**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.

Dear Stefano,

Thanks for sending this along, it's nice to hear from you.

* I could imagine in the thesis that you would need to discuss the variety of conceptualizations of polarization from the literature
  + Siehe draft paper
* And, presumably, you will need to argue for the need for clearer metrics and/or a tool that offers centralized metrics for researchers (which I am assuming is the goal of your work)
  + Viele theories, nich so viele large-scale empirische quantifizierungen
* The choice of looking at opinions on immigration should also be grounded in the literature
  + klar
* Perhaps you also provide a "test run" of the tool by developing a few hypotheses (based on a literature review) that can be tested with the tool and demonstrating how it performs in this regard.
  + Hm.
* Each metric should reflect one aspect of polarization
* E.g., “non-neutrality reflects …. Meaning a high value or increasing trend indicates…
* Dispersion reflects…..
* The explained variance of PC1 indicates issue alignment
* Paste formula into chatgpt, ask for sociological interpretation

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

Prior research in this domain frequently adopts a singular methodological lens to quantify polarization. In contrast, this thesis advances the field by integrating multiple established metrics, each capturing distinct facets of polarization, to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of immigration-related opinion dynamics across Europe. Furthermore, we introduce an innovative approach to quantifying issue alignment. Departing from conventional single-variable measures, our methodology incorporates several attitudinal variables simultaneously, offering a richer and potentially more accurate assessment of how opinions on different aspects of immigration cohere within individuals.

Pointing out a gap in the knowledge of some topic

to my knowledge, there is no existing systematic, Europe-wide study that comprehensively analyzes opinion polarization by simultaneously considering overall and country-specific trends over time using multiple polarization metrics alongside a multi-variable approach to issue alignment. While studies have examined aspects of polarization across Europe and utilized ESS data, they often focus on a limited number of metrics or employ single-variable measures for issue alignment. Therefore, an analysis that integrates several polarization metrics, distinguishes between overall and country-level dynamics across the extensive timeframe covered by the ESS (2002-2022), and incorporates a novel multi-variable approach to issue alignment would represent a significant and novel contribution to the field of computational social science. This comprehensive approach would offer a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the complex landscape of opinion dynamics related to immigration in Europe.

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

* Do some papers suggest that there is a lack of polarization

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

Drawing upon data from the European Social Survey (ESS), this investigation delved into the multifaceted nature of opinion polarization across Europe.

outline the approach

Observations and / or executed theory

To achieve this, we computed six distinct metrics, informed by existing literature, to quantify various trends and aspects of polarization, examining both overall patterns and country-specific variations. Furthermore, we introduced a novel multi-variable approach to assess issue alignment, employing principal component analysis (PCA) to capture underlying structures in attitudinal data.

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

Weighted ESS survey data from 2002 to 2024

Our analysis utilized the weighted survey data provided by ESS, spanning the period from its inception in 2002 up to the most recent available wave in 2022. Including these weights ensured that our findings are representative of the national populations surveyed across this twenty-year timeframe.

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

By analyzing these measures over successive ESS waves, we were able to identify and characterize significant temporal patterns in opinion dynamics, shedding light on the evolution of public sentiment on opinions regarding immigration.