**Research territory definition**

A few sentences laying out the broadest possible context for the work

The global number of international migrants has grown significantly, from 75 million in 1965 to around 272 million in 2019 (World Migration Report, 2020). Europe has emerged as one of the primary global destinations (Haas et al., 2019). Economic inequality, demographic pressures, and environmental crises are just some of the drivers of migration (Richmond, 2002). In Europe, opinions about immigration are heterogeneous. In Western Europe, short-term increases in immigration can lead to more negative attitudes, particularly when immigrants are from non-EU countries. However, regions with a higher share of foreign-born populations tend to be less anti-immigrant (Dražanová & Gonnot, 2023). Differences between countries often reflect economic conditions, for example the severity of a current recession (Hatton, 2016). Polarization refers to the divergence of opinions or attitudes within a society, often leading to the formation of distinct and opposing groups (Williams, 2018). In the context of immigration, polarization can manifest as stark differences or subtle distinctions in attitudes towards migrants, ranging from acceptance and support to scepticism and opposition.

POLARIZATION IN GENERAL

While media reports often report somewhat loosely about a “polarized Europe” (SOURCE), in the academic literature researchers have approached the topic in several different contexts using diverse methodologies.

For example, social psychology provides the concept of group polarization, a phenomenon where “members of a deliberating group move toward a more extreme point in whatever direction is indicated by the members’ predeliberation tendency” (Sunstein, 2003, p. 81).

In politics, polarization describes a phenomenon of accentuated differences in larger groups or societies. Political scientists distinguish between elite and mass polarization. Whereas elite polarization looks at the polarization of parties or elected officials (Druckman et al., 2013), mass polarization refers to polarization of the general public (although the pertinent literature disagrees on the exact definition of the concept, Silva, 2018).

Another distinction is made between affective polarization and opinion polarization (sometimes called attitude polarization). Affective polarization refers to “a tendency among party supporters (partisans) to view other party/parties as a disliked outgroup(s) while holding positive ingroup feelings for one’s own party” (Reiljan, 2020, p. 1). Opinion polarization looks at the “distributional properties of public opinion” (DiMaggio et al, 1996, p. 691) regarding certain socio-political topics. This thesis investigated opinion polarization on three migration-related issues.

THIS IS A TEST

ISSUE ALIGNMENT

One additional aspect of polarization is issue alignment. Issue alignment refers to the process by which people's attitudes, beliefs, or preferences on one set of issues become correlated or aligned with their attitudes on other issues, often due to shared ideological, partisan, or social factors. This concept is commonly studied in political science, sociology, and psychology to understand how individuals or groups develop cohesive worldviews or political identities. Issue alignment is associated with increased negative political affect, particularly towards out-groups. This alignment of issue attitudes can exacerbate political hostility, as individuals perceive others with differing issue alignments as more ideologically distant (Bougher, 2017). Investigating issue alignment regarding immigration opinions in Europe is an important topic because it sheds light on how attitudes toward immigration are connected to broader political, social, and cultural dynamics, with significant implications for understanding public opinion, policy-making, and social cohesion.

**Niche establishment within research territory**

A concrete and narrow open problem within the research territory

* Issue alignment is usually considering only one variable at once – a multi-variable approach is missing

Pointing out a gap in the knowledge of some topic

* (To my knowledge), there is no systematic, Europe-wide study considering overall as well as country-specific trends over time using several polarization metrics in addition to multi-variable issue alignment

Noting an apparent contradiction in the literature or a published claim that is vulnerable to new data

Identifying rival theoretical models that can be distinguished by new data

Suggesting an entirely novel way of thinking about a research area

clearly and specifically state the central research question

has there been an ongoing trend of several aspects of polarization, including issue alignment in Europe regarding opinions about immigration?

**Niche occupation**

how we occupied the niche we just identified

* using ESS data
* calculate 6 polarization metrics + issue alignment
* consider trends over time

outline the approach

Observations and / or executed theory

General form of the data (what quantities and how we measured them)

Weighted ESS survey data from 2002 to 2024

How analyses of the data can can answer the central research question

* work out trends regarding different aspects of polarization across europe

Maybe end the introduction with a short summary of our main results and conclusion (even if they are already stated in the abstract)

Results suggest….