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Scapegoating the Unknown: How Anti-Immigration Sentiments Relates to the Decline in Political Trust in the European Parliament

Bachelor's project in Political Science

Supervisor: Jennifer L. Bailey

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Table of Content

Table of Content	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Theory	4
2.1. Nationalism and Group Threat Theory	4
2.2. Political Trust	6
3. Literature Review	7
3.1. Institutional approach of Political Trust	7
3.2. Can Specific Policy Issues Affect Political Trust?	8
3.3. Criticism of Political Trust	8
3.4. European Integration and Identity	9
3.5. Why is sentiments towards immigration interesting in context to a decline in trust in political institutions?	11
3.6. Other explanations for decreasing trust in the European Parliament	12
4. Methodology	14
4.1. Variables & Coding	15
4.2. Shortcomings	16
4.3. Statistical Procedures	17
5. Results	24
6. Discussion	27
7. Conclusion	29
8. Bibliography	31

1. Introduction

A much debated question since the founding of the European Union (EU) has been the different scopes of European integration and conflicting national and European identities. For hundreds of years, nationality and nation-states have been fundamental sources of self-identification in Europe. More recently, however, the EU has contributed to creating a new source of self-identification (Stockemer, Niemann, Doris & Speyer, 2019; Kroskrity, 1999). A fundamental change in the 2019 European Parliament (EP) election was the increased MEPs of both green and nationalist populist party politics in Europe and within the EP, where the nationalist party Identity & Democracy gained 37 seats; making scholars note an already apparent rise of far right wing populist and nationalist parties in Europe (Mudde, 2019, p. 23). Previous academic work has since then noted a rise of anti-immigration attitudes in party politics in Europe. Immigration has in the last five years been a first priority concern for most of the EU member states that voted in the EP elections in 2019, according to the Eurobarometer 89, conducted by the European Commission (European Commission, 2018). Nationalist parties are, more than often, documented for their politicizing of the immigration question, scapegoating immigrants to secure the vote. In light of these documented changes in the political landscape in Europe, this paper aims to analyse the relationship between European citizens' concerns about immigration and its effect on their trust in the EP as a political institution.

Scholars have argued for a number of years that political trust is in a decline (Hetherington, 2005; Torcal, 2014). While a growing body of academic literature debates the concept of political trust and its effect on democratic institutions, some earlier work has focused on the effects (and possible consequences) of a decline in political trust in national governments and national politics. I wish to expand this to the EU, a supranational regional actor that directly affects policy decisions in its member states. Specifically, this study aims to analyse if attitudes towards immigration have an effect on political trust in the EU's only democratically elected institution, the EP. Interest in the relationship between concerns about immigration and declining political trust in the EU stems from a study conducted by Lauren McLaren (2011) delving into this relationship in Britain, arguing that the deep entrenchment

of national identity and how it makes individuals relate to concerns about perceived threat of immigration affects our trust in the political institutions that govern us. If scholars are noting a decline in political trust and a rise in anti-immigration attitudes in nation states, this sentiment is hypothesized to be taking place in attitudes towards political trust in the European Parliament as well. The EU offers another scope of the role of identity, juggling between the relevance of national identity and integration of a European identity. By analyzing recent data collected from the European Social Survey 7 & European Social Survey 9, I aim to discuss the effect concerns about immigration has on political trust in the EP on European countries in contemporary time, and see if this plausible relationship has changed in the most recent EP election cycles. I aim to discuss, based on the empirical data and survey data presented in this paper, the following research question: *“Does a rise in anti-immigration sentiments across Europe decrease political trust in the European Parliament?”*

First, I offer an introduction of the research question and why it is interesting to research the plausible correlation between anti-immigration sentiments in Europe and declining trust in the EP. Secondly, I offer a presentation of relevant theory and a literature review from previous academic work in the relevant fields. Thirdly, I offer a presentation of the method I have chosen, alongside a reflection of this choice. Fourthly, the results will be presented with graphs and figures to further visualize my findings. Lastly, I offer a discussion of my findings and their implications in accordance to my research question, as well as concluding remarks regarding expected and actual findings. The analysis of the collected data overall confirms a relationship of statistical significance between anti-immigration sentiments and decreasing trust in the EP.

2. Theory

2.1. Nationalism and Group Threat Theory

It is arguably uncontroversial to state that scholars of international relations (IR) often state that modern European states were built on the notion of shared national identity and values to create a political community. Whether it stems from the creation of common language, religious connection, active attempts of bringing people together by state leaders, or an underlying human need for connection, it implies an amount of artificially constructed conceptualization of national identity and ethnic or cultural components (McLaren, 2011. p. 165-166). This understanding of a nation as a social artefact is also noted in Benedict Anderson's acclaimed book on nationalism and nation-building; that national identity is something everyone has in an imagined community. It is understood to be imagined, because while in even the smallest nation an individual will not know all of their fellow citizens, but yet sharing an imagined relationship due to common language, common borders and common culture (Anderson, 1991. p. 5-6). Despite how artificial these identities may seem, this heavily implies that national identities and the idea of belonging to a group is meaningful to individuals, emphasizing the power of identity to an individual. Imagined does not, however, mean imaginary; the identity is very real, but understood as a construct rather than something that "just is". What, then, happens when this feeling of identity and community clashes with another? This question arises when, for example, immigration occurs, especially when the newcomers arrive from cultures with largely different values than the native homogenous majority. Some scholars, like McLaren, argue that this poses a challenge to this identity, due to the understanding that merging with other cultures bring new, uncommon values that do not fit into the perceived homogenous majority identity. This can be theorized by the group threat theory, which states that rather than race prejudice being a feeling that exists fundamentally within individuals, it is a concept that occurs when a group feels threatened by another racial group, and is fundamentally a collective process; and the threat becomes more prevalent the larger the incoming group is or is perceived to be (Blumer, 1958. p. 3-4; Quillian, 1995, p. 586). Blumer suggests that race prejudice understood as "feelings lodged in an individual", or an individual understanding of prejudice, is a misdirect. At the time when he wrote this theory (in the 1950s), Blumer emphasizes that race prejudice was largely

studied as an individual feeling. He, however, suggests that race prejudice should be understood in a sense of group position, and should be viewed as fundamentally a matter of relationship between racial groups, especially the relationship between a dominant group and a subordinate group (Blumer, 1958. p. 3). Blumer then goes on to suggest four basic types of feeling that is usually present in race prejudice in the dominant group; (i) a feeling of superiority, (ii) a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien, (iii) a feeling of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, and (iv) a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant group (Blumer, 1958. p. 4). While Blumer acknowledges the individual differences likely to be apparent in the dominant group, such as some feeling hatred, some feeling more suspicion, some feeling more fright; the common denominator is the social position of the group (Blumer, 1958. p. 4).

Race prejudice, according to Blumer occurs when a challenge is felt by the dominant group towards this social position. It may come from several of the components listed above, but it is entirely understood to be a defensive trait that can create hostility towards a subordinate racial group. This defensive position functions to preserve the felt threatened position of the dominant group by a new, alien racial group (Blumer, 1958. p. 5). Perhaps most interestingly, however, is Blumer's discussion on how this affects the social discourse; where he mentions this to be a historical approach to understanding race prejudice. Anti-semitism in Europe is used as an example to show how dominant groups, in the face of big political events or changes, may be more so projected to allow for the formation of a scapegoat; blaming the subordinate group (Blumer, 1958. p. 7). It is important to note that this theory is quite old, which is why I will give a brief overview of more recent discourse on the matter. Quillian, which was cited previously, conducted a study in 1995 where he used survey data on anti-immigration sentiments in Europe to test Blumer's theory. The results found that the average degree of prejudice in European Economic Countries (EEC) were highly related to the threat perceived by the dominant group of residents in the country (Quillian, 1995. p. 605). However, the group threat theory is quite influential and has had its critics over the years. A more recent study conducted by Hjern (2007) found that Blumer's focus on the dominant group's size might not be as influential as previously thought; as he found evidence for size not being a general indicator of a perceived group threat effect (Hjern, 2007. p.

1271). Another important note is the contact hypothesis by Gordon Allport, which suggests that, very briefly explained, intergroup contact will lessen racial prejudice between different groupings (Pettigrew, 1998. p. 66). The contact hypothesis is not necessarily in conflict with Blumer's theory, but it does offer another angle of researching racial prejudice. With this in mind, this study will operationalize Blumer's theorized understanding of racial prejudice in the contemporary European setting in accordance with how it possibly effects decreasing political trust.

2.2. Political trust

Why is it interesting to study what affects political trust, and what its consequences are? Most scholars seem to agree that political trust is important; but the debate around what exactly lies within the term of political trust (and how to operationalize it) remains up for academic debate. For a democracy (or a democratically elected government) to have legitimacy in its authority, it has to be widely accepted by its citizens to have that authority and power (Hauge, Harrop & McCormick, 2016). To accept a government as legitimate can be argued to be an extension of trusting the institutions to be legitimate. As noted by Miller (1974) in his article concerning government and political trust, *"A democratic political system cannot survive for long without the support of a majority of its citizens. When such support wanes, underlying discontent is the necessary result, and the potential for revolutionary alteration of the political and social system is enhanced."* (Miller, 1974. p. 951). While political trust can be understood as a loose term with many definitions, one important component supported in earlier academic work is the notion that without a certain level of trust in each other or central political institutions, society nor democracy can function (Eder & Katsanidou, 2015. p. 86). Political trust, in its essence, concerns trust in the institutions that are perceived to govern people and its performance. Trust in the political institutions that govern, and hold power over citizens interests, is fundamental for a political system to function as it is intended to; for its citizens.

Trust is relational; it describes a situation where A depends on B for something. In the political sense, the trustee (A) is in one way or another subject to vulnerability towards the actions of the trusted (B). Here lies an uncertainty; when A decides to trust B, there will also be a risk of B not performing as expected (Van der Meer, 2017. p. 5). Hence, political trust

encompasses the relationship between voting citizens and their governing institutions. What happens when the institutions fails to perform as expected? Arguably, a decline in political trust.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Institutional Approach of Political Trust

Earlier work by scholars emphasizes that there is a robust and significant relationship between political institutions, democracy and trust (Rothstein & Uslaner 2005; Mishler & Rose, 2001). The approach towards political trust most critical to this dissertation is the institutional approach on political trust. The institutional approach on political trust emphasizes the rational part of a citizen: trust hinges on the evaluation of an institutions utility, and satisfactory performance (Mishler & Rose, 2001. p. 31). The institutional approach on political trust underlines that sustained low trust ultimately causes a challenge for the legitimacy of an institution; especially if specific issues continue to stay unresolved, citizens may begin to question (and distrust) the legitimacy of the regime (Hetherington, 1998. p. 792). Institutional approach in political trust can be divided into macro and micro-levels. Macro-level institutional theory concerns the performance of government. The choices and actions that political institutions make therefore have an effect on citizens trust in the institutions that govern them; the performance of the institutions itself is fundamental to political trust. This, according to the institutionalist approach, weighs heavily on the consequences of actions and the rationality of citizens. Trust is therefore evaluated on performance of the institution itself, and the production of desired political and economic outcomes (Mishler & Rose, 2001. p. 36). Micro-level theory, however, notes the presence of individual circumstances and values; for example, citizens who are unemployed or believe to have suffered from government policy decisions are likely to be less trusting of political institutions than those in countries that fare better on these policy areas (Mishler & Rose, 2001. p. 36). In sum, the institutional approach on political trust is arguably based on contemporary experience with government and institutional performance, and how that affects their trust (or distrust) towards the government or political institution.

3.2. Can Specific Policy Issues Affect Political Trust?

Trust in political institutions is most important when the results of policy might differ from what a citizen expects. Additionally, trust is important when it requires the citizen to sacrifice something on an individual level; such as when government proposes race-targeted programs, where the importance lies in that it needs to be publically believed that it does not only benefit a citizen personally, but it benefits in a better future for everyone (Hetherington, 2005. p. 4). A government's policy output arguably has an effect on political trust. William A. Gamson made the argument that distrust in the government rises out of the political decisions made, where the result is deemed undesirable (Miller, 1974. p. 964). The notion that specific policy issues has an affect on an individual's trust in an political institution can be understood in terms of policy dissatisfaction. Policy dissatisfaction is, as previously also operationalized by Miller (1974), "*the distance between the individual's own policy preferences, and the policy alternative that he identified with a particular party*" (Miller, 1974. p. 965). In his paper, he goes on to conclude that the individual evaluates the policies a party implements according to his own preferences. If he is dissatisfied with these results, he will likely feel more alienated from the political system (Miller, 1974. p. 970). In other words, policy dissatisfaction with a specific policy (and particularly, the result of this policy) is likely to affect a citizens political behavior and their trust in their political institution. Utilizing the micro-institutional aforementioned approach, this emphasizes the individual evaluation of institutional performance based on (dis)satisfaction with the implemented policy issues, such as individual stance on economic growth or migration policy.

3.3. Criticism of Political Trust.

A highly debated term such a political trust does not come without its criticism. As aforementioned, political trust is a widely debated political concept, but most scholars seem to agree that political trust in government and governing institutions is an important, pro-democratic value of a functional democracy. However, van der Meer (2017) argues that declining trust is not necessarily a bad trend in liberal democracies; healthy skepticism towards government and its implemented policies can arguably keep citizens engaged politically, and skepticism bolsters a citizens desire to monitor government actions. This principle argues that skeptical citizens strengthen democracy, simply because they are skeptical, which encourages vigilant citizenry (van der Meer, 2017. p. 6). As noted by

Kimmo; *“A certain level of distrust towards political actors is an element of a healthy representative democracy.”* (Kimmo & Setälä, 2007. p. 400). Skepticism and reflective citizenry in itself is a healthy and necessary part of democracy, noted since the beginning of democracy, and political trust arguably relates to this skepticism. Political trust is arguably understood to be most important when government implements policy that requires sacrifice on the individual level, or trusting a political institution while at the risk of performing as expected. Arguably, skepticism of elected representatives and elected government is fundamental in democracy, trusting an institution is an important factor regardless of skepticism; in other words, a citizen can be skeptical of policy and government while also trusting the political institution by still participating politically, such as choosing to vote. If this skepticism turns into political ambivalence or refusal to participate politically, the result is arguably negative in a functional democracy. Skepticism and dissatisfaction with policy outputs can be effective for a functional political system when being a catalyst for orderly change, but can have serious implications for ambivalence or increasing conflict towards the political system if it is deemed ineffective to deliver any form of viable change (Miller, 1974. p. 970).

3.4. European Integration and Identity

As noted by several scholars, the European Union has increasingly lost the trust of its citizens (Brosius, Elsas & Vreese, 2018; Harteveld, Meer & De Vries, 2013; Kopecky & Mudde, 2002). Political parties sceptic towards European integration have been present for decades in the EP, but is currently represented in the political group of far-right MEPs called Identity and Democracy. On their website, the party states their stance to *“reject any further evolution toward a European superstate”*, and advocate for the voluntary cooperation between sovereign national states (Identity & Democracy, 2020). Taggart (2004) notes that euroscepticism *“expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration.”* (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004. p. 3). A challenge to the European Union has since its founding been how to integrate its member states and further adopt towards the European ideal; the idea of an European people unified by the EU. What started as an economic union to maintain peace on the continent has evolved into an economic and political supranational regional actor, that promotes cooperation and intergovernmentalism through its treaties,

enlargements, bureaucracy and four freedom concept (European Union, 2020.) A central debate in European integration theory since the creation of the Union has always been the question of national sovereignty, and its limits. How far can European integration (whether economic, functional or political) proceed before sovereignty is at stake? I will here present two competing approaches to studying European integration: The intergovernmental approach and the constructivist approach.

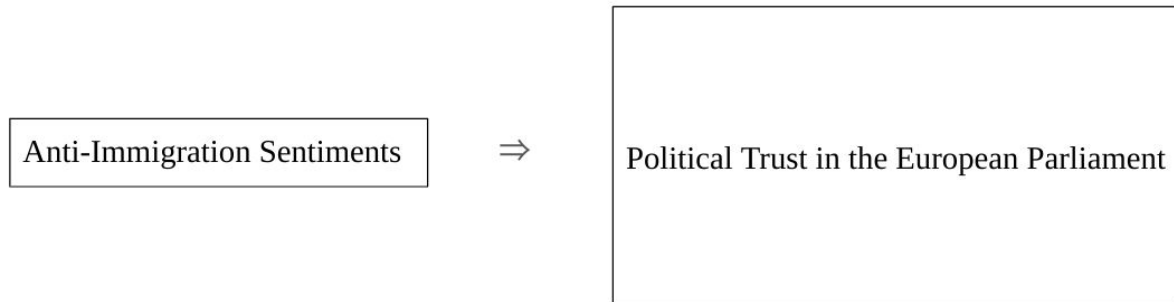
The intergovernmental approach of European integration stems from claims of the failings of the nation state, where Stanley Hoffman (1966) called the nation state obstinate (Pollack, 2015. p. 16). The intergovernmental approach emphasizes the role of national governments in strengthening the European integration process. Andrew Moravcsik furthered this theory by creating the “liberal intergovernmentalism” approach, which re-focused the role of national government and national government interests in decision-making processes in the EU. He argues that; *“pooling and delegating sovereignty through international organizations allows states to commit themselves credibly to their mutual promise, by monitoring state compliance with international agreements and filling in the blanks of broad international treaties”* (Pollack, 2015. p. 16-18). In terms of European identity, the intergovernmentalist approach argues for the strengthening of the Union through national cooperation, and somewhat rejects the idea of the EU becoming a supranational actor that strips national governments of autonomy; because it is in a national government’s best interest to cooperate and bargain. This school of thought, however, received criticism for its understanding of identity by the constructivist school. The constructivist school of European integration suggests that the institutions of the EU influence individual and national identities, preferences and behavior in a more profound way than the rational-choice, rational actor theories (such as the liberal intergovernmentalist idea that national governments will cooperate to maximize their own output). Empirical evidence from this school of thought has found mixed evidence, but some studies suggest a weak socialization of “European” values on its member states, especially following the enlargement of the Union. This poses a halt for the European integration model where cooperation will bring the “peoples” closer together; rather, national identities are understood as resistant and resilient (Pollack, 2015. p. 21). If these claims are correct, that national ideas and identities are deeply entrenched and resistant to change, adopting this European identity could prove to be difficult. The European Union, in other words, offers a

new dimension of identification for its citizens; which is plausible to cause conflict with their national identity. Building on Anderson's conceptualization of identity, I utilize the constructivist approach when discussing my findings.

3.5. Why is sentiments towards immigration interesting in context to a decline in trust in political institutions?

Previous academic work has found support for a link between concerns about immigration and euroscepticism (Stockemer, Niemann, Unger & Speyer, 2019). The aim of this dissertation is to analyse and discuss whether or not the concern about immigration increases political distrust in the EP, as the only directly elected institution in the European Union. This dissertation also builds further on the previous academic work finding support for concerns about immigration and political trust on nation-state level (McLaren, 2011), and aims to divulge into if this plausible link can be found between citizens of the EU, and the European Parliament. Here, political trust is operationalized by the understanding of political trust as a majority of the population trusting its governing institutions legitimacy to power, i.e. making policy. While, as noted before, a healthy scepticism towards political institutions is arguably a positive component of a democracy (i.e. reflected and politically interested citizens), growing political distrust can have negative implications for any political institution. The European Union offers an interesting new dimension of how to understand growing distrust in institutions, due to the fact that it is a supranational political actor. Previous academic work has suggested that growing distrust of institutions has negative implications when it turns into ambivalence or refusal to participate politically, such as voting (Cin, 2017, p. 1355-1356; Miller, 1974. p. 970; Kimmo & Setala, 2007. p. 418-419). Building on the previous academic work by McLaren (2011) and Mudde (2019) finding support for a link between national identity, the rise of nationalist politics and decreasing trust in the EU, explained by Stockemer (2019) as '*a more recent source of self-identification*', I predict to find correlation between persons with anti-immigration sentiments and decreasing trust in the European Parliament. Further building on the institutional approach of political trust, I argue that individuals who feel a perceived threat posed by immigration are more likely to call the institutions that govern them into question, potentially creating distrust.

Figure 1: Predicted casual relationship between independent variable and dependent variable



3.6. Other Explanations for Decreasing Trust in the European Parliament

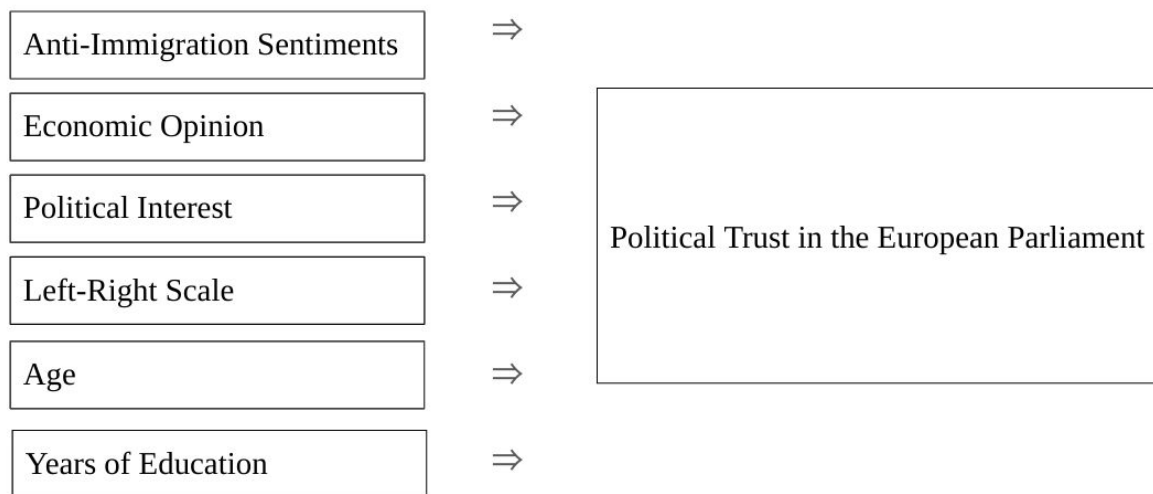
Seeing as political trust is a complex question of political behavior, I aim to control for other variables that are thought to have an effect on political trust in regards to the EP. Previous work has found that while immigration is one of the strongest indicators of critical attitudes towards the EU, attitudes towards economic performance also can be linked to negative attitudes towards the European Union; another study of political trust in national institutions found that an individual's perception of government mishandling economic issues was a strong indicator of increasing mistrust (McLaren, 2011. p. 178). Utilizing Mishler & Rose's logic derived from the institutional approach of trust and Miller's findings on dissatisfaction and trust, those who are dissatisfied with the national government's economic performance are potentially more likely to be increasingly distrusting of the EP. Two other variables that are theorized to have an effect on increasing distrust towards the EP is political interest and self-placement on left-right scale. One of the major problems regarding the EU has been theorized to be its citizens ambivalent relationship to political engagement: one example is the consistently low voter turnout in the EP elections. While studying political ambivalence has come to different conclusions on the effect it has on political behavior, some studies have found that individuals who trust the EU are more likely to be less ambivalent and indifferent (Stoeckel, 2012. p. 41). The effect of political ideology on trust in the EU or any of its institutions is a complex measurement as complicated as the question of ideology in itself. It is worth noting that negative attitudes towards the EU is not necessarily limited to a nationalist right-wing trait: European left-wing parties have opposed or questioned furthering European integration. This varies, however: the Norwegian Socialist Party (SV) advocates more sovereignty and leaving the European Economic Area (EEA), whereas the Swedish

socialist party (Left) scrapped this idea in 2019, and the German Socialist Party (Die Linke) supports further European integration, but opposes the structural market liberalism visible in the European Union¹. How a citizen on the left-wing scale determines trust towards the EP may, in other words, depend on national party politics. Beside this, nationalist and conservative values, which are often noted as right-wing values, have in earlier studies been shown to be associated with negative attitudes towards the EU; specifically, scepticism towards further European integration have been shown to be prevalent in countries where nationalist right-wing political parties are strong (Hooghe & Marks, 2004. p. 418).

Earlier work has found that higher levels of education are consistent with being less inclined towards negative attitudes regarding European integration (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2007. p. 656). Higher education reflects higher cognitive mobilization, which has been found to promote higher levels of support for European integration of the EU, and arguably, trust in its institutions. This could be due to the fact that the EU is a highly complex political actor, and higher educated individuals are more likely to have a reflected opinion on the matter (Inglehart, 1970. p. 785). Arguably, younger people are more likely to be positively inclined towards European integration, based on the argument that younger people subscribe to post materialist values moreso than the older generation, and that younger people are more likely to be higher educated (Inglehart, 1977. p. 57-58). While the relationship between age and support for European integration has been noted to be inconclusive in earlier work, studies have found evidence for support of the EU decreasing with age (Stockemer, Niemann, Unger & Speyer, 2019. p 12-21).

¹ The Norwegian Socialist Party (SV) are, however, based in a country that is not a member of the EU, but the EEA. SV, however, does campaign to completely leave the EEA (Sosialistisk Venstreparti, 2020). The Swedish Left only recently voted to remove their pledge for Sweden to leave the European Union (The Local, 2019). The German Socialist Party, Die Linke, however, supports the existence and complete reform of the European Union, on the basis of opposing the Lisbon treaty and treaty system, neo-liberalism and undemocratic structure in their party manifesto (Die Linke, 2011). The larger point is: left-wing political parties in Europe differ in their views on the European Union. National variations of attitudes towards the EU is logically thought to be reflected in citizens who identify with socialist left-wing politics.

Figure 2: Predicted casual relationship between all independent variables and dependent variable



Based on the aforementioned theories and literature review, I aim to test the following hypotheses:

(H1) individuals with negative concerns about immigration are likely to be less trusting of the European Parliament

(H2) the plausible link between anti-immigration attitudes and decreasing political distrust in the EP is stronger in European nations with strong populist parties

(H3) the relationship between anti-immigration sentiments and decreasing political trust has increased from the 2014 to the 2019 EP election period

(H0) there is no relationship of statistic significance between anti-immigrant sentiments and decreasing political trust in the European Parliament.

4. Methodology

To test the posed hypotheses, I look at data on anti-immigration sentiments and political trust in in the European Parliament, collecting data from the European Social Survey (ESS), from the datasets ESS7 (2014) and ESS9 (2018). The European Social Survey is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted across european nations since 2001 every two years, and measures attitudes, beliefs and behavioral patterns (European Social Survey, 2020). The survey data is frequently used in academic papers to chart change in

structures in Europe across a plethora of topics. The countries analysed were the ones available within the dataset². The ESS7 and the ESS9 datasets were chosen due to them being the datasets closest available to the 2014 and 2019 European Parliament Elections³. A fundamental change in the 2019 election was the increased MEPs of both green and nationalist populist party politics in Europe and within the European Parliament, where the nationalist party ID gained 37 seats; making scholars note a rise of right wing populist and nationalist parties in Europe (Mudde, 2019. p. 23). The growth of these parties can arguably be understood as an indicator for an increase of nationalist politics in Europe. However, I wish to analyse if this recent rise in nationalist politics in Europe could be related to an increase in anti-immigration sentiments and decreasing political trust in the EP specifically.

4.1. Variables & Coding

The dependent variable is defined by ESS as “Political Trust in the European Parliament”. The participants in the European Social Survey were asked the question, “How much do you personally trust the European Parliament?”. The values range from a 0-10 point scale, offering 11 different values of varying trust. Values range from 0, meaning “No trust at all” to 10, meaning “Complete trust.” The participants were also given the chance to choose “refuse”, or “don’t know”.

The main independent variable of interest is understood as general sentiments of anti-immigration attitudes, where respondents were asked if they believe immigration makes their country a worse or better place to live. The operationalization of the term is a generic understanding of these sentiments. The reason why a generic understanding of anti-immigration attitudes has been chosen for the main independent variable of interest is due to the presumption that a more general understanding of the concept encompasses a larger scope of dimensions of the sentiment. However, a generic operationalization limits the possibility to make assumptions based on specific issues concerning immigration; such as the difference between immigration from same ethnic group from the majority in a country and

² The countries included in the ESS7 dataset were Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and The United Kingdom. The ESS9 does not include Denmark, Israel, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and Sweden, and as opposed to ESS7 includes Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy and Serbia.

³ The ESS9 (2018 dataset) is the closest available dataset to the 2019 EP election; hence why it was chosen.

immigration from a different ethnic group from the majority in a country. The participants were asked the question “Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?”. The values range from a 0-10 scale, offering 11 different values of varying sentiments towards the generic attitude towards immigration by the participants. Values range from 0, meaning “Worse place to live”, to 10, meaning “Better place to live”. Neither the dependent or the main independent variable had to be recoded.

Additional independent variables serve the purpose of checking for other covariates that influence political trust. The variable regarding “attitudes towards national economic policy performance” is sorted on an 11-point scale, ranging from “0” which means “extremely dissatisfied”, to “10”, which means “extremely satisfied.” Placement on the left-right scale and political interest were also included. “Placement on left-right scale” is sorted on an 10-point scale, ranging from “0” which means “left”, to “9” which means “right. “How interested in politics”, which here is understood as the variable showing political interest, was re-coded. Originally, individuals who responded they were “very interested” were found as 1 in the dataset. To best show gradual increase rather than decrease (as with the other similar variables), this was flipped, so “1” means “not interested at all” and “4” means very interested on the 4-point scale. Two sociodemographic variables have been included in the regression analysis: level of education and age. Level of education shows how many years of education the respondent has completed, and ranges from “0” to “51”. Age ranges from “15” to “90”, offering means to control for age-related relationships⁴.

4.2. Shortcomings

In this paragraph, I wish to comment on the reliability and validity of the data, and reflect on possible shortcomings. Reliability and validity are important concerns when conducting scientific research. The reliability of this data is considered quite strong, due to the fact that the survey data is collected from European Social Survey, specifically the datasets from 2014 (ESS7) and 2018 (ESS9). The ESS is a well-known institution, and the data-collection process is known to be thorough and conducted by professional interviewers. Reliability means conducting several tests and trials of the hypotheses asked to ensure the

⁴ The age limit to answering the ESS surveys is 15 years, hence why the youngest participants are at the age of 15.

trustworthiness of the results, while validity is understood as taking measures to decrease systematic mistakes when conducting your research. This can, for example, be avoided by building a strong theoretical reason for the choice of variables (Ringdal, K. 2018) A possible shortcoming with the chosen variables is the fact that several variables are subjective and attitudinal. This weakens the validity of the variables in two ways: (i) the variables are a subject of personal opinion and (ii), the variables have a higher risk of being misinterpreted by the participants. If, say, a participant misunderstood the scope of the question due to the range of values or simply misinterpret the question, this significantly affects the answer. Therefore, it is important to be aware of this while discussing the results of the analysis. Another possible shortcoming that is fundamental to be aware of when working with subjective variables from survey data is the possibility of overgeneralizing the results. Seeing as this data is derived from a survey questionnaire, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of what claims that can be made from a study such as this. A statistical method, such as using a regression analysis to examine correlation between variables in a large n-study like this, does not offer a grand mass of in-depth insight into the causal mechanisms that cause the plausible correlation (Moses & Knutsen, 2019. p. 92). A strong theoretical approach and thorough literature review of previous academic work strengthens the validity of a statistical approach, such as the aim of this study.

4.3. Statistical Procedures

First, I aim to present the two main variables of interest through descriptive statistics & graphs; (i) “anti-immigrant sentiments” and (ii) “political trust in the European Parliament” from both the 2014 and 2018 datasets. These statistics will show the distribution of data from the independent and main dependent variable. Second, I aim to test the bivariate relationship between the two main variables of interest to see what the relationship looks like without added control variables, and if there are any significant changes to this relationship between 2014 and 2018. Lastly, I aim to test the multivariate relationship between the main variables when control variables are added to the analysis. These results will be the basis for discussing the hypotheses presented earlier. I have chosen to conduct a regression analysis (both bivariate and multivariate) to try to locate correlation between the two main variables of interest. Seeing as the interest in this topic stems from a desire to delve into the relationship between anti-immigration attitudes and declining trust in the European Parliament

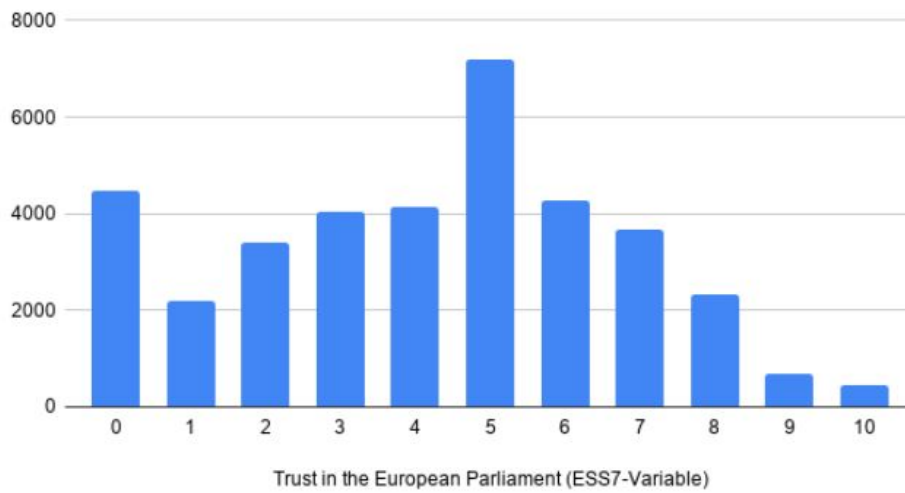
specifically, a large N-study was deemed most reasonable to locate the general, broad trends in Europe.

To measure the plausible effect of anti-immigration sentiments on political trust in the EP, the survey data from 2014 and 2018 have been analysed. The two main variables of interest are shown below in Figure 3 & Figure 4. These figures show the distribution of answers from both variables, and are included to chart changes in distribution between 2014 and 2018. For the dependent variable, the value 0 means “No trust at all”, while 10 means “Complete trust.” The bivariate relationship between immigration attitudes and political trust in the European Parliament is shown visually in Figure 5, and descriptively in Model 1 & Model 2. Its purpose is to show the bivariate relationship between anti-immigration sentiments and political trust in the European Parliament. Further, its purpose is to (i) test the relationship between the two variables to see its effect, and (ii) to compare the changes from 2014 to 2018 EP election cycles. Model 3 & Model 4 serves as the multiple regression analysis for all countries available in the dataset, with the added control variables. Model 3 shows the results from the 2018 survey data, while Model 4 shows the results from the 2014 survey data. The last figure, Figure 6, show results in a country fixed effects visual, showing difference in results from the 2018 survey data in Germany and Hungary. The figure shows the distribution of the main independent variable, similar to Figure 3 & 4. Additionally, a multivariate regression analysis checking for all variables has been added to test the significance in plausible correlation between the main variables. These countries were chosen based on most recent national election results to test H2⁵.

⁵ Nationalist and populist parties are increasing in popularity in several European countries. In the latest election in 2018, the Hungarian right wing nationalist coalition Fidesz-KDNP, lead by Viktor Orban, received 49.3% of the votes and won the election (Statista, 2020). The latest election in Germany took place in 2017, where the right wing nationalist party ADF received 11.5% of the vote; coming in third place to the center-right CDU and the social democrats in SDP (The Federal Returning Officer, 2020). This arguably shows that nationalist, right-wing anti-immigration sentiments are likely to be increasing moreso in Hungary rather than Germany as of 2018. The choice to look at these countries specifically are based on these election results and assumptions.

Figure 3. Distribution of the dependent variable “Trust in the European Parliament”; data from 2014 (ESS7) and 2018 (ESS9)

Political Trust in the European Parliament (2014)



Political Trust in the European Parliament (2018)

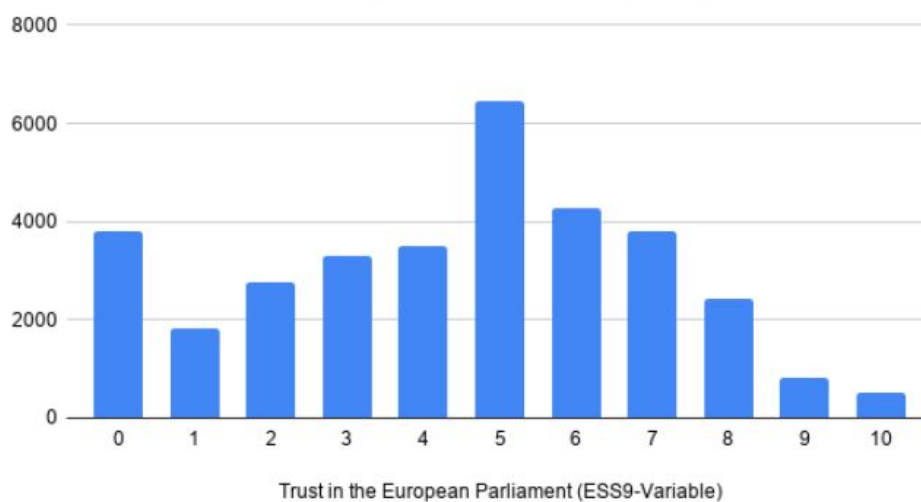
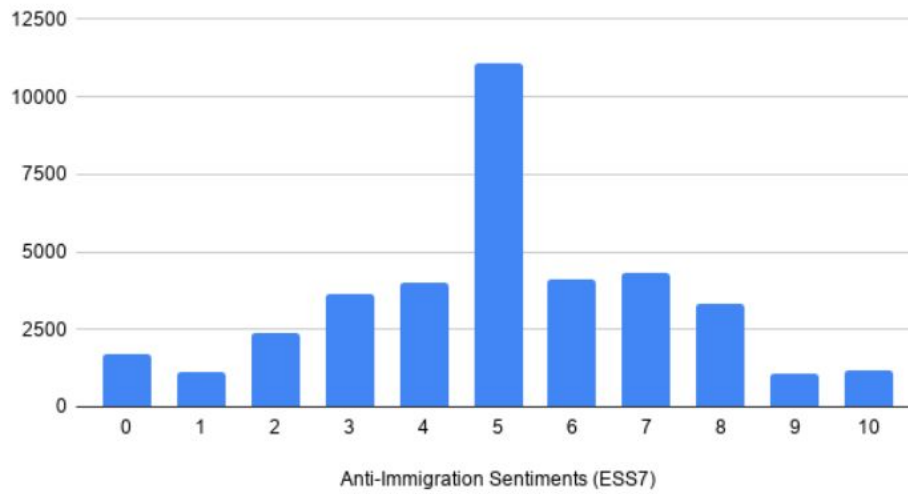


Figure 4. Distribution of the independent variable “Immigration makes country better or worse place to live”:
data from 2014 (ESS7) and 2018 (ESS9)

Anti-Immigration Sentiments based on ESS7-variable (2014)



Anti-Immigration Sentiments based on ESS-variable (2018)

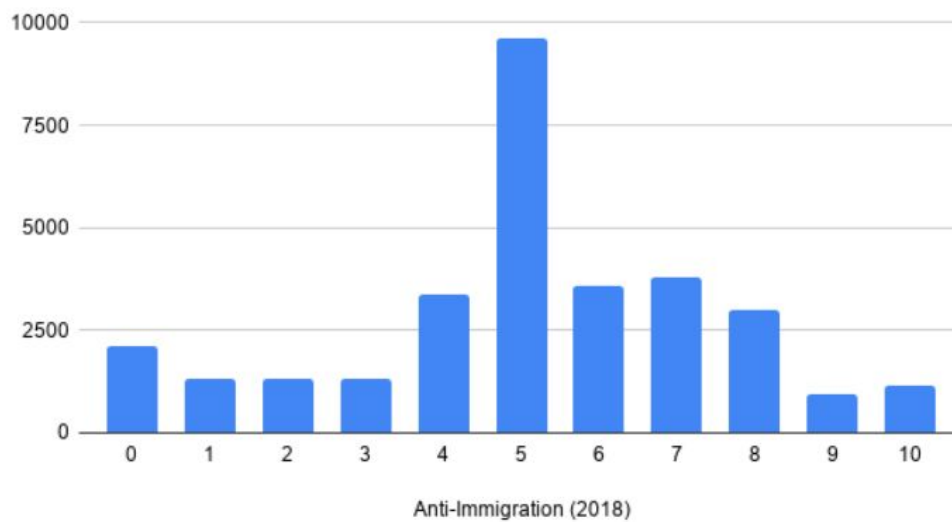
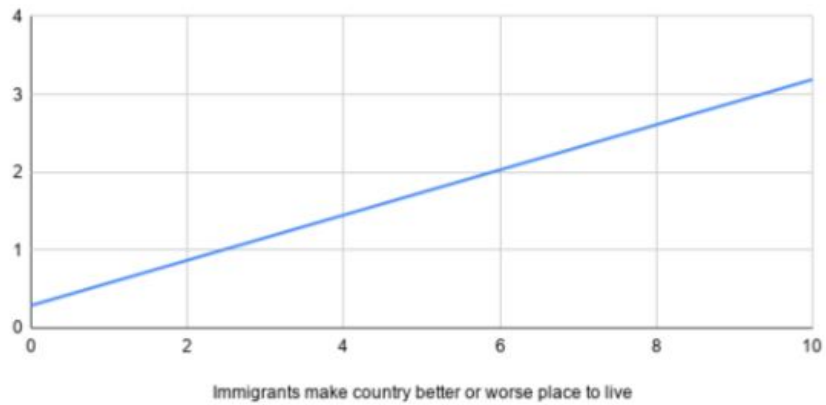
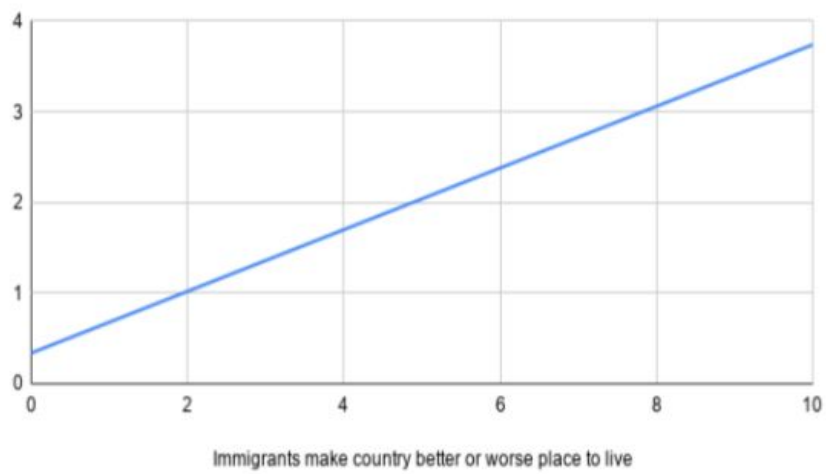


Figure 5. Bivariate relationship between dependent and independent variable (2014 - 2018)

Relationship between anti-immigration sentiments & political trust in the EP (2014)



Relationship between anti-immigration sentiments & political trust in the EP (2018)



Model 1 & Model 2. Bivariate regression analysis of relationship between dependent and independent variable from 2018 (Model 1) and 2014 (Model 2)

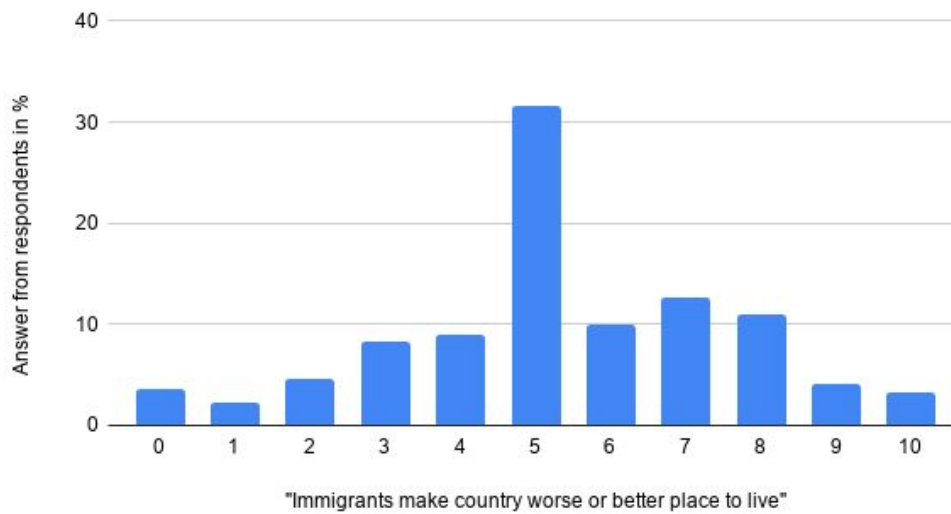
	Model 1 (2018)		Model 2 (2014)	
	B-Coef	P- Value	B-Coeff	P- Value
Constant	2.743	0.000	2.719	0.000
Immigration Attitudes	.344	0.000	.292	0.000
R2		0.1046		0.0684
Number of Observations		32360		35815

Model 3 & Model 4. Multivariate regression analysis of relationship between dependent, independent variable and control variables from 2014 (Model 3) and 2018 (Model 4)

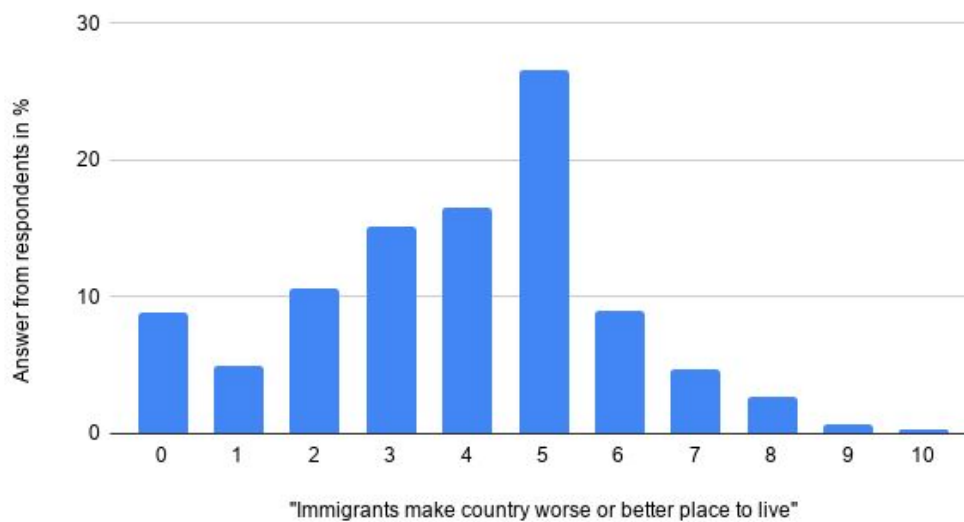
	Model 3 (2014)			Model 4 (2018)		
	B-Coef	P- Value	S. Dv.	B-Coeff	P-Value	S. Dv.
Constant	2.445	0.000	.076	2.153	0.000	.083
Immigration Attitudes	.201	0.000	.006	.256	0.000	.006
Economic performance	.249	0.000	.005	.272	0.000	.006
Political Interest	.051	0.001	.015	.087	0.000	.016
Left-Right Scale	.028	0.000	.005	-.006	0.337	.006
Age	-.015	0.000	.000	-.013	0.000	.007
Years of education	.004	0.249	.003	.004	0.186	.003
R2			0.1375			0.1755
Number of Observations			32151			28039

Figure 6. Distribution of responses to variable “immigrants make country worse or better place to live” in Germany & Hungary (2018)

Immigration sentiments in Germany (2018)



Immigration sentiments in Hungary (2018)



Model 5 & Model 6. Multivariate regression analysis of relationship between dependent, independent variable and control variables using ESS9 (2018 data) in Germany (Model 5) and Hungary (Model 6)

	Model 5 (Germany)			Model 6 (Hungary)		
	B-Coef	P- Value	S. Dv.	B-Coeff	P-Value	S. Dv.
Constant	2.181	0.000	.314	2.746	0.000	.409
Immigration Attitudes	.312	0.000	.022	.334	0.000	.034
Economic performance	.238	0.000	.022	.129	0.000	.032
Political Interest	.164	0.008	.061	.366	0.000	.366
Left-Right Scale	-.014	0.552	.024	-.110	0.000	.028
Age	-.022	0.000	.026	.000	0.810	.003
Years of education	-.011	0.415	.013	.018	0.369	.020
R2			0.2056			0.1193
Number of Observations			2167			1289

5. Results

Overall, the models presented show support for a link between participants with anti-immigrant sentiments and decreasing political trust in the EP. There is an increase in these attitudes both in the bivariate and multivariate regression analysis. While the increase from 2014 to 2018 is not large, there is evidence based on the results for a small increase in the relationship between anti-immigration sentiments and decreasing political trust in the European Parliament. Breaking down the models and figures, we can see clearly in Figure 3 that the amount of participants who answered “No trust at all” (11.35% in 2014, and 12.11% of participants in 2018) is significantly higher than those who answered “Complete trust” (1.21% in 2014, and 1.50% in 2018). However, most seem to converge on the middle of the survey options (19.53% in 2014, and 19.26% in 2018). Figure 4, which visually presents

distribution of the independent variable “Immigrants make country worse or better place to live”, the value 0 means “Worse place to live”, while 10 means “Better place to live.” Figure 4 shows us that most participants converge on the middle with the value 5 (30.25% in 2014, and 27.94% of participants in 2018). These results imply that the majority of European citizens are still unsure about the negative or positive aspects of immigration.

Figure 5, which display the OLS lines between the two variables in both 2014 and 2018, demonstrate that the more respondents thought that immigrants was good for the country, the more likely they were to trust the EP. Both Model 1 and Model 2 show a correlation between those who have anti-immigration sentiments and those who have a decreasing amount of trust in the EP. Since the coefficient is positive in both Model 1 & Model 2, we can establish that individuals with increasing pro-immigrant sentiments are more likely to also be more trusting on the EP. The R^2 shows an increase from 2014 (6.8%) to 2018 (10.4%), which shows the proportion of the variance in political trust in the European Parliament explained by immigration attitudes. There is only a slight change from 2014 to 2018, as the coefficient increased in 2018, but the changes are not large enough to be considered a significant increase. However, the results of the bivariate regression analysis do show support for a statistically significant relationship between immigrant-friendly attitudes and those who trust the EP more. Most importantly, the p-value for both models are of statistic significance; meaning a correlation between the two variables is present and less likely to be linked by chance.

When adding other variables in the multivariate regression analysis in Model 3 & 4, we find the same overall results; the coefficient is over 0, showing an increasing, indicating that respondents who are pro-immigration are likely to be more trusting of the EP. The coefficient did increase from 2014 to 2018 here as well, from 0,21 in 2014 to 0,25 in 2018, which only shows us a slightly steeper increase in the relationship between pro-immigration sentiments and trusting the EP in 2018. However, more interestingly, the relationship still keeps a p-value of $>0,05$, confirming the correlation between the main independent and dependent variable when controlling for other variables as well. The other variables overall act as expected; respondents with a positive experience of national economic performance are more positive towards trusting the EP, and respondent’s who are more politically interested are

more positive towards trusting the EP. However, the results were inconclusive for the effects of left-right political leanings, as this variable was found not statistically significant in Model 4, and the coefficient lies barely above 0 in Model 3. Therefore, it is impossible to make any conclusions about this variable's effect. As for the sociodemographic variables, age decreases trust in the EP (decreasing with each year you gain). The p-value for education, however, was $>0,05$ for each model, meaning conclusions cannot be drawn from educational effect. This does not mean education does not have an effect: it was just not found in this model. Overall, however, the relationship between pro-immigration sentiments and individuals who increasingly trust the EP was confirmed and found to be statistically significant, with a value of $>0,05$ with both models. This confirms a correlation between the two variables according to these models when tested with other variables as well.

The tests run on specific countries (Germany & Hungary) show support for H2. Figure 6 shows support for different distributions of respondent's answers when asked about their views on immigration in their nation. The graph presenting this distribution in Germany shows most respondent's converging on 5 - which is understood to be the median answer. 31,5% of respondents answered 5. However, we can also see that 33,5% of respondents answered from 6-8, which can be understood as being increasingly positive towards immigration in their country. A total of 74 people (out of 2500 respondents) answered 10, which is fairly high, when comparing to Hungary. In the graph presenting distribution of answers in Hungary, most converge on 5 as well, which 26,5% responded with. However, individuals who responded from 0-4, which can be understood as finding immigration increasingly negative on the country, represents 56,2% of the individuals who responded to this question. Only 17,3% responded 6 and up, and only 4 people responded 10 (out of 1500 respondents). Anti-immigration sentiments are, according to these numbers, higher as of 2018 in Hungary as opposed to Germany. As for the Models 5 & 6, both show support for positive attitudes towards immigration having a positive effect on trust in the EP. The relationship is found in both models to be statistically significant according to their $>0,05$ value, proving correlation in this relationship at a country-fixed level as well. Looking at Figure 6, one can find support for these anti-immigration sentiments being stronger in Hungary as opposed to Germany.

6. Discussion

Unsurprisingly, the results of analyzing this data finds support for a correlation between anti-immigration sentiments and decreasing political trust in the EP. Looking at the results this thesis has produced, there is evidence for specific policy issues, such as the immigration issue, having an effect on people's political trust in the institutions that individuals evaluate to be responsible for this policy. In other words, as previously suggested by Mishler & Rose (2001), if an individual is dissatisfied with the policy decision presented by a political institution, this makes it more likely for the individual to put the institution responsible into question. Blumer's theory on group threat can, looking at this data, help explain why an individual with higher anti-immigration sentiments is more likely to be decreasingly trusting of the EP. An individual who is anti-immigration, for many different reasons, may be more likely to scapegoat immigrants as a reason for bad political turnout. The EP is often put into question about their immigration policies and the "free flow of peoples" principle the European Union has built since Schengen started in 1985⁶. This could, arguably, also have been pushed moreso due to the refugee crisis starting in 2015; where the number of immigrants and refugees from outside of Europe grew exponentially higher than before. An individual who feels threatened by this influx of immigrants, despite the actual size of the outgroup, is understood to be more likely to question the political institution they deem responsible for this policy decision; which arguably, could explain one source of decreasing political trust in the EP. This answers the research question posed earlier, and confirms H1, where the data confirms a relationship of statistic significance between rising anti-immigration sentiments and decreasing political trust in the EP. The results of the analysed data rejects the null hypothesis in this case. However, it is important to note that this study cannot confirm any causal mechanisms, but it can imply that these mechanisms might be caused by this. It can only confirm the correlation between the tested variables. Further study is needed to confirm causal mechanisms.

⁶ The Schengen Agreement means free flow of people between the countries who have signed the agreement, which is 22 different European nations as of today. This means less border control between these countries. I found it important to note this distinction, because it does not mean that people who are not part of Schengen can travel without stricter border control (Europalov, 2020).

This relationship is also confirmed in the country-fixed models testing this data in Germany and Hungary. However, the distribution of the main independent variable “anti-immigration sentiments” show a visible difference between the two countries. Since both countries confirm the relationship, it is difficult to conclude whether or not the link is stronger in either country. However, the Hungarian results show a visible increase in anti-immigration sentiments as opposed to Germany, given that over 50% of the respondents found immigration to make the country worse (below the median). This does indicate that H2 concerning that this link is stronger in countries affected by nationalist parties in government could have an effect. The relationship was found statistically significant in both countries, but I would not find it amiss to suggest that seeing as anti-immigration sentiments are clearly stronger in Hungary, the link between strong nationalist parties, anti-immigration sentiments and decreasing trust in the EP logically seems likely. However, to find the causal mechanism, another type of study would have to be conducted; such as an in-depth case study of Fidesz-KDNP’s discourse regarding immigration and the EU. Lastly, H3, which concerns this link increasing from 2014 to 2018, was overall confirmed, but the increase was not of large proportions. The coefficient in the relationship between the two main variables increased by 0,5 from 2014 to 2018. This does not disprove that a change has occurred, but it does suggest that the increase in political distrust towards the EP did not change drastically over the 4-year time period.

If anything, the findings of this paper arguably shows further evidence for a challenge the European Union will be facing in the coming years. Nationalist parties and nationalist policies (such as anti-immigrant policies) have been documented in Europe increasingly in the last decades. In particular, populist radical-right parties such as the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and French National Front (FN) secured their political footing in national political systems with appeals that shone of authoritarianism, nationalism, and populism (Mudde, 2007. p. 11). The roots of this insurgency in the populist party movement in Europe has risen primarily following the structural changes happening in Europe mid and late 20th century, both economically and politically, with the post-industrial revolution showing increasing structural support for European integration (Mudde, 2019. p. 24). With the Refugee Crisis starting in 2015, nationalist and populist right-wing parties increasingly scapegoated the large streams of incoming refugees by trying to capitalize on the fear and

uncertainty this brought by employing anti-immigration, anti-Islam and anti-Europe rhetoric both in national party politics, and increasingly in EU politics (Akkermann, de Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016. p. 5). These political trends and previous trends in academic work on nationalism and constructivist European integration shows support on the basis of converging identities - the national identity and the European identity. Assuming, based on the groundwork presented earlier, these identities are conflicting, and this relationship is increasingly brought to the surface by nationalist parties, this could prove to be a challenge for the EU in the coming years. Fearing the unknown is not a new trend in Europe (or any part of the world). However, since the foundation of the EU, the shift from the westphalian system of strong, sovereign nations to the liberal globalism that the EU represents offers new challenges to how Europeans relate to its political actors, and the role of identity becomes more prominent. As noted by McLaren, immigration may have long-term and unanticipated consequences on this political system's functionality and how trustworthy its citizens find it (McLaren, 2011. p. 185). This further challenges the intergovernmental approach to understanding European integration, showing that, as argued by the constructivists, national identity might be more influential and sturdy than the rational idea of cooperation.

7. Conclusion

Overall, this study confirms a correlation between european citizens with stronger anti-immigration sentiments being less trusting of the EP. This relationship has slightly increased from 2014 to 2018, and this relationship is present in countries with both strong nationalist parties such as Hungary, and otherwise, such as Germany. However, the anti-immigration sentiments were found to be much stronger in Hungary. The data collected confirms the main hypothesis in the research question posed at the beginning of the paper, *"Does a rise in anti-immigration sentiments across Europe decrease political trust in the European Parliament?"*. This research contributes and compliments earlier academic work on this relationship by not simply looking at euroscepticism, but at political trust in institutions. Additionally, this paper also contributes to support the notion that anti-immigration sentiments not only affect trust in national governments, but also in the EU, which offers another political dimension of this relationship.

As noted, further research into the causal mechanisms of this relationship is necessary to find evidence for these claims. One obvious shortcoming with this study is that it is not able to find causal mechanisms; however, the study aimed to find correlation on a broad basis and to isolate the relationship in the EU; a large, complicated political entity where several nations are included. Seeing as trust in the EU has, arguably, been relatively low for decades, I found it interesting to study what variables could have an affect on political trust in such a large, complex political actor. This paper can only support the evidence found that individuals who have stronger anti-immigration sentiments are more likely to also be distrusting of the EP. As noted earlier, some degree of political trust in the political institutions is necessary and crucial for effective policy making. This study finds evidence for the institutional approach towards understanding political trust having some merit, meaning that those who have stronger anti-immigration sentiments are more likely to distrust the EP due to dissatisfaction with the relevant policy. However, this relationship is clearly more complex than just a case of policy dissatisfaction; based on the previous work presented in this paper, I argue that it is also a relationship affected by converging identities and a feeling of group threat, arguably promoted by rising nationalist parties in Europe. more in-depth study of this relationship on a national-based model would be necessary to isolate these causal mechanisms, seeing as this study mainly researches this relationship on a broad, regional level. Nonetheless, the findings of this paper show support for the aforementioned relationship; and if current political trends in Europe continue on the same path, the EU might be facing a challenge regarding furthering integration.

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