



DISCUSSION
BRIEF

July **2019**

Thomas Huddleston & Hind Sharif

Who is reshaping public opinion on the EU's migration policies?

INTEGRATION





This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the grant agreement **770730**



The **ReSOMA Discussion Policy Briefs** aim to address key topics of the European migration and integration debate in a timely manner. They bring together the expertise of stakeholder organisations and academic research institutes to identify policy trends, along with unmet needs that merit higher priority. Representing the second phase of the annual ReSOMA dialogue cycle, nine Discussion Briefs were produced covering the following topics:

- Secondary movements within the EU
- Implementation of the Global Compacts on Refugees (GCR)
- SAR and Dublin: Ad hoc responses to refusals to disembarkation
- Funding a long-term comprehensive approach to integration at the local level
- Public opinion on migrants: the effect of information and disinformation about EU policies
- Integration outcomes of recent sponsorship and humanitarian visa arrivals
- Strategic litigation of criminalisation cases
- Implementation of the Global Compacts on Migration (GCM)
- The increasing use of detention of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in the EU

Under these nine topics, ReSOMA Discussion Briefs capture the main issues and controversies in the debate as well as the potential impacts of the policies adopted. They have been written under the supervision of Sergio Carrera (CEPS/EUI) and Thomas Huddleston (MPG). Based on the Discussion Briefs, other ReSOMA briefs will highlight the most effective policy responses (phase 2), challenge perceived policy dilemmas and offer alternatives (phase 3).

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Discussion Policy Brief

Who is reshaping public opinion on the EU's migration policies?

By Thomas Huddleston and Hind Sharif, [Migration Policy Group](#)

"When, generations from now, people read about this moment in Europe's history books, let it read that we stood together in demonstrating compassion and opened our homes to those in need of our protection."

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, 'State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity', 9 September 2015

"We will have to continue working hard to convince people of the value of our Europe."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament, 7 October 2015

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Europe experienced its 2015/6 large-scale arrivals, immigration has never been so high on the political agenda of the European Union and several of its Member States. News of these arrivals spread through Europe's fragmented media and political landscape. This discussion brief aims to capture the changes and drivers of public opinion on EU migration policy since 2015/6. To what extent have the media, fake news, national politicians, EU officials and migrants themselves reshaped public opinion? What are the differences across Europe and the implications for EU policymaking?

The desk research for this discussion brief took advantage of the explosion in public opinion research in recent years. The wide geographical coverage of these studies fill the major gap in research on media and public opinion on immigrants in Central Europe. Changes and drivers of EU public opinion have been identified through multivariate analysis of the European Social Survey and Eurobarometer as well as recent literature reviews, for example thanks to the Observatory of Public Attitudes to Migration. The increase in innovative survey experiments and panels allows researchers to better understand public decision-making and the effects of (dis)information. Several EU-wide reviews have been commissioned of the recent migration media coverage, while investigations by practitioners have revealed the importance of media ownership and social media campaigns.



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The Discussion Brief begins with a review of the EU agenda and state-of-knowledge on the recent changes on public opinion on EU migration policy. The main section then investigates the relative importance and dynamics of the key drivers of public opinion: values and socialisation, political preferences, personal experiences, media framing and salience, the dynamics on social media, the key decision-makers behind media content and the key actors in the debate. The Brief concludes with the implications of these recent changes in public opinion for Europe's societies and role in the world.

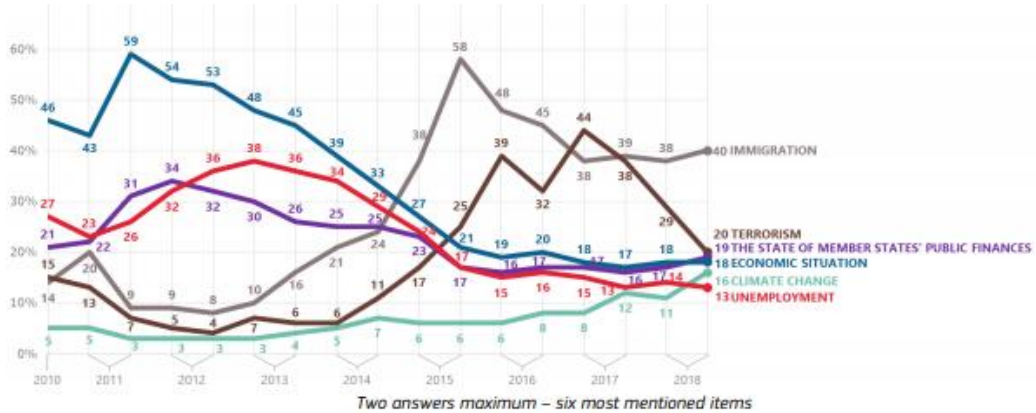


2. EU AGENDA

Since the 1980s, Europeans have become less conservative on social issues and slightly less conservative on immigration, particularly in Western Europe and among young people (Caughey et al. 2018). EU public opinion on migration and immigration policy is generally balanced, stable and improving over decades (Messing and Ságvári 2019).

Since 2015, the major change has been the increased salience of immigration as an EU political priority. EU citizens hardly ever rank immigration as an important issue facing them personally in their daily lives. Instead, EU citizens believe immigration is the most important issue for the EU. Immigration became the top priority for the EU in 2015 for majorities in nearly all Member States and has remained so, except during 2017 when immigration was overtaken by terrorism (Figure 1). Immigration is consistently ranked as a more important priority at EU than national level. After surging to the top of citizens' national priorities in 2015, immigration today is just one of citizens' many fragmented national priorities, rising to the top in only Austria, Belgium, Germany and Malta.

Figure 1: What are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?



Source: Standard Eurobarometer survey 90 (Autumn 2018)

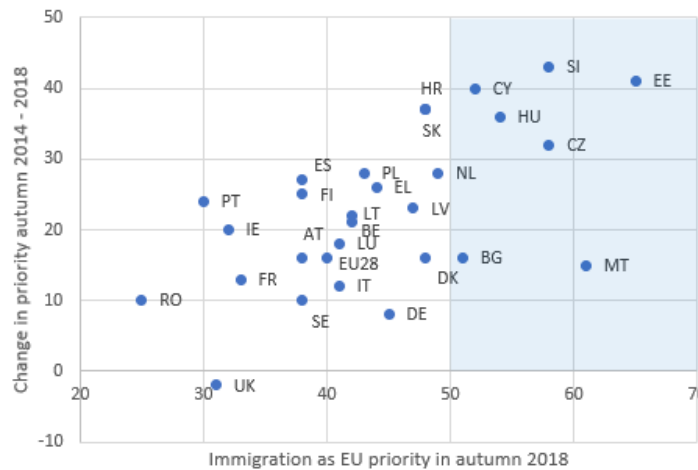
Traditionally, the EU institutions have been characterised as resistant to anti-immigrant sentiments and as a refuge for depoliticised debates behind Gilded Doors (Guiraudon 1997). The European Parliament's long-held ideological positions on immigration (Hix and Noury 2007) have weakened, as its co-decision powers under the 2007 Lisbon Treaty brought greater pressure from MEPs' national parties and governments (Servent 2012). The Commission has been reticent to use public opinion arguments on immigration, unlike in other areas of shared EU competence (Haverland et al. 2018).'' With the 2015/6 arrivals, President Juncker's 'political' Commission tried to anticipate and address public opinion with reforms of nearly every EU migration policy. These proposals were accompanied by an active communications policy, often cast in an extraordinary moral narrative of solidarity and unity (Radu 2016), as demonstrated in the introductory quote from European Commission President Juncker's 2015 State of the Union.



3. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

The main reason why immigration became the top EU priority was the seismic shift in salience and attitudes in Central Europe. From 2014 to 2015, the rise in immigration as an EU political priority was greatest in Central Europe and in Europe's major destination countries for asylum-seekers. From 2015 to 2018, immigration remains the top EU priority for majorities in only seven Member States, all of which joined the EU since 2004 (highlighted in blue in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Immigration as the most important issue facing the EU: autumn 2014 –2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer surveys 82 (Autumn 2014) and 90 (Autumn 2018)

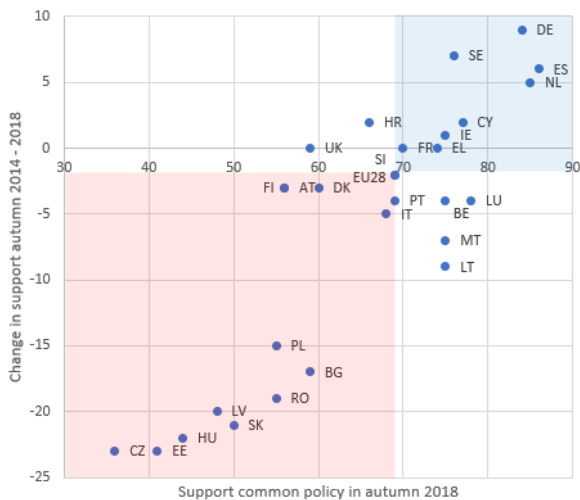
As immigration became citizens' top EU priority, public support for a common EU migration policy fractured between Western and Central Europe. Although two-thirds of citizens across Europe disapproved of the EU's handling of the refugee crisis (Ipsos 2016), three-quarters still wanted a common EU migration policy (Standard Eurobarometer) and majorities in all countries supported a common integration policy (Special Eurobarometer 469). Since 2015/6, demands for a common policy have grown in several major destination countries (highlighted in blue in Figure 3). In contrast, support for a common policy plummeted to only 40-60% of citizens in all Central European countries (highlighted in red) except Croatia, Slovenia and Lithuania. A major shift in support for EU policies was confirmed in national polls in Bulgaria (Balabanov and Lendzhova 2018), Czechia and Hungary (Szeidl and Simonovits, 2019), Poland (Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka 2018, Cichocki and Jabkowski 2019) and Slovakia (Bolečeková and Androvičová 2015 and Lincényi 2018). For example, Polish opposition to refugees jumped from 21% in May 2015 to 61% in April 2016 and remained above 50%, even if respondents were told that their opposition would lead to Poland losing EU funds or leaving the EU (Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka 2018). Since the 2015/6 arrivals, majorities in Central Europe firmly believe that their top priority for EU politics is to oppose a common migration policy.

Central European citizens' opposition to a common EU migration policy seem related to perceived threats at Europe's borders. As Figure 4's x-axis shows, by autumn 2015, one-quarter of citizens in both Central and Western Europe associated the EU with "not



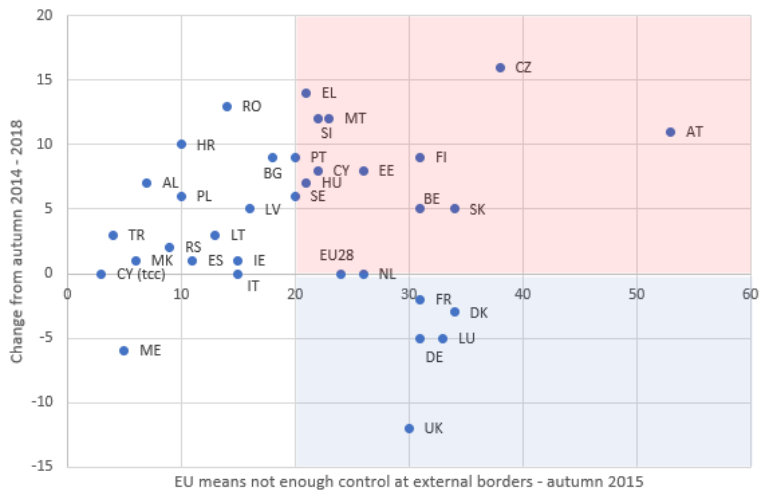
enough control at external borders” – an increase of four percentage points on average compared to 2014. From 2015 to 2018, this perception then decreased by an average of four points, but mostly in Northwestern Europe (highlighted in blue). The perception of a lack of EU border controls remains as strong as ever in Central Europe, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Greece and Malta (highlighted in red). Research suggests that Western Europeans who perceive immigration as a cost or threat are more likely to support a common EU policy ‘as a shield’ and cost-sharing mechanism, whereas Central Europeans, regardless of their attitudes towards immigrants, are more likely to oppose a common policy (Conti et al. 2019).

Figure 3: Support for an EU common migration policy: autumn 2014 –2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer surveys 82 (Autumn 2014) and 90 (Autumn 2018)

Figure 4: Personal perception that EU means ‘not enough control at external borders’ 2014-2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer surveys 82 (Autumn 2014), 84 (Autumn 2015) and 90 (Autumn 2018)

The major increase in immigration's salience at EU level has been associated with just a small increase in anti-immigrant attitudes, mostly in Central Europe. Over the past twenty years, few countries have witnessed a rise in anti-immigrant attitudes: Austria, Italy and Central European countries, especially Hungary (Messing and Ságvári 2019). The 2015/6 arrivals galvanised this anti-immigrant segment of the population. Figure 5 shows changes in very negative attitudes to non-EU immigration from 2014 to 2015 (x-axis) and 2015 to 2018 (y-axis). Extreme negative positions slightly increased in most countries from 2014 to 2015. This trend diverged between Central and Western Europe from 2015 to 2018. Following all the EU's border measures and deals, extreme negative attitudes decreased in most countries (below the x-axis), especially in Western Europe, falling below pre-2015 levels (highlighted in blue). In contrast, very negative attitudes are much more common in 2018 than before 2015 across Central Europe (highlighted in red), especially in Hungary, where the majority would reject all poor non-EU migrants (Messing and Ságvári 2019).



Figure 5: Change in very negative attitudes towards non-EU migration

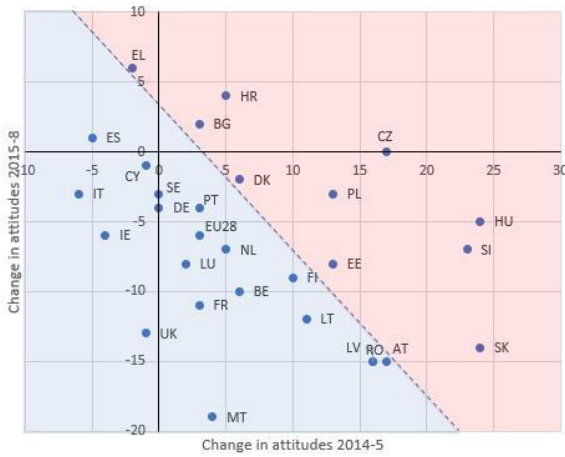
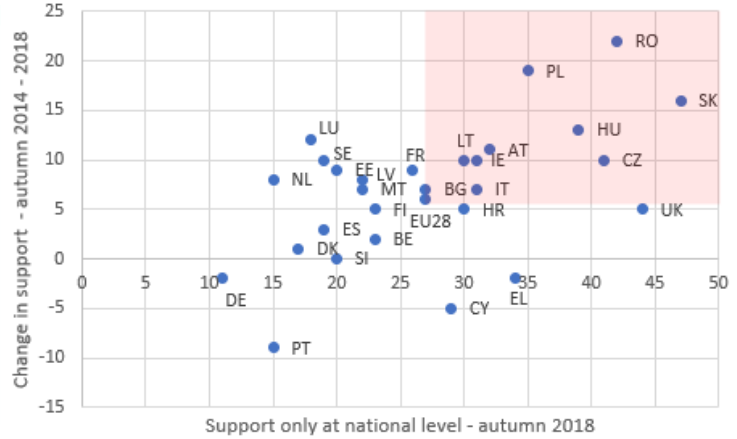


Figure 6: Support for more measures against irregular migration only at national level



Source: Standard Eurobarometer surveys 82 (Autumn 2014), 84 (Autumn 2015) and 90 (Autumn 2018)

Source: Standard Eurobarometer surveys 82 (Autumn 2014) and 90 (Autumn 2018)

As a result, the minority in favour of nationalist restrictionist measures has grown across Europe, as shown in Figure 6. Across the EU, one-quarter of citizens want greater measures to fight irregular migration at national rather than EU level (see figure 6). This view has slightly increased in nearly all Member States, particularly since 2015, among people who are rightwing, Eurosceptic, precarious and dissatisfied with life and politics. Across Central Europe, Austria and Italy (highlighted in red), one-third to one-half of citizens would prioritise restrictive measures at national rather than EU level. This nationalist restrictionist perspective helps to explain why near-majorities in Poland (39%) and Hungary (50%) approved of their governments' response in 2015/6 (Ipsos July 2016).

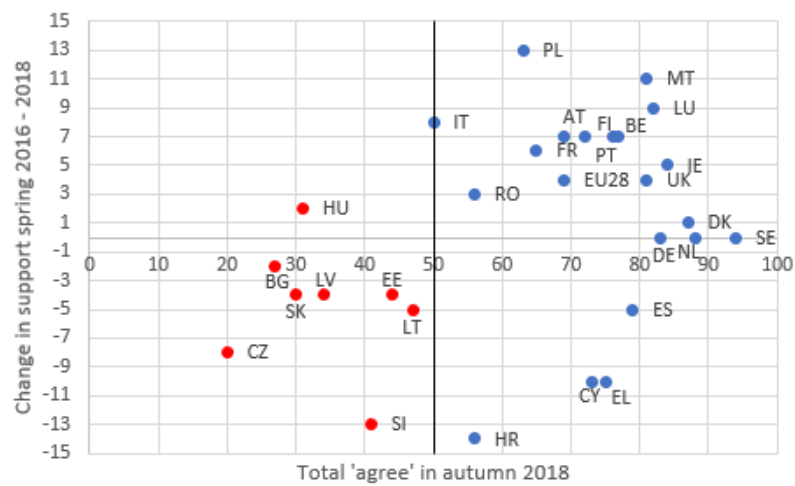
Attitudes towards refugees are surprisingly similar across Europe, according a 2017 study in 15 European countries (Bansak, Hainmueller and Hangartner 2017). When citizens were presented with profiles of asylum-seekers, only 10% would categorically reject all of them and another 10% would accept all. The vast majority—around 80% in every country—would accept or reject applicants based on a set of preferences that were common across all countries: applicants' fear of persecution, vulnerabilities, professional and language skills and religion. The 2017 Tent Foundation confirmed that only one-third of citizens in developed countries think that all refugees should be helped equally. Looking at global development, the 2015/6 arrivals did not change support for development aid, except for an increase in support in EU border countries (Huepers et al. 2018).

Central Europe has drifted away from this EU-wide consensus on support to refugees. Majorities (69% EU-wide) agree that their country must help refugees in all EU countries except in eight Central European countries (Figure 7). Similarly, Amnesty International's 2016 *Refugees Welcome* survey found that Poland was the only large EU country where a majority did not support the principle of asylum and demand more government action.



According to Bansak et al. 2017, majorities supported the harmonisation of asylum rules, except in Czechia and Poland. Most agreed that asylum-seekers should have the right to long-term support, housing, health and language learning (Bansak et al. 2017 and Tent Foundation 2017). Majorities also preferred a fair proportional allocation system based on asylum-seekers' family, economic and language ties. This was true even in Czechia, Hungary and Poland. Even when respondents were told the consequences for their country in terms of asylum application numbers, a proportional system was still the most popular, except in three countries now slightly in favour of the Dublin system (Czechia, Poland & UK) and three tied for an equal allocation (France, Italy and Netherlands).

Figure 8: 'Do you think that your country must help refugees?'



Source: Standard Eurobarometer surveys 82 (Autumn 2014), 85 (Spring 2015) and 90 (Autumn 2018)

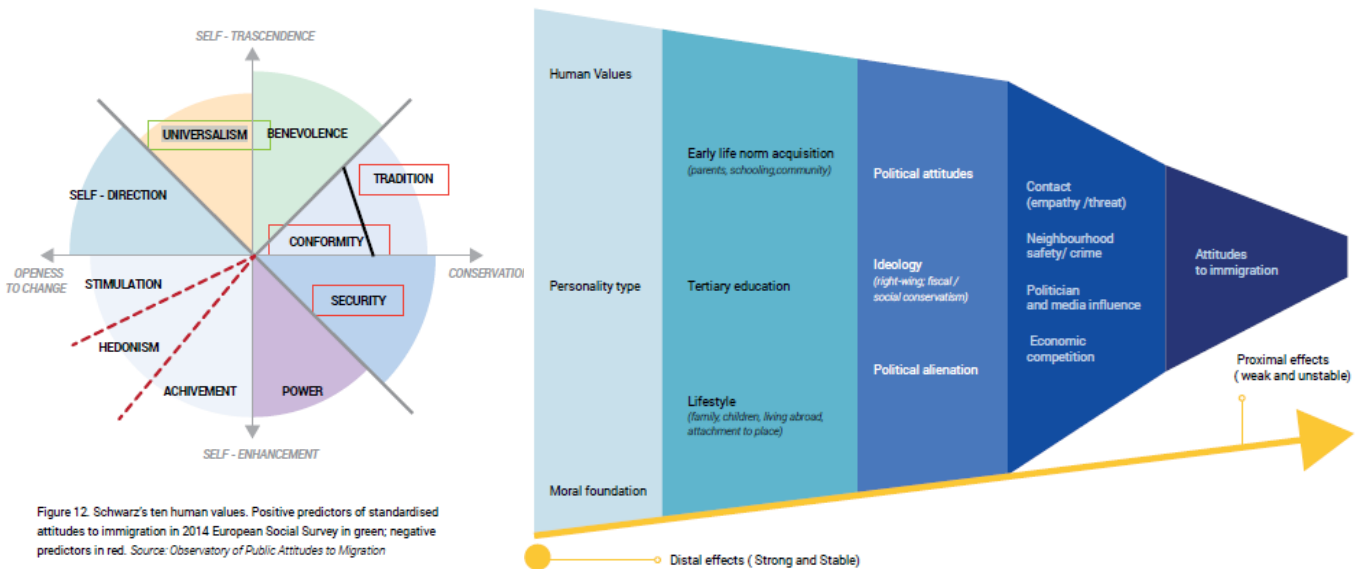


4. KEY DRIVERS

a. Values & socialisation

Attitudes to migration and migration policy are stable, hard-to-change and value-based. People's values, psychology, socialisation and education are the strongest determinants of their attitudes towards immigration and most other social issues (Dennison and Dražanová 2019). What a person says about immigrants says a lot about who they are as a person and hardly anything about the immigrants they are talking about. Interestingly, attitudes towards immigrants are not very different from most other social issues. People driven by universalist values (empathy and care for all people and nature) and people driven more by conservative values (tradition, conformity, security) have strong opinions (for vs. against) about migration, human rights, social and global justice (McFarland 2015, Goren et al. 2016 and Dennison and Dražanová 2019). Across Europe, the public's attachment to universalist values is generally weaker in Central Europe and stronger to conservative values in Central and Southern Europe (Davidov et al. 2014).

Figure 9: Values and drivers behind European attitudes towards immigration



Source: Observatory of Public Attitudes to Migration

In between people driven by universalist vs. conservative values are people driven more by more egocentric values, such as power, achievement and stimulation. People with egocentric values generally do not have clear or strong positions on immigration or social issues. Polling has divided this 'moveable middle' – representing 50-60% of the population in Western Europe—into sub-groups based on how their values and identities relate to immigration: humanitarians, pragmatists, disengaged moderates, traditionalists, economically insecure and the left behind (More in Common 2018 and 2019).



b. Political preferences

People's political preferences are less influential than their values but more influential than most other factors underlying their attitudes towards immigrants. What a person says about immigrants echoes to some degree what they heard from the party or politician they trust. Contrary to popular belief, the size of immigration flows and populations in themselves do not necessarily affect public sentiment towards immigrants (Semyonov et al. 2004; Strabac and Listhaug 2008, Davidov et al. 2014, Stockemer 2018, Harteveld et al. 2018). Rather, the public debate and policies in a country shapes the general outline of public opinion towards immigrants (Callens 2015).

The increased salience of immigration in EU politics has shifted the political preferences and attitudes of people driven by universalist and conservative values, particularly in Central Europe. People mostly driven by universalist or conservative values are more likely to react to major immigration debates by shifting their political preferences if their party's position does not match to their pre-existing values (Bechtel et al. 2015, Mader and Schoen 2018). This so-called 'moveable middle' is actually hard-to-move and their political preferences are harder-to-predict (McFarland 2015, Goren et al. 2016 and Dennison and Dražanová 2019). The mobilisation of this middle seems heavily context-specific, depending on the ability of politicians and actors to reach and connect with them at a specific time.

This political realignment was greatest in younger democracies with small immigrant populations, such as Central Europe and Turkey, where parties were not traditionally aligned along universalist vs. conservative values or immigration issues (Caprara et al., Tolay 2013). In Western Europe, where immigration is a longstanding issue, this realignment was limited to a 'reinforcing effect' on the extremes: a slight move to the far-right among people driven more by conservative values, particularly among low-information voters, as well as a smaller shift to the left among people driven more by universalist values (Claassen and McLaren 2019, Dennison and Dražanová 2019 and Dennison and Geddes 2019).

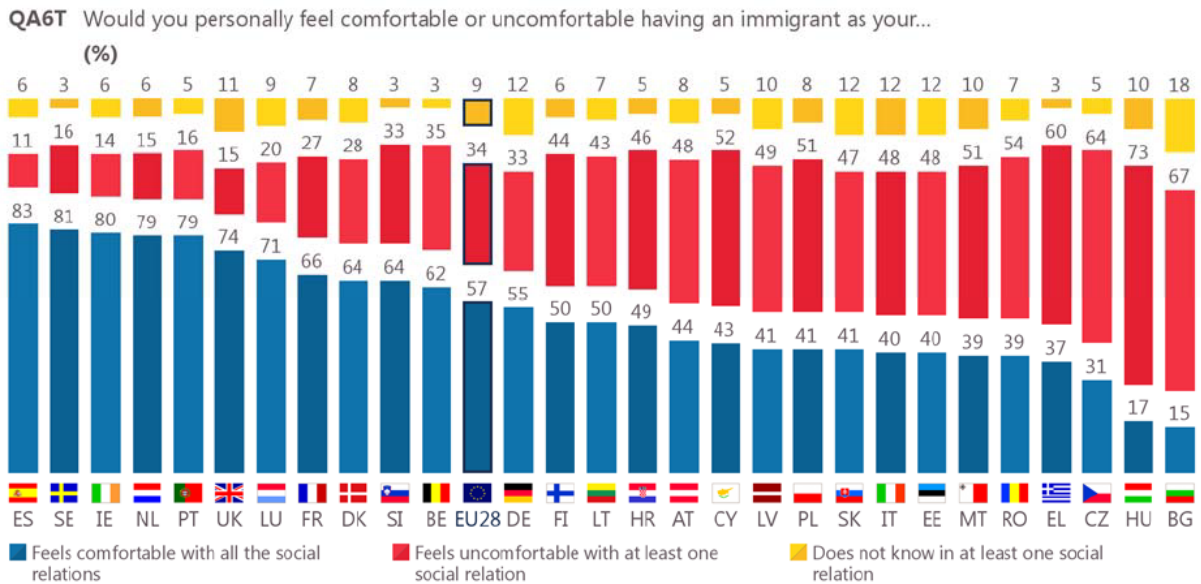
This political realignment can occur, regardless of whether the actual tone of the debate is positive or negative, and have a long-term impact. People's political preferences are hard-to-change, but, once changed, hard to change back. People tend to justify their choice by adopting the party's positions. People moving to the far-right or left become more extreme in their attitudes towards immigrants (Harteveld et al. 2017). In the future, these new far-right voters will represent a shrinking section of the electorate in Western Europe and EU-wide (Dennison and Geddes 2019). But at present, the 2015/6 arrivals have shocked Europe's political systems, with minor electoral shifts turning unexpected parties into kingmakers in a highly fragmented electoral landscape.



c. Immediate context: Positive and close contact with immigrants

What people say about immigrants also says a little about where they live—and, particularly, about how well they actually know immigrants. Europeans are more likely to be pro-immigrant in Western European countries with higher levels of immigration, education, economic prosperity and trust (Dennison and Dražanová 2019) and in countries with more developed integration policies (see literature review in Callens 2015). Contact theory has proven that interaction with immigrants significantly improves public attitudes, so long as these interactions are frequent, intimate and positive—like friendship and work—rather than anonymous or conflictual (Dennison and Dražanová 2019). Currently, around one-third of Europeans have discomfort or little-to-no interaction with immigrants, including majorities in Central Europe (Figure 10), while citizens in Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Italy report regular—but generally uncomfortable—interactions (Special Eurobarometer 469 2017). People in greater contact with immigrants do express greater solidarity with refugees and greater resistance to the far-right (Pogliano 2016, Ferwerda et al. 2017, Koos and Seibel 2019). Since people's attitudes to immigrants are primarily driven by their values and political preferences, people's context and experiences have a relatively small and short effect.

Figure 10: Europeans' comfort with social interaction with immigrants



Source: Special Eurobarometer 469, 2017

Most strikingly, direct experience of EU migration policies does not fundamentally change people's minds about immigrants or the EU. Even the most negative experiences of the 2015/6 large-scale arrivals appear to have had few long-term effects. Residents of the Greek islands experiencing arrivals experienced a one-quarter increase in anti-immigrant/refugee attitudes compared to other Greek islands (Hangartner et al. 2019). This drop in public support only translated into a two-percentage point increase in voting for the extreme-right Golden Dawn party (Dinas et al. 2019). Similarly, Hungarians living in



municipalities along the 'Balkan route' were only two-to-three percentage points more likely to vote against refugee resettlement in Hungary's 2016 referendum, as some Fidesz voters shifted to the extreme-right Jobbik party (Gessler et al. 2019). In Germany—Europe's main destination for refugees—the so-called 'NIMBY' ('Not In My Back-Yard') effect could be detected among one fifth of survey respondents—often those with lower pro-immigrant attitudes and education—who, between 2015 and 2016, turned against the idea of hosting a reception centre in their municipality. Opposition to reception centres is greatest at the time of their opening, decreasing over time (Linder 2018) and more related to the quality of the centre (empty large house or renovated house rather than multi-purpose hall or container) than to its size/distance or the origin/religion of its residents (Liebe et al. 2018). Overall, the negative effects of public exposure to the 2015/6 arrivals were surprisingly small and similar across Europe, from the Greek hotspots to the Balkan route to Germany's reception centres. While locals experience short-term shocks, the long-term political effects seem limited to conservative voters.

d. Public debate: Salience and framing in the media

Media coverage is the main driver of the salience of immigration as a political priority for citizens, since the public debate influences the amount that people think about immigration (Dennison and Dražanová 2019). The words and images used for migrants and refugees are highly changeable over time and malleable in public debate (Berry et al. 2016, Kluknavska et al. 2018 and Consterdine 2018). This section will provide the key findings from several EU-wide reviews of press and social media coverage of the 2015-2018 migration debates. In general, salience and framing in the media has a small and short-term effect on public attitudes and parties' positions. A prolonged immigration debate can have more negative effects due to voter fatigue and polarisation. In countries new to the immigration debate, the media has an even greater long-term 'socialisation' effect defining the terms and framing of the debate.

The EU-wide media coverage began in response to the increase in asylum-seekers arriving in the EU (Harteveld et al. 2018) and adopted a humanitarian framing of migrants as victims (see overviews in Berry et al. 2016, Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017, Consterdine 2018 and Kluknavska et al. 2018). This humanitarian frame was common in both Western and Central Europe, although the latter portrayed their region solely as countries of transit for these movements to Western Europe. During 2015, an initial period of 'careful tolerance' in the media—discussing the potential socio-economic consequences of these arrivals—gave way in September 2015 to 'ecstatic humanitarianism' with highly emotional language (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). This humanitarian frame likely improved attitudes towards immigrants, as one survey identified a 'drowning refugee effect' – exposure to news of migrants as victims of drowning is estimated to improve attitudes by around two percentage points (de Poli et al. 2017).

The 2015 humanitarian framing was nevertheless a missed opportunity to reassure threat-sensitive citizens with storytelling by migrants and volunteers. These humanitarian stories focused on numbers, nationalities and discussions of how authorities should 'manage the



crisis' (Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti 2016). Newcomers were presented as anonymous and unskilled groups of men, with little mention of women, different age groups or professions. These representations reinforce the stereotype of refugees as vulnerable and potentially dangerous outsiders that are different from Europeans and of no benefit to society (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). Quotes from migrants themselves or EU citizen volunteers were rare, especially in Central Europe, decreased over time across Europe and generally limited to the horrors of migrants' journey (Berry et al. 2016 and Kluknavska et al. 2018). Few articles linked their stories with the international news about these conflicts or with success stories about the social and economic benefits of migration (Berry et al. 2016 and Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). Even so, this type of humanitarian framing around social vulnerability, human rights and diversity mostly resonates with people driven by universalist values. Public opinion experts speculate the most effective stories would have targeted threat-sensitive citizens with conservative values. These stories would highlight their similarities to migrants, showcase migrants expressing universalist and benevolent values and demonstrate their hard work and integration success (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017, Tent Foundation 2017, Howat 2018 and Dennison and Dražanová 2019). While this storytelling might not be deemed newsworthy at national level, this type of content can emerge in local news (Cooper et al. 2016).

Following the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, the humanitarian framing was quickly overwhelmed by a defensive securitisation frame in the media across Europe, especially in Central Europe (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). The number of positive news stories decreased (Backfried and Shalunts 2016 and Hussain et al. 2018), while countries with the most negative news coverage experienced the highest levels of anti-immigrant sentiment (Dennison and Dražanová 2019). Between 2015-2017, citizens in developed countries become more concerned about refugees—but also less sympathetic—with half citing fear over security and terrorism (Tent Foundation 2017). Negative stories can reinforce feelings of threat about an out-group. Stories about security, crime and borders, coupled with language about migrants as 'illegal immigrants' and 'failed asylum seekers' are also likely to galvanise citizens with conservative values (Kim et al. 2011).

Notwithstanding these major shifts in the EU-wide media debate, the effects of positive and negative coverage should not be exaggerated. Individuals' reactions to news stories depend more on their pre-existing values and political preferences than on the framing itself (Jansky 2017). In general, framing effects are small and decline over time, as an issue becomes salient and people's opinions become fixed and polarised along their pre-existing values (Dennison and Dražanová 2019). For example, terrorist attacks no longer seem to seriously affect Europeans' attitudes to immigrants (Silva 2018 and Brouard, Vasilopoulos and Foucault 2018). One study of the 2015 Cologne New Years' Sexual Assaults found negative effects on attitudes to immigration from the Mideast and Africa, no effects on attitudes to Muslims and positive effects for attitudes to refugees (Czymara and Schmid-Catran 2017). Beyond these small short-term effects, the literature identifies two dynamics in media framing that could have longer-term consequences.



Firstly, the prolonged media debates across Europe may reinforce negative attitudes over the long-term. The mere frequency of the news on immigration itself has a negative impact regardless of the content (Dennison and Dražanová 2019). Even 'balanced' stories showing both conflicting sides in debate can reinforce the polarisation of public opinion on migration (van Klingeren et al. 2017). The long-term combination of extensive media coverage and negative public attitudes creates significant pressure on a country's immigration policies and mainstream politicians, even in the absence of an established far-right party (Morales et al. 2015). Despite the decrease in arrivals, the media has sustained the salience of immigration. Currently, the number of irregular arrivals to the EU is at its lowest level since 2014. And yet, the EU policies to reduce irregular arrivals did not reduce the salience of immigration in media and public debates. European media coverage is no longer sustained by the numbers of migrant arrivals, but by politicians with mediatised events and political disagreements (Harteveld et al. 2018). This never-ending media debate perpetuates the perception of large-scale arrivals and the narrative of chaos at Europe's borders.

Secondly, the impact of media framing is stronger and long-lasting in countries where immigrant populations are small and the topic is new in the public debate, such as Central Europe (Davidov et al. 2019 and Dennison and Dražanová 2019). The level of media attention was not related to the number of asylum applications in the countries concerned (Harteveld et al. 2018). Rather, the salience of immigration skyrocketed across Central Europe after the EU's relocation quota distribution system transformed the region in the public's eyes from countries of transit to destination for asylum-seekers transferred from Greece and Italy. A Eurosceptic and securitisation framing spread rapidly across both tabloid and quality press in the Visegrad Four countries (Kluknavska et al. 2018 and Kovar 2019). This effect was an increase and coverage of levels of anti-immigrant sentiment across the region, largely among citizens with conservative values (Cichocki and Jabkowski 2019). In Poland, the negative media coverage had a major effect on public attitudes, regardless of citizens' political preferences and cognitive skills (Wenzel and Żerkowska-Balas 2019).

e. The influence of social media

Social media can offer a platform for improving public information and attitudes towards immigrants. Citizens in developed countries said that they were more likely to change their mind based on exposure to videos and photos of refugees evoking hardship (69%) or empathy (64%), rather than based on news, direct contact with refugees or facts (Tent Foundation 2017). Migrants themselves are often easier to reach on social media than through traditional means (Pötzschke and Braun 2017 and Zagheni et al. 2017). Refugee Welcome volunteers and activities are often present and organised through social media platforms. Migrant NGOs can engage their large numbers of followers on social media through online campaigns and activities. Petitions in support of migrants and refugees have taken off on a number of online campaigning platforms. The "We Are A Welcoming Europe" European Citizens' Initiative was one of the few cross-EU coordinated campaigns



online. In its social media evaluation (MPG forthcoming), positive framing and hopeful examples of a more welcoming and compassionate European society were found to be the most successful form of messaging, as empathy and equality are clear motivational values for the audience.

More generally, social media has become an even more important factor accelerating the frequency, political bias and manipulation of European coverage on migration. When compared to traditional media, the exposure to information on social media is higher than in media consumption, in what is referred to as 'information overload' (Tucker et al. 2018). While sharing news and content on social media can be viewed as a solution to the public's knowledge and empathy gaps, this could also be leading to polarisation, as users selectively consume news that strengthens their biases and reinforces their personal beliefs as what users read largely relies on what 'friends' are sharing or liking (Klinger et al. 2017).

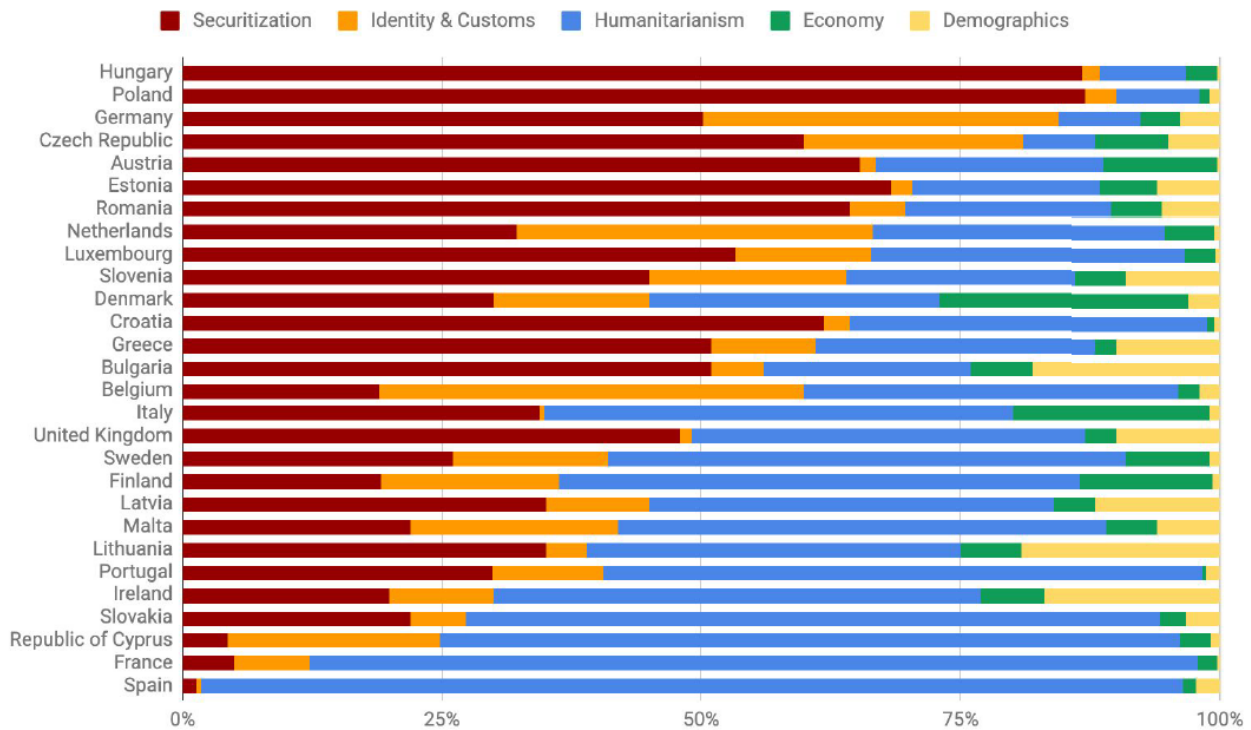
The efforts of pro-immigrant groups are often ad hoc and uncoordinated in comparison to anti-immigrant groups. Users of social media consume a large portion of ideologically extreme and negatively framed content, since these channels provide a platform for disruptors including populist politicians, media outlets, fake-news websites, bots and conspiracy theorists. A 2019 study by Bakamo Social of social media content on migration in all 28 Member States showed that anti-immigrant actors often coordinate cross-EU efforts to direct the conversation on social media by using conspiratorial disinformation and negative news on migration. For instance, one study of the UN Global Compact for Migration found that far-right and right-wing populist influencers coordinated and fuelled large-scale social media activities, including online petitions, tweets, Facebook posts and videos on YouTube. For example, out of the 100 most popular YouTube videos on the UN migration pact, a majority of 75 percent derived from right-wing populist and conspiracy theory channels (Cerulus and Schaart 2019). Prior to the 2019 European elections, Avaaz (2019) reported European-wide networks of disinformation on Facebook. The investigation found more than 500 pages and groups followed by 32 million people spreading fake and false content in France, Germany, Italy and Poland.

Another worrying trend in social media is its role as a main source for news online, where the consumption of news about refugees is especially high (Tent Foundation 2017). The countries consuming the most news on social media include Greece (83%), Serbia (67%) and Italy (61%). In Western Europe, the percentage is less than 50% (Tent Foundation 2017). In countries with a lack of press freedom, social media has chilling effects, as a large segment of content is driven by news with direct or indirect ties to the government. This includes countries like Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia. In addition, whilst Twitter is a key channel where the conversation on migration takes place online, the most influential accounts are often managed by politicians and online media outlets in Central Europe (Bakamo Social 2019). It is thus not surprising that discussions on social media in most EU Member States were dominated by anti-immigrant framings (Figure 11). In particular, narratives relating to security and identity were found to be the



most discussed themes, with the highest percentages in Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Austria and Romania.

Figure 11: Social Media Migration Narratives: July 2017 to July 2018



Source: 2019 Bakamo Social

f. The key decision-makers on media content

Who decides on the tone and framing of media coverage? Contrary to expectations, the attitudes of journalists does not seem to be a determining factor. For instance, journalists tend to be more tolerant and interventionist in newer destination countries with more hostile policies and public opinion, such Central Europe (Mertens et al. 2018).

Instead, press freedom and ownership seem to be more important factors influencing the tone and framing of national media coverage of immigration. Media owners and political allies in Central European countries were key drivers of anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic content. In Bulgaria, ranking 111 on the Press Freedom Index – the lowest score in the EU – the media is heavily anti-immigrant and 80% owned by one Member of Parliament Delyan Peevski (Reporters Without Borders 2019). Similarly, Czechia's two most influential dailies and its most popular news website are owned by populist prime minister Andrej Babis (Reporters Without Borders 2019a). Hungary is a notorious example of violations of press freedom, with repeated political interventions, forced removals of editorial teams and significant government control of the agenda and framing on migration (Mérték 2015 and Gábor and Messing 2016). Researchers argue that Hungary's ruling Fidesz party has taken indirect and direct control of 90% of media outlets (Dragomir, 2017). These threats to press



freedom have a domino effect, as the visual representations and frames used in one country are reshared in others. For example, despite considerable differences on the ground, images of large numbers of migrants stranded at Budapest train stations dominated the media coverage in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia, fuelling fear and representations of an uncontrolled threat to social stability in Central Europe (Kaspárek 2016).

g. The key actors in the media debate

The actors that dominated the media debate on immigration from 2015-2018 were national governments—usually the prime minister or interior minister. Traditionally over the past thirty years, the parties in power in government and parliament have controlled the media debate on immigration and determined the topics on the agenda, with little-to-no mention of the European Union (Koopmans et al. 2005 and Berkhout 2012). Although the 2015/6 arrivals recast immigration as a European issue and political priority, the media often retained a national focus on the consequences for the country concerned. The national government—usually the prime or interior minister—were the most cited on a wide diversity of topics, including the economic, social, security and political consequences for the country (Berry et al. 2016 and Kluknavska et al. 2018). The dominance of the parties in power helps to explain why leaders like Merkel and Orban set the terms of their respective national debates (Jungblut 2017). For example, Simonovits and Bernát (2016) find that the Hungarian government's campaigns were responsible for public levels of xenophobia after a period of all-time low.

Opposition parties, especially far-right parties, were prominent but never dominant. Far-right parties generally receive greater coverage, regardless of their size or status, because of their 'ownership' of the issue of immigration (van der Brug and Berkout 2015). Despite the limited coverage of opposition parties in the media debate, the media focus on the political consequences of the 2015/6 arrivals created significant competition and pressure for national governments, especially from the right for conservative parties (Dennison and Dražanová 2019 and Dennison and Geddes 2019). Studies of political parties in Finland and Germany find that this competition led to a significant polarisation of parties' positions on immigration, among both mainstream and extreme parties (Mader and Schoen 2018 and Lönnqvist et al. 2019).

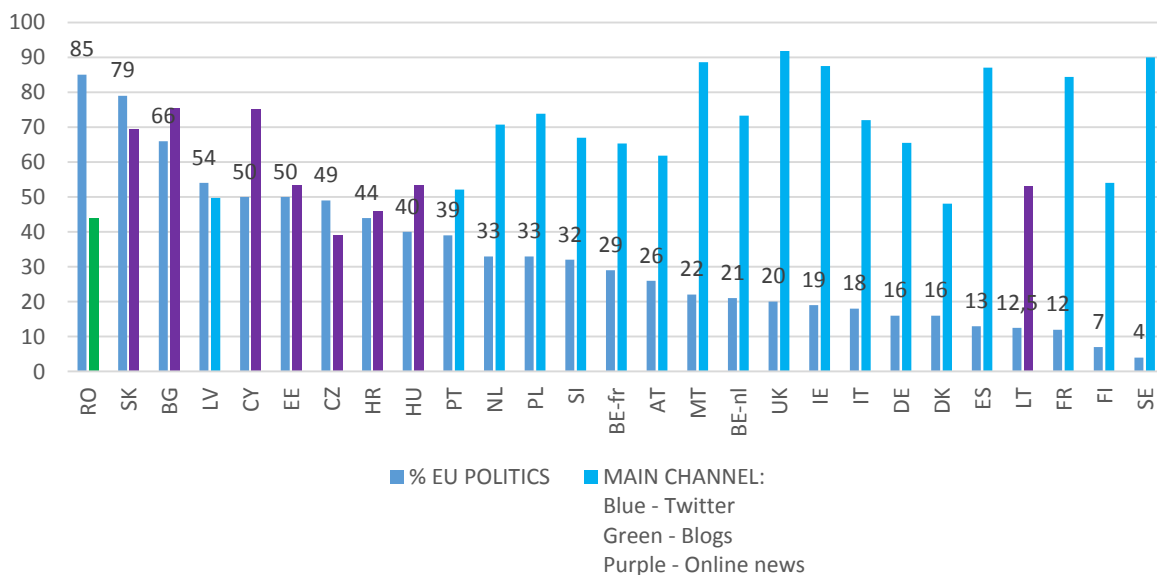
The second most dominant actor in national media debates was not the EU institutions themselves, but rather the national leaders of other EU Member States. The EU influenced the media agenda and its framing of the problem, as media shifted its focus on specific nationalities and regions from Syrian and Iraqi refugees along the Western Balkan route to smugglers of African migrants along the Libyan route (Berry et al. 2016 and Consterdine 2018). The EU appeared less successful at communicating about EU solutions. The press initially criticised the EU's failure to respond to the humanitarian crisis. By the height of the 2015/6 arrivals, only half of articles mentioned EU solutions and then only in vague calls for a common policy (Berry et al. 2016). Of all the EU's proposed reforms, the relocation



quotas were the dominant topic. In Central Europe, the EU's proposed solutions came as a shock, since the public debate was largely non-existent until the week of the Council's agreement on relocation quotas (Kluknavska et al. 2018 and Cichocki and Jabkowski 2019). EU leaders were mostly quoted about the general EU policy and politics, while national governments were allowed to address the national and local consequences of these policies. The media quoted EU officials less often than the leaders of other EU Member States, most notably Merkel and Orban (Berry et al. 2016 and Kluknavska et al. 2018). This Merkel/Orban framing—with the one opposing and frustrating the other in a game of winners and losers—reframed EU developments in terms of competing national interests and focused on the divisions between EU Member States.

Across Central Europe, the negative online conversations on migration always peaked around EU politics (Figure 12). For example, European political references were mentioned in 66% of the public comments on Twitter in Bulgaria and in 50% of the social media conversations in Estonia. In countries like Czechia, topics involving other EU countries role in the migrant crisis were exceptionally discussed, including on burden-sharing between Member States and the EU quota system. Similarly, in Slovakia, the online conversation on migration was found to be strongly connected with the EU and its responsibility to resolve the issue. The EU summit on migration has also caused an increase and predominance in security, identity and demographics frames in those countries.

Figure 12: Main channels and discussions related to EU policies: July 2017 to July 2018



Source: 2019 Bamako Social



5. POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF CHANGES IN PUBLIC OPINION

The common assumption about recent changes in public opinion is that most Europeans are now hostile to immigration because all types of voters were easily pushed to the far-right by negative media coverage and misinformation (Dennison and Dražanová 2019). Instead, public opinion remains relatively positive, stable and hard-to-change in most parts of Europe, even among people who lived near EU hotspots, refugee routes and reception centres.

A small shift to the far-right did occur in Western Europe. Since 2015/6, public opinion and political parties have become more polarised. The frequent and negative media coverage, combined with coordinated far-right social media campaigns, have realigned the political preferences of conservative voters with pre-existing anti-immigrant attitudes and values of security, conformity and tradition. National parties in power have faced greater competition, but still dominated and perpetuated the debate, despite the recent 90% decrease in irregular arrivals.

The major change occurred in Central Europe, where immigrant populations are small, media freedom limited and parties not traditionally aligned along conservative vs. universalist values. Powerful populist politicians used their contacts in traditional and online media to introduce the region's many latently conservative voters to threatening images of migrants and refugees in order to shift voters' political preferences to populist parties. As a consequence, most voters and parties in Central Europe prefer nationalist restrictionist measures over a common EU migration policy.

These small but significant changes in public opinion on the EU's migration policy can have major implications for Europe's policies, politics, societies and role in the world.

- **Political effects**



Party positions on migration have polarised among all types of parties on both the left and right. National politicians are partly responsible for the sustained media coverage and salience of immigration as an EU priority. The main beneficiaries of these sustained public debates have been far-right and populist politicians, particularly in Central Europe. Migration disinformation also raises election security concerns among security officials, practitioners and the social media platforms.

Higher levels of Euroscepticism are generally triggered by sustained media coverage on migration, primarily among right-wing citizens with pre-existing anti-immigrant attitudes (Harteveld et al. 2018 and Stockemer 2018). The securitisation framing around migration been used by Eurosceptic campaigns in both Central and Western Europe. The greatest ramifications came with the Brexit campaign, which appropriated media coverage of the 2015/6 arrivals and applied a Eurosceptic reframing of the 'Mediterranean migrant crisis' as a Calais/illegal/EU migrant crisis (Goodman et al. 2017 and Tong and Zuo 2018).



The EU institutions are facing not only increased interest and critique from citizens and media, but also increased polarisation from voters and parties. For the European Parliament, the increased salience of immigration has contributed to the historic increase in turnout for the 2019 European elections, but also the increased polarisation between parties in Western vs. Central Europe. In Western Europe, parties with more pro-immigrant positions did much better than expected, while, in Central Europe, parties supporting EU relocation quotas did worse (De Sio, Franklin and Russo 2019).

The actual impact on the European Commission and Council is not yet clear. Public opinion is invoked as reasons for recent EU migration proposals and for the opposition from certain Member States. Member States' positions in the Council seem unrelated to domestic public preferences and more about their political, institutional and strategic considerations (Arregui and Creighton 2018). But when Euroscepticism is high, public attitudes can influence the level of government opposition to EU harmonisation in politically contentious areas like migration and borders (Hagemann et al. 2016).

- **Inclusiveness of European societies**



Changes in public attitudes towards immigrants can have a major effect on a society's willingness to invest in integration as a strong two-way dynamic exists between integration policies and public opinion (Callens 2015).

Public opposition in Central Europe to the common EU migration policy may further concentrate immigration—with all its costs and benefits—in Europe's established destination countries.

Deteriorating public attitudes towards immigrants can encourage discriminatory behaviour among employers and clients and decrease contacts and interaction between immigrants and the public. These effects can undermine labour market integration and the economic and fiscal benefits of immigration. Changes in public policies and opinion can also have a major effect on immigrants' themselves in terms of immigrants' mental health, sense of belonging and political participation in their country of residence (Just and Anderson 2013, MIPEX 2015 and EU Website on Integration 2018). Attitudes can sporadically translate into violence as radicalisation via social media has led to terror attacks against immigrants (Muller and Schwarz 2018) as well as pro-immigrant citizens and politicians.

The success of far-right parties and the mobilisation of people driven by conservative values have broader implications for public attitudes not only towards immigrants, but also towards issues of diversity, human rights, social and global issues. Continued polarisation of party positions and public opinion in Member States most concerned, not only in Central Europe, may threaten consensus on the EU budget and any future solidarity mechanisms that Europe will need.



- **International and EU legal standards (human rights and rule of law)**



The assumption that reducing the number of arrivals would improve public opinion has led to policies and rhetoric that have politicised all arrivals, including the number of asylum applications and legal immigration numbers, such as family reunification and resettlement.

The negative media coverage in Central Europe should be seen as less driven by migration policies and attitudes and more related to oligarchs' strategies to undermine media freedom and civil society.

- **The EU as an international actor**



The assumption that reducing the number of arrivals would improve public opinion has also led to deals with third countries that undermine the EU's role as an international defender of human rights and the rule of law.

The erosion of global norms is increasing the expression of racist anti-immigrant attitudes among far-right Europeans, who are influencing and influenced by global populists like Trump (Giani and Méon 2017) and actors in Europe's neighbours (Russia, Turkey, Mideast and North Africa) where anti-immigrant sentiment is much higher (Dennison and Dražanová 2019). These intersecting movements have created new pressure against international governance like the Global Compact on Migration (Guhl 2019).



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ReSOMA

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AND ASYLUM

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