how many immigrants should be accepted by each member state each year'.

Descriptive analyses show a strong polarisation in support for EU cooperation and decisions regarding the number of immigrants accepted. Responses between 6 and 10 account for 45 per cent of the total, while 39 per cent give a value from 0 to 4. Differences between countries are also prevalent in the data. The Czech political elite, for instance, are strongly in favour of national decisional power over the admission of immigrants, with 90 per cent indicating this preference. This position also forms the majority in the Netherlands (50 per cent), Poland (55) and the UK (65). However, France (54 per cent), Germany (67), Greece (68), Italy (66) and Spain (71) display a

¹⁹ We excluded data for Greece in the analysis for consistency. The first wave of the [XXX_omitted] elite survey was carried out between April and November 2016. The survey includes 635 members of the national parliaments (lower houses) and 61 members of the European Parliament for a total of 696 interviewed people. Table A2 in the appendix displays the frequency of interviewed MPs by country. Type of interview: mixed method CAWI/CATI. Website source: [omitted].

preference for EU decision-making on this issue. Respondents are then asked to rank the majority of public opinion on the same scale. Accordingly, elites generally select a national preference, indicating that the domestic government and not the EU should decide on the number of immigrants to accept. In total, 71 per cent place the majority of public opinion close to national primacy (0 to 4 on the scale), while only 17 per cent place the public as being favourable to EU primacy. We use this data to test H3a and H3b. For H3a, we pool the dataset with ESS percentages of those who select 'allow none' responses regarding immigration from outside the EU. We also include respondents' socio-demographic indicators (age, gender, education and country of election) and the groups to which are they affiliated in the EP.

During coding, we reverse the ranking to create a scale from 0, indicating that the EU should decide policies, to 10, meaning that the country should decide. Controls for the country of origin are provided in all the models.

Results

The analysis conducted on the sample of nine EU countries supports our first hypothesis (H1). At the individual level, rejectionist positions were indeed adopted between the pre-crisis and crisis periods towards immigrants coming from outside of the EU (Table 1). A change of one unit in the crisis variable (from 2013 to 2017) decreases the odds of accepting immigrants by one factor of 0.931.

Economic indicators show that the higher the satisfaction level towards national economic situations or personal income, the more individuals accept non-EU immigrants. Left-right GAL-TAN and anti-equalitarian positions show that

conservatives are, as expected, anti-immigrant. The opposite results are shown for people who follow religious practices. Results are not significant for members of discriminated groups, while education is positively correlated with the dependent variable, with a much higher probability among those with a high educational qualification (higher tertiary education = 4.244) than those with a lower educational qualification. The odds of accepting immigrants are the same regardless of GDP levels, while the number of immigrants residing in a country and the number of asylum seekers are considered statistically insignificant when it comes to predicting the likelihood that respondents accept immigrants.

	Odds Ratio (Rob. St. Err.)
Crisis (2013)	0.931*** (0.021)
Left-right scale (left)	0.914**** (0.007)
Satisfaction with national economy (extremely dissatisfied)	1.159**** (0.010)
Government initiative to reduce inequalities (neither agree nor disagree)	
<i>disagree</i>	0.813*** (0.056)
<i>agree</i>	0.916 (0.050)
Religious (not at all)	1.056**** (0.007)
Member of discriminated group (no)	0.918 (0.060)
Libertarian – ‘Gay free’ (neither agree nor disagree)	
<i>disagree</i>	0.590**** (0.040)
<i>agree</i>	1.311**** (0.071)
Gender (female)	0.971 (0.035)
Age	0.990**** (0.001)
Education (less than lower secondary)	
<i>lower secondary</i>	1.300**** (0.079)
<i>lower tier upper secondary</i>	1.378**** (0.089)
<i>upper tier upper secondary</i>	2.065**** (0.145)
<i>advanced vocational</i>	2.094**** (0.155)
<i>lower tertiary education</i>	3.105**** (0.305)
<i>higher tertiary education</i>	4.244**** (0.375)
Income (very difficult on present income)	

<i>difficult on present income</i>	1.400**** (0.104)
<i>coping on present income</i>	1.537**** (0.109)
<i>living comfortably on present income</i>	1.820**** (0.146)
GDP per capita (t-3)	1.000**** (0.000)
Immigrants (t-3)	1.000 (0.000)
Asylum seekers (t-3)	1.000 (0.000)
Constant	--
Country	@
R2 (McFadden)	0.116
N	27,426

Table 1. Logistic regression on acceptance of immigrants ('many', 'some' and 'few' coded as 1 versus 'none' coded as 0) coming from outside the EU (reference categories in parentheses).

Note: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01, ****p<.001. Source: ESS waves 6 and 7.

The tests concerning H2a and H2b have been conducted through different [linear](#) regression models on a dataset that combines two CHESs gathered in 2014 and 2017. In the first model, reported in Table 2, the regression explains 84.1 per cent of the variance. When we consider the parties surveyed in the nine countries under analysis, it is possible to observe a general inclination towards restrictive immigration policies from 2014 to 2017, thereby supporting H2a. The betas show a lower impact of the crisis (beta = 0.079) compared to ideology (beta = 0.345) and GAL–TAN (beta = 0.597), although it is significant and positive. Shadowing public opinion, parties within these countries became more restrictive towards immigration during the crisis, producing a general shift towards rejection.

An indication of major positional shifts towards rejection by CHES party families is provided by Models 2 and 3.²⁰ In 2014, the Christian Democratic parties (beta = -

²⁰ We preferred to show party families in these separate models in order to compare their effects longitudinally and test for predicted changes. We excluded them from Model 1 because no longitudinal effect is observable in this model for party families.

0.202), the Regionalists (beta = -0.116) and the Confessional parties (beta = -0.179) stand out for their clear opposition to a restrictive policy on immigration (i.e. holding positive attitudes towards acceptance). During the refugee crisis, however, their positions change. In 2017, only the Confessional parties (beta = -0.090) continue to strongly oppose restrictive immigration policies as other parties undergo a statistically significant transition towards non-acceptance. This is the case for the Socialists (beta = 0.195) and also, albeit to a much lesser extent, for the Radical Left parties, the Liberals and the Greens (beta = 0.104). According to these results, we can partially accept H2b. Some party families tend to be (statistically) significantly pro-immigrant before the crisis and not significantly pro-immigrant during the crisis (e.g. Christian Democrats). Others become significantly more rejectionists during the crisis (e.g. the Liberals, Socialists, Radical Left and Greens).

	Model 1	Model 2 (2014)	Model 3 (2017)
	Beta (Rob. St. Err.)	Beta (Rob. St. Err.)	Beta (Rob. St. Err.)
Year (2014)	0.079*** (0.047)		
Party family (no family)			
<i>Radical right</i>		-0.032 (0.757)	0.043 (0.760)
<i>Conservative</i>		-0.084 (0.553)	0.022 (0.743)
<i>Liberal</i>		-0.029 (0.469)	0.132* (0.627)
<i>Christian democratic</i>		-0.202*** (0.584)	-0.067 (0.694)
<i>Socialist</i>		0.019 (0.364)	0.195** (0.631)
<i>Radical left</i>		-0.041 (0.599)	0.147* (0.807)
<i>Green</i>		-0.059 (0.368)	0.104* (0.635)
<i>Regionalist</i>		-0.116* (0.544)	0.042 (0.686)
<i>Confessional</i>		-0.179** (1.168)	-0.090* (1.072)
<i>Agrarian/Center</i>		-0.045 (0.686)	-0.028 (0.614)
Left–right scale (left)	0.345**** (0.062)	0.321*** (0.122)	0.438**** (0.121)
GAL–TAN (Libertarian)	0.597**** (0.057)	0.729**** (0.084)	0.659**** (0.102)
Country	@	@	@

Constant	-283.533*** (95.146)	0.181 (0.673)	-1.196 (0.758)
R ²	0.841	0.905	0.907
Adj. R ²	0.830	0.871	0.884
Prof >F (sig.)	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	244	93	122

Table 2. OLS models on party positions regarding immigration policies (reference categories in parentheses).²¹

Note: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01, ****p<.001. Source: CHES surveys (2014–2017).

What emerges from these initial analyses is that the migration crisis is related to a widespread higher rejection of immigrants among parties.

H3a and H3b are tested using data from the [XXX_omitted] project elite survey of 2016. Table 3 shows the results of this analysis. During coding, we reverse the ranking to create a scale from 0, indicating that the EU should decide policies, to 10, meaning that the country should decide. Model 1 confirms that the higher the percentage of public opinion rejecting immigrants within a country, the more likely it is that a representative will support the prominence of national decisions regarding the number of accepted immigrants (beta = 0.971).

	Model 1	Model 2
	Beta (Rob. St. Err.)	Beta (Rob. St. Err.)
ESS (2014–2015) % allowing 'none' immigrants from poorer countries outside the EU	0.971**** (0.171)	0.658** (0.163)
Majority perception		0.289****(0.048)
Party Group (none)		
<i>European People's Party (Christian Democrats)- EPP</i>	-0.268**(0.933)	-0.268**(0.878)
<i>Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament – S&D</i>	-0.500**** (0.937)	-0.450**** (0.883)
<i>European Conservatives and Reformists Group - ECR</i>	-0.009 (0.997)	-0.033 (0.939)

²¹ VIF values are below 10, showing no problems of collinearity (averages respectively for Model 1 = 1.91; Model 2 = 2.74; Model 3 = 2.66).

<i>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe - ALDE</i>	-0.329**** (0.960)	-0.319****(0.904)
<i>European United Left – Nordic Green Left- GUE-NGL Greens/European Free Alliance</i>	-0.291***(0.978)	-0.273***(0.920)
<i>Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group-EFD</i>	-0.258****(1.114)	-0.238****(1.049)
<i>Europe of Nations and Freedom-ENF</i>	-0.092 (1.138)	-0.078 (1.072)
	0.082*(1.363)	0.065 (1.284)
Gender (male)	0.046 (0.271)	0.040 (0.256)
Age	0.038 (0.012)	0.056 (0.011)
Education (elementary/primary school or below)		
<i>Some high (secondary) school education</i>	-0.011 (2.928)	0.010 (2.787)
<i>Graduation from high (secondary) school</i>	-0.125 (2.673)	-0.107 (2.515)
<i>Graduation from college, university or other third-level institute</i>	-0.286 (2.639)	-0.258 (2.484)
<i>Post-graduate degree (Masters, PHD)</i>	-0.255 (2.637)	-0.229 (2.482)
Country	@	@
Constant	4.498	4.243
N	461	460
R-squared	0.467	0.507

Table 3. OLS models of national versus EU preferred level of decision regarding immigrant numbers.

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$. Source: [XXX_omitted] project elite survey Wave 1 – 2016.

Party group orientations are consistent with the majority within the EP. **PPEPP** and **S&D**, along with ALDE, the left (GUE–NGL) and the Greens, tend to support more coordination and EU integration by accepting the EU as the preferred level of governance for immigrant quotas. Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), as expected, tends to prefer national decisions over EU ones. In contrast, socio-demographic MP characteristics show insignificant results. When we add elite perceptions about their own populations into the analysis, in respect to preferences regarding national or EU prerogative on deciding the number of immigrants to accept, the relationships observed in Model 1 still hold, such that the results support

H3b. Respondents who perceive the majority of people as being against the primacy of EU decisions tend to prefer national governance over EU integration (beta = 0.289).

Conclusions

About a decade ago, post-functionalists argued for the need to include public attitudes within grand theories of EU integration by framing them in different phases of the politicisation process. Our study moves from these arguments to investigate the role of the public in the politicised issue of integration in immigration policy and the reform of the Dublin system. We show a triggering effect of the refugee crisis, with both the public and political parties tending to increase rejectionist positions after the peak of arrivals. Along with right-wing parties (which traditionally adopt anti-immigrant positions), we also observed a significant shift in rejection for both centre-right and centre-left parties. As parties tend to co-opt rejectionist positions on the acceptance or refusal of immigrants under pressure from a concerned public, we hypothesised political elite co-optation on the conservation of national prerogatives over immigration quotas and, consequentially, opposition of further EU integration under the Dublin system. Our analyses show that the higher the percentage of the public rejecting extra-EU immigrants, the more political elites tend to prefer a national rather than an EU quota system. Moreover, political representatives tend to prefer national decision-making on quotas when they perceive that a majority of people supports this position.

Our results contribute to the literature on both public–elite relationships and politicisation. Within the politicised refugee crisis, the public matters to political elites

since they tend to co-opt challenging anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic parties to align with public sentiments. This public–elite convergence transcends the ‘who is cuing who’ question because it has implications for EU integration within a perspective of reciprocal public–elite influence (Steenbergen, Edwards and de Vries, 2007).

We confirm that elected representatives react to politicisation, especially within a core state power issue (Shimmelfenning, 2020). Moreover, in this case, politicisation limits further integration even if there is not an *ad hoc* electoral competition such a referendum at stake. Elites seem, then, to prevent the (electoral) consequences of politicisation when challenging (extreme right-wing/TAN) political entrepreneurs gain consensus because of the crisis.

Since our analyses concern national political spaces, it may be useful also for governmentalist approaches that investigate public constraints to mainstream parties and government action (see Ripoll Servent, 2019). At the same time, the effects we observe at the individual level spread across different member states, showing an underlying European dimension to the issue. Perhaps the fact that, despite a resilient majority pushing for more co-ordination on the relocation issue, rebels have emerged within the European People’s Party and the Socialists²² suggests that public concern may have implications for core EU institutions.

²² See the vote on ‘Making Relocation Happen’ on May 18, 2017 (<https://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-making-relocation-happen-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution.html>).

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