

The 2015 Refugee Crisis and Political Alienation in the EU

Name: Kim Spaansen
Student number:
Class: ES4
Date: 16/05/2021
Supervisor: Mr. Funk
Second Reader: Ms. Weijerman
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The Hague University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Management and Organisation
European Studies

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Preface

This dissertation has been written to finalize the European Studies program at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. I would like to thank everyone who supported me during the writing process. With a special thanks to my supervisor Mr. Funk for all the guidance and support he has given even during times of a pandemic. Furthermore, I would like to thank my friends and family for all their support during this project.

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List of Acronyms

- EU: European Union
- EP: European Parliament
- EC: European Commission
- EU Member States abbreviations

Belgium	BE	Lithuania	LT
Bulgaria	BG	Luxembourg	LU
Czechia	CZ	Hungary	HU
Denmark	DK	Malta	MT
Germany	DE	The Netherlands	NL
Estonia	EE	Austria	AT
Ireland	IE	Poland	PL
Greece	EL	Portugal	PT
Spain	ES	Romania	RO
France	FR	Slovenia	SI
Croatia	HR	Slovakia	SK
Italy	IT	Finland	FI
Sweden	SE	Republic of Cyprus	CY
Latvia	LV	United Kingdom	UK

Executive Summary

A vital element of liberal democracy is the relationship between a government and its citizens, which is often characterised by the concept of political support or its reverse, political alienation. Ideally, this relationship should display political support since this indicates a high level of trust in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy; however, this is not always the case in most democracies (Borre, 2000). When the degree of political alienation is high, this will damage a governments' legitimacy. In order to determine what causes a sense of alienation, studies show a strong connection between critical issues in generating political alienation among citizens (Miller, 1974). Borre (2000) created the theory of critical issues, which argues that it is a government's cosmopolitan response to a critical issue that conflicts with isolationist values, which will generate political alienation.

This research aimed to test the theory of critical issues on a larger scale as it has only proven itself to be trustworthy on a national level. By applying the theory using the 2015 Refugee Crisis, the impact of a critical issue on the degree of political alienation has been measured on an EU level. The central research question goes as follows: "How did the European Union's response to the 2015 Refugee crisis impact the degree of political alienation among EU citizens?". In order to measure political alienation, three indicators have been used; namely, the extent to which citizens feel their voice counts in the EU, the degree of distrust in politics, and the level of dissatisfaction with EU institutions.

The findings show that the EU created the European immigration policy to respond to the refugee crisis, which had a cosmopolitan nature. As predicted, some Member States were more likely to reject this policy rather than support it. The countries showing the most resistance were considered to be isolationist. To support Borre's theory, the degree of political alienation should have increased in more isolationist countries. However, in both cosmopolitan and isolationist countries, EU citizens showed more political support than political alienation in 2019 than in 2014. Therefore, the refugee crisis did not increase the share of politically alienated voters, and Borre's theory cannot be fully supported on an EU level.

Ever since this research did not take national events into account, it is recommended that future research focuses more on the role critical issues have on a national level. Additionally, even if the degree of political alienation did not increase, the share of Eurosceptic parties did grow significantly during the 2019 EP elections. Therefore, it is also recommended to conduct more research on the relationship between the politically alienated voter and one's likelihood of supporting anti-EU parties.

Introduction

The European refugee crisis that erupted in 2015 vividly exposed massive flaws in EU governance. Hundreds of thousands of people were fleeing war-torn countries and risking their lives to reach Europe. Rather than being offered a haven, they were exposed to an absence of a coherent EU immigration policy and different policies being pursued by the different Member States. Europe has displayed the arbitrariness of its borders, both internally as externally (United Nations, n.d.). Not only did the crisis dominate the headlines, but it was also causing an intense political debate. While most EU citizens seemed to accept the challenge and tried to develop a humanitarian solution, a significant minority of populations felt threatened in their way of life (Magone, 2019). It is clear that there was little consensus around the EU's response to the crisis, and this seems to have made European citizens wonder about the legitimacy and usefulness of the Union.

Public sovereignty is often seen to be the fundamental idea of liberal democracy. This sovereignty is ensured by a political system elected through free and fair elections, high political participation of the people, human rights protection, and law rule (Barnett & Low, 2009). Another vital element of a democracy is the relationship between a government and society, which is often characterised by either the concept of political support or its reverse, political alienation. An ideal democracy should have a strong relationship between a society and its political system since this indicates a high level of trust in politicians, satisfaction with democracy, and legitimate political institutions (Borre, 2000). However, this is not always the case in most democracies.

Scholars argue that the changing European map and rapid expansion of international relations raise a new array of issues and a new political alienation pattern, which requires a new theoretical framework for the concept of political alienation (Borre, 2000). Studies show a strong connection between the role of critical issues in generating a sense of political alienation among citizens (Borre, 2000; Miller, 1974). As a result, the theory of critical issues was developed to show that certain events have a disproportionate impact on increasing political alienation. This theory claims that a government tends to respond to a critical issue by creating a cosmopolitan policy. This policy would conflict with nationalist or isolationist values among the mass public (Borre, 2000)

Critical issues seem to play a significant part in generating political alienation among citizens and, therefore, in damaging governments' legitimacy (Miller, 1974). The refugee crisis is an example of a critical issue for the EU and has far-reaching political consequences for the Union and its Member States. Along with an increase in the support for eurosceptic and

populist parties, democratic dissatisfaction and distrust in politicians seem to be widespread (Kriesi, 2020).

The theory of critical issues has only been tested on a national level. In order to understand whether the theory can be trustworthy on an EU level, it will be tested using the case of the 2015 Refugee Crisis. By doing so, it may be easier to predict future changes in the European electorate as a result of critical issues and politically alienated EU citizens. The dissertation's central question is: "How did the European Union's response to the 2015 refugee crisis impact the degree of political alienation among EU citizens?". The central research question is rather broad; therefore, three sub-questions are created to provide greater insight into the crisis's role in generating political alienation. The sub-questions are: 1) What are the policies and ideology of the EU in response to a critical issue such as the 2015 Refugee Crisis? 2) Which social groups are becoming politically alienated by the present course of the EU integration process? 3) What political consequences are seen in the European electorate as a result of the crisis?

This dissertation will delve deeper into the political consequences of the crisis by examining the electoral behaviour in the 2014 and 2019 EP elections and public opinion surveys measuring democratic satisfaction and trust in EU institutions. After discussing the research methods, a literature review will introduce political alienation and its indicators, causes, and relevant political values. Additionally, background information on the theory of critical issues and the EU's response to the refugee crisis is under discussion. After doing so, the findings will be analysed, and it will become clear how the EU's response to the refugee crisis impacted the degree of political alienation among EU citizens.

Research Methodology

This chapter sets out the research methodology for the dissertation. This research aims to analyse the relationship between critical issues and political alienation and to study this in a larger perspective by using a case study. The central research question "*How did the European Union's response to the 2015 Refugee crisis impact the degree of political alienation among EU citizens?*" is a relationship-based research question. Therefore, this dissertation deals with dependent and independent variables. The indicators of political alienation may be described as attitudes towards the political system. This research has investigated the relationship between the 2015 Refugee Crisis and attitudes towards the political system, which makes the independent variable the crisis and the dependent variable attitudes towards the political system. Three dependent variables have been used: voters feeling powerless, distrust in the political system and dissatisfaction with democracy. These variables are perceived to be indicators of political alienation and relevant data from 2014 to 2019 has been included to provide a clear understanding of trends among voters. The group of interest that has been studied are EU citizens. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been conducted, and these will be explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Type of research

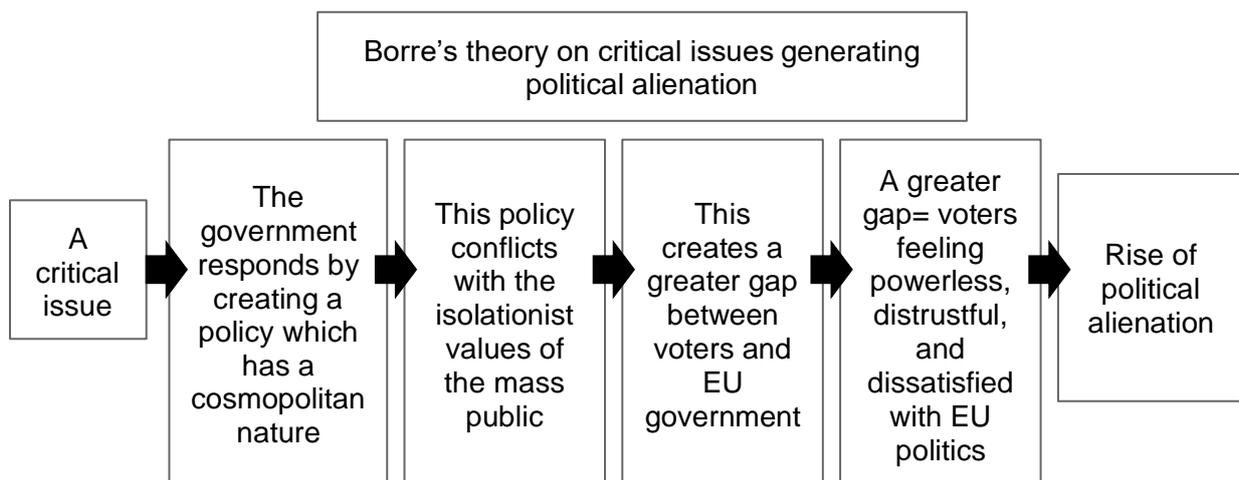
The first sub-question: "*What are the policies and ideology of the EU in response to a critical issue such as the 2015 Refugee Crisis?*" has a more descriptive nature and has been answered through content analysis and qualitative research. The reason for including this question is because the answer provides more insight into the characteristics of the EU's response to critical issues. Using Borre's theory of critical issues and political alienation (2000), a definition for critical issues has been given that justifies the selected case. According to this theory, the government's responses on critical issues often have a cosmopolitan nature that conflicts with nationalist values, which will generate political alienation. Therefore, academic sources and journals have been used to operationalise cosmopolitanism, primary sources (EU policies) have been used to study the EU's response and these policies can be analysed to see whether these responses have a cosmopolitan nature.

The second sub-question: "*Which social groups are becoming politically alienated by the present course of the EU integration process?*" has been answered through content analysis. By examining various academic articles and theories, a comprehensive definition for political alienation has been given. The concept of political alienation has been operationalised by using multiple studies, for example, Borre's theory of critical issues (2000), by analysing the dimensions of political alienation as stated by Finifter (1970), and by using a study

conducted by Thijssen & Dierickx (2001) on the relationship between extreme right parties and political alienation. To define the politically alienated voter, research conducted by Miller & Listhaug (1993) and Hobolt & de Vries (2016) have been used to find relevant political values and social background factors of politically alienated citizens. The reason for the first and second sub-question being descriptive was that both sub-questions described the findings on the ideology of the EU's response to the refugee crisis and the characteristics of the politically alienated citizens.

The final sub-question is *"What political consequences are seen in the European electorate as a result of the crisis?"*. To answer this, content analysis and survey data have been used to measure the degree of political alienation among EU citizens from 2014 till 2019. By systematically collecting data from post-election surveys, evaluation reports, and data from the Populist, a better understanding of the development of the degree of political alienation was given. As shown, the degree of political alienation can be measured by looking at the degree to which voters feel powerless, distrust in the political system and the level of dissatisfaction with democracy. After studying the indicators of political alienation, a conclusion was drawn about the impact of the 2015 Refugee Crisis on the degree of political alienation among EU citizens. The results also indicated a relationship between a critical issue and the rise of Euroscepticism.

Figure 1; Borre's theory of critical issues visualized



Measuring political alienation

The first variable studied the degree to which EU voters feel powerless in European politics. Using data from the standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019 an understanding of how citizens feel their voice matters in EU politics was given. The most relevant survey question to measure

the first variable was "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement - my voice counts in the EU".

The level of distrust in the political system as a dependent variable was studied by gathering and analysing survey data from the Eurobarometer and Eurostat. Firstly, the standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019 was used to provide an overview of how the level of trust in political institutions, both on a national and EU level, has evolved from 2014 till 2019. This survey consists of approximately 1000 face-to-face interviews per Member State. One of the questions asked is: "How much trust do you have in national governments and parliaments and in the European Union?". Additionally to the Eurobarometer, data from Eurostat has been included to study the confidence levels of EU citizens in the European Parliament from 2014 to 2019. Citizens are asked to express their confidence levels in multiple EU institutions by choosing the following alternatives: 'tend to trust', 'tend not to trust' and 'don't know or 'no answer'. The data from these surveys have been included in the results section of the dissertation.

The third dependent variable, the degree of dissatisfaction in democracy, was studied by conducting the standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019 survey that asked: "How satisfied are you about the way democracy works in the EU?". Additionally, two voter studies (from 2014 and 2019) conducted by European Election Studies are included. Especially the data received from the following question was most relevant to use: "How satisfied are you, on the whole, with the way democracy works in your country/ the European Union?".

Case selection

This study focused on testing Borre's theory of critical issues being the cause of political alienation (2000). To test this theory from an EU perspective, it was necessary to select a case that would meet the critical issue requirements and be relevant for all EU Member States. Ever since the 2015 Refugee Crisis had an international character, was essential and endured through changing governments, it made for a relevant case that had high potential in generating political alienation among EU citizens.

The first unit of analysis was the EU's response to the refugee crisis. The second unit of analysis was the evaluation of EU policies in response to the crisis. This public opinion evaluation was retrieved from a report created by the Pew Research Center, which dealt with the public opinion of the refugee crisis and the EU's role.

Current literature seems to validate the view that critical issues dealing with refugees and migration are most likely to cause a sense of political alienation among citizens. Therefore, the expected outcome based on the literature was that after 2015 citizens felt less powerful in

impacting politics, that the levels of trust in the political system decreased, and the degree of dissatisfaction with democracy grew.

Justification research methods

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used in combination with content analysis to answer the research questions. This study's quantitative nature lies in its dependence on the numbers and graphs confirming the theory that is tested. Therefore, standard quantitative methods such as the analysis of survey results have been included. Additionally, to provide a greater understanding of the theory of critical issues, it was necessary to explain relevant concepts and events. This was given through a literature review which gave in-depth insights on the topic of political alienation. Additionally, content analysis has been used since this allows researchers to recover and examine the nuances of societal trends. It is also an important bridge between purely quantitative and purely qualitative research methods.

Limitations

Measuring the degree of political alienation among EU citizens by using various surveys has its limitations. As these surveys have been conducted among approximately a few hundred to thousands of interviewees per Member State, this does not deliver significant in-depth data from a population but rather a generalised view of a wider audience. Despite this, the sources are still acknowledged and used in various academic studies, making the answers provided by a wide range of EU citizens are still valuable for this dissertation.

According to Borre, the chances of a crisis related to refugees and migration negatively impacting governments' legitimacy are slightly more prominent than other types of critical issues. Therefore, while this research might conclude that the refugee crisis did generate a sense of political alienation among EU citizens, it cannot automatically be assumed this is the case for all types of critical issues. Even though this might be the case, studying the impact of one critical issue on the degree of political alienation may show the usefulness of repeating this theory-testing research on another type of critical issue.

Literature Review

Defining Political Alienation

This chapter will introduce the concept of political alienation. Scholars such as Finifter (1970), Miller & Listhaug (1993) and Borre (2000) who have studied this field of research have delivered multiple suggestions to define political alienation and its indicators. These studies will now be discussed through a literature review to elaborate on the existing knowledge of political alienation.

Being alienated from the political system

The concept of alienation refers to having no connection with the people or group in one's environment. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, political alienation became popularised in political economy and sociology. Only around the 1960s, political scientists started to use the term political alienation to explain the intense feelings of opposition against the polity expressed by US citizens (Ranade & Norris, 1984). Literature defines political alienation as a lasting form of estrangement from some aspects of one's political system (Olsen, 1969; Finifter, 1970). Therefore, political alienation is the opposite of the most desired type of relationship between a government and its citizens, namely, the concept of political support that indicates a high level of respect for authority and political institutions' legitimacy (Borre, 2000). The extent to which citizens experience a degree of political alienation characterises the relationship between a society and its political system. An individual's expression of political alienation is perceived as a sense of distrust, rejection and negative attitude towards the prevailing political system, indicating that their relationship with the political entity has become fundamentally flawed (Thijssen & Dierickx, 2001). Rather than being a short-term expression of dissatisfaction, political alienation is a lasting form of estrangement with a long-term orientation towards a political system (Citrin, McClosky, Shanks, & Sniderman, 1975).

Relationship between ideology and political alienation

Not only is political alienation defined by a level of distrust in politicians and dissatisfaction with the political system, but it also offers a significant determinant to an individual's political behaviour (Aberbach, 1969; Denters & Geurts 1993). Looking at the relationship between political alienation and ideology, in which the term ideology refers to both left/right self-identification and policy preference in politics, research shows little consensus. Some argue that right-wing conservatives tend to be most alienated (Wolfinger et al., 1964). These studies claim that the politically alienated citizen is more conservative and more isolationist than the

mass public (Miller & Listhaug, 1993). However, others show how liberals tend to be the most politically alienated because liberalism encourages holding a critical view of political institutions (Citrin, McClosky, Shanks, & Sniderman, 1975). Finally, some studies argue that liberals and conservatives, especially those who find themselves on the extreme ends of the political spectrum, are more politically alienated than those locating themselves in the centre, between extremes (Lipset & Schneider, 1983).

Gap between government policy and the voter

While it seems complicated to find a direct relationship between one's ideology and how that impacts the degree of political alienation, this can be found when looking at the element of distrust in politics without linking that to a fixed ideology. Political trust arises from the interplay between voter preferences and actions taken by the government; therefore, distrust develops when citizens perceive a gap between their preferred ideology and the political colour of their government (Miller & Listhaug, 1993). This discrepancy is defined as a policy distance and refers to the distance between a voter and government policy (Miller, 1974). In case a government's ideological orientation remains the same over a significant amount of time, it is likely to alienate those who do not identify with this ideology. Citizens who find themselves on the extremes of political ideologies, either left- or right-wing, tend to be most alienated since their demands are not easily reflected in government policy (Miller & Listhaug, 1993; Borre, 2000).

Causes of Political Alienation

While some scholars emphasise one's political development during adolescence to be the source of political alienation, others argue there is no solid research on the relationship between certain social factors and an individual's feeling of being alienated from the political system. In turn, they claim that the government and its policies cause a level of alienation among citizens. Since there seem to be multiple factors causing a sense of political alienation among citizens, these are now under discussion.

Social background factors of the politically alienated

Some argue that an individual's political socialisation strongly influences one's sense of being politically alienated. Such as the five-nation study conducted by Almond and Verba (1963), which discusses how the inadequate transmission of democratic norms through family, school and social groups is likely to generate a feeling of being politically alienated. These studies perceive social agents to be vital in creating experiences that introduce an individual to the

political process and expose them to democratic norms. When exposing someone to an environment in which these socialising agents distrust politicians and are cynical towards politics, political alienation will be encouraged (de Vreese, 2005; Gniewosz, Noack, & Buhl, 2009). Accordingly, a sense of alienation is developing over the years. Due to its reinforcement, being politically alienated becomes a habit, meaning that changing one's relationship to the political system becomes unlikely (Fox, 2015; Borja, 2017). With this in mind, Almond and Verba (1965) showed how political alienation tends to be higher among low-status and low-educated voters than high-status voters who are well educated. On the one hand, the level of education seems to be one of the most significant predictors of political alienation (Finifter, 1970). Nonetheless, later studies showed a growing number of students and middle-class citizens, displaying a sense of discontent with the political system (Barnes & Kaase, 1984).

The role of the government in generating alienation

More recent studies shifted the focus from social background factors to the government's role in generating a sense of political alienation. Scholars show that the cause for a declining level of confidence in politics and political dissatisfaction was the government's decisive role and its policies (Pharr & Putnam, 2001; Torcal & Montero, 2013). To add to these studies, Borre (2000) introduced a theory which claimed that it is the government's response to critical issues that plays a significant part in generating political alienation among citizens. According to Borre, the generating of political alienation seems to be event-based rather than determined by social background factors. Therefore, one's level of political trust and satisfaction with democracy can change after one election due to government policy changes.

Theoretical Framework using Borre's critical issues theory

The theory that perceives critical issues as the cause of political alienation argues that the emergence of critical issues, government policies on those issues, and the policy results are the sources of political alienation (Borre, 2000). This theory uses Miller's policy distance model that shows the vital role of issues in creating a greater policy distance between a government and voter, which generates distrust in politics (Miller & Listhaug, 1990). The policy distance model argues that a citizen's voter distance from a government policy is a critical determinant for a voter's support for the political system. In addition to using the policy distance model to determine the level of trust in politics, the "democratic paradox" is used to give a comparison between the average support for democracy and the degree of satisfaction with the way democracy operates (Dahl, 2000; Kriesi, 2020). This paradox refers to the discrepancy between satisfaction with- and support for the political system. Both the policy distance model

and the "democratic paradox" are used to study the widespread democratic dissatisfaction among European citizens.

Borre's theory of critical issues claims that other studies on political alienation are not addressing the impact of issues and ideology, both left- and right-wing, on generating a sense of alienation among citizens. The policy distance model merely speaks of which issues are most likely to generate alienation. This theory must, therefore, be supplemented with a theory of critical issues since these play a significant role in generating political alienation. The term 'critical issue' refers to a political event that has a disproportionate impact on the degree of political alienation among citizens. For an event to be critical, it must be essential and endure through changing governments (Miller & Listhaug, 1990). The majority of voters are most likely to be double alienated when a critical issue occurs, because they experience a great distance from the government policy, they are at odds with this policy, and they believe the demands of the people are not listened to (Borre, 2000).

The theory of critical issues as the cause of political alienation is based around the idea that when a critical issue occurs, governments tend to respond by creating a policy which has a cosmopolitan nature. Cosmopolitanism is often linked to the political elite. As a result, it is the cosmopolitan nature of government policies on critical issues that confront various kinds of nationalist or isolationist values of the mass public which leads to the masses being politically alienated (Miller, 1974; Borre, 2000). Since cosmopolitanism and isolationism play a significant role in Borre's theory, the role of political values in causing political alienation is discussed in further detail.

Political values; cosmopolitanism and isolationism

Most older literature on the role of political values in stimulating a sense of political alienation focuses on authoritarian values as the issue in democratic systems (Eysenck, 1954). These studies suggest that those who disagree with the current political system are automatically less likely to participate in the electoral process; therefore, they link political alienation to anti-democratic attitudes (Geurts & Denters, 1993). However, more recent studies on political alienation do not assume a direct link with anti-democratic attitudes, leading to voter turnout. Citizens who find themselves politically alienated may say they have very high democratic standards (Borre, 2000). As a result, the relationship between political support and political values is generally weak. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that a higher level of political alienation automatically leads to a higher voter turnout (Gabriel, 1998). Additionally, a government change may shift the focus of alienation to the extreme left/right, the libertarian- or conservative side (Borre, 2000). This idea argues that there is no constant relationship between political values and alienation. Studies show that a critical issue generates political

alienation due to the discrepancy between the citizen's preferred ideological orientation and that which the government is perceived to take (Borre, 2000; Miller & Listhaug, 1993). Especially for issues related to migration, citizens who place themselves on the right-wing political spectrum are likely to become alienated since impatience over the government's liberal policies has risen (Borre, 2000). This idea argues that a government's cosmopolitan response to such critical issues raises discontent among the mass public who prefer an isolationist government policy orientation.

The central idea of cosmopolitanism is that every human being has a global stature as an ultimate unit of moral concern; therefore, cosmopolitan thinkers long for a world where universal values are protected and enforced (Conversi, Leoussi & Smith, 2001). This approach has a universal and general nature that takes direct responsibility for fulfilling human rights, regardless of nationality (Pogge, 1992). As a result, having a supranational organisation is needed when it comes to cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan thinkers perceive hegemony and domination to be destructive processes and aim for human coexistence. As a result, cosmopolitanism relates to homogenisation and contemporary globalisation. Critics of cosmopolitanism argue it betrays a sense of sovereign legitimacy and that it equates with Westernisation (Conversi, Leoussi & Smith, 2001).

The concept of isolationism is often defined as the critical undercurrent in foreign policy and is most likely to describe the international community as a threat to the standard of domestic living conditions (Urbatsch, 2010). Isolationist thinkers prefer not to get involved in political developments outside their territorial borders and feel the need to protect the territorial integrity and fundamental national interest by distancing themselves from the external environment. Therefore, isolationism suggests that a nation is self-sufficient and tends to pursue isolationist foreign policies (Urbatsch, 2010; Oğuzlu, 2020). Also, isolationist movements tend to be led by intellectuals close to the dominant culture who stress the nation's uniqueness, making isolationism more appealing for individuals who feel estranged from a government's foreign policy (Conversi, Leoussi & Smith, 2001).

Just as with political alienation, the level of education seems to be a significant determinant of one's likeness to identify with being either a cosmopolitan or isolationist thinker. Watts and Free (1976) showed in an analysis of demographic variations that a higher proportion of cosmopolitans can be found among higher education groups. People with no to lower education were more likely to identify with being isolationist.

Measuring Political Alienation using the Critical Issues Theory

Dimensions of political alienation

Political alienation is by no means one-dimensional. Previous literature has identified three dimensions through which citizens express a sense of alienation. These dimensions help in crafting indicators that can measure the degree of political alienation among citizens. The first one is 'political powerlessness' (Seeman, 1959; Finifter, 1970; Southwell, 2008), which refers to one's inability to affect the political process. This indicator is often associated with an individual's withdrawal from political activity (Fox, 2015). The second dimension is 'political meaninglessness' (Finifter, 1970; Borja, 2017). This dimension suggests that individuals feel as if they lack the knowledge to understand politics, which results in a likeliness of withdrawal from the political process altogether due to the undermining of their capacity to participate actively (Denters & Geurts, 1993). The third dimension is 'political normlessness' (Finifter, 1970), which refers to the individual's degree of trust in the integrity of political institutions, politicians, and the political process. This dimension is associated with political cynicism and may lead to the withdrawal from politics or the desire to take remedial action (Southwell, 2012; Borja, 2017).

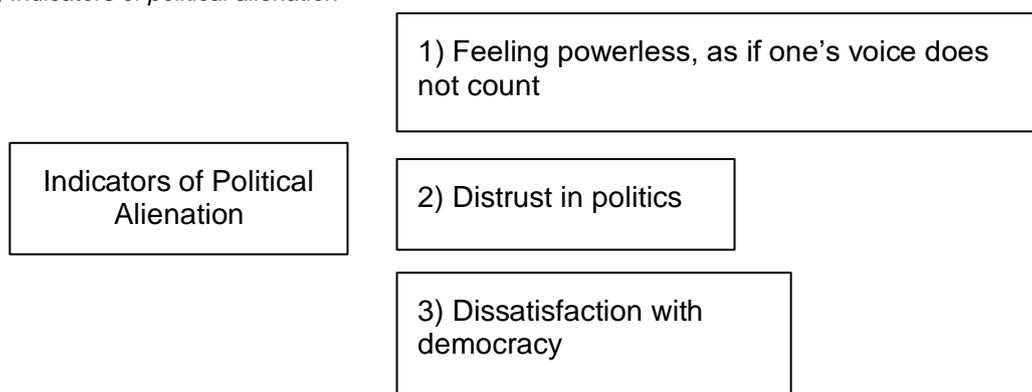
The indicators of political alienation

The three dimensions stated by Finifter are directly linked to the indicators used by Borre to measure the degree of political alienation among citizens. Political powerlessness is measured by looking at the extent to which voters feel powerlessness in impacting politics. This indicator looks at whether citizens feel their voice counts (Olsen, 1969; Borre, 2000). The second dimension, political normlessness is measured by looking at the level of distrust in politics citizens experience. Distrust in politics is associated with external efficacy, meaning an evaluation of the government's responsiveness and the extent to which it operates effectively and delivers according to the citizens' expectations (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975; Erikson, Luttbeg, & Tedin, 1980). Finally, political meaninglessness is measured by studying the degree of dissatisfaction people feel with the political system. Dissatisfaction with democracy concerns whether the elected officials are representative of the general public and an individual's assessment of how much influence they have in the government's decision-making process (Southwell, 2012).

Correlation between political alienation and the eurosceptic vote

These indicators show a clear overlap between political alienation, political discontent and 'anti-politics, which refers to citizens' turning away from mainstream parties and the political elite attempting to better or exploit an individual's negative attitude towards politics. This phenomenon indicates a causal relationship between them (Jennings, Stoker, & Twyman, 2016; Fox, 2020). In addition to the indicators, a more recent development is the rise of contemporary societies going through a wave of anti-politics (Jennings, Stoker, & Twyman, 2016), which results in citizens turning away from mainstream parties and goes hand in hand with the rise of populism in European politics. More scholars are now researching the

Figure 2; Indicators of political alienation



relationship between dissatisfaction among citizens with the current political system and their likelihood to vote for a populist and eurosceptic party. Studies show that the rise of democratic dissatisfaction has a solid connection to the rise of populist parties (Kriesi, 2020). This development indicates there is a relationship between political alienation and a eurosceptic vote. However, a causal link between political alienation and the rise of eurosceptic parties has not been proven (Fox, 2020; Thijssen & Dierickx, 2001). Studies show that while one's discontent with the EU's handling of a crisis is a major factor in explaining the defection from a pro-European to a Eurosceptic party, the degree to which an individual is adversely affected by the crisis plays a significant role as well (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). Therefore, the result section might show a relationship between the degree of political alienation among citizens and the popularity of the Eurosceptic vote. However, since there is little consensus on using the Eurosceptic vote as a sign of political alienation it will not be used as an indicator.

Using the 2015 Refugee Crisis as a critical issue to measure the impact on alienation

Never has the EU seen such a high number of people applying for asylum as with the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015, in which more than 1.3 million people fled to the EU Member States (Pew Research Center, 2016). This crisis is perceived to be a wake-up call for the European Union because it showed little consensus among the EU Member States about the

EU's responsibility of welcoming the refugees. While most Member States and citizens seemed to accept the new challenge and tried to find a solution, a significant minority of populations felt threatened in their way of life. Studies argue their response had a more isolationist nature and stimulated the rise of right-wing eurosceptic parties (Magone, 2019).

The 2015 Refugee Crisis meets all critical issue requirements because it is an issue that is vital for the political system and endures through changing governments (Miller & Listhaug, 1990; Borre, 2000). Since 1999, the EU has established a Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which, after multiple reforms, is now built upon three pillars; 1) efficient asylum and return procedures, 2) solidarity and a fair share of responsibility, and 3) strengthened partnerships with third countries (European Commission, 2016). In 2015, due to the high migratory pressure, the Union policies on asylum were showing a series of deficiencies and gaps. The crisis tested the EU's main building blocks, including its Member States' notion of an ever-closer union (Maani, 2018). While some Member States have taken a leading role during the crisis, such as Germany, by hosting the highest number of refugees in the EU, others took the opposite approach. For example, Hungary, which rejected all of the asylum requests made in 2015. Other deficiencies like the Dublin Regulation, which required asylum seekers to claim refugee in the first country they entered, leading to unfairly burdens of countries geographically closer to the war-torn countries, brought even more tension between the EU Member States (Guild, Gros, Blockmans, & Carrera, 2015).

The crisis has had a significant impact on the European Union, the internationalisation of politics and society, and the origins of dissatisfaction with democracy. Also, Miller (1974) found that critical issues related to EU integration and refugees are most likely to create a discrepancy between a government and its citizens since the average voter is less optimistic about these topics than most liberal governments. The emergence of refugee-related issues has created a new source of alienation on the right where the politically alienated think the government pushes too fast on the EU issue and allows too many refugees to settle (Borre, 2000). Urbatsch (2010) shows that unpopular governments will face more significant restrictions in pursuing foreign policy agendas because the mass public will be even more resistant to international engagements when they feel alienated from the political system. Regarding the relation between the refugee crisis and widespread democratic dissatisfaction, studies show that the origin of this dissatisfaction seems to be the inadequate representation of citizens' demands, caused by the lack of responsiveness of the government and a change in demands of the citizens. As Kriesi (2020) argued, mainstream parties have avoided issues such as the rise of conflicts related to EU integration and the increasing number of migrants. Also, they failed to respond to the demands of the so-called 'losers' of globalisation. The winners are cosmopolitan, and the losers being nationalist (De Vries, 2017; Katz & Mair, 2018).

EU Politics and the European Parliamentary elections

Perceiving the EP elections results as a legitimate source to study the voter's satisfaction with the EU is considered to be a controversial topic in the existing literature on EP elections. Older literature, such as Reif and Schmitt (1980), argues that EP elections are so-called "second-order elections". This model suggests that the elections mimic midterm elections in which voters merely express their grievances with national governments (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996). However, more recent studies show that EU-related concerns are becoming more important for understanding electoral behaviour during EP elections. Hobolt and de Vries (2016) suggest in a study on the impact of the economic crisis on the eurosceptic vote that those who disapproved of the EU's performance during the crisis were more likely to have a eurosceptic vote. This study argues that since voters' evaluations of the EU impact their electoral behaviour, EP elections do not merely represent national considerations suggested by the second-order model.

During the 2014 EP elections, which were held right in the middle of an economic crisis, it was the first time that more EU citizens tended to mistrust the EU institutions than those who still trusted them (European Election Studies, n.d.). Then, five years later, the rise of the eurosceptic vote continues to gain popularity. The elections took place between 23 and 26 May 2019 across 28 European countries. During the 2014 elections, eurosceptic parties (both left- and right-wing) gained around 28% of all votes. Five years later, this share increased to approximately 33% (Rooduijn et al., 2019). In some member states, such as Hungary and Poland, eurosceptic parties even received more than half of all votes. The current European political landscape looks as following; the EPP (182 seats), the S&D (154 seats), Renew Europe (108 seats), the GREENS/EFA (74 seats), ID (73 seats), ECR (62 seats), other/non attached members (57 seats) and the GUE/NGL (41 seats) (European Parliament, 2019). Most established parties, such as the EPP and S&D, lost a fair share of parliament seats. The winner of the elections seems to be Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), an anti-immigration, eurosceptic and right-wing populist party that has almost doubled its number of seats.

Results

The policies and ideology of the EU in response to the 2015 Refugee Crisis

The political nature of the European immigration policy

The European immigration policy, which is based on Articles 79 and 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), is described as a forward-looking policy that is based on solidarity and aims to establish a harmonised approach to dealing with both regular and irregular immigration (European Parliament, 2021). Its main objectives include defining a balanced approach to immigration, creating proper management of migration flows, ensuring equal treatment of third-country nationals residing legally in the Member States and enhancing measures to combat irregular immigration while promoting closer cooperation between non-member countries in all fields. In sum, the EU aims at establishing a consistent level of rights and obligations for regular immigrants, comparable to that for EU citizens (European Parliament, 2021). The European immigration policy shows a cosmopolitan nature as the policy is based on moral obligations and aims to enforce human rights for every human being, regardless of their nationality. Additionally, in contrast to most isolationist policies, the immigration policy pleads for cooperation among nations and emphasises the need for a supranational organisation to coordinate the refugee influx.

As with most policies with a cosmopolitan nature, critics argue it betrays a sense of sovereign legitimacy (Magone, 2019). Studies argue that most European leaders have been chiefly occupied with political scaremongering about increased security threats posed by taking in refugees. Rather than actively filling the gaps left by policy failures and leaving this task up for local volunteer groups and civil society actors across the continent (Bhambra, 2017). Proposed reforms to EU asylum laws, put forward in May 2016, mostly encountered resistance. Changes to the EU Dublin regulation needed to ensure a more equitable distribution of responsibility for asylum processing. Instead of seeking a regional disembarkation agreement among EU countries, the Member States focused on creating disembarkation platforms outside the EU (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Only in 2020, the European Commission proposed amendments to some of the proposals on the reform of the Dublin system and the Asylum Procedure Regulation (European Commission, 2021).

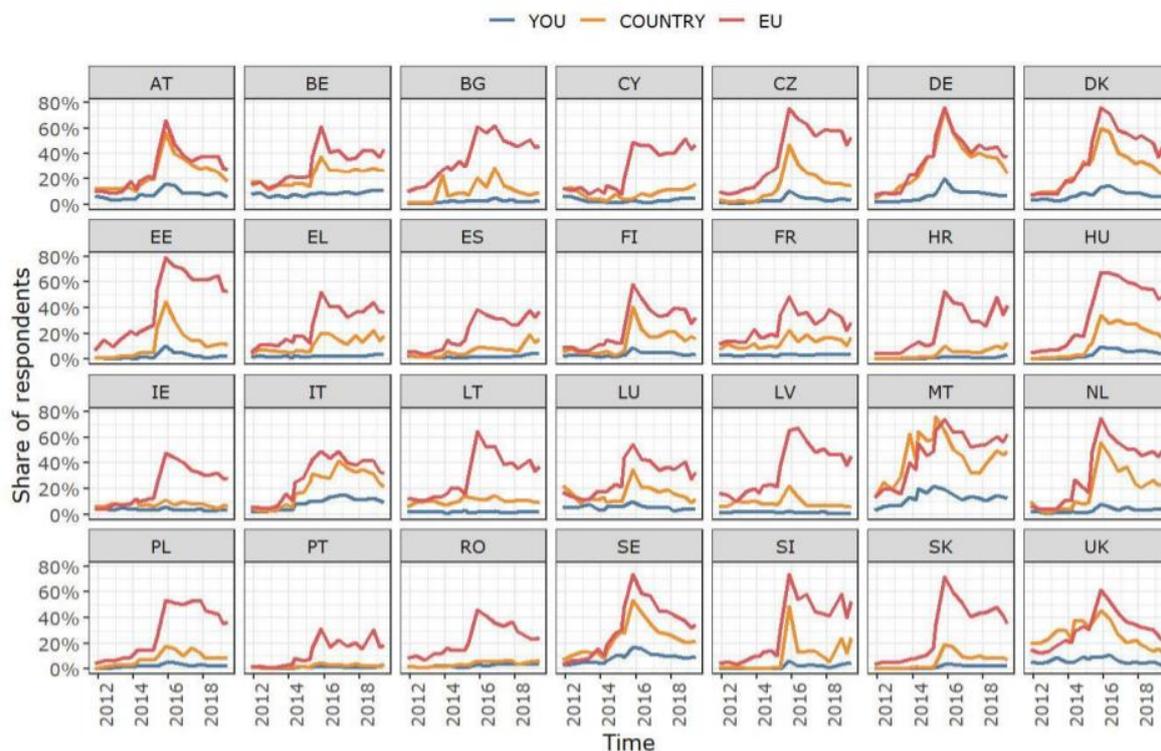
Freedom of movement of persons and the immigration issue

In order to understand the complications of the EU immigration policy, this research must first focus on the immigration issue and the fundamental freedoms of the EU. Immigration brought about a critical political issue in the EU because of its electoral impact and the significance of the EU single market. One of the 1986 Single European Act's "four freedoms" of movement is the free movement of labour; this includes EU Member States allowing complete freedom of movement and residence for EU citizens and having mutual border controls. This freedom is essentially harmonised and governed by the European Commission and Parliament (European Parliament, 2021). The freedom of movement is a critical economic and institutional imperative of European integration that has led to two contradictory political developments. Namely: 1) a plea of EU institutions and some Member States to develop a common, 'harmonised' EU immigration policy including Third Country Nationals (TCN's); and 2) resistance from the other Member States to this development (Geddes, 2003). Even though most studies see a harmonised immigration policy as necessary if the EU is to meet its goals of free movement of persons, it is argued that because of national resistance, the harmonisation of the immigration policy has lagged behind other EU policy areas (Geddes, 2003; Joppke, 1999).

Political salience and attitudes to migration

Studies argue that it is the intensity of political salience of a migration issue combined with institutional constraints in a given country that determines whether a national government shows support for a harmonising EU policy (Geddes, 2003). When there is high political salience, countries will either block harmonisation, push for maximum restrictiveness in the harmonisation, or allow for a relatively comprehensive harmonised European immigration policy (Givens & Luedtke, 2004). When political salience is low, it is more likely for institutions to succeed with harmonising a migration policy. Since 2011, the Standard Eurobarometer has asked EU citizens whether immigration is one of the most critical issues at the personal, national, and EU level. This question is regarded as capturing the degree of issue salience (Scipioni, Tintori, Alessandrini, Migali, & Natale, 2019). Figure 1 illustrates the trends for this question since 2011 and shows that the salience of migration has witnessed a significant increase.

Figure 3; Saliency of immigration at the personal, country, and EU level



Source: European Commission, 2020

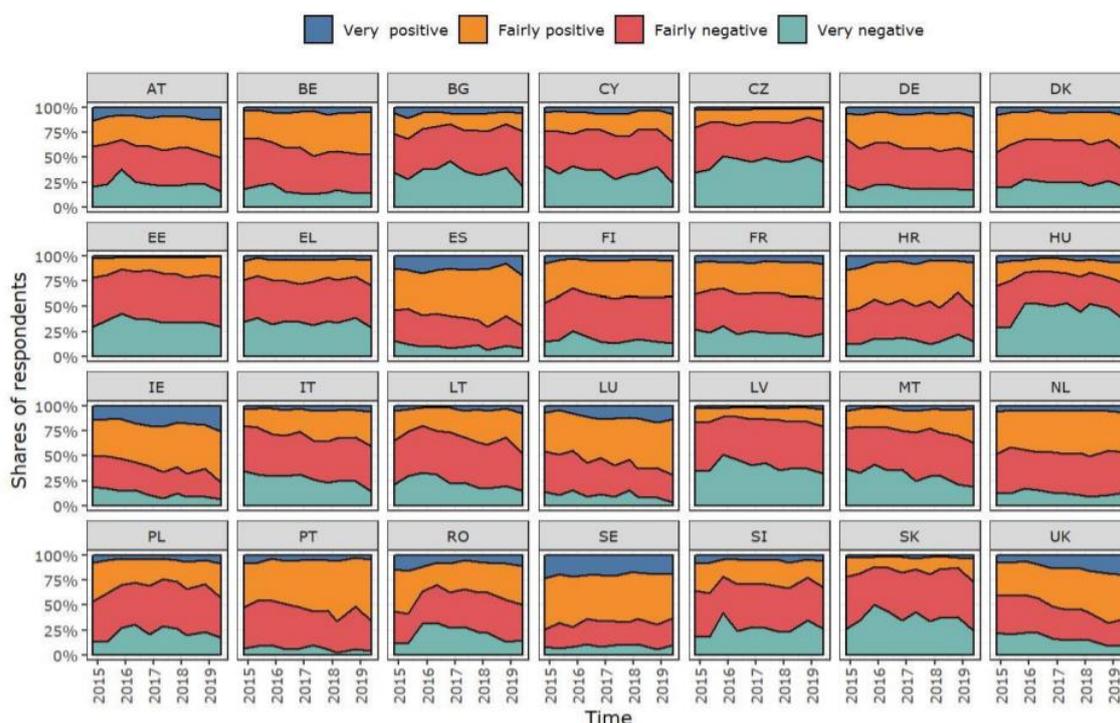
Studying the EU Member States' attitudes towards immigration and how this differs depending on demographics lays the foundation in finding a relationship between isolationist values shown by countries and the degree of political alienation among EU citizens. In order to understand whether the Member States had a more cosmopolitan or isolationist attitude, research was conducted on the extent to which governments were welcoming or showing resistance towards refugees. Isolationism is often linked to being opposed to immigration as it perceives the international community as a threat to standard domestic living conditions (Oğuzlu, 2020). As a result, isolationists tend to pursue foreign policies which fundamentally operate from national interest and tend to show opposition towards immigration (Urbatsch, 2010). Therefore, isolationist governments are more likely to reject a cosmopolitan policy such as the EU immigration policy. Accordingly, this will generate a gap between the voter and their government, leading to a sense of political alienation (Borre, 2000). The European Social Survey shows a clear divide between European regions when it comes to their attitudes towards immigration. While northern and western Europe show a more positive view towards immigration, southern and eastern Europe remains rather negative (2014). Countries such as Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria & Austria dominated the immigration debate with their hardline anti-

immigrant approach. At the same time, Germany and Sweden took a more welcoming approach towards refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

To start with data retrieved from the Gallup Migrant Acceptance Index, which provides an overview of the most- and least-accepting countries in the world for migrants. Exactly 145 countries were included, and European countries were significantly represented at the bottom of the scale, being least-accepting to migrants; Slovakia (place 136), Latvia (place 138), Croatia (place 142) and Hungary (place 144). Research shows that most people are more likely to want immigration levels in their countries to either stay the same or increase; this is true for every major region globally except for Europe. Europeans are most negative toward immigration, with the majority (52.1%) saying immigration levels should be decreased (Espipova, Ray, & Pugliese, 2021).

However, the attitudes towards immigration are significantly different per region (Figure 2). The majority in Northern European countries, such as Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, say they would like to see the immigration levels stay the same or increase. With the UK being the sole exception. The UK and most residents living in the Mediterranean region (such as Greece and Italy) would like to see immigration levels decreased (International Organization for Migration, 2015).

Figure 4; Attitudes towards immigration from outside the EU



Source: European Commission, 2020

EU citizens who become politically alienated

Factors determining one's degree of political alienation

As shown by the European Parliament (2019), younger EU citizens are more likely than older citizens to agree that their voice matters in the EU. While 60% of those aged under 25 agree and 31% disagree, 53% of those aged 55 and over seem to agree, and 41% disagree. Also, citizens who finished their education at 20 years or older are more likely to feel their voice counts (67%) than those who left school around 15 years (40%). In addition to age and the level of education, citizens who have difficulties paying their bills most of the time are less likely to feel like their voice counts than those who rarely experience difficulties.

When looking at the individual profile of those trusting the EU, research shows that the level of education plays a significant role. The highly educated tend to trust the EU more than the low educated. Age also plays a role since at the EU level; older individuals are less likely to trust the EU than the youngest (aged 15-24). However, a mixed picture arises when the relationship between age and trust in the EU is analysed across the Member States, which suggests that a country's history and contextual factors play an essential role in determining one's relationship with the EU (European Commission, 2019; Scipioni et al., 2019). Regarding the labour market role, citizens who are less likely to trust EU institutions are often unemployed or manual workers, while higher levels of trust can be found among students and citizens with other occupations in employment (European Commission, 2020). Turning to the territorial dimension of trust in the EU, which also shows great differences in trust regarding citizens' place of living; namely, rural, small and large towns. In the UK, Slovenia, Poland, Sweden, Greece, Croatia, the Netherlands, and Malta, people living in large towns tend to trust the EU more than those living in rural areas. There is no clear relationship between the two (European Commission, 2020) for all other Member States.

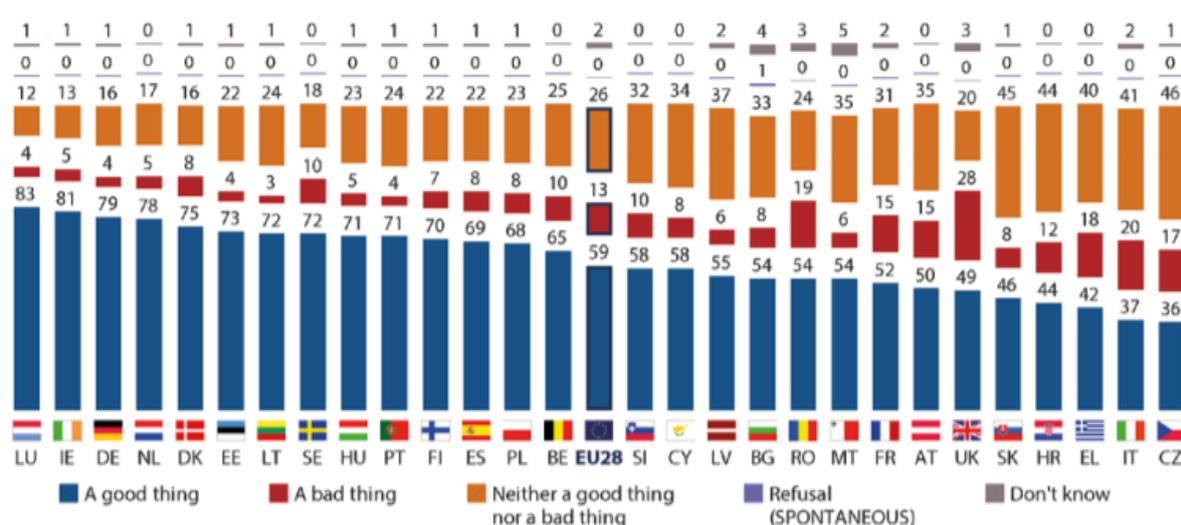
The extent to which EU citizens are satisfied with the way EU democracy works seems different across socio-demographic groups. However, the role of education plays a significant role again. Those who finished their education at 20 years or older are more satisfied (83%) than those who left school at 15 years (68%). Also, citizens who experience difficulties with paying their bills are less satisfied with the functioning of the EU (57%) compared to citizens who rarely experience this (80%). The role of education and lack of employment does not only seem to play a significant role in someone's level and satisfaction in EU politics but also influences one's likeability of anti-EU voting. Studies show that in Europe, areas with lower employment rates or with a less-educated workforce are also more likely to vote anti-EU (Dijkstra, Poelman, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

Member States opposing or supporting EU integration

Citizens showing opposition towards EU integration is considered an indication of distrust in the political system, which provides a measure for political alienation (Borre, 2000). Studies show that those who support the core values of liberal democracy are also more likely to support the European Union. In contrast, supporters for more direct forms of citizen influence tend to be more Eurosceptic (Van der Burg, Popa, Hobolt & Schmitt, 2021). Strong liberal institutions are necessary for the formation of structured, positive attitudes towards the EU. Critics of the Union argue there is a democratic deficit, meaning that the electoral pillar is underdeveloped and that no opportunities are offered to hold anyone accountable for EU policies (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). Data from the European Election Studies (2019) shows specific attitudes that determine one's support for the EU, namely, economic satisfaction, support for migration, education, wealth and social class (Van der Burg, Popa, Hobolt & Schmitt, 2021).

A positive view of EU membership is more common among citizens who place themselves on the left of the political spectrum (71%) than those in the centre (60%) or on the right (56%). Looking at the European Parliamentary elections results in 2019, People who voted in the recent European Parliament elections are more likely than those who did not vote to see EU membership as a good thing (68% compared with 50%). A positive view of EU membership is also influenced by perceptions of whether their voice matters in the EU (75% of those who agree that their voice counts say that EU membership is a good thing (Figure 3), compared with 38% of those who disagree) (European Parliament, 2019).

Figure 5; How citizens perceive membership with the EU (% of citizens)



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 2019

When it comes to EU integration, the politically alienated are more likely to show discontent and vote for political parties that show an opposing view towards this (Fox, 2020; Hobolt & De Vries, 2016). A report on the geography of EU discontent shows that the votes for parties opposed and strongly opposed to European integration are widespread across the EU. Hot spots for anti-EU voting include Southern Denmark, Northern Italy, Southern Austria, Eastern Germany, Eastern Hungary and Southern Portugal. Overall, the Eurosceptic vote is more prevalent in rural areas and small towns compared to larger cities. Votes for parties strongly opposed to European integration are almost nonexistent in Spain, the Baltics, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Belgium and Ireland. A more optimistic view towards EU integration can be found in West Germany, Bulgaria, Northern Portugal and Slovakia.

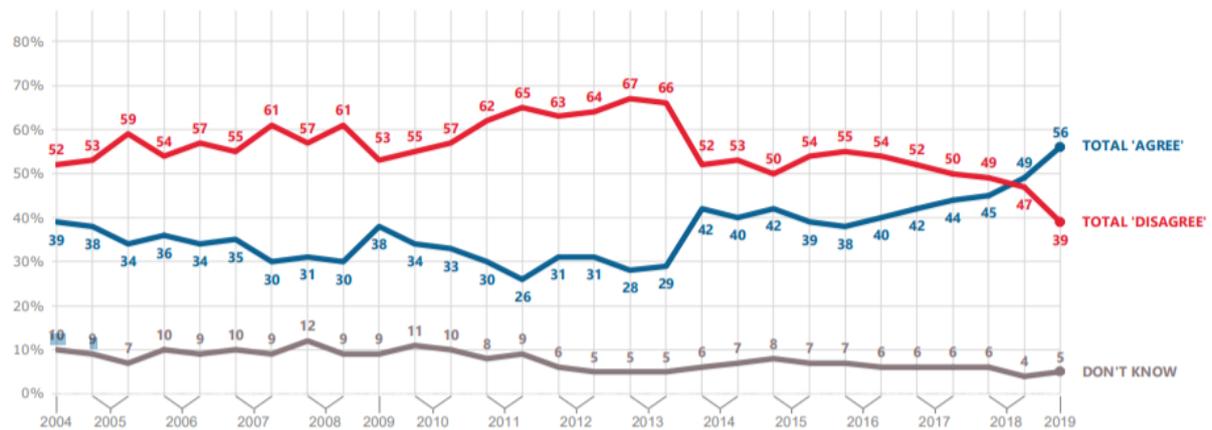
While the share of votes for parties strongly opposing EU integration remains relatively small, moderate anti-European parties gained a significant share of votes in the whole of Greece, Hungary & Italy and secured power after the last national elections. Additionally, more than one-fifth of the electorate in Czechia, France, the Netherlands, Southern Denmark, Austria and Slovenia voted for anti-European parties. Meanwhile, the presence of moderately anti-EU parties is almost nonexistent in places like Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, and only a relatively small phenomenon in Denmark and Sweden (European Commission, 2020; Dijkstra, Poelman & Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

Measuring political alienation after the 2015 Refugee Crisis

Political powerlessness

Political powerlessness is the first indicator of political alienation, measured by the degree of EU citizens who feel their voice matters in the EU. The Standard Eurobarometer asked citizens across the Union to what extent they agree with the statement 'My voice counts in the European Union'. Research shows that at the beginning of 2015, 50% of respondents tended to disagree with the statement, while a few months later, this number increased to 54% (Figure 4). Therefore, it can be argued that after the 2015 Refugee Crisis erupted, the number of EU citizens who felt that their voice did not count in the EU increased. However, the feeling of being politically powerless did not continue to rise among the respondents. A continuous upward trend is observed since autumn 2016, leading to 56% of EU citizens in 2019 agreeing with the statement that their voice counts in the EU.

Figure 6; My voice counts in the EU (% of EU citizens)



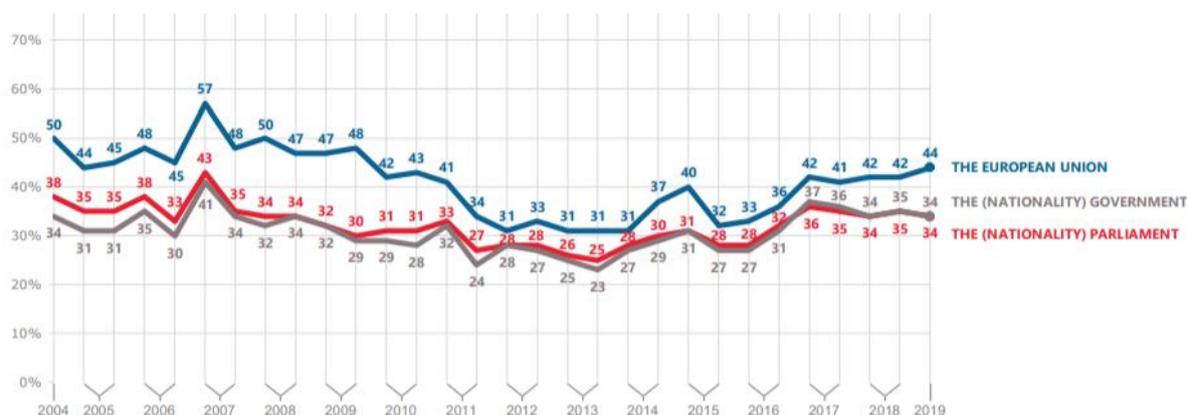
Source: Standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019

Since 2019, the majority of respondents agreed with the statement, with the highest proportions in Sweden (86%, Denmark (81%), and the Netherlands (76%). The respondents who disagreed most with the statement are from Greece (68%), Cyprus (62%) and Estonia (60%) (European Commission, 2020).

Distrust in the political system

In order to measure the second dimension of political alienation, political normlessness, distrust in the political system has been studied. The Standard Eurobarometer asked EU citizens about their trust in national governments, national parliaments, and the European Union. As presented in Figure 5, from 2014 to 2019, the degree of trust in both national politics and the EU has fluctuated significantly. When looking at the impact of the refugee crisis, it seems that EU citizens became less trustful of the EU since the level of trust in the EU dropped by 8% in 2015. Although, trust in the Union increased again in the following years.

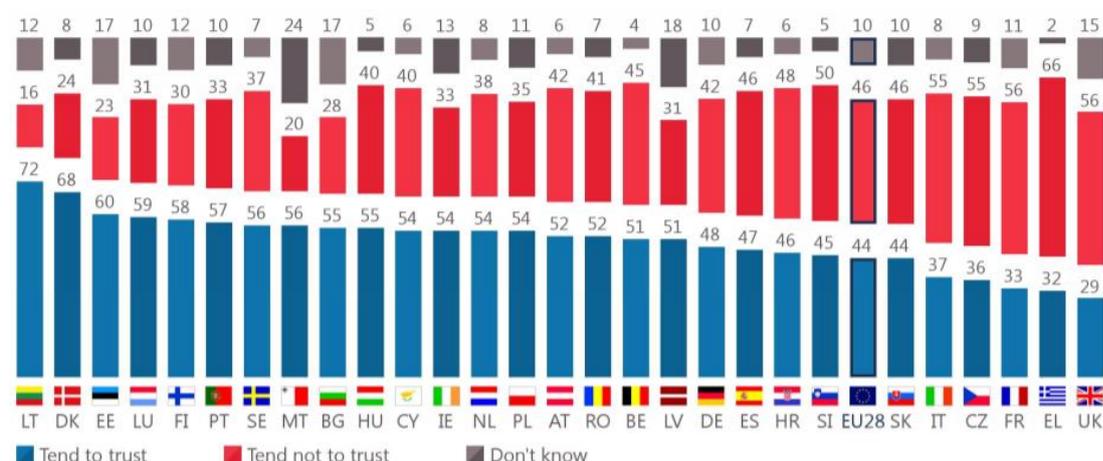
Figure 7; Tend to trust the EU (% of EU citizens)



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019

Looking at the level of trust in the EU per Member State (Figure 6), a majority of respondents say they trust the EU, led by Lithuania (72%), Denmark (68%) and Estonia (60%). Then, more than half of the respondents say they "tend to trust" the EU in Luxembourg (59%), Finland (58%), Portugal (57%), Malta and Sweden (both 56%), Bulgaria and Hungary (both 55%), Ireland, Poland, the Netherlands and Cyprus (all 54%), Romania and Austria (both 52%) and Latvia and Belgium (both 51%). Meanwhile, the most distrustful countries are the UK (29%), Greece (32%), France (33%), Czechia (36%) and Italy (37%).

Figure 8; Trust in the European Union (% of EU citizens)

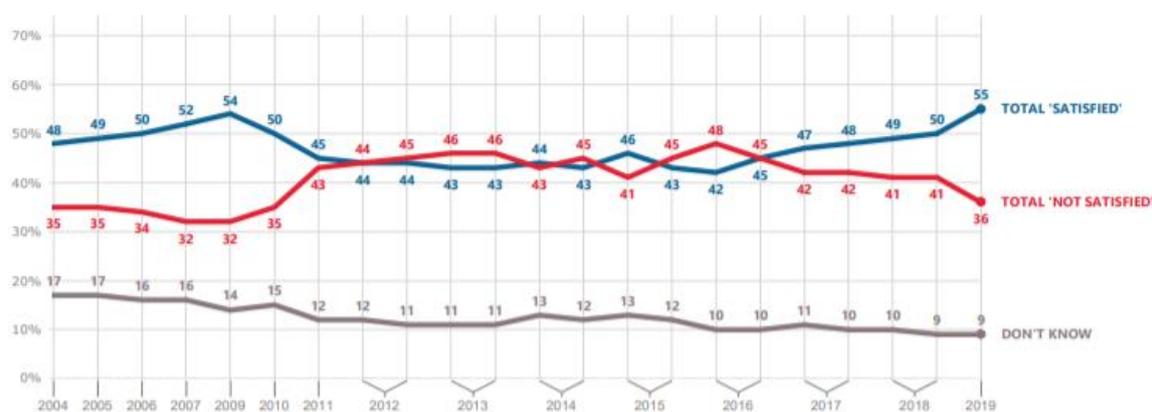


Source: Standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019

Dissatisfaction with democracy

Political meaningfulness is the third dimension of political alienation and measured by looking at the satisfaction with EU democracy. Data from the Standard Eurobarometer shows the number of satisfied EU citizens seems to have dropped as a response to the refugee crisis in 2015, with a decrease of 3%, while the number of dissatisfied EU citizens increased by 4% (Figure 7). Despite this, the satisfaction with democracy continued to rise since 2016 and reached a new highest point in 2019 (55% satisfied). The highest proportions of respondents who mentioned being satisfied with EU democracy in Ireland (77%), Denmark (75%), Portugal (72%) and Poland (70%). At the bottom of the scale were France (45%), the UK (46%) and Greece (36%).

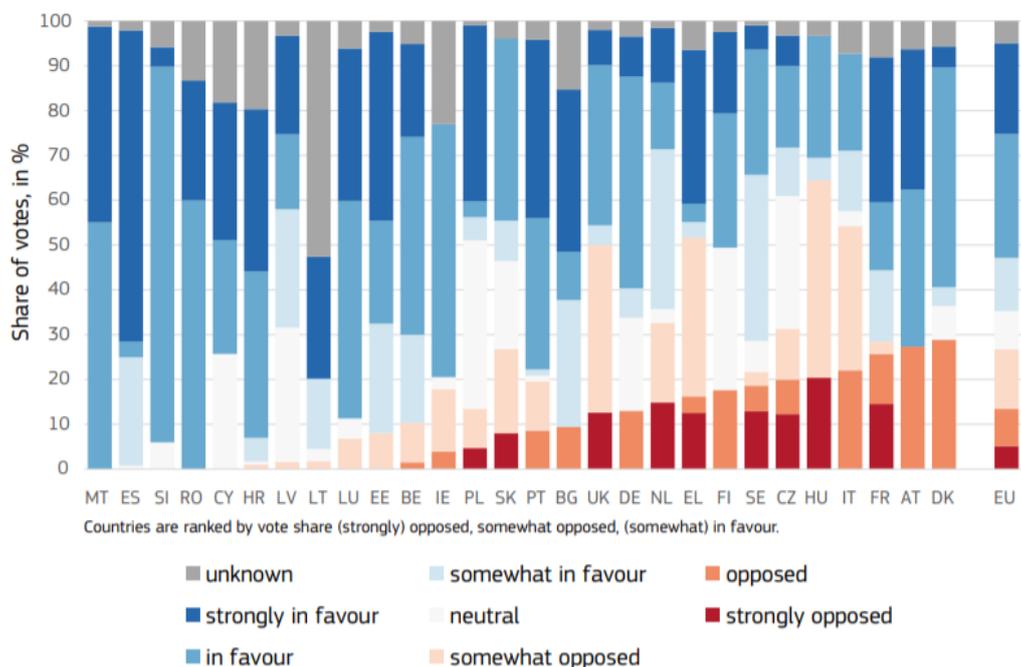
Figure 9; Satisfaction with the way EU democracy works (% of EU citizens)



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 91 Spring 2019

Not only were respondents from the UK and Greece, Italy and Hungary, one of the least satisfied with EU democracy, they were also showing most opposition to EU integration (Figure 8). Parties opposing EU integration have become more popular and gained more than 25% of all votes during the last national elections in Austria, Denmark and France. Meanwhile, in Greece, Hungary, and the UK, the share of votes for parties opposing EU integration was over 50% (Dijkstra, Poelman, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

Figure 10; Satisfaction with the way EU democracy works (% of EU citizens)

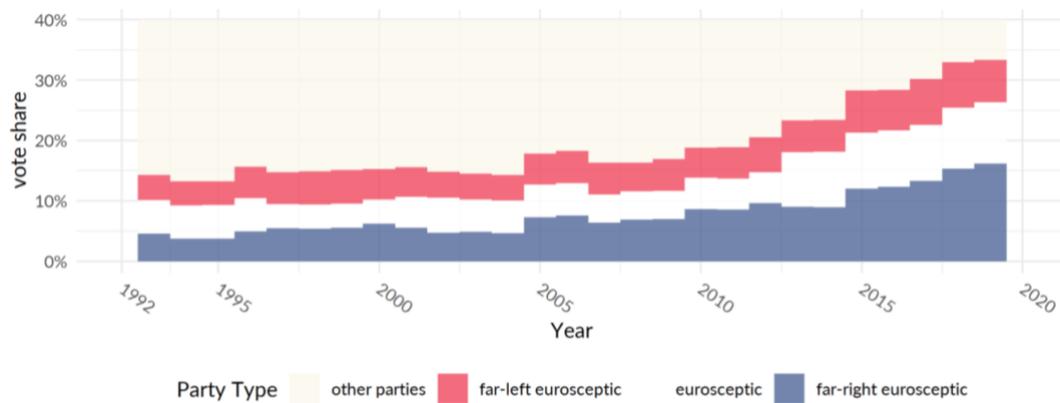


Source: European Commission, 2018

Electoral changes and the Eurosceptic vote

The turnout of the May 2019 European Parliamentary elections was the highest since 2004, with an EU average of 50.66%. For the first time since the first direct elections 40 years ago, the two largest parties, the EPP and S&D, do not have an absolute majority anymore. However, they remain the largest groups. Many expected a significant rise of extreme right-wing nationalist and populist parties. While they did almost double their share of seats (Figure 9), Eurosceptic parties still fell short of reaching one-third of all MEPs (European Parliament, 2019). The rise of Euroscepticism was expected as a result of the negative attitudes towards the refugee crisis. Studies show that the high salience of migration issues combined with negative media coverage has given rise to anti-immigration electoral strategies and boosted the popularity of far-right parties (Epstein & Segal, 2000; Givens & Luedtke, 2004).

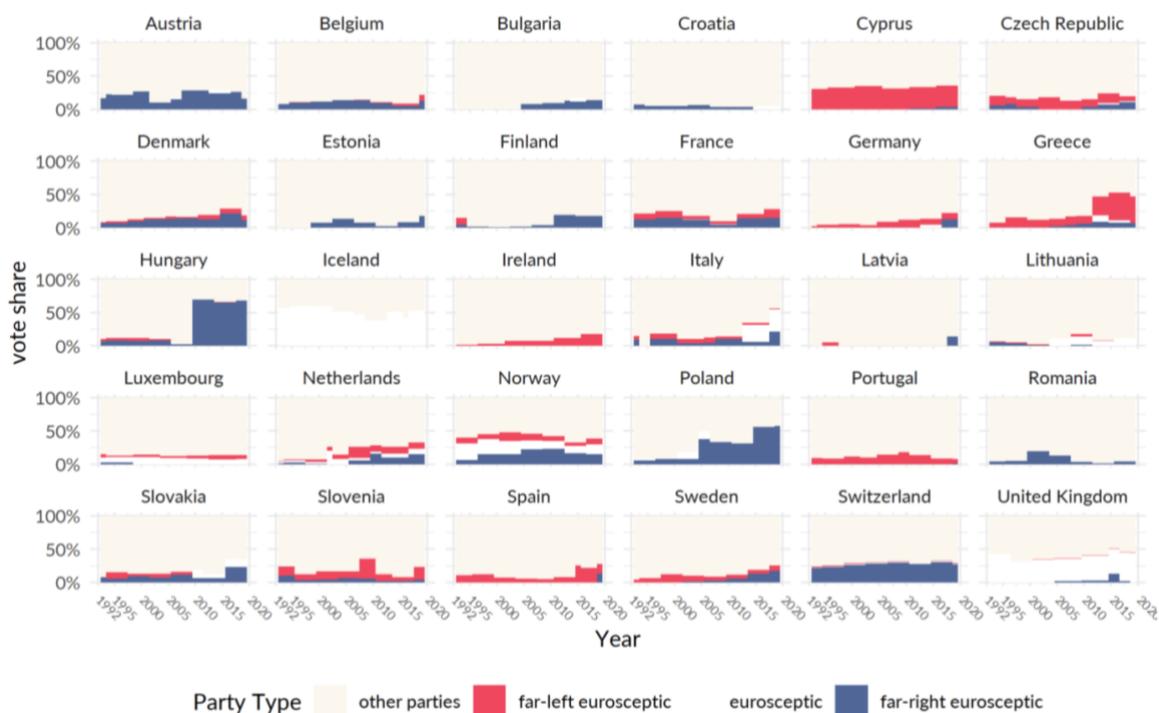
Figure 11; Vote shares of Eurosceptic, far-right and far-left parties in European Countries



Source: The PopuList 2019

While looking at the growing popularity of Eurosceptic votes, it shows that especially in Hungary, Poland, Greece and Austria, Eurosceptic parties received an increased share of votes (Figure 10).

Figure 12; Vote shares of Eurosceptic, far-right and far-left parties by country



Source: The PopuList 2019

Analysis

The cosmopolitan response of the EU to the crisis

This research aims to see whether Borre's theory of critical issues is relevant on an EU level. An essential element of Borre's theory includes the government's response to a critical issue, which is expected to have a cosmopolitan nature. The findings support this claim because the EU created the European immigration policy to respond to the 2015 Refugee Crisis. This policy shows a cosmopolitan nature as it is based on moral obligations, aims to enforce universal human rights, and emphasises the need for a supranational organisation to coordinate the refugee influx. Borre argued that when a cosmopolitan policy has been created, this will conflict with isolationist thinkers who are expected to generate a sense of political alienation.

Isolationist countries barely showing signs of political alienation

The Member States who showed most opposition to the EU immigration policy and were least welcoming of refugees are considered countries with a more isolationist nature. These countries are Hungary, the UK, Italy, Greece, and Czechia. On the other hand, countries that showed a more welcoming attitude towards refugees are Sweden, Finland, Germany, and Denmark. As suggested by Borre, isolationists are more likely to reject EU integration and perceive EU membership as a bad thing. Figure 3 shows how citizens perceive EU membership, and these findings support Borre's claim since the more isolationist countries show more discontent with their countries being a member of the Union. At the same time, the more cosmopolitan countries were more likely to perceive EU membership as a good thing.

When looking at the indicators of political alienation, the findings should show an increase of citizens who feel their voice does not matter, an increase of distrust in politics, and an increase of dissatisfaction with democracy to support Borre's theory. The first indicator, political powerlessness, showed that the number of EU citizens who felt that their voice did not count in the EU increased slightly from the beginning of 2015 till the beginning of 2016. However, from 2016 onwards, EU citizens started to feel that their voice does matter. This trend continued, and in 2018, the number of people who feel heard has become even more prominent than the number of people who feel their voice does not count. This trend is the case for both isolationist and cosmopolitan countries.

Initially, the second indicator also seems to change according to Borre's theory as the level of trust in EU institutions dropped significantly in 2015, right around the start of the crisis. However, the degree of people distrusting the EU decreased again in 2016. In 2019, more than half of the respondents trust the Union in most countries except for the UK, France,

Czechia and Italy. Even for the least trusting countries, the level of trust in the EU has not dropped compared to 2014. Therefore, these findings do not support Borre's theory.

Finally, the third indicator should show an increase in dissatisfaction with democracy to support the theory of the critical issues. However, this is not the case. There was a slight drop in citizens being satisfied with the EU from 2015 till 2016. Nevertheless, from 2016 onwards, the satisfaction with how EU democracy works continued to rise and reached a new highest point in 2019 (55% satisfied). The findings do not initially support Borre's theory. However, it is essential to keep in mind that this research has not considered other national issues that might have impacted the results.

Defining the politically alienated by the level of education

In contrast to previous studies on political alienation, Borre argued that no specific social background factors characterize the politically alienated voter. According to Borre, older studies focus too much on background factors, such as education and status, influencing one's likelihood of becoming politically alienated and spending too little to no time addressing the impact of issues and ideology. The theory of critical issues argues that events play a significant role in generating political alienation, even more than one's upbringing. However, looking at the results, what keeps occurring is the importance of one's level of education. As shown by Almond & Verba (1965) and Finifter (1970), the level of education seems to be one of the most significant predictors of political alienation.

The first indicator of political alienation, political powerlessness, shows a clear link between one's level of education and social status, influencing whether someone feels their voice counts in the EU. Respondents who finished their education at 20 years or later and experience fewer difficulties paying their bills are more likely to feel heard. Meanwhile, respondents who finished their education around 15 years and often experience difficulties paying the bills are more likely to feel their voice does not matter.

The level of education also played a significant role in the findings for the second indicator, political normlessness. The highly educated are more likely to trust the EU than the lower educated voters. When it comes to trust in the Union, age also seems to play a notable role as the level of trust tends to be lower among older EU citizens than the youth.

Finally, the findings for the third indicator, political meaninglessness, also shows the importance of one's background. Respondents who said to feel most satisfied with the way EU democracy works also tend to have finished their education at 20 years or later. Not only does the level of education and the lack of employment play a significant role in determining one's satisfaction with the EU, but it also influences one's likeability of anti-EU voting. As

shown in the literature review, anti-EU voting is by some scholars also perceived to be an indicator of dissatisfaction with EU politics.

As a result, Borre's claim that there is little consensus about social background factors cannot be supported by the results. Only one's likelihood of showing support towards welcoming refugees seems to be impacted most by a critical issue rather than specific background factors.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to analyse whether there is a relationship between critical issues and the degree of political alienation among EU citizens. As Borre (2000) suggested in his theory of critical issues, the EU's cosmopolitan response to the 2015 Refugee Crisis should have conflicted with the isolationist values among the mass public and therefore generated political alienation. This theory was tested by measuring the extent to which EU citizens felt their voice matters in the Union, the degree of distrust in EU politics, and the level of satisfaction with the way EU democracy works in the period from 2014 to 2019. By doing so, the degree of political alienation among EU citizens was measured prior to and after the refugee crisis erupted.

Starting with the political nature of the EU immigration policy, which has proven itself to have a cosmopolitan nature since the policy is based on moral obligations, aims to enforce universal human rights, and emphasises the need for a supranational organisation (European Parliament, 2021). As expected, some Member States showed more resistance to the cosmopolitan nature of this policy than others and are therefore perceived to be isolationist. The more isolationist countries are Hungary, the UK, Italy, Greece, and Czechia. In order for the findings to support Borre's theory of critical issues, the isolationist countries should have shown an increase in the degree of political alienation. When analysing the findings, all three indicators of political alienation initially tended to support Borre's theory since right after the crisis less people felt as if their voice counted, there was less trust in the EU and less satisfaction in the Union. However, from 2016 onwards, EU citizens from both isolationist and cosmopolitan countries were becoming more positive about the EU. This trend continued and by the time the 2019 EP elections were held, EU citizens felt more heard, felt most trusting in the EU and more satisfied compared to the 2014 elections (European Commission, 2019).

Even though the degree of political alienation did not seem to increase as a response to the refugee crisis over the entire study period, EU citizens did briefly show more dissatisfaction and distrust in the EU right after the crisis. As a result, it was possible to study which citizens are more likely to become politically alienated. While Borre (2000) argues there are no social background factors determining one's likability of becoming alienated, research shows that one's level of education, social status and lack of employment do play a significant role. As described by Almond & Verba (1963) and Finifter (1970), the level of education is the most common determinant of someone's chances of becoming politically alienated. The findings of this research support this since most citizens saying they felt their voice did not matter in the EU, were distrustful and dissatisfied were more likely to be lower educated (European Commission, 2019).

As the degree of political alienation did not increase among EU citizens in the period from 2014 to 2019, Borre's theory of critical issues cannot be fully supported on an EU level. Although this may be the case, some elements did seem to be relevant. Borre argued that once a critical issue arises, governments are likely to create a cosmopolitan policy in response, which was something the EU did. This policy would then conflict with isolationist thinkers and the national interests they represent. As shown, while the degree of political alienation did not increase, the share of anti-EU voting did continue to rise (Rooduijn, M., et al., 2019). The most significant change in the European electorate was the gained popularity of Eurosceptic parties.

Regarding the limitations of the findings, this research did not take into account national events that could have impacted the degree of political alienation among EU citizens. By focusing on the larger picture, it was not possible to go into much detail per country which is something Borre did do in his research in which he introduced the theory of critical issues (2000).

Recommendations

Even if this research cannot fully support Borre's theory of critical issues, Borre shows an interesting theory that takes the government's role in generating political alienation into consideration. The findings do not show an increase in political alienation on a larger scale, but it does show a significant increase in the support for Eurosceptic parties. As this research did not take national events into account, it is recommended that future research focuses more on the role critical issues have on a national level. In addition, it may be interesting to conduct more research on the relationship between the politically alienated voter and one's likelihood of supporting anti-EU parties since there is still little consensus on this relationship. By doing so, a more comprehensive and up to date definition of political alienation can be created.

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Appendix

European Studies student ethics form

THE HAGUE
UNIVERSITY OF
APPLIED SCIENCES

European Studies Student Ethics Form

Your name: Kim Spaansen

Supervisor: Mr. Funk

Instructions:
Before completing this form you should read the APA Ethics Code (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>). If you are planning research with human subjects, you should also look at the sample consent form available in the Final Project and Dissertation Guide.

- a. Read section 2 that your supervisor will have to sign. Make sure that you cover all these issues in section 1.
- b. Complete section 1 and, if you are using human subjects, section 2, of this form, and sign it.
- c. Ask your project supervisor to read these sections (and the draft consent form if you have one) and ask him/her to sign the form.
- d. Always append this signed form as an appendix to your dissertation. This is a knock-out criterium; if not included the Final Project/Dissertation is awarded an NVD.

Section 1. Project Outline (to be completed by student)

(i) Title of Project: The 2015 Refugee Crisis and Political Alienation in the EU

(ii) Aims of project:

This project aims to see whether Borre's theory of critical issues is useful on an EU level in monitoring the degree of political alienation among EU citizens.

(iii) Will you involve other people in your project – e.g. via formal or informal interviews, group discussions, questionnaires, internet surveys etc. (Note: if you are using data that has already been collected by another researcher – e.g. recordings or transcripts of conversations given to you by your supervisor, you should answer 'NO' to this question.)

No

If yes: you should complete the section 2 of this form.

If no: you should now sign the statement below and return the form to your supervisor. You have completed this form.

This project is not designed to include research with human subjects. I understand that I do not have ethical clearance to interview people (formally or informally) about the topic of my research, to carry out internet research (e.g. on chat rooms or discussion boards) or in any other way to use people as subjects in my research.

Student's signature  _____ Date 14/05/2021 _____

Section 2 Complete this section only if you answered YES to question (iii) above.

(i) What will the participants have to do? (v. brief outline of procedure):

(ii) What sort of people will the participants be and how will they be recruited?

(iii) What sort of stimuli or materials will your participants be exposed to? Tick the appropriate boxes and then state what they are in the space below

- Questionnaires
- Pictures
- Sounds
- Words
- Other

(iv) Consent: Informed consent must be obtained for all participants before they take part in your project. By means of an informed consent form you should state what participants will be doing, drawing attention to anything they could conceivably object to subsequently. You should also state how they can withdraw from the study at any time and the measures you are taking to ensure the confidentiality of data. A standard informed consent form is available in the Dissertation Manual. Appendix the Informed Consent Form to your Final Project/Dissertation as well.

(vi) What procedures will you follow in order to guarantee the confidentiality of participants' data?

Student's signature:



Date 14/05/2021

Supervisor's signature:



Date 14/03/2021

(if satisfied with the proposed procedures)