

Coming to Terms with the European Refugee Crisis

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The refugee crisis that hit the European Union (EU) and its member states during 2015–16 was just one in a series of crises over recent decades, but perhaps the most critical for the EU's resilience. This book shows how policymakers in the EU polity have tried to come to terms with the crisis. To explain how they reacted to the crisis domestically and jointly at the EU level, the study relies on an original method to analyze political processes. It argues that the policy-specific institutional context and the specific crisis situation, defined in terms of asymmetrical problem pressure and political pressure, to a large extent shaped the crisis response. The authors suggest that the way in which the refugee crisis was managed has resulted in conflicts between member states, which have been further exacerbated in subsequent crises and will continue to haunt the EU in times to come.

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Preface

This study presents key findings of our research on how the EU and its member states managed the refugee crisis of 2015–16. This was not the first refugee crisis in Europe, nor has it been the last such crisis. The most important previous crisis was linked to the Balkan wars in the early 1990s, when the break-up of former Yugoslavia led to the inflow of roughly 1.5 million refugees into the EU, and into Germany in particular. The refugee crisis we study here peaked in 2015–16, when Europe received no less than 2.5 million asylum applications, mainly from Syrian refugees who had fled the civil war in their country, but it lingered on at least until spring 2020, when the focus of attention abruptly turned to the Covid-19 pandemic. More recently, the Russian attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, triggered the greatest inflow of refugees into Europe ever. At the end of May 2023, more than 8 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe. Although the number of refugees who needed to be accommodated far exceeded that of the crisis that we focus upon, this new crisis proved to be much less contentious in the EU and its member states. As a matter of fact, the 2015–16 refugee crisis posed a greater threat to the EU than the inflow of refugees that resulted from the Ukraine war has.

During the last two crisis-ridden decades, the EU has had to face other crises as well. Thus, the 2015–16 refugee crisis was preceded in fall 2008 by the great financial crisis, which, in Europe, mutated into the Eurozone or sovereign debt crisis – a crisis that lasted until the third Greek bailout in summer 2015. It was followed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which exploded in spring 2020, and partially overlapped with the Brexit crisis, which was precipitated by the Brexit referendum in June 2016 and ended provisionally with the adoption of the agreement on the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU at the end of 2020. In addition, more “slow-burning” crises, like the climate crisis and the social crisis, loomed in the background – latent crises with a constantly increasing potential political fallout. In this period of the European “polycrisis,” when the sum of the interdependent challenges

has been creating a compound effect that is expected to exceed that of its individual parts, the 2015–16 refugee crisis was a crucible that, for a moment, brought out the underlying tensions of the EU polity and tested its resilience to the core. This was not a “good” crisis for the EU, and our study of how the EU polity managed it shows in detail what has gone wrong. The way the EU and its member states have come to terms with this crisis relied on short-term expedients, which exacerbated internal tensions, compromised the polity’s humanitarian values, exposed it to blackmail by authoritarian third countries, and prevented it from reforming its dysfunctional Common European Asylum System.

To empirically analyze questions related to the EU polity’s crisis management, we use an innovative method that we have developed for the study of political processes, policy process analysis, a method that builds on related methods such as protest event analysis (Tilly 2008; Hutter 2014), political claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), and contentious episode analysis (CEA; Bojar et al. 2021). This method focuses on the analysis of the public debate on policymaking episodes, and we apply it to key episodes of policymaking during the 2015–16 refugee crisis at both levels of the EU polity. While requiring a great coding effort, this methodological approach has the advantage of combining quantitative analyses with the reconstruction of qualitative narratives. In this volume, we try to systematically illustrate our quantitative results with detailed accounts of specific episodes that put some flesh on the bare quantitative bones. The downside of this approach is that it requires some effort from the reader as well, since it is not possible to do justice to the qualitative details of the episodes in just a few words.

Our theoretical approach is inspired by the polity approach that is being elaborated in the SOLID project into which our team has been embedded. This project is an ERC synergy project that brings together scholars of different orientations and disciplinary backgrounds and that relies on generous financial support from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 810356). The polity approach is still a work in progress, but a paper by the three principal investigators of the project provides a first outline (Ferrera, Kriesi, and Schelkle 2023). We have benefited enormously from debates within the SOLID project to elaborate our theoretical framework for the present study. Even if our colleagues might not be entirely convinced by our way of adapting the common framework for our own purposes in this study, we are heavily indebted to them and would not have been able to come up with the framework we use here without having been constantly exposed to their constructive critique in the context of the project. For us, this has been a synergistic experience, and we are very grateful to our colleagues in

the SOLID project, which is composed of the team of Maurizio Ferrera (including Niccolò Donati, Anna Kyriazi, Joao Mirò Artigas, Marcello Natili, Alessandro Pellegata, and Stefano Ronchi) at the University of Milan and the team of Waltraud Schelkle (including Kate Alexander-Shaw, Federico Ferrara, Joe Ganderson, Daniel Kovarek, and Zbig Truchlewski) at the London School of Economics and Political Science/European University Institute (EUI), in addition to our team at the EUI (which also includes Alex Moise and Chendi Wang).

We have also received detailed feedback on earlier versions of this manuscript from Andrew Geddes, Ruud Koopmans, Frank Schimmelfennig, and an anonymous reviewer for Cambridge University Press – for which we would like to express our gratitude. We would also like to thank Maureen Lechleitner, our administrative assistant at the EUI; Eleonora Scigliano, the project manager of the entire SOLID project at the Feltrinelli Foundation; and Manuela Corsini, our project manager at the EUI, without whose daily support our study would not have been possible. We are also grateful to the coders involved in the data collection process for this part of the project: Maria Adamopoulou, Claudia Badulescu, Viola Dreikhausen, Marcus Immonen Hagley, Afroditi-Maria Koulaxi, Eleonora Milazzo, Fred Paxton, Adrian Steinert, Zsófia Victória Suba, and Mikaella Yiatrou. Together with us, they went through thousands of newspaper articles and for countless hours coded what is now condensed in a few dozen figures and tables.

Part I

The Refugee Crisis in the EU and Its
Member States: Our Approach in Context

1 Introduction

This book is about the crisis management of the European Union (EU) and its member states during the refugee crisis of 2015–16 and its aftermath. We focus on crisis policymaking and crisis politics during this crisis, which reached its peak in 2015–16, but continued to occupy European policymakers for several additional years. This was not the first refugee crisis in Europe, and its coming was not entirely unexpected. The inflow of asylum seekers into the EU had already started to rise before 2015, but in the first half of 2015, the number of arrivals accelerated, and it virtually exploded in the fall of that year. The asylum seekers crossed the Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece in ever larger numbers, proceeded along the Balkan route, and arrived in Hungary, from where they continued their journey toward Austria, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries. The crisis's emblematic event occurred on September 4, 2015, when thousands of asylum seekers decided to leave the central train station in Budapest, where they had been stuck for some time, and to march on along the Hungarian highways in pursuit of their stated goal of reaching German soil. The Hungarian government, all too pleased by the asylum seekers' decision to move on, facilitated their arduous trek toward the Austrian border by sending buses to accommodate them and bring them to the border. Faced with the prospect of the approaching caravan, the Austrian government urgently sought the help of the German government. It was during the night of this Saturday in September 2015, under the immediate pressure of the refugees proceeding toward the Austrian–Hungarian border, that the German chancellor made the critical decision to suspend the Dublin III Regulation and to admit asylum seekers to Germany, although they had already passed through several other member states of the union. This decision was later to haunt her as she tried to find a joint solution to the crisis with her fellow heads of government in the EU. It proved to be very hard to come to a joint approach to the crisis, and it was impossible to share the burden among the EU's member states.

The puzzle we are trying to elucidate in our study of the refugee crisis is why the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, had come to be trapped

in such a desperate situation in early September 2015, and why she and her fellow heads of government together with EU agencies proved to be unable to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). It is not as if the European policymakers did not see the crisis coming. But although they were aware of what was brewing, they did not jointly prepare to meet the inflow of asylum seekers in the short term. Nor did they, once the policy failure of the CEAS was there for everyone to see, get their act together to reform the system in the long term. They only came up with a stop-gap solution, which made them dependent on less-than-reliable third countries. Answers to this puzzle do not just speak to the refugee crisis 2015–16 (from now on referred to as “the refugee crisis”); the way the EU and its member states faced this crisis goes a long way toward clarifying how the EU works more generally.

In the two-year period 2015–16, the member states of the EU received no less than 2.5 million asylum applications, mainly – but not exclusively – from Syrian refugees who had fled the civil war in their country. Under the pressure of this exceptional inflow of asylum seekers, the prevailing EU asylum policy and the asylum policies in the member states were put under enormous pressure, and existing conflicts within and between member states relating to the management of refugee flows and asylum requests were exacerbated. The pressure varied, however, from one member state to another, with important implications for policy-making. The way the EU and its member states reacted to this pressure demonstrates how cooperation is difficult in a situation, where they are not all hit in the same way, and in a policy domain where the EU and its member states share competences. In asylum policy, cooperation is rendered even more difficult by the fact that it is highly contested in the member states themselves. Already before the refugee crisis 2015–16, the humanitarian imperative to accommodate asylum seekers had been challenged by the European radical right in the name of national sovereignty and the protection of national cultural traditions. The refugee crisis served to increase the salience of migration issues and to reinforce the resistance of the radical right to the reception and integration of refugees.

It is important to study the refugee crisis because it has been most salient among the European publics, as we found in a survey put into the field in summer 2021. Asked about the “most serious threat to the survival of the European Union” in the decade before the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic,¹ almost a third (32 percent) of the citizens from

¹ The question was formulated like this: “Thinking about the past decade before the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union has faced a number of challenges. Which of the following challenges do you think represented the most serious threat to the survival of the European Union?”

sixteen countries considered the refugee crisis to be the most important threat,² outdistancing the other recent EU crises, such as the Euro area and Brexit crisis. Importantly, the assessment of the threat to the EU's survival varied by region: It was particularly in the northwestern European member states where most asylum applications were registered and in the eastern European member states where resistance to joint burden-sharing was the most intense that the population deemed the refugee crisis to be the most threatening to the EU. By contrast, while the refugee crisis was ranked highly by a significant portion of the population there, too, southern Europeans considered the threat of the financial and economic crisis and of the poverty and employment crisis as considerably more important than the refugee crisis, and the citizens of the UK and Ireland perceived the Brexit crisis as the biggest threat.

As a matter of fact, the way the refugee crisis was managed has left behind conflicts between member states, which have been further exacerbated in subsequent crises and which are likely to haunt the EU in times to come. Moreover, against the background of the underlying integration–demarcation conflict in the national European party systems, asylum policy constitutes a latent time bomb that might explode at any moment if inflows of asylum seekers increase again and the issue becomes once again more salient. Asylum policy remains a potent means for electoral mobilization on the left and on the right. The large opposition to immigration in some member states is bound to constrain the future options available to policymakers, as it is likely to constitute a major obstacle to joint solutions.

At both the EU level and the level of the member states, we investigate the kind of conflicts that were triggered by the problem and political pressure the EU and its members were exposed to during the crisis, how these conflicts influenced the way they attempted to deal with the pressure, and the kinds of policy solutions they adopted in the short and longer term. At the EU level, cooperation between the member states was, if anything, even more demanding than at the national level, because of the fragmented competence structures in asylum policy and because both the intensity and the type of problem pressure varied significantly between the member states. While the member states that were directly hit by the crisis in one way or another sought the cooperation of the others, the more fortunate among the member states were not prepared to contribute to joint solutions, or at least not to lasting joint solutions. We

² The countries are: Austria, France, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden (northwestern Europe); Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece (southern Europe); Hungary, Latvia, Romania, and Poland (eastern Europe); and the UK and Ireland (Anglo-Saxon Europe).

investigate the attempts to overcome the initial unilateral scramble to the exit by the member states and ask what kind of transnational conflicts were exacerbated or newly created by these attempts and to what extent they prevented joint solutions. We pay particular attention to the interaction patterns between the national and the transnational conflicts in policymaking during the crisis.

As we shall see, conflicts within and between member states during the refugee crisis were very intense, and the prevailing EU asylum policy proved to be impossible to reform during the crisis. This does not mean that any joint solution was impossible. We demonstrate that the member state governments found provisional stop-gap solutions that did reduce the problem and political pressure in the short and medium term, even if they did not produce a long-term policy solution. As a result, asylum policy remains an unfinished construction site that constitutes a latent threat to the resilience of the EU polity to the date of writing.

To answer our key puzzle, we intend to embed the refugee crisis in a broader theoretical framework that allows us to situate crisis policymaking and crisis politics more generally in the EU polity and in Europe's underlying conflict structures. In order to understand the difficulty of coming to joint decisions in asylum policy, we need to first grasp the fragmented and nontransparent decision-making structure in the multi-level EU polity in general and in EU asylum policy in particular. Second, we need to get a sense of the already existing fractures in the member states and between them – fractures that were then exacerbated in the crisis or complemented by newly created divides as a result of the way some member states attempted to come to terms with it.

A General Framework for the Analysis of Crisis Policymaking and Crisis Politics

At a first glance, the refugee crisis threatened at most the resilience of the Schengen area and the principle of free movement. Designating it as a “deep” crisis that threatened the survival of the polity as a whole might, therefore, seem somewhat overblown. However, we claim that it should be at least considered as such a crisis, because it revealed fundamental tensions undermining the resilience of the EU polity and its capacity for designing joint EU policy. To understand this, we build on Stein Rokkan's structural approach to the formation of the European state system as it has been applied to the process of European integration by [Stefano Bartolini \(2005\)](#). This approach has the advantage of being situated at the intersection of the literatures on European integration and comparative politics. We complement this macro-structural approach

with insights from the grand theories on European integration and concepts of policy analysis, which will allow us to link the macro-structural context to policymaking in general and to policymaking under crisis conditions in particular.³

Our framework is not generally applicable; rather, it is specifically focused on the context of the EU polity, since we are interested in how the refugee crisis was managed in Europe. As is well known, of course, the EU is quite an exceptional polity, which has important implications for the way the refugee crisis – or, for that matter, any Europe-wide crisis – is managed. The EU is composed of a set of heterogeneous member states that are constituted as nation-states – that is, polities characterized by the successful integration of their economic, cultural, administrative, and coercive boundaries (Bartolini 2005). Over a period covering several centuries, in each member state, the closure of external boundaries has created three processes of internal consolidation: center formation (the creation of authority structures), system maintenance (the creation of loyalty, identity, and solidarity among the locked-in population), and political structuring (the creation of organizations, movements, and institutional channels for the articulation of the population's voice). The combination of boundary building (bounding), center formation (binding), and system maintenance (bonding) – the three B's of the “polity approach” to the EU integration process (Ferrera, Kriesi, and Schelkle 2023) – has provided the member states with an idiosyncratic structure of opportunities and constraints for the internal political structuring.

In the nation-state, external closure and internal structuring (voice) are intimately linked, as are opening and destructuring (exit)⁴: As the people in a given territory can no longer escape the binding decisions of the political authorities at the center, they demand participation in the political process and organize collectively in order to make their claims known and to impose themselves against opposing claims. The external closure induces social interactions among the locked-in actors, which increases the likelihood of collective action among them, “domesticates” the actors' strategies, and focuses them on central elites (forcing them to become responsive to pressures from below). Political structuring within the nation-states results from the strategic interaction of collective actors and the stabilization of these interaction patterns, which produce

³ This general framework has been developed for the study of crisis management in the EU more generally (Ferrera, Kriesi, and Schelkle 2023).

⁴ Ferrera (2005) called this the “bounding-bonding” mechanism, Giddens (1985: 202) referred to this link as the “dialectic of control,” while Poggi (1990: 76) has pointed to the intimate link between the concentration of power and participation in the exercise of power in the process of political modernization in Europe.

national policies. Importantly, this structuring has occurred in a way that is specific to each nation-state and has focused policymaking and politics on the national center.

Compared to the nation-state, the EU and its member states constitute a new type of polity with a rather unique character that we attempt to capture by the notion of the “compound polity of nation-states” (Ferrera et al. 2023). At its core is a fundamental tension that the European integration process has introduced in the European system of nation-states (Bartolini 2005: 368, 375), a tension that is exacerbated by the fact that it is the governments of the nation-states that are the drivers of the integration process. On the one hand, the process of European economic (and other forms of) integration is predicated upon the removal of boundaries between the European nation-states. On the other hand, the national, democratic, and welfare features of the union’s member states (the features that were left outside the initial integration project) are predicated upon the continued control over redistributive capacities, cultural symbols, and political authority by the member states. The integration project progressively represents a direct challenge to these other features of the member states. The integration process breaks up the three-layered coherence between identities, practices, and institutions; dismantles the coincidence among the different types of state boundaries; and leads to the dedifferentiation of European nation-states after five centuries of a progressive differentiation in their legal and administrative systems, social practices and cultural and linguistic codes, economic transactions and market regulation, and social and political institutions. As Bartolini (2005) points out, the integration process is causing the destructuring of national polities without sufficient restructuring at the EU level.

This was never more evident than in the period of the refugee crisis. The fundamental tension between the integration process and the destructuring of the national polities becomes particularly critical in crisis situations, above all in a policy field like asylum policy, where some, albeit not all, member states are jealously defending their national sovereignty against the encroachment of European integration. Routine policies in established polities (such as nation-states) have only marginal implications for the maintenance of the polity itself. However, the combination of the lack of a joint policy on border control, outdated asylum policies that were concocted at a different juncture, the ability to follow beggar-thy-neighbor approaches, isolated national policies, and finally a resistance to share the common burden meant that what should have been a routine policy problem challenged the bounding, the binding, and ultimately the bonding of the EU member states, revealing the fundamental tensions in the EU’s architecture. In other words, policymaking

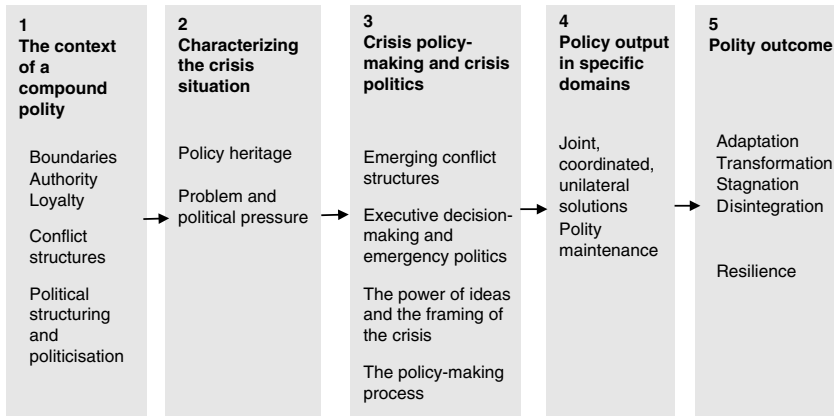


Figure 1.1 The analytical building blocks of the theoretical framework

in crisis situations is more likely to impinge on the maintenance of the polity as such, and this applies in particular for a compound polity like the EU, where a stable underlying structure has not (yet) been established. As a compound polity, the EU is constantly testing new modes of combining its three constitutive elements, that is, boundaries, binding authority, and bonding ties.

Taking this into account, [Figure 1.1](#) (taken from [Kriesi, Ferrera, and Schelkle 2021](#)) presents the five building blocks of our general analytical framework. The three B's and the preceding discussion are located as the initial "block" of our model and structure the policy space afforded to European policymakers. The actual policymaking, which lies at the heart of our analysis, is constrained by this "compound" EU structure and the conflicts it generates and, furthermore, by the policy heritage begotten by this structure, that is, the lackluster border control coordination and the semifunctional joint asylum framework, and also by the immediate problem and political pressure. In turn, the crisis policymaking reshapes the bounding, binding, and bonding status quo as new institutions and actions attempt to face the crisis, contributing to or hindering polity maintenance and eventually leading to one of the outcomes indicated in our final building block.

The challenge of the refugee crisis focused on bounding, that is, on the internal and external bordering of the EU, with important implications for binding and bonding. In the EU, the master tension is exacerbated by the fact that the integration process breaks down internal borders without, at the same time, providing for commensurate joint external border controls. Accordingly, migration governance currently has two

components in the EU: free movement internally, and a common migration and asylum policy with regard to third country nationals (TCNs). Put simply, the EU has an open borders framework internally (the Schengen area) but external migration restrictions (Geddes and Scholten 2016). However, while EU member states have little control over internal movements,⁵ they remain in charge of regulating admission of TCNs, a prominent group among whom have been asylum seekers.⁶ Though matters of asylum are notionally a shared competence between the EU and national governments (article 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU]), at the end of the day, it is the member states themselves that determine access to their territory and whether and how they will abide by international norms (Schain 2009), the amount of resources they are willing to invest in the assessment of asylum claims, policing efforts against irregular migration, deportation procedures, and the integration of successful asylum applicants. Moreover, the ability of the EU to control its external borders extends only as far as the capacity of the member states at its external borders to fulfill this task. As a result of insufficient control of external borders, the refugee crisis was first an instance of the breakdown of external borders in the southern European border countries most exposed to the inflow of refugees. Greece, in particular, had border control issues, which created tensions that jeopardized the Schengen area's continued existence.

As they struggled to regain control, decision-makers both in the EU supranational institutions and in the member states, particularly those most affected by the refugee crisis due to their country's exposure, implemented a set of measures that amounted to what Schimmelfennig (2021: 314) calls "defensive integration," that is, a combination of measures of mainly internal rebordering (the resurrection of barriers between member states or their exit from common policies or the EU altogether) with external rebordering, that is, the creation and guarding of "joint" external EU borders, policed partially by a common armed force, that are institutionally recognized as the union's borders in treaties and agreements with third countries. Combined with internal debordering, external rebordering contributes to "effective integration" (Schimmelfennig 2021: 314), as the bounding process of the EU acquires meaningfulness at the expense of the national bounding. By contrast, the combination of internal and external debordering would lead to an outcome of "disintegration." From

⁵ On free movement, there are some limits (public health and security) that have become more relevant as a result of asylum/refugee arrivals, terrorism, and Covid-19.

⁶ Note, however, that labor and family migration have been – and will likely remain – the main migration flows into the EU.

the perspective of the European integration process, “defensive integration” appears as a second-best solution that is basically one step forward, one step backward – or a “failing forward” (Jones, Kelemen, and Meunier 2016, 2021; Lavenex 2018) – approach with regard to integration, an outcome that combines elements of stagnation and adaptation in our framework. While our description of the outcome of the crisis is in line with the failing forward approach, we focus on the policymaking process, which is given short shrift by this approach.

Our Argument in Brief

Our focus on the policymaking process puts the making of binding decisions at the center of the analysis. Our basic argument is that, against the background of the underlying conflict structures at the EU and the national levels, the policy-specific institutional context within the compound polity (the competence distribution in the policy domain and the institutionalized decision-making procedures governing crisis interventions) and the characteristics of the crisis situation (the intensity and distribution of the problem and political pressure among member states) jointly determine to a large extent the way policymakers attempt to come to terms with the crisis.

Generally, the crisis-induced distribution of problem and political pressure may be more or less symmetrical. Crucially, in the refugee crisis, the incidence of the crisis across EU member states was asymmetric. Some member states were hit hard by the crisis, while others hardly experienced any problem pressure at all. Uneven exposure to a crisis creates a differential burden of adjustment, which increases the salience of national identities and limits transnational solidarity. In other words, an asymmetric crisis activates the underlying integration–demarcation conflict. In the case of the refugee crisis, the activation of this conflict was enhanced by the fact that it concerned, above all, external and internal boundaries. By contrast, the presence of a common, symmetrical threat experienced by all the member states of the EU multilevel polity is likely to be a powerful driver of expanded solidarity between member states. As in the Covid-19 crisis, the shared experience of a crisis may reduce the salience of constraints imposed by national identities and facilitate an extension of transnational solidarity. The uneven incidence of the refugee crisis among the member states makes for a complex configuration of transnational interests and facilitates the creation of “circles of bonding,” that is, coalitions of member states that are strengthened by the crisis and that lead to divisive bonding instead of systemic bonding that enhances the integration process.

In the absence of a joint approach to the looming threat of the crisis, unilateral actions on the part of some member states become more likely, with individual member states reacting to their specific crisis situation and relying on their own policy legacies. In the compound EU polity, such unilateral actions lead to externalities or spillover effects for other member states. Because of the dysfunctionality of the CEAS and the interlocking of EU and national policymaking in European asylum policy, the refugee crisis has engendered a large number of such spillover effects, giving rise to numerous cross-level and transnational interactions and conflicts, which, in turn, have rendered policymaking not only more complex but also more vulnerable to obstruction by some member states.

With respect to the institutional context of policymaking, we highlight four aspects. First, we take into account the policy-specific distribution of competence in the EU polity. In policy areas where the EU has high competence, it is more likely for European institutions to be situated at the heart of the crisis resolution process. Instead, where EU competences are low, European institutions lack the capacity to make an independent impact on crisis management. In the asylum policy domain, the EU has rather low competences and depends heavily on intergovernmental coordination among member states. In this domain, responsibility is shared between the EU and the member states, and the mixture of member-state interdependence and independence imposes reciprocal constraints on policymakers at each level of the EU polity. The limited competence of the EU in the asylum domain posed a great challenge for policymaking in the crisis, a challenge that was enhanced by the diversity of policy heritage as well as by the uneven incidence of the crisis in the various member states.

Second, we consider the institutional power hierarchy between member states. Depending on their size and resources, member states have more or less institutional power in the EU and are expected to contribute a larger share to the common public good. Moreover, informally, large states may also provide leadership for crisis resolution. This more or less institutionalized power hierarchy may be reinforced (as in the Euro area [EA] crisis), but also undermined (as in the refugee crisis), by crisis-induced power relations, which depend, in turn, on the distribution of the crisis incidence. Thus, Germany, the most powerful member state, was unable to play the role of a stabilizing hegemonic power in the refugee crisis because its institutionally strong position was undermined by the joint effect of the EU's limited policy-specific competences and the crisis-induced spillover processes between member states.

Third, as regards the decision-making mode, we insist on the importance of what we call executive decision-making. Building on new

intergovernmentalism, which stresses that intergovernmental coordination has become the key decision-making mode in the EU in general and in crisis situations in particular, we focus our attention on executive decision-making in the crisis. In the EU, this decision-making mode involves the heads of governments of the member states in a dual role – that of head of state or government representing a country in European negotiations and that of member of the European Council representing Europe back home. As a result of this dual role, the chief executives of the member states become the pivotal actors in the two-level game linking domestic politics to EU decision-making. Accordingly, we expect the governments of the member states and their key executives to play a pivotal role not only in domestic policymaking but also in policymaking at the EU level.

Last, but certainly not least, the focus on heads of member state governments crucially introduces partisan contestation into the management of the refugee crisis, since, at the level of the member states, the national governments are exposed to party competition. Building on postfunctionalism, we argue that the refugee crisis lent itself to the activation of the integration–demarcation divide in national party competition, providing a golden opportunity for the radical right to mobilize against the governments’ and the EU’s asylum policies. Exploiting the political explosiveness of asylum policy, in some member states, not only the radical right opposition but even government parties seized the opportunity of the crisis situation to create divisive coalitions of member states, which rendered the search for joint solutions extremely difficult in the refugee crisis. This final point of our argument indicates that we do not exclude the possibility of endogenous political sources of a crisis. But we maintain that strategies of “crisisification” (Rhinard 2019; Boin, ’t Hart, and McConnell 2009; Rauh 2022) are not at the origin of great crises such as the refugee crisis, even if they can exploit such crises once they have come about. Such crises have largely exogenous origins that create a situation of urgency and uncertainty for policymakers, who are taken by surprise – although they might have seen the crisis coming. Policymaking in the crisis situation takes place under great pressure and produces policy-specific conflict configurations, constraints, and opportunities that may have consequences for the maintenance of the polity itself.

The Focus on Policy Episodes

For our analysis of the policymaking processes, we break down the management of the refugee crisis into a set of key policymaking episodes, which are triggered by salient policy proposals at both the EU and the

national levels. Overall, we consider six EU-level episodes and five episodes each in eight member states. A policy episode covers the entire policy debate surrounding specific policy proposals that governments put forward, from the moment the proposal enters the public realm to the moment it is implemented and/or the related debate peters out. We carefully select the most important policy episodes during the refugee crisis at the EU level and in the individual member states. Episodes constitute more or less clearly delimited political developments that allow for “a disciplined and limited kind of dynamic research,” which, as [Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet \(1968\[1944\]: xxi\)](#) suggested in the preface to the second edition of their classic study *The People’s Choice*, holds the greatest promise for the future development of the social sciences.⁷ Episodes are composed of actions by a stylized set of individual and collective actors. The focus on policy episodes makes it possible to systematically analyze and compare the policymaking process across levels and countries during the crisis. We have developed a new method – policy process analysis (PPA) – that is specifically suited to the comparative analysis of such episodes.

For the analysis of political conflicts within the episodes, we use some key concepts, which we briefly introduce here: political structuring, politicization, and conflict intensity. As conceptualized by [Bartolini \(2005: 37\)](#), *political structuring* refers to the structural preconditions that allow the expression of voice. Bartolini uses this term “to point to the formation of those institutional channels, political organizations, and networks of relationships that allow for individual voice to achieve systemic relevance.” Conflicts are politicized within such structural preconditions. In addition, we adopt the broadly shared understanding of the concept of *politicization* (e.g., [de Wilde, Leupold, and Schmidtke 2016](#); [Hoeglinger 2016](#); [Hutter and Grande 2014](#); [Rauh 2016](#); [Statham and Trenz 2013](#)), which builds on [Schattschneider’s \(1975\)](#) notion of the “expansion of the scope of conflict within a political system” ([Hutter and Grande 2014: 1003](#)). More specifically, we distinguish between two conceptual dimensions that jointly operationalize the concept of politicization: salience (visibility) and actor polarization (conflict, direction). Conflicts are politicized to the extent that they are both salient and polarized. Politicization can characterize an entire episode or the

⁷ Among the examples of such promising research, Lazarsfeld and colleagues included systematic analyses of political campaigns, which are, of course, what they used in their own research. We have previously studied another type of episodes – contentious episodes that were initiated by government policy proposals (see [Kriesi, Hutter, and Bojar 2019](#); [Bojar et al. 2023](#)).

actor-specific contribution to the politicization of the episode. *Conflict intensity* provides an additional aspect of the conflict in a given episode. While the polarization measure does take into account the direction of the actors' position on the policy in question, it says little about the nature and intensity of the conflict. The conflict intensity concept takes these additional aspects into account.

In relying on the concept of *politicization* in particular, we assume that, under contemporary conditions of "audience democracy" (Manin 1997), policymaking is generally taking place under the close scrutiny of the media and of the attentive public. In addition, we assume that public scrutiny is particularly close in instances where policymaking is no longer confined to policy-specific subsystems but becomes the object of "macro-politics" (Baumgartner and Jones 2002), as is typically the case in crisis situations. Even under such conditions, however, not all policymaking is equally likely to become the object of the expansion of the scope of conflict in the public sphere. Some policymaking remains in the realm of "quiet politics" (Culpepper 2011), confined to experts and technocratic problem solvers, and sometimes even top brass politicians succeed in avoiding the limelight of the public, at least for a few decisive moments. To be sure, we consider only key episodes of policymaking during the crisis, which are particularly likely to get politicized. But, as we show, even within this highly selective set of episodes, there is great variation in the extent to which they have become politicized. We inquire into the factors determining the level of episode-specific politicization.

Overview of the Volume

The volume is divided into four parts. The first introduces our theoretical and empirical approach in more detail and presents the context of the crisis – the crisis situation and the variety of episodes of policymaking to which it gave rise. **Part II** covers the actors and conflict structures at the two levels, while **Part III** analyzes the dynamics of policymaking and pays particular attention to the interaction between the two levels. **Part IV** addresses two types of political outcomes – the public opinion with respect to key policies in the asylum policy domain in the aftermath of the crisis, and the electoral consequences of the crisis. It also draws some conclusions from our findings.

Part I includes four more chapters. The next two chapters present our theoretical and empirical approach. **Chapter 2** introduces our theoretical framework. **Chapter 3** presents the eight countries we are focusing on and the forty-six episodes that we are studying in detail. In addition, it provides an introduction to our main tool for the analysis of crisis

policymaking and crisis politics in these episodes – policy process analysis – and to the complementary methods of analysis, which we apply to the study of electoral outcomes and outcomes in terms of policy-specific public opinion. **Chapter 4** introduces the three aspects of the crisis situation – policy heritage, problem pressure, and political pressure. It shows that at the EU level, as a result of the lack of harmonization of minimum standards between member states and of the deficient capacity of some national systems, the asylum policy rested on an “organized hypocrisy” (Krasner 1999), which, predictably, led to the breakdown of this policy in the course of the crisis. At the domestic level, the details of the heritage of the eight member states of our study serve to justify their categorization into four distinct types, as does the country-specific variation in the problem pressure in the crisis situation. **Chapter 5**, which concludes **Part I**, turns to the details of the policy episodes. It presents their timing and their substantive content. The association between politicization and the two types of pressure proves to be less close than expected – a finding that is discussed in terms of endogenous political dynamics during the crisis. As for the substantive content of the policy responses, the chapter documents that continuity prevailed – the crisis did not prove to be an opportunity to reform the existing system. Instead, failure to reform at the EU level and retrenchment at the national level characterized the predominant responses.

Against the general background characterizing the crisis situation and the policy responses adopted during the crisis, **Parts II** and **III** analyze in detail the actor configurations, conflict structures, and political dynamics of policymaking during the crisis. In these chapters, we combine quantitative characterizations of the various aspects of crisis management by the EU and its member states with qualitative narratives illustrating our more general points with specific cases. This strategy results in a rather long account, but we hope that the reader will appreciate our attempt to make the complex policymaking processes come alive.

Part II includes four chapters. **Chapter 6** focuses on the actors and conflict structures at the national level, while **Chapter 7** turns to the actors and conflict configurations at the EU level. At the national level, partisan and international conflicts were most common. Mainstream opposition parties emerged as the most important adversaries of national governments, although on occasion they were aided by challenger opposition from the left and, especially, from the right. At the EU level, member states and their key executives played a crucial role in the two-level game of EU crisis management. In terms of conflict configurations, the analysis shows that, at this level, international conflicts prevailed – vertical conflicts between the EU and its member states, transnational conflicts

between member states, and externalization conflicts between the EU/member states and third countries.

Chapter 8 zooms in on the relationship between national governments and opposition, whereas **Chapter 9** goes one step further and examines the right-wing discourse related to the refugee crisis. **Chapter 8** highlights the importance of government composition in explaining the nature of domestic conflict in the refugee crisis. The analysis focuses on two aspects of government composition – fragmentation (as in coalition governments) and ideology. Fragmentation is associated with intragovernmental conflicts, while ideological distance accounts for the intensity of the partisan conflict between government and opposition. Tracing how right-wing actors responded to the crisis, **Chapter 9** tries to uncover the elements that allowed these actors to become the main beneficiaries of this crisis (as shown in **Chapter 14**). The analysis shows that the right-wing parties tried to shift attention away from the initial humanitarian response to the crisis by framing it as a security issue. Concurrently, themes of perversity, jeopardy, and calls to tighten border and asylum policies dominated across the right-wing spectrum.

Part III, on the dynamics of policymaking, starts with **Chapter 10**, which seeks to uncover the determinants of elite support – broadly understood – behind government policies. The analyses build on the results of **Chapter 8** and show how the governments' opponents systematically responded to each other's expressed level of support to the government's initiatives. The results indicate that far from the elite groups closing ranks behind government proposals – as the “rally-around-the-flag” perspective would lead us to expect – they, depending on the context, used the strategic opportunity offered by mounting problem pressure to signal opposition to these proposals and to governments.

Chapters 11 and **12** address the dynamics of policymaking across the levels of the multilevel polity. **Chapter 11** takes a closer look at cross-level episodes, which involve an important amount of interaction between the two levels. They include roughly half of the national episodes of our study. This is a remarkably high share, which indicates that national asylum policymaking is taking place in the shadow of EU policymaking. **Chapter 12** studies the different ways in which the most important episode of our study – the EU–Turkey agreement – was linked to national policymaking. In this chapter, we ask, based on the EU–Turkey agreement, to what extent the debate on EU policymaking has been domesticated and to what extent the conflict configuration at the EU level is transformed in the national debate about an EU policymaking process.

In **Part IV**, **Chapter 13** looks at the transnational and domestic conflict configurations among the citizen publics of sixteen member states in the

aftermath of the refugee crisis. In terms of transnational conflicts, we find the expected opposition between the frontline states (Greece and Italy) and the Visegrad 4 (V4) countries (augmented by eastern European bystander states). At the domestic level, we find the equally expected opposition between nationalists and cosmopolitans that is politically articulated by the radical right and some nationalist-conservative parties on the one side, and by the left and some parties of the mainstream right on the other side. The domestic polarization appears to be more intense than the transnational one.

Chapter 14 examines the electoral repercussions of the refugee crisis in seven member states. As the refugee crisis wanes in memory, it has left some important and lasting marks in the European political landscape. However, the legacy of this crisis was not a wholesale transformation of party systems in some countries, as in the case of the Euro area crisis. Instead, it served as an opportunity for parties mainly from the right, which were able to strategically exploit the crisis for their own electoral purposes. Finally, Chapter 15 summarizes and concludes. To reiterate the general point we are trying to make: The refugee crisis constrained European policymakers, who tried to come to terms with it in ways that induced them to adopt short-term, stop-gap responses and prevented them from coming up with long-term, joint solutions. If, in a certain sense, we confirm the failing-forward assessment of the crisis outcome, we provide a much more specific account of the policymaking process in the crisis that allows us to pinpoint the crisis-specific conditions that, combined, led to this outcome. There is nothing inherent in the integration process that led to the outcome of the crisis. Instead, there is a lot of crisis-specific conditioning that, however, has path-dependent effects that will outlast this specific crisis.

2 Theoretical Framework

Our approach to the management of the refugee crisis of 2015–16 builds on the polity approach to the EU integration process (Ferrera, Kriesi, and Schelkle 2023) and attempts to elaborate it in various ways by making use of insights from the grand theories of European integration in combination with concepts and ideas from comparative politics and policy analysis. This has the advantage of tying the supranational and national policymaking during the crisis together within one and the same theoretical and empirical framework. Such a combination allows one to systematically link policymaking at the two levels of the EU polity and to consistently focus on the prevailing conflict configurations at each level individually and jointly at both levels.

The challenge of the refugee crisis focused on bounding, that is, on the internal and external bordering of the EU, with important implications for binding and bonding. In a certain sense, bounding is the precondition for binding and bonding. Without the creation of external closure, it is hard to develop internal feelings of community and to create a center of political authority able to take binding decisions for the entire community. As observed by Schimmelfennig (2021), open boundaries not only weaken the community's capacity to protect itself against outside intervention (e.g., military attack, terrorism, crime), they also tend to weaken internal communal ties. The weakening of bonds of identity, in turn, may undermine the willingness of individuals to contribute to the public good and engage in social sharing. Solidarity may suffer both from the opportunities to exit (e.g., tax evasion, capital flight, and brain drain) and from the opportunities to enter (e.g., when those who enter benefit from the public goods without ever having contributed to them). Weak identity and solidarity undermine the consensus that constitutes the social foundations of democracy (Dahl 1956). By contrast, higher and better-enforced barriers and congruent external boundaries reduce exit and entry opportunities. Schimmelfennig (2021: 323): "Locking in actors and resources helps to preserve the cultural homogeneity and identity of the people living inside the territory, strengthen institutions

of social sharing, protect the territory from outside threats to security – and thereby build the social foundations of democracy” (Bartolini 2005: 36–53; Rokkan 1974: 49).

Schimmelfennig (2021: 324) expects community deficits – such as threats to national identity, rising inequality, or an increase in crime and military vulnerability – to lead to the politicization of boundaries and to rebordering pressures. The question is whether such pressures lead to more internal or external rebordering. Schimmelfennig expects that, for reasons of efficiency, such pressures increase demands for external rather than internal rebordering: Internal rebordering would constrain the benefits of increasing scale in the EU. However, efficiency considerations clash with community considerations. Thus, exogenous shocks, such as the refugee crisis, which render both external and internal boundaries highly salient, tend to activate the underlying integration–demarcation conflict and mobilize partisan contestation at the level of the member states in the name of defending the national community. This mechanism is likely to enhance internal rebordering, even if the member states are closer to each other than to non-member states. As a result of these contradictory influences (see Chapter 1), the refugee crisis has given rise to what Schimmelfennig (2021) calls *defensive integration*, that is, a combination of measures of mainly internal rebordering (the resurrection of barriers between member states or their exit from common policies or the EU altogether) with external rebordering (the creation and guarding of “joint” external EU borders).

In this chapter, we elaborate our argument to account for this outcome. This argument, as we have already pointed out in the introductory chapter, focuses on the policymaking process. In other words, it is the binding component of the polity approach that constitutes the center of our theoretical attention. The crisis led to the politicization of the EU’s boundaries – internal and external, both at the EU level and at the level of the member states. We shall try to explain why it was “defensive integration” rather than “dilutive integration,” full integration, or disintegration that was the chosen outcome of this politicization process.

We divide the presentation of our theoretical framework into three parts: First, we discuss the underlying conflict structure in the EU’s compound polity of nation-states. Then we turn to the politicization of policymaking during the crisis, which is a function of both the specific characteristics of the crisis situation and some key characteristics of the compound polity. Finally, we discuss possible outcomes and their determinants in terms of policy (“defensive integration”) and in terms of polity (the underlying conflicts and their political structuration).

The Underlying Political Conflicts of the Refugee Crisis

“Defensive integration” constitutes a limited, minimum common denominator solution to the refugee crisis, an outcome predicated on the combination of conflicts between member states, between the central EU authorities and member states, and finally within member states. Our analysis will be guided by the key notion that the outcome of the policymaking process fundamentally depends on the political structuring and politicization of the underlying conflicts in the crisis situation and the political dynamics unleashed by it.

We start from the observation that the EU polity has a two-level structure that invites political structuring at both the supranational level of the EU and the national level of the member states. Similar to coming-together federations, in the compound polity of the EU, the conflict structure *at the EU level* is dominated by the *territorial* dimension. This dimension produces two lines of conflict: a vertical one, focused on the powers of the polity center vis-à-vis those of the member states, and a horizontal one, revolving around the specific interests of the member states. Throughout the twentieth century, functional conflicts became increasingly important in the nation-states. Thus, territorial structuring was complemented by partisan/ideological structuring. This facilitated central consolidation – the formation of a center capable of speaking directly to “the people” and of advancing system building. In the EU, however, the conflict structure is still dominated by the territorial dimension. Given the strength and direct legitimation of national centers, the territorial channel of representation (via the European Council and Council of Ministers) has remained more important than the corresponding functional channel (via the European Parliament [EP]).

Accordingly, the main political fault lines at the EU level run between member states and between member states and the EU agencies. Only recently have party-based conflicts gained some visibility and salience in the EP arena. Interstate conflict is by definition *horizontal* and pitches (coalitions of) member states against each other based on material and normative interests. Conflicts between member states have many triggers and targets. In the refugee crisis, they led to the politicization of internal and external boundaries and of national communities. The dividing lines between member states that emerged during the crisis were above all the result of the differential incidence of the crisis: The immediate problem pressure differed from one state to the next depending on the policies in place, the state’s geographical location, and its attractiveness as a destination state for asylum seekers. In our subsequent analyses, we shall distinguish between five types of member states that developed very

distinct interests during the crisis: frontline states (Greece and Italy); transit states (Austria and Hungary); and destination states, which are further divided into two subsets – restrictive (France and the UK) and open destination states (Germany and Sweden), depending on their institutional and political openness toward incoming refugees. In addition, there is the category of the bystander states, which were not directly concerned with the crisis but which played an important role in its management nevertheless.

According to the Dublin regulation, border states are responsible for any asylum seeker entering the EU (i.e., the Schengen area) through their territory. In the refugee crisis, this regulation shifted the obligation of accepting and integrating asylum seekers to the southern European frontline states, where they first arrived in the EU. But, as we know, the bulk of the asylum seekers did not stay in these frontline states but continued their journey toward the north of Europe. On their way, they traveled across the transit states such as Hungary and Austria. The classification of Austria as a transit state instead of a destination state might be contested, since Austria received a comparatively large number of asylum seekers, too. But as we shall see, the data point toward Austria having been above all a transit state. Our distinction between two types of destination states is partly informed by the member states' policies and border control practices during the refugee crisis (more open versus more restrictive) and partly by their prior policy regimes (IMPIC dataset, [Helbling 2016](#)). Germany and Sweden were the principal destination states during the refugee crisis, while countries like France and the UK remained largely untouched by the inflow of asylum seekers. In addition to these four types of member states, there is a fifth category – the bystander states, a category that was not at all directly concerned with the crisis. Among these states were several eastern European countries, as well as countries like Ireland and Portugal.

Based on their common preferences, member states often form transnational coalitions. New intergovernmentalist scholars have provided evidence that national preference formation in the EU has become an inherently transnational process that involves governments of member states ([Kassim, Saurugger, and Puetter 2020](#); [Fontan and Saurugger 2020](#); [Kyriazi 2023](#)). Moreover, under crisis situations where uncertainty and urgency prevail, national preference formation and European-level bargaining tend to become simultaneous processes, with policymakers being involved and negotiating at the national and the EU level at the same time ([Crespy and Schramm 2021](#)). At this bargaining stage at the European level, transnational coalition formation is a crucial part of policymaking (see [Wasserfallen et al. 2019](#) for the Euro area crisis).

The *vertical* component of the territorial conflict configuration at the EU level refers to the relationship between the EU agencies and the member states. The supranational institutions may be pitted against (coalitions of) member states. Once decisions are made, they become collectively binding and directly enforced by the ECJ (European Court of Justice). A given member state can thus feel dominated by the center when its interests are defeated and undesired policies are implemented. In this case, conflict may indeed take on a vertical drift, turning into opposition against the EU as such. As Mair (2013) has argued, it is the lack of a government–opposition nexus at the EU level that opens the door to opposition in principle against the polity – to Euroscepticism and to populist reactions against the loss of control at the domestic level.

At the *national level*, the European integration process has, indeed, given rise to a nationalist reaction to European integration in the party systems, which is part and parcel of a larger conflict opposing cosmopolitans-universalists and nationalists-communitarians that has by now been restructuring domestic European party systems for decades. This new structuring conflict raises fundamental issues of rule and belonging and taps into various sources of conflicts about national identity, sovereignty, and solidarity. Importantly, in addition to the European integration process, migration has become the most important issue that has been politicized by this conflict. The conflict is structurally rooted, opposing the “losers of globalization” or the “left behind” against the “winners of globalization” or the “cosmopolitan elites” (Kriesi et al. 2006).¹ While the mainstream parties have mainly taken the position of the “cosmopolitan elites,” the preferences of the “losers” have above all been articulated by the new challenger parties of the radical right.

The radical right had become a most vocal and visible opposition in the party systems of most northwestern European countries (except for Germany) before the advent of the refugee crisis, while it had not been as present yet in the party systems of southern and eastern Europe. Already before the refugee crisis, the new divide had initiated a break with the period of a permissive consensus, and conflicts over Europe had been transferred from the backrooms of political decision-making to the public sphere. As argued by postfunctionalists, with the increasing importance of

¹ Scholars have used different labels to refer to this new structuring conflict at the domestic level – from GAL-TAN (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002), independence-integration (Bartolini 2005), integration-demarcation (Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012), universalism-communitarianism (Bornschieer 2010), cosmopolitanism-communitarianism (Zürn and Wilde 2016), and cosmopolitanism-parochialism (Vries 2017) to the transnational cleavage (Hooghe and Marks 2018) and the cleavage between sovereignty and Europeanism (Fabbrini 2019: 62f).

this conflict, identity politics have become more important for decision-making at the EU and national levels (Deutschmann et al. 2018; Kuhn 2019). In the refugee crisis, joint action was constrained, and conflicts between member states were reinforced by the domestic politicization of national identities produced by the uneven distribution of crisis pressures within the EU polity. Consistent with the predictions of postfunctionalist theory, the tension between the uneven distribution of costs and benefits of crisis resolution at the international level and the limited scope of community feelings at the national level has made opposition to EU policy proposals more vocal. As a matter of fact, for the radical right, the refugee crisis constituted a golden opportunity to mobilize its nationalist constituencies against the admission and integration of refugees in its own country, including opposition to any joint schemes of international burden-sharing that would have increased the number of refugees to be admitted on the national territory. The decision-makers at both levels of the EU polity were exposed to the *political pressure* exerted by the radical right at the national level and had to come to terms with it.

However, the conflict structure at the domestic level of the member states cannot be reduced to the conflict between the nationalist radical right and cosmopolitan and pro-European forces. As a matter of fact, we face a much more complex reality domestically. If the ultimate source of partisan conflict is the radical right opposition, the pressure on government more often is likely to come from the mainstream opposition that tries to pin the government into a corner by accusing it either of doing too little in coming to terms with asylum seeker flows or of excesses and inhumane treatment of asylum seekers. As a matter of fact, the electoral success of the radical right parties has prompted mainstream parties to engage in strategic responses to fend off this electoral threat, often by shifting their own programmatic position toward a more restrictive stance on immigration (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2018; Abou-Chadi et al. 2020). In the extreme, such strategic positioning can play out within the government itself in the case of coalitions, and especially grand coalitions (Engler et al. 2019; Höhmann and Sieberer 2020), where coalition partners compete not only with the radical right but also with each other in an effort to send credible signals to voters that their concerns are heard. In this context, center right parties face the dilemma of whether an anti-immigration stance will advantage them in the electoral competition or whether it will play into the hands of the radical right.

The dilemma for the center-left parties is that they are trapped between the principle-based expectations of a left-liberal electorate and the threat of an exodus to the radical right of its traditional working-class voters. As

center-left parties shy away from outright humanitarian positions, especially if they are part of a coalition government, nonpartisan actors are likely to enter to fill the void. The most likely candidates for such a role are political actors who are driven less by electoral considerations than by humanitarian and legal principles, such as NGO groups; intellectuals; church actors; and more broadly speaking, civil society actors. At the national level, we expect a more general conflict to emerge between governments and such civil society actors as a result of the parties' turn to more restrictive policy positions on immigration. In addition to such a domestic conflict, a similar conflict is likely to emerge at the EU level, too, given that the EU and its member states adopted a realist strategy of "defensive integration." At the EU level, the humanitarian position is also likely to be defended by civil society actors, together with supranational organizations charged with a humanitarian task, such as the UNHCR. [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#) present the conflict structures at the national and the EU levels, and [Chapter 9](#) provides a closer look at the framing of the refugee crisis by parties from the right.

Finally, in the compound EU polity, the national government is involved in the inter- and transnational conflicts that play out at the EU level. The existence of these parallel conflict lines is perhaps the most important feature of the structural political preconditions at the domestic level during the refugee crisis. Throughout this crisis, governments were involved in a two-level game, with their bargaining power in the European arena conditioned by the type and the intensity of conflict they faced from domestic stakeholders.

Policymaking in the EU Polity under Crisis Conditions

The crisis situation is first of all policy domain specific. It corresponds to the extraordinary moment of urgency and uncertainty that poses an immediate threat to the proper functioning of the policy domain challenged by the crisis, not necessarily to the polity as such. We claim that whether joint action at the EU level is forthcoming depends above all on two sets of factors – the policy-specific institutional context within the compound polity and the characteristics of the crisis situation. The policy-specific institutional context refers to the competence distribution in the policy domain at the moment the crisis intervenes and to the institutionalized decision-making procedures that govern the crisis interventions, while the characteristics of the crisis situation refer to the intensity and distribution of the problem and political pressure, that is, the crisis incidence, among the member states. Although their impact is hard to separate, we shall consider these two sets of factors in two

separate sections and begin with the crisis situation. [Chapter 4](#) will present the details of the crisis situation.

The Crisis Situation: Problem Pressure and Political Pressure

The immediate *problem pressure* is crisis specific, as is the distribution of the pressure across member states. The refugee crisis represents a specific type of crisis in terms of its problem structure and in terms of the distribution of its incidence across the EU member states. We expect the spatial distribution of crisis pressures to directly affect the policymakers' perceptions of the tradeoff between the functional scale of governance and the territorial scope of community that lies at the heart of postfunctionalist theory ([Hooghe and Marks 2009](#)).

The crisis-induced distribution of problem pressure may be more or less symmetrical. Crucially, in the refugee crisis, the incidence of the crisis across EU member states was *asymmetric*. Some member states were hit hard by the crisis, while others hardly experienced any problem pressure at all. An uneven exposure to a crisis creates a differential burden of adjustment. By contrast, the presence of a common, *symmetrical* threat experienced by all the member states of the EU multilevel polity is likely to be a powerful driver of expanded expectations of community to the transnational level. As in the Covid-19 crisis, the shared experience of a crisis may reduce the salience of constraints imposed by national identities and facilitate an extension of transnational solidarity ([Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2021](#)). This is the key insight from the work on federalism as a theory of regional integration by William H. Riker and David McKay, who characterize federations as the result of a bargain between central and regional elites intent on averting a common existential threat (see [McKay 2004](#)). In the absence of such a commonly perceived threat, national identities and related political pressures are likely to be reinforced, and joint action becomes rather more difficult to achieve.

The uneven incidence of the crisis among the member states makes for a complex configuration of transnational interests. Given the cumulation of both problem and political pressure in the open destination and transit states, we would expect these states to become the major protagonists not only in the national responses to the pressure but also in the search for a joint EU policy response to the crisis. For these states, stopping the inflow of asylum seekers and sharing the burden of accommodating the refugees who had already arrived was a priority. In the short run, the two types of states shared a common interest, which aligned them with the frontline states but placed them in opposition to the restrictive destination and the bystander states, as the latter were not directly concerned

with the inflow and would have had to bear the brunt of burden sharing. However, even if, with respect to the inflows, the interests of the transit states were clearly in line with those of the open destination and frontline states, with regard to accommodation, the position of transit states was more ambiguous, since they clearly benefited from the secondary movements of the asylum seekers within the EU. Moreover, the interests of the frontline and destination states were not fully aligned either: If they shared a common interest in the short run, they were on opposing ends with regard to the reform of the CEAS. Together with the other member states, open destination states were in favor of restoring the Dublin regulation, which attributes responsibility for accommodating incoming asylum seekers to the frontline states. By contrast, the expected priority of the frontline states was reform of the CEAS in such a way that they would no longer have to assume the entire responsibility for accommodating the inflow of new arrivals. We would expect them to accept support in handling the reception of asylum seekers – under the condition that they would not have to assume the entire responsibility on their own and that they would not be forced to accept interventions imposed by the EU and other member states.

In addition to its asymmetrical incidence, the problem structure of this crisis implied a high degree of *urgency* but only a limited degree of *uncertainty*. In terms of the comparison with natural catastrophes, this crisis had an avalanche (or earthquake) structure. Such a structure is characterized by generally expected and cumulative developments that suddenly escalate (see Pierson 2004). The immediate effect calls for urgent action. The policy response is typically one of rapid deployment under constrained creativity. In such a case, we do not expect major shifts in the political underpinning of the status quo. Given the accumulated previous experience with refugee crises, one could have seen this crisis coming. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the EU Commission was, indeed, preparing for its advent. But as a result of a series of nondecisions in the face of the rising threat, when the crisis finally escalated, it still found the member states unprepared and required responses under conditions of high urgency.

In the absence of a joint approach to the looming threat of a crisis, *unilateral actions* on the part of some member states become more likely, with individual member states reacting to their specific crisis situation and relying on their own policy heritage. Thus, in reaction to the mounting pressure during the refugee crisis, given the dysfunctionality of the CEAS, we expect a “free-for-all,” with member states adopting unilateral policies adapted to their own crisis situation – the frontline states waving through the flood of asylum seekers, the transit states doing the

same and building their own fences, and the destination states closing their borders. But note that in a compound polity such as the EU, the interdependence among the member states increases the likelihood that unilateral actions of some member states create important externalities or *spillover effects* for other member states. In the refugee crisis, the spillover effects were widespread and literally visible for anyone to see. They took the form of secondary movements of asylum seekers across borders of member states. Such spillover effects got the policymakers in some member states into a situation where they were trapped by the suddenly mounting crisis pressure and left without any options to respond. In this crisis, the sequence of events arguably ended up trapping the governments of the open destination states in such a way that they could do nothing but accept the normative power of the facts on the ground, at least in the short run.

In a compound polity, these endogenous spillover effects set in motion *cross-level and transnational interactions and conflicts*. We expect the important spillover effects to have created a particularly large number of cross-level and transnational interactions. In a symmetrical crisis, such as the Covid crisis, where all member states are hit in similar ways, they are all likely to take unilateral actions, too. But given that they are all hit in similar ways, their actions are likely to be rather similar and similarly consequential for their fellow member states. In such a situation, fellow member states are less likely to react unilaterally to the others' actions and more likely to look for joint reactions on the part of the supranational institutions. Cross-level and transnational interactions are expected to lead to higher levels of politicization, since they involve the expansion of conflict beyond the national borders both in a transnational and a vertical direction. In addition, we expect such conflicts to involve higher levels of government support at the national level because of a "rally-around-the-flag" effect, which leads national actors to close ranks in the face of trans- or international challenges.

In this respect, it is important to distinguish between *two sets of issues* that have been politicized during the refugee crisis: issues of border control and asylum rules (including integration laws). Modifications of national asylum rules have primarily domestic implications (at least at first sight), while it is border control measures that have a direct impact on other member states and trigger conflicts between member states and/or between member states and third countries. We expect border control measures to be of prime importance in frontline and transit states, which are directly confronted with the inflow of asylum seekers and the unilateral actions that originate the secondary movements of asylum seekers. By contrast, in destination states, asylum rules ought to play a

more important role. The frontline and transit states try above all to fend off new entries by closing their borders and/or to get rid of the inflow by opening up their borders for secondary movements. The destination states, by contrast, are stuck with their inflow of asylum seekers and try to make themselves less attractive by changing the asylum rules to allow them to accept a lower number of asylum seekers in the future and to return increasing numbers of them to their countries of origin. At the EU level, we expect border control measures to be more accessible for joint solutions than changes of asylum rules, at least as far as external borders are concerned: Closing the external borders allows for reducing the joint burden, while changing the EU asylum rules inherently implies a redistribution of the burden that is hard to achieve. Internal rebordering is situated somewhere in between these two extremes because it tends to involve only a subset of (neighboring) countries, which makes finding a solution more palatable.

For the analysis of the cross-level and transnational interactions in the refugee crisis, it is useful to distinguish between “top-down” interventions, when EU policymaking or policymaking in fellow member states intervenes in domestic policies of a given member state, and “bottom-up” interventions, when national policymaking influences EU politics or the politics of other member states. EU authorities may directly intervene in a top-down fashion in the implementation of EU policy at the national level if a member state fails to implement the joint EU policy. This is [Börzel’s \(2002\)](#) case of “foot-dragging.” The EU may also attempt to “download” the implementation of a certain policy to specific member states if it lacks the capacity to do so on its own. Conversely, the EU may intervene in national politics to prevent some domestic policy that is incompatible with a common EU approach from being implemented. In the bottom-up variety, a member state may signal to its fellow member states and the EU that it is unable to implement the EU policy because of national resistance or because of a lack of resources. It may call on the EU or other member states for help to meet the crisis challenge, or it may unilaterally deal with the challenge and adopt a policy that it then may try to “upload” to the EU level. National policymakers may also find themselves in a situation where they face domestic political pressure that threatens their very political survival, given the policies they are forced to adopt. In the face of such pressure, they may call for EU coordination and intervention to come to their rescue, as Greece did in the Euro area crisis. EU policymakers may want to ignore such calls, but, depending on the power of the member state and the perceived threat to the EU polity of a member state’s policy failure, they may be obliged to intervene. In the refugee crisis, several member states needed to turn to the

EU for rescue – either because their unilateral capacity fell short of the task they faced (frontline states) or because they were, indeed, trapped by the unilateral actions of frontline and transit states (Germany). In each case, the call for support triggered attempts at EU policymaking but, as we shall see, not always with great success.

Following Börzel (2002), we shall study both the ways in which member states have adapted to European policies and the ways in which they have attempted to shape European policy outcomes during the refugee crisis. In contrast to our predecessor, however, we focus not on the eventual effects of Europeanization on national policy outcomes but on the conflictual interactions between EU policymaking and policymaking in the member states and its consequences for policy outcomes. Depending on the crisis situation in a given member state, the same policy decision at the EU level may work out very differently in the member states concerned. We shall show how this differential impact played out in the case of the EU–Turkey agreement, comparing the cases of Germany and Greece. Chapters 11 and 12 will focus on cross- and transnational interaction processes.

Although we argue that the characteristics of the crisis situation constitute important preconditions for the policymaking, we readily acknowledge that policymaking is shaped not only by the exogenous characteristics of the crisis situation but also by a set of factors related to endogenous political dynamics, which are only superficially related to the intensity of the crisis: The anticipating reactions of policymakers, the strategies of political entrepreneurs, key events, the legislative cycle, and the endogenous dynamics of policy reactions to the crisis once they had been set in motion all contributed to the politicization of the crisis, too. Thus, immigration-related issues may be rendered salient by the operation and effects of politics and the wider socioeconomic context within which they are embedded (Hadj-Abdou, Bale, and Geddes 2022), and party strategies play an important role in this context (Abou-Chadi, Cohen, and Wagner 2022), too. As the emergency politics literature reminds us (see Chapter 1), there can be strategies of “crisisification” (Rhinard 2019). According to one strategy of political entrepreneurs, action may be explicitly delayed until a foreseeable policy problem escalates into a crisis and the ensuing crisis is then “exploited” to increase support for public office-holders or their policy agendas (Boin, ’t Hart, and McConnell 2009; Rauh 2022). An alternative strategy of political entrepreneurs consists of creating a crisis where there is hardly a policy problem at all. We can get an idea of the importance of such endogenous factors by inspecting the timing of the individual episodes at the EU and the national level. The greater the concentration of the episodes in

time, the greater the impact of the characteristics of the crisis situation can be assumed to be; by contrast, the greater the variation of the timing of episodes within and across countries, the greater the likelihood that endogenous factors play a role (see [Chapter 5](#)).

Institutional Context and Policy Legacies

Policy responds to the consequences of *policy legacies* ([Hecló 1974](#)). Past policies create a situation of path dependence that limits the available choices for policymakers in the crisis situation. They do so by generating institutional routines and procedures that constrain decision-making. In particular, policy legacies constrain the range of available options ([Pierson 2004](#)). In the multilevel polity of the EU, the heritage of past policies refers both to the EU and the domestic level. We shall consider four aspects of the institutional context and policy legacies in particular.

First, depending on the policy domain, the *competence distribution* between the two levels varies a great deal, with important consequences for the policymaking process. Thus, in policy areas where the EU has high competence, it is more likely for European institutions to be situated at the heart of the crisis resolution process. As suggested by [Schimmelfennig \(2018\)](#), when the EU has high competence in a policy domain that is directly affected by the crisis, supranational authorities most notably the European Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB), have both the autonomy and the resources to preserve and expand supranational integration. Where the EU competences are low, European institutions lack the capacity to make an independent impact on crisis management. Moreover, we expect conflict intensity to be lower in policy domains of high EU competence than in domains of low EU competence because in policy domains of high EU competence, the leverage of opposing transnational minority coalitions is more limited than it is in domains of low EU competence.

As we have already seen, in the *asylum policy domain*, the EU has rather low competences and heavily depends on intergovernmental coordination among member states. In this domain, responsibility is shared between the EU and the member states. While the latter have retained core competences, their policymaking still depends on the common Schengen–Dublin framework. In asylum policy, the mixture of interdependence and independence of the member states imposes reciprocal constraints on the decision-makers at each level of the EU polity: While the interdependence imposes constraints on the policy response of national policymakers, the independence that national policymakers have retained constrains the decision-making in asylum policy at the EU level. The

limited competence of the EU in the asylum domain poses a great challenge for policymaking in the crisis, a challenge that is enhanced by the diversity of the policy heritage in the various member states.

Second, in a policy domain like asylum policy, where intergovernmental coordination looms large, the institutionalized power hierarchy between member states constitutes an important factor. Thus, member states have different vote endowments – depending on size – in the Council, including the European Council, and different capacities to contribute to the common good. Large member states not only have a stronger position in the policymaking process than smaller member states do, they are also expected to make a larger contribution to the common good, as is suggested by the public goods literature, since they have potentially more to lose (in absolute terms) from the nonprovision of the public good and are also the ones who are able to unilaterally make a significant contribution to the provision of the good. In the case of the refugee crisis, the common good consisted of both the securing of human rights and solidarity norms (Suhrke 1998), and in greater security and stability as a result of reduced tensions at the borders and limited secondary movements of asylum seekers (Thielemann 2018: 70; Lutz, Kaufmann, and Stünzi 2020). Informally, larger states may also provide leadership for the resolution of the crisis. Thus, Germany and France, the union's largest members, have often exercised joint leadership in crisis situations (Krotz and Schramm 2022).

This more or less institutionalized power hierarchy may be reinforced, but also undermined, by the crisis-induced power relations. The latter, in turn, depend on the distribution of the crisis incidence. As liberal intergovernmentalism tells us, the states that are hardest hit by the crisis find themselves in a weak bargaining position and are most willing to compromise, while the fortunate member states are in a strong bargaining position, which makes them least willing to compromise (Moravcsik 1998: 3). Thus, in the Euro area crisis, Germany's hierarchical position was reinforced, since it was the main creditor of other member states. By contrast, the refugee crisis demonstrates how the institutionalized power relations in the EU may be undermined by the EU's limited policy-specific competences and by the crisis-induced spillover processes between member states. The combination of these two factors goes a long way to explain why Germany, the most powerful member state of the EU, failed to impose its preferred joint solution. Indeed, Germany's capacity to play the role of a stabilizing hegemonic power in the EU proved to be limited in this crisis (Webber 2019: 17), which suggests that crisis-induced bargaining positions may trump institutional power relations. As it turned out, Germany's efforts to arrive at collective solutions

was undermined by some member states trying to minimize their own burden of processing asylum seekers and hosting refugees. We shall present German case studies in [Chapters 6, 10 and 11](#).

Third, as regards the decision-making mode, we insist on the importance of what we call *executive decision-making*. New intergovernmentalism stresses that intergovernmental coordination has become the key decision-making mode in the EU in general and particularly in crisis situations ([Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter 2015](#); [Fabbrini 2019](#); [van Middelaar 2019](#)). [Fabbrini \(2019: 93ff\)](#) characterizes this decision-making mode as a system of voluntary coordination among member states, without any legal restrictions on their choices. In this decision-making mode, it is the heads of member state governments (in the European Council) and responsible ministers (in the Council of Ministers) who assume a decisive role. These are precisely the actors who provide the critical link between the two levels of the EU polity. As a result of their dual role – that of head of state or government representing a country in European negotiations and that of member of the European Council representing Europe back home – the executives of the member states become the pivotal actors in the two-level game linking domestic politics to EU decision-making. Accordingly, we expect the governments of the member states and their key executives to play a pivotal role not only in domestic policymaking but also in policymaking at the EU level.

Under crisis conditions, the role of key executives of both the EU and member states is likely to become even more prominent. Under such conditions, which combine high political pressure in the sense of conflict-laden salience with high time pressure (urgency), executive decision-making is expected to become the preferred mode of decision-making both at the supranational and the national level. In a crisis, policymaking is no longer confined to the policy-specific subsystem (asylum policy in our case), but it becomes the object of macro-politics or “*Chefsache*,” to be taken over by the political leaders who focus on the issue in question. In the terminology of the punctuated equilibrium model of policymaking, executive bargaining occurs as a result of “serial shifts” from parallel to serial processing ([Baumgartner and Jones 2002](#)). The decision-making mode of intergovernmental coordination corresponds to the EU-specific version of executive decision-making.

In intergovernmental coordination, the member states have joint responsibility, and in this decision-making mode, deliberation and consensus have become the dominant behavioral norms ([Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter 2015: 2](#)), which is largely explained by the prevailing unanimity rule. Under this rule, every member state has a veto position. However, in the Council of Ministers, QMV (qualified majority

voting) and RQMV (reverse qualified majority voting), as applied in the excessive deficit procedure, have become prevalent modes of decision-making.² These alternative decision-making modes of intergovernmental coordination reduce the possibilities for member states to veto joint solutions and strengthen the center. They can be used in an attempt to impose joint solutions, and they have been used in this way during the refugee crisis. However, these efforts have been to no avail. In the EU polity, the consensus requirements among executives from the member states prove to be very high, and they are disregarded only at high costs, as we shall show. Chapters 6 and 7 will present the key actors at the national and the EU level and confirm the role of executive decision-making in this crisis.

Last, but certainly not least, the focus on heads of member state governments crucially introduces partisan contestation into the management of the refugee crisis, since, at the level of the member states, the national governments are exposed to party competition. We build on postfunctionalism and its insight that national preference formation has shifted from the elite arena of issue-specific negotiations – involving interest groups, executives, and supranational bodies in the distribution of the policy gains of integration – to the mass arena of identity politics. In this arena, *partisan contestation* determines national policymaking, and identities and values contribute to shaping integration preferences (Hooghe and Marks 2019). Partisan contestation was crucial in the refugee crisis. Above all, given the distribution of competences in the asylum policy domain, the bulk of the political decision-making processes took place at the domestic level. Short-term executive-led crisis management has activated opposition from both pro-demarcation and pro-integration forces in the party system and beyond.

Overall, how can we expect the national elite to react to the problem and political pressures of the crisis situation? With respect to the rising problem pressure, we entertain contrasting expectations. Thus, the rally-around-the-flag perspective suggests that the elite will close ranks behind government proposals. By contrast, the party competition perspective suggests that nongovernment elites use the strategic opportunity offered by mounting problem pressure to articulate opposition to the government's proposals and signal distance from government as a result. With respect to rising political pressure, the expectation is more clear-cut: In response to the growing strength of the radical right, the political elite is likely to step up dissent. Moreover, the governments' opponents are

² RQMV implies that sanctions are approved by the Council of Ministers unless a qualified majority turns against them.

expected to systematically respond to each other's expressed level of support to the government's initiatives. Though the government, by virtue of its central role in the policy process, is indeed the main originator or target of conflict, other actors are hardly expected to act in isolation when they decide on their response strategies.

Indirectly, via its consequences for *government composition*, partisan contestation also influences policymaking at the EU level. Thus, we should not only consider the radical right and the parties under its influence as an oppositional force at the national level, but we should also take into account the possibility that such forces may become part of the national government coalition or even the dominant governing party. In the compound EU polity, this implies that the intergovernmental policymaking process may be decisively shaped by the outcome of the national partisan electoral competition. By determining the government's composition, the national electoral competition at the same time shapes the constraints of the policymaking process at the EU level. In the refugee crisis of 2015–16, there were already member states with nationalist-conservative governments that took up the policy stances, frames, and themes of the radical right and mobilized their voters in the name of their opposition to the EU's management of the crisis. Moreover, these governments formed a transnational sovereignty coalition (Fabbrini 2022), which attempted to block joint solutions to the crisis. We expect the policymaking process at the EU level to become more difficult the more the government composition in the member states includes parties that represent the policy positions of the radical right, whether they belong to this party family or are rather situated on the nationalist-conservative right (such as the Hungarian or Polish governments under Orbán and Kaczyński) or the nationalist-conservative left (such as the Slovak Smer government). Chapter 8 focuses on government composition and domestic conflicts, Chapter 10 studies the drivers of elite support in the refugee crisis.

To sum up the impact of the crisis situation on policymaking, we expect that policymaking in the refugee crisis was characterized by a primarily intergovernmental process of crisis resolution, as required by the lack of significant competence and capacity of EU institutions in the domain of the crisis. At the EU level, we expect policymaking to have been characterized by hard-nosed bargaining and for it to end up being stalled due to the perceived divergence of interests among asymmetrically exposed EU member states. Consistent with the postfunctionalist framework and the notion of “constraining dissensus,” we expect to find irreconcilable divergences in intergovernmental fora, catalyzed by the high degree of politicization of identity issues both between and within

member states. At the national level, we expect a plethora of unilateral actions that create spillovers for other member states and trap some of them in impossible situation, which, in turn, results in important cross-level and transnational interactions and conflicts.

Crises Outcomes

Crises often act as “windows of opportunity” for the introduction of new joint solutions. However, in the refugee crisis, the joint presence of intergovernmental crisis management and heightened politicization of national identities has acted as a powerful constraint on the crisis policy-making process, increasing the likelihood of minimum common denominator solutions based on narrowly defined member states’ preferences and making joint policy initiatives harder to achieve (Ferrara and Kriesi 2021). As we know, the breakdown of the EU’s asylum system in the 2015–16 crisis has mainly triggered the same kind of response as in past crises – namely, a shift of responsibility outward and a reinforcement of border control at the EU level (Guiraudon 2018). There was a lack of a push for more integrative solutions. At the national level, we also witness continuity with past legacies: The crisis led to the reintroduction of border controls at the domestic borders and to a further retrenchment of asylum policy across the member states but not to any fundamental changes of policy. In general, the measures introduced during the crisis were consistent with an approach at the national and EU levels that can be traced back for more than two decades (Geddes, Hadj Abdou, and Brumat 2020). Chapter 5 will present an overview of the policy responses at both the EU and the national level.

Reform of the dysfunctional EU asylum policy proved to be impossible. We expect that two factors mainly contributed to this outcome: on the one hand, the early policy failure (relocation scheme) at the EU level, and on the other hand, the stop-gap externalization solution (EU–Turkey agreement) that was adopted at the peak of the crisis. The early policy failure has undermined mutual trust among the member states and has lastingly poisoned the mutual relationships between them. The successful stop-gap solution has taken off the pressure for more far-reaching reforms. As a result, both capacity and motivation to reform declined, and the can was kicked down the road in a series of non-decision-making episodes. The early policy failure, in turn, has to be interpreted in terms of the underlying master conflict between integration and demarcation: As we shall show, it is the result of the mobilization of national identities by nationalist-conservative governments that deliberately used the issue to radicalize their opposition to joint solutions. Such mobilization

processes against joint solutions by member state governments are, of course, most likely in member states that are not directly affected by the crisis. Moreover, we would expect that such mobilization processes occur especially if the potential beneficiaries of joint solutions are widely perceived as undeserving because of earlier domestic policy failures (such as Germany) or as untrustworthy because of endemic structural incapacities (such as Greece).

In spite of the great threat to EU survival perceived in the citizen public (see survey results reported in the previous chapter), no disintegrative dynamic developed at the elite level to threaten the survival of the EU polity during the refugee crisis. It has been argued that not only were national measures and externalization sufficiently effective, but supranational integration among member states was actually not functionally necessary in this crisis (Schimmelfennig 2022; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018). This kind of argument downplays the dysfunctionality of the existing system of European asylum policy and also neglects the indirect consequences of the unresolved issues of asylum policy for subsequent crises in the EU. Given the importance of the integration–demarcation conflict in the European party systems, asylum policy remains a potent means for electoral mobilization on the left and on the right. The large opposition to immigration in some member states is bound to constrain the options available to policymakers because it is likely to constitute a major obstacle to joint solutions. Chapters 13 and 14 address the explosive potential of migration-related issues among the voters, as well as the electoral consequences of the refugee crisis.

More specifically, we should not only consider the consequences of the crisis for policymaking at the EU level. The problem pressure in the destination states may be such that it constitutes a fundamental threat to the survival of political regimes, governments, political parties, and their leaders. We would argue that the refugee crisis provided the crucial impetus for the emergence of the illiberal democracies in Hungary and Poland: Political entrepreneurs in both countries seized the opportunity to transform their political regimes and thereby created the rule-of-law crisis. In terms of threats to governments, parties, and their leaders, in the Euro area crisis, this concerned mainly the southern European member states (see Hutter and Kriesi 2019). In the refugee crisis, we expect that this danger loomed large above all in the northwestern European destination states, and especially in Germany, where a grand coalition dominated by a center right party (the CDU-CSU) was held responsible for the large inflow of asylum seekers. As has been already pointed out, the German government, and especially the dominant center right party, was caught by surprise and found itself trapped by the incoming flow of

asylum seekers. It had to adopt policies that were obviously unpopular with large parts of the dominant party's electorate. We expect leaders of governments who are trapped in this way to look for the EU to come to their rescue by adopting EU measures that alleviate the pressure they are facing. Whether such support will be forthcoming depends, as we have already pointed out, on the distribution of the pressure among the member states and on the support such a government finds among the EU authorities.

However, contrary to the Euro area crisis, we do not expect the refugee crisis to have triggered a wholesale transformation of party systems in some member states. Except for some open destination states, we suggest that the refugee crisis provided much more room for strategic choices by parties, since it was cumulative and expected and, overall, posed less of a threat to the individual governments. The parties could anticipate the potential political impact of the issue and either shield against it or try to exploit it more or less successfully, depending on the case at hand. For individual parties, the crisis provided opportunities to benefit from the increased salience attributed to the immigration issue by the mainstream media and European electorates. We expect that right-wing actors who were persistent on their anti-immigration message and "owned" the issue enjoyed electoral gains at the expense of their proximate party families and the left. We do not suggest, however, that the drivers of the politicization and those who reaped benefits from this right-wing drift were necessarily the same in every country. Instead, we expect the beneficiaries to vary depending on the country-specific context of party competition.

Conclusion

To summarize our main expectations: We expect the management of the refugee crisis to be heavily shaped by the underlying political conflicts in the compound EU polity of nation-states, by the crisis situation that prevailed as a result of the policy-specific heritage, and by the combination of problem and political pressures at both levels of this polity in interaction with a set of particular characteristics of the EU polity. The vertical and horizontal territorial conflicts that are typical of this compound polity are expected to have been exacerbated by two aspects of the crisis situation in particular – the limited number of competences of the EU in the policy domain of asylum policy and the asymmetrical incidence of the refugee crisis among the member states. Finally, we formulated some expectations with regard to the crisis outcomes at the two levels of the polity. At both levels, previous assessments argue for more continuity

than change – in terms of both policy and conflict structures – and limited spillovers from policy to polity change. However, we argue that the implications for the maintenance of the compound polity created by the way the crisis was managed may have been more problematic than meets the eye at first sight.

Our approach is compatible with the “failing-forward” framework as far as the outcome of the crisis is concerned. But this framework lacks concepts for the analysis of the policymaking process that we provide. At the same time, our framework is also compatible with the neofunctionalist approach as far as the importance of spillover processes is concerned. Contrary to neofunctionalism, we insist, however, that these spillover processes do not necessarily contribute to further integration but might, instead, undermine such integration by creating externalities for fellow member states that induce the latter to adopt internal rebordering measures and to create “circles of bonding” that may prove to be highly divisive for the future of the EU polity. Our framework also borrows from intergovernmentalism, whether in its liberal or its renewed version. The refugee crisis was primarily managed by intergovernmental coordination, in close interaction with the EU authorities, most notably with the Commission. The crisis-induced power relations between member states are as expected by liberal intergovernmentalism, and the details of executive decision-making are precisely in line with the expectations of new intergovernmentalism. However, contrary to liberal intergovernmentalism, we do not consider interest groups to be of prime importance for the management of a crisis like the refugee crisis. In this crisis, where identity issues loom large and are activated by partisan contestation in the member states, the political pressure exerted by party competition is much more important, in line with the expectations of postfunctionalism.

3 Design of the Study

Introduction

In [Chapter 2](#), we described our theoretical approach for studying the refugee crisis in a multilevel polity. We have also already introduced the outline of our empirical design. In this chapter, we describe the main elements of this empirical design, including our case selection strategies and the types of data used.

In the first part of the chapter, we describe our case selection, essentially delimiting the empirical scope of our study. As our theoretical approach is based on the perspective of the EU as a multilevel polity involving asymmetrical and interdependent relations between member states, our empirical universe consists of the unfolding of the crisis at both the EU level and the level of the member states. Within this empirical universe, our case selection strategy involves two steps. In the first step, taking into consideration the variation in policy heritage of European countries in the immigration domain, the immediate crisis situation they were facing, but also their centrality in the unfolding of the refugee crisis, we classify EU member states into four main types: frontline, transit, open destination, or closed destination states. In addition, we consider a fifth type, bystander states, which we, however, do not study in detail.

In the second step, within these selected countries, but also at the EU level, we study the crisis by breaking it down into a set of key policymaking episodes, which are triggered by salient policy proposals. Some of the policies we have chosen are legislative acts, such as reforms to the countries' asylum systems, while others are administrative decisions and novel practices by state institutions, such as the reimposition of border controls in a period of heightened problem pressure. In the [next section](#), we describe our episode selection strategy based on systematic media and secondary source analysis.

In the second part of this chapter, we focus on the empirical approaches we employ for studying the different stages and elements of the crisis. As our theoretical framework involves an ambitious design that aims to

study the interplay of both supply-side and demand-side dynamics, our book draws upon a variety of original datasets involving various methods of data collection. While many of these methods are mixed throughout the forthcoming chapters depending on the elements of the crisis on which we zoom in (e.g., the crisis situation, policymaking during the crisis, political competition dynamics), the central dataset upon which the book is based uses policy process analysis (PPA), a method that relies on the systematic coding of media data for capturing the policymaking and politics surrounding policy debates. Drawing upon political claims analysis (PCA) (Koopmans and Statham 1999), our original PPA dataset incorporates into a single framework information about all the major components of an empirically delimited policy episode in a country of interest. PPA is complemented with core-sentence analysis (CSA) for studying political competition dynamics in election campaigns, survey data for capturing public opinion on immigration, and speech analysis for studying rhetorical devices employed by key right and radical right actors during the crisis. In the following text, we detail the methodology behind these empirical approaches, and we point to the various parts of the book where they are employed.

Selection of Countries

Our theoretical approach is based on the perspective of the EU as a multilevel polity involving both dynamics at the EU level and asymmetrical and interdependent relations between member states, and domestic dynamics that shape the available policy options and outputs. Therefore, we study how the refugee crisis is unfolding in its various aspects at both the EU level, and in the various EU member states. By complementing a within-country perspective with an EU level perspective, we aim to provide a comprehensive account of the European refugee crisis's origins, ongoing developments, and consequences.

For breaking down the variety of EU member states and the role they played in the crisis, we categorize these states into the four main types we already mentioned: frontline, transit, open destination, and closed destination. The fifth type, bystander states, was hardly affected by the crisis and therefore played a marginal role in its unfolding. While not studied in depth, we do mention these bystander states when zooming out on broader aspects such as the salience of the immigration issue in the public across member states or when they get involved in any political dynamics in our countries of interest or at the EU level. This country typology is guided by several criteria related to the policy heritage in the immigration domain of these countries; the immediate crisis situation

they were faced with; but also, more generally, the migration trajectories in Europe. We selected two countries per type based on their centrality in the unfolding of the crisis: Greece and Italy as frontline states, Austria and Hungary as transit states, France and the UK as closed destination states, and Germany and Sweden as open destination states. It is in these eight countries and at the EU level that we study the specifics of policy-making and political dynamics during the crisis, while in the rest of the member states we adopt a more birds-eye view. In the following text, we describe our two main classification criteria: the crisis situation and the asylum policy heritage.

The first criterion on which we base our classification is the crisis situation. In this respect, the incidence of the crisis across EU member states was asymmetric, with countries experiencing different types and levels of problem pressure with regard to the number of entries and asylum requests. These asymmetries mainly result from the countries' geographical location and their attractiveness as destination states for asylum seekers. Countries that are geographic points of entry into the EU are frontline states, countries that are desirable destinations for migrants are destination states, while countries situated along migration trajectories are transit states.

The second criteria behind our classification refers to the immigration policy heritage and the nature of the prevailing asylum regime. First, central to the asylum policy is the Dublin principle, according to which countries that are the first point of arrival for an asylum applicant are responsible for processing their claim. This principle shifted the burden of accepting and integrating refugees to the EU border states, which became the frontline states in the refugee crisis. Second, while the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) aimed at setting common minimum standard for asylum across EU member states,¹ asylum regimes remain largely unharmonized (Kriesi, Altiparmakis, Bojar, and Oana 2021; Scipioni 2018; Niemann and Zaun 2018). Differences in these asylum regimes existed even before the crisis struck, as will become more apparent in [Chapter 4](#). In order to obtain an idea of how the national asylum regimes actually worked in the past, we propose examining the rejection rate of asylum seekers prior to the crisis (2010–14). For our eight countries, the first column in [Table 3.1](#) presents these rates for asylum seekers from the five countries (Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq,

¹ In setting this common minimum standard for asylum across EU member states, the CEAS did not lead to significant upgrades in those countries, especially in western Europe, that already had well-developed asylum systems, but it did lead to changes in those member states that previously did not really have a system, such as those in central-eastern Europe.

Table 3.1 Average rejection rates 2010–14 for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Nigeria, and annual budgets for national asylum systems in 2018 (in million euro)

	Country	Rejection rate ^a	Annual budget ^b
<i>Open Destination</i>	Sweden	0.18	3,080
	Germany	0.35	1,800
<i>Closed Destination</i>	France	0.63	74
	United Kingdom	0.70	301
<i>Frontline</i>	Greece	0.92	10
	Italy	0.43	1,447
<i>Transit</i>	Hungary	0.75	0.3
	Austria	0.51	114
	Average	0.56	853

^aSource: Eurostat: asylum statistics

^bSource: AIDA database (Ott 2019: 26); Italian figures also refer to 2018 but are taken from European Commission, ESPN Country profile stages 3 & 4 Italy 2017–2018, Table 29, p. 107; British figures are obtained from the UK Home Office's Annual Report and Accounts for the budgetary year of 2015–16 (UK Home Office 2016, p. 132).

Pakistan, and Nigeria) that due to either political instability or sheer population size presented national asylum authorities with the greatest burden during the refugee crisis. We notice here that there are wide differences among the countries that are regularly considered as destination states for migrants. While Sweden and Germany had been open destination states for asylum seekers prior to the crisis, having rather low rejection rates, France and the UK were already more closed before the crisis. Consequently, we split the group of destination states into two categories: open and closed. The differences between these groups of countries will be studied in more depth and will become more apparent in Chapter 4, where we further inquire into their crisis situation in terms of policy heritage, political pressure, and problem pressure. While there is also some variation among the frontline and transit states, we do not divide them any further but do take into account these differences when studying individual countries.

Moreover, the capacity of national asylum systems to deal with asylum requests also varies considerably between member states. Unfortunately, there are no longitudinal data available for this aspect, but the figures in the second column of Table 3.1 provide a snapshot of the financial resources available for the determining authorities. The ordering of countries is closely aligned with the rejection rates, except that the UK has somewhat more resources and Austria a lot less resources than the rejection rates would lead us to expect. As these numbers suggest,

the Greek, Hungarian, and French systems fall far short of what would have been required for proper functioning. The Greek asylum system had already been judged to be dysfunctional by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Justice (ECJ) as of 2011, and in 2012, the UNHCR arrived at the same assessment for the Hungarian asylum system (Trauner 2016: 314). In other words, the national asylum systems of precisely those countries that were supposed to take care of the massive refugee inflows in the refugee crisis were least prepared to do so. Admittedly, annual budgetary appropriations are only one aspect of how effectively a given country's asylum system functions. However, in the context of a sudden spike in requests, the available resources of the system are an important indicator of its capacity to satisfy the country's CEAS obligations. These resources further reinforce our split of the destination states into an open and a closed type, while still pointing to significant differences in the asylum regimes of the other types of countries that will be studied in the upcoming chapters.

Selection of Episodes

Within these selected countries, but also at the EU level, we study the refugee crisis by breaking it down into a set of key policymaking episodes, which are triggered by salient policy proposals. Some of the policies we have chosen are legislative acts, such as reforms to the countries' asylum systems, while others are administrative decisions and novel practices by state institutions, such as the reimposition of border controls in a heightened period of problem pressure. A policy episode in our framework comprises the whole policy debate surrounding these specific policy proposals that governments put forward, from the moment the proposal enters the public debate to the moment the proposal is implemented and/or discussion surrounding it is no longer salient.

Our approach of focusing on specific policymaking episodes, rather than studying the refugee crisis as a whole, brings several advantages to the analysis. First, adopting an episode-based strategy enables the systematic comparison of our countries of interest by allowing us to compare policies of a similar type across countries (e.g., asylum reforms, border control). Second, by breaking down the crisis into policy proposals and by focusing on periods of heightened salience of the immigration issue in the public debate, we can limit the resources required for an in-depth study of all the actors involved, the actions they undertake, the issues they address, and their interactions in a systematic manner. Lastly, our episode-based strategy does not preclude, but rather complements, the strategy of studying the crisis as a whole. Different aspects of the crisis are

better suited to be studied by one or the other strategy; for example, general trends in salience are better studied throughout the crisis as a whole, whereas policymaking and political dynamics surrounding specific policy proposals are preferably studied in a bounded episode. Accordingly, we adopt an encompassing analytical strategy when looking at problem and political pressure (Chapter 4), at conflict configurations on the demand side (Chapter 13), and at electoral outcomes (Chapter 14). Conversely, we focus on episodes when studying the variety of policy responses to the crisis (Chapter 5), the actors and conflict structures in policymaking (Chapters 6–9), and the dynamics of policymaking (Chapters 10–12).

To systematically select these episodes, we have resorted to a two-step strategy. In the first step, we analyzed a variety of international press sources using a broad timeframe (starting in 2013 and ending in 2020) covering the crisis so as to make sure that we capture policy processes starting before or continuing after the peak of the crisis in 2015–16. We used the international press at this initial stage based on the idea that the proposals that make it into the international news are publicly most relevant and impactful. We constructed a corpus of news articles based on general migration-related keyword and performed an initial round of in-house, manual coding for identifying policy proposals. Based on the number of times a selected proposal appeared in the media, we delimited an initial set of particularly relevant proposals. In the second step, we cross-validated this initial set of episodes by using secondary sources (various publications of think-tanks and NGOs such as the Migration Policy Institute, European Migration Network, and Asylum Information Database) and by performing similar searches in the national press with the aid of native-language-speaking coders. Finally, we ended up with five key policy episodes in each of the eight countries and six policy episodes at the EU level. Additionally, to obtain a better grasp on the interactions between the EU and the domestic levels, we also studied one of the salient EU-level policy proposals – the EU–Turkey Deal – and the debate surrounding it in four member states representing our four country types: Greece, Hungary, Germany, and the UK.

A similar process was adopted for establishing the more specific timeline of these episodes, with a few important additional steps. The initial episode timeline that was established based on the two steps described above was further refined in close collaboration with a team of native-language speakers who helped us identify episode-specific keywords that were iteratively tested and applied to national news sources. Episode timelines are, therefore, exclusively based on the characteristics of the individual episodes. We have not harmonized their duration, as we are interested in how the episodes unfolded in their entirety. The process of

Table 3.2 *National-level policy episodes in the refugee crisis*

Country	Episode I	Episode II	Episode III	Episode IV	Episode V	Episode VI
EU	EU–Turkey Deal (7/2015–9/2016)	Emergency Relocation Scheme (4/2015–12/2018)	EU–Libya Deal (9/2016–2/2020)	Hotspots (6/2015–8/2016)	European Border and Coast Guard (4/2015–12/2019)	Dublin Reform (05/2015–12/2019)
Austria	Border Controls (4/2015–12/2016)	Balkan Route Closure (6/2015–3/2016)	Asylum Law (3/2015–5/2016)	Integration Law (10/2015–6/2017)	Right to Intervene (7/2015–12/2015)	
France	Ventimiglia (6/2015–11/2015)	Border Controls (11/2015–2/2020)	Asylum Law (12/2017–4/2019)	Rights of Foreigners (7/2013–11/2015)	Calais (1/2015–11/2016)	
Germany	“Wir Schaffen Das” (8/2015–4/2016)	Asylum Package (8/2015–3/2016)	Integration Law (2/2016–8/2016)	Deportation (1/2017–12/2019)	CDU-CSU Conflict (5/2018–7/2018)	
Greece	Summer of 2015 (5/2015–10/2015)	Hotspots-Frontex (10/2015–5/2016)	International Protection Bill (9/2019–11/2019)	Turkey Border Conflict (2/2020–3/2020)	Detention Centers (11/2019–2/2020)	
Hungary	Fence Building (6/2015–12/2016)	Quota referendum (11/2015–12/2016)	Legal Border Barrier Amendment (1/2017–11/2018)	Civil Law (1/2017–12/2017)	“Stop Soros” 1/2018–12/2019	
Italy	Mare Nostrum (10/2013–11/2014)	Ventimiglia (05/2015–10/2015)	Brenner Pass (1/2016–06/2016)	Port Closures (6/2018–9/2018)	Sicurezza Bis (9/2018–8/2019)	
Sweden	Border Control (7/2015–11/2018)	Residence Permits (6/2015–9/2016)	Police Powers (2/2016–3/2018)	Family Reunification (12/2018–7/2020)	Municipalities (1/2015–1/2016)	
The UK	Immigration Act (2014) (2/2013–6/2014)	Immigration Act (2016) (4/2015–5/2016)	Dubs Amendment (3/2016–5/2017)	Vulnerable Persons’ Re-settl. Scheme (12/2013–11/2017)	Calais (8/2014–10/2016)	
EU episode in member states	EU–Turkey Deal in Germany (9/2015–12/2016)	EU–Turkey Deal in Greece (9/2015–12/2016)	EU–Turkey Deal in Hungary (9/2015–12/2016)	EU–Turkey Deal in the UK (9/2015–12/2016)		

timeline selection is further described in the [following section](#) on policy process analysis, where we also describe the data we have collected on these episodes.

[Table 3.2](#) summarizes the episodes we have coded via the short labels we assigned to them together with their timeline. We can classify these episodes into two main types according to their substantive scope: (1) asylum-related policy reforms (including rules of burden sharing between member states, the retrenchment of asylum law, and the introduction of integration laws and laws on return in the member states) and (2) external border control measures (including the externalization of refugee protection). Not only does the substantive focus of policymaking vary across member states and phases of the crisis (as we show in [Chapter 4](#)), but it also plays a role in how political dynamics develop in these countries. For example, in [Chapter 5](#), we show that the dominant types of actor conflict vary by episode type: societal conflicts are prevalent across all episode types, while intragovernmental conflict is prevalent mostly in border-related episodes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Policy Process Analysis (PPA)

The main method we rely on for studying the political dynamics during the crisis and the variety of policy responses across our selected EU and country episodes is policy process analysis (PPA) ([Bojar et al. 2021a](#)). PPA intends to be a comprehensive method for the data collection and analysis of policymaking debates. As such, PPA aims at capturing the public face of policymaking, that is, the subset of actions in a policymaking process that are presented to the general public through the mass media. The method relies on analyzing media data based on systematic hand-coding of indicators related to the actors involved in the policy debate, the forms of action they engage in, the arena where the actions take place, the issues addressed, and the frames used to address these issues. The resulting dataset allows for the construction of more aggregate indicators at different levels of analysis (at the episode level, at the actor level, at different time units) for studying the policymaking debate and the political dynamics surrounding it from multiple angles, both statically and over time.

In its design, PPA is a specific form of political claims analysis (PCA) (see [Koopmans and Statham 1999](#)) and also incorporates elements from other methods previously employed to study protest events (protest event analysis [PEA]) (see [Hutter 2014](#); [Kriesi et al. 2020](#)) or contentious

politics (contentious episodes analysis [CEA]) (see Kriesi, Hutter, and Bojar 2019; Bojar et al. 2023) by making use of the systematic coding of media data. At its core, PPA is also an event-based methodology that focuses on identifying distinct *actions* undertaken by a variety of *actors* addressing particular *issues* and how they unfold over time. However, while PEA and CEA are usually limited to identifying either actions in the form of protest events or actions initiated by a limited set of actors (government versus challengers) to study mostly contentious politics, PPA enlarges the empirical scope to the study of entire policy debates.

Its encompassing scope and event-based focus make PPA a specific form of political claims analysis (PCA) (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Starting from a critique of protest event and political discourse newspaper analysis as being too “protest-centric” and focused primarily on nonroutine protest actions, PCA argues for the need to include events that occur outside the context of reported protest but that are important for understanding conflict. As such, PCA extends event coding to including actions that take on institutional forms, such as legal actions, and including public and institutional actors beyond social movements. Our PPA methodology takes this critique seriously by also enlarging the empirical scope of the analysis to include both institutional and non-institutional actions and actors. Where PPA departs from PCA is in its focus. PCA originated as a method primarily focused on studying *the demand side* of politics by taking as its starting point claims making (“strategic demands made by collective actors within a specific contested issue field”) (Koopmans and Statham 1999: 206) and attempting to enlarge the study of contentious politics and placing it into its wider context. By contrast, our PPA methodology is essentially *supply-side* focused by having as a starting point policymaking processes and specific policy debates while attempting to place these in their wider political context. It is this supply-side focus that drives our strategy of analyzing selected empirically delimited policy episodes rather than general contested issue fields and studying the policy debate surrounding them in a systematic fashion.

In its supply-side focus, PPA also comes close to another approach to the study of policymaking processes – the comparative policy agendas (CPA) project (Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen, and Jones 2006). However, rather than focusing particularly on the agenda-setting phase of policymaking as the CPA does, PPA systematically incorporates into a single framework information about all the major components of a policy debate. Therefore, as further detailed in the section below, PPA documents actions ranging from formal steps in the policymaking process to administrative and nonstate actions but also protest events and even

single verbal claims. Due to its goal of studying both the politics and the policymaking surrounding a particular episode, the actors documented in PPA are not restricted to solely governments; rather, they include all actors involved in the debate – political parties, civil society actors, supranational actors, and third-country actors.

Similar to CEA, PPA attempts to capture the middle ground between a qualitative narrative approach and a quantitative approach to describing the chronology of policy processes (see [Kriesi et al. 2019](#)). By including extensive string descriptions of each action, PPA provides a rich body of qualitative information on the politics and policymaking surrounding policy debates. At the same time, by coding specific action characteristics, it allows for the construction of systematic, comparative indicators at various levels: countries, episodes, and actor types. In its qualitative inclination, one could think of this approach as being related to process tracing in that we seek to document all the various chains of actions involved in a policy debate as they unfold over time in a systematic fashion. However, process-tracing is aimed mainly at *single-case inferences* about the intervening causal process, that is, on the causal mechanisms that link a given cause to an outcome in a single case ([George and Bennett 2005](#): 206–207; [Beach and Pedersen 2016](#): 4–5). In contrast, our method is aimed at combining such single-case inferences with *cross-case inferences*, making it essentially a comparative method. We therefore analyze the refugee crisis by comparing the variety of countries and episodes based on a combination of both qualitative evidence on the sequences of events in the form of descriptive narratives and systematic, quantitative indicators measuring relevant characteristics of these episodes (e.g., politicization and conflict intensity, as further detailed in the [next section](#)). In doing so, we aim to study within-country policy processes and how they evolve from problem pressure via domestic actor constellations and conflicts all the way to policy outcomes but also to compare such policy processes in a systematic fashion.

To sum up, PPA is well suited for our research goals in studying the refugee crisis for two main reasons. First, its *broad empirical scope* allows us to focus on a wide variety of actions and actors in systematically reconstructing the various policy debates both at the EU level and at the level of the member states. We can therefore use PPA for identifying the policymaking repertoires employed at these different levels, as well as for systematically studying the wide variety of actors involved in these debates, their configurations, and their discursive strategies. Second, by aiming at the *middle ground between quantitative and qualitative* approaches, PPA allows us to combine systematic, comparative indicators of the various aspects of politics and policymaking surrounding policy debates with the

reconstruction of the narrative chronology of these policy debates by the use of a rich body of qualitative evidence.

Having set up our empirical universe as bounded segments of the policy debate that take the form of distinct policy episodes embedded in the broader context of the 2015–16 refugee crisis, the first step in constructing our PPA dataset was defining and gathering the media corpus to be analyzed. Therefore, the first decision we were confronted with was source selection, that is, the selection of news media to be studied. Depending on the level of policymaking, we selected either international news sources (for the EU level) or national news sources (for the level of the member states). We used the news aggregator platform Factiva for document retrieval, as it provided us access to a large number of media outlets, which allowed for systematic multicountry comparison together with transparent and replicable selection criteria on the source.

Following good practice standards in working with media data from methods such as protest event analysis (Hutter 2014; Kriesi et al. 2019), we also tried to engage with issues of *selection bias* (e.g., Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2006), that is, with the biases associated with news source selection and their coverage of debates, actions, or events. In order to mitigate such biases, we adopted several strategies. First, we relied on a wide variety of media sources, rather than a single source, in order to be able to capture as many aspects of the policy debates as possible. Second, as just mentioned, in order to mitigate biases related to newsworthiness and proximity, we selected news sources that are proximate to the level of analysis: For EU debates, we focused on large news agencies (Agence France Presse, Associated Press, Reuters, Financial Times, Euronews, ANSA, BBC, MTI), while for national debates, we relied on national media. Third, in order to mitigate biases related to the political motives of the various sources and their potential impact on news coverage, we selected news sources on different sides of the political spectrum. Consequently, for each of the eight selected sources, we selected one major newspaper left of center and one right of center in terms of ideological leaning (with some minor exceptions related to data availability).

After selecting the news sources, the second decision related to corpus construction consisted of the identification of the keywords used for the retrieval of articles related to a particular episode. One of the main considerations at this step was achieving a balanced relevance ratio – the ratio between false positives (irrelevant articles that the keyword combination retrieved as positive hits) and false negatives (relevant articles that the keyword combination filtered out as negative hits). Since our data is manually coded, we aimed for a relatively slim but robust corpus. That is, our corpus needed to be manageable in terms of the number of

articles identified so as to not make the coding process too cumbersome and resource intensive, but it still allowed us to capture the full range of actions in a given policy episode without missing relevant articles filtered out by a too restrictive keyword combination.

In practical terms, the selection of keywords related to each of the EU and country episodes was performed by the authors of the book in close collaboration with a team of native-language-speaking coders (mostly comprised of political science PhD students who were also knowledgeable about the subject at hand – the refugee crisis). At this stage, we took advantage of the capabilities of the news aggregator Factiva, which allowed us to construct complex search strings using Boolean algebra and its standard logical operators. For each episode, we chose an initial set of episode-specific keywords based on secondary sources (policy reports, secondary scientific literature, etc.) and initial search queries in the national press. We then further refined this initial keyword selection through an iterative process of going back and forth between the selection and the corpus obtained. We selected those keyword combinations that passed the initial reading of the selected articles and achieved a satisfactory balance between the size of the corpus and the number of events filtered out.

After having constructed the corpus, the last step in the PPA coding process consisted of action coding. As already mentioned, PPA is an event-based methodology and hence the unit of observation at the level at which the data is collected is an action. An action in our framework is defined as “an act, or a claim by an actor with a prominent role in the political world that has a direct or indirect relevance for the policy debate” (Bojar et al. 2023). Therefore, within our framework, actions can be steps in the policymaking process, verbal claims, episode-related protest events, and other types of actions that we outline in the coding scheme below. This definition is rather open-ended because the relevance of an action is contingent on the specificities of the actual policy debate at hand.

Note that while the lowest level of observation is an action, the unit of analysis at which we draw conclusions can be pitched at any level of aggregation (actor types, issue categories, entire episodes, types of countries, etc.) depending on the research question, as will become apparent in the following chapters. In order to measure the various features of actions, action coding is based on a common core of variables that are coded for each of the actions in each episode: the arena where the action takes place, its (procedural) form, its (substantive) type of engagement with the policy, its overall direction vis-à-vis the policy, its direction vis-à-vis target actors, the organizational characteristics of the actor

undertaking them, the organizational characteristics of the target actor, the issues it engages with, and the normative frames used by actors to present their positions to the public (Bojar et al. 2023).

Based on initial trial rounds of action coding, we refined these major characteristics of an action with specific categories relevant for the refugee crisis. This resulted in a detailed codebook with hierarchically organized categories at various levels of specificity. The codebook was complemented by a dedicated coding spreadsheet that was provided to the coders to make the data collection process as systematic and comparable throughout country episodes as possible. At the end of the coding process, at the national level, our team identified 6,338 codable actions for the 40 episodes, yielding 157 actions per episode on average. However, there is considerable variation in how eventful the individual episodes are, ranging from 48 actions in the Residence Permits episode in Sweden to no less than 363 actions during the quota referendum in Hungary. In fact, Hungary has proven to be the most eventful of our eight countries with 1,204 actions, followed by Greece with a total of 1,086 actions. At the EU level, we have coded 1,257 actions in the six episodes, with the EU–Turkey Deal being the most eventful one (437 actions), while the EU–Libya episode had the lowest number of actions (62). These two datasets are complemented by the EU–Turkey Deal episode and the debate surrounding it in four member states containing an additional 1,138 actions. In the following text, we describe how each action characteristic was implemented in our data collection effort.

The first set of characteristics for each action that we have identified is related to the arena where it takes place. Arena choice is an important aspect of the policy debate because it can shape the type of actors that gain access to policymaking, the size and type of audiences that participants can address, and the type of policy options on the table as a function of the gate-keeping role of agenda setters (Timmermans 2001; Lowi and Nicholson 2009; Princen 2011). Arenas are also important because procedural forms of action depend on where they take place. We identify nine types of arenas in our codebook (see Figure 3.1) varying from decision-making institutional arenas such as the national governments to less institutionalized arena types such as protest or society more generally. Furthermore, for each of these nine arenas, we also identified specific forms of the action. For some of the arenas, the set of action forms was based upon long-standing traditions in the pertinent literature, such as the set of action repertoires in the protest arena (Traugott 1995; Della Porta 2013), while for others, such as the media arena, it was decided inductively based on our trial coding.

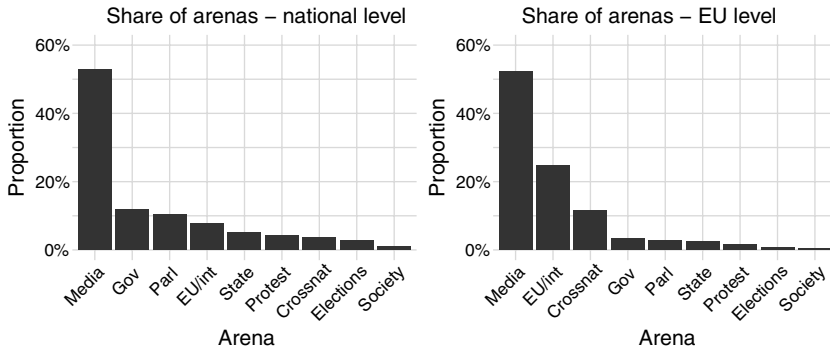


Figure 3.1 Policy action arenas at the national and EU levels

Figure 3.1 shows that most of the actions in our dataset at both the EU level and the national level take place in the media area (these usually come in the form of statements, press conferences, interviews, etc.). Unsurprisingly, the next most prominent arenas in our dataset at the national level are national governments and parliaments, while European institutions and the cross-national arena prevail at the EU level. Beyond these arenas, our data collection effort also captured actions taking place in the electoral arena, in the protest arena, and at the level of society more generally, thereby providing us with a multifaceted picture of the policy debate not only in venues mostly dedicated to supply-side actors but also in venues where demand-side actors such as civil society organizations most often operate.

After settling the “where” of the action, the next set of characteristics refers to the type of action that actors undertake with reference to the policy proposal and to other actors involved in the policymaking process. In this respect, we included a wide action repertoire, distinguishing between policymaking steps, policy claims, administrative state actions, and nonstate actions. It is at this level that our PPA methodology is distinguished from other methods dedicated to analyzing policymaking processes such as the comparative policy agendas (CPA) project (Baumgartner et al. 2006). Rather than only studying formal steps in the policymaking process, our dataset also includes verbal claims and statements made by a variety of actors in the policy process. In fact, as Figure 3.2 reveals, the most prominent policy action forms at both the national and EU level are precisely policy claims (these usually include actions such as full verbal support/opposition of the policy, clarifications, apologies, and verbal commitments to further action).

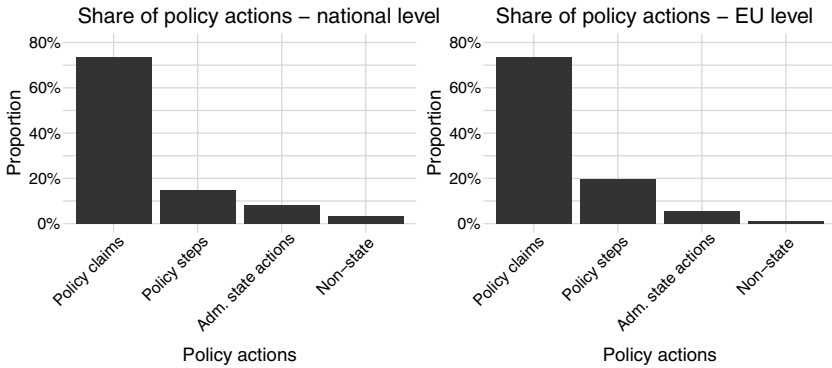


Figure 3.2 Policy action types at the national and EU levels

Distinguishing between policy claims and formal policy steps provides us with a more nuanced picture of how the policy debates unfolded, as these substantive types of action most often also indicate whether the action implies a broad level of agreement or disagreement with the underlying policy on the table. In addition to the substantive action types, we also use a general policy direction code (positive, negative, or neutral) as an indicator of the actor's position regarding the issue at stake. Finally, since in most of the episodes we follow up on the implementation of the policy in question and also include actions undertaken by nonstate actors (such as policy evaluations, NGOs involved in the implementation of a particular policy), we also consider administrative actions performed by state and nonstate actions.

Beyond characteristics of the action itself, the actors involved in a particular policy debate are of particular interest to us, as is shown in [Part II](#) of our book. By studying actors and the actions they undertake, we are able to analyze conflict structures and dynamics of coalition formation at both the national and EU levels, which is crucial in the negotiation stages of these policy episodes. Note that at this stage, we try to identify not only which actors undertake a particular action but also whether that particular action is targeted at other actor(s) in the policy debate. We therefore take into account two types of actions: monadic actions, which only have an initiator actor who addresses an issue, and dyadic actions, which have initiator actors who address not only an issue but also a target actor. For the dyadic actions, similar to the policy direction code, we introduce an actor direction code (negative, positive, or neutral) that captures the actor's relational position vis-à-vis the target actor regardless of how they relate to the policy as such.

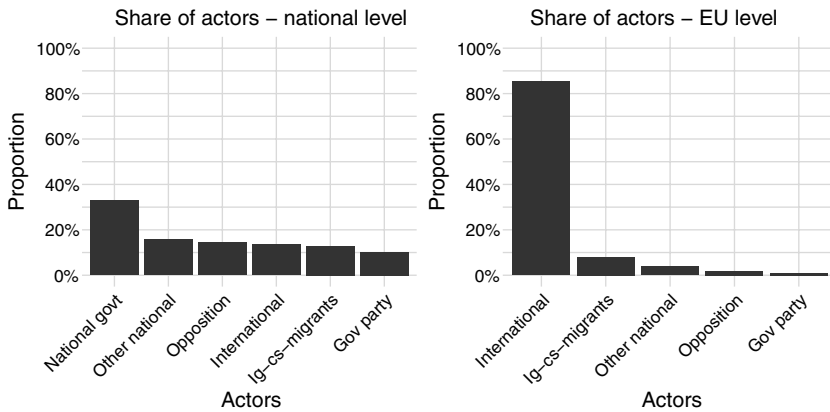


Figure 3.3 Initiator actor types at the national and EU levels

The actor characteristics that we identify in our PPA data collection are organized hierarchically at four levels: their nationalities; their broad institutional affiliations (such as the national government); their narrow institutional affiliation (a particular ministry); and, in the case of individual actors, their position within the institution's hierarchy (executive, subexecutive, or lower rank). This hierarchical organization allows us to study actor configurations at various levels of specificity, identify both domestic coalitions and cross-national coalitions, as well as capture dominant decision-making modes such as executive decision-making or partisan contestation.

In Figure 3.3, we present the share of actors involved in policy debates at the EU and national levels according to their broad institutional affiliations. National governments are the central actors in our domestic policy debates, with more than 30 percent of the actions being initiated by them. In contrast, inter- and supranational actors are the initiators of most actions (more than 80 percent) at the EU level. Despite these two categories unsurprisingly taking center stage at their respective levels, we can see that other national institutions (e.g., regional authorities), political parties both in government and in opposition, as well as interest groups and civil society actors have nontrivial shares of actions, especially at the domestic level.

Although in all the episodes we select actions relating to a particular policy proposal, most of the time the debates tend to revolve around more than one issue. Many of these proposals are in fact policy packages containing multiple issues that collectively make up the policy debate. Moreover, many actions do not directly relate to the policy but

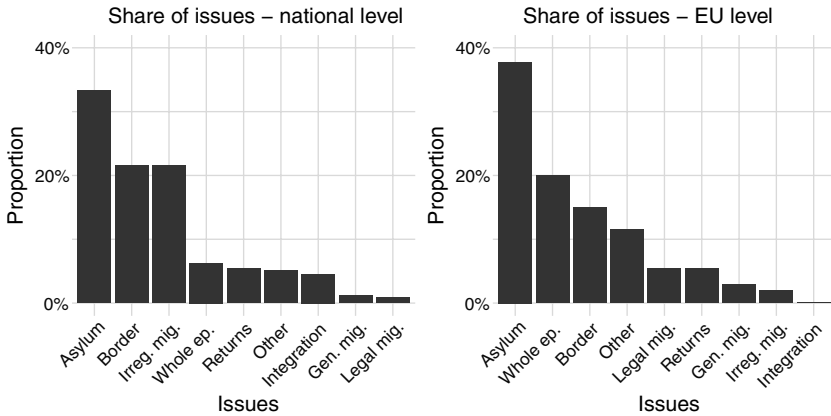


Figure 3.4 Issues at the national and EU levels

are important nevertheless because they have the potential to influence the future course of the debate. Differentiating between specific issues allows us to capture the more fine-grained thematic crisis responses, which are discussed in more depth in [Chapter 5](#). We therefore introduce a set of issue codes organized in such a way as to capture a broad categorization of migration-related policy areas as reflected in the organization of asylum and migration policies in the EU member states.

[Figure 3.4](#) presents the broad categorization of issues our episodes involve.² We can see that at both the EU and the national level, asylum issues and border control issues dominate the agenda. As some actions are directed toward a whole policy package (i.e., an episode), we introduce this as a specific issue. As we are interested also in some actions that do not directly relate to migration policy but are relevant for the policy debate at hand, we have complemented this with an “others” category to capture impactful actions and/or events in our episodes, such as issues pertaining to diplomatic relations between countries or humanitarian tragedies.

Finally, an important characteristic we include in our study relates to the discursive frames actors use. This essentially refers to the ways in which actors justify their action or interpret the political problem

² Our issue codes are also organized hierarchically; therefore, under these broad categories, we also have information on specific issue codes. Additionally, since the actions can touch upon multiple issues at once, we allow for up to two issue codes to be identified. This fine-grained information on issues, together with the qualitative, string description of each action provide further information for reconstructing the narrative surrounding each episode.

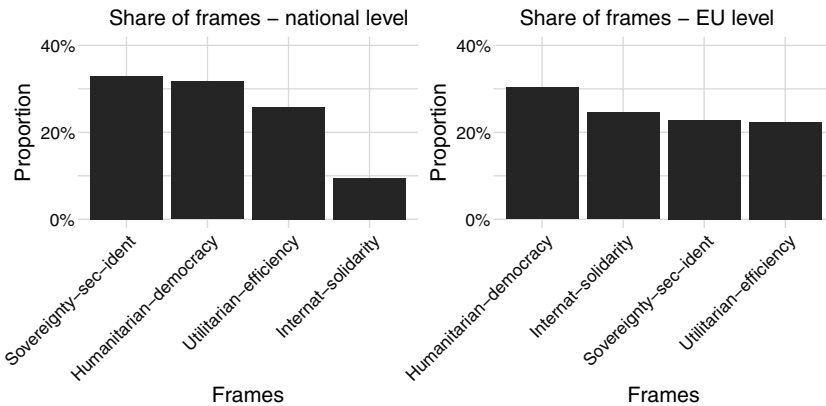


Figure 3.5 Frames at the national and EU levels

at hand. Such discursive framing is important because it can shape other actors' attitudes and behavior (Koopmans and Statham 1999; Rucht and Neidhardt 1999). The frames employed give us an overview of the communication strategies employed by the various actors involved in the policy debate and can be used to identify discursive coalitions in the political process.

Figure 3.5 presents the main frames identified in the refugee crisis grouped into four major categories. These broad categories were constructed inductively based on several rounds of trial coding and were further adapted through the data collection process. We observe that while humanitarian and democratic frames appear to be important at both the EU and national levels, there is still a wide discrepancy between the discursive strategies that actors employ at the two levels regarding other framing categories. At the national level, sovereignty, security, and identity frames dominate the discourse, but at the EU level, international solidarity arguments take a more central place. Chapter 9 will further delve into the issue of framing, looking at the role of discursive coalitions within the refugee crisis.

If above we have presented general descriptions of the major characteristics of actions captured by our PPA dataset, these characteristics also stand behind the formation of systematic, comparative indicators used across our country episodes. One example of such an indicator that is used extensively in the following chapters is *politicization* (De Wilde 2011; Hooghe and Marks 2012; Hutter and Kriesi 2019b). Politicization allows us to capture the expansion of the scope of

conflict within the political system (Hutter and Grande 2014: 1003). We conceive of politicization as a multifaceted concept involving a dimension of *salience* (the number of actions occurring in a particular episode in a particular time frame) and a dimension of *polarization* (the share of positive and negative actions in that timeframe), both of which are captured by our PPA dataset.³ Another indicator based on our PPA dataset that we use in Chapter 6 is *conflict intensity*, which is designed to capture the conflictual nature of the policy actions undertaken by actors. We define conflict intensity as a combination of the type of policy action that the actor undertakes and the direction of their actions vis-à-vis their target actors. While politicization allows us to capture the expansion of the scope of conflict, conflict intensity allows us to capture its nature, as some policy actions in our dataset are more conflictual than others (e.g., threats and denigrating opponents are more conflictual than simply proposing a new policy or negotiating) and as actions can be negative, positive, or neutral toward target actors. Accordingly, each action in our dataset is assigned an ordinal conflict intensity score on a 5-point scale based on a classification of policy actions and direction toward the target actor.

Complementary Data Collection Methods

While PPA constitutes the core data collection method used in our study, its empirical reach is not all-encompassing. First, our PPA data can unveil party competition dynamics related to the particular episode at hand but not the wider spectrum of such dynamics in the immigration field in our particular countries. Second, the PPA data described above are not suitable for capturing public opinion dynamics in the refugee crisis, such as the salience of immigration issues in the public or the public legitimacy of the policy outputs. Third, our PPA data allow us to capture the rhetorical devices employed by different actors in the refugee crises only to a limited extent. For these reasons, we complement the PPA data with various other datasets throughout the following chapters. While some of these datasets are widely known and available (e.g., major surveys such as the European Social Survey and the Eurobarometer), some others have been originally collected for the purpose of this book.

³ The composite polarization measure is the product of salience and polarization as described above, weighted by the different length of the reporting newspapers to allow for the possibility that press outlets systematically differ in their coverage, and standardized between 0 and 1.

We briefly describe these latter types of data collection strategies in the following sections.

Election Campaign Data (CSA)

We have mentioned that while the PPA data can be used to study party competition dynamics in a particular episode, their use is limited with regard to studying the wider spectrum of such dynamics in the immigration field in the selected countries. Therefore, for studying party competition dynamics specifically, as in [Chapter 14](#), we rely on an original core-sentence analysis (CSA) dataset ([Hutter and Kriesi 2019a](#); [Kleinnijenhuis, de Ridder, and Rietberg 1997](#)).

Similar to PPA, CSA is also based on the large-scale content analysis of mass media. However, rather than measuring all types of actions taking place in a specific policy episode, CSA focuses on the debates among parties in election campaigns as reported in national newspapers. As parties need to develop coherent programs prior to elections, election campaigns provide a good indicator of their issue positions. The core-sentence approach is based on the decomposition of news articles into relevant sentences. Each of these sentences is reduced to its most basic structure, the so-called core sentence, indicating only its subject (the actor) and its object (actor or issue), as well as the direction of the relationship between the two, which ranges from -1 (negative) to $+1$ (positive). Specifically, we code all core sentences that involve at least one national party-political actor as subject and/or object without further constraints regarding the issues that we code.

The dataset built following this approach covers all elections from 2000 to 2020 in seven of our eight countries of interest (all except for Sweden). This dataset allows us to analyze the salience that different political parties in these countries attribute to immigration issues and the positions these parties adopt in public discourse vis-à-vis other parties over immigration issues.

Surveys

While some of the following chapters utilize existing major surveys (e.g., [Chapter 4](#) relies on Eurobarometer data for measuring the salience of immigration in national publics), [Chapter 13](#), which looks at conflict configurations in asylum policy preferences in the general public, relies on original survey data collected by our team. This survey was fielded in sixteen EU member states in June–July 2021 and is based on national samples of around 800 respondents per country, amounting to a total of 13,095 respondents. Beyond general political attitudes and attitudes toward migration, this survey allows us to complement our other empirical

strategies by capturing evaluations of specific policies proposed or adopted during the refugee crisis and, hence, enabling an in-depth analysis of the conflict configurations surrounding these policies in the public.

Speech Analysis

Last but not least, while our PPA data allow us to capture the frames used by actors to justify their policy actions, they do so only to a limited extent based on a minimal frame categorization and without covering actors' actions and discourse that are not part of specific policy episodes. We further zoom in on the rhetoric devices employed by specific actors in [Chapter 9](#), where we examine the right-wing discourse related to the refugee crisis. For this purpose, we collected additional data on 58 speeches made by twelve key right and radical right politicians⁴ between 2014 and 2020 in six countries (Austria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and the UK) covering all of our country types. We built our speech analysis coding scheme through an inductive, iterative process. In the first phase, we started our coding procedure from a limited set of frames corresponding to our PPA frame list, which we subsequently expanded through an initial trial-coding phase. In the final coding phase, we separated our analysis into frames and themes. Whereas "frames" refer to overarching characterizations of the refugee crisis, inducing the audience to adopt a general understanding of the crisis, "themes" are more detailed arguments that attempt to focus the audience's attention on a specific aspect of the crisis and persuade them to either prioritize certain of its elements or view it primarily in terms of this specific aspect. We coded as many frames and themes as were found per speech, without restricting their number. Our final dataset comprises 751 instances of frames and/or themes that were subsequently aggregated into eleven frame and eight theme categories that are presented and analyzed in [Chapter 9](#).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have introduced the main building blocks of our empirical design for studying the refugee crisis. In order to meet our ambitious goals of studying the refugee crisis in all its stages, taking into account both its policymaking and political developments, involving both supply-side and demand-side dynamics, we have set up an equally ambitious empirical strategy.

⁴ Alexander Gauland, Alice Weidel, Frauke Petry, Sebastian Kurz, Heinz-Christian Strache, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Kyriakos Velopoulos, Viktor Orbán, Giorgia Meloni, Matteo Salvini, Nigel Farage, and Theresa May

First, this strategy relies on both a categorization of the type of countries in the refugee crisis as well as a selection of key policymaking episodes together with the political debates surrounding them. We focus on eight countries of four different types: Greece and Italy as frontline states, Austria and Hungary as transit states, France and the UK as closed destination states, and Germany and Sweden as open destination states. Most chapters in [Part II](#), [III](#), and [IV](#) study the refugee crisis in these eight countries by breaking it down into a set of key policymaking episodes involving salient policy debates. Additionally, since we look at the refugee crisis as taking place in a multilevel polity, EU-level dynamics are also included and studied following our episode approach both on their own (in [Chapter 7](#)) and in interaction with the domestic level (e.g., in [Chapters 11](#) and [12](#)).

Second, we have described our data collection and analysis strategies, which rely on several novel methods. Central to our book, we have introduced policy process analysis (PPA), a method that allows us to study these policymaking episodes in a multifaceted fashion by taking into account the actions undertaken, the fine-grained issues touched upon in the episode, the actors involved in the debate, as well as their substantive positions toward the policy at hand and their discursive framing strategies. While these data capture central aspects of the episodes we have selected, we do combine them with a variety of additional original datasets in order to capture those elements of the refugee crisis the PPA fails to measure. In particular, we have introduced core-sentence analysis (CSA), survey analysis, and speech analysis data collection efforts, which enable us to further zoom in on the collective mobilization dynamics and the political party election campaign strategies throughout the refugee crisis. The building blocks of the methods introduced in this chapter are essential for understanding the specific indicator construction and usage in the chapters to follow.

4 Crisis Situation

Policy Heritage, Problem Pressure, and Political Pressure

Introduction

In this chapter, we present the crisis situation – the policy heritage in the relevant policy domain of asylum policy, as well as the immediate problem and political pressure at the EU level and in the eight countries. The refugee crisis of 2015–16 was not the first refugee crisis in Europe. Other such crises preceded this one and have shaped the policy heritage at both the EU and the national level, which in turn was what the decision-makers relied upon when the problem pressure and the political pressure kept mounting during the summer and early fall of 2015. With increasing numbers of refugees arriving in Europe, the crisis pressure has been building up continuously. We track the mounting pressure in terms of the number of asylum seekers (problem pressure) Europe-wide, the salience of immigration issues in the national publics, and the strength of the radical right (political pressure) in the different countries. The crisis situation is expected to set the stage for the policymaking patterns as the crisis evolves.

In the first place, policy responds to the consequences of *policy legacies* (Hecló 1974). Past policies create a situation of path dependence that limits the available choices for policymakers in the crisis situation. Policy legacies generate institutional routines and procedures that constrain decision-making. In particular, they constrain the range of available options (Pierson 2004). In the multilevel polity of the EU, the heritage of past policies refers both to the EU and the domestic level. Importantly, in the EU polity, the supranational level is not just another level at which international agreements are negotiated to be transposed nationally later on, nor is the EU a full-fledged federal system. In this “compound polity,” as a result of market integration and the more or less extensive pooling of core state powers, the EU member states are highly interdependent.

In the domain of *asylum policy*, responsibility is shared between the EU and the member states. While the latter have retained core competences,

their policymaking still depends on the common Schengen–Dublin framework. Moreover, the policy-specific legislative framework is embedded in the overall institutional structure of EU decision-making. In asylum policy, the mixture of interdependence and independence of the member states imposes reciprocal constraints on the decision-makers at each level of the EU polity: While the interdependence imposes constraints on the policy response of national policymakers, the independence national policymakers have retained constrains the decision-making in asylum policy at the EU level. The limited competence of the EU in the asylum domain poses a great challenge for policymaking in a crisis, a challenge that is enhanced by the diversity of the policy heritage as well as the uneven incidence of the crisis in the various member states.

The immediate *problem pressure* is crisis-specific, as is the distribution of the incidence across the member states. The refugee crisis represents a specific type of crisis in terms of its problem structure and in terms of the distribution of its incidence across the EU member states. Crucially, the problem structure of this crisis implied a high degree of urgency but only a limited degree of uncertainty. Given the previous experience with refugee crises, one could have seen this crisis coming, and, as we shall see in the [next chapter](#), the EU Commission was, indeed, preparing for its advent. But when the crisis arrived, it still hit the member states unprepared and required responses under conditions of high urgency. Crucially as well, the incidence of the crisis across EU member states was asymmetric. Some member states were hit hard by the crisis, while others hardly experienced any problem pressure at all. As we have already seen in the [previous chapter](#), in addition to the problem pressure, the capacity to deal with the problem also varied considerably between member states, as some were more resourceful than others. We shall argue that the asymmetrical distribution of problem pressure and problem-solving capacity across member states, combined with the independence member states have retained in asylum policymaking, made joint responses particularly difficult. *Political pressure* added to this predicament in a number of key member states.

Policy Heritage

As already mentioned, the refugee crisis of 2015–16 was not the first refugee crisis in Europe. The most important previous crisis was the one linked to the Balkan wars in the early 1990s. At the end of the Cold War, between 1989 and 1994, the break-up of the former Yugoslavia led to the inflow of roughly 1.5 million refugees into the EU and in particular into Germany (see [Figure 4.1](#)). Germany not only managed hundreds

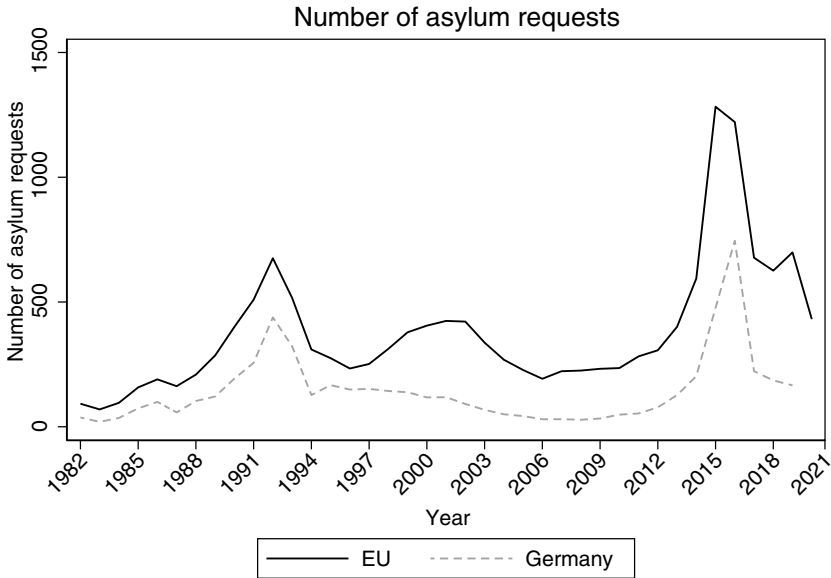


Figure 4.1 Refugee crises in Europe: number of asylum requests in the EU and in Germany, 1982–2020, in thousands

Sources: 1982–1997: UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2001, Table C1; 1998–2020: Eurostat

of thousands of refugees at the time, but it also received 1.1 million ethnic German “Aussiedler” from central–eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc. In reaction to this influx, the German government sought to export the crisis to the EU level. As [Schuster \(2000: 120\)](#) has already observed in her comparative analysis of the asylum policy in seven western European member states, six of which are part of our selection: “[P]erhaps the most remarkable about all the countries discussed in this volume is that, in spite of their different histories and experiences of granting asylum, asylum policy in each state has been so reactive. Asylum policy is developed and changed in response to particular crises.” Thus, although more limited in quantitative terms than the 2015–16 crisis, the previous crises have been very important in shaping the thinking of policymakers in the field. It forged the EU’s policy heritage, or, in [Andrew Geddes’s \(2021\)](#) terms, its repertoire of migration governance. The Dublin Convention, which became the centerpiece of European asylum policy, was adopted in 1992, at the height of the earlier crisis. It was to determine which member states would have jurisdiction in matters of asylum – fatefully, responsibility was attributed to the member state in

which the refugees arrived. As [Geddes \(2021\)](#) argues, the past experiences of migration policymakers with crises generally shape their representations of what is normal about migration. Perceptions of normality, in turn, define what they know how to do and what they think they are expected to do next. Core perceptions and beliefs, once established, are hard to change and prove to be rather stable over time, even in new crisis situations.¹

The repertoire of EU migration governance has two components: free movement internally and a common migration and asylum policy with regard to third country nationals (TCNs). Put simply, the EU has an open borders framework internally, but external migration restrictions ([Geddes and Scholten 2016](#)). EU member states cannot control internal movement, but they are in charge of regulating admission of TCNs. While none of the EU laws govern admission, there are EU laws covering asylum, the return/expulsion of TCNs, family migration, the rights of TCNs who are long-term residents, highly qualified migrant workers, seasonal migrant workers, and a single permit directive linking work and residence. Added to this are a lot of other activities. Overall, EU asylum policy is partial in that it covers some, but not all, aspects of policy, and it is differential in that its effects have been more strongly felt in some member states than in others. Crucially, as argued by [Geddes \(2021\)](#), while the numbers of TCNs in general and asylum seekers in particular to be admitted and their “integration” remain matters for member states, EU measures on migration and asylum are primarily oriented toward stemming “unwanted” flows at the external borders.

Policy Heritage at the EU Level

The Single European Act (SEA) in 1986 was a major trigger for the common immigration agenda ([Hadj-Abdou 2016](#)). The abolition of internal border controls by the SEA provided a strong incentive for cooperation on immigration issues at the external borders. The member states addressed the issue through intergovernmental or trans-governmental arrangements.² More specifically, it was national interior ministries

¹ Similarly [Ripoll Servent and Trauner \(2014\)](#) and [Trauner and Ripoll Servent \(2016\)](#). However, they more explicitly build on the advocacy coalition approach. In addition, these authors downplay the impact of more recent exogenous events and of institutional change (such as the communitarization of Area of Freedom, Security and Justice [AFSJ] policies) on the policymaking process.

² The term “trans-governmental” has been coined by [Wallace \(2000: 33\)](#) and [Lavenex \(2000: 854\)](#). In contrast to “intergovernmental,” the term “trans-governmental” arrangements refers to the activities of governmental actors below the level of heads of government, such as ministerial officials, law-enforcement agencies, and other bureaucratic

that set the direction of EU cooperation on migration and asylum (Guiraudon 2003). A first cornerstone was the Schengen Agreement of 1985 (implemented in 1995), which abolished internal border controls and constituted a paradigm for EU policymaking in this domain (Boswell and Geddes 2011: 231f). It began as a limited arrangement outside the treaty among the traditional pro-integration states (Benelux, Germany, France, and Italy), which have played a key role in shaping EU migration policy. The Dublin Convention, the second cornerstone of European migration policy, was, as already mentioned, adopted at the peak of the previous crisis in 1992 (implemented in 1997). This convention was motivated above all by the concern of “older” immigration states that newer immigration states in southern Europe or prospective member states in central and southeast Europe needed to have credible border control frameworks. Germany, the member state most directly hit by the earlier crisis, played an especially important role in the creation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (Hellmann et al. 2005). Zaun (2017) explains why the frontline states followed the lead of the destination states when negotiating the key asylum directives: Given the absence of adequate asylum regulation in these states, they often felt that EU legislation did not concern them. They were not aware of the potential consequences and lacked the expertise and administrative capacity to foresee the effects of agreeing to individual provisions in the long run. The destination states with strong positions were able to exploit the silence of those less willing to fight to have their own positions accommodated.

Migration policy was supra-nationalized in several steps of treaty revisions. Eventually, since the Lisbon Treaty (2009), immigration has become a shared competence of the member states and EU institutions. However, the intergovernmental mode of decision-making still prevails in this policy domain, and the national ministries of the interior remain the most influential actors. At the EU level, they have been strengthened by the formalization of their deliberations in the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council; the support they receive from a certified Council secretariat, and in particular the staff of the DG H (JHA); the absorption of the Schengen group; and the attachment of staff from the ministries of the interior and of justice to the permanent representations of the member states (Lavenex 2001).

The current legislative framework of the CEAS was developed in two phases (1999–2004 and 2005–15). First, between 1999 and 2004,

actors who act with a certain degree of autonomy vis-à-vis their chief executives and are free to develop their own policy agenda.

several legislative measures designed to harmonize minimum standards for asylum were adopted. In addition, financial solidarity was reinforced by the creation of the European Refugee Fund in 2004, which compensated the member states receiving the highest numbers (in total) of asylum seekers. The harmonization effort led to the introduction of three important directives – the reception conditions directive (stipulates minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers), the qualification directive (specifies the status and rights of refugees), and the asylum procedures directive (establishes minimum procedural standards for granting and withdrawing refugee status in member states). As of 2013, all three directives had been revised. In addition, the Dublin regulation has been revised twice (in 2003 and 2013). Moreover, to ensure a rigorous application of the Dublin regime, in 2000, member states agreed to introduce a fingerprint data base (Eurodac).

Despite being adopted under full communitarization, the second phase of the CEAS (2005–15) proved slow and difficult in coming and did not introduce any major changes that would address the effective implementation of EU asylum policies at the domestic level (Ripoll Servent and Trauner 2014). The common rules of the CEAS have largely remained on paper (Scipioni 2018), and the harmonization of asylum policies in the EU has barely led to the implementation of minimum protection standards in the EU, let alone common standards (Niemann and Zaun 2018: 12). Zaun (2017: 256f) concludes that it is striking how strongly the member states' asylum systems differ after more than fifteen years of EU asylum legislation and despite the official completion of the CEAS in 2015: "The gap between strong regulating member states with asylum systems that generally work effectively and weak regulating member states that are overwhelmed and paralyzed by rising numbers of asylum-seekers is even more salient during the crisis."

As a matter of fact, the large differences in the countries' asylum regimes resulted in different outcomes even before the crisis struck. As a result, recognition rates, reception conditions, and asylum procedures continued to vary strongly across member states, as is shown in Table 3.1. Moreover, as this table also shows, the capacity of national asylum systems to deal with asylum requests also varies considerably between member states. As the indicator for the systems' capacity suggests, the Greek, Hungarian, and French systems fall far short of what would have been required for proper functioning. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the national asylum systems of precisely those countries that were supposed to take care of the massive refugee inflows during the refugee crisis were least prepared to do so. Admittedly, annual budgetary appropriations are only one aspect of how effectively a given country's asylum system

functions. However, in the context of a sudden spike of requests, the available resources of the system are an important indicator of a country's capacity to satisfy its CEAS obligations.

As a result of the lack of harmonization of minimum standards between member states and of the deficient capacity of some national systems, the entire CEAS rests on what has been called an organized hypocrisy (Krasner 1999; Lavenex 2018; van Middelaar 2019: 103ff). Even in terms of the protectionist policies, not to speak of humanitarian values, the system failed to fulfil its task: The states that were supposed to control the external borders were the least able to do so. Even before the crisis exploded, they had reacted by waving the refugees through to other states (Lavenex 2018: 1197), while the northern destination states had turned a blind eye to this kind of disruptive behavior because they had imposed these obligations on the frontline states in the first place. Predictably, the crisis led to the breakdown of the CEAS and to exposure of the organized hypocrisy.

Policy Heritage in the Member States

In reaction to the suppression of internal borders by the Single European Act, and to the Yugoslavian crisis, asylum policy in western European member states generally became more restrictive from the mid-1980 up to the end of the 1990s, both in terms of immigration controls and the provisions and services available to asylum seekers during the asylum determination process (Bloch, Galvin, and Schuster 2000). Hatton (2017: 463f) shows the overall trend of the asylum policy index for nineteen countries (sixteen European countries, plus the United States, Canada, and Australia) up to 2005.³ This trend confirms the tightening of the policies throughout the 1990s up to 2003. All three components of the index – access, processing, and welfare – display the same trend. However, at the country level, the extent and timing of changes in policy were far from uniform. A severe tightening occurred in several, but not all, countries. The effect was to reduce asylum applications by more than 25 percent in twelve out of the nineteen countries and by more than 40 percent in five of them (Austria, Australia, Ireland, Netherlands, and the UK).

Zooming in on the eight member states we cover in our study, we begin with the *open destination states* – Germany and Sweden – which provide a striking contrast to the increasingly restrictive trend in asylum policy. To begin with, *Germany* had traditionally not considered itself as an immigration country. German immigration policy was slow in

³ See his Table 4 on p. 459.

coming, and constraints on the development of a national immigration policy until the 1990s are key factors helping to explain why Germany was actively involved in the development of EU migration policies, partly compensating for the absence of national policies (Geddes and Scholten 2016, Chapter 4). Thus, the EU's Dublin system for asylum applications facilitated Germany's own 1993 "asylum compromise" that helped to significantly reduce the number of asylum seekers entering Germany and defuse the asylum crisis of the early 1990s.

Traditional approaches to immigration faded in the early 2000s, when a series of reforms fundamentally reshaped Germany's migration policy (Müller and Rietig 2016) and, contrary to the common trend, changed the country from "a restrictive outsider to a liberal role model" (Kolb 2014: 71). These reforms also include the liberalization of asylum policy: As required by the EU directives, Germany gradually abolished many of the restrictions that had been introduced by the 1993 asylum compromise. These changes triggered an increasingly generous interpretation of humanitarian protection in German law. Consistently falling asylum numbers in the late 1990s and early 2000s helped make these adaptations politically feasible. The paradigm change is illustrated by Angela Merkel's statement on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in 2013 (Laubenthal 2019: 415): "Germany must become an integration country."

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Sweden became a major receiving country of both asylum seekers and resettled refugees. It is during this time that Sweden became known as a humanitarian haven (Skodo 2018). During the 1990s, the multicultural component was downscaled, but only to a limited extent (Borevi 2014: 714). There has been a continuity in asylum policy that differentiates Sweden from other EU countries (Abiri 2000). Although Sweden introduced a few mandatory requirements for asylum seekers following the civic integration model in the 2000s, they have not been enforced. Economic assistance and residence permits have remained largely independent of integration performance. Moreover, during the period 2005–14, Sweden saw a massive loosening of policy, which went against the general trend (Hatton 2017: 465). By September 2013, Sweden had become the first country in the world to offer permanent residency to all Syrians seeking asylum (Scarpa and Schierup 2018).

By contrast, the overall trend is illustrated by the *restrictive destination states* – France and the UK. Since the 1980s, in a series of legislative steps, France has consistently restricted the access of asylum seekers to the country (Wihtol de Wenden 1994; Wihtol de Wenden 2011). Moreover, as early as 2011, France was one of the first countries to call

the Schengen regime into question by starting to reintroduce checks at its border with Italy (AIDA 2018). France even temporarily closed its border with Italy at Ventimiglia in April 2011 and asked the EU to revise the Schengen border treaty to take into account “exceptional” situations like the massive inflow of Tunisian immigrants in 2011. As a result, the Schengen border code was reformed in 2013, granting a provision that in times of the arrival of large migrations, internal border controls could be reinstated for a certain period (AIDA 2018) – a provision that would become a major policy tool for member states during the refugee crisis.

In the second closed destination state, the *United Kingdom*, starting in the late 1990s and with the advent of New Labour, a cross-party consensus emerged that considered immigration in general and asylum seekers in particular as a threat (Mulvey 2010). Accordingly, the pace of restrictive legislation with respect to TCNs accelerated in the new millennium (DEMIG 2015). Among the large number of policies employed by the British state to act as a deterrent for asylum seekers, we highlight the dispersal system that distributes asylum seekers to socially deprived areas with highly precarious financial and material conditions and limited prospects for social integration (Bakker et al. 2016); the increased use of detention practices (Bosworth and Vannier 2020) that were facilitated by opt-outs from the EU’s Asylum Procedures and Reception Conditions Directives; a heavy reliance on prohibitive fines and fees for immigration control, enforcement, and access to services (Burnett and Chebe 2020); and a general promotion of the “cimmigration” narrative in public discourse. When Theresa May, head of the Home Office at the time, declared the “Hostile Environment Policy” as a part of the Conservative–Liberal coalition’s agenda in 2012, the foundations for such policies had already been laid during the previous decades.

The Mediterranean *frontline states* – Greece and Italy – have been traditional emigration countries, but they had experience with immigration as well. Thus, *Greece* experienced relatively large waves of migration after the fall of the Berlin wall, with the gradual arrival of migrants from Albania and Bulgaria but also Romania and other eastern European and Middle East countries (Cavounidis 2002; Kasimis and Kassimi 2004; Triandafyllidou 2014). In addition, the country saw the return of diaspora Greek groups who had long resided in the former Soviet Union as well as the return of exiled civil war fighters and their families, which created a strong immigration current into the country during the 1990s. Overall, it was estimated that approximately 1 million immigrants lived in Greece at the eve of the Euro area crisis in 2010, comprising 10 percent of the population (Chindea 2008). In the 2000s, the immigration profile shifted to refugees from Afghanistan and the Middle East

who – unlike previous immigrants – applied for asylum, with asylum applications climbing from 11,000 in 2005, to 51,000 in 2010.

However, the Greek immigration policy regime has always been among the most restrictive in Europe. It scarcely allowed for the integration of non-ethnic Greek immigrants (DEMIG 2015), discouraged entry into the country, and treated immigration as a “necessary evil” (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011). The main components of immigration policy consisted of deterrence of entry, tight border policing and quick expulsions of immigrants who had illegally entered the country, combined with intermittent “regularization” initiatives that settled the status quo of individuals who had managed to reside illegally in the country for a number of years (Triandafyllidou 2014: 16). Greek asylum policy in particular developed only in the 1990s, but remained one of the most rudimentary and restrictive in Europe (Sitaropoulos 2000).

Much like Greece, *Italy* has a generally restrictive policy heritage on immigration focusing mostly on regulating economic immigration. The most important influx of immigrants prior to the European refugee crisis, again like in the Greek case, came with the arrival of large numbers of Albanians in the early 1990s, an era that produced iconic images of people crowded in ships attempting to cross the Adriatic (Hermanin 2021; Zincone 2011). Like in Greece, the general impulse was to treat immigration as a “necessary evil” (Ambrosini and Triandafyllidou 2011), and it was not welcome among the traditionally culturally homogenous citizenry (Ambrosini 2013). Italian asylum policy was also slow in coming, and it was only the left-wing governments of the 1990s that paid more attention to the issue (Vincenzi 2000). Italian migration policies have typically been in reaction to emergencies (Fontana 2019: 433). Thus, its first comprehensive immigration laws – the Martelli Law (1990), the Turco-Napolitano Law (1998) and the Bossi-Fini Law (2002) – treated immigration and asylum mostly as exceptional phenomena and contained emergency-driven measures. The sudden influx of asylum seekers fleeing the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 provided a new impetus for this reactive logic, which resulted in numerous ad hoc ministerial decrees to manage the large number of arrivals. To cope with these arrivals, the government granted humanitarian permits to all North African citizens who had arrived in spring 2011 and to asylum seekers coming from Libya. Until March 2013, humanitarian protection was recognized almost by default. As a result of these measures, Italy defied the overall restrictive trend preceding the refugee crisis.

Finally, we turn to the two *transit states* – Austria and Hungary. *Austria* is a somewhat ambivalent case in its own way. Like the destination states, Austria has experienced several major waves of refugee inflows

during the postwar period (Rutz 2018). Due to its geopolitical position, Austria was one of the main receiving countries for refugees fleeing communist regimes in central and eastern Europe between 1945 and 1989. However, a relatively limited number of refugees ended up staying in Austria; for example, most of the Hungarian refugees entering Austria in 1956 did not stay in Austria. In the 1990s and early 2000s, after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia, just like Germany, Austria was again hit by several waves of refugees originating in the Balkan states. This time, more of the arrivals stayed. As a result of this influx, the number of non-nationals in Austria doubled, from 344,000 in 1988 to 690,000 in 1993. As a reaction to the increasing number of refugees fleeing the Balkan wars, Austria's asylum laws and the country's traditionally liberal treatment of refugees became considerably more restrictive (Rutz 2018: 23f), making it a prime example of the general restrictive trend. From 1992, when a new Aliens Act tightened regulations on the entry and residence of foreigners, up to the refugee crisis, laws governing asylum and aliens' residence were amended several times (Rutz 2018: 25).

Finally, among the eight member states we analyze in depth in this study, *Hungary* is an exception in many ways. Economically the least developed among the eight member states and a country with few cultural, linguistic, and diaspora links to sending states, Hungary lacked many of the pull factors identified by the empirical literature on migration flows (Klaus and Pachocka 2019). Unlike Austria, the precrisis period was characterized by nation-building efforts to ease legal immigration for Hungarian coethnics living abroad and by aligning the migration regime with the EU's *acquis communautaire* – the CEAS – as a precondition for EU accession (Tétényi, Barczikay, and Szent-Iványi 2019). The Balkan wars had little impact on Hungarian asylum policy. As of 2002, only some 115,000 foreign citizens with a valid long-term permit (i.e., good for at least one year) or permanent residence permit were residing in Hungary. This population amounted to roughly 1 percent of Hungary's population. More than 40 percent of these foreigners were Romanians.

In the context of the external pressure from the EU, Hungarian authorities adopted a large number of pieces of legislation concerning immigration between the year of democratic transition (1989) and the refugee crisis. The DEMIG database (DEMIG 2015) identifies no fewer than 103 such legislative acts during this period. Perhaps most importantly, the Asylum Act of 2007 laid the foundations of the modern Hungarian asylum regime. The implementation of the *acquis communautaire* was, however, more than uneven. As we have seen in Table 3.1, in actual fact, the precrisis Hungarian asylum regime was characterized by highly

restrictive practices in the assessment of asylum claims, with an overwhelming majority of asylum decisions resulting in rejection. Especially the period between 2010 and 2014 marked a steady increase in rejection rates. Already before the refugee crisis, Hungary was primarily a transit country for asylum seekers. Economic forces only partly explain this phenomenon (Juhász 2003). Equally important are the restrictive policies and scarce opportunities for integration. Asylum seekers have generally sought protection elsewhere, mainly in other EU member states. The most common reason for terminating an asylum procedure has been that the applicant simply “disappeared.”

Problem Pressure

It was the external shock of mass displacements that created the crisis situation, that is, the urgency for decision-makers at the national and EU levels. This shock came to a head in the summer and fall of 2015, as is illustrated by Figure 4.1, which presents the development of the overall monthly number of asylum requests in the EU and in Germany, the country that received the largest number of such requests (as in the previous crisis). This figure also shows that, measured by the number of asylum requests, the problem pressure in 2015–16 crisis was considerably larger than in the previous crisis in the early 1990s. Given the accumulated experience with refugee crises, one might have expected that the uncertainty linked to the new crisis would be rather more limited and that the decision-makers were better prepared for this crisis. However, as we have already pointed out, this was not the case. EU asylum policy proved to be quite inadequate for dealing with the crisis shock, and the individual member states were, at least at first, left to their own devices. Past policy failures exacerbated the problem pressure that was mounting in the summer and early fall of 2015.

Importantly, however, the shock varied enormously from one member state to another, as is shown in Figure 4.2, which presents the monthly submissions of asylum requests as a share of the population (a proxy for problem pressure). It is in Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Sweden that the number of asylum applications peaked in the crisis situation of fall 2015 (indicated by the vertical solid line). Relative to the population, the peaks were most important in Hungary and Sweden, followed by Germany. In absolute terms (see Figure 4.1), Germany received by far the largest number of applications. While Germany and Sweden became the key destination states, Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Austria remained transit states, even as they also faced increasing numbers of asylum requests. In Hungary and Austria, asylum requests had already increased in the years preceding

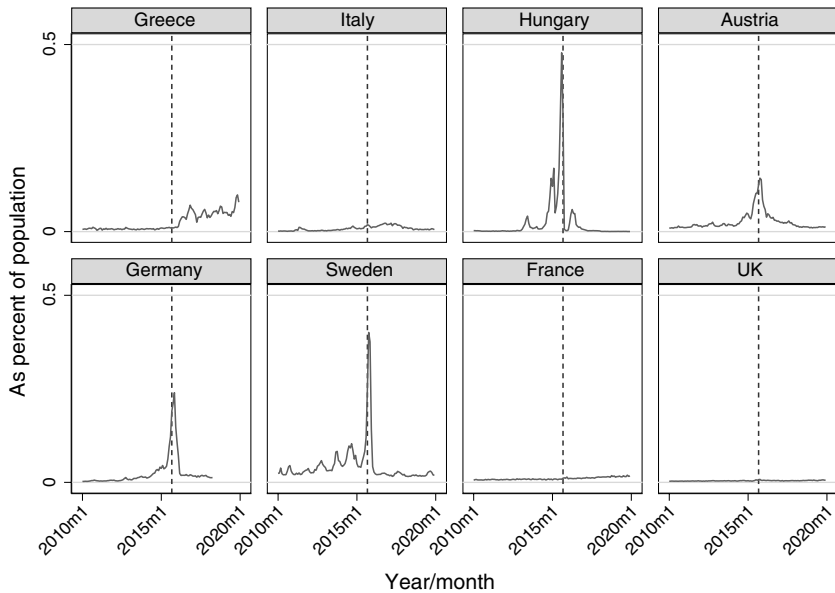


Figure 4.2 Monthly submissions of asylum requests in 2010–2019 as a percentage of the population

Source: Asylum requests: Eurostat: asylums statistics; for Germany: EASY registrations (*Erstverteilung Asylbegehrende*, initial distribution of asylum seekers)

the crisis, and they peaked in 2015 at the height of the crisis. Thus, from a couple of thousand in a year, the number of claims submitted in Hungary increased to 19,000 in 2013 and 43,000 in 2014, and they reached a peak of 177,000 in the crisis year of 2015. Even so, only a minor percentage of the refugees submitted their asylum request in Hungary, as most refugees arriving in Hungary wanted to reach the destination states in northwestern Europe. This is most dramatically illustrated by the events of September 4, 2015, when thousands of asylum seekers marched on a Hungarian highway in their stated goal to reach German soil (Than and Preisinger 2015). Moreover, most asylum requests were subsequently rejected by the Hungarian authorities. Similarly, Austria also waved through most of the arrivals to Germany and destinations farther north.

By contrast, France and the UK were mostly spared by the crisis in summer and fall 2015. These potential destination states were not accessible for refugees due to the strict regulatory regime, border control practices, and geographical location – which confirmed their status as restrictive destination countries. The inflow of refugees increased only

slightly in France and was essentially nonexistent in the UK. France experienced an almost linear increase in asylum requests after the peak of the refugee crisis of 2015–16, but it was at such a low level that it is hardly noticeable at all in Figure 4.2. The UK's geographically remote position with its maritime borders coupled with a restrictive immigration regime that had already made the "hostile environment" a reality on the ground by the time it was officially declared ensured that it would never face the kind of immediate problem pressure that open destination countries such as Germany and Sweden had to deal with.

Finally, the problem pressure measured by the number of asylum requests was also rather limited in the frontline states, in spite of the fact that one of them – Greece – was at the epicenter of the crisis because the inflow of refugees into the EU mainly passed through Greece. If measured by the *number of arrivals*, the problem pressure was most important in Greece, as is illustrated by Figure 4.3. In March 2015, the number of arrivals started to climb. They increased throughout the summer and autumn of 2015 and peaked at 211,000 in October 2015, before gradually declining to below previous levels in March 2016, when the deal between the EU and Turkey was signed. While Greece was overwhelmed

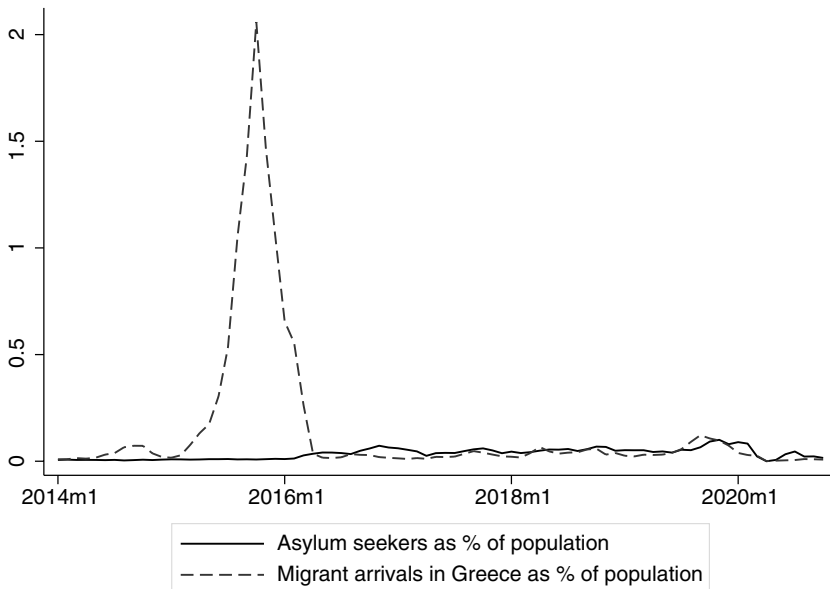


Figure 4.3 Asylum seekers and arrivals in Greece as a percentage of the population (arrivals are three-month rolling averages)

by arrivals in summer 2015, most of the refugees arriving in Greece made their way farther north and did not register themselves with the Greek authorities, who were unable to process large numbers of applications anyway. Of the 800,000 arrivals in 2015, the EU Commission estimates that only 60,000 remained in Greece (Dimitriadi and Sarantaki 2019).

However, once the Balkan route started closing in early 2016 and once the EU–Turkey agreement was signed in March 2016, the number of asylum applications started to climb as some of those stuck in Greece took their chances with applying for asylum there. From that point onward, asylum applications and arrivals have tended to evolve together, which serves to document not only the advanced control provided by the joint EU–Greece hotspot approach but also the fact that the main movement corridors were shut down, allowing Greece time to process the backlog of asylum requests.

Italy faced a different type of crisis than Greece: Rather than a sudden and explosive shock, its type of crisis was characterized by small but reoccurring shocks, which had already started before the refugee crisis of 2015–16 and which persisted during 2017 and 2018, as shown in Figure 4.4. It is only after the Italian–Libyan deals and the port closures

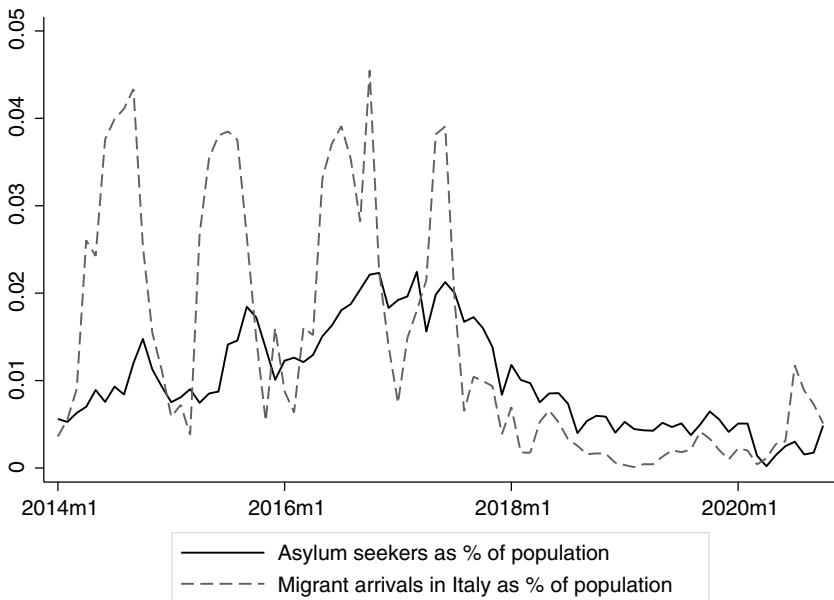


Figure 4.4 Number of asylum seekers and arrivals in Italy as a percentage of the population

that Italian arrival and asylum patterns displayed a steady declining trend. Moreover, the Italian migration pattern had seasonal characteristics: A lull in the winter is followed by an increase in sea arrivals in Sicily during the spring and summer – a scenario that, until 2018, played out each year in a similar fashion. In Italy's case, too, a large percentage of these arrivals did not register in the country, as is made clear by the two lines in the graph: Until 2018, only a fraction chose to apply for asylum in Italy, with the rest instead probably pursuing their journey toward other European countries without being registered.

The two trends are largely uncorrelated up to mid-2017, when their relationship goes into reverse and becomes more tightly aligned: The arrivals drop significantly, and the number of asylum applications exceeds the number of arrivals. At this point, most probably as a result of the increasing difficulties related to pursuing their journey to other European countries, a larger number of refugees decided to register with Italian authorities.

Political Pressure

Political pressure contributes to problem pressure and the urgency perceived by policymakers in two ways: On the one hand, political pressure is exerted by the issue in question becoming more salient in the general public, and on the other hand, political pressure results from the issue being picked up by challengers in the party system who “own” it or by social movements from outside of the party system that mobilize on an “ad hoc” basis. We use as indicators for political pressure the issue of salience in public opinion, which is measured by a Google trends search for topics related to immigration and refugees; the issue salience according to Eurobarometer data; and the presence of a radical right challenger party – that is, the party that “owns” the immigration issue – at the outset of the crisis.

In terms of the *salience of the issue in public opinion*, political pressure was added to problem pressure in precisely those member states where problem pressure was greatest. Figure 4.5 presents the public salience of immigration and refugees as measured by Google trends and by the share of respondents to the Eurobarometer who considered immigration to be one of the most important problems at the time of the interview. As is shown by this figure, in the open destination and transit states, the public salience of immigration and refugees spiked at precisely the moment of greatest problem pressure at the peak of the crisis. In *Germany*, the salience of the migration issue shoots up in summer 2015, peaks in September 2015, and then drops off in two steps – first in November

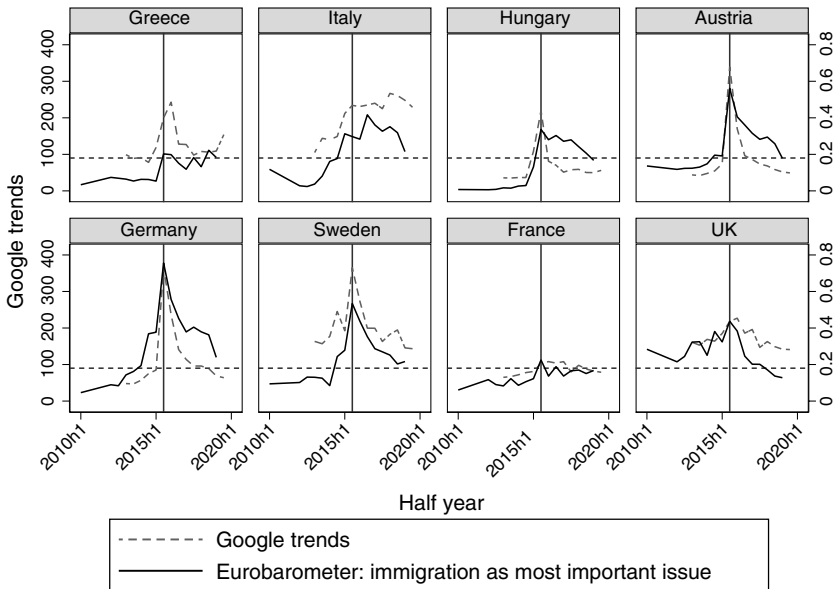


Figure 4.5 Salience of immigration in national publics: Google trends and share of Eurobarometer respondents who consider immigration to be one of the most important issues

2015 and then in early 2016. When measured by the second salience indicator – the most important problems mentioned by Eurobarometer survey respondents, the salience of migration similarly shoots up in the second half of 2015 – from 29 percent who consider immigration as one of the three most important problems facing the country in early July to an incredible 75 percent in September 2015. The salience of immigration declines more slowly according to this measure and remains at a high level of more than 30 percent up to the end of 2018. In the *Swedish* public, not only is the salience of migration issues closely related to the refugee crisis (with a peak in fall 2015), but the salience of immigration declines more slowly according to this measure and remains at a high level of more than 30 percent up to the end of 2018. In the Swedish public, the salience of migration issues is closely related not only to the refugee crisis (with a peak in fall 2015) but also to the national elections (witness the secondary peaks in September 2014 and September 2018), which saw the rise of the Sweden Democrats (SD), the radical right party in Sweden (see below). In fall 2015, no less than 44 percent of Swedes considered immigration to be among the most important problems, up from 21 percent in the first half of 2012. Similar developments can be

observed for transit states – Austria and Hungary. In *Hungary*, 34 percent of the public considered immigration to be one of the most important problems facing the country in fall 2015, up from only 8 percent in 2013. Similarly, in fall 2015, the immigration issue was most important to 56 percent of Austrians, up from 19 percent in the first half of 2015. In these countries, too, after the peak of the crisis, the public salience in terms of the most important problem did not fall off as rapidly as the salience measured by Google trends.

Public salience of immigration and refugees increased in the front-line and closed destination states at the peak of the crisis, too, but to a much more limited extent. *France* is the extreme case, where the public hardly registered the crisis at all. In the *UK*, the other closed destination state, the immigration issue had already been salient in the public before the crisis. Its salience in the British public did spike in fall 2015, but in terms of Google trends, it peaked only in June 2016, at the time of the Brexit referendum, when related concerns featured in the campaign, such as the largely unfounded claim that Turkey was about to join the EU. *Greece*, in turn, was in the thrall of the Eurozone crisis when the inflow reached its peak in fall 2015, and the crisis tended to crowd out any other public concern. The fact that most of the arrivals pursued their journey to the north also explains the relative lack of public salience of the issue in Greece, as does the fact that the migration flows at that point were concentrated on five islands, where only a small percentage of the Greek population lives. As the number of stranded asylum seekers grew, however, and the opposition's leadership changed in late 2015, the perception of the issue became much more salient in the public sphere, as is evidenced by the Google salience trends in [Figure 4.5](#), which reached a peak in Greece in March 2016, at the time of the EU–Turkey agreement and the closure of the Balkan route.

In *Italy*, finally, the salience of the issue of immigration seems to have a reverse relationship with the actual problem: The issue rises in importance according to Eurobarometer data, reaches its peak by 2017, and then recedes in importance. But the salience according to Google trends remains comparatively high throughout 2018 and 2019, although the number of arrivals and asylum applicants was in full decline ([Figure 4.4](#)). The case of Italy illustrates that problem pressure and political pressure do not necessarily rise and fall in lock-step, even if they did so in the open destination and transit states during the refugee crisis. Importantly, political pressure may actually be constructed by political entrepreneurs for their own purposes, and it may serve as a substitute for problem pressure. In other words, immigration issues may be rendered salient by the operation and effects of politics and the wider socioeconomic context

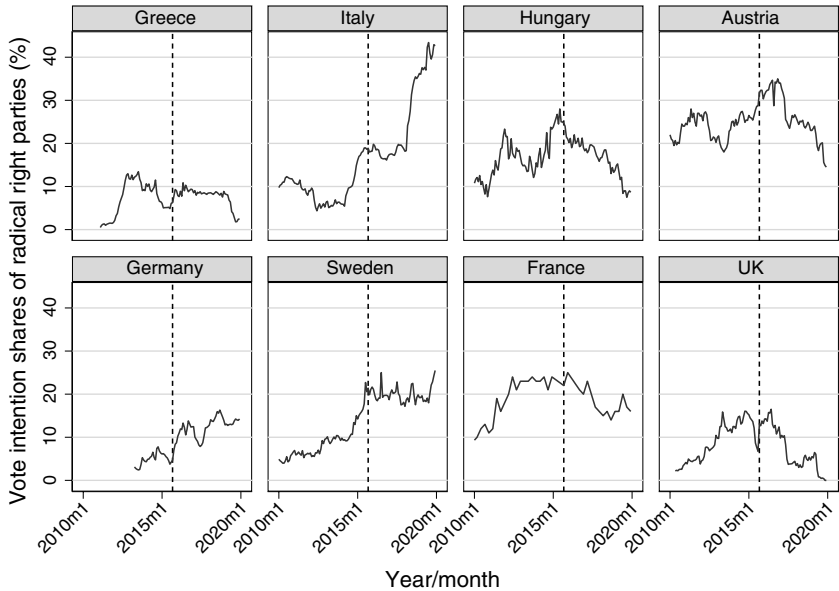


Figure 4.6 Political pressure: radical right vote shares by country, monthly vote intentions

within which they are embedded (Hadj-Abdou, Bale, and Geddes 2022). Party strategies play an important role in this context (Abou-Chadi, Cohen, and Wagner 2022).

This brings us to the more direct pressure exerted by *political challengers*. Figure 4.6 presents the monthly vote intentions for the radical right party in the different countries. We can first distinguish between countries that already had a *strong radical right* before the crisis (Austria, Hungary, Italy, and France) and countries that had a comparatively weak radical right before the crisis (Germany, Sweden, Greece, and the UK).

Among the strong radical right challengers, with the exception of France, all have been reinforced by the experience of the crisis. Only the French radical right did not benefit at all from the crisis, which is not surprising, given that France hardly experienced any crisis shock at all. Among the other three countries, the rise due to the crisis was temporary in the two transit countries, followed by a decline for similar reasons: Both the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Hungarian Jobbik were outcompeted by their mainstream center right competitors – People’s Party (ÖVP) and Fidesz, respectively. It is important to recognize, however, that at the time the crisis hit, both in Austria and

in Hungary, the government was under pressure from a strong radical right. In Hungary, Jobbik had crossed the 20 percent threshold in the 2014 elections, becoming the main opposition party, and by the spring of 2015 it was polling above 25 percent. Well-positioned to capitalize on the influx of asylum seekers, Jobbik's rise prompted Fidesz's Victor Orbán to shift gears and to outcompete Jobbik on its own terrain – immigration. Contrary to the main thrust in the party competition literature that highlights mainstream parties' difficulties in coopting the radical right vote (Meguid 2005; Pardos-Prado 2015), Fidesz's shift to the right on immigration has proved surprisingly successful. As shown by Figure 4.5, after its peak in the spring of 2015, Jobbik's electoral strength began a steady decline, leaving Fidesz in a dominant position on the right by the end of the refugee crisis.

In Austria, the FPÖ had already been on the rise before the refugee crisis and had obtained 20.6 percent of the vote in the 2013 elections. As the crisis hit, the party clearly was one of its beneficiaries: At the peak of the crisis in fall 2015, its vote intentions reached 32 percent, and in summer 2016, it was 34 percent. In the local elections in Vienna, which took place at the peak of the crisis in October 2015, the issues of immigration and security were most salient. The dominant SPÖ defended an open border policy, while the FPÖ, its main challenger, called for a more restrictive policy. The SPÖ lost roughly 5 percent (from 44.4 to 39.6 percent), while the FPÖ gained roughly the same share (from 25.8 to 30.8 percent). Most importantly, in the presidential elections, which took place in April 2016, just after the EU–Turkey agreement had been signed and in the midst of heated debate on the asylum law, the candidates of both the SPÖ and the ÖVP failed to reach the run-off, where the candidates of the FPÖ and the Greens faced each other. This was an important reason for the then SPÖ chancellor to step down.

Importantly, the pressure from the rise of the FPÖ was felt not only by the SPÖ but maybe even more so by the ÖVP, which took a sharp right turn early on in the refugee crisis. The ÖVP leader also stepped down before the next elections and was replaced by Sebastian Kurz. The 2017 elections essentially turned into a battle over the meaning of the developments in migration policy since 2015 – a battle that was won by the mainstream conservative camp. From a traditionally pro-business party, the ÖVP transformed itself into a party focused on “law and order” in migration policy, largely adopting the respective positions of the FPÖ (Bodlos and Plešcia 2018: 1357). In 2019, the FPÖ ended up being almost destroyed by a huge scandal involving its leader in the so-called Ibiza affair.

Italy is a special case because, as we have already seen, problem and political pressure were not aligned. Accordingly, the Lega and Fratelli

d'Italia, the two parties of the radical right, increased their vote share not only when the crisis hit in fall 2015 but above all in later phases of the crisis when it became largely politically constructed by the very parties that benefited the most from its construction.

The four countries with an originally *comparatively weak radical right* can be divided into the two open destination states (Germany and Sweden), where the radical right rose as a result of the crisis and became a stable element of the party system, and Greece and the UK, where the radical right hardly benefited from the crisis and ended up essentially disappearing for reasons that were highly idiosyncratic – prosecution of Golden Dawn as a criminal organization in Greece and the aftermath of the Brexit referendum in the UK. However, as in the case of the transit countries, in both of these countries, too, competition from the mainstream right played a non-negligible role in the disappearance of the radical right. In Greece, New Democracy's right-wing faction, emboldened by its role in helping elect the then leader of the opposition, Mitsotakis, had acquired crucial influence in the party. Launching rhetorical attacks on the government, its members managed to turn New Democracy into the largest beneficiary of the widespread public perception that Syriza's "pro-immigration policies" had been one of the causes of the refugee inflow (Dimitriadi and Sarantaki 2018). This contributed to the party's sudden climb in voting intentions and deprived the far right of its electoral support. In the UK, the radical right challenger (UKIP) was originally disadvantaged by the first past the post electoral system. In addition, similar to Greece, the Conservatives succeeded in outcompeting UKIP by becoming a hard-Brexit party. As we have argued in the section on British policy heritage, in this particular case, freedom of movement within the EU had become closely linked to the Brexit issue, and it was on this issue that the main bout of competition between the radical right challenger and the mainstream party from the right took place in the UK.

Finally, the cases of open destination states are very interesting because in both of these countries, the radical right experienced its breakthrough belatedly compared to other northwestern European countries and strongly benefited from the crisis. For different reasons – the long prevalence of class politics in Sweden and the fascist heritage in Germany – the rise of the radical right was delayed in these two countries. The breakthrough of the Sweden Democrats (SD) took place in 2010, when they obtained 5.7 percent of the vote, and they more than doubled their vote share (to 12.9 percent) in 2014. At the peak of the crisis in 2015, they polled 23 percent, becoming the largest opposition party. They have maintained an average of around 20 percent ever since. Their rise is part of the decline of class politics in Sweden, of the growing

salience of sociocultural politics and in particular of the politicization of immigration, of the increasing convergence between the major mainstream parties (Social-Democratic and Conservative Parties), and of the radical right's moderation (Rydgren and van der Meiden 2019; Jungar 2015). Predictably, the Sweden Democrats exploited the refugee crisis and mobilized against asylum seekers coming to Sweden. Among other things, they praised Orbán's hardline immigration policy in Hungary, organized an information campaign in foreign media to discourage asylum seekers from heading to Sweden, and even called for Sweden's withdrawal from the EU if that was the price they had to pay for ending free movement.

Similarly, the German AfD rose belatedly. It had originally experienced a first breakthrough in 2013 thanks to its opposition to the Eurozone's bailout operations, but eventually it benefited enormously from the refugee crisis. While it had not crossed the electoral threshold in the 2013 elections, when it received only 4.7 percent of the vote, it gained additional ground in the European elections of 2014 and in the subsequent German state elections, transforming itself from a neoliberal elitist party to a prototypical populist radical right party (Bremer and Schulte-Cloos 2019a). It had fallen in a trough by summer 2015 (with only 4.7 percent of vote intentions) but rose rapidly during the peak months of the refugee crisis. By the end of 2015, it had reached 10 percent. After a new setback in summer 2017, it obtained 12.7 percent in the fall 2017 elections and has been able to maintain this level of support ever since.

As we have already seen in the cases of Austria, Hungary, Greece, and the UK, and as we shall see in the subsequent chapters, political pressure on the governments during the refugee crisis did not only or, depending on the country, not even mainly come from the radical right challengers. Transformed parties of the mainstream right, whether in opposition or in government, have become key protagonists of opposition to the reception of asylum seekers and of tightening asylum policies during the refugee crisis.

Conclusion

The configuration of the crisis situations among the member states makes for a complex configuration of transnational interests. Given the cumulation of both problem and political pressure in the open destination and transit states, we expect these states to become the major protagonists not only in the national responses to the pressure but also in the search for a joint EU policy response to the crisis. For these states, stopping the inflow of refugees and sharing the burden of accommodating the refugees

who had already arrived was a priority. In the short run, the two types of states shared a common interest, which aligned them with the frontline states but put them in opposition to the restrictive destination states and the bystander states, as we argued in [Chapter 2](#). While the interests of the transit states were clearly in line with those of the open destination and frontline states with respect to the inflows, the position of transit states with regard to accommodation was more ambiguous, since they clearly benefited from the secondary movements of the refugees within the EU. Moreover, the interests of the frontline and destination states differed with regard to the reform of the CEAS: Together with the other member states, open destination states were in favor of restoring the Dublin regulation, while the frontline states wanted to reform the CEAS in such a way that they would no longer have to assume the entire responsibility for accommodating the flood of new arrivals. Among the hard-hit open destination states, Germany is a special case. Even if it shared the most explosive combination of problem and political pressure with some other member states, the combined pressure became particularly important in its case – because of its size and influence, which enabled it to take the lead in common initiatives.

Let us finally add that the political dynamics that develop based on the country-specific conditions in the crisis situation are hard to predict. They depend not only on the exogenous pressure in the crisis situation but also on endogenous political dynamics – the actor configurations in the respective countries and the strategies of the respective political actors, which do not follow general expectations. Thus, with the benefit of hindsight, we know that the two transition states played an outsized role in managing the crisis. But we are hard put to formulate some general expectations in their respect. In both of these countries, center right parties radicalized, outflanked their radical right competitors, and proceeded to become the dominant governing parties. Both of these governments adopted policy positions designed to limit the number of successful asylum seekers, and both of them became highly influential in shaping the European response to the refugee crisis. The Hungarian government, together with its allies among the eastern European bystander states, actually became the most important opponent of European burden sharing in asylum policy. We shall now turn to the characterization of the individual episodes to get a better idea of how these political dynamics evolved during the crisis.

5 The Variety of Policy Responses at the EU and National Levels

In [Chapter 3](#), we introduced the policy episodes during which the policy-makers elaborated their multidimensional response to the crisis at both levels – six episodes of policymaking at the EU level and forty episodes at the national level. In this chapter, we present these episodes and their exogenous and endogenous drivers in more detail to lay the groundwork for the subsequent analysis of the way policymakers reacted to the crisis. In a first step, we show how the overall politicization of the crisis response developed over time.¹ This will allow us to characterize the timing of the policymaking during the crisis in a summary way. To be sure, we consider only key episodes of policymaking that are particularly likely to get politicized. But even within this highly selective set of episodes, there is great variation in terms of the extent to which they have become politicized, as we intend to show in the [first section](#) of this chapter. In addition, in this part of the chapter, we shall also discuss the episodes in terms of their key drivers, which we have introduced in the [previous chapter](#) – problem pressure and political pressure. As we shall see, in addition to these forces, endogenous factors also played a considerable role in determining the timing of the episodes.

In presenting the development of the politicization of the policy response over the course of the crisis, we shall distinguish between *three periods*: the precrisis period, which starts in early 2013 with the initiation of the first episode in our set and lasts until August 2015, when the crisis situation becomes acute; the peak period, lasting from September 2015 until the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement in March 2016; and the postpeak period, which extends over several years from April 2016 up to the end of February 2020. We shall show that the politicization of the policy response at the EU level and at the level of the member states reached its apex during the peak period of the crisis. A closer look at the episodes

¹ Let us remind the reader that we conceptualize politicization as the product of salience and polarization – the salience of the policymaking process in the attentive public and the polarization of the actors participating in this process.

involved at the national level will reveal, however, that not only the level of politicization but also its timing varied greatly across member states.

In the next two steps, we shall *zoom in on the individual episodes* at the two levels, briefly indicating their politics and substantive policy content, although space constraints will not allow us to go into much detail. While the timing and the details of the policymaking process are hard to predict and are sometimes rather surprising, in substantive terms, the policy responses did not stray very far from the well-known policy heritage in the asylum policy domain. In the 2015–16 refugee crisis, EU asylum policymaking remained prone to continuity rather than change (Ripoll Servent and Zaun 2020), and the same can be said of national policymaking. Despite crises often acting as “windows of opportunity,” the breakdown of the EU’s asylum system in the 2015–16 crisis has triggered the same kind of response as in past crises – namely, a shift of responsibility outward and a reinforcement of border control at the EU level (Guiraudon 2018). At the national level, it led to the reintroduction of border controls at domestic borders and to a further retrenchment of asylum policy across the member states. In general, the measures introduced during the crisis were consistent with an approach at the national and EU levels that can be traced back for more than two decades (Geddes, Hadj Abdou, and Brumat 2020).

The Overall Politicization of the Policy Response during the Crisis

We have measured the monthly politicization of the policymaking processes during the refugee crisis at the EU level and across all eight countries at the national level.² The two graphs in [Figure 5.1](#) present the development of politicization over the three periods of the crisis for the EU and for the eight member states as a whole. The two graphs differ with respect to the indicator for politicization at the national level – the cumulation of the national politicization across the eight member states (graph a), as opposed to the average national politicization in a given member state (graph b). The two vertical lines in the graphs refer to the quickening of the crisis in September 2015 and to the adoption of the

² Salience is measured by the number of times the episode (or some aspect of it) has been mentioned in the media on which we rely in our project (see [Chapter 2](#)). Polarization is measured by the product of the share of actions in favor of the proposals put forward by the government during the episode with the share of actions opposing the proposal. If all actions are favoring the proposal, this product is zero. It is also zero when all actions are opposing the proposal. As the share of favoring and opposing actions becomes more balanced, polarization increases and reaches a maximum when they are both equal.

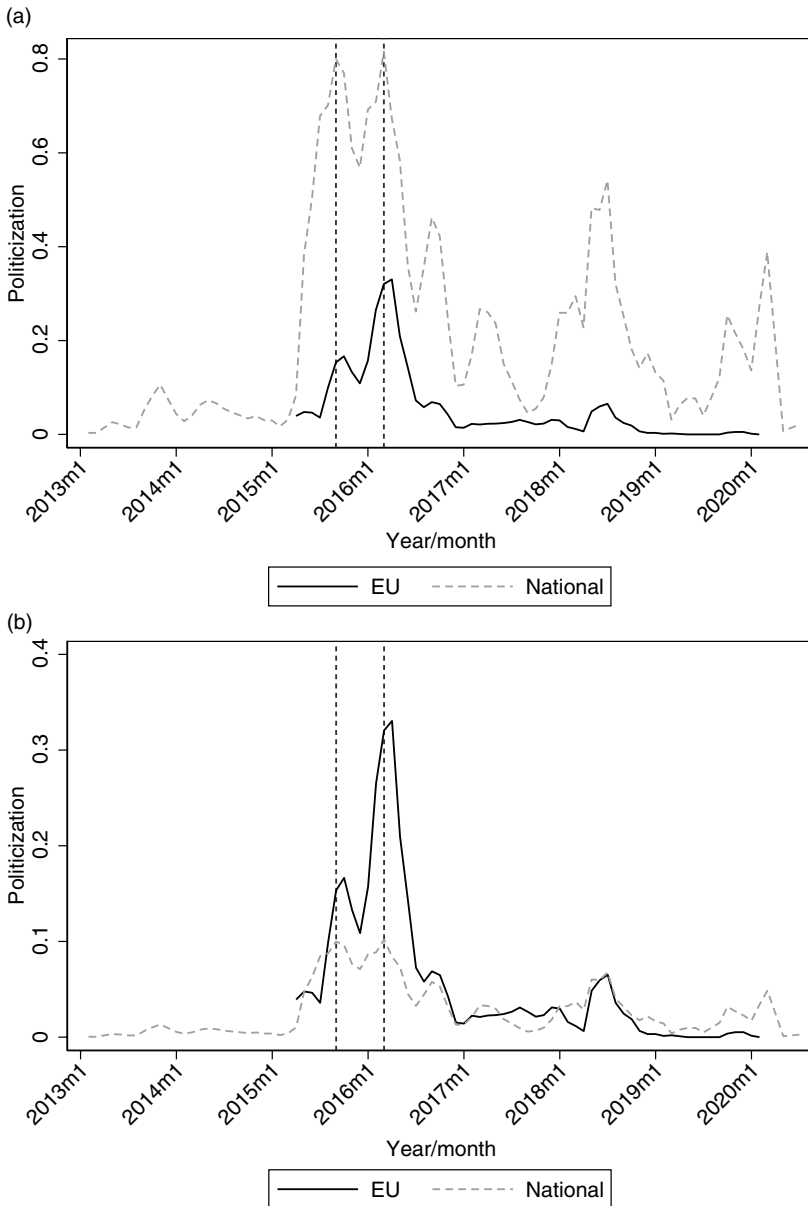


Figure 5.1 Development of politicization of the policy response during the refugee crisis at the EU and national levels. (a) Sum of national politicization: smoothed curves^a; (b) average of national politicization: smoothed curves^a

^aThe first vertical line refers to the beginning of the crisis in September 2015, and the second one refers to the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement in March 2016. The graph presents three-month running averages.

EU–Turkey agreement in March 2016 – the key moments that divide the crisis into its three periods. As is immediately apparent, the politicization of the crisis reaches its apex during the peak period, at both levels. For the EU, politicization is single peaked at the time of the EU–Turkey agreement; for the member states, there are two peaks, one at the moment the crisis explodes in September 2015 and another at the time of the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement. But note that politicization does not subside in the aftermath of the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement. More limited peaks follow in the third phase at the level of the member states in particular.

Figure 5.1 also shows that the politicization of the asylum policymaking process had already started before the crisis situation became intolerable in September 2015, although it stayed at a low level. As we shall see below, it was above all the restrictive destination states that had already, before the crisis shock in September 2015, taken measures to restrict asylum seekers' access to their countries. Finally, graph a shows that the cumulated politicization of the crisis at the member state level far outreaches its politicization at the EU level. If taken together, a lot more was going on in the member states than at the EU level. Indeed, the attentive public that follows quality news sources may have gotten this impression, given that such news sources report on a variety of countries. However, national policymakers are responsible only for what is going on in their own country. Thus, it might be more accurate to juxtapose the politicization of the crisis at the EU level to the average politicization of policymaking in the eight member states. Graph b provides this information. Viewed from this perspective, the development of national politicization is much flatter and far outclassed at its peaks in September 2015 and March 2016 by the politicization at the EU level. Compared to the politicization of the crisis in any individual member state during the peak of the crisis, but not before and after the peak, the EU-level politicization was most impressive.

As we have seen in the [previous chapter](#), at the peak of the crisis, the *problem pressure* and the *political pressure* (measured in terms of public salience) were at their maximum in the transit and open destination states, and to some extent also in the frontline states (at least in Greece if measured by the number of arrivals). We expect the politicization of the crisis to be a direct response to the pressure exerted by the crisis situation on policymakers in the respective countries. The problem pressure in the crisis situation is bound to focus the governments' attention on the policy domain that is hit by the crisis shock. Theories of the policy process stress the importance of attention to policy domains and the limited attention spans of governments ([Jones 1994](#); [Baumgartner and](#)

Table 5.1 *Correlations between politicization and problem/political pressure, by member states*

Type	State	Problem pressure	Public salience	Radical right vote	<i>n</i>
Frontline	Greece	0.19	0.51	-0.04	16
	Italy	-0.15	0.65	0.34	35
Transit	Hungary	0.20	0.27	0.46	50
	Austria	0.66	0.71	0.04	27
Open destination	Germany	0.46	0.78	-0.34	47
	Sweden	0.71	0.66	0.22	53
Closed destination	France	0.10	0.24	-0.11	67
	UK	0.39	0.29	0.24	56
	All	0.67	0.75	0.59	120

Jones 2002; Jones and Baumgartner 2005). More specifically, the crisis situation is likely to cause a so-called serial shift in policy processing, that is, a shift from parallel processing in policy-specific subsystems to serial processing in the “macro-politics” of top executives. At the same time, the crisis situation also concentrates the mind of the public on the policy domain in question. Just like the top brass political decision-makers, the public is focusing serially on one thing or at most a few things at a time (Simon 1983), given its limited attention span and the limited capacity of the media (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). The increased public attention on the policy in question is likely to reinforce the pressure on the government to act.

Table 5.1 provides a straightforward measure of the relationship between the pressure on the policymakers and the politicization of their crisis response: the correlation between politicization on the one hand and the three indicators for pressure that we introduced in the last chapter on the other hand. These correlations do not inform us about causal relationships, but they give us a rough idea of the strength of the association between the variables involved. Summing over all eight member states, the correlations are quite high, varying between $r = 0.59$ and $r = 0.75$. In other words, in line with expectations, the pressure exerted by the crisis is rather closely associated with the politicization of policymaking in response to the crisis.

However, if we go to the level of the individual member states, the association turns out to be close only in the two open destination states and in Austria, one of the transit states, and only for two of the three indicators for pressure. Even in the key open destination state, Germany, the association with problem pressure is relatively modest ($r = 0.46$). In the frontline states, politicization is associated only with public salience,

but not with problem pressure (in Italy, the corresponding correlation is even negative), and in the closed destination states and Hungary, all associations are quite weak. While we would have expected such weak associations for the closed destination states, which were not directly hit by the crisis, the low associations in the case of Hungary are somewhat unexpected. For the third indicator, political pressure as measured by the radical right vote share, correlations are, with the exception of Hungary, generally low or even negative.

If this shows that policymakers reacted to the combined problem pressure and political pressure at the peak of the crisis by launching policy episodes in the most heavily hit countries, the associations between politicization and pressure are not as strong as we might have expected. The reason is that policy episodes were also politicized by factors *endogenous* to politics: The anticipating reactions of policymakers, the strategies of political entrepreneurs, key events, the legislative cycle, and the endogenous dynamics of policy reactions to the crisis once they have been set in motion all contributed to the politicization of the crisis, too. We can get an idea of the importance of such endogenous factors by inspecting the timing of the individual episodes at the EU and the national level.

To start with the EU level, the EU Commission responded to the rising tide of refugees in anticipation of things to come. In May 2015, it had presented the *European Agenda for Migration*, which sought to formulate a comprehensive EU approach to the surge in Mediterranean arrivals. The agenda-setting by the Commission rested on four pillars (Geddes 2018):

- Strengthening the common asylum policy with a reform of the Dublin regulation
- Improving control of the external border (through solidarity with border countries such as Greece and Italy and strengthening the mandate of Frontex)
- Reducing incentives for irregular migration (addressing the root causes of such migration in countries of origin, dismantling smuggling and trafficking networks, and better application of return policies)
- A new policy on legal migration

Based on this agenda, the Commission launched four of the five policy episodes we cover in this study in spring or summer 2015, that is, before the peak of the crisis. But the Commission's proposals were not yet followed up by the European Council. Thus, the Commission had proposed to use, for the first time, the emergency response mechanism under Article 78(3) to set up a temporary relocation scheme (for a total of 40,000 persons in need of international protection) based on mandatory

country quota to relieve the frontline states, Greece and Italy. The number of persons to be relocated seemed quite small, given the dimensions of the inflow of persons in need. But even this very limited measure was watered down by the July 20, 2015, European Council meeting: Participation in the scheme was to remain voluntary rather than mandatory as proposed by the Commission. At the EU level, the policymakers saw the crisis coming, but they did not yet react decisively.

For the national level, Figure 5.2 presents a systematic overview over the starting points of the national episodes by type of member state against the background of the developments of problem pressure (number of asylum requests) and political pressure (public salience of immigration and asylum as measured by Google trends). The vertical dashed lines in this figure indicate the starting points of the episodes, with grey lines referring to border control measures and black lines to modifications of asylum rules. The figure shows how the timing of the episodes varied depending on the type of member state. Thus, in the closed destination states (France and the UK), most episodes were initiated before the advent of the crisis and do not seem to be directly related to increases in problem pressure (which was comparatively

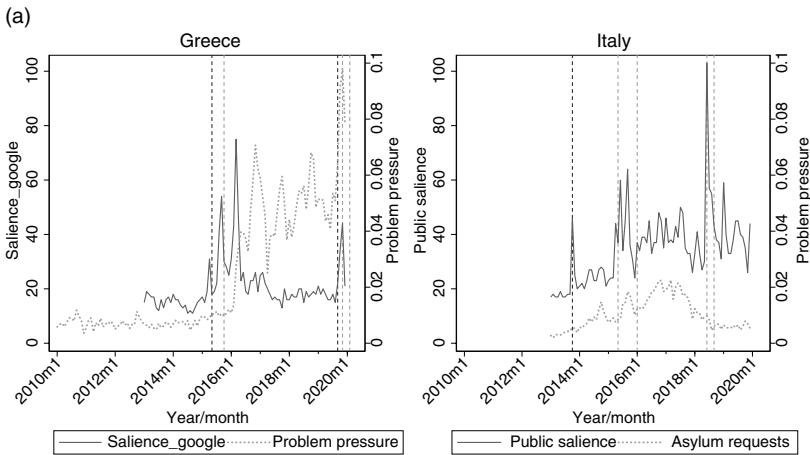


Figure 5.2 Starting dates of the episodes in relation to problem pressure (asylum requests) and political pressure (public salience). (a) Frontline states; (b) transit states; (c) open destination states; (d) closed destination states (smoothed curves).

^aVertical lines indicate the beginning of an episode. Gray lines refer to Border Control episodes, while black lines refer to asylum rules' episodes. For a given type of member state, both problem pressure and political pressure are displayed on the same scale.

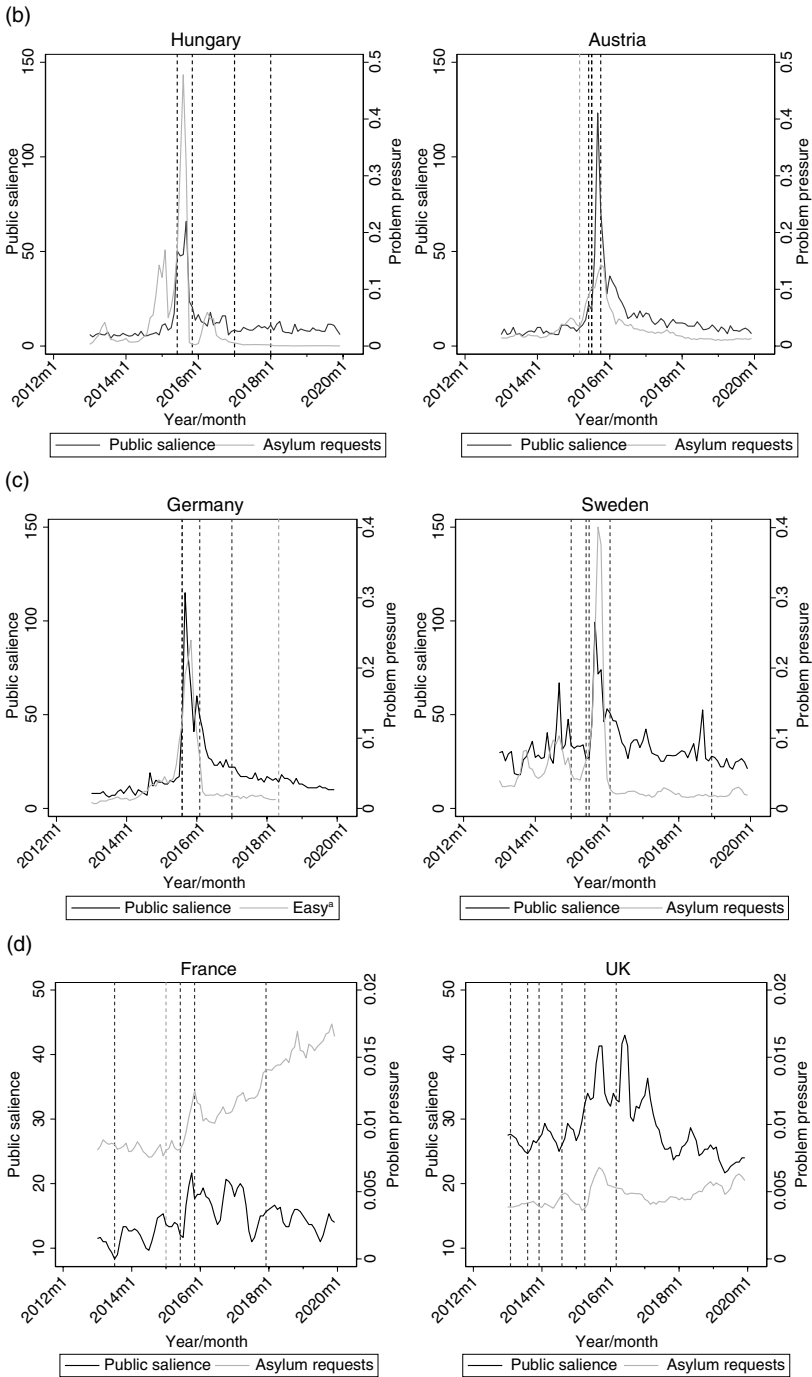


Figure 5.2 (cont.)

low anyway) or to public salience of refugee and migration issues. These states had preventively taken measures to close their borders and to retrench their asylum policy. By contrast, in the frontline states (Greece and Italy), we observe a clustering of episodes rather late in the day – their starting points are only partially related to the development of pressure. It is in the transit and open destination states that the episode triggers are clustered just before the peak or during the peak of the crisis, when problem pressure and political pressure in the respective countries were at their maximum. With the exception of Austria, however, even in these countries, some of the episodes intervened only in later stages of the crisis.

As a matter of fact, there are several instances of episodes launched by *political entrepreneurs*. As we have argued in the [previous chapter](#), immigration issues may be rendered salient by the operation and effects of politics and the wider socioeconomic context within which they are embedded ([Hadj-Abdou, Bale, and Geddes 2022](#)), and party strategies play an important role in this context ([Abou-Chadi, Cohen, and Wagner 2022](#)). As the emergency politics literature reminds us, there can be strategies of “crisisification” ([Rhinard 2019](#)). According to this strategy, action is often delayed until a foreseeable policy problem escalates into a crisis, and the ensuing crisis is then “exploited” to increase support for public office-holders or their policy agendas ([Boin, 't Hart, and McConnell 2009](#); [Rauh 2022](#)). There is, however, also an alternative strategy of political entrepreneurs that consists of them creating a crisis where there is hardly a policy problem at all. Several episodes among our selection correspond to the latter pattern.

Thus, the low association between problem/political pressure and politicization in Hungary is explained by the fact that three of the five episodes occurred after the crisis peaked and problem pressure ceased to exist. These episodes all refer to measures that the Fidesz government under Victor Orbán introduced in its attempt to outbid its radical right competitor as a defender of the national cause – the Legal Border Barrier Amendment further tightened the already very tough border control regime, and the other two episodes served to attack NGOs’ supportive of refugees. In the frontline states, too, only two of the five episodes in Greece and only one of the Italian episodes were launched at the time or just preceding the time when the crisis peaked. The two Italian episodes that occurred in the aftermath of the crisis as well as two of the three Greek episodes that occurred late in the day responded more to endogenous political dynamics triggered by a political entrepreneur than to external pressure, and their high public salience is more likely the result of political dynamics than their cause. In Italy, the two

episodes were related to port closures in fall 2018, which were a direct consequence of the policy of the new minister of the interior and leader of the Lega, Salvini, who attempted to exploit the refugee issue for his own political purposes. In Greece, the political entrepreneur in question was Turkish president Erdogan, whose policy to incite refugees to cross the border into Greece in order to put pressure on the EU led to two belated Greek episodes: One of them was the domestic conflict on the islands created by the increasing number of arrivals, and the other was the direct Greek reaction at the land border to Turkey. The last German episode, finally, was in many ways similar to Salvini's port closures. It was instigated by the new minister of the interior, Seehofer, who aimed to toughen the German border controls for his own political purposes in June 2018.

The *legislative cycle* not only played a role in the strategies of the new ministers of the interior, Salvini and Seehofer, but it also helped to initiate one of the three late episodes in Greece. The so-called International Protection Bill was the first act related to immigration from the newly elected New Democracy government, which aimed at streamlining the asylum process, making it faster and stricter.

Triggering events launched at least one of the German and French episodes. In both instances, the events were terrorist attacks. Thus, after the terrorist attack by a Tunisian refugee on a Christmas market in Berlin on December 19, 2016, the issues of return and deportation of rejected asylum seekers became particularly salient in the public debate in Germany, which triggered the introduction of a new act on deportation (return) in January 2017 and its adoption in July 2017. In France, border controls became a highly salient issue after the November 2015 terrorist attacks (Bataclan, Stade de France) in Paris. Following these attacks and ahead of UN climate talks in Paris, France introduced border checks on all of its borders. Subsequently, citing the persistent threat of terrorism, France renewed the border checks every six months up to the end of the period covered.

The issue of return also provides an example of the *implications of early decisions* to open the door to a large number of refugees. The issue became pressing in the aftermath of the peak of the crisis as large numbers of asylum seekers who did not qualify for asylum in the destination countries were required to return to their country of origin. Not only in Germany, but also in Sweden, one of the episodes deals with this issue. Finally, the last Swedish episode was a direct sequel to an earlier episode that had introduced temporary residence permits for asylum seekers for a limited period of time, after which the measure had to be amended again.

Zooming in on EU Policymaking

We have already introduced the basic distinction between external border control measures and internal measures concerning asylum rules. At the *EU level*, external border control actions have been somewhat more frequent, with 57 percent of all actions in the six policymaking processes, but asylum rules have been important, too, accounting for 43 percent of all the actions. **Figure 5.3** presents the development of the politicization of decision-making processes across the period covered, with a focus on these two types of episodes at the EU level. The left-hand graph illustrates the predominance of Border Control episodes during the peak phase. The right-hand graph provides the details for the four episodes that focused on border control. As we can see, the EU–Turkey agreement dominated the peak phase completely: The externalization of refugee protection to Turkey was the single most politicizing policy decision taken during the crisis, not only at the EU level but overall. It was more salient than any other episode, but in terms of polarization, it was only slightly above the rather high average. The other Border Control episodes – the much more limited deal with Libya, the hotspot approach, and the reinforcement of the European Border and Coast Guard – were much less politicized. As a matter of fact, on average, the two episodes referring to asylum rules, the relocation quotas and the Dublin regulation – were more politicized than the Border Control episodes at the EU level and even more politicized than both types of episodes at the domestic

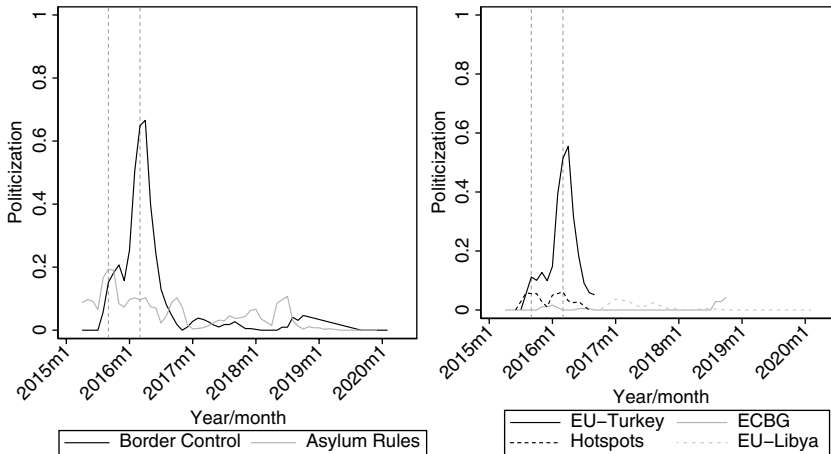


Figure 5.3 Thematic focus of policymaking at the EU level: development of issue-specific politicization over time

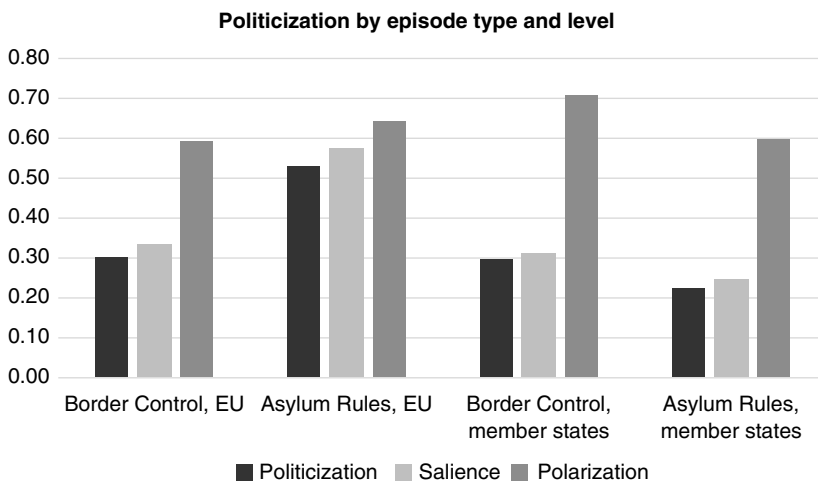


Figure 5.4 Politicization by episode type and level of polity

level. This is illustrated by [Figure 5.4](#), which shows the average level of politicization and of its components – salience and polarization – by episode type and level of polity. As this figure clarifies, polarization is high for both types of episodes at both levels of the polity. However, in terms of the average salience, the episodes concerning asylum rules at the EU level stick out, which makes them most politicized overall. At the national level, border control episodes are somewhat more polarized and salient than episodes concerned with asylum rules, but not by much.

At the EU level, the relocation of refugees was the Commission's first attempt to come to terms with the crisis. But, as we have already seen, the Commission had been blocked in its attempt to introduce a relocation mechanism to provide for burden-sharing between member states in summer 2015. But it did not give in. In his speech on the 2015 state of the union, which was held on September 9, at the very moment when the crisis blew up, Commission president Juncker announced a proposal for a second mandatory emergency mechanism that aimed to relocate a further 120,000 persons seeking international protection from Greece, Italy, and Hungary. Under the pressure of the crisis situation, the response was immediate: On September 14, an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Interior took place in order to adopt this plan. While the European Parliament endorsed the emergency mechanism on September 17, the plan met with great resistance from eastern European member states. Nevertheless, under German pressure, at another extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers on

September 22 that was arranged by the Germans, the relocation mechanism was adopted by qualified majority voting: Twisting the arms of several reluctant member states (including Poland), the Germans obtained the required majority.

As [van Middelaar \(2017: 110\)](#) observes, this “revolutionary decision,” pushed through by the Germans, who did not want to be left alone with the task of receiving and integrating refugees, turned into a fiasco. From the seeming German victory, the European refugee policy would not recover. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania had voted against the relocation mechanism; Finland had abstained. Hungary, which had originally been proposed as a beneficiary of the emergency relocation mechanism, rejected the offer. In Poland, the liberal center right government soon was to be replaced by a conservative right government, which joined the eastern European resistance against the mechanism in the so-called Visegrad group (V4). Two of the countries that had voted against the mechanism – Hungary and Slovakia – appealed to the ECJ against the decision, and Hungary later organized a referendum over the relocation quota (see below). Eventually, the ECJ upheld the decision in September 2017, and the Hungarian referendum held on October 3, 2016, after the largest ever advertising campaign, failed to reach the quorum due to opposition boycott. Nevertheless, in central and eastern Europe, the fight for public opinion was lost for a long time. From this point on in this part of Europe, the acceptance of refugees was viewed not as a humanitarian act but as submission to Berlin. As a result, the implementation of the decision fell far short of the expected numbers. [Van Middelaar \(2017: 110–112\)](#) suggests that the crucial mistake was the attempt to keep the European Council, where qualified majority decisions are not possible, out of the loop.

At the same time as Germany tried to alleviate its burden with internal burden sharing, it also sought the help of Turkey to stop the arrival of refugees on the Greek islands. The contacts were already established in late summer 2015. Only with controlled external borders could Germany maintain its welcome culture. Between October 2015 and May 2016, Angela Merkel traveled no less than five times to see President Erdogan in Turkey, bowing to him in an unusual bout of European “realism.” A first joint action plan of the EU with Turkey was agreed at the EU Council meeting on October 15–16. On November 29, the EU Council decided to implement this plan, but in mid-December, eleven member state governments rejected the implementation plan ([Webber 2019: 167](#)). Arrivals remained high, and the negotiations between Turkey and the EU continued, driven by the German chancellor, who, backed by the European Commission, fought for her political survival. [Slominski and](#)

Trauner (2018: 109) point out that the deal was negotiated in a format that shielded the EU member states from the other EU supranational institutions, notably the EP and the ECJ. After a dramatic finish during the early days of March, negotiations eventually succeeded: The EU–Turkey agreement that finalized the deal between the EU and Turkey was adopted on March 18, 2016. In the aftermath of the agreement, the implementation of the deal gave rise to protracted additional negotiations, which we followed until September 2016, at which point the episode breaks off in our data.

The deal stipulated that as of March 20, 2016, new irregular migrants entering Greece from Turkey had to be returned to Turkey. For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian was to be resettled in the EU. The maximum number of people to be returned according to this mechanism was 72,000. As part of the agreement, Turkey promised to take necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes from Turkey to the EU. In return, the EU promised to pay Turkey up to 6 billion euro to contribute to its expenses with Syrian refugees by the end of 2018. It also promised to upgrade the customs union, accelerate visa liberalization for Turks in the EU, and relaunch the accession process. As a result of the deal, arrivals on the Greek islands dropped sharply, as did registered deaths and missing persons in the Aegean Sea.

Since the adoption of the EU–Turkey statement more or less coincided with the closing of the west Balkan route (see below), the question is which of the two measures was responsible for the effective closure of the EU's borders. As van Middelaar (2017: 118) argues, both measures contributed to this result. The arrivals started to decline once the west Balkan route was closed, but the decline was accentuated after the adoption of the EU–Turkey Deal. He suggests that Turkey agreed to the deal only once it realized that the EU was ready and able to close the border without its cooperation. There is an important difference between the two measures, however: While closing the west Balkan route abandoned Greece, an EU member state, the EU–Turkey Deal allowed Greece to stay in the Schengen area.

The EU–Turkey agreement, the most important measure at the EU level, was one of the first examples of EU realist foreign policy, and it has been criticized by those who do not consider Turkey a place where asylum protection is in accordance with international standards (Niemann and Zaun 2018: 8). Legal considerations in this respect have been partly removed by declaring Turkey a safe third country. Other critiques argued that this deal exposed the EU to blackmail by a leader with clear authoritarian leanings. Moreover, the agreement did not deal coherently

with the situation in Greece: It did not cover the more than 42,000 refugees who had entered Greece before March 20 and who remained in Greece after the agreement. And finally, the deal did not work out as planned. While the number of arrivals dropped by 97 percent three years on, the number of returns remained very limited (only 2,441 migrants had been returned since March 2016), and the number of resettlements of Syrians from Turkey to EU member states remained rather limited as well (roughly 20,000 in total).³ The threat of being returned to Turkey and the closing off of Greek borders to the north seem to have been sufficient to dissuade most refugees from making the crossing to the Greek islands. Eventually, after the summer 2016 coup in Turkey, negotiations on the implementation of the deal went sour and, except for its financial contribution, the EU did not deliver on its promises.

The *hotspot approach*, another border control measure adopted by the European Council during the peak period, was part of the European Agenda on Migration. The European Asylum Support Office, Frontex, and Europol were to work on the ground with frontline member states, in particular Greece and Italy, to swiftly identify, register, and fingerprint incoming migrants. On the whole, notwithstanding the “assistance” rhetoric, hotspots were designed to shift back to frontline states all the responsibilities they (theoretically) have to shoulder under current EU legislation: to identify migrants, provide first reception, identify and return those who do not claim protection, and channel those who do so toward asylum procedures in the responsible state – in most cases, none other than the frontline state itself. The implementation of the approach in Greece and Italy has been slow, due in part to the need to build the procedures from scratch and with shortcomings in infrastructure, staffing, and coordination but also due to foot-dragging on the part of the two frontline states (see below).⁴ At the end of 2016, the reception facilities in the two countries were still inadequate, particularly in terms of accommodation and international standards for unaccompanied minors.

The creation of the *European Border and Coast Guard* (EBCG), the third border control measure implemented swiftly in late 2015, involved extension of the already existing border control agency Frontex, which had been created in 2004 on the eve of the “Big Bang enlargement.” The proposal for the creation of the EBCG was drawn up in record time by the Commission in the midst of the crisis situation, between September

³ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20190318_eu-turkey-three-years-on_en.pdf

⁴ European Commission, 2017. Implementing the European Agenda on Migration: Commission reports on progress in Greece, Italy and the Western Balkans, press release, 10 February 2017.

and December 2015 (Niemann and Speyer 2018: 32f). Frontex's mission was to coordinate operational cooperation; assist member states in training, technical equipment, and joint return operations; follow up on technical innovation; and conduct risk analyses (Niemann and Speyer 2018: 26f). The former Frontex had been underfunded and lacked administrative staff, a deficiency that was addressed by creating a standing 1,500-member-strong rapid reaction pool of border guards and technical equipment, to which the member states committed explicit contributions that could not be withheld. The new EBCG would have funding worth 322 million euros by 2020, up from the 114 million euros that had been originally budgeted for 2020.

The critical question in the creation of the EBCG was whether it had the right to intervene even if the member state on the territory in which it wanted to intervene did not agree – a critical question for the constitutional set-up of the EU, as van Middelaar (2017: 123) points out. In this case, and contrary to the relocation issue, the European Council agreed to a compromise solution: If a member state did not cooperate within thirty days with an emergency plan designed by the EBCG on behalf of the Council, the Commission could start the procedure to suspend the country's membership in the Schengen area. In other words, the EU could not control the external border against the explicit will of a member state, but it could exclude the country from access to the area of free movement if it did not cooperate. This provision allowed for the closure of a possible gap in the external border without forcing a joint solution on a resisting member. The new EBCG soon proved to be too limited, however. In his state of the union speech in 2018, Commission president Juncker confirmed that it should have an additional 10,000 border guards by 2020, and he provided a blueprint for the future of the EBCG (Angelescu and Trauner 2018).

With the closure of the eastern Mediterranean, the focus of the refugee streams shifted back to the central Mediterranean and to the sea crossing between Libya and Italy. Following up on an Italian deal with Libya, in February 2017, the European Council also turned its attention to the support of Libya in controlling the central Mediterranean route. The Malta Declaration of February 3, 2017, outlined a number of measures as part of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen the EU's intervention along this route. The declaration pledged 200 million euros to the North of Africa window of the EU Trust Fund for Africa, with a priority to be given to Libya for 2017.⁵ A series of measures followed, all of which were designed to actively support Libyan authorities in contributing to efforts

⁵ www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/02/03/malta-declaration/

to disrupt organized criminal networks involved in smuggling migrants, human trafficking, and terrorism.

The EU episodes concerning *asylum rules* refer to the relocation of refugees in particular and to the *reform of the Dublin regulation* in general. Having failed in the short term with its relocation measures, the Commission repeatedly proposed a reform of the dysfunctional Dublin regulation as a long-term response to the crisis. This crucial internal solidarity measure was, however, repeatedly shelved – a blatant case of non-decision-making in the face of a major crisis. The new Commission, which took over after the EP elections in 2019, rapidly proposed a new plan for the reform of the CEAS – the so-called *Pact on Migration and Asylum*, which has met with the same lack of success as the attempts of the previous Commission. As the Covid-19 crisis hit the EU, asylum policy more or less disappeared from the agenda of EU decision-makers, and further reform steps have been shelved once again.

Zooming in on Policymaking at the National Level

At the *national level*, the thematic focus of policymaking varies heavily across the type of member state, as is shown in [Figure 5.5](#), which presents the share of border control actions by member state type and crisis period. Border controls include measures to secure the external borders of the EU as well as border closures between EU member states. While

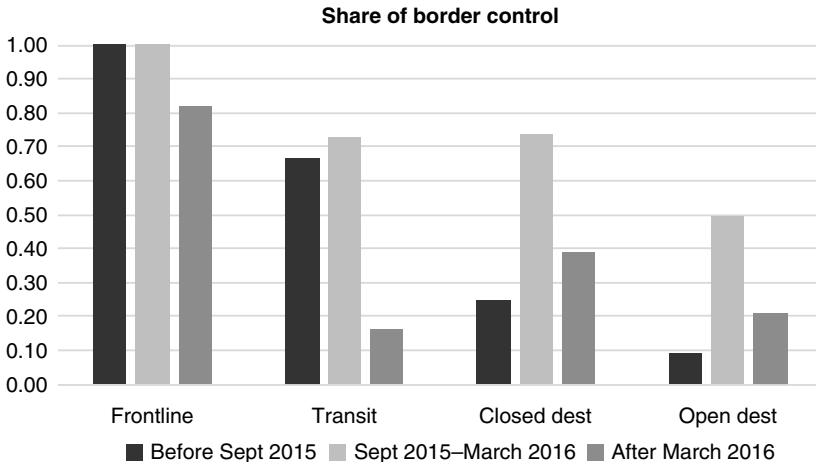


Figure 5.5 Share of border control actions by member state type and crisis period: percentages

border control was more in the focus in all member states during the peak phase of the crisis, it was the exclusive issue in frontline states. Thus, in all three phases, major policymaking episodes in Italy were exclusively devoted to border control issues, as were all episodes except one in Greece. Border control issues were also dominant in transit states during the first two periods but lost much of their importance in these states during the third period. By contrast, in both types of destination states, *asylum rules* prevailed in the prepeak period as well as in the postpeak aftermath of the crisis.

Border Control Episodes

If Border Control episodes prevailed in the frontline states, they did not result in effective policies, especially not in Greece. In the Summer of 2015, *Greece* was preoccupied with the bailout process, the referendum, and the snap elections in September 2015 and it was not properly equipped to deal with the incoming flow of refugees. At the EU summit on October 15–16, 2015, at the peak of the crisis, when the member states adopted the joint action plan with Turkey, Commission president Juncker and the German government suggested that Greece should ramp up its efforts to protect its frontier by operating joint border patrols with Turkey. This proposal was, however, adamantly rejected by the Greek government, given Greece's traditionally poor relationship with Turkey. Eventually, in yet another leaders' summit at the end of October, the Europeans agreed to scrap the request for joint Turkish–Greek maritime patrols and instead asked Greece (as part of the “hotspot approach”) to greatly accelerate the registering and documentation of refugees; create camps in the Aegean; and accommodate 50,000 refugees who would later be redistributed across the EU, 30,000 in hotspots and 20,000 in camps set up with the help of the UNHCR. It was also at this point that, instead of joint patrols, the Commission proposed to transform Frontex into the EBCG. Both proposals met again with Greek resistance. On the one hand, Greece was reluctant to set up hotspots because it was afraid that they would be perceived as an alternative to relocations. On the other hand, Greece was reluctant to subscribe to the plan to deploy the transformed EBCG without the consent of the directly concerned member state.

While the EBCG plan could be rapidly implemented thanks to the compromise described above, the hotspots were slow in coming, as already indicated. For a while, the Greek government was happy to pretend it was registering refugees, while its European peers were happy to pretend that they would implement a relocation scheme. Eventually, in

December 2015, this theater ended, with the EU governments demanding in earnest the implementation of hotspots and border controls but not guaranteeing the viability of the relocation scheme. As the Greek prime minister Tsipras told his colleagues at the leaders' summit in late December, Greece was at risk of becoming a "black box" that refugees disappeared into. But his strategy of foot dragging was vulnerable to the Balkan countries shutting down their borders, which is exactly what was going to happen a few weeks later (see below). As a result, by the end of January 2016, the Greek government ended up mobilizing its army to complete the hotspot construction in a timely fashion, and by mid-March, the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement stopped the inflow of refugees for some time to come.

The Greek border conflict that flared up with Turkey around Christmas 2019 and lasted until spring 2020 was the single most highly politicized of all the episodes. At the time, as a result of President Erdogan provocatively inciting refugees to move on to Europe, increasing numbers arrived at the land border. The Greek government responded by mobilizing police and armed forces to seal the land border with Turkey and by tolerating the actions of "civil militias" that acted behind the borderlines. Daily clashes of refugees with police occurred at the border in what was reported in Greek media as a "defence against invasion." Eventually, the realization that the Greek authorities would not allow them to pass and the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic put an end to this episode in March 2020.

At the same time, the Greek government also tried to alleviate the anxieties of local authorities on the islands who balked at the prospect of new closed centers being installed. The regional authority of the Northern Aegean, where most centers were to be built, went on a collision course with the government, engaging in protest mobilization as well as judicial challenges of the government's decision. The standoff culminated in an actual confrontation between far right and far left groups, each opposing the hotspots for their own reasons, and the riot police that had been sent to supervise and protect the start of the building process. Engaging in a sort of low-key guerilla warfare, locals ambushed police cavalades, blockaded their arrival at the centers, and burned police equipment. Eventually, the government retreated and delayed the building of the hotspots to "consult" with local authorities, with the prime minister promising to visit the three most afflicted islands.

As we have already observed, in *Italy*, all five episodes were concerned with border controls. The first one, the yearlong policy of *Mare Nostrum* that was initiated by the center left Letta government, predated the crisis. It involved deploying the Italian armed forces and coast guard near the

Strait of Sicily, with the dual objective of performing humanitarian rescues and arresting human traffickers and smugglers. The project was the continuation of previously existing rescue schemes, but Mare Nostrum greatly expanded the resources and personnel made available for search and rescue operations. It was enacted after a horrible shipwreck near the Strait of Sicily that had left more than 360 drowned immigrants on October 3, 2013. The shock of the immense loss of life jolted the government into action, and on October 18, it responded with the Mare Nostrum plan. Mare Nostrum operated for a year before, on October 31, 2014, it was abandoned. Operation Triton, a common EU project, albeit initially smaller in scale, partially replaced it.

The second and third Italian episodes refer to border conflicts with other EU member states. The second episode involves the Italian and French governments' fight over Ventimiglia, where a large number of refugees had gathered in an attempt to pass over the French border. The Italian border police's unofficial practice of allowing those crossings was challenged when France, following a large number of migrant arrivals, temporarily reintroduced border checks at Ventimiglia in June 2015. The episode was concentrated in time, as almost all action occurred within one month, just before the eruption of the main European crisis, which shifted attention elsewhere. A similar story, but without migrants actual camping near the border, took place in a conflict between Italy and Austria in 2016. Austria threatened to unilaterally impose stricter controls on its Brenner Pass border with Italy. It cited similar reasons – the lack of registration of immigrants in Italy and Italy's unwillingness to adhere to the Dublin rules. This confrontation was more long-lived and acrimonious than the French–Italian one, as it did not center on the semiformal actions of police bodies but on the official policies of two EU member state governments. The EU Commission became involved, trying to mediate between the two member states. In the end, in a manner similar to what happened to Greece, the Austrian chancellor reassured everyone that since the Italian authorities were ramping up their efforts to perform their duties on migration, the Brenner Pass, the bottleneck route linking Austria and Italy, would remain open. Contrary to the previous two episodes, the Brenner confrontation reached very high levels of politicization.

As already mentioned in the [previous section](#), the two final Italian episodes occurred after the government coalition of the Five Star Movement (M5S) and Lega came to power in summer 2018, and the leader of the Lega, Salvini, assumed the role of minister of the interior. Tasked with migration, he soon proceeded with his first project, which was to severely limit the role of NGOs in rescue operations by closing Italian ports for NGO ships carrying refugees. The standoff between Salvini and the

crew of the *Aquarius* drew immense international publicity and became a symbol of the conflict about asylum seekers in Europe. It was eventually resolved by the Spanish government, which allowed the *Aquarius* to dock in Spain, while henceforth NGO rescue ships essentially ceased operations in Italian waters. The second episode of this period, called the Sicurezza decrees, involved the codification of Salvini's drastic measures into official law and was split into two legislative acts that were passed in October 2018 and spring 2019. The first decree made it harder to obtain a humanitarian residence permit, while the second formalized the port closure for NGOs and made it illegal for NGO rescue ships to assist migrants requiring help. Both decrees became official Italian law, even though the Italian constitutional court threw out some aspects of both, declaring them unconstitutional.

Turning to *transit states*, two of the five Hungarian episodes concerned border controls. To stem the tide of the refugees, in summer 2015, Hungary started to build a fence at the Serbian border that was extended to the Croatian border in the fall – an episode that was highly politicized early on, especially by the negative international reactions to the fence building. Hungary also set up transit zones near the border as temporary reception centers for asylum seekers, tightened the penal code for offenses related to illegal crossings and physical damages to the fence in September 2015, and imposed an eight-kilometer rule that allowed for the detention of asylum seekers in the summer of 2016. The bulk of the action took place in the Summer of 2015 and into September. In spring 2017, the legal border amendment, a highly consequential but less politicized Hungarian episode, considerably tightened the border controls once again. The legal changes introduced by this amendment effectively meant that all asylum seekers found outside the transit zones in the country would be escorted back to the other side of the border fence. The only way to obtain asylum rights would be via long months of detention in metal containers set up at the southern border. Asylum seekers could leave these containers only by returning to Serbia, thus effectively surrendering their right to asylum (Klaus et al. 2018). Adding insult to injury, stories about blatant human rights abuses abounded in these containers, as documented by a Hungarian human rights group.

With the arrival of the flood of asylum seekers from Hungary in early September 2015, which caught the authorities off guard, the first Austrian responses had a temporary character. In line with the German response, Austria opened the borders, and the new arrivals were met with a wave of solidarity (“welcome culture”), which was carried by a high degree of civil society activism. During a short period in fall 2015, the Austrian federal railway, the police, and the Austrian armed forces

worked closely with the big nonprofit rescue organizations to establish efficient transportation, emergency shelters, and provisional accommodation for refugees. The public mood changed rather rapidly, however, and the sudden wave of solidarity and civic engagement ebbed the longer the influx of asylum seekers persisted. Once Germany decided to reintroduce identification checks for asylum seekers at its Austrian border on September 14, Austria introduced controls on its border with Hungary. Moreover, toward the end of the year, it started building a fence at its southern border with Slovenia.

In addition, Austria took the lead in coordinating national border control measures in the western Balkans to shut down the Balkan route and to halt the refugee flows at the Greek border, a measure that created pressure for a common border control mission on the EU's external borders and for adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement. At the west Balkan conference that took place on February 24, 2016, in Vienna, the ministers of the interior of four EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia) and of six candidate countries from the western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) agreed on the shut-down. The Austrian foreign minister, Kurz, emphasized that all the participants would prefer a common European solution, but that in the absence of such a solution, the countries were forced to adopt national measures. Austria, he asserted, was “simply unable to cope” (*OÖ Nachrichten*, February 24, 2016). Immediately after the conference, the participant countries started to close down their borders.

Major destination state *Germany* had kept its borders open. Pressured by her Austrian colleague, Chancellor Faymann, and by the critical situation at the Austro–Hungarian border, Chancellor Angela Merkel took the unprecedented decision, during the night of September 4, 2015, to keep the borders open for refugees. More specifically, Germany suspended the Dublin regulation for Syrian refugees. On the following day, a new train full of refugees arrived at the Munich railway station almost on the hour. Over this one weekend in September 2015 alone, 22,000 refugees arrived in Germany (Alexander 2017: 63). And the refugees kept coming. Merkel's decision on September 4 had been preceded by her summer press conference, where she had pleaded for more flexibility in the refugee crisis, had made it clear that there was zero tolerance for right-wing extremists, and had tried to reassure the public by asserting that “we can do it” (“Wir Schaffen Das”)⁶ – the expression that was to become the slogan of the German “welcome culture.”

⁶ www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenzen/sommerpressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-848300

Just like in Austria, however, the mood of the German public soured rapidly, political contestation in the streets (witness the surging number of criminal acts against refugee shelters) and in the party system increased, and asylum policymaking in Germany quickly became more restrictive. In terms of border controls, Germany reintroduced identity checks for refugees on September 14, although no one was refused entry. Subsequently, in spite of massive internal critique, Chancellor Merkel kept insisting on her open-doors policy. Thus, in her New Year's address, she again claimed that "we can do this, because Germany is a strong country." She also praised civil society for its commitment and dedication, and she stressed that integration of hundreds of thousands of refugees would be "a chance for tomorrow" (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 31, 2015). In December 2015, Merkel was chosen as Person of the Year by *Time* magazine, and "Flüchtlinge" (refugees) was chosen as the word of the year in Germany. The phrase "Wir Schaffen Das" made it into the top ten.

Following the infamous assaults on dozens of women by immigrants in Cologne on New Year's Eve, a new wave of criticism of the chancellor's policy swept over the country. Merkel refused to change her policy, although critiques of it grew massively, especially among the politicians on the ground who had to receive and accommodate the refugees – and even within the ranks of her own party. Only with the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement, Merkel's plan B, did the border control issue fade from public debate in Germany.

The issue returned, however, when Horst Seehofer, the head of the CSU and Merkel's most vocal critic, became minister of the interior in Merkel's new cabinet that took office in March 2018. As the new minister of the interior, Seehofer was sensing the chance to implement his hardliner asylum policy, which gave rise to the second Border Control episode in Germany. In June 2018, Seehofer insisted on turning back at the German border refugees who had already been registered in other countries. He met with resistance on the part of Chancellor Merkel, who, at this point, defended a coordinated European solution. The issue unleashed an open power struggle between the two, which developed into the most politicized German episode. To everyone's surprise, although Merkel was unable to obtain the hoped for European solution at the EU summit at the end of June 2018, the two finally reached a domestic compromise in early July, which essentially served as a face-saving device for both and did not change much in Germany's policy.

In *Sweden*, throughout the summer and early autumn 2015, authorities continued taking a humanitarian position to welcoming refugees ([Hagelund 2020: 8](#)). But later in the fall, the historically liberal consensus

characterizing the Swedish immigration regime began to adjust to the new reality, and more restrictive measures were introduced. Not only did the incoming numbers put great stress on the asylum system, according to the government, they also posed a serious threat to public order and internal security. Just as in Germany, two strategies were used to reduce the number of asylum seekers: the introduction of border controls to limit access to Swedish territory and the revision of the migration law with the intention of making Sweden a less attractive destination for asylum seekers (Emilsson 2018: 11). The debate on border controls started in July 2015, with the Migration Agency claiming that it was unable to handle the number of migrants. After a lot of hesitation, the government ended up introducing identification checks at the border for incoming refugees in November 2015. This measure resembled the measure Germany had introduced two months earlier. Just as in Germany, the purpose of the temporary border checks was above all to exercise control over who came to Sweden. However, refugees without identity documents were prevented from boarding ferries in Germany, which meant that they could no longer seek asylum in Sweden. At the press conference, where Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and his deputy Åsa Romson (leader of the Green Party), the latter in tears, announced these measures, the prime minister declared that the decision had been heavy and painful to make but that it had been necessary: “We have to act to safeguard that people trust the society and the welfare to work.”⁷ This measure gave rise to the most intense political debates at the peak of the crisis, but the issue continued to occupy the Swedish public until the end of 2020, given that the temporary border controls were repeatedly extended over time.

Finally, among the closed destination states, *France* was involved in two major rows with neighboring countries involving border management and migrant camps at these borders – the already mentioned row with Italy in Ventimiglia and the Calais conflict with the UK. The temporary border checks at Ventimiglia in June 2015 were challenged before the French State Council, but the court ruled that border controls were legal and that the elimination of systematic interior border controls in the Schengen area did not prevent French authorities from carrying out identity controls. The situation at Calais also became more intense over the course of the summer and autumn of 2015, with growing numbers of migrants trying to make their way to Britain. French and British officials continued to negotiate the management of the camp throughout the coming years, introducing tougher security tools to guard the Channel

⁷ *Dagens Nyheter*, November 25, 2015.

Tunnel, joint police commands, and increased financing. The Calais situation prompted the UK government to announce not only tougher security tools to guard the Channel but also tougher immigration policies. In France, border control generally became highly politicized due to the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. After these attacks and ahead of UN climate talks in Paris, France introduced border checks on all of its borders. Subsequently, citing the persistent threat of terrorism, just like Sweden, France renewed the border checks every six months.

Asylum Rules Episodes

As we have seen, compared to border control measures, episodes modifying asylum rules appear to have been generally less politicized – with the exception of some episodes in Hungary, Austria, France, and the UK, which reached an even higher degree of politicization than border control measures. In *Hungary*, the quota referendum in October 2016, which opposed the relocation plans of the EU Commission, was most highly politicized. Domestically, the referendum episode marked the final stand of Jobbik as the standard bearer of the Hungarian radical right. Jobbik had originally put the idea of the referendum on the agenda, but it was Fidesz that initiated a petition against the quota scheme and eventually organized the referendum. In the face of the government's and Fidesz's unparalleled resources to mobilize the no vote, Jobbik proved unable to outbid the government and to preserve its status as the most credible defender of the “national cause.” Squeezed into a diminishing electoral corner, Jobbik thus began the long march to the center of the Hungarian party system. On the whole, Fidesz successfully politicized the issue of migration and acted as an agenda setter rather than a follower (Bíró-Nagy 2022). With refugee flows largely under control by 2017, the Hungarian government set its sights on domestic NGO groups, mostly those supported by the philanthropic Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros, that were accused of acting as domestic agents of external actors. The assault proceeded in two waves. First, in 2017, the government imposed a financial disclosure requirement on all NGOs receiving funding from abroad. This policy debate came to be known as the infamous Civil Law, which was later challenged by the European Commission and struck down by the European Court of Justice in 2020. The following year, in preparation for the upcoming 2018 parliamentary elections, the government sought to impose even more onerous requirements on NGOs – including a special “migration tax” on all organizations deemed to aid immigrants. This second policy package was labeled “Stop Soros”, a not-so-subtle reference to the new enemy in town. These measures were

highly contested by international actors as well as Hungarian civil society and the opposition.

The most highly politicized episode in *Austria* was also an episode related to asylum rules, that is, to the question of whether the federal government could force member states and municipalities to host refugees. This issue is the domestic equivalent of the international relocation issue in Hungary. Already before the peak of the crisis, in spring 2015, the conflict between the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the state governments about the latter's insufficient provision of accommodation for asylum seekers reached a new level. By this point, only three out of nine states had provided sufficient accommodation facilities. At the same time, the situation in the federal reception center of Traiskirchen became intolerable. To relieve the situation in the federal reception centers, the government proposed incorporating into the constitution the right of intervention ("Durchgriffsrecht") by the federal government. This would allow the minister of the interior to set up shelters for asylum seekers in member states and municipalities that did not assume responsibilities on their own. The measure was proposed in August 2015 and adopted on September 23, at the peak of the crisis.

The first *Swedish* episode, which started in January 2015, also addressed the uneven distribution of refugees across the country – municipalities instead of regions in the Swedish case. Like in Austria, the government considered that the uneven distribution of refugees among municipalities was unsustainable, but no mandatory legislation was in place. The legislative process was, however, slower and less contentious than in Austria. The bill forcing municipalities to receive refugees was eventually adopted in January 2016.

As we have already pointed out, the mood in Austria quickly changed, and the government not only introduced border controls, but it also adopted ever more restrictive asylum rules. By early 2016, the Austrian government had completely changed course: Within a four-month period, it had shifted from "an Angela-Merkel-course to a Viktor-Orbán course."⁸ The most important change of the new asylum law, which was adopted in April 2016, concerned limiting the asylum period to three years, the minimum stipulated by the EU Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU. Most controversially, however, the new law also introduced an annual asylum cap ("Obergrenze"), putting a limit on the number of refugees permitted to enter the asylum process. As Gruber (2017: 51) observes, with this decree, the Austrian government set a European

⁸ As formulated in a critical comment by the leader of the Austrian Greens, Pelz, in early February (Der Standard, February 7, 2016).

precedent: the provision of a quantitative limit to grant a human right. The preset upper limit has not yet been reached, which means that the decree was never applied. A second reform package adopted in summer 2017 stipulated compulsory civic integration programs for beneficiaries of international protection as well as a ban of face veiling in public – yet another tightening of the screw in Austrian asylum policy.

In *Germany*, the retrenchment of asylum law was set in motion even earlier than in Austria. Thus, the chancellor announced the legislative initiative for the first (limited) asylum package on September 1, 2015, shortly before she took the fateful decision to suspend the Dublin regulation for Syrian refugees. The proposal aimed at better accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers and at an acceleration of the processing of asylum applications. It was rapidly adopted. The second asylum package was more ambitious and more contested. It also sought to accelerate the asylum procedures and, above all, it intended to suspend the right of people in subsidiary protection status (mainly Syrians) to reunite with their family members. Negotiations between the coalition partners CDU-CSU and SPD dragged along and were complicated by the New Year's Eve events in Cologne, after which the debate shifted to deportation, that is, to the designation of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria as "safe countries of origin," thus easing deportations to these countries. While the Bundestag adopted the package at the end of February 2016, the Bundesrat rejected the bill in March 2017, and, once again, in February 2019.

At the time when the second asylum package was adopted in the Bundestag, the coalition partners had already started to discuss a new integration law. This law was not only new, it was also encompassing. It had been demanded by the SPD for a long time and was to regulate the details for a sustained acceptance and integration of refugees. Just like the Austrian law, the new law was an example of civic integration policies. This is reflected in the law's guiding motto of "support and demand," a programmatic slogan borrowed from the welfare reform of the early 2000s. On the "support" side, the law established integration classes that allowed asylum seekers with a high likelihood of receiving protection (including Syrians, Iraqis, Iranians, and Eritreans) to begin learning German while their claim was still pending. Moreover, access to the labor market became easier. On the "demand" side, the law stipulated that asylum seekers refusing to participate in integration classes would have to accept cuts in their benefits. It also linked the right to settle permanently in Germany with integration efforts: Permanent residency became contingent upon finding employment or training within three years of arrival for those fluent in German and within five years for those

who spoke basic German. In addition, all new arrivals seeking long-term settlement had to successfully complete an integration course. The law was rather consensual and was rapidly adopted by both chambers.

As already mentioned, after the terrorist attack by a Tunisian refugee on a Christmas market in Berlin on December 19, 2016, the issues of the return and deportation of rejected asylum seekers became particularly salient in the public debate. A new act on deportation was introduced and eventually adopted in July 2017. The new policy tried to address the relatively low return rate by facilitating the consistent deportation of rejected asylum seekers. The act was adopted only after the federal court decided that the deportation of persons posing a terrorist threat was compatible with the constitution. The new policy was again amended in 2019.

In *Sweden*, with regard to the retrenchment of asylum rules, the Social Democratic and Green Party coalition government signed an agreement with the four center right parties on October 23, 2015. Only the Left Party, which did not accept its content, and the Sweden Democrats, who were not invited, were left out of the broad compromise. The agreement proposed twenty-one measures for a more orderly asylum reception, a more efficient settlement process, and a limitation of the costs of the asylum policy. The most important measure of the package resembled the one adopted in Austria – the introduction, albeit only temporarily and limited to three years, of three-year residence permits. While both Denmark and Norway had for a long time already granted refugees only temporary protection in the first round, Sweden had in the main granted all protection beneficiaries permanent residency. When this was reversed, Sweden let go of its image as a humanitarian frontrunner and international exception on immigration policy, and instead accepted that it, too, had to (temporarily at least) lower its standards. In view of the expiration of the temporary migration law in June 2019, the Swedish government had to deal with the issue once again, which led to yet another Swedish episode on asylum rules. After the extension of the temporary migration law in June 2019 for two years, the government invited all parliamentary parties to a parliamentary inquiry into the future of Swedish migration policy from the summer of 2021 onward, when the extension of the law was to expire. The inquiry committee was, however, unable to find a consensus and in July 2020, the negotiations between the Social Democrats and the Alliance crashed. A solution is still pending at the time of writing. Just as in Germany, the last Swedish episode dealt with deportations and was running into the same kind of opposition.

Finally, two comparatively highly politicized episodes on asylum rules occurred in the closed destination states. As we have seen, in

both countries, asylum rules had already been toughened before the advent of the crisis. In *France*, however, the most politicized reform of asylum and immigration law took place under the Macron government in the aftermath of the crisis in 2017–18. The minister of the interior, Gerard Collomb, proposed toughening France's immigration policy, which met with heavy opposition from left and right as well as from human rights groups. The bill proposed shortening asylum application deadlines and doubling the time for which illegal migrants could be detained. After intense parliamentary debates, it eventually passed into law in August 2018.

In the *UK*, the Immigration Act 2014 constituted the most complex and most politicized episode, as it included a multitude of measures aimed at putting the “hostile environment” principle into practice. Legally speaking, the most controversial measure turned out to be the citizenship clause that allowed authorities to strip naturalized criminals (but not British-born citizens) of their citizenship. However, as it impacted the life of very few people, it did not become the most contentious part of the package. Instead, what made the episode hotly debated – involving stakeholders in the business world and civil society – was the extension of the controlling functions of the state to the private sector. Thus, the Right-to-Rent scheme legally mandated landlords to check the immigration status of tenants and held them legally responsible if illegal immigrants gained access to private housing. Compared to the 2014 Immigration Act, the Immigration Act of 2016 concentrated on fewer issues and was less politicized, with the Right-to-Rent scheme again in the center. The main policy innovation in this regard was the introduction of a hefty fine of up to 3,000 pounds for landlords found to be in breach of their obligations to check prospective tenants' immigration status.

The two last British measures are related to the issue of the distribution of refugees across member states – the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Dubs Amendment. The VPRS marked the British contribution to the EU's relocation scheme. The VPRS's early focus was on women and survivors of torture. Later, in September 2015, it was extended, both in numbers and in scope, to all Syrian refugees in Middle Eastern refugee camps who were eligible according to the UNHCR's vulnerability criteria. The UK government actually came close to fulfilling the target of 20,000 Syrian refugees resettled by 2020, although resettlements were temporarily halted because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Dubs Amendment, finally, can best be characterized as a minor humanitarian concession in an otherwise restrictive immigration environment: Before the Immigration Act of 2016 was adopted, Alf Dubs, a member of the House of Lords from the Labour Party and a

son of a Jewish refugee who had fled the Nazis in Czechoslovakia, had tabled an amendment that would allow the relocation of a prespecified number of unaccompanied children to Britain, even if they did not have family members residing in the UK and therefore would not have automatic right to enter via family reunification according to the legal status quo. Though originally ambitious, the actual number accepted under the amendment turned out to be quite low, numbering in the couple of hundreds rather than the thousands as originally intended.

Conclusion

Table 5.2 provides an overview of the episodes ordered by level and type of member state. It indicates the thematic focus, the start and the end dates as well as the duration of each episode, and the extent of its overall politicization. In terms of timing, we have observed that the politicization of the responses adopted by government during the crisis was most intense during the peak period, both at the European and the national level. This is in line with the expectation that the combined problem and political pressure during the peak period would incite the authorities to rapidly initiate and adopt policy responses to come to terms with the massive inflow of refugees. However, the association between politicization and pressure, both problem and political pressure, proved to be rather variable across member states and looser than expected. We have tried to account for this finding by taking a closer look at the endogenous political dynamics during the crisis. Policy responses at the national level were not only required by the failure of the CEAS and by the inability of the leaders to adopt joint solutions at the EU level, but these policies were also the result of a series of endogenous factors at the national level, which operated independently of problem pressure and, in part at least, created the political pressure in the first place. The strategies of political entrepreneurs – Orbán, Salvini, Seehofer, and Erdogan – most clearly fitted this bill, but anticipation of crisis situations to come, legislative cycles, conspicuous events like terrorist attacks, and sequels of policy decisions made earlier in the crisis all contributed to these endogenous dynamics.

In terms of thematic focus, we distinguished between border controls and internal retrenchments of asylum rules. At the EU level, four of the six episodes concerned the control of external borders, with the EU–Turkey agreement dominating all other episodes, which turned out to be the single most politicized episode during the refugee crisis because of the episode’s very high saliency at the peak of the crisis. In terms of polarization, however, it does not stick out, since all types of episodes,

Table 5.2 *Basic characteristics of the episodes^a*

Country	Episode	Thematic focus	Start	End	Duration (months)	Politicization
EU	EU-Turkey	1	2015m7	2016m9	14	1.00
EU	Relocation	2.1	2015m4	2018m12	44	0.74
EU	ECBG	1	2015m4	2018m10	42	0.05
EU	Hotspots	1	2015m6	2016m8	14	0.12
EU	Libya	1	2016m9	2020m2	41	0.04
EU	Dublin	2.1	2015m5	2019m12	55	0.31
GRE	Summer 2015	1	2015m5	2015m10	5	0.27
GRE	Hotspots-Frontex	1	2015m10	2016m5	7	0.56
GRE	International Protection Bill	2.2	2019m9	2019m11	3	0.34
GRE	Detention Centers	1	2019m11	2020m2	4	0.29
GRE	Turkey Border Conflict	1	2020m2	2020m3	2	0.34
ITA	Mare Nostrum	1	2013m10	2014m11	13	0.13
ITA	Ventimiglia	1	2015m5	2015m10	5	0.02
ITA	Brenner	1	2016m1	2016m6	5	0.22
ITA	Port Closures	1	2018m6	2018m9	3	0.65
ITA	Sicurezza Bis	1	2018m9	2019m8	11	0.60
HUN	Fence Building	1	2015m6	2016m12	18	0.62
HUN	Quota referendum	2.1	2015m11	2016m12	13	0.96
HUN	Legal Border Barrier Amendment	1	2017m1	2018m11	22	0.13
HUN	Financial disclosure	2.2	2017m1	2017m12	11	0.52
HUN	“Stop Soros”	2.2	2018m1	2019m12	23	0.49
AT	Border Control	1	2012m6	2016m12	54	0.32
AT	Balkan route	1	2015m6	2016m3	9	0.19
AT	Asylum Law	2.2	2015m3	2016m5	14	0.22
AT	Integration Law	2.3	2015m10	2017m6	20	0.09
AT	Right to Intervene	2.1	2015m7	2015m12	5	0.13
GER	Keeping border open	1	2015m8	2016m4	8	0.19
GER	Asylum Packages	2.2	2015m8	2016m3	7	0.12
GER	Integration Law	2.3	2016m2	2016m8	6	0.06
GER	Deportation	2.3	2017m1	2019m12	35	0.12
GER	CDU-CSU	1	2018m5	2018m7	2	0.02
SWE	Border Control	1	2015m7	2018m11	40	0.25
SWE	Residence Permits	2.2	2015m6	2016m9	15	0.00

Table 5.2 (cont.)

Country	Episode	Thematic focus	Start	End	Duration (months)	Politicization
SWE	Police Powers Family Reunification (12/2018– 7/2020)	2.3	2016m2	2018m3	25	0.09
SWE	Family Reunification Amendment	2.2	2018m12	2020m7	19	0.08
SWE	Municipalities	2.1	2015m1	2016m1	12	0.06
FR	Ventimiglia	1	2015m6	2015m11	5	0.22
FR	Border Control	1	2015m11	2020m2	51	0.36
FR	Asylum Law	2.2	2017m12	2019m4	16	0.75
FR	Rights of Foreigners	2.3	2013m7	2015m11	28	0.23
FR	Calais	1	2015m1	2016m11	22	0.43
UK	Immigration Act, 2014	2.2	2013m2	2014m6	16	0.25
UK	Immigration Act, 2015	2.2	2015m4	2016m5	13	0.09
UK	Dubs Amendment	2.1	2016m3	2017m5	14	0.05
UK	VPRS	2.1	2013m12	2017m11	47	0.04
UK	Calais	1	2014m8	2016m10	26	0.16

^aType codes: 1 = border control, 2 = asylum rules, 2.1 = burden sharing, 2.2 = asylum law, 2.3 = integration/return

whether dealing with border controls or with the retrenchment of asylum rules, were typically highly polarized. At the national level, the mix of measures depended on the type of member state: In frontline states, border controls prevailed, while in the UK, asylum rules prevailed. In transit states, open destination states, and France, both types of measures were important for coming to terms with the crisis situation.

With respect to the substantive content of the policy responses, continuity prevailed, with the possible exception of integration laws in Germany and Austria, which, however, also only adopted what other countries (e.g., the Netherlands) had already implemented before (see Joppke 2017). The crisis did not prove to be an opportunity for reforming the existing system. Instead, failure to reform at the EU level and retrenchment at the national level were the predominant responses. The internal rebordering between member states constitutes a persistent threat to the internal freedom of movement policy, the retrenchment of asylum rules contradicts Europe's humanitarian values, and the

externalization of the border control to Turkey makes the EU vulnerable to the whims of the Turkish president. The outcome is a form of stagnation or inertia that reproduces the policies in the asylum domain without providing the output the polity is meant to produce.

In the subsequent parts of this volume, we shall analyze in detail the actor configurations, conflict structures, and political dynamics of policymaking during the crisis to show how this state of affairs came about.

Part II

Policymaking: Actors and Conflict Structures

Introduction: Conflict Lines in the Shadow of the Transnational Cleavage

In the [previous chapter](#), we shed light on the variety of policy responses to the refugee crisis starting in the spring of 2015 when the European Commission put forward the European Agenda on Migration. We have shown that in the shadow of joint solutions, including external rebordering, efforts toward burden sharing, and overhauling the largely dysfunctional Dublin regulation, significant conflict lines opened up between groups of member states on the one hand and between member states and European institutions on the other. This chapter zooms in on the role of domestic interests and the way they are articulated in national policy debates. Issues of migration and asylum are part and parcel of political actors' conception of national and group identities, which, as we know from postfunctionalist integration theory ([Hooghe and Marks 2009](#)), serve as powerful battle cries in the hands of politicians to rally public opinion on their side either to politicize the European Union's role in crisis management or to oppose national governments' efforts to come to terms with the refugee crisis on their soil.

This self-conception of national- and group-based identities, however, matters politically only to the extent that they are activated by politicians and organized interests, leading to enduring cleavages that structure political competition ([Bartolini 2005](#)). Over recent decades, the cleavage structure that well described the “frozen” party systems of the post-war period in western Europe ([Lipset and Rokkan 1967](#)) gave way to a national cleavage pitting the winners of globalization and European integration against its losers ([Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012](#); [Hooghe and Marks 2018](#)). Within this integration-demarcation divide that manifests itself both in public attitudes and in political competition, immigration, rendered highly salient by the refugee crisis, can be regarded as a sort of “super-issue” with a potential to activate cultural and economic grievances simultaneously ([Odmalm and Super 2014](#)).

The key venue for political conflict around immigration is thus likely to play out in the partisan-electoral arena where radical right parties (RRPs), having made their first electoral breakthroughs in the 1980s, are well positioned to capitalize on their ownership of the issue, as their primary appeal lies in a nativist defense of the nation state against cultural threats from immigration (Bornschieer 2010; Mudde 2013). However, the electoral success of these RRP has prompted mainstream parties to engage in strategic responses to fend off this electoral threat, often by shifting their own programmatic position toward a more restrictive stance on immigration (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020). In the extreme, such strategic positioning can play out within the government itself in the case of coalitions, and especially grand coalitions (Engler, Bauer-Blaschkowski, and Zohnhöfer 2019; Höhmann and Sieberer 2020), where coalition partners not only compete with the radical right but also with each other in an effort to send credible signals to voters that their concerns are heard. These considerations together lead us to expect that the most common conflict line in the refugee crisis will play out in the partisan-electoral arena between political parties, with the government (and senior government parties) on one end of the conflict line and radical challenger parties, the mainstream opposition, and occasionally coalition partners – in the case of grand coalitions – on the other end.

However, the political representation offered by political parties is likely to be highly imperfect, ridden with conflicting pressures on parties in a multidimensional political competition (Odmalm and Super 2014). Especially center-left parties are expected to feel the pinch (Hinnfors, Spehar, and Bucken-Knapp 2012; Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020), as they are trapped between the principle-based expectations of a left-liberal electorate and the threat of an exodus to RRP of their traditional working-class voters. As center-left parties navigate this trade-off and other actors in the party-political space, such as radical left-wing competitors, can offer only limited representation for the pro-refugee electorate (or for refugees themselves for that matter), nonpartisan actors are likely to enter to fill the void. The most likely candidates for such a role are political actors that are driven less by electoral considerations than by humanitarian and legal principles, such as NGO groups, intellectuals, church actors, and more broadly speaking, civil society actors. While the mobilization of such actors in the context of the refugee crisis has already been documented in a number of countries that we study (see Majtényi, Kopper, and Susánszky 2019 for Hungary; Kalogeraki 2020 for Greece; and Durán Mogollón, Eisele, and Paschou 2021 for Greece and Germany), we expect a more general conflict line to emerge between

governments and such civil society actors as a result of the parties' turn to more restrictive policy positions on immigration.

Furthermore, the national cleavage that we regard as the driving force behind conflicts related to the refugee crisis has an important international component, especially in the context of policy episodes with an inherently international dimension. In addition to domestic conflict lines, governments are thus likely to engage in conflict with international actors in line with the liberal intergovernmental perspective (Moravcsik 1998; Hosli and Arnold 2010) that predicts an interstate cleavage will emerge as national governments seek to bring a unified "national position" to the negotiating table. In these debates, far from acting alone, member states are likely to seek transnational alliances to challenge EU initiatives, such as the V4 grouping's steadfast opposition to the EU's relocation scheme in the refugee crisis (Koš and Séville 2020). Moreover, bilateral conflicts between individual member states are likely to arise as unilateral decisions of member states, such as rebordering efforts and waiving through asylum seekers, impose an additional burden on neighboring states in the form of redirected migrant flows and/or secondary movements (Kriesi et al. 2021). Therefore, we expect two types of international conflicts to emerge: one between national governments and EU institutions and another between national governments of different member states.

Based on these theoretical considerations, we derive the following expectations for this chapter. As the foregoing discussion suggests, different types of policy episodes are likely to trigger different kinds of conflicts. In particular, we expect episodes revolving around border control measures to draw in international audiences and trigger international conflicts, whereas asylum-related episodes are more likely to be dominated by conflicts between the national government and its domestic opponents. Second, the structural position that countries found themselves in during the refugee crisis is also likely to be systematically linked to the emerging conflict lines. Those member states whose policy decisions are likely to impose negative externalities on other countries – namely front-line states and to some extent transit states – are more likely to trigger international conflicts than domestic ones. Third, within domestic conflicts, the underlying problem and political pressures that the national governments are confronted with are expected to be linked to the type of opponents of government policies. While the party-political opposition and civil society actors are "natural" opponents of governments – albeit for different reasons – the less common intragovernmental conflicts are more likely to emerge under conditions of intense problem and political pressures because only under such extreme scenarios may coalition

partners risk a government breakdown for anticipated electoral gains, or at least for damage control. Lastly, different conflict lines are expected to imply different levels of politicization and levels of support behind the governments' policies. On one end, international conflicts are likely to imply relatively high levels of politicization due to the wider range of actors involved in the debate, and relatively high levels of support behind government policies because domestic opponents may feel pressured to mute their opposition in the face of an international challenge. On the other end, societal conflicts are expected to be little politicized because nonpartisan actors face higher hurdles to keep the issue on the agenda compared to the party-political opposition. At the same time, intragovernmental conflicts are likely to imply the lowest level of average support behind governments because in addition to the usual sources of opposition, governments also need to confront criticism within their own ranks in these conflicts.

In this chapter, we build on these theoretical expectations to describe the main conflict lines that emerged in the national debates in the refugee crisis. To do so, we return to the forty policy episodes that we introduced and described in detail in [Chapters 3 and 5](#). In the [following section](#), we describe the broad actor types that we expect to act as protagonists in the conflicts. In the [third section](#) of this chapter, we introduce our conflict intensity indicator based on our PPA dataset and describe the episodes in terms of the average intensity of their conflict. In the [fourth section](#), we first propose a simple and transparent measurement to allocate episodes to one of the conflict types that we introduced above: partisan conflicts, societal conflicts, international conflicts, and intragovernmental conflicts. We then proceed to provide a rough empirical test for the expectations that we derived, relying on descriptive comparisons only due to the limited number of cases, ruling out more rigorous statistical tests. The [fifth section](#) provides illustrations of these conflict lines from four selected episodes. The sixth concludes the discussion.

Governments and Their Opponents

In the original scheme of our PPA dataset, the national government is understood in a narrow sense. It comprises the heads of governments (premiers and the president in the semipresidential regime of France), the ministers, and other cabinet officials who are not affiliated with any particular ministry (e.g., spokespeople for the entire cabinet). By contrast, state institutions, local and regional authorities, and government parties are considered to be distinct actor types. For operationalizing conflict lines between actors, we partly relax this assumption by

including government parties under the national government category. When a government MP in parliament criticizes the opposition, we would consider this a manifestation of a government–opposition conflict. Conversely, if a politician from the government party is addressed individually by civil society actors in a negative light, this would be counted as a manifestation of a government–civil society conflict.

Operationalizing the party-political opposition is comparatively straightforward. All actions undertaken by opposition parties regardless of their parliamentary presence or strength are considered as opposition actions and to the extent that they carry an element of criticism of the government, they contribute to partisan conflict. These actions can take the form of a statement by an individual politician from an opposition party or an action undertaken by the party as a whole (e.g., a motion in parliament). An important distinction we make, however, is between mainstream parties and challengers, following [Hobolt and Tilley \(2016\)](#). Within partisan conflicts, we thus further distinguish between conflicts dominated by government–mainstream opposition exchanges and those dominated by government–challenger opposition exchanges.

Civil society actors comprise a diverse group of organizations. The most common actor to enter the policy debates are NGO groups, such as Amnesty International and Médecins Sans Frontières, via either their international representatives or their local branches. In addition to these NGO groups, various expert groups, such as think tanks, academics, public intellectuals, and media representatives were also important opponents of government policies if not by virtue of their institutional powers, then by the moral weight of their words. Compared to these two broad groups, a relatively marginal role was played by business actors; churches; unions; and on occasions, migrants themselves who engaged in numerous protests and other confrontative actions involving policy demands, especially in Greece.

Opposition from international actors came from two main sources. On the one hand, EU institutions frequently intervened in domestic debates, especially when these debates were closely linked to EU-level policies, such as the Hungarian quota referendum that explicitly opposed the policy initiative of the European Commission. Even more prominently, foreign governments played an important role in some of the debates, especially in the case of border conflicts between neighboring countries, such as the stand-off at the French–Italian border (Ventimiglia), the French–British border (Calais), and the Austrian–Italian border (the Brenner Pass). In addition to these two main sources of international actors' intervention, a smaller third group comprises other supranational institutions, such as the UN (UNHCR), the Council of Europe, and NATO.

Table 6.1 confirms the central role of the national government. In six of the eight countries (the two exceptions are France and Sweden), the national government was responsible for the largest share of the coded actions in the policy debates. When subsuming government parties under national governments, even these two exceptions fit the general pattern. As for the three potential opponents of governments, they have a roughly equal average share, with important cross-country variation, however. In France, Sweden, and the UK, the party-political opposition accounts for more than 20 percent of the actions. International actors are particularly prominent in the frontline states (Greece and Italy), and to some extent Austria and Hungary. Civil society actors are the most active in the UK and Sweden (and to a lesser extent in France). Germany stands out for the prominent role of government parties, suggesting that debates within the government, as we shall subsequently see, accounted for the lion's share of the conflict.

Considering the actors themselves, however, is only part of the story. Conflicts, by definition, have at least two actors involved, and our PPA dataset is well suited to pick up this link. In addition to the actors undertaking the actions, we thus also consider the actors who were most frequently targeted in the debates. Targeting can take place in multiple forms, but the most common form is an actor explicitly addressing another actor in their statements. Such targeting may not necessarily imply conflict, but in the empirical distribution of these targeted actions, only 15.6 percent are assigned a positive actor direction code, and the rest are either neutral (36.3 percent) or negative (48.1 percent). Therefore, to the extent that interaction takes place between actors, these interactions tend to have a conflictual bent.

When evaluating the importance of the actor types on the targeted end of the conflict lines (Table 6.2), the prominence of the national government is even more pronounced, accounting for an average of almost half of all targeted actions. Compared to the distribution of the actors undertaking the actions, international actors also appear to have a more pronounced role on the targeted end, suggesting that foreign actors – EU actors and other governments – were popular scapegoats in the policy debates (except for Germany, the UK, and Sweden, where their role was rather negligible). This is particularly the case in the two frontline states, where international actors appear between one third and half of the time among the target actors. Comparatively speaking, the other two broad actor types are less commonly targeted with a few exceptions, however. Opposition parties are targeted on numerous occasions in France, Hungary, and Sweden, whereas civil society organizations are the most commonly targeted in Germany and Sweden. Overall, however, the bulk

Table 6.1 *The distribution of broad actor types across the forty domestic refugee crisis episodes (column percentages)*

Broad actor type	Country								Total
	Austria	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Sweden	UK	
International	10.1	7.2	6.5	36.0	11.4	15.6	3.6	2.6	13.3
National government	32.8	26.4	35.8	38.2	31.4	42.2	21.1	31.9	32.9
Other national	23.4	27.3	11.2	6.8	9.3	23.7	22.8	7.8	15.8
Government party	11.2	4.0	32.1	2.3	18.0	1.1	7.7	8.7	10.3
Opposition	10.7	20.2	9.2	8.6	18.9	4.7	22.8	22.0	14.5
Civil society	11.9	15.0	5.2	8.1	11.0	12.7	22.1	27.0	13.2
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total (n)	607	1,007	651	1,078	1,199	763	470	618	6,393

Table 6.2 *The distribution of broad targeted actor types across the forty domestic refugee crisis episodes (column percentages)*

Broad actor type	Country								Total
	Austria	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Sweden	UK	
International	29.7	23.4	8.0	47.2	22.3	37.9	1.2	1.2	24.7
National government	56.2	43.0	46.8	26.9	45.3	41.3	49.1	88.9	44.7
Other national	3.2	11.7	8.8	11.4	4.4	13.8	21.0	4.2	9.5
Government party	9.1	2.3	15.3	2.5	3.6	0.7	4.3	3.1	5.0
Opposition	1.8	12.1	3.7	3.8	12.3	0.7	10.1	1.5	6.4
Civil society	0.0	7.6	17.4	8.3	12.2	5.7	14.3	1.2	9.8
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total (n)	219	265	511	881	844	298	328	260	3,606

of the attention is focused on the government, with the UK being an extreme case to illustrate this pattern: No less than 88.9 percent of all targeted actions are addressed at the national government.

The Intensity of the Conflict

The actors involved in the policy debate, either as initiators (actors undertaking the actions) or as targets (actors addressed by the actions of other actors), reveal only one aspect of the conflict. To fully understand the nature of the conflict in a given policy episode, we need to make refinements both conceptually and in operational terms. First, a relatively small, but nontrivial share of the targeted actions are positive vis-à-vis the target actor, for instance, when actors praise other actors' efforts toward finding a solution to the refugee crisis. Such positively targeted actions reduce the overall level of conflict in a given episode. Second, a large share of targeted actions are coded as "neutral," such as when an actor calls upon another actor to act in a certain way without expressing explicit criticism of them. Third, even those actions that carry a negative attitude toward the target are assigned a negative actor direction code and as such vastly differ in the tone and the substance of the critique vis-à-vis the target. Fourth, among the nontargeted actions, some imply an escalation of the conflict, such as actions to veto or sabotage the policy and its implementation. These considerations taken together point to the need for an indicator that captures both the directionality of actors' action vis-à-vis their targets (positive, negative, or neutral) and the type of actions they undertake.

We utilize our conflict intensity indicator for this purpose. For the present purposes, it suffices to say that conflict intensity is a composite indicator of actor direction (whether actors express a positive, a neutral, or a negative attitude vis-à-vis the target) and the policy action codes (the type of action that the actor undertakes). To illustrate the logic behind combining these two variables, for a given direction code vis-à-vis the target (let's say negative), compare a personal attack to a policy demand: The level of conflict is expected to be higher when an actor launches a personal attack against the target (criticizes, accuses, or denigrates it) than when they merely demand a policy change.

Taking the average level of conflict intensity by episodes reveals that the episodes are broadly comparable, with the indicator in most of the episodes moving within a relatively narrow range between 0.4 and 0.6 on the 0–1 conflict intensity scale. A notable exception is Hungary, with four of the five episodes registering an average conflict intensity score of above 0.6. The Civil Law episode especially stands out for its high level

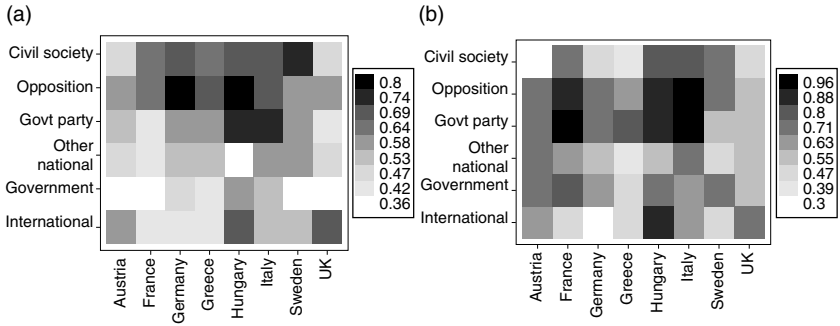


Figure 6.1 Average level of conflict intensity by country and broad actor types as instigators (a) and targets (b)

of conflict (0.8). Ironically, the highest level of conflict intensity in the Civil Law episode (as well as in the very similar “Stop Soros” episode) occurred in a context where the debate had very little to do with the rules regulating the border and the asylum process. On the other end of the spectrum, cases of low conflict intensity cover a group of diverse episodes, such as the Summer of 2015 in Greece, the first Immigration Act in the UK, and two Border Control episodes in France (Ventimiglia and the General Border Closures).

Since our conflict intensity indicator is action-specific, we can calculate the average conflict intensity scores by the initiating actors and the target actors. We illustrate this in Figure 6.1, with darker shades indicating higher average levels of conflict. Note that the color scales on the two heatmaps are not identical because when we restrict observations to targeted actions (Figure 6.1b), the average level of conflict intensity is likely to be higher.

Among the instigators, opposition parties and to a lesser extent civil society groups stand out from the rest, though the cross-country variation is substantial. Opposition parties instigate, on average, the most intense conflicts in Germany and Hungary, while civil society is the most conflictual in Sweden. Among the third broad type of opponents of government policies that we identified above, international actors are comparatively restrained, with the partial exception of Hungary (the relatively high average conflict intensity score for international actors involved in British debates results from very few corresponding observations). The most noteworthy result from this heatmap is the limited role of governments as instigators, arguably because the majority of government actions in the overall sample (58.6 percent) are nontargeted, as governments typically focus on the policies rather than on their opponents in their actions. Again, the partial exception is Hungary, where the

government very often made critical remarks to their opponents. The restraint shown by most governments, however, needs to be somewhat nuanced when we include government parties, which often engaged in conflictual actions not only in Hungary but also in Italy and to a lesser extent Germany, Greece, and Sweden.

Government parties, therefore, often acted as the more militant arm of governments in the debates, as evidenced by the considerably higher average conflict intensity score in the parliamentary arena (0.54), the natural venue for these government party actors, compared to the governmental arena (0.41).

This difference between government parties and national governments is mirrored in the conflict intensity patterns by target actors. Though the average conflict intensity score among actions aimed at governments is considerably higher compared to actions instigated by governments, when government parties are targeted by their opponents, the average level of conflict tends to be even higher. Most importantly, however, actions aimed at opposition parties proved to be, yet again, the center of the conflict, with average conflict intensity scores above 0.8 in France, Italy, and Hungary. Civil society actors, by contrast, are largely spared as targets; their contributions to the overall level of conflict reside rather in their role as instigators. A partial exception from this pattern are Hungary and Italy, where civil society groups provided popular scapegoats for right-wing government officials because of their alleged role in helping asylum seekers reach the national territory. Finally, both as instigators and as targets, international actors tend to elicit relatively limited conflict intensity. The notable exception, yet again, is Hungary, where EU institutions – or in the case of the Fence Building episode, neighboring governments – often served as the prime target in the debates.

Conflict Lines and Their Correlates

Having outlined the main actors involved in the policy debate across the forty episodes as well as the average intensity of the conflict in each episode corresponding to our broad actor categories, we now return to the task set out in the introduction and identify the main conflict lines that prevail in each episode. To speak of conflict lines, it is imperative to restrict our PPA dataset to the subset of observations where target actors can be identified. As a first step, we rely on the same broad actor categories that we used up to this point – international actors, national governments, government parties, opposition parties, and civil society actors both on the initiator and on the target sides. We exclude other national actors (state institutions and local/regional authorities) from our analysis

because of their relatively marginal role in the conflict, as evidenced by [Figure 6.1](#). Theoretically, there are ten actor pairs involving two of the five actor types. However, we consider only the subset of conflict lines where the government is one of the actors. Moreover, we treat governments and government parties as the same actor at first – a restriction we drop later on in order to identify specific subtypes of intragovernmental conflicts.

The first step toward identifying conflict lines consists of calculating the share of targeted actions for each relevant pair. For example, we can calculate the share of all targeted actions in an episode involving the government and opposition parties. The measurement is symmetrical in the sense that governments targeting the opposition and the opposition targeting the government contribute equally to the strength of this conflict line. The second step in the measurement concerns the intensity of the actor pair-specific conflict, which we measure by the average conflict intensity score among the actions that involve a given actor pair. For each relevant actor pair, we then take the product of these two elements – the share of actor pair-specific targeted actions in all targeted actions and the average conflict intensity score of these actor pair-specific targeted actions. The product ranges from 0 (when either no actor pair-specific targeted action occurs in the episode or all the actor pair-specific targeted actions are of minimum conflict intensity) to 1 (when all the targeted actions are undertaken by the same actor pair and all these targeted actions are of maximum conflict intensity). We call this product the actor pair-specific conflict score.

Below, we concentrate on those pairs where one of the actors is the government. We also calculated the conflict scores for pairs not including the government, but these scores turned out to be considerably lower compared to the pairs involving the government. This is hardly surprising, given that targeted actions between civil society, opposition, international actors, and state and regional institutions are quite rare compared to actions where one of the actors is the government.

A quick look at [Figure 6.2](#) reveals that the average strength of the four conflict lines differs considerably. Whereas the partisan and the societal conflict lines are present in almost all of the episodes, this cannot be said for the other two types of conflicts: intragovernmental and international. Especially intragovernmental conflicts appear to be the exception rather than the rule: Only in a quarter of the episodes does their strength exceed 0.1, and in another quarter of the episodes, there is no such conflict to speak of whatsoever. By contrast, only two of the forty episodes register a zero score for the partisan conflict line, and three of the forty episodes register a zero score for the societal conflict line. The average strength of

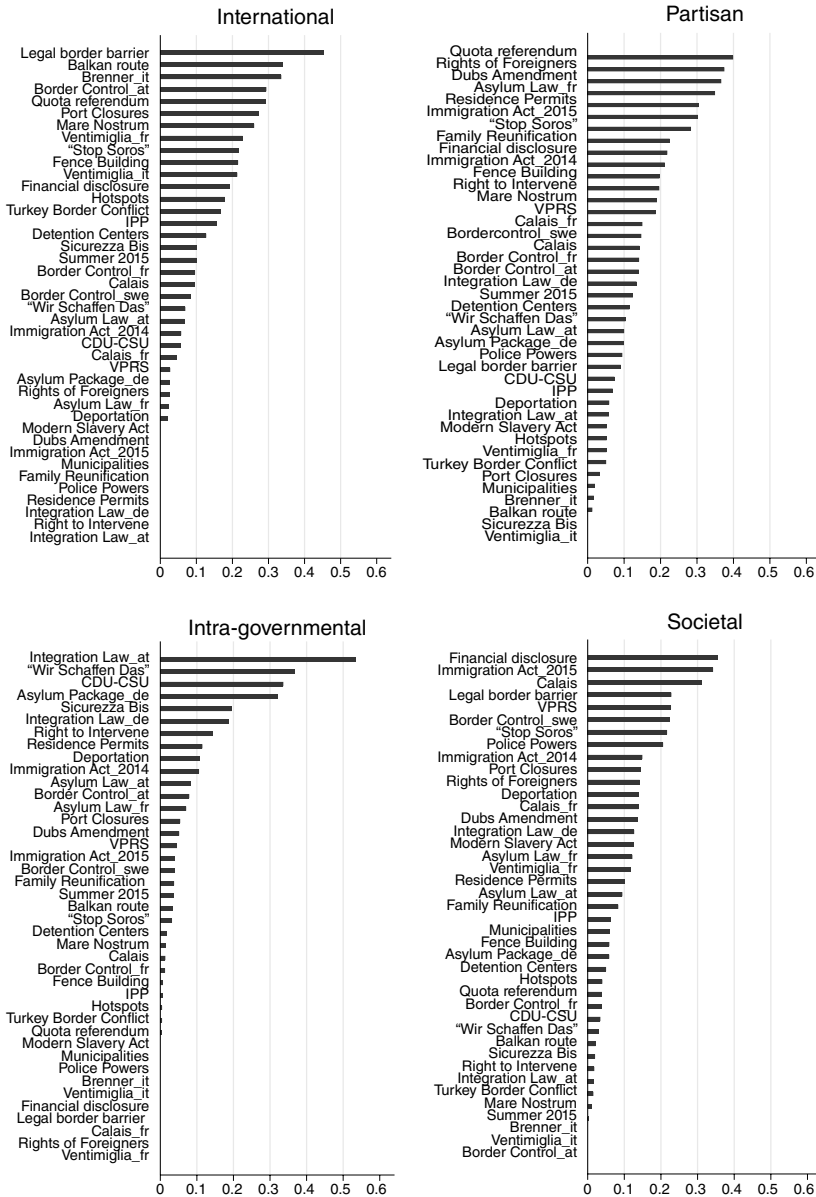


Figure 6.2 Conflict scores for the four dominant conflict lines in the policy episodes

the four conflict lines corroborates these differences. The average scores are 0.14 for partisan, 0.12 for international, 0.10 for societal, and 0.08 for intragovernmental conflicts. This provides some tentative evidence for our initial expectations that partisan conflicts are the most likely venue for conflicts in refugee-related policy episodes.

With the episodes ordered according to the size of the respective conflict score, some of the ideal typical episodes in terms of the conflict lines can be identified. Thus, the Legal Border Barrier Amendment in Hungary stands out as an example for a conflict between the government and international actors. With respect to the conflict between the government and its partisan opposition, there is a more even distribution of episodes at the top, with the Hungarian quota referendum, the Rights of Foreigners Bill in France, and the Dubs Amendment in the UK involving the most intense partisan conflicts. Comparatively speaking, as we noted above, many fewer episodes register high conflict scores between government actors themselves. The Austrian Integration Law episode is a clear outlier here, and three of the five German episodes (“Wir Schaffen Das,” the CDU-CSU Conflict, and the Asylum Package) follow in second, third, and fourth place, respectively. Finally, three episodes stand out for their relatively intense conflict between governments and civil society actors: The Civil Law episode in Hungary, the second Immigration Act in the UK, and the Calais border conflict (on the British side).

Beneath these broad-brush characterizations of conflict lines, however, there are important nuances. For three of the four types of conflicts, we further distinguish between two subtypes each. Within international conflicts, the main conflict line can be either between the national government and EU authorities or between the national government and other governments. For partisan conflicts, the bulk of the opposition can come either from mainstream or from radical opposition parties. For intragovernmental conflicts, the main conflict can take place either between coalition partners in the case of coalition governments, or within the government (or the senior ruling party) itself. We shall call the former type coalition splits and the latter type government splits. We do not further distinguish between societal conflicts, partly because we consider it to be of secondary importance which type of civil society organization the main source of opposition is coming from. With this second-level splitting, we thus end up with seven subtypes within the four main types we have previously identified. [Table 6.3](#) allocates each episode according to the prevailing conflict. For the identification of the subtypes, we simply reproduce the conflict scores for the subtypes and allocate the episodes depending on which subtype-specific conflict score is greater.

Table 6.3 *The dominant conflict line across the refugee episodes*

Dominant conflict type	International conflict		Partisan conflict		Intragovernmental conflict		Societal conflict
Subtype	Government–EU	Transnational	Main opposition	Radical opposition	Coalition split	Government split	Societal conflict
Italy	Mare Nostrum	Ventimiglia Brenner Port Closures				Sicurezza Bis	
Greece	Hotspots Detention Centers	IPP Turkish border	Summer 2005				
Hungary	Legal border barrier	Fence Building	Quota referendum “Stop Soros”				Civil Law
Austria		Border Controls Balkan Route	Asylum Law	Right to Intervene		Integration Law	
France		Ventimiglia	Asylum Law Rights of Foreigners	Border Controls Calais			
The UK			Immigration Act of 2014 Dubs Amendment				Immigration Act 2016 VPRS Calais
Germany					Integration Law	“Wir Schaffen Das” Asylum Package CDU-CSU	Deportation
Sweden		Family Reunification (12/2018–7/2020)	Residence Permits Family Reunification				Border Control Police Powers Municipalities

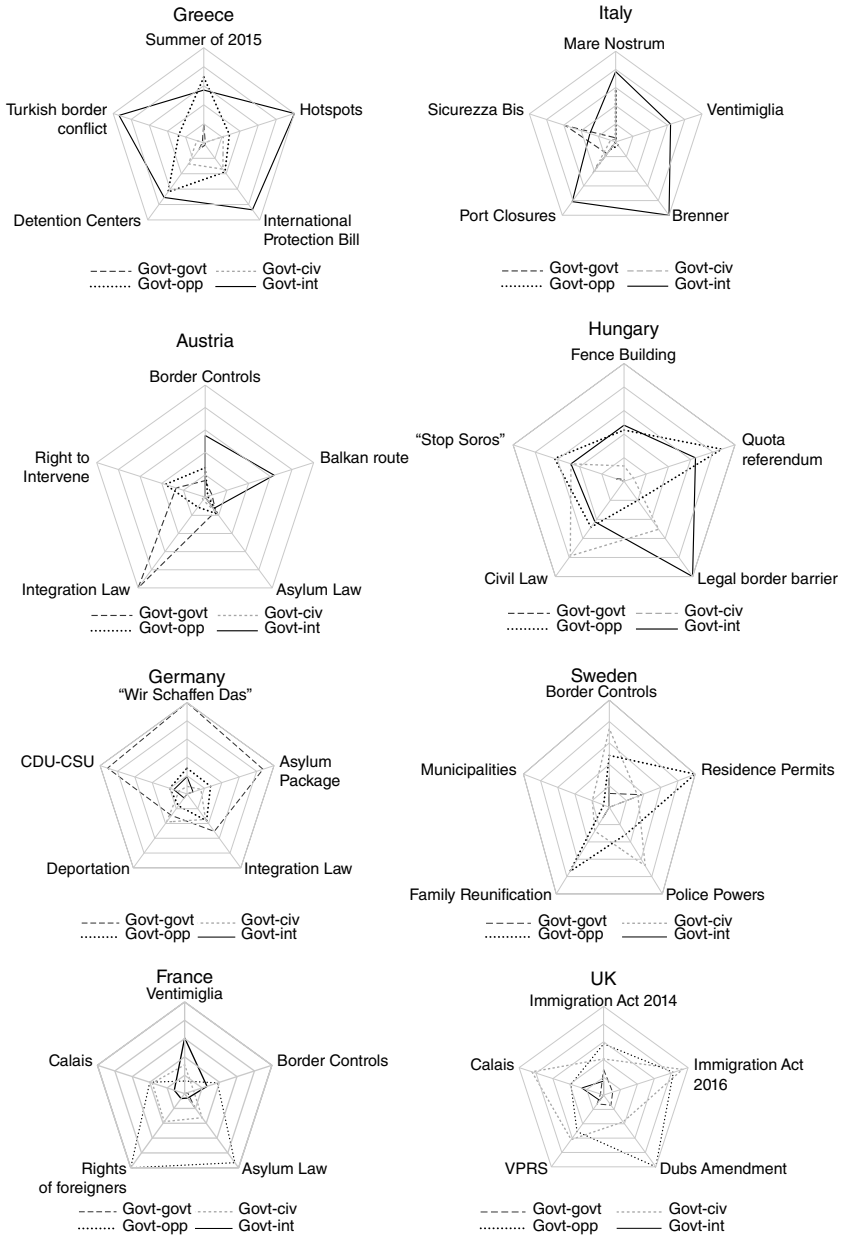


Figure 6.3 Relative strength of conflict lines in policy episodes (by country type: frontline states, transit states, open destination states, closed destination states)

Examining the dominant type of conflicts across countries and policy episodes, some interesting patterns emerge. Thus, in line with our expectations, international conflicts are mostly limited to frontline and transit states. Partisan conflicts dominate in at least one episode in six of the eight countries, but they are absent from Germany and Italy. Most partisan conflicts take place between the government and the mainstream opposition, suggesting that strategic behavior by mainstream opposition parties often succeeds in sidelining challenger parties from the debates. That said, in Austria and France, where two of the largest and most established radical right populist parties in the EU are key actors in the party-political space, three episodes are dominated by the conflict between the government and the challenger opposition (the FPÖ and the National Rally). Interestingly, most of the intragovernmental conflicts (five of the six episodes) are characterized by splits within the government, strictly understood, or between the senior government party and the government. There is only one episode (the Integration Law episode in Germany) that is dominated by a coalition split between the ruling parties. However, it must be noted that allocating the episodes within the intragovernmental category is highly sensitive to coding decisions (e.g., whether the government position or the party position enjoys precedence when coding individual actors). Finally, with one exception, government–civil society conflicts are restricted to destination states. The only exception is the Civil Law episode in Hungary, where civil society groups were explicitly targeted by the government.

The disadvantage of treating episodes as belonging to one but only one conflict type is that we neglect possible secondary conflicts that may have strength that is comparable to the dominant conflict. To take the full configuration of country-specific conflicts into account, we present a series of country-specific radar plots (Figure 6.3) with episodes in the angles of the outer pentagons and the four rectangles showing the episode-specific conflict scores for each type of conflict. Starting with the frontline countries, the dominance of the international conflict line is clearly visible and is represented by the large area carved out by the black rectangles. In Greece, this international conflict primarily stems from the relatively important role of the European Commission in the debate and from the frequent exchanges between Greek authorities and foreign governments (mostly Germany and Turkey). In Italy, the international dimension of the conflict is primarily driven by Italian authorities interacting with neighboring governments (France and Austria) during the border conflicts at Ventimiglia and the Brenner Pass. In addition to this international dimension, a relatively large secondary conflict (government–opposition) is visible in Greece, whereas secondary conflicts

appear only in individual episodes in Italy (e.g., the intragovernmental conflict in the case of the *Sicurezza Bis* episode).

In the case of the two transit states, Hungary has three dominant conflict lines that are comparable in size; the international conflict line is the strongest overall, and the partisan and societal conflict lines are close seconds. In the international dimension, the European Commission and the European Parliament emerged as the Orbán government's most vocal critics, whereas foreign governments contributed to the conflict mostly during the Fence Building episode. Within the partisan conflict line, the left liberal mainstream opposition played a much more prominent role than the right-wing challenger party, Jobbik. The societal conflict was largely driven by civil society groups that the government directly targeted in two of the five episodes (Civil Law and "Stop Soros"). By contrast, the intragovernmental conflict line is almost completely absent, due to the highly cohesive nature of the Fidesz-led government.

The strongest conflict line that emerges in Austria is the intragovernmental one, but it is heavily driven by a single episode, the Integration Law. During this episode, the national government and both members of the grand coalition (SPO and OVP) regularly engaged in verbal exchanges that were predominantly critical, accounting for around a quarter of all actions in the episode. In addition to these intragovernmental debates, the international conflict line (with EU institutions as well as with Germany and Balkan route countries) emerged as a secondary conflict, with partisan conflicts and societal conflicts lagging far behind.

Destination states show great variation in their conflict patterns. Germany is a paradigmatic case of the intragovernmental conflict, with a pattern similar to the Austrian Integration Law episode, except that this type of conflict persists throughout all five German episodes (around a third of all coded actions involve some sort of intragovernmental exchange). All components of the government triangle – the national government, the senior coalition member (CDU-CSU), and the junior coalition partner (SPD) – contribute to this conflict in roughly equal proportions. The other three conflict lines pale in comparison to this intragovernmental standoff in the German case. Sweden, by contrast, has a more balanced conflict configuration, with the partisan conflict playing the most prominent role and the center right opposition leading the attack against the center left government, occasionally complemented by exchanges with the challenger left (The Left Party) and the challenger right (Swedish Democrats). A secondary conflict line in Sweden is the one between the government and civil society, which unlike in the Hungarian case, largely involves media actors and other influential individuals in society.

In France, the partisan conflict is the dominant conflict line, with two important caveats, however. First, only a relatively low share of all actions (27.4 percent) are targeted, so the overall policy debate has a comparatively subdued level of conflict with the second lowest average conflict intensity among the eight countries (0.47). Second, the high partisan conflict score is driven by two of the five episodes: the Asylum Law and the Right of Foreigners Bill. During these two episodes, the mainstream opposition and radical challengers both from the left and the right contributed roughly equally to the partisan conflict. Finally, in the UK, there is a rough balance between the partisan and the societal conflicts, with the other two conflict lines largely absent. Within the partisan conflict in the UK, the opposition Labour Party led the attacks on the Conservative–Liberal Democratic coalition (later on, the single-party Conservative government), while the societal conflict was largely driven by various NGO groups (and to a lesser extent, religious figures from the Anglican Church) voicing their humanitarian concerns about the plight of asylum seekers in the restrictive policy environment of the UK.

Correlates of Conflict Lines

Having outlined the main conflict lines in the eight countries, we are now well placed to investigate systematic differences between these conflict lines in terms of the substantive scope of the episodes and the underlying political context. To briefly recall the expectations that we derived in the introductory section, we shall examine whether conflict lines systematically covary with the types of policy episodes, the underlying problem and political pressures, and the levels of politicization and average support behind the governments' policies. Given the limited number of cases, we are unable to offer a rigorous statistical analysis across the episodes to answer these questions, but a descriptive summary provides some tentative answers nonetheless.

First, we investigate whether the substantive scope of the episodes offers any cues to the kind of conflict line that is most likely to emerge. We distinguish between the four types of episodes that we introduced in [Chapter 4](#): border measures, changes in asylum rules, burden sharing episodes, and integration/return measures. It is readily apparent from [Table 6.4](#) that international conflicts, unsurprisingly, are heavily concentrated among the border measures: All but one of the thirteen international conflicts correspond to this episode type. The other most common type of conflict, partisan conflicts, are more evenly distributed across the episode types, with the exception of integration and return episodes, all four of which triggered either societal or intragovernmental conflicts.

Table 6.4 *The distribution of dominant conflict lines by types of episodes (frequencies and column percentages)*

Type of episode	Dominant conflict type				Total
	International	Partisan	Societal	Intragovernmental	
Border episodes (%)	92.3	38.4	33.3	50.0	56.1
Asylum rules (%)	0.0	23.1	22.2	0.0	12.2
Burden sharing (%)	7.7	38.5	22.2	16.7	22.0
Integration/return (%)	0.0	0.0	22.2	33.3	9.8
Total <i>n</i>	13	13	9	6	41
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

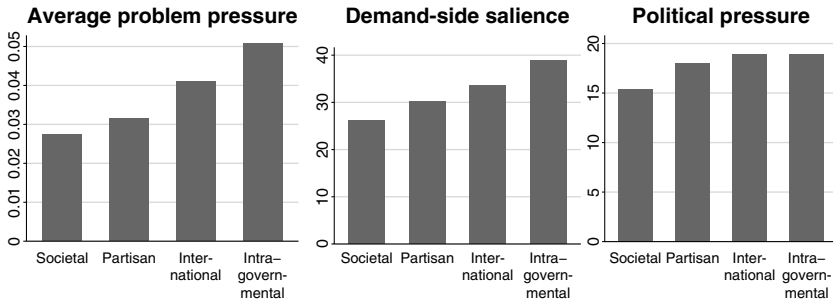


Figure 6.4 Problem pressure, demand-side salience, and political pressure by conflict type

While societal conflicts are evenly distributed among the episode types, none of the intragovernmental conflicts revolved around changes in asylum rules.

Turning to the demand-side correlates of conflict lines (Figure 6.4), problem pressure and demand-side salience appear to systematically differ between conflict types, whereas political pressure differs less. Intragovernmental conflicts stand out both in terms of problem pressure and salience from the rest, which is in line with our expectations. Though one has to interpret this with great caution because there are only six intragovernmental conflicts and they occur in only three countries, it appears that in contexts of high migration pressure and heightened public scrutiny, government actors are more likely to engage in

public debate, crowding out other sources of conflict. Societal and partisan conflicts, on the other hand, tend to occur in contexts of significantly lower problem pressure and public salience, whereas international conflicts tend to occur at moderate levels in both dimensions. No such differences can be discerned with regard to political pressure, however, as all four types of conflicts tend to occur in roughly comparable political contexts as far as the strength of the radical right is concerned. A partial exception is societal conflicts in which the radical right seems somewhat weaker (by around 3 percentage points) compared to the rest.

Compared to the political and migration context, there are considerably greater differences in the nature of the debate that the different conflict lines trigger. We focus on two elements of the debate that we have introduced in earlier chapters: politicization and average levels of support behind governments. On the left chart of Figure 6.5, we show the average level of politicization by conflict types, while on the right chart, we show the average level of support that the government received for their proposed policies. In both dimensions, international conflicts stand out from the rest with more than double the level of politicization and support behind governments compared to the other conflict types. The involvement of international actors thus seems to simultaneously lead to higher levels of politicization and to higher level of support that the government can expect. Our tentative explanation for this, as we laid out earlier, is that international conflicts tend to draw in a

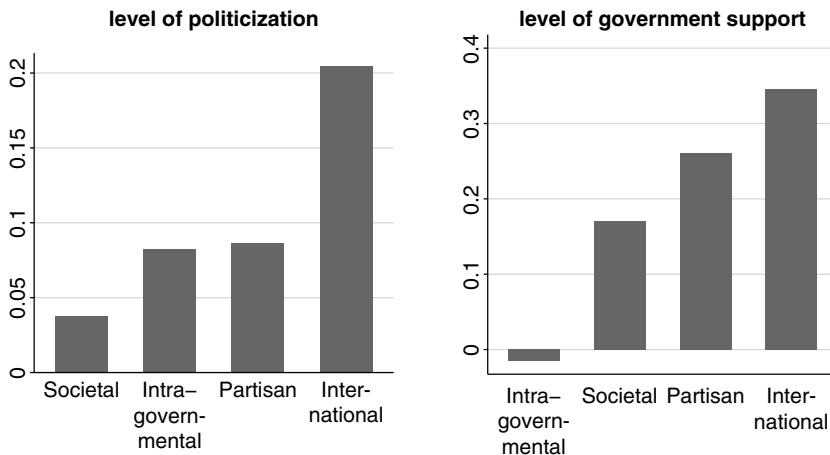


Figure 6.5 Average levels of politicization and support behind government policies across the policy episodes

broader group of participants, thus increasing politicization, but at the same time, they tend to mute criticism from domestic opponents in the face of an international challenge. On the other end of the spectrum, societal conflicts tend to score low in politicization, while intragovernmental conflicts uniquely register a negative average level of government support. It appears, therefore, that as parts of the government (coalition partners, individual ministers, parliamentary wings of ruling parties, etc.) turn against the government proposal, they swell the ranks of critical voices, thus lowering the average level of government support. The low level of politicization in societal conflicts in turn is arguably the result of civil society actors' institutional constraints and limited capacity to keep the debate on the agenda for an extended period of time and to draw in a wider array of actors in the debate.

Conflict Lines in Detail

International Conflict: Legal Border Barrier Amendment in Hungary

The episode that best illustrates the type of international conflicts that occurred during the management of the refugee crisis unfolded in the spring of 2017 in Hungary. After a series of fence construction drives and a set of legal measures to hinder illegal crossings mostly across the Serbian and to a lesser extent the Croatian and the Slovenian borders, the Orbán government tightened the screws further by opening the way to the forced detainment of refugees and their confinement in metal containers under abject humanitarian conditions. This episode, while comparatively short and low in action count, constitutes a perfect example of an international conflict as the Hungarian government found itself in opposition to multiple sources of external contestation: EU institutions, the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, the UN, and other supranational institutions. Contrary to the Fence Building episode in the summer and autumn of 2015, there was no involvement of neighboring governments in the policy debate this time, arguably because they had come around to acquiesce to the sealed Hungarian borders as a *fait accompli*.

The exchanges between the Hungarian government and EU- and supranational institutions, however, were intense and conflict-ridden. Overall, the episode registers by far the highest conflict score on the international dimension (0.45 versus a sample average of 0.12). In fact, more than 40 percent of all actions in the episode involved exchanges between the Hungarian government and these international actors, and a majority of these actions carried a critical attitude toward the target

actor. The directionality of these exchanges was rather lopsided, with the Hungarian government being the most common initiator (71.1 percent of the time) with the EU or EU institutions being the most common targets (60.5 percent of all such government–international exchanges).

On the Hungarian side, many of the attacks on European institutions and officials came from the highest circle and involved Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his closest entourage. In fact, Orbán himself undertook the very first action in this episode in February 2017: While defending the proposed detention plans, he criticized Brussels in an interview as being aloof to the “bloody reality” in Europe stemming from illegal migration. His criticism was later echoed by his chief security adviser, who accused the EU of double standards and a failure to appreciate the importance of protecting external borders. Other ministers, including the foreign minister and the justice minister, joined the fray with the common underlying narrative that while Hungary was protecting Europe, the EU had failed to live up to its responsibilities in the domain of border protection.

Other fronts of the offensive involved particular EU institutions and officials. In late March, the chief security adviser expressed “puzzlement” over a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights related to the transfer of unaccompanied minors from their care facility. Later in March, the prime minister’s office criticized the European Commission for its lack of flexibility and compromise on the issue of DNA testing of unaccompanied minors to verify their age. Simultaneously, attacks were launched on actors from the European Parliament (specifically, the Socialist Group) for passing a resolution against Hungary, which Janos Lazar, a prominent cabinet member, shrugged off as a “left-wing political provocation.” The most popular boogeyman among these offensives, however, turned out to be Judith Sargentini, a Green MEP from the Netherlands, for her role in getting another critical resolution passed by the European Parliament in 2018. In this later phase of the episode, the conflict was more sporadic but no less intense in its tone. For example, in September 2018, Gergely Gulyas, minister of the prime minister’s office, dismissed the Sargentini Report in parliament as a “false immigration indictment and slander.”

Comparatively speaking, the attacks on Hungary by EU- and supra-national actors were more measured in tone but equally critical in substance. In late March 2017, the Council of Europe (CoE) called on Hungary to review its new migration law because it carried the risk of subjecting minors to sexual exploitation. A month later, it accused Hungarian authorities of being unable to differentiate between victims of human trafficking among illegal asylum seekers and refugees. Among

EU actors, it was mostly the European Parliament and left-wing parties and MEPs within (including Sargentini herself) who led the wave of critical voices against Hungarian authorities because of the humanitarian conditions reigning in the transit zones after the legal changes. The European Commission also contributed to the conflict, however, via two critical interventions by Dimitris Avramopolou, the migration commissioner, in the spring of 2017. All in all, however, these critical remarks mostly concerned the specific provisions of the law and practices by the coercive authorities, in contrast to the much broader and personal critiques articulated by Hungarian officials. The conflict was therefore rather one sided both in terms of the scale of the attacks and in terms of its substance, with the Hungarian government clearly in the initiating seat. Moreover, compared to the international aspect of the conflict that we have outlined above, critical exchanges with the opposition and civil society were few and far between.

Partisan Conflict: Rights of Foreigners Bill in France

Compared to the Hungarian border episode discussed above, the Rights of Foreigners bill in France was only moderately conflictual, with an average conflict intensity score of 0.45. Moreover, in line with the demand-side and supply-side correlates we have shown above, it occurred in a context of low problem pressure (stemming from France's role as a closed destination country), moderate demand-side salience (it ended before the Bataclan and the Nice terror attacks shocked French political life), and low politicization. Only in political pressure did the episode score above the sample average, mostly due to the continuously high level of political support enjoyed by the right-wing challenger National Rally in the run-up to the refugee crisis when this episode was on the political agenda (2013–15).

In its substance, this episode concerns two legislative changes initiated by the center left Holland government: an asylum reform to reduce the processing period of asylum applications from 24 to 9 months and an immigration law involving the creation of a multiyear residence permit so that foreigners could avoid having to go to the prefecture every year to renew their residence permits. Its duration was accordingly rather long, spanning two and a half years between the summer of 2013 and November 2015.

Two features of the French political context provided fertile grounds for partisan conflict. First, the two legal changes were initiated by a center left government that quickly found itself in a partisan cross-fire between the left (left-wing challenger parties) and the right-wing opposition (the

Republicans as the mainstream opposition and the National Rally as the right-wing challenger opposition). In this particular policy debate, however, the National Rally played a secondary role, and the main conflict line was mostly between the government and the Republicans, and to a more limited extent, between the government and left-wing challenger parties, such as the Parti Radical de Gauche and the New Anti-Capitalist Party led by the self-proclaimed Trotskyite Olivier Besancenot. Second, the bicameral French legislative process ensured that the government would be exposed to partisan attacks at two separate legislative readings for each of the two reforms: first at the Assembly and second at the Senate.

The bulk of the conflict originated from opposition parties targeting the government. The left-wing challengers emphasized principles of individual liberty and humanitarian considerations. For instance, Olivier Besancenot criticized the government for racist and xenophobic practices upon the evacuation of a migrant camp in Paris. Meanwhile, the mainstream opposition emphasized concerns related to illegal migration and accused the government that its legal proposals did not go far enough, especially with regards to the second bill on foreigners' rights. During the debate on the first bill, Eric Ciotti from the Republicans expressed broad agreement with the principle of reducing the application time for asylum claims but claimed that "if it serves to receive more people, it is not certain that the French people like this policy." Les Républicains continued their opposition throughout the parliamentary readings of the second bill. A group of MPs from the Republicans criticized Bernard Cazeneuve, the interior minister standing behind the proposals, in a National Assembly debate, claiming that the text is "contrary to the national interest."

In response, the government, mostly represented by Cazeneuve, also turned its attention to the right-wing opposition in general and to former president Sarkozy, an old-new presidential hopeful at the time, in particular. In the early stages of the debate in 2014, he claimed in an op-ed article that the former president was still struggling with "his old demons" on immigration, "scorning the facts" by "demagogy." Later, on the sidelines of a study day on asylum reform organized by the National Federation of Associations for Reception and Social Reintegration (FNARS) in September 2015, he took aim at Sarkozy's hardliner proposals once again, claiming that "refugee status is not divisible, it is one and indivisible like the Republic." Overall, however, despite the government's best efforts to defend its initiatives against attacks from both the left and the right, it struggled to escape from this partisan cross-fire in a context of sagging popularity at the polls. Its only solace was the fact

that neither international actors nor civil society actors were particularly vocal in this episode and could not match the critical voice of the parliamentary opposition. Also, the government managed to maintain a semblance of unity in the public eye, presenting a united front against the opposition in the midst of this partisan conflict.

Societal Conflict: Immigration Act 2016 in the UK

The 2016 Immigration Act in the UK, the second set of reforms to the British asylum system within two years, scores the second highest on the societal conflict dimension, just behind the Civil Law episode in Hungary. However, given the fact that this episode is a comprehensive reform package rather than a direct and targeted assault on civil society, we consider it more interesting than the Civil Law episode for the illustration of societal conflicts in the context of refugee crisis management.

In terms of the demand-side and supply-side correlates, the conflict took place in an environment of low problem pressure (the UK had to deal with one of the lowest average levels of monthly claims relative to its population), low political pressure (although UKIP was polling strongly in the period before the Brexit referendum, it had not reached its peak yet and did not even come close to the electoral strength of right-wing challengers elsewhere, such as France and Austria), and moderate demand-side salience of immigration. The episode was not particularly politicized (its average politicization score is well below the sample average), and the government received a low level of average support for its initiative. Though the government itself stayed largely united throughout, both the parliamentary opposition and civil society actors took a resolutely hostile and critical stance toward the proposal. However, the intensity of the conflict with civil society was higher, not least because the leader of the parliamentary opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, tried to strike a cautious tone in his criticism of the bill, fearing an exodus of Labour voters to UKIP.

The conflict between the government and civil society was entirely unidirectional, with all such exchanges being initiated by civil society and targeting the government. Being shut out of the institutional venues for voicing their opposition, these civil society actors communicated via the media and collected numerous petitions against the government. Different groups, often in coordination with each other, focused on different aspects of the bill. Some of the criticism from media actors and landlord organizations concerned the Right to Rent scheme and the expected discrimination that tenants would face as a

result. The social workers' union demanded appropriate funding of specialist social and health care support for refugees and asylum seekers, accusing the government of turning a blind eye to children in particular. Business leaders accused the government of "taxing talent" in relation to the visa levy for companies employing foreign workers. The Scottish Refugee Council emphasized issues of regional competences and institutional prerogatives, accusing the government of treating devolved administrations as "second class" because of its attempt to circumvent the Scottish parliament in key areas of housing, child protection, and licensing.

Ultimately, none of the criticism against the government proved particularly effective, perhaps because of the cautious and restrained attitude of the parliamentary opposition; the lack of involvement of international actors; and the general honeymoon period that David Cameron's single-party government enjoyed at the time, just a few months after its reelection in May 2015. Nevertheless, the episode illustrates the potential vulnerability of governments to societal conflicts in complex policy episodes that touch upon a multitude of issues, drawing a large number of stakeholders and opponents into the debate.

Intragovernmental Conflict: "Wir Schaffen Das" in Germany

When on the eve of September 4 German chancellor Angela Merkel made the fateful decision to suspend the Dublin regulation and leave the southern border with Austria open to Syrian refugees traveling to Germany via transit countries, she made one of the most controversial policy decisions during the whole refugee crisis, splitting German society (and the wider European public for that matter) to its core. One of most unique features of this episode – "Wir Schaffen Das" – for the purposes of this chapter is the main locus of conflict being within the government, as opposed to the international, partisan, and societal conflict lines we have presented above. This intragovernmental conflict pitted three main actors against each other: the national government; the grand coalition partner (SPD); and perhaps most importantly, the Bavarian sister party of Merkel's CDU, the CSU. Most prominently, Horst Seehofer, leader of the CSU and Merkel's most influential critic, proved to be the protagonist in this conflict line both as initiating actor and as a target of his opponents, including Merkel herself.

The episode took place in the very center of the refugee crisis, both in terms of space (Germany received the highest number of asylum claims in absolute terms) and in time (autumn 2015, the peak of the crisis). Accordingly, the conflict was met with high problem pressure

and demand-side salience. Political pressure, on the other hand, was comparatively low because the right-wing challenger party AFD would begin its steady rise in the polls only after this episode. Though politicization remained moderate, the government nevertheless received the lowest level of support for its policies (-0.21) among all the episodes, a general feature of such intragovernmental conflicts.

Zooming in on the intragovernmental triangle, the most common initiator of these exchanges is the senior ruling party (mostly the CSU, represented by Seehofer, and to a lesser extent the CDU), accounting for 47.1 percent of such exchanges, with the junior member in the grand coalition, the SPD, in second place (33.8 percent) and the national government accounting for a mere 19.1 percent. On the target side, however, the government found itself in the center of the attacks, accounting for 72.1 percent of all targeted actions, with the senior ruling party (again, mostly the CSU) in second place. The SPD, on the other hand, was largely spared attacks in this intragovernmental conflict, with only a single action targeted against it.

The role of Seehofer in the conflict deserves special attention. He engaged in critical action against the government no fewer than ten times, with all of these actions being targeted at Merkel personally. He first personally entered the debate after a successful petition by CDU-CSU members to reintroduce border controls at the Austrian border, with the important caveat that refugees would still be allowed to enter the country upon registration. On the day of the closure (September 14), he criticized Merkel in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, calling her earlier decision to open the border “a mistake that will haunt us for a long time to come.” He continued his attacks in October, claiming that “a new order and new content [were] necessary at a government-level.” This statement was interpreted by many as a *de facto* vote of no confidence in the chancellor. Later that month, he went further by threatening to issue a complaint of unconstitutionality against the federal government, followed by an ultimatum targeting Merkel that pressured her to slow down the flow of refugees. It was not just Seehofer, however, who contributed to the conflict from the CSU’s side. Other prominent names included Edmund Stoiber, a previous Bavarian premier and chancellor candidate; Thomas Holz; and Michael Müller.

The government and its CDU allies tried to hold the ground in the midst of these attacks. First, Merkel simply tried to dismiss Seehofer’s critiques, sticking to her line on humanitarian grounds. Later, she sharpened her tone and engaged in public dialogue with him. For instance, in response to Seehofer’s threat of issuing a complaint of unconstitutionality, she rebuked him with a public letter, claiming his “accusations

are invalid.” In mid-October, one of her closest allies in the CDU who would become a chancellor-hopeful for a brief period of time later on, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, rushed to Merkel’s defence in a thinly veiled attack on Seehofer in an interview. She stated that “as politicians it is not our responsibility to fuel fears, but to devise solutions for impending problems.”

During the conflict between Seehofer and Merkel, the junior coalition partner, the SPD, took a cautious stance on Merkel’s side. Their critical remarks were mostly aimed at Seehofer instead. In the early stages of the episode, Dieter Reiter, the SPD mayor of Munich, explicitly endorsed Merkel’s “Wir Schaffen Das” idea. Upon the reintroduction of border controls, SPD secretary general Yasmin Fahimi harshly criticized Seehofer for inviting Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán for a meeting, in what she described as a “stab in the back of Merkel.” The chairwoman of the Young Socialists in the SPD (Jusos), Johanna Uekermann, went even further and recommended that the CSU consider leaving the coalition government. That said, the SPD’s attitude toward the government was hardly without a critical undertone. Reiter criticized the interior minister, Thomas de Maizière, claiming that “the humane and dignified treatment of hundreds of thousands of refugees arriving in Germany is a national task, and so far Berlin has not risen to the challenge.” Minister President Malu Dreyer from Rheinland-Pfalz reiterated the SPD’s support for Merkel’s “Wir Schaffen Das” but at the same time criticized the chancellor in an interview for failing to maintain discipline in the coalition. The SPD’s rhetorical strategy illustrates, among other things, that nongovernment actors can contribute to the conflict even if they are in agreement with the policy initiative in substance.

All in all, the “Wir Schaffen Das” episode was a paradigmatic example of an intragovernmental conflict with multiple actors stuck in a tug-of-war in a situation of high problem pressure and public salience. Ultimately, Merkel would emerge from this conflict politically weakened, paving the way for the AFD to emerge as a strong right-wing challenger party in the German political scene.

Conclusion

As we have shown in this chapter, the domestic responses to the refugee crisis in the period between 2013 and 2020 exposed vastly different conflict lines running through European societies. In particular, we argued that the integration–demarcation cleavage that rose to prominence in the context of the refugee crisis triggered four types of conflicts throughout the policy debates. The two most common types of conflicts

were partisan conflicts on the one hand and international conflicts on the other. In international conflicts, national governments found themselves in opposition to EU actors, foreign governments, and/or other supranational institutions such as the UN. Such conflicts were almost the exclusive remit of Border Control episodes. Partisan conflicts, on the other hand, covered a more diverse set of episode types. In these episodes, mainstream opposition parties emerged as the most common adversaries of national governments, though on occasion they were aided by the challenger opposition both from the left and especially from the right. However, in particular cases as we have shown via the example of the Rights of Foreigners Bill in France, the left-wing challengers were somewhat more active in the debate than the National Rally, though all challenger parties paled in comparison to the mainstream opposition's (The Republicans) contribution to the conflict.

Comparatively speaking, societal and intragovernmental conflicts were fewer. Societal conflicts are characterized by a stand-off between governments and civil society groups that comprise a wide array of different actors, such as NGOs, experts and academics, unions, religious institutions, or groups of migrants themselves. In our policy episodes, NGOs proved to be the most common type of such civil society actors, and our brief summary of the 2016 Immigration Act in the UK has revealed the type of civil society organizations that played the central role in this societal conflict line. Finally, the intragovernmental conflicts are the fewest but arguably the most intense, as is evidenced by the low level of support that governments received for their policies in their wake as well as the high levels of problem pressure and public salience that tend to accompany them. These conflicts mostly occurred in Germany and to some extent in Austria and Italy. Via our summary of this type of conflict taking place in the context of the "Wir Schaffen Das" episode in Germany, we have shown that this conflict can occur via multiple channels: either between the coalition partners (coalition splits) or within the government (and within the senior ruling party). In the "Wir Schaffen Das" episode, both of these channels were present, but in other episodes, one of the two is likely to dominate. We shall further elaborate on the details of such conflicts in [Chapter 7](#) of this volume.

Though we have adopted a stylized categorization of episodes in terms of the dominant conflict line that prevails in each, in reality, many of the episodes were driven by multiple conflicts that simultaneously unfolded in them. Hungary, the country that stands out for its high level of overall conflict intensity, is the paradigmatic case for such parallel conflicts with three of the four conflict lines – the international, the partisan, and the societal – at comparable strength. These parallel conflict lines are

perhaps the most important feature of the refugee crisis at the domestic level. In contrast to the EU-level conflicts that largely unfolded between member states and EU institutions, as we shall show in the [next chapter](#), the domestic debates revealed a much more complex reality with a diverse set of actors involved. Throughout the refugee crisis, governments were trapped in a two-level game, with their bargaining power in the European arena conditioned by the type and the intensity of conflict they faced from domestic stakeholders – with the fate of the millions of refugees making their way to the EU in the balance.

Introduction

In this chapter, we present the actors and conflicts at the EU level. The study of these aspects of the crisis management includes the analysis of the actors and conflict configurations in the different episodes as well as the politicization of the episodes. We begin by introducing expectations about the actors and conflict structures at the EU level, which reiterate some considerations we have already introduced in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#). Next, we proceed to presenting the actor distributions and conflict structures in the six EU-level episodes. In a third step, we show how the various episodes have been politicized by the different actors and adversarial camps that we identified previously, overall and in the two key phases of the refugee crisis – the peak phase preceding the conclusion of the EU–Turkey agreement and the phase following the adoption of this agreement.

As we have argued in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#), in the multilevel polity of the EU, the supranational level is not just another level at which international agreements are negotiated to be subsequently implemented nationally. Polity membership creates a foundational interdependence that stems from the original choice to become a member of a compulsory association. Market integration and the extensive pooling of core state powers have increased this interdependence over time. Still, the EU is not a full-fledged federal system, and the degree of interdependence varies by policy domain. As we have observed in [Chapter 4](#), in the domain of asylum policy, responsibility is shared between the EU and its member states. While the latter have retained core competences, their policymaking still depends on the common Schengen–Dublin framework. Moreover, the policy-specific legislative framework is embedded in the overall institutional structure of EU decision-making. In asylum policy, the mixture of interdependence and independence of the member states imposes reciprocal constraints on the decision-makers at each level of the EU polity: On the one hand, the interdependence restricts

the possible policy responses of national policymakers, and on the other hand, the independence that national policymakers still enjoy constrains the decision-making at the EU level. The limited competence of the EU in the asylum domain poses a great challenge for joint EU policymaking in times of crisis.

In terms of relevant actors, the grand theories of European integration locate the power alternatively in the supranational agencies – the Commission (neofunctionalism) or the European Council (new intergovernmentalism) – or in the member states (liberal intergovernmentalism, postfunctionalism). Given the low capacity and lack of policy resources of supranational institutions in the asylum policy domain, we expect supranational entrepreneurship to be highly constrained (Moravcsik 2005: 362–363). Under such conditions, the success of the policy proposals by supranational actors depends on the support by the member states. In the case of the refugee crisis, opposition to joint solutions and conflicts between the member states have been reinforced by two conditions: First, the member states were asymmetrically affected by the crisis and unequally prepared to deal with it. While the frontline and open destination states, the states directly hit by the crisis, favored joint solutions, the bystander and to some extent also the transit and closed destination states were less affected by the crisis and therefore were less ready to share the burden (Noll 2003; Bauböck 2018). Second, joint action was constrained, and conflicts between member states were reinforced by the politicization of national identities produced by the uneven distribution of crisis pressures within the EU polity. Consistent with the predictions of postfunctionalism, the tension between the uneven distribution of costs and benefits of crisis resolution at the international level and the limited scope of community feelings at the national level has made opposition to EU policy proposals more vocal. As pointed out by Ferrara and Kriesi (2021), this decision-making scenario is consistent with the postfunctionalist notion of “constraining dissensus.”

It is the territorial channel of representation in the EU that provides the most important (although not the exclusive) conduit for the politicization of the reciprocal constraints and related conflicts. Accordingly, intergovernmental coordination has become the key decision-making mode in the EU in general, and particularly in crisis situations. In this mode of decision-making, the heads of member state governments (in the European Council) and responsible ministers (in the Council of Ministers) assume a decisive role. They provide the critical link between the two levels of the EU polity. As a result of their dual role – that of head of state or government representing a country in European negotiations

and that of member of the European Council representing Europe back home – the executives of the member states become the pivotal actors in the *two-level game* linking domestic politics to EU decision-making. Accordingly, we expect the governments of the member states and their key executives to play a crucial role not only in domestic policymaking in the refugee crisis but also in policymaking at the EU level.

Under crisis conditions, the role of key executives of both the EU and member states is likely to become even more prominent. Under such conditions, which combine high political pressure in the sense of conflict-laden salience with high time pressure (urgency), executive decision-making is expected to become the preferred mode of decision-making both at the supranational and the national level. In a crisis, policymaking is no longer confined to the policy-specific subsystem (asylum policy in our case); rather, it becomes the object of macro-politics or “Chefsache,” to be taken over by the political leaders who focus on the issue in question. The decision-making mode of intergovernmental coordination corresponds to the EU-specific version of executive decision-making.

Foremost among the expected conflict lines are the vertical and transnational conflicts involving member states and the EU. In [Chapter 2](#), we have formulated some expectations about these conflict lines. At this point, we reiterate the general expectations formulated in [Chapter 2](#). In the short run, that is, in the early phases of the crisis, we expect open destination and transit states to share a common interest in stopping the flow of arrivals and in sharing the burden of accommodating refugees, which aligns them with the frontline states but opposes them to the restrictive destination states and the bystander states. While at first the transit states’ interests are clearly in line with those of the open destination and frontline states, the position of transit states is likely to get more ambiguous as the crisis progresses, since they clearly benefit from the secondary movements of the refugees within the EU. Moreover, the frontline and destination states are also divided with regard to the reform of the CEAS: Together with the other member states, open destination states are in favor of restoring the Dublin regulation, while the frontline states demand reform of the CEAS to share the responsibility for accommodating the flood of new arrivals.

The configuration of member states’ interests is further complicated by country-specific conditions. Thus, as a nonmember of the Schengen area, the UK largely stands outside of conflicts involving burden sharing. The ambiguous crisis situation of transit states provides room for mobilization by political entrepreneurs, as has been the case of Prime Minister Orbán in Hungary and of Foreign Minister Kurz in Austria. Similarly, the ambiguous situation of frontline states, which have to

deal with incoming arrivals but have an incentive to close their eyes to secondary movements, also provides opportunities for political entrepreneurs to exploit the crisis, as we have also discussed in previous chapters. Moreover, the directly concerned states that are interested in joint solutions do not necessarily all sit in the same boat. In general, their support for joint solutions depends on the specific conditions attached to them: If the EU intervention comes with strings attached and is perceived to impinge upon the state's sovereignty, it may not be accepted even if it were to bring direct relief from the crisis pressure. Thus, external border control, demanded by open destination states, may involve the direct intervention of the EU in the national sovereignty of frontline states, as was the case in two EU episodes – the episodes of the hotspots and the EBCG. In the hotspot episode, the frontline states were expected to take back all the responsibilities they shoulder under current EU legislation, an expectation to which, as we have seen in [Chapter 5](#), they responded with foot-dragging and other forms of informal resistance. In the EBCG episode, Greece was reluctant to subscribe to the plan to deploy the transformed EBCG without the consent of the directly concerned member state. Such resistance may be overcome by external pressure, as in the case of the hotspots, where the border closures at Greece's northern border with Northern Macedonia put an end to Greek resistance, or by compromise solutions, as in the case of the EBCG, which implied that the EBCG could not be deployed without the consent of the directly concerned member state, which, in the case it refused to give its consent, risked a suspension of its membership in the Schengen area.

In addition to vertical and transnational conflicts involving member states, there are two other types of international conflicts involved in the policymaking at the EU level. One of them results from the EU's strategy to externalize the burden of border control during the refugee crisis. As we have seen ([Chapter 5](#)), two of the six episodes at the EU level involved this kind of response to the crisis – the EU–Turkey agreement and the EU–Libya arrangement. In such instances, we expect the EU to present a more united front, since the externalization of the border control provides the EU member states with a public good from which they all benefit. Instead, the main conflict is expected to involve the EU and/or its member states on the one hand and the third country to which the burden is intended to be externalized on the other hand. In the case of Turkey, it was above all the EU that confronted the third country, while in the case of Libya, it was Italy, the member state most concerned by refugee arrivals from Libya. The other type of international conflict refers to other international organizations, which may get involved in the

management of the crisis. Thus, [White \(2020: 81f\)](#) points to the involvement of NATO in the management of border control with Turkey. Arguably, however, it was not NATO but UN organizations such as the UNHCR that played a considerable role in the management of the refugee crisis at the Turkish border with Europe. The UNHCR not only supported the reception efforts in the frontline states but also was a vocal critic of the situation in the hotspots and in the Mediterranean.

At the EU level, the conflict structure is expected to be dominated by these four types of international conflicts: vertical conflicts between the EU and the member states, transnational conflicts between member states, externalization conflicts with third countries, and conflicts with other international organizations. As we have seen in the [previous chapter](#), at the national level, partisan, intragovernmental, and societal conflicts prevail, in addition to international conflicts. At the EU level, however, partisan conflicts are likely to be negligible, given the weakness of the European parties, while conflicts with civil society organizations are likely to play an important role, given the large number of humanitarian NGOs active in the migration policy domain (e.g., NGO ships in the Mediterranean rescuing migrants or NGOs supporting migrants in the camps). In addition to humanitarian NGOs defending the migrants, civil society actors also include migrant organizations, think tanks and individual experts making proposals for joint solutions (e.g., Gerald Knaus, head of the European Stability Initiative, the think tank that first floated the idea of the EU–Turkey Deal), or the media (e.g., by exposing shipwrecks or inhumane conditions in the camps). Finally, there is a possibility of intra-EU conflicts between different EU authorities. Conflicts between the Commission and the Council involve conflicts between the EU and the member states and are, therefore, already covered by the vertical conflicts introduced above. However, the crisis management may also pit other EU authorities against each other – for example, the Commission/Council against the European Parliament, all three institutions against specialized agencies like the ECB or Frontex, or different factions within one and the same institution (e.g., different Directorates-General [DGs] of the Commission).¹ We do not expect to find a lot of such internal conflicts, not only because conflicts within agencies are more difficult to pinpoint by our approach, which relies on public sources, but also because we assume that in the refugee crisis, the conflicts mainly involved member states, with respect to which the EU authorities took a rather homogenous position.

¹ As in the case of the SGP, where the “Moscos” and the “Dombros” faced each other ([Mérand 2022](#)).

The Actors

For the actor distribution, we first show the distribution over three summary categories – member states, EU actors, and other actors. At the EU level, member states are virtually exclusively represented by national governments. Thus, the category of the member states is almost exclusively composed of national governments and their agencies and includes only a few actions attributable to local governments (1 percent) and to governing parties (2 percent). The category of EU actors is dominated by the Commission, which accounts for roughly half (49 percent) of the actions attributable to EU actors, the other half being almost equally divided between the Councils (European Council and Councils of Ministers) (24 percent) and other EU actors (European Parliament, parties, and specific agencies) (27 percent). The category of others consists of third countries (Turkey and Libya) (36 percent), supranational organizations (roughly 24 percent), and civil society organizations (roughly 40 percent). [Table 7.1a](#) presents the distribution of the actions in the six EU-level episodes over these three actor categories. As we can see, the member state governments and EU actors jointly dominate decision-making in four out of the six episodes. The other actors are very important only in the two episodes that aim at the externalization of border control. Obviously, in these two cases, the third country that is directly concerned plays a key role, as can be seen in [Table 7.1b](#). Civil society is also important in these two episodes (as well as in the relocation episode). It includes above all NGOs (43.2 percent) but also experts and media (17.6 percent), migrants and their organizations (16.0 percent), and opposition parties (18.4 percent).

[Table 7.1](#) confirms above all the central role of member state governments. At the EU level, they are even more important than at the national level (see [Chapter 6](#)): In all episodes except for the EU–Turkey agreement, they are the most salient actors and account for almost half of the actions overall, compared to a third at the national level (see [Table 7.1](#)). [Table 7.1b](#) demonstrates that, except for the closed destination states, which are least present at the EU level, all types of member states are roughly equally represented in EU episodes. However, each type is not equally represented by its component members. Thus, Germany accounts for no less than three-quarters (76.8 percent) of the actions of the open destination states, while Sweden is virtually absent at the EU level (with a share of only 3.5 percent of EU-level actions of open destination states). Even Luxembourg and the Netherlands (which assumed the EU presidency in the second half of 2015 and in the first half of 2016, respectively) have a greater presence among the open destination

Table 7.1 *The distribution of actor types across the six EU-level episodes*

Actors	Episode						Total
	EU–Turkey	Relocation	Dublin Reform	EBCG	Hotspots	EU–Libya	
(a) Broad categories							
EU actors	24.2	23.2	39.1	42.7	30.8	11.3	28.0
Member state governments	32.7	57.8	49.1	50.9	60.6	58.1	47.3
Others	43.0	19.0	11.8	6.4	8.6	30.6	24.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>N</i>	437	332	212	110	104	62	1,257
(b) Details							
EU actors	24.3	23.2	39.2	42.7	30.8	11.3	28.0
Frontline states	7.3	6.0	16.0	9.1	29.8	50.0	12.6
Open destination states	14.7	10.5	9.9	10.0	8.7	3.2	11.3
Transit states	6.2	16.9	8.5	12.7	12.5	1.6	10.3
Bystander states	3.7	18.4	9.4	12.7	3.9	0.0	9.2
Closed destination states	0.9	6.0	5.2	6.4	5.8	3.2	4.0
Turkey–Libya	22.7	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.1	8.8
International/other government	7.1	7.8	4.7	2.7	1.9	4.8	6.0
Civil society, opposition	13.3	10.5	7.1	3.6	6.7	9.7	9.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	437	332	212	110	104	62	1,257

states, with 7 to 8 percent of the latter's actions each. The interventions of the frontline states are mainly attributable to Italy (60 percent) and Greece (30 percent); those of the transit states mainly to Hungary (47 percent), Austria (34 percent), and Bulgaria (12 percent). The actions of the bystander states are more evenly distributed among a larger number of states, but the Czech Republic and Slovakia (22.6 percent each) as well as Poland (16.5 percent), which together with Hungary formed the V4 group, are the ones most present. Finally, the closed destination states are above all represented by France (with a share of 68 percent of the corresponding actions). The German government is the most salient member state government at the EU level, closely followed by the Italian government, and, at a greater distance, by the governments of Hungary, Austria, and Greece.

The presence of the different types of member states varies, however, from one episode to another. Thus, the open destination states (and above all Germany) were most involved in the EU–Turkey agreement. The frontline states dominated in the EU–Libya episode (Italy) and in the hotspot episode (Greece), and they were also heavily present in the Dublin Reform episode, where they are the key promoters of reform. The transit and bystander states, in turn, predominated in the relocation episode, where they were the main adversaries of a joint solution. The closed destination states, finally, were a minor force in all episodes, which reflects the fact that they were hardly affected by the crisis.

We also present the target actors in [Table 7.2](#). While national governments are the preferred targets at the national level (see [Chapter 6](#)), at the EU level, it is the EU institutions that are the most important targets – overall and in four out of the six episodes. Only in the externalization episodes is the third country targeted even more frequently. This already foreshadows that the conflict lines run between the member states (the most important actors) on the one hand and the EU institutions and third countries (the most important targets) on the other hand. In terms of member states, the frontline states are the most frequent targets. Especially in the hotspot episode, Italy and above all Greece were the privileged targets of the interventions by the EU and other member states. In the EU–Libya episode, it was Italy that played the key role as both actor and target.

Turning to the individual actors, the question is whether the *top executives* played the expected role in the policymaking processes at the two levels. In this respect, we distinguish between four types of actors: top executives at the EU and the national level; other individual actors who have been mentioned by name in the media reports; and institutional actors, who are responsible for actions that have not been explicitly

Table 7.2 *The distribution of targeted actor types across six EU-level episodes*

Target actors	Episode						Total
	EU–Turkey	Relocation	Dublin Reform	ECBG	Hotspots	EU–Libya	
EU	34.4	45.8	50.0	62.5	32.7	8.5	38.3
Turkey–Libya	38.7	2.1	0.0	0.0	1.8	53.2	19.7
Frontline states	4.8	2.1	12.5	18.8	58.2	34.0	14.1
Open destination states	6.5	6.3	10.4	12.5	1.8	0.0	6.1
Transit states	1.1	11.8	4.2	0.0	3.6	0.0	4.5
Bystander states	1.1	12.5	10.4	3.1	1.8	0.0	5.3
Closed destination states	0.5	9.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9
Supranation–other government	5.4	3.5	8.3	0.0	0.0	4.3	4.1
Civil society, opposition	7.5	6.3	4.2	3.1	0.0	0.0	5.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	186	144	48	32	55	47	512

Table 7.3 *Executive decision making by level, percentage shares*

Leaders	Level		
	EU	National	Total
EU top executives	4.6	0.2	0.9
National leaders	17.4	7.1	8.8
Other individuals	52.4	65.8	63.6
No names	25.6	26.9	26.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	1,257	6,424	7,681

attributed to any individual. The top executives at the EU level include two leaders – Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker and Council president Donald Tusk. At the national level, they include the prime ministers and presidents (where they are not merely symbolic figures) representing our eight countries: Alexis Tsipras for Greece; Matteo Renzi, Paolo Gentiloni, and Giuseppe Conte for Italy; Viktor Orbán for Hungary; Werner Faymann, Christian Kern, and Sebastian Kurz for Austria; Angela Merkel for Germany; Stefan Löfven for Sweden; François Hollande, Emmanuel Macron, and Manuel Valls for France; David Cameron for the UK; and Ahmet Davutoğlu and Tayyip Erdogan for Turkey.

Table 7.3 compares the role of top executives in the decision-making processes at the EU level with their role at the national level. As is immediately apparent, top executives play a more important role in EU decision-making than in decision-making at the national level. Moreover, national top executives are more prominent policymakers in these crisis episodes at the EU level than EU top executives are. This confirms the expected pivotal role of government leaders of the member states in the two-level EU decision-making. They account for no less than one sixth of the actions (17.4 percent) in the policymaking processes at the EU level. The most prominent individual actor at the EU level is the prime minister from the most important member state, German chancellor Angela Merkel, who, on her own, accounts for 4.6 percent of all actions. She is followed by Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker and the Hungarian prime minister Victor Orbán. By contrast, EU top executives are virtually absent from the policymaking process at the national level. In national policymaking, power is not only more divided among a larger number of participants but also more focused on national policymakers.

The influence of top executives varies by stage in the policymaking process. As is shown in Table 7.4, EU top executives are most important

Table 7.4 *Executive decision-making at EU level and policy stage, percentage shares*

Leaders	Policy stage					Total
	Claims-making	Proposal	Negotiation	Adoption	Implementation	
EU	4.5	8.6	7.7	2.1	1.5	4.6
National leaders	19.9	7.4	20.0	9.6	3.0	17.4
Other individuals	60.3	29.6	27.7	22.3	33.3	52.4
Institutional actors	15.4	54.3	44.6	66.0	62.1	25.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	951	81	65	94	66	1,257

in the proposal and negotiation phases of this process, while top executives of member states have a most important role to play in the negotiation and adoption phases of this process – mirroring the respective institutional roles of the EU Commission and the EU Council. Thus, Commission president Juncker is the individual leader most present in the proposal stage, accounting for 7.4 percent of the corresponding actions, while German chancellor Angela Merkel is responsible for no less than 10.8 percent of the actions in the negotiation phase and for 4.3 percent in the adoption phase. Only Jean-Claude Juncker comes close to her in the negotiation phase, accounting for 5.2 percent of the actions. No one else is as prominent as Chancellor Merkel in the adoption phase. These shares are all the more remarkable if we keep in mind that at the various decision-making stages, institutional actors predominate in the public sphere. As Table 7.4 shows, in the public, the actions in the decision-making stages are above all attributed to institutional actors. By contrast, it is the public claims-making that is attributed above all to individual actors and, as the table shows, it is in this respect that the top executives of the member states are also highly present. They constitute the public face of the decision-making process at the EU level during the crisis, which implies that they are also the actors who take public responsibility for these decisions and who are most likely to be blamed for them by the public.

Conflict Lines

The actors involved in the policy debate, either as initiators or as targets, reveal only one aspect of the conflict. To understand the nature of the

Table 7.5 *Conflict intensity scores for the dominant conflict lines, by episode^a*

	EU member state	Trans- national	EU/ms- third country	EU/ms- international org	EU/ms- civil society	Intra-EU
EU–Turkey	0.04	0.02	0.28	0.02	0.08	0.01
Relocation	0.16	0.11	0.02	0.06	0.12	0.05
Dublin reform	0.11	0.11	—	0.06	0.05	0.07
EBCG	0.14	0.10	—	0.02	0.02	0.10
Hotspots	0.07	0.10	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.01
EU–Libya	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.00	—

^aThe major conflict lines are in bold, the minor ones in italic.

Ms = member states.

conflict in a given policy episode, we need to make refinements both conceptually and in operational terms. Our indicator for conflict intensity, which we use here, captures both the directionality of actors' action vis-à-vis their targets (positive, negative, or neutral) and the type of actions they undertake (see [Chapter 6](#)). It suffices to reiterate at this point that conflict intensity is a composite indicator of the actor direction vis-à-vis the target and the type of policy action that the actor undertakes.

[Table 7.5](#) presents the average intensity of six conflict types in the six EU episodes. The most important conflicts per episode are printed in bold, the second most important conflicts are in italic. As expected, the vertical and transnational conflicts constitute the two most important conflict lines in four out of the six episodes – the two episodes involving the Asylum Rules (Relocation and Dublin Reform) and two of the Border Control episodes (Hotspots and EBCG). By contrast, the two Externalization episodes (EU–Turkey and EU–Libya) above all gave rise to conflicts between the EU and the respective third countries, with the EU–Turkey agreement the most conflictual of all the episodes. Compared to these three types of conflicts, the other conflict types were at best secondary. Conflicts with international organizations and intra-EU conflicts were generally of low intensity. The exception concerns the EBCG episode, where the transformation of Frontex into the new EBCG created some intra-EU conflicts. Conflicts between the EU/its member states and civil society have been of some importance in two episodes – the EU–Turkey agreement and the relocation quotas. In the EU–Turkey case, NGOs and opposition parties heavily criticized the deal because they did not consider Turkey a safe third country, given the human rights abuses in Turkey. They also

criticized the implications of the deal for the refugee camps on the Greek islands, which suddenly became closed centers where the refugees were stuck and had to count on being returned to Turkey. In the relocation episode, NGOs like Amnesty International and left-wing opposition parties pleaded for a relocation of refugees across Europe, while right-wing opposition parties like Jobbik in Hungary, UKIP in the UK, and RN in France refused to accept additional quotas of refugees.

To represent the resulting conflict structure between the nine types of actors we have distinguished in [Tables 7.1](#) and [7.2](#), we calculated two types of dissimilarities for all the actor pairs involved (i.e., thirty-six pairs): the average distance between their positions on the six episodes at the EU level and the average conflict intensity between them (as actors and targets) across all six episodes. We then multiplied the two types of dissimilarity for each pair, which amounts to weighting the distance between the two actors' positions with the conflict intensity between them. Finally, we analyzed the resulting matrix of dissimilarities with a multidimensional scaling (MDS) procedure. Such a procedure allows us to represent the overall actor configuration in a low-dimensional space, in our case in a two-dimensional space. Actors who took similar positions in the six episodes and who did not get involved in conflicts with each other are placed closer to each other in the resulting space, while actors who opposed each other in substantive terms and fought against each other to impose their own position against the position of their adversaries are located at some distance from each other. [Figure 7.1](#) presents the resulting summary actor configuration.

We can distinguish three camps in this actor configuration: the EU, which forms the core of the policymaking space, and two adversarial camps – the noncooperative camp of the transit and bystander states, and the humanitarian camp of civil society, which also includes the supranational institutions. The core camp of the EU is joined by the frontline states (Greece and Italy above all) and the closed destination states (represented above all by France), which share similar positions. The open destination states (mainly Germany) are located at the midpoint between the EU camp and the civil society camp, which indicates that their position is closer to the humanitarian position of the civil society and the UNHCR, the most important supranational actor. The third countries, Turkey and Libya, are located between the noncooperative camp and the EU, which indicates that their position is more in line with the EU than that of the noncooperative camp but that nevertheless they are to some extent adversaries of the EU.

The noncooperation by the bystander and transit states became most obvious in the two episodes concerning the asylum rules. Three bystander

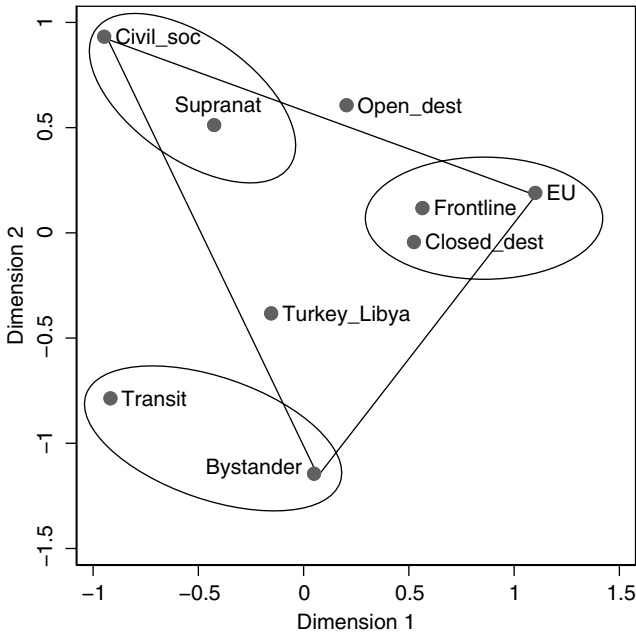


Figure 7.1 Overall configuration of conflict structure at the EU level: MDS result

states (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) together with one of the transit states (Hungary) formed the Visegrad four group (V4), which blocked the implementation of the relocation scheme and prevented any reform of the Dublin regulation. In addition, under the leadership of yet another transit state, Austria, they embarked on the elaboration of a unilateral solution to the external border control, the closing down of the Balkan route, which they implemented by the end of February 2016. In the short run, this solution isolated Greece, but it ended up being instrumental in getting the cooperation of Turkey in the external border closure in the Aegean Sea, which allowed keeping Greece in the Schengen area.

Given the triangular configuration of the conflict space, two dimensions are needed to accommodate the relationships between the key actors at the EU level. The vertical dimension might be called the humanitarian dimension, separating most clearly the pro-humanitarian civil society actors from the noncooperative bystander and transit states. The horizontal dimension distinguishes most clearly between both the humanitarian and the noncooperative camps on the one hand and the

EU camp on the other hand. We propose calling this the pragmatism dimension. The EU, together with the frontline and the destination states, tried to find a pragmatic solution to the crisis, which was opposed by the principled opposition from two sides – the civil society actors who opposed the pragmatic “realism” of the EU in the name of humanitarian principles and the V4 actors who opposed it in the name of the principles of national self-determination.

Politicization

The politicization indicators allow for yet another summary presentation of the conflicts that characterized the refugee crisis. We have already presented the thematic focus of the politicization at the EU level in [Chapter 5](#). We would now like to focus on the contribution of the various actor types and actor camps to the politicization of the policymaking process at the EU level during the refugee crisis. [Figure 7.2a](#) presents these contributions as well as their two components – salience and polarization – for the more detailed actor types. In this figure, the overall politicization and its components have each been standardized to the 0 to 1 range. As the figure shows, the EU actors dominate the politicization at the EU level, as well as its components: They are not only the most salient actors at this level, but they also contribute most to the overall polarization. Together with the destination and the frontline states, they are most supportive of the policy proposals at this level, but together with their allies, they also face strong opposition from the two adversarial camps, and they constitute the most frequent targets of this opposition – as we have seen in [Table 7.2](#). In other words, EU actors constitute the most conspicuous actors on the supportive side of the policy proposals, which makes them at the same time the most conspicuous adversaries of the opponents of these proposals.

The contribution to the politicization by all other types of actors is more limited, since they are both less salient (they account for at most a third of the actions of the EU actors) and less polarizing (they are at best roughly half as polarizing as the EU actors). The closed destination states are the least politicizing actors of all, which confirms the limited stakes they had in the refugee crisis.

In the [previous section](#), we have seen that the EU actors are allied to the frontline and destination states, which both count on joint solutions at the EU level, and opposed by two camps – the civil society camp and the camp of the transition–bystander states, with the third countries being caught somewhere in between. If we combine the actors into these opposing camps, we get a better sense of the politicization by the opposing forces.

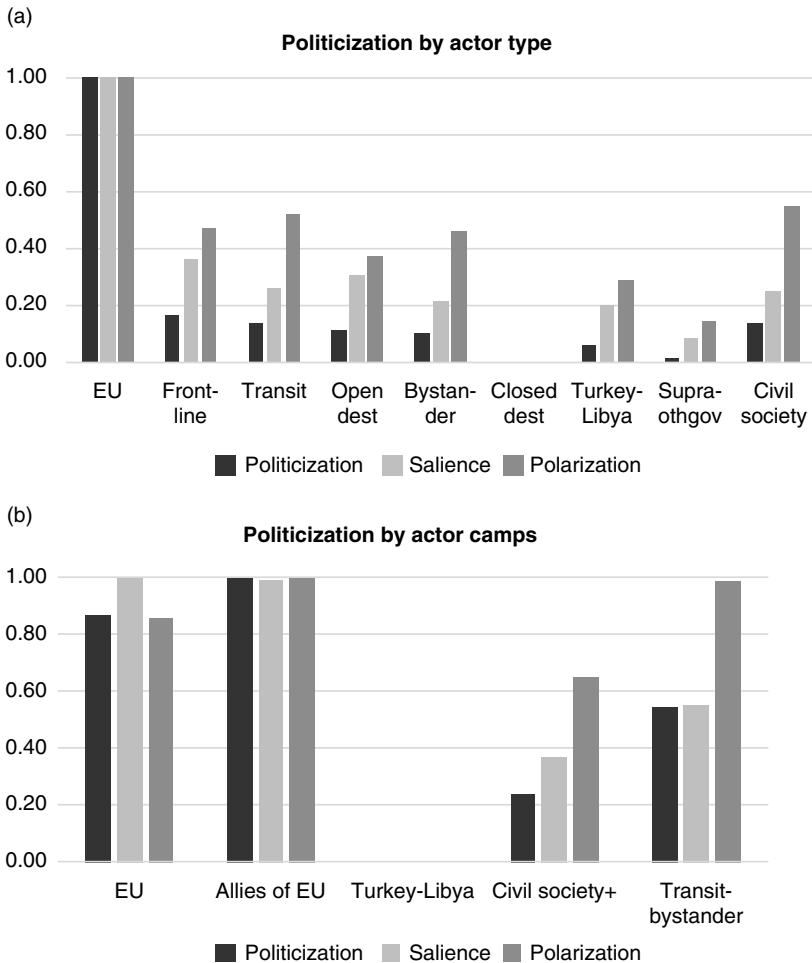


Figure 7.2 Politicization and its components by actor types: standardized averages. (a) Actor types; (b) actor camps

As we can see from [Figure 7.2b](#), once we combine the actors of the camps, the EU actors no longer stick out. Taken together, the member states allied to the EU actors are contributing just as much to the politicization of the policy response in the refugee crisis as the EU actors themselves are, in terms of both salience and polarization. The two opponent camps contribute to the overall politicization to a lesser degree, since they are less present, although they are still highly polarizing. Compared to these three camps, the third countries are hardly contributing to the politicization at

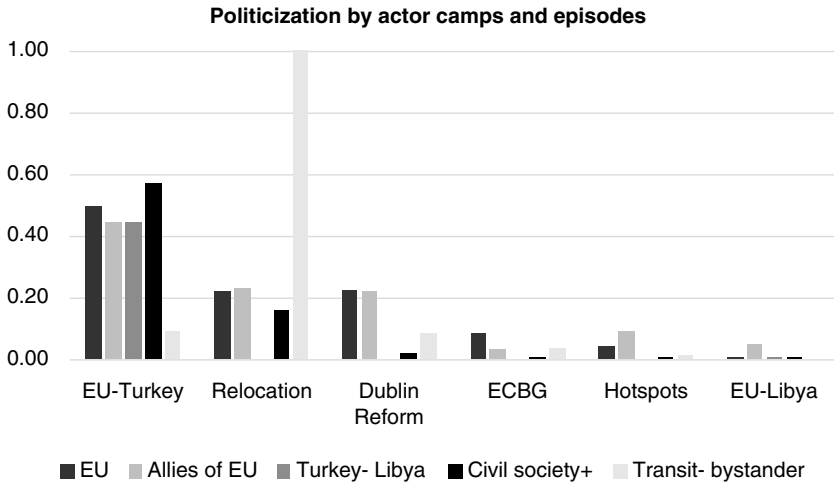


Figure 7.3 Politicization by broad actor camps and episodes: standardized averages

all. While they are contributing to the conflict intensity, as we have seen previously, they are much less visible in the European public sphere, and their opposition to the EU decision-makers is also less pronounced than the opposition from some member states and from civil society.

If we finally break down the actors' contributions to the politicization of the policymaking process by episodes, we find that the politicization of the relocation quotas by the adversaries from bystander and transit states dwarfs all other contributions to the politicization of EU episodes (see [Figure 7.3](#)). Overall, the EU–Turkey episode has been more politicized than the relocation episode because it has been politicized by a broader set of actors, which notably does not include the bystander and transit states (see [Table 4.2](#)). However, the single most important contribution to the politicization of the refugee crisis at the EU level has been made by the opponents to the relocation quotas. This goes a long way to explain why this kind of proposal had no chance for success in subsequent debates and why later attempts to reform the Dublin regulation, which always contained some related policy ideas, have repeatedly failed.

Phases of the Policymaking Process at the EU Level

At the EU level, we can clearly distinguish between two phases in the policymaking process – the phase preceding the conclusion of the EU–Turkey agreement and the phase following it. About half of the actions at

Table 7.6 *Episode by phase, shares of actions*

Episode	Phase		Total
	Up to March 2016	After March 2016	
EU–Turkey	41.9	27.5	34.8
Relocation	31.2	21.5	26.4
Dublin Reform	5.2	28.9	16.9
ECBG	8.2	9.4	8.8
Hotspots	13.6	2.8	8.3
EU–Libya	0.0	10.0	4.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	638	619	1,257

the EU level fall into the short first phase that lasts for less than one year, from the adoption of the European Agenda for Migration in May 2015 to the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement in March 2016. The second half of the actions is drawn out over a four-year period that ends in February 2020. The first phase, which corresponds to the peak period of the crisis, was dominated by the two most politicized episodes – the EU–Turkey agreement and the relocation quotas. It also included most of the hotspot episode. As is shown in [Table 7.6](#), the two most important episodes also extended into the second phase, but during this period, they no longer dominated to the same extent. The Dublin Reform became as important as the two more specific issues, and the attention shifted to the external borders in the center of the Mediterranean. This is also illustrated by [Figure 7.4](#), which displays the relative politicization of the episodes in the two phases.

Distinguishing between the two phases, we can also detect the development of the overall conflict structure at the EU level over the course of the crisis. The conflict structure was not yet as clear-cut in phase 1 and really became consolidated only during the long, drawn out phase 2. This is illustrated in [Figure 7.5](#), which displays the conflict structures in each one of the two phases. In the first phase, at the peak of the crisis, the open destination and the frontline states constituted a cluster of their own, in the middle of the space. Their joint interest in stopping the flows and sharing the burden between all member states brought them together and placed them in opposition to some extent to all the other major actors. During the second phase, their interest became more aligned with those of the EU actors, and they also found a close ally in the closed destination states (above all, France). In the configuration of the second phase, the tripolar structure presented in [Figure 7.1](#) emerged

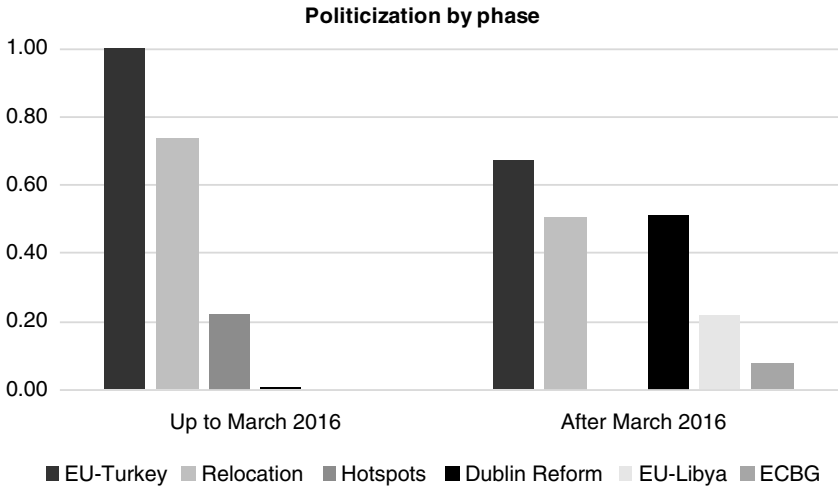


Figure 7.4 Politicization by episode and phase, average index value

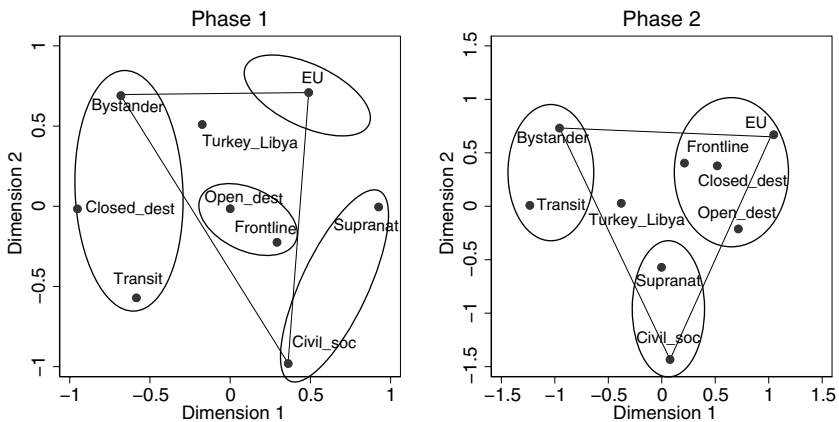


Figure 7.5 The conflict structures at the EU level, by phase: MDS results

as a consequence of the management of the crisis. The contrast between the bystander–transit states alliance (V4) on the one hand and the frontline–destination states–EU alliance on the other hand becomes quite clear. The civil society actors and the other supranational actors (mainly the UNHCR) constitute the third (humanitarian) pole, which is opposed to both the intransigent defenders of exclusively national solutions (the V4) and the pragmatic defenders of burden sharing and of a reform of

the Dublin regulation, who can rely on the support of the Commission and of the most important member states – Germany, France, and Italy. The third countries, which have become key partners of the EU in this policy domain, are located in between the three poles, ready to play off one against the other.

Conclusion

At the EU level, international conflicts prevailed. These were mainly of three types – vertical conflicts between the EU and its member states, transnational conflicts between member states, and externalization conflicts between the EU/member states and third countries. The episodes that did not involve third countries were characterized by the first two types, while the externalization episodes obviously involved third countries. Other types of conflicts were secondary. The emerging conflict structure, which was consolidated only in the long period after the conclusion of the EU–Turkey agreement, is characterized by the antagonistic relationship between three camps – the EU core coalition (including destination and frontline states in addition to EU actors); the coalition of transit and bystander states; and the coalition of civil society actors, international organizations, and domestic opposition parties. The two-dimensional conflict space is structured by a dimension that opposes the pragmatic, “realist” EU and its allies to its principled adversaries, and a dimension that distinguishes its humanitarian from its nationalist adversaries. At the EU level, the sovereignty camp is composed of member states that have been largely spared by the refugee crisis and that refuse to share the burden of refugees with the hard-hit destination and frontline states. The latter in turn seek the help of the EU actors in their quest for burden sharing with the member states that have been largely spared by the crisis.

The actor configuration confirms the expectation that member states and their key executives play a crucial role in the two-level game of EU crisis management. In a policy domain where the EU shares its competences with the member states, it is unable to impose its policy proposals without the cooperation of the member states. As we have seen, Germany, the “hobbled hegemon” (Webber 2019), and its chancellor Angela Merkel played a key role in policymaking at the EU level. Even if it shared the most explosive combination of problem and political pressure with some other member states, the combined pressure became particularly important in the case of Germany because of its size and influence, which enabled it to take the lead in common initiatives. As is suggested by the public goods literature, Germany as the largest member state and

the recipient of the largest number of refugees was most engaged in the search for joint policy solutions, since it had potentially more to lose (in absolute terms) from the nonprovision of the public good in terms of stability and security, and since it also was the member state that was best able to unilaterally make a significant contribution to the provision of the public good (Thielemann 2018: 69).

8 Government Composition and Domestic Conflicts

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, we have offered an analysis on the conflict lines that emerged at both polity levels: between member states and EU institutions, within member states, and between domestic actors and the EU. In this chapter, we continue this line of inquiry by zooming in on two types of conflicts: the conflicts within governments and the conflicts between governments and their domestic partisan opposition. For both types of conflicts, we put the role of government composition at center stage and argue that the fragmentation of governing coalitions as well as the ideological make-up of governments are important determinants of the extent and the type of domestic conflicts that emerge, as well as their substantive content. We consider government composition as an important and yet often overlooked variable in the refugee crisis. Since most of the governments in the countries we study came to power before the crisis reached its peak, their composition can be regarded as largely exogenous to the crisis itself, serving as an overarching constraint on political actors throughout the management of the crisis.

There were exceptions to this rule, however. In the spring of 2017, France experienced a political upheaval as the deeply unpopular government of Francois Hollande was replaced by Emmanuel Macron's centrist coalition that included ministers from both the traditional left and the right. Later in the same year, one of Austria's ruling parties, the center-right People's Party (ÖVP), ditched its uneasy alliance with the center-left Social Democrats (SPÖ) and under the new leadership of Sebastian Kurz formed a right-wing government with the FPÖ, Austria's long-standing radical right-wing challenger party. In the spring of 2018, Italy's center left Democratic Party, unable to recover from the failed Renzi experiment, was severely punished at the polls and was replaced by the unwieldy populist coalition of the 5 Stars Movement and Matteo Salvini's right-wing challenger party, the Lega. Finally, Greece also experienced a full-fledged partisan swing from the left to the right: Syriza was defeated decisively at the polls by its conservative rival, New Democracy, in 2019.

Though highly consequential, all these changes came in the later stages of the refugee crisis, which means that most of the policy episodes in our study fell under the departing governments. Moreover, in the four remaining countries, we observe remarkable continuity. After winning the 2015 election with an unexpectedly wide margin, the center right Conservative government of the UK stayed in power, now unconstrained by its previous junior coalition partner, the Liberal Democrats. In Sweden, the center left coalition led by Stefan Löfven came to power just before the start of the crisis and stayed there until the bitter end despite repeated attacks from the right-wing opposition for not taking a harder line against the influx of refugees. Angela Merkel's grand coalition also survived the crisis despite the highly fractious relationship among the coalition partners, and despite an intervening election in fall 2017, as we shall see in greater detail later on in this chapter. Finally, the crisis did little to dent the stability of Viktor Orbán's single-party government in Hungary; if anything, it allowed him to tighten his grip over Fidesz and catalyze Hungary's descent into autocratic rule.

Behind these (partial) continuities within individual countries, however, there is important variation in government composition across policy episodes. In this chapter, we shall assess the explanatory power of this variation in order to account for the type of domestic conflicts that emerged. The first task of this chapter is descriptive: For both intra-governmental and partisan conflicts, we distinguish between various subtypes, relying on the fine-grained information that our PPA dataset provides on the general and specific institutional categories of the actors. Second, we aim to relate various aspects of government composition – namely, government fragmentation and their ideological make-up – to the type of conflict lines. Since our sample is rather limited – forty episodes in total – we limit ourselves to bivariate correlations rather than full-fledged multivariate statistical models, so we lay no claim on any definitive causal link behind the relationships we uncover. Third, we illustrate some of the patterns we have found via episode-specific narratives that illustrate the two main types of domestic conflicts and some of their subtypes. We motivate these empirical exercises, however, with some theoretical considerations derived from the coalition and issue competition literatures in the [next section](#).

Government Composition and Political Competition

As the introductory discussion suggests, the bulk of the refugee crisis was managed by coalition governments. More precisely, twenty-eight out of the forty episodes – in their entirety or during the largest part of their

timeline – fell under such government types. The rather obvious observation that coalition governments are not unitary actors has inspired a rich literature in political science, which examines how coalitions are formed (Debus 2008; Laver and Shepsle 1990, 1990; Riker 1984), how they allocate portfolios between each other (Fernandes, Meinfelder, and Moury 2016), and how constituent parties monitor coalition partners to prevent ministerial drift (Indridason and Kristinsson 2013; Martin and Vanberg 2004; Thies 2001). Underneath all these accounts, the common problem that coalition partners need to overcome is the multidimensional and often conflicting objectives they face when they are in government. The classic study on coalition behavior by Müller et al. (1999) distinguishes between three such objectives: policy, office, and votes.

While policy-seeking and vote-seeking behavior by coalition partners potentially pulls them apart as a function of the difference between their policy preferences (ideology) and the preference distribution and the overlap between their electorates, office-seeking motives exert a centripetal force on coalition partners because they have a joint interest in ironing out their differences in order to avoid a government collapse and present a united front to voters as viable coalition partners for the future. Since voters do not assess parties merely for their programmatic and ideological appeals but also for their role and performance as coalition partners (Blais et al. 2006), incentives to signal agreement even against ideological preferences may serve the vote-seeking incentives of coalition partners as well. At the same time, however, coalition partners may also have an incentive to signal disagreement to facilitate voters' responsibility attribution for policy outcomes (Duch, Przepiorka, and Stevenson 2015) and to counteract voters' tendency to mesh the ideological profiles of coalition parties by putting them into the same basket (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013). Which specific incentive structure prevails is a highly complex outcome of the party system, the most salient issue area of the day, and the electoral standing of the constituent parties. A complete analysis of all these considerations lies beyond the aim and empirical feasibility of this chapter. We limit ourselves instead to two aspects of government composition as explanatory factors: fragmentation and ideological composition.

The role of government fragmentation is a central insight behind the common pool perspective in budgeting, which argues that with an increasing degree of government fragmentation, the incentives of individual members to internalize the costs and to limit the adverse consequences of excess budgetary demands decrease (Martin and Vanberg 2013; Perotti and Kontopoulos 2002; Roubini and Sachs 1989). We carry this logic

forward to intragovernmental conflict beyond budgetary demands and argue that fragmentation within the cabinet is likely to increase incentives by coalition parties to emphasize their differences from coalition partners and reduce incentives to prioritize coalition unity and survival. Such conflict of interest can be especially sharp when coalition partners have equal or comparable access to policymaking levers (Bojar 2019).

The preceding discussion has been ideology-blind in the sense that fragmentation was conceptualized only in numerical terms. Fragmentation, however, has an ideological dimension, too: When coalition members hail from different party families, they are likely to have different policy preferences on immigration and therefore their policy-seeking preferences in the Muller and Storm framework will collide. By contrast, if coalition partners come from the same (or ideologically adjacent) party families, their policy differences are likely to be relatively small, so policy compromise (and lower levels of conflict) is easier to achieve. The second, ideological dimension of government composition thus predicts that with greater ideological distance between coalition partners, intragovernmental conflict is likely to intensify.

The pressure on government parties, as we have seen in the Chapter 6, more often comes from the opposition that tries to pin the government into a corner either by accusing it of doing too little in coming to terms with refugee flows or of excesses and inhumane treatment of refugees. The ultimate source of such partisan conflict is the radical right opposition that has had an immense influence on immigration-related policies over the past decades either directly (Akkerman 2012; Schain 2006; Carvalho 2013) or by putting and keeping the issue on the agenda and compelling government parties to respond by getting tough on immigration both in rhetoric and in substance (Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019; Bale 2003; Meguid 2005).

Though the distinction between mainstream parties and radical right challenger parties is analytically useful in this regard, we need to take a step further and distinguish between the center-left and the center-right both in government and in the opposition. The distinction is important when one considers the different strategies parties have when faced with issue competition from opposition parties that own an issue that is salient among the electorate (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015). One of these strategies is issue avoidance, as documented in the Swedish context by Odmalm (2011): When parties are faced with challenges from parties that own the immigration issue, it might be electorally worthwhile for them to avoid engaging with the challenge, lest it divert attention from the parties' core competencies. This consideration is expected to weigh particularly heavily in the calculus of center-left party strategists,

which have an ideological inclination to offer a comparatively permissive stance on refugees that may clash with the vote-seeking objectives of the party if forced to compete on the immigration issue. The center-right, by contrast, is comparatively well positioned to compete on immigration (Pardos-Prado 2015), as many of its voters share some of the underlying anti-immigration attitudes that allowed the radical right to capitalize on the refugee crisis (see Chapter 4). Therefore, when center-right governments are in power, partisan conflict is likely to be stronger because governments may actively compete on immigration, either by accommodating the radical right's demands or by confronting these demands with an emphasis on their own competence to deal with immigration. In sum, our main expectation regarding partisan conflict is that the ideological composition of governments is related to the degree of partisan conflict, with center right governments engaging in more conflictual policy debates with opposition parties than center left governments do.

The foregoing considerations referred to only the intensity of the conflict, not its substantive content. In principle, the conflict both between government actors and between government actors and the opposition can revolve around either overly permissive or overly restrictive immigration policies. Though most of the policies we study imply significant tightening of the countries' immigration regimes (see Chapter 5), governments can be under simultaneous pressure for breaching human rights and democratic principles and for not going far enough in limiting refugee flows. We expect the ideological composition of the government to be related to whether conflict revolves around humanitarian, solidaristic, and democratic considerations or around securitization, sovereignty-based, and identitarian principles. Specifically, while center left governments are more likely to engage in conflicts on the former grounds, their center right counterparts are more likely to engage in and respond to conflicts revolving around the latter.

Finally, in terms of partisan conflicts, it is not just the ideological composition of the government that matters but also the origin of the conflict. When conflicts emerge between the government and its right-wing opposition (either center right, or radical right), the security–sovereignty–identity mix is likely to predominate when compared to conflicts that emerge between governments and their left-wing opposition.

Data and Measurement

Many of the variables we use to test our theoretical expectations are based on the PPA dataset that we use throughout the book. In order to measure the intensity of intragovernmental and partisan conflicts, we

revert to the conflict scores we derived in Chapter 6. In this chapter, we focus on only the intragovernmental and the partisan conflicts. We shall further investigate which particular actor pairs contribute most to these two conflicts. Within intragovernmental conflicts, the debate can unfold according to four different scenarios: within governing parties, between coalition partners, between government parties and the government, and within the government itself (for instance, between the prime minister and particular ministries). As for partisan conflicts, one of the conflicting parties is always the government (or government parties), but the adversaries can be the radical left, the radical right, the mainstream left, or the mainstream right. Figures 8.1 and 8.2 illustrate the distribution of these conflict sources in the policy episodes that we classified as intragovernmental conflicts and partisan conflicts, respectively.

Figure 8.1 shows the relative distribution of the four sources of intragovernment conflicts. Overall, the most common source is conflicts between government parties and the government, which arguably reflects the fact that parliamentary actors sought to achieve some sort of oversight over the crisis management of what has been predominantly an executive affair. In fact, more than half of such party–government

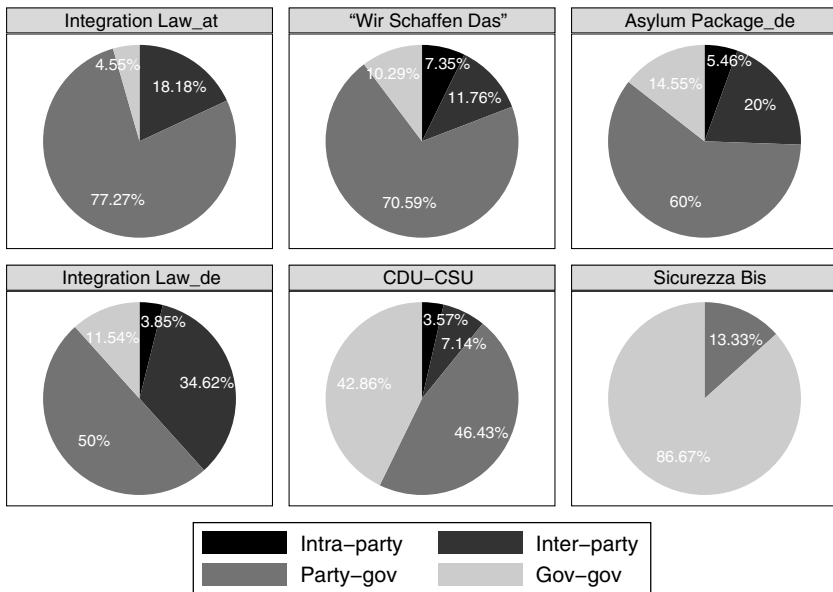


Figure 8.1 The sources of intragovernment conflicts in the refugee crisis

interactions were initiated by senior government parties and targeted at the government. Comparatively speaking, conflicts within the government were rarer, on average. However, such conflicts were the dominant sources of intragovernmental conflicts in the *Sicurezza Bis* episode in Italy. In this episode, such within-government conflict was a triangular debate between the prime minister (Giuseppe Conte), the interior minister (Matteo Salvini), and the ceremonial head of state of the Italian Republic (Sergio Mattarella). Such a premier–interior minister stand-off was replicated in the CDU-CSU Conflict in Germany, where Chancellor Angela Merkel and Interior Minister Seehofer got caught in an acrimonious debate over the latter’s emboldened push toward a tighter asylum regime and an accelerated deportation process after becoming interior minister in the autumn of 2018.

Some degree of interparty debate was present in five out of the six intragovernmental conflicts, but in none of them was it particularly intense, with the partial exception of the integration law debate in Germany, where the three coalition partners – CDU, CSU, and SPD – exchanged verbal blows, with the SPD taking the leading role by criticizing the CSU on its hardline stance. Conflicts within the parties themselves were least common. They appeared only in the German episodes, whereas the Austrian and the Italian government parties managed to maintain party discipline and concentrated their efforts on criticizing coalition partners or the government.

Turning to partisan conflicts, [Figure 8.2](#) displays their sources. As the reader may recall, partisan conflicts are significantly more common than intragovernmental conflicts, and there is a larger variation in the partisan patterns. What is immediately apparent is that governments engage in conflict much more often with their mainstream opposition rivals (especially with the center right) than with their radical challengers. The role of radical left challengers is especially limited. The mainstream right is an important source of conflict in six out of the thirteen episodes – in three of the four French episodes, in the Summer of 2015 episode in Greece, in one of the Hungarian episodes (“Stop Soros”¹) and the two Swedish partisan conflict episodes. The fact that the mainstream right has been a more vocal opponent of governments than the mainstream left provides early tentative support for the expectation that the center right has more to gain from politicizing immigration than the center left does.

On the radical end of the partisan spectrum, the dominance of the radical right is unsurprising. It has been the most vocal opponent of governments

¹ Some of the Hungarian opposition parties with ambiguous party family roots were coded as center right.

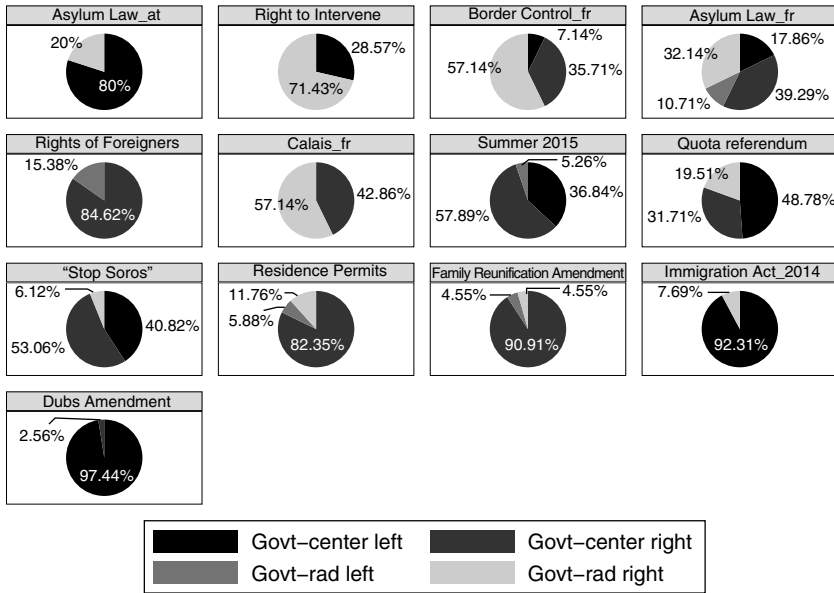


Figure 8.2 The sources of partisan conflicts in the refugee crisis

in one Austrian (Right to Intervene) and two French (Border Controls and Calais) episodes, consistent with their long-established presence in the political scene of the two countries. Comparatively speaking, Golden Dawn, Jobbik, the Sweden Democrats, and UKIP have accounted for a much more limited share of partisan conflict with the Greek, Hungarian, Swedish, and British governments. Overall, the share of a conflict that is attributable to the radical right tends to be higher in contexts where it is electorally stronger, such as France and Austria. The correlation coefficient between the average electoral strength of the radical right challengers throughout the policy episodes and the share of the partisan conflict with the radical right is 0.38. By contrast, the participation of the radical left in government-opposition conflicts is restricted to five of the thirteen episodes, and in none of them did it become a particularly prominent feature of the debates. The only partial exception is the Rights of Foreigners bill in France, but even here, merely two actions were targeted at the government by radical left politicians from the New Anti-Capitalist Party and the Radical Left Party.

After this brief overview of the sources of intragovernmental and partisan conflicts, we now return to the variables we highlighted as potentially important explanatory factors for the strength and substantive content

of the conflicts.² For government fragmentation, we use the Herfindahl Index of governments from the Database of Political Institutions (Cruz et al. 2021), which measures the sum of the squared seat shares of all parties in the government. In case of single-party governments, this indicator takes a value of 1, whereas for large coalitions constituted by many parties of roughly equal strength, it is close to 0. In our sample, none of the governments were particularly fragmented, so the effective distribution of the variable in our sample is situated between 0.5 and 1.

For the ideological variable, we rely on the GALTAN (Green–Alternative–Libertarian, Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalist) score of parties assigned by experts participating in the Chapel Hill Survey (Jolly et al. 2022). We use the respective scores from the survey wave closest to the corresponding policy episodes. The GALTAN score locates parties on a 0–10 scale, with higher values assigned to parties taking a position closer to the Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalist pole and lower values for positions closer to the Green–Alternative–Libertarian pole of the attitudinal divide (Hooghe et al. 2002). We measure the ideology of governments by the average of the governing parties, weighted by their seat shares in parliament. For ideological fragmentation, we take the average absolute distance between the GALTAN scores of the governing parties.

As Figure 8.3a reveals, governments in the refugee crisis spanned the entire ideological spectrum, with a slightly rightward skew. The most ideologically right-wing government (the third Orbán government in Hungary) is closer to the TAN pole than the most left-wing ones (the Renzi/Gentiloni governments in Italy) are to the GAL pole. Moreover, fifteen of the forty episodes occurred under left-of-center, and twenty-five occurred under right-of-center governments. The typical form of such left-of-center governments was a coalition between left-wing parties. An example of this constellation is the Swedish case, where the Social Democratic Party was in a coalition with the Green Party throughout all five Swedish policy episodes. Among right-of-center governments, we observe two main types. Twelve of the twenty-five right-of-center governments were single-party governments, such as the Fidesz-led governments in Hungary and the Mitsotakis-led government in Greece during the late Greek episodes in the years of 2019 and 2020. Another twelve were grand coalitions, which, due to the ideological position of the constituent parties as well as their relative strength, score above 5 on the weighted ideological position variable. Examples of such right-of-center grand coalitions are the German and

² For episodes that spanned the tenure of more than one government, we assigned scores for the government fragmentation and ideological composition variables to governments that accounted for the largest part of the episode.

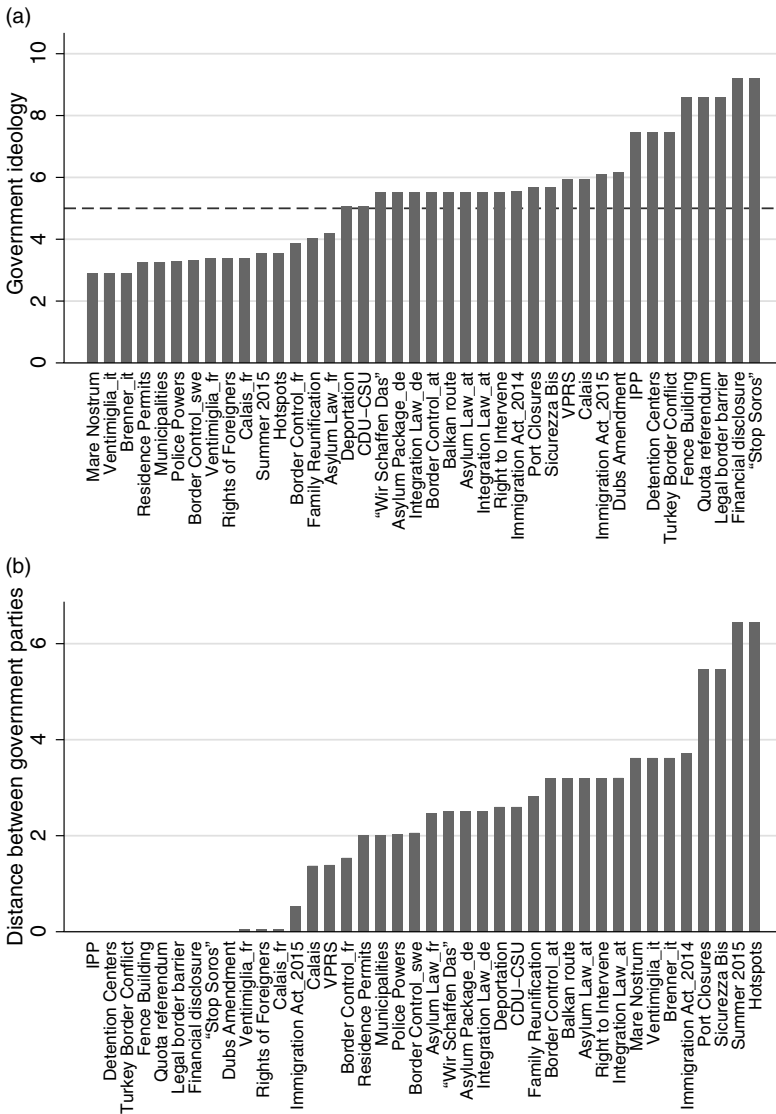


Figure 8.3 Ideological position (a) and distance (b) of governing coalitions in the refugee crisis

the Austrian grand coalitions as well as the Lega–M5S government in Italy. In fact, the only left-of-center grand coalition in our sample is the French government led by President Macron’s centrist REM party during the Asylum Law episode. As for the ideological distance (displayed in the lower panel of Figure 8.3), single-party governments score 0,

by construction. Most governments' ideological distance varies in a moderate range between 0.2 and 0.4, and only a few governments display large differences between the coalition members on the GALTAN scale. This group includes two Greek episodes under the Syriza–Anel coalition and two Italian episodes under the M5S–Lega coalition.

The final measurement issue concerns the substantive part of the conflict. To this end, we rely on frame scores in our PPA coding, which distinguishes between ten frames actors use to justify their position/action (see [Chapter 9](#)). We distinguish between security–sovereignty–identitarian frames on one end and humanitarian–solidarity–democratic frames on the other. Our measure for the substantive part of the debate is then the share of these two types of frames among all the frames used. We limit this calculation to those actions that constitute the respective conflict lines for intragovernmental and partisan conflicts.

Government Composition and Political Conflict in the Refugee Crisis

We begin the empirical investigation with the relationship between government fragmentation and intragovernmental conflicts.³ As [Figure 8.4](#) shows, the relationship is in the expected direction. All six episodes where such intragovernmental conflicts predominate are characterized by high levels of government fragmentation (relatively low scores on the Herfindahl index). On the other end, episodes falling under single-party governments all have a lower than average intragovernmental conflict score. The correlation between the two variables is rather high (–0.61), and even if we exclude all single-party governments from the sample and concentrate on coalition governments only, it is not much lower (–0.58).

It must be emphasized, however, that the high levels of intragovernmental conflict associated with government fragmentation are largely driven by the German and the Austrian grand coalitions, as is readily visible in [Figure 8.4](#). Though we operationalized government fragmentation simply by the relative strength of the constituent parties, certain other idiosyncratic features of these grand coalitions beyond party fragmentation provide equally important parts of the story. In the German case, one of these features is the role of the CSU, the Bavarian sister party of the senior government party, the CDU. A significant part of the intragovernmental conflict played out between this regional party and Chancellor Merkel and her party as well as the junior coalition member, the SPD. The leader of the CSU, Horst Seehofer, who also became interior minister in March

³ The correlation tables for the variables included in this analysis is presented in the chapter appendix.

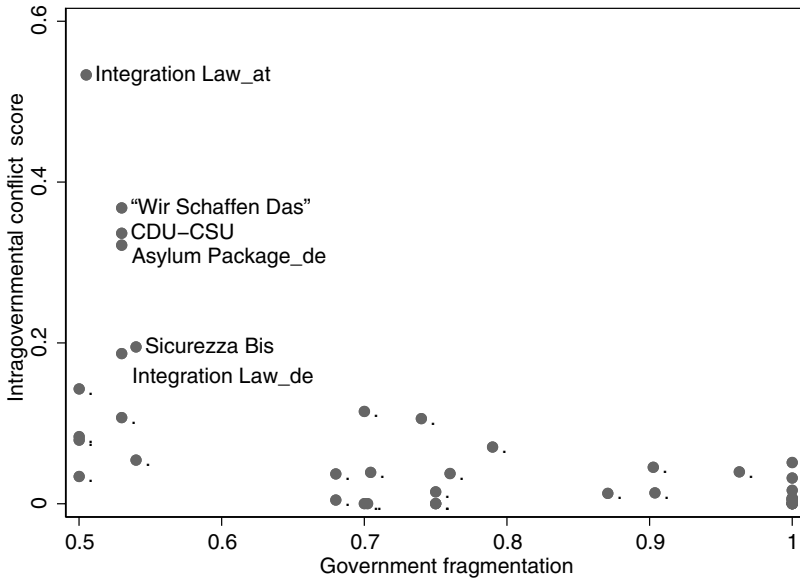


Figure 8.4 Government fragmentation and intragovernmental conflicts

2018, played an especially pronounced role in this conflict due to his hardliner stance against Chancellor Merkel's "Willkommenskultur" (see [Chapter 6](#)). In the Austrian case, an important venue for this intragovernmental conflict was the interaction between regional authorities and the central government. Although in [Chapter 6](#) we treated such interactions as a distinct state–government conflict, it is important to recognize that several regional politicians played a prominent role in one of the government parties, such as Hans Niessl, SPÖ governor of Burgenland; Josef Pühringer, ÖVP governor of Upper Austria; and Michael Häupl, SPÖ mayor of Vienna. From their position as regional politicians, therefore, they also contributed to intragovernmental conflicts, particularly in the Asylum Law episode, where they launched no fewer than fourteen critical actions against the federal government. Intragovernmental conflicts in grand coalitions can thus be conceptualized as a result of government fragmentation in a broader sense that includes fragmentation across different levels of policymaking, particularly in federal countries.

The correlation between ideological fragmentation (average ideological distance between the coalition partners) and intragovernmental conflict score is considerably weaker, albeit still in the expected direction: 0.27. This relationship is, however, largely driven by single-party governments, where the ideological distance is zero by definition, as we saw on [Figure 8.4](#), and which tend to be characterized by low intragovernmental

conflicts. When focusing on coalitions only, the correlation coefficient is a mere 0.06, which provides very limited evidence for our expectation that ideological distance is a determinant for conflict. A more plausible interpretation of the data is that government fragmentation is a likely determinant of intragovernmental conflict even if coalition partners hail from similar or ideologically proximate party families. This is likely to be the result of the fact that conflict over immigration within the government is not necessarily a result of different ideological principles but rather follows from debates over electoral strategies, policy details, or blame avoidance strategies by the coalition partners.

A case in point is the Integration Law episode in Austria. This episode has the highest intragovernmental conflict score in the whole sample, and it occurred under a grand coalition government with a relatively large ideological distance (3.2) between the two constituent parties, the center left SPÖ and the center right ÖVP. In the conflict, however, few of the actions emanated from distinct ideological principles. The most contentious elements of the debate revolved around a ban on veiling in public places, language requirements, and a requirement for refugees to accept nonprofit jobs. Despite the sensitivity and ideological divisiveness of these issues, few of the conflictual actions revolved around basic ideological principles; rather, they focused on procedural matters and took the form of the parties mutually accusing each other of not sticking to their part of the coalition bargain. What this anecdotal evidence suggests is that even in cases with a relatively large ideological distance between coalition partners, the debate between them can be rather nonideological, so government fragmentation alone is a sufficient condition for intragovernmental conflicts.

Turning to the second conflict dimension that we examine in this chapter, we probe the relationship between the ideological make-up of governments and the extent and type of partisan (government–opposition) conflict (see [Figure 8.5](#)). As it turns out, the relationship between the average ideological position of the government on the GALTAN scale and the partisan conflict score of the episodes is positive but weak (0.2). On the one hand, with one exception, governments scoring high on the GALTAN scale (>8) are characterized by comparatively high levels of partisan conflict. On the other hand, all but two of the governments scoring low on this scale (<4) produced below-average partisan conflict scores. The two outliers among the governments with low scores – the Hollande government during the Rights of Foreigners Bill in France and the Swedish center left coalition led by Löfven in Sweden during the Residence Permits episode – were both characterized by a partisan context where the government was simultaneously attacked from both the left and the right. Though in both cases, the mainstream center right opposition led the offensive, the government was also criticized by the radical right and the radical left opposition.

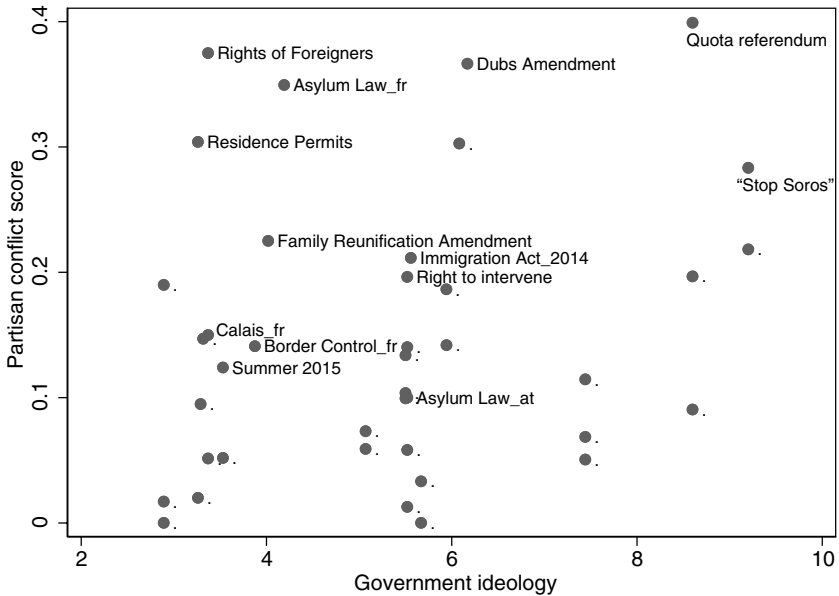


Figure 8.5 Government ideology and partisan conflicts

What explains the outlier status of these cases, therefore, is the multiple angles of partisan attack against the government rather than the government proactively seeking out conflict.

We expected that the center-right, when in government, may have a lot to gain from politicizing immigration, in contrast to the center-left. Though it is highly questionable to what extent Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party can be considered a center-right party, the location of the two Hungarian partisan conflicts – the Quota referendum and the “Stop Soros” episode – in the upper right quadrant of Figure 8.5 suggests that these two episodes provide a useful testing ground for the validity of this mechanism. If our expectations are valid, the government (and government parties) should be in the driver's seat as instigators of the conflict. This is definitely the case for the “Stop Soros” episode, where the government (and its parliamentary wing) was responsible for almost half (47 percent) of conflictual actions. If the government's initiating role in the Quota Referendum episode was less pronounced, accounting for 36 percent of the partisan conflict, it is still situated well above the average government share for all partisan conflicts (roughly a quarter). Overall, however, as the proponents and the executors of the policy packages, governments are obviously much more likely to be targets rather than initiators of the conflict when forced to defend their policy proposals (see Chapter 6). Against this backdrop,

the two Hungarian cases, particularly the “Stop Soros” episode, provide some suggestive evidence for the prospects of the center-right to electorally benefit from putting the immigration issue on the political agenda.

We also anticipated that government ideology determines the conflicts’ substantive content, as it is conveyed to the audiences via particular framing strategies that actors employ in the debates. In particular, we expected that center-left governments are more likely to engage in debates on humanitarian–solidarity–democratic grounds, whereas the center-right would prioritize debates revolving around themes related to security, sovereignty, and cultural (identitarian) concerns. However, the correlations between the share of such frame types and government ideology provide only weak support for this argument. For intra governmental conflicts, the relationship between government ideology and the share of humanitarian–solidaristic–democratic frames is indeed negative (correlation coefficient: -0.26), while the share of security–sovereignty–identitarian frames is positive (correlation coefficient: 0.17). For partisan conflicts, however, the resulting patterns go against expectations, with correlation coefficients for the types of frames amounting to, respectively, 0.17 and 0.06 . This unexpected result can be explained by the fact that in the case of partisan conflicts, governments have only partial control over the substance of the debates. For instance, left-wing opposition parties may trigger conflicts on humanitarian grounds even if the center right government tries to ignore their actions. Conversely, center left governments may decide to ignore conflicts around security concerns, but that does not make the conflicts go away, as (center) right opposition parties can keep such security threats on the agenda against the wishes of the government.

To test this proposition, we now turn to the final empirical exercise, which relates the substantive content of the conflict to the sources of partisan conflict. To reiterate our expectations, we expected the share of humanitarian–solidaristic–democratic frames to be higher when the main opposition challenge comes from the left, and we expected the share of security–sovereignty–identitarian frames to be higher under challenges from the right. Starting with the share of the first type of frames, the patterns are closely in line with our expectations: The correlation coefficient between the share of such frames and the share of partisan conflict emanating from the center left and the center right are 0.63 and -0.40 , respectively. For the conflict between radical challengers, the coefficient is -0.35 with radical right challengers and exactly zero (no correlation) with radical left challengers. The lack of correlation with the radical left is most probably related to the very low number of such actions in our sample. For frame shares of the security–sovereignty–identitarian type, the patterns largely mirror the previous findings, with one important difference. For such types of frames, it is the radical right that appears to be successful in putting such

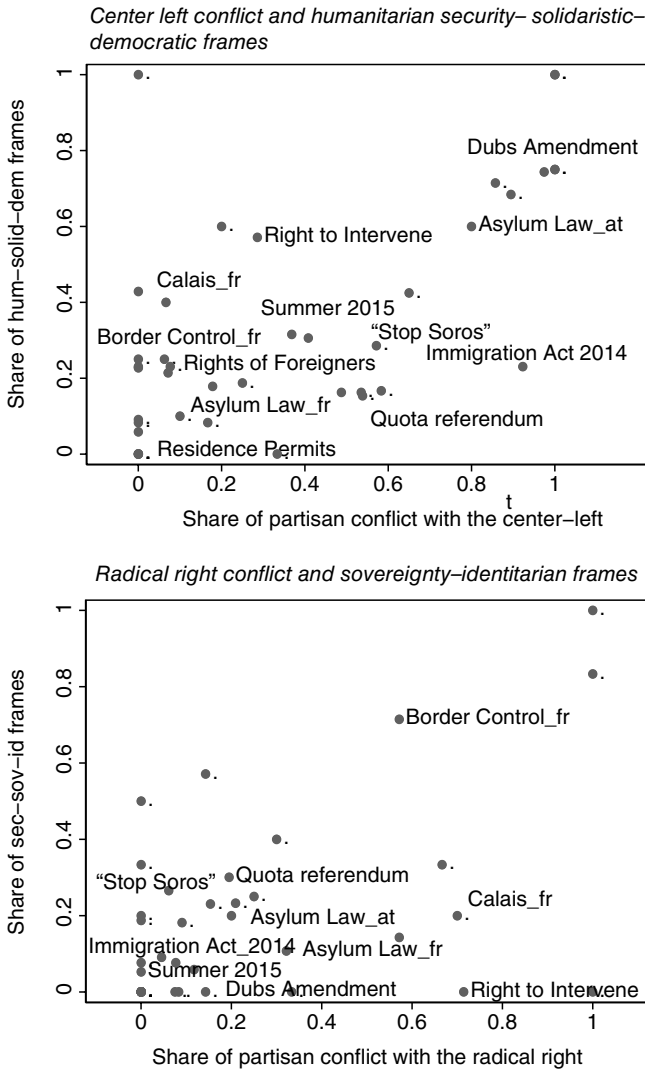


Figure 8.6 Relationship between the content of the conflict and their partisan source

concerns on the agenda (the correlation coefficient between the share of these frames and the share of the conflict originating from the radical right is 0.52). The corresponding correlation coefficient for the mainstream left amounts to -0.38 , for the mainstream right it is -0.04 , and for the radical left it is -0.02 (again, no correlation). Therefore, while the center right has

been a more vocal opponent of governments during the refugee crisis, the radical right opposition has been more successful in sticking to a consistent securitarian and sovereigntist narrative in the debate.

To sum up the findings on the relationship between the substantive content of the conflict and the source of partisan challenges, the most noteworthy patterns are the high share of humanitarian–solidaristic–democratic frames when the opposition comes from the center-left and the high share of security–sovereignty–identitarian frames when the challenge comes from the radical right. The role of the center-right is somewhat ambiguous: Though its presence, when in opposition, is associated with less conflict on humanitarian–solidaristic–democratic grounds, this does not translate into a higher share of security–sovereignty–identitarian concerns. More generally, we have seen that while the ideological composition of the government is consistent with the substantive content of the conflict in the intragovernmental domain, it is the ideological source of partisan opposition that has a stronger predictive power related to the content of the debate in the government–opposition (partisan) domain. [Figure 8.6](#) shows the scatterplots with the highest correlation coefficients in such partisan conflicts.

The Impact of Government Composition in Action: Two Case Studies

Sicurezza Bis in Italy (September 2018 to August 2019)

Based on the composition of the government that presided over the *Sicurezza Bis* episode in Italy toward the end of the refugee crisis, the episode was always going to be a perfect candidate for intragovernmental conflict. The coalition was composed of two main parties with vastly different ideological profiles on the GALTAN dimension: the Lega, an archetypical populist radical right party and M5S, a relatively new actor on the Italian party scene with a rather motley ideological profile but as far as the cultural dimension is concerned, arguably playing the role of the functional equivalent of a new left party in the Italian political system ([Kriesi 2020](#)). Government fragmentation was thus rather high both in numerical terms (0.54 on the Herfindahl index) and in terms of the ideological distance between the parties (5.47). Moreover, the M5S–Lega government was a case of nonaligned setting between the interior portfolio and the prime minister. Arguably, the interior minister and the leader of the Lega party, Matteo Salvini, even eclipsed the role of the nonpartisan premier Giuseppe Conte in this episode.

Unsurprisingly against this backdrop, the episode turned out to be one of the six intragovernmental conflicts and the only one that emerged

outside Germany and Austria, the two countries with long-standing traditions of grand coalitions and the inevitable conflicts these entail. Most of the conflict played out within the government itself, as we have briefly mentioned before. Thirteen of the fifteen intragovernmental exchanges took place between government actors, while the remaining two occurred between government parties and the government. The relative peace between the coalition partners, however, is largely due to the fact that the Lega was largely a one-man show led by Salvini, who now acted in his new role as interior minister, rather than as the head of his party.

Salvini and Conte contributed to the conflict in roughly equal measure both as initiators and as targets. Predictably, they targeted each other most of the time. Though Salvini refrained from outright criticism of the premier and relied on softer forms of pressure via a radio interview, a letter directed at him, and statements made in a government meeting, his actions were largely aimed at speeding up the process of approving the law that sought to tighten the asylum system by accelerating deportations and facilitating the detainment of asylum seekers. In exchange, Conte expressed doubts on the constitutional legality of the decree and invoked the president of the republic, Sergio Mattarella, who shared these concerns.

In fact, Mattarella pushed his constitutional prerogatives to the limits by expressing concerns about the decree on various occasions. In early October, he invited Salvini for a meeting in the Quirinale – the Italian presidential palace – to express reservations about the law. Later, in a letter addressed to the government, he emphatically demanded that the constitutional rights of foreigners be respected. Much later, at the end of the episode, he made a last-minute attempt to curb the excesses of the law in yet another letter addressed to the leaders of both chambers, where he labeled the sanctions of those violating territorial waters “unreasonable,” a rather harsh expression from the president in an otherwise civilized debate.

Amidst the Salvini–Conte–Mattarella triangle, the role of Luigi di Maio and the senior coalition party, M5S, was somewhat ambiguous. Though he sought to assuage the concerns of Salvini by promising that he would impose order in the ranks of his party and get the votes to support the decree, at the same time, he did not shy away from distancing himself from the interior minister. In one statement, he accused the latter of trying to push the decree through without proper consultation with his party: “Salvini is trying to provoke us to cover up his failures, we will not fall into the game of responding to a decree that no one has ever discussed in advance.” In an inner-circle discussion, he went even further by accusing Salvini (and the Lega) of threatening the survival of the government and at the same time thought to assuage his party,

saying that he would not give in to all of Salvini's demands. Ultimately, however, this balancing act of di Maio turned out to be a failure because the substance of the decree ended up largely representing the Lega's (and the populist radical right's in general) vision of clamping down on asylum seekers in the context of the crisis.

In terms of the substance of the debate and the frames that the actors used, the main patterns also largely conform to our theoretical expectations. We argued that center right governments are more likely to engage in intragovernmental conflicts on security–sovereignty–identitarian grounds, whereas center left governments would prioritize humanitarian–solidaristic–democratic concerns as far as the intragovernmental conflict line is concerned. The ideological placement of the M5S–Lega coalition government is far from trivial because of the ideological ambiguity of M5S. The Chapel Hill expert survey scores place the Lega firmly on the right of the GALTAN spectrum, whereas M5S is coded as center left, giving rise to a weighted average ideological score of 5.67 (i.e., slightly right of center) for the government. Considering that both the nonpartisan premier Giuseppe Conte and the head of state Sergio Mattarella, who played a prominent role in the episode, had entered politics from a legal background, the overall weight of the government is expected to tilt further to the center. Accordingly, the frame mix in the debate was rather balanced. In the overall debate, roughly a quarter of the frames are of the security–sovereignty–identitarian mix, and slightly less than half are humanitarian–democratic (no solidaristic frame was used in this episode).

When zooming in on the part of the debate that unfolded along the intragovernmental conflict line, the balance is roughly the same: Two actions were accompanied by a security–sovereignty frame and three by humanitarian and democratic ones. Starting with the security–sovereignty types, both of these actions were undertaken, unsurprisingly, by Salvini. In May 2019, he defended the proposed measures to his followers on the grounds that they would protect Italy against “smugglers, criminals, and convicts,” rhetorically musing about how the coalition partner M5S could possibly be against the proposal. In the same month, in a letter addressed to Premier Conte, he sought to dismiss concerns voiced by six UN rapporteurs, calling these interventions “undue invasions” in a domestic political matter. On the other end of the frame mix, Sergio Mattarella played the leading role yet again. On various occasions, he invoked the constitutional rights of foreigners, and in the letter sent to the heads of the legislative chambers toward the end of the episode, he stressed that “there is always a responsibility to rescue at sea.”

Quota Referendum in Hungary (November 2015 to December 2016)

If the Sicurezza Bis episode in Italy created fertile grounds for intra-governmental conflicts to emerge, the one-year-long Quota Referendum episode in Hungary was an equally likely candidate for partisan conflict. While the party discipline that Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian premier, imposed on his single-party government all but precluded any sort of dissent from the government's ranks, the ultraright policy platform of Fidesz (GALTAN score: 8.6) foreshadowed that not only would the government be exposed to frequent attacks from the opposition but that it would also readily engage with such attacks or provoke the conflict itself. In fact, as we previously showed, in the two Hungarian partisan conflicts – the Quota Referendum and “Stop Soros” – the government and its parliamentary wing initiated a comparatively large share of the partisan conflict. Moreover, given the rather heterogenous partisan opposition standing against Fidesz, the government's plans to block the EU's relocation scheme via a referendum was likely to be criticized from multiple directions and substantive angles. Accordingly, the episode came to be dominated by the partisan conflict line (with a partisan conflict score of 0.40). No less than 123 actions involved the government and the opposition, an outstanding number among our episodes both in relative (as a share of total actions) and in absolute terms.

Most of the government's attacks were targeted at the long-standing leader of the mainstream left, the postcommunist MSZP (Magyar Szocialista Párt) party. However, by the time the referendum initiative was launched, the radical right challenger party, Jobbik – which, incidentally, initiated the constitutional change to block the relocation of asylum seekers to Hungary in the first place – had overtaken MSZP as the leading opposition force and was steadily climbing in the polls. As Jobbik's challenge was widely perceived as more threatening to the government than the left-wing opposition, Fidesz could not ignore it and often targeted Jobbik in the debate. From the opposition's side, the most active initiator of the conflict was yet again MSZP, followed by ex-premier Ferenc Gyurcsany's Democratic Coalition. Jobbik was comparatively silent as an initiator, not least because the referendum initiative was close to its original plans and its general policy agenda. Nevertheless, Jobbik also targeted the government on eight different occasions. Finally, LMP – a nominally green left outfit but in political terms a centrist party playing a “bridging” role between the two blocs – also participated in the debate, though it was largely spared from the kind of government offensive that other opposition parties had to face.

Apart from its intensity, one of the most unique features of the partisan debate is the multiple arenas in which it unfolded. The media accounted

for only around a third of the action, a limited share when compared to other episodes. This is largely due to the fact that in the summer as the date of the referendum (October 2016) neared, the debate gradually shifted to public campaigning, including various poster campaigns and other official campaign events. A number of opposition protest events also took place – including conventional demonstrations as well as a “human chain” around the parliament organized by the Democratic Coalition, most of them immediately before the referendum vote. Finally, the referendum also loomed large in the parliamentary arena, both in the preparatory phase in the spring and in the referendum phase in the autumn, when Fidesz first tried to mobilize the vote to reach the quorum and then to impose a constitutional amendment despite the unsuccessful referendum outcome for its position. Meanwhile, the opposition’s main strategy in the parliamentary debate was to take an ambiguous stance on the Relocation Scheme as such, while arguing that the referendum was a futile tool to fight it. However, there were discernible differences in the strategies between the mainstream opposition and Jobbik. The former sought to highlight the government’s incompetence and hidden agendas while refusing to take a firm stance on the fate of refugees, whereas Jobbik was careful to emphasize its substantive policy agreement with the government even as it criticized the latter on procedural grounds.

Similar to the *Sicurezza Bis* episode in Italy, the prevalent frames in the policy debate were rather mixed. Conspicuously, solidarity frames, yet again, were entirely absent from the debate, which is somewhat paradoxical given that the debate was ultimately about interstate solidarity. Instead, while the government successfully promoted its own narrative on security and identitarian grounds – with sovereignty frames taking a secondary role, the frame mix by the opposition mostly centered around democratic/legal norms – humanitarian considerations were invoked only once, in a mocking response to the government’s poster campaign. Instead, the most common frame type employed by the opposition was one of efficiency/pragmatism. This conforms to its overall strategy that we highlighted before: Instead of attacking the government on principled grounds, the opposition mostly aimed to highlight the futility of the referendum push. The relatively low share of security–sovereignty–identitarian frame types thus partly goes against our expectation that such frames should prevail if the mainstream left is the main source of conflict. Even if somewhat unexpected, this outcome can be accounted for by the government’s successful dominant initiating role in the conflict and the support it obtained from Jobbik, ever so careful to emphasize its toughness on immigration.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the importance of government composition in explaining the nature of domestic conflict in the refugee crisis. We have put into evidence two important aspects of this composition: fragmentation and ideology. Our focus on government fragmentation was informed by the notion that most of the governments in our study are coalition governments and therefore should not be treated as unitary actors. The type of governments in charge during the crisis ranges from monolithic single-party governments – such as the Fidesz government in Hungary and the Mitsotakis government in Greece – to fractious grand coalitions. Some of these coalitions are further fragmented on ideological grounds, as we have witnessed in the case of the M5S–Lega coalition in Italy.

Our empirical exercises relying only on bivariate correlations due to the limited sample size in our study revealed some interesting patterns regarding the relationship between government fragmentation and the intensity of the intragovernmental conflict line. Numerical fragmentation showed a fairly close link to the prevalence of this conflict, while the link with ideological distance between the parties appeared to matter less. Ideology turned out to be of mixed relevance for the intensity of the partisan conflict. We confirmed that center-right governments are more likely to engage in debates centered on immigration with the opposition. Moreover, the role of government ideology also matters for the content of the debate along both the intragovernmental and the partisan conflict lines. However, the general relationship between ideology and partisan conflict is weak.

In substantive terms, we expected (and empirically confirmed) that center-right governments are more likely to engage with immigration-related debates among themselves compared to center left governments, whose electoral incentives push them to hide their differences and emphasize other issues instead. However, when the conflict unfolds between the government and the opposition, we have seen that the source of the partisan challenge matters more than the ideological make-up of the government: When the challenge comes from the radical right – and to a lesser extent, from the center right – security–sovereignty–identitarian frame types are more likely to be prevalent compared to challenges from the mainstream left, where humanitarian–solidaristic–democratic themes are likely to take center stage. In practice, however, as we have seen both in the case of the *Sicurezza Bis* episode in Italy and in the case of the Hungarian Quota Referendum, the frames that dominate the debates tend to be highly mixed and variegated, and they are likely to depend on a host of other factors beyond ideology and the general scope of this chapter.

Introduction

The most salient event early in the refugee crisis was perhaps the drowning of a young Syrian Kurdish boy at the coast of Turkey, three-year-old Alan Kurdi. It received wide media coverage for multiple days, placing the humanitarian aspect of the refugee crisis under the spotlight. Worries about the sustainability of the refugee flow subsided for a while, given the shock caused by the viral circulation of photos portraying this meaningless loss of life of one so young. It is hard to alter the perception that the refugee crisis is a humanitarian crisis at its core. It is driven by one of the most historically common human impulses, the urge to migrate in order to escape danger or depravity – and it can be stopped only by paying a steep price in terms of human life, as is evident on the seafloor of the Mediterranean. We instinctively classify the influx of 2015–16 as a refugee crisis due to all its political consequences, but in reality, the number of refugees was low compared to other major migratory incidents, like those after World War II. A question that has remained somewhat in the background up to now, therefore, is why was this even a crisis? Why was there such a zeal to implement ever-stricter border controls and asylum regulations when most of the people were indeed coming from a torn and depraved place?

One partial answer to this is that this is a result of politicians following public opinion, which is generally hostile to immigration across the EU. But this only begs the question of where this hostility comes from and who capitalizes on it. Arguably, anxieties about cultural mismatches and resource depletion do exist among the public, irrespective of what politicians say. However, this chapter claims that partially, the hostility is still greatly amplified by concerted efforts by political actors, focusing here specifically on the right wing of the political spectrum to present or *frame* the refugee crisis – and migration in general – as something different and bigger than a simple humanitarian issue. Mainly, this works by tapping into a primordial fear of outsiders and foreigners, but it must

also address and annul the humanitarian aspect of the refugee crisis in order to allow the audience to overcome – or at least sidestep – the repulsion caused by images such as the lifeless body of an infant laying on the Turkish shore.

This chapter, then, slightly deviates from policy and issue-based politics and looks at arguments and frames surrounding the refugee crisis by right-wing actors. Regarding the defenders of the refugees and immigrants, the line of reasoning is relatively straightforward, attuned to what has been already mentioned. People are drowning in the sea as they seek a brighter future, and our advanced economies and societies can and should afford them an opportunity to pursue that. For the pro-migration side, first and foremost comes our humanitarian and moral duty to other persons, then our legal duty as inscribed in the Geneva treaties and UN participation. For the defenders of anti-immigration policies though, the ideational battle cannot be positive or straightforward to that extent. To defend their anti-immigration position, they can resort to identitarian ideals, stressing the cultural – among others – differences of newcomers; however, those must be weighed against humanitarian concerns. It is difficult to argue in favor of an abstract community cohesion when viral images of dead bodies washing ashore are everywhere in the media. To come to terms with this challenge, anti-immigration actors, predominantly on the right, are complementing their rhetoric with frames that correspond to Hirschman's (1991) rhetoric of reaction: that the aid provided to refugees is bringing about perverse results, resulting in more human tragedy than they avert and concurrently placing our societies in grave jeopardy due to the social changes brought about by the refugee inflow.

As noted, we focus specifically on the themes and frames utilized by right and radical right actors to portray the refugee crisis because, as we shall see in Chapter 14, they were the main mobilizers and beneficiaries of the refugee crisis. We account for the most common frames utilized by these actors and make only passing reference to those invoked by others, such as civil society and other parties, which are generally more predictable. For this purpose, we briefly present the frames we coded in our PPA analysis but also perform and mostly rely on a separate speech analysis, described in Chapter 3, that attempts to record – more precisely and extensively – the frames used by right-wing actors specifically.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, we briefly review the literature on framing and situate our concepts and methods within this literature. Afterward, we look at the distribution of actors and frames/themes, aiming to see who uses which frames and themes. Moving forward, we rely primarily on speech analysis (see Chapter 3), which focuses on

several key right and radical right actors who were the protagonists of our refugee crisis episodes. Finally, we discuss the commonalities and differences with respect to the themes among different right-wing parties and conclude the chapter by pondering what type of convergences and divergences in the right's rhetoric we witnessed during the refugee crisis.

Theoretical Framework

Frames have become a staple of political and communication sciences. They are analyzed because of their potential to persuade recipients of a frame to “see” a situation in a specific way (Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Nelson 2011). In this study, the frames we are interested in are “whole-story” frames (Gray 2003) that characterize an entire situation, in this case the refugee crisis, in different ways and aim to steer the audience toward a specific way of making sense of the crisis (Brewer and Gross 2005). While originally, after the first migrant deaths, the refugee crisis had a distinct humanitarian hue, it was gradually embedded in different frames, mainly, but not exclusively, by right-wing actors who attempted to present the whole situation as something entirely different, guiding the audience to see it through the lens of threat and lurking danger.

Most of the work done on the framing of the refugee crisis has focused on an analysis of media or social media content (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017; Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017; Pérez 2017), mainly zooming in on whether the media presented the refugee crisis as a “security” or an “economic” issue (Kovář 2020). We consider this to be our starting point, but because our analysis focuses on political actors and analyzes their speeches directly, we expand on the list of possible ways of framing the situation, as politicians tend to utilize a wider variety of frames to characterize the refugee crisis. Some of them often treat it in a completely dispassionate way, relegating it to a mere technical issue of hotspot functionality, while other utilize more apocalyptic overtones, presenting it as a lethal threat to the existence and continuity of European civilization. In the next section, we present our list of frames in more detail.

Apart from “whole-story” frames, which aim to characterize the crisis in its entirety, we also engage in thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Lorimer 2021). In a more detailed way, we engage with the speeches of right-wing politicians and attempt to code constant tropes, arguments, and themes that they utilized in their speeches to characterize more specific aspects of the refugee crisis and to justify their use of the overarching frames. For example, talking about refugees as potential

criminals or terrorists is often used to justify the framing of the refugee crisis as a security issue or even, depending on the context, as a geopolitical threat, as was the case when the Greek prime minister claimed that the influx of migrants from Turkey was an attempt to destabilize the country.

We thus approach the issue methodologically from these two sides, in order to address two main questions. First, we ask whether the right used a common template, or simply a common discursive agenda, to frame and talk about the refugee crisis, and if so, what the common discursive elements were. The refugee crisis presented both a threat and an opportunity for the right-wing party families. It was an opportunity because public opinion seemed massively hostile to the influx of immigrants and thus, the adoption of a stricter anti-immigration rhetoric could have gathered votes. It was also a threat, however, because there were impediments to such an outcome. First, many of the parties on the right were in government at the time and therefore had to balance their anti-immigration stances with government responsibilities. As the signatories of international treaties on asylum seeking and participants in the European Union that imposes certain minimal standards in the reception of asylum seekers, right-wing parties in government were often constrained with regard to what they could credibly promise in terms of antimigration policies. Concurrently, many of them faced competition on the issue from radical right antagonists, who could seize the opportunity to bolster their anti-immigration rhetoric and consequently their vote share at the expense of their mainstream rivals. Additionally, many of the radical right parties are associated in the minds of the voters with antimigration stances (see [Chapter 14](#)), own the issue, and are in a much better position to benefit from it.

Therefore, right-wing parties were faced with a dilemma concerning the rhetoric they adopted on the issue. Would an antimigration stance help them in political competition, aligning themselves with the public's preferences, or would it drive more voters into the hands of the radical right? And if they adopted such a stance, should they use arguments similar to those of the radical right, or should they try to differentiate their discourse to appear more like responsible and credible governing parties? Overall, we want to study whether a common discursive strategy about immigration issues emerged among the center and radical right or whether, instead, there were multiple strategies depending on the position of a party in government or on other factors.

Furthermore, a second motivation of this study is to focus on the radical right instead to examine whether there was indeed a sort of transnational radical right discourse, as argued by [Lorimer \(2021\)](#) and

McDonnell and Werner (2020), favoring tighter European integration on a civilizational basis and advocating a “fortress Europe.” These scholars have argued that radical parties in recent years have abandoned their dominant nationalistic-sovereigntist discourse (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002; Kitschelt and McGann 1997; Kriesi 2016) in favor of one that is more ambivalent about Europe. Whereas before they would seek the dissolution of the European Union, they were now more tempted to maintain the edifice but remold it in the image of their own ideals. PiS, Fratelli d’Italia, and Fidesz, for example, have often lamented the cowardice of the European Union in proudly and unabashedly protecting what they regard as “European civilization,” which is purportedly under threat from the hordes of migrants and the dilution of European moral values and traditions. Ideally, these parties would seek the transformation of the European migration policy away from ideas of fair redistribution of refugees toward a system focused on providing impenetrable border protection and slim chances of any migrant receiving asylum. It is therefore an open question as to how some of these parties have argued in the refugee crisis: Have they assumed a discourse that stresses the policy failures of the EU as is, or have they insisted on charting a different, sovereigntist course altogether? We shall try to probe this question, too.

Presentation of Frames and Themes

As noted, we separate our analysis into frames and themes. Whereas our frames are overarching characterizations of the refugee crisis, inducing people to understand it as a specific kind of issue or crisis, themes are specific arguments that attempt to draw the audience’s attention to a narrow aspect of the crisis and persuade it to either prioritize certain of its elements or associate it primarily with this narrower aspect.

In other words, our frames are generally more abstract, attempting to classify the refugee crisis as a specific type of crisis. We deploy eleven different frames, contrary to other relevant studies that focus mostly on security or economic frames (Kovář 2020), as we find that for the array of policy actors that we cover, a wider variety of frames is used. The eleven frames are presented in Table 9.1 and range from frames typically invoked to argue against immigration to frames more closely associated with humanitarian organizations. In between, we find some frames that are used equally for framing the refugees in a negative or positive light, and frames that attempt to evade the issue and present it as a more neutral, “technical” one.

The first frames in Table 9.1, which as we shall see are the most common among right-wing parties, are typically used to frame the refugee

Table 9.1 *Frames and frame classification in our analysis*

Frames
Security
Identity
Sovereignty
Efficiency
Cost–benefit
Legalistic
Democratic
Sustainability
Geopolitical
Humanitarian
Solidaristic

crisis as a negative phenomenon that one must defend themselves against. Security frames commonly invoke the dangers of terrorism or crime from incoming refugees, while identity frames claim that the identity of refugees is incompatible with European identities. Sovereignty arguments are more ambiguous, as they can have multiple uses. While they are sometimes used for expressing opposition against efforts to create a common European approach to deal with the refugee crisis, as is very often the case with Fidesz, they are also used to justify claims that the country's closing of borders is its sovereign right, as was mostly the case with the Greek New Democracy.

Moving down the list in [Table 9.1](#), we encounter frames that tend to be neutral toward immigration and sidestep arguments on principles, preoccupying themselves only with the technical aspects of the refugee crisis. Arguments about the efficiency of policies dealing with the refugee crisis are some such frames, often arguing for the return of policies like Hotspots and Port Closures. Additionally, cost–benefit frames also approach the crisis from a “utilitarian,” dispassionate standpoint, while legalistic frames tend to narrow it down to a strict examination of the legal standing and rights of immigrants, the legality of their entry into a country, or the legal obligations of the country vis-à-vis the international community.

Much like legalistic frames, democratic arguments can cut both ways on the pro-/anti-immigration spectrum. They may be used either to argue that minority and refugee rights are a cornerstone of democracy or to make claims that elites are thwarting the democratic will of the people who are generally hostile toward migration. Similarly, sustainability frames are made either to argue in favor of immigration due to

Table 9.2 *List of themes in speech analysis*

Themes
Border protection/stricter asylum
Economic pressure
Populism/democracy
European themes
Policy efficiency
Perversity
Jeopardy
Conspiracy/invasion/Islamophobic

the spillover economic and manpower benefits it provides to an aging Western population or to articulate opposition to immigration, as when stressing the unsustainable implications of large immigration waves for the welfare systems and societies of Europe. Geopolitical frames are generally rarer and attempt to situate the refugee crisis within a wider context of geopolitical turbulence, subsuming it under the wider turmoil in the Middle East and Africa, or as in the Greek case, specifically, embedding it into the wider antagonism in the Aegean Sea.¹

Finally, at the bottom of [Table 9.1](#), there are two frames that are typically used in pro-immigration discourse – humanitarian and solidaristic frames. Solidaristic frames are generally coded when actors, at least implicitly, accept the inevitability of immigration and call for other actors to share the burden caused by it and/or show some solidarity with the refugees. While such frames are generally rather rare in our speech analysis database, they are often invoked in the first version by right-wing politicians in frontline states. Humanitarian frames are eventually self-explanatory, stressing the humanitarian aspect of the refugee crisis and focusing on the problems of the immigrants themselves, but they are seldom used by the actors that are prevalent in our speech analysis and are usually invoked by NGOs and other civil society organizations.

Moving on to the themes – the coding here has been more inductive. While first coming up with a list of often-repeated tropes and arguments, we condensed this list of sixty or more arguments, which try to prioritize a specific aspect of the refugee crisis, into eight overarching categories, which are shown in [Table 9.2](#).

Some of the themes have a very direct correspondence with the frames we analyzed above. Thus, we typically assign a democracy frame when

¹ More recently, similar frames have been used to characterize the latest influx of refugees entering eastern Europe from Belarus and Russia.

also assigning a populism/democracy theme. The same applies to themes regarding policy efficiency/policy failure. When politicians, for instance, claim that the wave of immigration is imposed by unelected European elites upon an unwilling European public, they try to situate the refugee crisis within a wider frame of democracy. However, some of the arguments made in favor and – mostly – against immigration do not neatly correspond to an overarching frame but either can be subsumed under several of the frames we previously listed or may even not correspond to any of them. When we present the themes in more detail below, we also provide their correspondence with our existing frames.

Overall, our list of themes contains what we considered to be the broadest categories of arguments/tropes associated with the refugee crisis. Border protection themes are usually attributed to sentences where politicians ask for practical measures to bolster border security or make asylum procedures tougher. Economic pressure refers to a host of themes referring to the economic harm caused by migrants, either due to benefit recipience or because of increasing job competition. We have already referred to the populism theme, whereas the European theme mostly comprises discourses within which a politician attempts to blame Europe or the failure of European cooperation for the refugee crisis. Policy failure and efficiency themes refer to more “technical” expressions, such as the need to accelerate the building of hotspots or more abstract calls for better policy.

The three themes that are at the bottom of our list correspond mostly to types of arguments first identified by Hirschman (1991). The first – and most common – type of argument is that of perversity or counterintuitiveness. Generally, it points to efforts to help refugees that produce a result opposite that of their stated goal, or it stresses the hypocrisy of those wanting to help refugees. Some of the arguments included in this category, for example, claim that drownings are actually caused by rescue missions like *Mare Nostrum* that act as a “pull factor.” Some other arguments of this type claim that progressives hypocritically defend migrants who are much more conservative than the conservatives they oppose at home or that the wrong type of migrants are helped, that the hypocritical policy caters to those who can make the journey while ignoring the most vulnerable people stuck in the conflict zones where refugees originate from. Jeopardy, by contrast, is more straightforward; it involves arguments that refugees pose an active threat to the local populace as potential terrorists, criminals, or – more recently – as carriers of diseases and Covid-19.

Finally, the more far-fetched arguments that border on conspiracy theories or explicitly target Muslim migrants and bemoan “multiculturalism”

are included in the last theme category. As we shall see, the “invasion” theme, by far the most common in this category, arguing that the local population will eventually be displaced by the incoming migrants, is almost exclusively invoked by radical right parties and Fidesz.

Frames in PPA and Speech Analysis

In [Table 9.3](#), we present the distribution of frames in our speech analysis and PPA, according to the categories used in each type of analysis. As noted, PPA is missing three of the categories we used in the speech analysis. One could argue that the legalistic and cost–benefit categories are incorporated in the efficiency frame, which would leave the sustainability frame as the one lacking a true counterpart in our PPA analysis.

The results indicate the major divergences and similarities between media discourse of political actors more generally and the discourse of the right-wing side of the spectrum in particular. The speech analysis, as expected, displays a higher frequency of security and identitarian frames than the general PPA analysis and somewhat higher counts of sovereignty claims, whereas humanitarian frames are much less numerous. This is unsurprising, as right and radical right parties tend to prioritize security and identitarian frames and arguments rather than humanitarian frames, which are mainly deployed by NGOs and civil society. Unexpectedly, however, democratic frames, typically deployed to argue that immigrants are not wanted by a majority of the population or that

Table 9.3 *Frame distributions in speech analysis and PPA: percentages*

Frame	Speech analysis	PPA
Security	22.4	15.1
Efficiency	21.1	19.9
Identity	9.9	4.7
Sovereignty	8.6	5.3
Solidaristic	7.7	14.2
Legalistic	7.4	—
Democratic	6.2	13.6
Geopolitical	4.9	3.3
Cost–benefit	4.1	—
Humanitarian	4.0	18.7
Sustainability	3.8	—
Totals	660 (100.0%)	5,071 (100.0%)

elites impose immigration on a hostile electorate, are actually more rarely used by right-wing actors than by all the actors taken together in the PPA analysis. Other than that, the distribution over the rest of the frames appears relatively similar across the two datasets and, in an analysis not shown here, is very similar in terms of distribution, when the PPA database is reduced to the same type of actors.

We now focus on the data for the right-wing actors and break down the frames and themes by the types of actors. We start with the frames and compare mainstream right parties to the radical right. The UK conservatives, ÖVP, New Democracy and more arguably, Fidesz are classified as mainstream right parties, whereas UKIP, AfD, FPÖ, Elliniki Lysi, Lega, and Fratelli d'Italia are classified as radical right parties. In general, with the exception of the Lega, the party-family distinction also correlates with participation in government. There is only one exception where center right parties studied here have not been in government – namely, New Democracy's early speeches. In other words, for the most part, the differences between party families are also differences between governmental and nongovernmental parties. In any case, in Figure 9.1, we see the difference in the usage of frames between mainstream right and radical right parties.²

Figure 9.1 shows a relative convergence in the types of frames used by the two party families, with two major exceptions. On the one hand, solidaristic framing is more typically deployed by mainstream right actors. As we shall see shortly, this is entirely due to a single party, as it is predominantly New Democracy that utilizes this frame (51 percent of the sentences of this frame are attributed to the Greek mainstream right; the Lega uses it, too, but to a lesser extent – hence the party family difference). The same is true regarding sustainability, a frame almost solely utilized by New Democracy to stress the unsustainability of Greece receiving so many refugees. Sovereignty is also more often deployed by mainstream right actors, a product of mainly three parties, namely the UK conservatives and Fidesz in Hungary, another expected result given their centrifugal or anti-European tendencies. The other mainstream party utilizing it on the fringes is New Democracy, but rather in sentences meant to stress that protecting the Greek borders is an act of sovereignty, rather than as juxtaposed to supranational authority. What is surprising, however, is the degree to which radical right parties shy away from the frame. The AfD accounts for almost all sovereignty-focused frames among this party

² This is simply the difference of the percentages of a particular frame in a party family's discourse over the total number of frames: $\text{Diff} = \Delta_j \frac{\sum_{i,j} \text{frame}}{\sum_i \text{frame}}$, where i is party family and j is frame type.

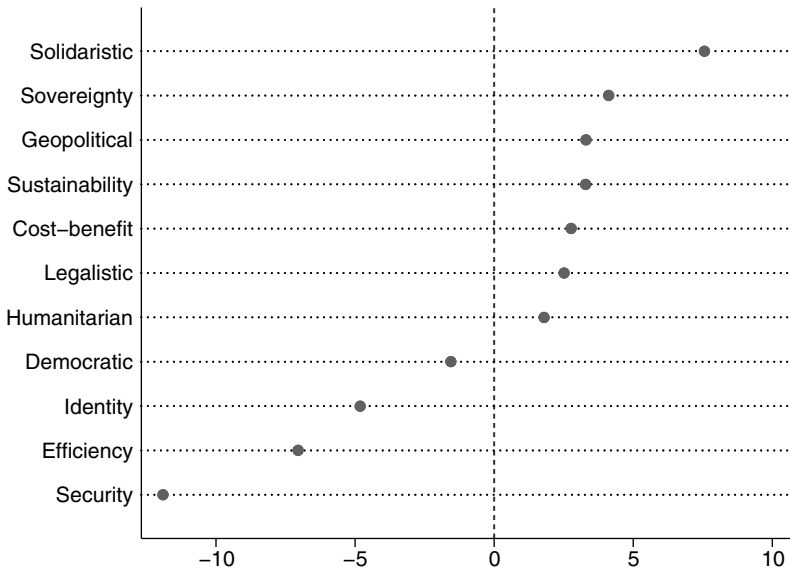


Figure 9.1 Differences in percentage use of frames between mainstream right and radical right actors

Note: The further right a dot is found, the more common is the usage of a frame by mainstream right parties compared to radical right ones and vice versa.

family. The Mediterranean radical right (ELLY, Lega, and FdI) almost never uses it, while it comprises only 6 percent of the frames utilized by the FPÖ.

On the other side of Figure 9.1, we can see that efficiency, identitarian, and especially security frames are much more common among the parties of the radical right. Identitarian frames are mostly avoided by all mainstream right parties, except for the family's arguably most fringe component – Fidesz. Instead, they form the backbone of the Greek radical right's repertoire, with its leader continuously stressing the incompatibility between Greek-European culture and the culture of Muslim immigrants. The FdI and – to a degree – UKIP and the Lega also utilize this frame, albeit much less frequently.

The security frame is the most common one and, concurrently, the one dominated by radical right actors. The champion is FPÖ, which comprises 30 percent of all security frames, copiously trying to present the refugee crisis as a security crisis. The Lega, Fidesz, and Elliniki Lisi all contribute almost equally to this framing, another sign that Fidesz is closer, in terms of rhetoric, to the radical right than to the mainstream

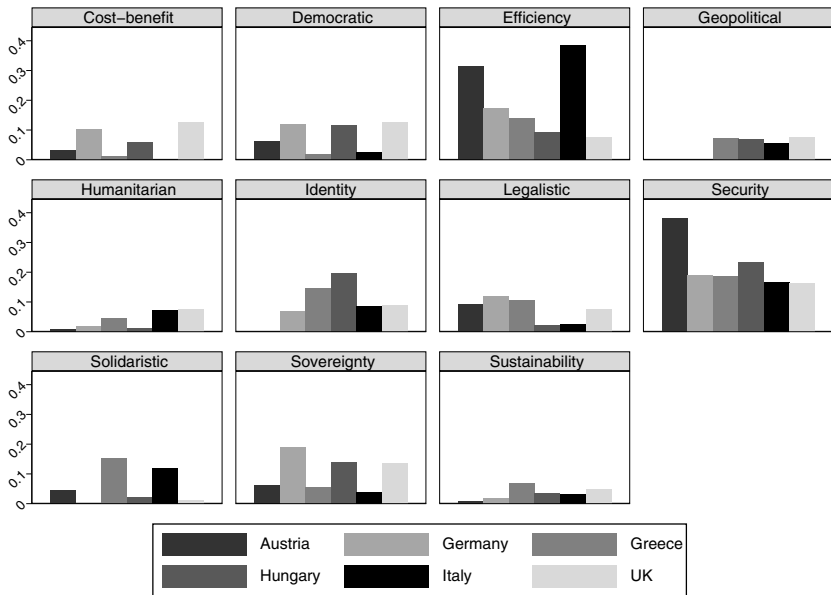


Figure 9.2 Frame type shares by country: percentages

right families. Nevertheless, unlike identitarian frames, mainstream right parties do deploy security frames, just not at the same frequency as the radical right.

Figure 9.2 presents the types of frames per country. This figure corroborates what has already been discussed, namely, that solidaristic frames are mostly used in the European south, dominating the discussion in Greece and partially in Italy, whereas they are nonexistent everywhere else. Also, despite the proliferation of security frames in both countries, they are the only countries (perhaps due to their frontline status making them confront the issue more directly) in which humanitarian frames appear at all, even by right-wing actors, compared to all the rest of the countries, except for the UK.

As we shall also see in Chapter 14, security frames in Austria dominated the political scene, with the mainstream and radical right competing to present immigrants as a menace. It is most peculiar that in Austria, the whole discussion is framed in terms of security, with identitarian frames barely making an appearance, compared to a much more “cultural” approach in Greece and Hungary and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the countries, where identitarian frames are more common. Finally, as we discussed previously, it is apparent here as well that sovereignty

frames are much more common in Germany, Hungary, and the UK, something that was to be expected, given the much more Eurosceptic profile of the parties involved.

Themes in Speech Analysis

Moving on to the second aspect of our coding, we trace the themes utilized in and by those different types of party families and countries. We start by showing the distribution of themes in [Table 9.4](#). As can be seen, the most common themes are those that have to do with calls for European cooperation, or the ones decrying European failure. Perversity themes, involving claims that the handling of the refugee crisis is either hypocritical in some way or leads to perverse results, constitute the second most common category, followed by border protection, which includes abstract claims to ramp up border protection and more “technical” discussions on related issues. Following those are more abstract arguments on the efficiency of policies and more security-related themes dealing with jeopardy and conspiracy theories. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, there is relatively little economic or populist/democratic argumentation, with our sample of parties rarely stressing such themes, compared to the more acute security threats caused by the refugee crisis.

Repeating the exercise performed for frames, [Figure 9.3](#) shows the difference of theme usage between party families. The only rhetorical devices that are more commonly used by mainstream rather than radical right parties are European-centered themes, which argue that the refugee crisis is either a product of European coordination failure or, contrarily, needs to be addressed via more European coordination. Almost all the rest of the themes, surprisingly, are hovering close to zero, even the conspiracy themes, as both radical and mainstream right parties seem to

Table 9.4 *Distribution of themes in our database: percentages*

Themes	Frequency (%)
European themes	19.6
Perversity	14.9
Border protection/stricter asylum	12.4
Policy failure/efficiency	10.3
Conspiracy/invasion/anti-Islam	10.0
Jeopardy	9.6
Economic pressure	7.1
Populism/democracy	5.9
Total	100.0%

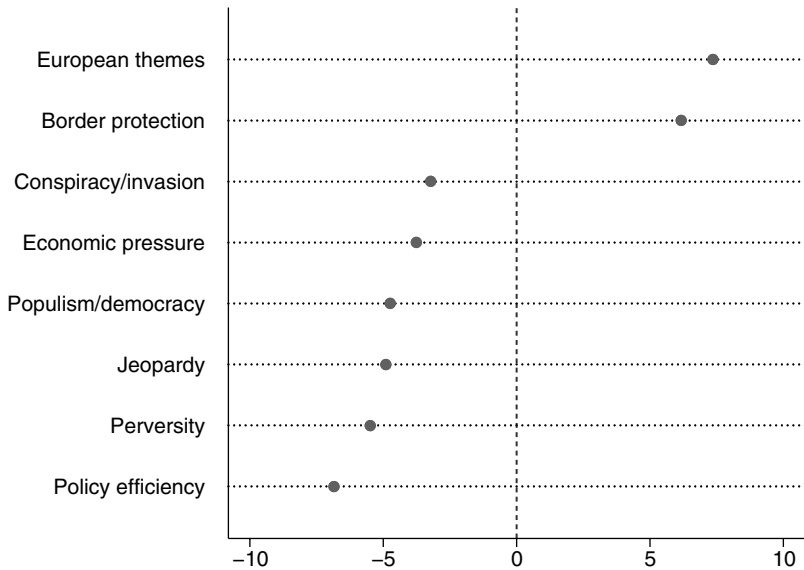


Figure 9.3 Differences in percentage usage of themes between mainstream right and radical right actors

deploy them equally. On the other side of the spectrum, one finds only policy-efficiency themes – that is, claims that the policy is inefficient, too slow to be implemented, or not working – which are used more frequently by the radical right, possibly due to those parties being in opposition. The same partially applies to populist themes, which are also slightly more frequently used by radical right parties, as they are easier to use when in opposition, a position from which arguments about policy elites ignoring the people sound more plausible.

In Figure 9.4, we present themes per country. First, it shows that concerns about policy efficiency dominate in Austria and Germany, whereas these themes are mostly absent in the other countries, with the exception of Greece. On the other hand, economic pressure themes are much more frequent in the southern European countries, which had an ailing economy, and the UK, where the Brexit discussion focused heavily on the burden of immigration.

Even though solidaristic frames were mostly present in Greece, as we previously saw, the rhetoric centered on Europe was not the most dominant among the Greek right. Instead, Hungary and Italy show a much higher prevalence of European themes. This is not only because themes related to Europe do not only concern calls to present the issue as a

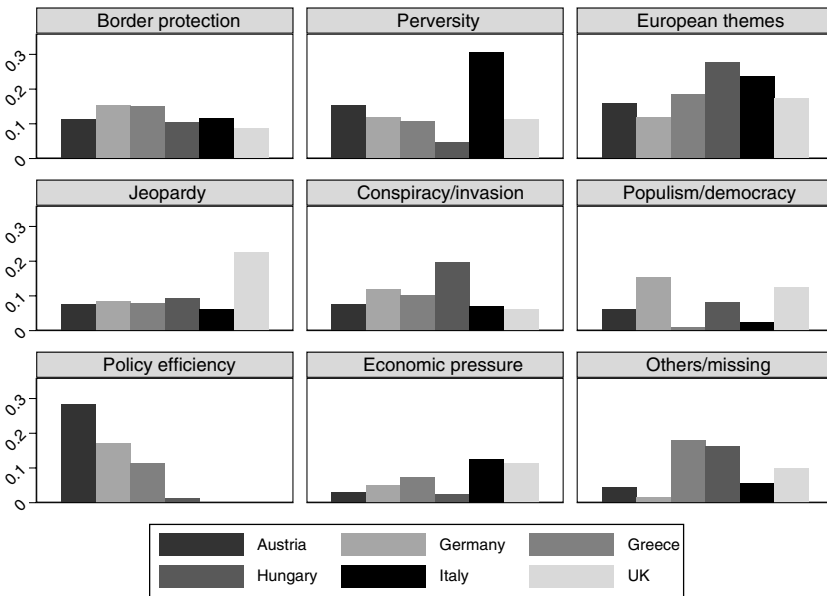


Figure 9.4 Theme type shares by country: percentages

problem requiring more European cooperation but because they also try to blame the refugee crisis on Europe’s decadence; weakness; and the “buonisti,” as Salvini used to call all those do-gooders in Europe who wanted to help refugees. The most common theme in this category by far is what we label as “impotent/weak Europe,” which refers to politicians – almost exclusively from the UK, Hungary, Italy, and Austria – who decry Europe’s catering to the so-called illegal migrants. In other cases, much less common and exclusively found in Greece, the refugee crisis was framed as a problem caused by the Visegrad countries, particularly Hungary, which blocked common European solutions for partisan and domestic reasons.

Perversity is another rhetorical trope that is particularly widespread in Italy, where Salvini repeated, ad nauseum, that efforts to help migrants were mismanaged, as they caused more drownings, and that the left was hypocritically helping conservative migrants who threatened European progressive values. Salvini also constantly suggested that the refugee crisis was in fact a fabricated crisis, cynically exploited by a cottage industry of NGOs, civil servants, and politicians – primarily from the left. A subtheme within this general category that is not, however, exclusive to the Lega but is actually widespread among all right-wing parties is that migrants are

not actual refugees and that framing the crisis as a “refugee crisis” rather than an illegal immigration crisis motivated by economic reasons was fundamentally misleading and led to perverse conclusions, as economic migrants placed a burden on society and made almost everyone worse off. This rhetoric was very common in Italy, Greece, the UK, Austria, and Hungary. Among our country sample, it is only really absent in Germany, where the focus was much more on the policy of the chancellor rather than on the refugees themselves. Indeed, Germany is where the populist theme is more prevalent, along with the UK, with the AfD scorching Merkel again and again regarding a policy that they considered to be unpopular and imposed from above on German citizens, who disagreed with it.

What is also striking is the presence of the jeopardy theme in all countries, including the rhetoric according to which migrants represented a terrorist or criminal threat and a danger to public health. While this is not the most dominant theme, it is common in all countries and used almost equally everywhere and by all parties. It is perhaps the common thread that links together the parties of both families and all countries, presenting the refugees and migrants as a potential threat.

Finally, we should note that the more conspiratorial discourses, which discuss the refugee crisis in terms of the loss of Christian Europe or of population and cultural displacement, are also common throughout Europe. As we saw, they are not necessarily the product of radical right parties, as these themes are sometimes invoked by the ÖVP, New Democracy, and the Conservatives – albeit in less apocalyptic forms – and are actually quite dominant in Fidesz’s discourse, too, coming only second to themes about Europe’s impotence.

The Refugee Crisis as Seen by the Right: Convergences and Divergences

So far, we have described the frames and rhetorical themes used by parties of the mainstream and radical right, but now we want to delve a bit deeper into the questions that fueled this descriptive exercise. Specifically, we wish to examine whether there was a common discursive agenda between the two party families – and all parties in general – and whether there has been some movement toward a unified vision of Europe and a transnational rhetoric, as some other scholars have argued (Lorimer 2021; McDonnell and Werner 2020).

For this purpose, we resort to the use of multidimensional scaling (MDS) to portray the proximity and distances of parties and frames/themes. We base our MDS figures on the distributions of frames and themes for each party and try to see how close the parties’ distributions

are to each other. Whereas MDS attempts to create a rough image of the relative distance of the objects it incorporates, it should be noted that the image produced cannot compress all the available information into the two-dimensional space of a typical figure; hence, some of the distances may not be represented precisely. Given that the process has to place the nodes based on a large number of distance pairs in a two-dimensional space, it cannot accurately reflect all distances, and we “correct” for this by returning directly to the distributions of frames for each party in [Table 9.5](#). Nevertheless, it produces a rough, but helpful, summary image of the relationships present between parties and frames, both to each other and between themselves. [Figure 9.5](#) presents the MDS graph for the parties, showing the proximity of their frame distributions.

[Figure 9.5](#) essentially reveals two clusters of parties. One is the “southern” cluster, containing the Greek and Italian parties, as well as the Austrian center right. The other one includes the radical right parties of northwestern Europe with the addition of Fidesz, which appears closer to them than to its own family. There is a particularly tight proximity between UKIP, Fidesz, and the AfD, while the extremity of ELLI places it further away but still closer to the radical right than to the “southern” cluster. The FPÖ is situated between the two clusters, but equally distant from the center of both. Finally, the UK Conservatives are in a league of their own, distant to all other parties studied here, as Brexit generated a quite different context that gave rise different frames than those used by the other parties.

We can take a closer look at the reasons for this configuration by complementing the MDS with the figures for the distribution of frames for each party. [Table 9.5](#) shows the distribution of frames and number of frames for each party. It demonstrates the centrality of security frames as a common element in right-wing discourse and the fragmentary nature of the other frames, which are shared only by certain parties at a time.

Overall, if there is a common thread running across all parties, a core of right-wing rhetoric, it is the common usage of the security frame among all parties in our study, albeit to different degrees. Only the Conservatives, the party that we showed as more distant from the rest, minimized the use of this frame. Otherwise, we clearly see the patterns that led to the clustering in the table; the parties of the radical right, plus Fidesz, tend to deploy the security frame in conjunction with *some*, but not all, of the other radical right frames, namely populism, identity, and sovereignty frames. Which of these other frames are stressed by the radical right parties depends on the local context, but it is clear that they use a combination of them more than the center right parties do, as is evidenced in the subtotals for this first dimension in [Table 9.5](#).

Table 9.5 *Frequencies of frames per party: percentages*

	ELLI	UKIP	Fidesz	AfD	FPÖ	Cons.	New Dem.	Lega	FdI	ÖVP	Total
Security	34.6	25.6	23.3	19.0	43.9	5.4	11.9	19.2	9.1	21.2	22.4
Democracy	1.9	16.3	11.6	12.1	8.2	8.1	1.6	3.2	0.0	0.0	6.2
Identity	46.2	14.0	19.8	6.9	0.0	2.7	1.6	4.3	21.2	0.0	9.9
Sovereignty	1.9	7.0	14.0	19.0	6.1	21.6	7.1	4.3	3.0	6.0	8.6
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>84.6</i>	<i>62.9</i>	<i>68.7</i>	<i>57.0</i>	<i>58.2</i>	<i>37.8</i>	<i>22.2</i>	<i>31.0</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>27.2</i>	<i>47.1</i>
<i>dimension 1</i>											
Efficiency	3.9	14.0	9.3	17.2	24.5	0.0	18.3	36.2	45.5	51.5	21.1
Solidarity	1.9	0.0	2.3	0.0	1.0	2.7	20.6	14.9	3.0	15.2	7.7
Legality	1.9	2.3	2.3	12.1	12.2	13.5	14.3	3.2	0.0	0.0	7.4
Geopolitical	1.9	11.6	7.0	0.0	0.0	2.7	9.6	5.3	6.1	0.0	4.9
Cost-benefit	1.9	0.0	5.8	10.3	4.1	27.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.1
Humanity	0.0	4.7	1.2	1.7	0.0	10.8	6.4	6.4	9.1	3.0	3.9
Sustainability	3.9	4.7	3.5	1.7	0.0	5.4	7.9	3.2	3.0	3.0	3.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	52	43	86	58	98	37	126	94	33	33	660

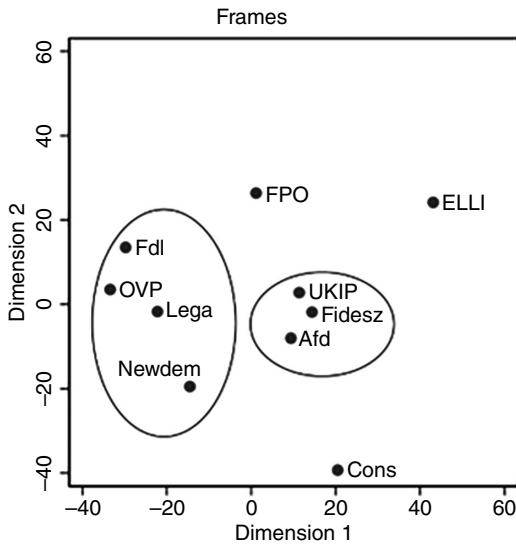


Figure 9.5 MDS configuration of parties' relative proximity based on their use of frames

Fidesz uses all four elements almost equally, but the other radical right parties tend to stress some of them disproportionately. UKIP places emphasis on populist and identity frames, whereas the AfD replaces identity with sovereignty frames, juxtaposing itself to the Europe-friendly policies of the CDU. Meanwhile, the other parties of the radical right are more distinct, with FPÖ focusing *exclusively* on security concerns, trying to outbid Kurz's encroaching on their rhetoric, whereas ELLI, apart from security, prioritizes only identity frames, frequently bemoaning the arrival of Muslim immigrants in Greece.

Looking at the parties of the “southern” cluster in Table 9.5, FDI appears closest to the other radical right parties, as it was also often complaining about the immigrants' identity, origins, and religious leanings. But much like the other parties in this cluster, it is distinct from its other European peers due to its focus on policy efficiency, as it had to respond to the actual arrival of migrants on Italian shores. Policy efficiency frames, discussing migration in technical-efficiency terms, are the one element that separates this “southern” cluster from the other parties here.

The other characteristic element of this cluster is the frequent invocation of solidarity frames by New Democracy, the Lega, and the ÖVP – albeit in different modes. The first two appeal for solidarity and for the

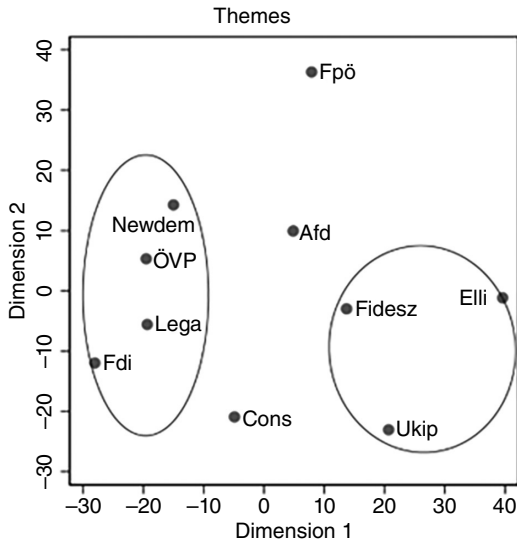


Figure 9.6 MDS configuration of parties' relative proximity based on their use of themes

sharing of the burden of immigration among all member states, something no other party is doing among the ones we study. The Austrian government party, in contrast, refers to solidarity mostly to delineate the terms for providing it: which objectives, with regard to hotspots, border controls, and so on should be reached before the Greeks and Italians can enjoy the goodwill of their peers. The common thread running through the frames used by these parties is the concept of *responsibility*: They were all in government at the time and thus responsible for domestic policy and coresponsible for European policy. Hence their treatment of the issue from a more technical viewpoint and in terms of European policy – and hence the talk of solidarity and the conditions for providing it. In contrast to the parties in the radical right cluster, they had to devise and discuss policies at both the national and the supranational level rather than deal with the refugee crisis as a more abstract threat.

We repeat the previous exercise for the themes and present the results in Figure 9.6. We can see the same clusters of parties emerge for the themes, albeit at greater distances than for the frames. We again complement the MDS figure with the distributions of themes across parties in Table 9.6, and we can clearly see that the rhetoric with regard to themes is even more fragmentary and particularistic than the use of frames, even if we can see similar clusters emerging.

Table 9.6 *Frequencies of themes per party: percentages*

Party	UKIP	ELLI	AfD	Fidesz	FdI	Lega	ÖVP	ND	Cons.	FPÖ	Total
Conspiracy	12.2	31.3	12.3	23.6	9.4	6.8	11.1	3.1	0.0	7.1	11.2
Jeopardy	31.7	18.8	8.8	11.1	6.3	6.8	3.7	5.1	16.1	9.2	10.6
Pop/dem	19.5	4.2	15.8	9.7	3.1	2.3	0.0	0.0	6.5	8.2	6.6
<i>Subtotal</i>	63.4	54.3	<i>36.9</i>	<i>44.4</i>	<i>18.8</i>	<i>15.9</i>	<i>14.8</i>	8.2	<i>22.6</i>	<i>24.5</i>	<i>45.0</i>
Perversity	12.2	4.2	12.3	5.6	40.6	29.6	29.6	17.4	12.9	12.2	16.6
European	19.5	4.2	12.3	33.3	15.6	28.4	22.2	31.6	19.4	15.3	21.8
Border	2.4	8.3	15.8	12.5	9.4	13.6	25.9	23.5	19.4	8.2	13.9
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>34.1</i>	<i>16.7</i>	40.4	51.4	65.6	71.6	77.7	76.3	51.7	<i>35.7</i>	52.3
Policy	0.0	8.3	17.5	1.4	0.0	0.0	3.7	16.3	0.0	36.7	11.5
Econ	2.4	20.8	5.3	2.8	15.6	12.5	3.7	3.1	25.8	3.1	7.8
<i>Subtotal</i>	2.4	29.1	22.8	4.2	15.6	12.5	7.4	19.4	25.8	39.8	19.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	41	48	57	72	32	88	27	98	31	98	592

Table 9.6 demonstrates that the radical right plus Fidesz cluster mainly utilizes the first three themes, namely jeopardy (UKIP, ELLI), conspiracy (ELLI, Fidesz), and populism (AfD), with each party again utilizing a particularistic mix. For ELLI and Fidesz, the refugee crisis is often treated as a civilizational crisis, with overtones of demographic replacement and “Muslim invasions” invoked to justify their rejection of refugees. For the AfD, while those elements are present, too, it is far more important to highlight the distance between the popular distaste for immigration and the chancellor’s policies. The AfD tends to add some more themes of European failure and sovereigntist frames, as we have seen previously; hence, it slightly diverges from the cluster’s core and scores comparatively high in the second dimension. Meanwhile, UKIP and ELLI constantly remind the public that refugees represent a potential security risk in myriad ways: They can bring terror, crime, or disease and threaten our societies.

For the Italian, Greek, and Austrian parties, the same is not true. While those themes are somewhat utilized, they focus much more on perversity, particularly the Italian parties, and on European themes. The first comprise a set of themes that function as a counterintuitive rhetoric. Rather than accept that their policies cause an increase in human lives lost, these parties try to turn the issue on its head: It is actually the left, whose open border policies in the past invited those people in, that is responsible for the drownings. It is the NGOs acting as a pull factor, it is the humanitarian organizations providing them aid that cause the most suffering, and so on. This can be summarized simply as a doctrine of “strictness as humanitarianism” in contrast with the deadly consequences of leniency toward the refugees. Salvini uses this theme predominantly, and so does the FdI’s Meloni, while Mitsotakis and Kurz often deploy it, too, aiming to shield themselves from humanitarian critiques.

What they do share in common with the radical right cluster is their frequent use of European themes. But unlike the sovereigntist tones of the AfD and the apocalyptic appeals of Fidesz harping on about “European weakness and decay,” these parties drift toward themes that either plead for more solidarity from Europe or encourage further cooperation within it. As such, they occupy a distinct position compared to the radical right and Fidesz.

It is also noteworthy that the Conservatives tend to veer off to a corner in both figures. As both tables show, they produce a relatively unique rhetoric, underscoring again the British distance from European politics. Preoccupied with Brexit and the quest for sovereignty, they have tended to deploy sovereignty frames and talk about migration in economic terms, grouping the refugee crisis with the wider issue of intra-European

migration that was a more salient concern for them than refugees arriving from Syria to Greek and Italian shores. The focus on economic themes is something they do have in common with three of the four southern European parties, the radical right ones, which also stressed the economic pressure from refugees on their already economically squeezed social systems.³

Overall, though, we should not entirely focus on differences but also remark that the themes of perversity, jeopardy, Europe as well as more vague calls for tighter border protection are staples in all kinds of right-wing rhetoric and comprise a part of *all* parties' speech. While the degree to which they resort to those tropes differs, it should be remembered that they all do resort to them and mostly alternate in representing the refugee crisis through one of these lenses.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, we tried to examine right-wing discourse on the immigration crisis, attempting to trace both how right-wing actors responded to an issue that had such a strong humanitarian overtone as well as what the elements were that allowed them to be the main beneficiaries of this crisis (see [Chapter 14](#)). We also wondered whether there was a convergence of rhetoric, culminating in a transnational radical right discourse, that shifted away from nationalism and sovereignty toward a defense of common European cultural heritage against the "migrant invaders."

While the data used in this chapter are not sufficient to provide a definitive response, they can lead to some preliminary conclusions. First, we saw that the *common* way the right-wing parties tried to shift attention away from the humanitarian initial response to the refugee crisis was by primarily framing it as a "security" type of issue, either stressing abstractly that border protection needed to be tightened to boost security or presenting specific types of threats, like terrorism or crime, which would manifest due to the arrival of migrants and refugees. Concurrently, if there were any elements of a common discourse, these were centered around qualms about the efficiency of current border and asylum policies, which were typically deemed too liberal, and disdain for the "do-gooders" of NGOs and left parties, who sabotaged efforts to

³ Finally, on a technical note, the FPÖ has an unusually high number of policy themes, which is a byproduct of the speeches selected for them, revolving around specific policy proposals. Therefore, we have been reluctant to place them firmly in one or the other group in either analysis and have mostly disregarded the party, as problematic speech selection might have diluted our results.

tighten security and inadvertently helped the smugglers and traffickers. In short, the frame of security and the themes of perversity, jeopardy, and calls to tighten border and asylum policies were dominant across the right-wing spectrum.

Beyond this common core, though, the parties did not speak with a united voice. We did, indeed, trace elements of a “civilizational” discourse, especially in Fidesz’s, ELLI’s and FdI’s speeches, stressing the need to protect European civilization from the invaders. But the mainstream right parties and the rest of the radical right did not particularly adopt this kind of civilization clash theme. Instead, some of the parties we examined continued to bang on the sovereignty drum, while others focused almost exclusively on security/jeopardy issues.

The overall attitude toward Europe was – to say the very least – divided. We noted a strong contingent that had outright Eurosceptic tendencies, such as the cases of UKIP, AfD, and the Conservatives, stressing the need for more sovereignty. Fidesz and the FdI were somewhere in the middle, criticizing European “weakness” when dealing with the refugee threat, sometimes urging the need for separate national-level action, sometimes urging a change in European practices themselves. Finally, other parties, especially the ones that were eventually tasked with governing during the refugee crisis or its aftermath, such as the Lega, the ÖVP, and New Democracy, concurrently leaned toward a tighter integration of asylum and migration policies at the European level and toward a much stricter regime.

Some scholars have mentioned the “ambivalence” of radical right parties toward the EU (Lorimer 2021). In our limited data, at least, this ambivalence manifested mostly at the aggregate level, that is, with some parties opting for closer and stricter integration and others remaining attached to sovereigntist claims. Yet some, like Fidesz, showcased this theorized ambivalence more clearly, concurrently bemoaning the EU’s policies and urging a different type of union rather than abandoning it altogether, even if they are located far removed from the solidaristic solutions proposed by the southern European parties.

We can summarize and synthesize the preceding discussion by concluding that, for all parties, there is a common corpus of security frame discourse and then each party, on the margin, adds rhetoric and frames *strategically*, based on *contextual* factors. These factors are mainly three. First, the country’s position or type, which spurred the creation of a joint security–solidarity discourse, for example, a frame mainly proposed by the Lega and New Democracy. Operating in frontline states, these parties aimed for a tighter integration of EU policies and redistribution of refugees, which would alleviate the more urgent problems of their country.

Secondarily, the party constellation and positioning of the other parties also had an impact on the type of framing and rhetoric. The AfD, for example, utilized populist themes more often than other radical right parties did, insisting on juxtaposing Merkel's welcoming attitude to the average German's – supposed – hostility toward migrants. In Italy and Greece, this manifested with a sort of division of labor, with the governing parties focusing more on solidarity frames, European and policy-related themes, whereas the radical right parties in opposition tried to carve out a niche based more on cultural-identity concerns and conspiratorial claims, such as the threat of a "migrant invasion."

Finally, the third factor is the timing of the refugee crisis in relation to the already existing political competition, providing incentives for the use of context-specific frames and themes. Thus, southern European parties deploy economic pressure/resource competition themes much more frequently than others, arguably driven by the dire economic straits their electorate found itself in on the eve of the refugee crisis. In Germany, the AfD emerged as the radical right pole of the party system at a time of increased Euroscepticism at the fringes of the political system, which is reflected by its much more frequent usage of sovereignty frames compared to other similar parties. The UK conservatives and UKIP, meanwhile, were already doing their utmost to please the "sovereignty base" of their parties by stressing the issue endlessly, a precursor to the Brexit activity that followed. Overall, the other crises that had preceded or followed the refugee crisis also played a role in the framing and representations associated with the refugee crisis.

To conclude, while there were some seeds of transnational discourse, mainly fixated on security and threat themes, in reality, the right-wing parties do not deploy a common rhetorical and framing template but share a *common pool* from which they borrow a wide array of frames and arguments liberally, depending on their country's context, the political competition there, and the issues that were dominant when the crisis was introduced in their respective countries. The result is the existence of a right-wing discourse that is not entirely unified but is, rather, a sort of kaleidoscope through which different patterns and permutations of arguments and frames present themselves as each party sees fit, depending on its strategic calculus and the country's status quo.

Part III

The Dynamics of Policymaking

10 The Drivers of Elite Support in the Refugee Crisis

Introduction

In the preceding chapters of this volume, we have developed a set of concepts and measurement tools to characterize policymaking and the nature of the policy debate in the wake of policy proposals put forward by governments in order to come to terms with the refugee crisis. In [Chapter 1](#), we introduced the notion of politicization, which captures how salient and how polarized the given policy debate becomes among the political elite. In [Chapters 6, 7, and 8](#), we focused on the intensity of the conflict between the respective actors in the debate. A crucial component underpinning these measures, which forms the backbone of our PPA dataset, is what we call the *issue direction* of the actions; in other words, whether the actor undertaking the action expresses a broad agreement or disagreement, or takes a neutral stance toward the policy in question. Aggregating these issue direction codes for a given unit of analysis – an entire episode, a given time period in an episode, or for a given actor – provides a glimpse of where the political elite (or particular elite groups) stand on the policy and by extension, how much elite resistance the governments face when enacting the policy.

In line with our previous analyses, we use the political elite in a rather holistic sense; not only does it capture the entire government apparatus as well as the parliamentary wings of the ruling coalition, but it also includes opposition parties (both the mainstream opposition and radical challengers), civil society organizations (including humanitarian groups, social movement organizations, experts, media, union, church, and other organized actors outside the party-political arena), and international actors (EU institutions and other governments). Such a broad interpretation of the political elite notwithstanding, we emphasize its distinction from the “demand side” of the policymaking equation that we focus on in [Chapter 13](#): general public opinion in relation to the refugee crisis. In other words, the notion of elite support that constitutes the dependent variable of this chapter refers to the average position held by

actors who act on behalf of political institutions or organizations with a capacity to reach and influence the opinion of broad audiences and the general public.

In an important departure from the previous chapters, the empirical analysis we provide in the [present chapter](#) takes an explicitly longitudinal perspective. Rather than asking why certain episodes face more or less elite support (on average), we inquire about the determinants of the ups and downs of such support over time within a given episode, while relegating much of the between-episode variation in support levels to episode-specific fixed effects. This is not to say that we consider context as irrelevant. Episodes play out across different geographical units in different time periods and in different issue domains. Accordingly, we will introduce some of the contextual variables – namely country type, episode type, and the phase of the refugee crisis – as possible moderators of the longitudinal drivers of elite support. Moreover, we distinguish between two types of drivers of support, which also serve as the most important organizing principle of this chapter: exogenous drivers that affect the overall level of elite support at any given point in time and endogenous interactions between actors. The analysis of the interactions investigates whether the ups and downs of support by one type of actor affect the contemporaneous or subsequent levels of support by another type of actor. The implicit theoretical framework we adopt thus assumes that in addition to the pressure of the crisis that affects all political actors involved in the policymaking process, actors also engage in strategic interactions, weighing the pros and cons of supporting government initiatives, voicing their opposition, or staying in the shadows of neutral ambiguity.

The unit of analysis of the chapter is the episode-month. With this choice, we aim to strike a balance between a temporal unit that is amenable to a meaningful aggregation of elite preferences (i.e., capturing enough observations for valid measurement), the availability of other longitudinal indicators as independent variables (e.g., problem pressure in the form of refugee flows and political pressure from the radical right are indicators that are available only on a monthly basis), and sufficient granularity that allows us to construct proper time series for statistical analysis. Especially the latter consideration proved somewhat problematic because fifteen of the forty episodes in our study lasted less than ten months, and ten episodes less than half a year. The prevalence of such short time series in our data is an important feature to keep in mind when we discuss some of the methodological choices in the empirical analysis. With this caveat in mind, the choice of the episode-month as the unit of analysis yields a time-series cross-section (TSCS) dataset of 644 observations with sufficient statistical power for valid inference.

The chapter is organized as follows. The [next section](#) provides a brief overview of the literature on elite support behind policymaking, emphasizing a lacuna present in the field: a heavy focus on the consequences of such support in the policymaking process for policy output and for public opinion in contrast to the relatively scant attention paid to its drivers. The [third section](#) aims to fill in this lacuna by putting forward a set of theoretical expectations on the drivers of elite support both on the systemic and on the actor-specific level. The [fourth section](#) describes the most important methodological choices, while the [fifth section](#) constitutes our empirical analysis, again structured along the systemic and the actor-specific levels. The [last section](#) concludes with a summary of our main findings and their implications.

The Importance of Elite Support behind Government Policies

In an abstract sense and from the perspective of various constraints that governments face, the policy challenge in the refugee crisis is no different from other policy challenges in the past. In addition to the exigencies of the underlying problem pressure, the constraints imposed by public opinion, and the institutional capacity of the state to address the problem, governments also need to reckon with potential dissent among the political elite. Alternatively put, the degree to which the government is able to rally elite support behind its policies may be a crucial determinant of the policies' success.

The empirical literature on this matter documents a close link between the degree and type of elite support and policy output. One strand in this literature is largely informed by the American experience on asymmetric policy representation ([Bartels 2016](#); [Hacker and Pierson 2010](#)). [Gilens and Page \(2014\)](#) take stock of a large dataset of policy issues (1,779 in total) and show that the final policy output bears a closer resemblance to business groups' and the economic elites' preferences than to those of the average citizens and mass-based interest groups. [Grossmann, Mahmood, and Isaac \(2021\)](#) find a similar effect of organized groups in American politics. However, the authors emphasize partisan differences with regard to the type of organized interest whose support tends to determine the policies' ultimate fate. [Burstein and Linton \(2002\)](#) provide a meta-analysis from published political science journal articles to evaluate the relative importance of different kinds of elite support. They arrive at a more nuanced conclusion: Political organizations' support for policies is most likely to have an impact when it resonates with the electoral concerns of politicians. That said, electoral considerations do

not typically feature in most accounts of interest group politics. A case in point is [Schamis \(1999\)](#), who emphasizes the role of elite support by business groups behind economic liberalization in Latin America, in contrast to the popular view of technocratic insulation at the top being the factor most conducive to structural reform programs ([Haggard and Kaufman 2018](#)). In neither of these accounts do electoral considerations take a central role, suggesting that elite support (or the lack thereof) has an autonomous influence on the policy process.

That said, elite groups' impact on public opinion may very well be an alternative mechanism through which elites influence policymaking. Such an impact has been most extensively documented in the foreign policy domain via survey experiments. Whether respondents are cued by celebrity endorsements of a given course of action proposed by the government ([Frizzell 2011](#)) or are exposed to the views of the military elite or policy advisors ([Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2018](#); [Saunders 2018](#)), their responses tend to align more closely with the proposed policy compared to nontreated individuals in these experiments. Similar effects were found in the issue domain of climate change policies. [Kammermann and Dermont \(2018\)](#) study the interaction between elite opinion and citizen preferences across a range of climate change policies in Switzerland and uncover the impact of elite support behind such policies on public opinion. [Rinscheid, Pianta, and Weber \(2021\)](#) come to similar conclusions in an empirical setting based on American respondents with regards to support for the phase-out of fossil fuel-powered cars and the deployment of carbon capture technology: When political parties endorse one of these policies, citizens' support for the policies increases but only when they trust the party in question. All in all, elite support for public policies that are high on the political agenda across various issue domains and by various elite groups appears to have a clear and consistent link with public support for the issues in question. In other words, not only does elite support facilitate the enactment of public policies, but it also goes a long way in selling them to the public.

A common feature of these accounts is that implicitly, they tend to take elite preferences as given. While this assumption may be valid for certain types of elite groups in the case of certain types of policies (such as the role of business groups vis-à-vis economic liberalization or the role of military elites vis-à-vis foreign interventions), in the face of novel types of problem pressure with uncertain consequences, such as the refugee crisis we are studying, this assumption is highly problematic. Besides its impact on the policy process, we thus need to ask about the origins of elite support. In this regard, however, the extant literature provides significantly fewer cues. Though various features of elite groups and the

policy debate, such as the institutional networks connecting elites (Van Gunten 2015), horizontal trust between them (Weinberg 2022), or the role of policy framing when faced with policies that potentially conflict with their interests (Teigen and Karlsen 2020) have been identified as possible determinants of elite support, we lack a coherent account of the origins of elite support behind government policies. Tellingly, in a two-wave survey of MEPs' immigration attitudes some time before the refugee crisis, Lahav and Messina (2005) document a convergence of views without specifying the driving mechanisms. This chapter thus takes up the task of specifying some of these mechanisms and subjects them to empirical testing on our PPA dataset.

Exogenous Drivers and Endogenous Interactions between the Elites in the Refugee Crisis

To begin conceptualizing the potential drivers of elite support for the forty national policy episodes that we study in this volume, we would like to remind the reader of the basic building blocks of our theoretical framework as outlined in Chapter 2. In one way or another, all the episodes were responses to the mounting problem pressures in the form of asylum applications overburdening the capacity of the countries' asylum systems. Moreover, as policymakers sought to address the problem by erecting border fences and/or reforming the countries' asylum system, they also had to reckon with pressures emanating from the exceptional salience of immigration in the minds of the public and the rising fortunes of radical right challenger parties that were uniquely well positioned to capitalize on the crisis. Throughout the book, we refer to these two forms of political constraints as political pressure.

How is the political elite expected to react in the face of such pressures? When these pressures mount, various elite groups are likely to weigh the expected costs and benefits of support and opposition to the governments' policy initiatives. Though the salience of the refugee crisis is likely to vary across the different elite groups, they have a shared interest in putting the issue on the political agenda, lest they risk appearing out of touch with the concerns of ordinary citizens or a narrower subset thereof who are directly affected by immigration (e.g., via wage competition). Once they engage with the policies, elite groups next have to decide whether the expected cost of supporting the initiatives outweighs the expected benefits. The cost of support mainly derives from sharing responsibility for the potential failure of the policy in controlling refugee flows and/or equipping the asylum system for the reception and integration of asylum claimants. The benefits of support in turn derive from the

perception that elite groups take the problem seriously and act as a voice of ordinary citizens clamoring for policy solutions. This consideration chimes in with the “rally-around-the-flag” perspective in crisis politics (Mueller 1970); In response to rising problem pressure and expectations from the general public, even potential dissenters among the political elite are under pressure to suspend criticism and temporarily support government initiatives. An additional source of benefits accruing from such support by the elite is that it allows them to come across as temporary policy allies of the government, which in turn may prompt the latter to offer policy concessions on other issue domains that are of greater importance for the respective elite groups.

The balance of these considerations thus suggests that in response to the crisis shock, the elite is expected to provide a temporary boost to government initiatives. However, we need to disentangle the impact of the two separate sources of pressures. While problem pressure may indeed prompt the elite to align behind governments, political pressure – especially when it comes from the radical right – may act as a countervailing force. Political pressure from the radical right is a signal to the other elite groups that public discontent with the proposed policies is palpable, and acting as a voice of such discontent may thus become a viable political strategy. This consideration leads us to put forward the baseline hypothesis for this chapter that expects opposite impacts emanating from the two sources of pressure that governments face.

H1: While mounting problem pressure leads to a (temporary) boost to elite support, increasing political pressure prompts the elite to oppose the proposed policy initiatives.

These considerations, however, need to be contextualized. Mounting problem and political pressures have vastly different implications across the types of countries, the types of episodes on the agenda, and the different phases of the refugee crisis. The underlying conditioning principle across these contexts is the notion of *contestability*. We posit that the degree to which the political elite perceives the government initiatives as contestable depends on their country’s structural location vis-à-vis refugee flows, the range of possible policy alternatives on the table, and the availability of a precedent and policy templates to be borrowed from other countries.

Starting with country types, an important distinction lies between the strategic calculation of elite actors in frontline countries on the one hand and transit and destination countries on the other. In frontline countries, the authorities can credibly scapegoat EU institutions and other member states for failing to relieve the asymmetrical burden that these countries

face solely due to the “bad luck” of geography. In such a context, openly opposing government initiatives to get the problem under control carries the risk of being seen as obstructing the national cause and contributing to the perceived sense of injustice and grievances. In transit and destination countries, on the other hand, the appropriate policy response to the crisis is more contentious, pitting proponents of a relatively open asylum regime against the hardliners clamoring for a closed-door immigration regime in general and an uncompromising stance on sticking to the Dublin rules in particular. In this context, the public positions of elite groups are likely to diverge, giving rise to a higher level of dissent to government initiatives compared to the frontline states.

Similar considerations apply for the differential response of the elites across episode types. Again, elite support in response to mounting pressure is likely to depend on the perceived viability of policy alternatives. These alternatives are more likely to be present in cases of asylum reform because eligibility criteria, appeal conditions, return procedures, and various other aspects of the asylum systems are subject to legitimate contention in the absence of an acute sense of urgency to act. Border controls, by contrast, are desperate moves to get the situation under control with no other immediate policy alternative being in sight. In the face of such an emergency, it is thus considerably riskier for elite groups to challenge governments. We thus expect that elite incentives to dissent in the face of rising problem and political pressure are reduced when border control measures are on the political agenda.

Finally, we expect the temporal evolution of the broader refugee crisis to act as a third moderator of the elite response to government initiatives. As we outlined in [Chapter 5](#), the refugee crisis can be conceptualized in terms of three distinct phases. The first phase is characterized by rising refugee flows across the Mediterranean without any overarching European or even national response commensurate to the scale of the problem to come. The second phase begins in the early summer of 2015 with the first border control measures imposed by the Hungarian authorities and the first European push toward a communitarian solution (the Relocation Scheme). The peak (and end) of the second phase is the EU–Turkey agreement signed in March 2016. We regard the period following the agreement as a distinct phase because with the externalization of border controls, refugee flows were significantly reduced, and the sense of urgency considered abated. We argue that elite incentives to respond to the problem and political pressures vary across the phases. The greatest scope for dissent exists in the early phase, when no European or national policy solutions are forthcoming as templates that governments can adopt, and critical voices against early policy initiatives

come across as highly credible in the absence of viable templates. As countries put up border barriers one after the other in the heat of the crisis and remolded their asylum systems in a comparable fashion, these critical voices became less credible, and the pressure on the elite to fall in line increased. We thus expect that in the later phases, elite groups have become more likely to support government initiatives in response to rising problem and political pressures. To summarize the three conditional hypotheses below:

H2a: Rising problem and political pressures lead to a higher level of dissent among the political elite in transit and destination states than in frontline states.

H2b: Rising problem and political pressures lead to a higher level of dissent among the political elite during policy debates on asylum rules compared to debates on border control measures.

H2c: Rising problem and political pressures lead to a higher level of dissent among the political elite during the early phase of the crisis compared to subsequent phases.

Thus far, we have implicitly treated the political elite somewhat monolithically, under the assumption that there is a common core of incentives they react to in a comparable fashion. We now relax the assumption and formulate expectations on group-specific behavior. Specifically, we identify four types of elite groups in line with the categorization we have put forward in [Chapter 6](#). One part of the elite is closely affiliated with the government as members of governing parties, members of the cabinet, or members of other institutions under the direct control of the national government. We shall refer to these elites as governing elites. The second elite group we analyze separately consists of members of opposition parties, either from the mainstream opposition or from radical challengers. The third elite group consists of EU and other supranational institutions as well as foreign governments. Fourth, we also include in the analysis what we have broadly referred to as civil society groups, comprising social movement organizations, churches, unions, media actors, experts, academics, and other actors whose elite standing derives less from holding the levers of political power than from their potential to sway public opinion. We shall refer to these groups as civil society elites.

Though group-specific elite behavior may also depend on the external pressure that the governments face in the refugee crisis, we shall focus in this second part of the analysis on endogenous dynamics between elite groups, namely on their *responsiveness* to the actions of other elite groups who may be allies or potential rivals. An intuitive conceptualization of such responsiveness is the expected level of support for the governments'

policy initiatives by one elite group as a function of the changing levels of support provided by the other elite groups.

Starting with the governing elite, we expect that it is the most sensitive to opposition support because other elite groups have an indirect influence at best on the fate of the policy and on the electoral standing of governments. Opposition parties, by contrast, can present policy alternatives in parliament and other institutional venues, and the government is under pressure to react to such alternatives. Moreover, opposition groups have the potential to mobilize crowds, putting the government under pressure in the protest arena. However, it is an open question whether the government, in response to dissent from the opposition, closes ranks behind the proposal or whether, alternatively, critical voices within the government are reinforced and it splits on the issue, especially when the opposition strategically seeks to precipitate such splits (Whitaker and Martin 2022). Given the urgency of the problem pressure the government faces and the electoral threat from the radical right, we expect closing ranks to be a more likely scenario because, under heightened media scrutiny, any split is likely to become public and detrimental to government survival, as exemplified by the splits in the Swedish governing coalition during the refugee crisis.

Turning to the opposition, it is most likely to respond to the actions of its potential allies. One such group of allies are critical voices in the government itself. However, splits in the government are likely to provide only temporary momentum to opposition offensives because potential dissenters within the government are unlikely to want to risk losing office by providing open support to opposition parties. International and civil society support, by contrast, are more reliable power resources because they have the potential to legitimate opposition discourse. Empirically, the opposition and civil society groups have been shown to act in concert against government proposals on various occasions in the recent past (Kriesi et al. 2020). We thus expect that lower (higher) levels of support behind government policies by international and civil society groups are likely to decrease (increase) support by the opposition.

Does a mirror logic apply for the determinants of support by international institutions and civil society? To some extent, the likely answer is affirmative: Both international and civil society groups have something to gain when they wish to express opposition to government policies and other elite groups share their critical stance – because coordinated opposition is likely to legitimate dissent. However, we expect this logic to hold particularly for civil society groups because international actors need to be seen as (at least somewhat) neutral arbiters between the governing elite and dissenting groups. It is particularly risky for international actors

to openly side with opposition forces, lest they be accused of interfering with domestic politics of a sovereign member state. We thus expect that civil society groups are likely to voice dissent in response to dissent by the opposition and international actors, whereas the position of international actors is less likely to be driven by the position of the governments' domestic opponents. To summarize these expectations in a third set of hypotheses below:

H3a: The governing elite is most responsive to opposition dissent. Specifically, in response to dissent (reduced levels of support) by the opposition, the governing elite is likely to close ranks and reduce dissent (increase levels of support) within its own ranks.

H3b: Opposition groups are likely to increase dissent (reduce levels of support) in response to dissent by civil society groups and international actors.

H3c: International and civil society groups are likely to increase dissent (reduce levels of support) in response to dissent by civil society groups and international actors, respectively.

H3d: Civil society groups are more likely to increase dissent (reduce levels of support) in response to dissent by the opposition rather than international actors.

Method: A Longitudinal Analysis of Elite Support

As already indicated in the introduction to this chapter, our sample consists of a total of 644 observations where the unit of analysis is the episode month. In theory, the data structure is well suited for a TSCS (time-series cross-section) design with episode fixed effects to control for the systematically different average levels of support across units (episodes) that may be correlated with the models' covariates. What sets the dataset apart from the most common TSCS designs is that the episodes (or at least a subset thereof) do not unfold simultaneously, and there is a considerable imbalance in the length of the individual series. One serious complication that arises from the relatively short ($T < 10$) series for a large part of the episodes is the well-known dynamic panel data bias (Nickell 1981) in case of a dynamic specification. To assess the gravity of the problem, we inspected the dynamic nature of the dependent variable, the average level of elite support both in its systemic and in its actor-specific forms.¹

¹ For its final form, we decided to introduce a minor modification of the dependent variable. Instead of using the raw average level of support for the country month, each action's issue direction score was slightly modified by the type of action that the actor undertook (the policy action variable) and the target of the action. Specifically, values of 1 (support for the policy initiative) were modified to 0.5 if the form of action did not

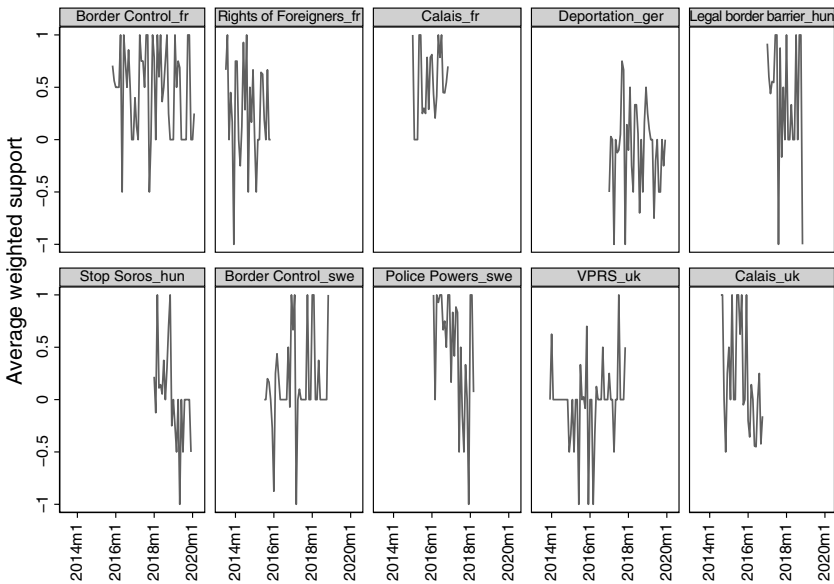


Figure 10.1 The evolution of average elite support over time

Reassuringly, the dependent variable displays little persistence over time, with an autoregressive coefficient of around 0.2. To visually convey this lack of persistence of the series, Figure 10.1 shows the evolution of the dependent variable for the ten longest episodes in our sample. The sudden spikes and drops of the series indicate that shocks dissipate rather quickly, making the behavior of the dependent variable not all that dissimilar from a white noise series. Substantively speaking, this pattern is somewhat puzzling at first because one would expect relatively stable elite preferences toward a given policy initiative over time. However, one must remember that the support variable is an aggregated measure of various actors and depending on which particular institutions act in a given episode month, it is likely to be rather volatile. Moreover, while some episode-months are rich in action, others are averages of only a handful of observations, further adding to observed volatility. With this volatility in mind, we consider that specifying the models in static terms poses little risk for biased coefficient estimates and goes a long way toward addressing the dynamic panel data bias in the case of short time series.

indicate clear steps toward policy support and/or the actor direction code was negative against the government. Likewise, values of -1 were modified to -0.5 if the form of action indicated openness toward policy support (or at least acquiescence) and/or the actor direction code was positive toward the government.

Other complications that may arise in time-series cross-section designs is the biased estimates for the standard errors of the coefficients due to panel-level heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation in the residuals. To get around this problem, we employ Beck and Katz's (1995) recommended tool of panel corrected standard errors with a Prais–Winsten correction of the residuals. As the autocorrelation coefficient estimates (ρ) reveal, however, autocorrelation was a marginal concern in most of the models, further underscoring the white noise-like behavior of the dependent variable.

All the estimated models shown below thus regress the average level of elite support (either in its systemic or its actor-specific form) on the key covariates of interest, a control for an episode-specific time trend and the episode-specific fixed effects. The key covariates in the first part of the analysis are the pressure indicators, all standardized between 0 and 1 so that the coefficient estimates are directly comparable on the same scale. The key covariates in the second part where we seek to predict the group-specific levels of support are the support variables for the other three elite groups. In the baseline models that test for the overall impact of the exogenous drivers (H1) as well as the models testing for interactions between the actors (H3a–H3c), contextual variables are included in the models as controls. In the models that test the three conditional hypotheses (H2a–H2c), interactions of the conditioning characteristics (type of state, episode, and phase) with the pressure indicators are introduced as additional covariates.

One important and open-ended decision we had to take was the temporal form of the time-varying covariates (exogenous drivers and support levels of the other actors). We had no strong theoretical priors to inform us whether the covariates should be introduced in a contemporaneous form or with lag(s). Introducing them with lags has the advantage of guarding against simultaneity bias, especially in the case of the interactive models, where the different elite groups may influence each other in a reciprocal fashion. However, not allowing for contemporaneous impacts runs the risk of arriving at false negative conclusions based on the coefficient estimates because a month may be a long enough time for a change in elite behavior to show up in the policy debate. The pragmatic compromise we took was running separate models for contemporaneous impacts and for one- and two-month lags.² In case of multiple

² In the initial stage of modeling, we ran separate models on the contemporaneous form, the first lag, and the second lag of each pressure variable. In the final models we show in the rest of this chapter (Tables 10.1 and 10.2), however, we only show coefficients for the temporal forms that provided the best fit for the data.

coefficients showing up as significant, we selected as the final model the one that produced the best fit based on the R^2 statistic.

Results

We begin the analysis with laying out the baseline model in [Table 10.1](#). The passage of time (see “counter” variable) exerts a small but steady drop in average levels of elite support, suggesting that elites tend to distance themselves from the policy proposals over time. The impact over a month is a trivial-sounding 0.007, but over a year it accumulates to over 0.08 (with the dependent variable defined on the -1 to 1 scale). In terms of country types, destination countries tend to display a significantly lower level of elite support, in accordance with our expectation regarding the more contentious nature of policymaking in such countries. The impact is rather large, amounting to a 0.6 lower level of support in these countries compared to frontline states. Furthermore, the third phase of the crisis that begins with the signing of the EU–Turkey agreement tends to be associated with higher levels of elite support. This is again consistent with the idea that with the availability of policy templates from other countries, the scope and incentives for elite dissent are reduced. Finally, the estimates for the policy type (a dummy for asylum reforms as distinct from border control measures) are also largely consistent with our expectations that the scope for dissent is greater in the case of asylum policies, even if the effect is not significant.

The central question of this chapter, however, concerns the reaction of the elites to rising problem and political pressure. The coefficient estimates of the corresponding coefficients are only partly in line with our expectations. Rising problem pressure is associated with a significantly lower level of elite support two months later, though the estimate is just short of the 5 percent significance level when the variable is introduced together with the political pressure variable. Therefore, in contrast to the rally-around-the-flag dynamics, if anything, the elite appears to distance themselves from the government initiatives in response to mounting problem pressure. We can only speculate at this point about the driving mechanism behind this effect. However, it appears to be the case that highlighting the potential risks (or outright failure) of the proposed policy remedies is viewed by the elite as the less risky option compared to tagging along with the governments’ agenda. The estimate is also substantively meaningful: The predicted difference between elite support between the sample minimum and the sample maximum of the standardized problem pressure variable is 0.40. The impact of political pressure, by contrast, is in the expected negative direction, with a

Table 10.1 *The impact of problem pressure and political pressure on levels of support behind government policies*

	Model I: baseline	Model II: country types	Model III: episode types	Model IV: periods
L2.problempressure	-0.402 (1.93)	9.943 (2.05)*	-0.577 (2.55)*	-6.839 (3.15)**
L.politicalpressure	-0.871 (2.63)**	1.985 (1.90)	-1.184 (2.26)*	-0.831 (1.20)
Mid-crisis	0.153 (1.84)	0.139 (1.68)	0.152 (1.84)	0.142 (0.59)
Late-crisis	0.217 (2.22)*	0.186 (1.89)	0.219 (2.23)*	0.146 (0.58)
Transit	0.176 (1.68)	1.726 (1.81)	0.188 (1.73)	0.252 (1.97)*
Destination	-0.561 (3.56)***	2.046 (2.49)*	-0.701 (2.87)**	-0.610 (3.65)***
Asylum	-0.127 (0.88)	0.599 (0.60)	-0.682 (1.66)	-0.027 (0.13)
Transit*L2.problempressure		-10.342 (2.12)*		
Destination*L2.problempressure		-10.416 (2.14)*		
Transit*L.politicalpressure		-1.684 (1.35)		
Destination*L.politicalpressure		-3.522 (3.11)**		
Asylum*L2.problempressure			0.440 (1.03)	
Asylum*L.politicalpressure			0.492 (0.75)	
Mid-crisis*L2.problempressure				6.398 (3.02)**
Late-crisis*L2.problempressure				5.680 (2.48)*
Mid-crisis*L.politicalpressure				-0.389 (0.63)
Late-crisis*L.politicalpressure				-0.175 (0.27)
Counter	-0.007 (2.38)*	-0.008 (2.62)**	-0.008 (2.57)*	-0.007 (2.35)*
Constant	0.731 (2.71)**	-1.630 (1.98)*	0.975 (2.40)*	0.919 (2.58)**
<i>N</i>	38	38	38	38
<i>n</i>	566	566	566	566
<i>R</i> ²	0.26	0.28	0.27	0.28
<i>Rho</i>	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	-0.03

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

substantively larger impact compared to problem pressure: The difference between the sample minimum and the sample maximum of political pressure gives rise to a 0.90 difference in the predicted level of elite support. Finally, no statistically significant effect is found for the impact of political pressure emanating from the higher salience of the immigration issue, so we omitted this coefficient estimate from the final models.

Before we proceed to the interactive models, it is worth stressing the difference in the temporal dynamics between the two pressure variables. While the impact of problem pressure shows up with two-month lag, political pressure exerts an instantaneous and one-month lagged impact on elite behavior (though we included only the one-month lag in the final model for ease of interpretation). One possible explanation is that rising political pressure is not just a trigger but also a manifestation of elite discontent. In other words, as the elite turns away from governments, a part of the electorate takes note by turning toward parties that own the immigration issue in general and act as the loudest critics of governments' handling of the refugee crisis in particular.

How do these impacts vary across the contextual characteristics we have identified above following the notion of contestability? We reestimate the models with each pressure variable introduced in interaction with the contextual covariates (Models II, III, and IV), and we calculate the marginal effects (Figures 10.2 and 10.3) of the pressure variables across the different contexts. Similar to the baseline models, the salience variable does not produce any significant estimates across any of the contexts. The impact of problem pressure, however, clearly separates frontline states from transit and destination states. In fact, the negative overall estimate we have found for the problem pressure variable (at its second lag) is restricted to transit and destination states, whereas in frontline states, we find a large positive estimate (amounting to a change in average level of support of around 10 for a full swing between the sample minimum and sample maximum level of problem pressure). This impact clearly lies outside the range of the elite support variable, but this is due to the fact that the typical level of problem pressure – as measured by submitted asylum claims – is considerably lower in frontline states than in transit and destination states. In fact, the sample maximum in this country group on the standardized scale of the problem pressure variable is a mere 0.03, so the estimated positive impact needs to be evaluated accordingly: Moving from the sample minimum to the sample mean in this country group, for instance, amounts to a change of 0.3 on the scale of the average support variable.

Turning to the conditional impact of problem pressure across episode types, there is some evidence for the conditioning role of episode

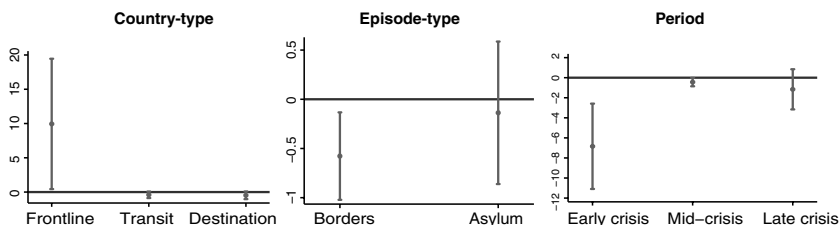


Figure 10.2 The impact of problem pressure across country types, episode types, and crisis periods

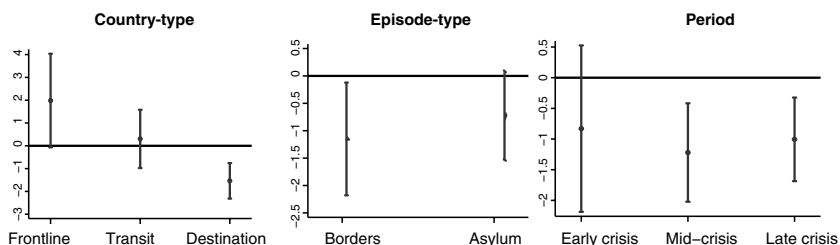


Figure 10.3 The impact of political pressure across country types, episode types, and crisis periods

types, but the impact goes against our expectations. Rather than asylum reforms, it is during debates on border measures that rising problem pressure leads to a higher level of dissent by the political elite, as is evidenced by the negative and significant estimate of the problem pressure variable during such episodes. The conditional role of the crisis periods, however, conforms to our expectations: While the impact of rising problem pressure in the early phase leads to a large drop in elite support, the impact is small and statistically indistinguishable from 0 in the subsequent phases. To quantify the impact, we need to again consider that the typical level of elite support was considerably lower in this first phase of the crisis. A move from the sample minimum to the sample mean in this period (0.03 on the standardized problem pressure scale) thus amounts to a drop of around 0.2 in elite support.

The conditioning role of political pressure from the radical right across the contextual characteristics we study in this chapter is very similar to that of problem pressure. While the political elite in destination states reacts to rising political pressure by stepping up dissent, the corresponding estimates in transit and frontline states are statistically indistinguishable from 0. As for episode types, we observe a pattern identical to the impact of problem pressure: Contrary to expectations, it is border control

debates that prompt the elite to oppose policy initiatives in response to political pressure, whereas the impact of this form of pressure during asylum debates is nonsignificant. Finally, in contrast to the impact of problem pressure, the impact of political pressure does not appear to significantly diverge across the phases of the crisis. The point estimates for political pressure throughout all the crisis phases are negative and comparable in size, though the estimate falls short of significance in the first crisis phase, probably due to the relatively few episodes and observations falling in this phase of the crisis. As for the substantive size of the estimates, most of the impacts are larger than for problem pressure. For instance, a move from the sample minimum to the sample maximum political pressure in destination states amounts to a drop of 0.8 in elite support. The corresponding move in border episodes is even greater, amounting to a drop of no less than 1.2 in elite support. Overall, in line with the baseline models, we can claim that the substantive impact of political pressure is larger than that of problem pressure.

Turning to the impact of interactions between the elites, [Table 10.2](#) shows the model estimates with group-specific level of support as the dependent variable and the contemporaneous and the lagged levels of support by the other elite groups as the key independent variables alongside the contextual controls and episode-specific time trends.

Starting with the government itself (Model I), its level of support only appears to be influenced by opposition dissent, in line with our expectations. The impact is significant only at its second lag. Dissent by the opposition thus appears to push potential dissenters within the government to fall in line. Alternatively put, at higher levels of opposition support, government dissenters are under less pressure to close ranks and feel freer to express reservations about the government's policy initiatives.

Model II provides only partial evidence for the legitimating momentum that we expected to play a role behind opposition behavior. Though the impact of civil society support is positive and significant in its contemporaneous form, there is a simultaneous negative impact of international support. Rather than gaining legitimacy from international actors' criticism of the government, a tentative interpretation of this finding is that the opposition is under pressure to line up behind governments when the latter are under attack from international actors. Regardless of the particular mechanism at play, it seems that domestic civil society elites are more reliable allies of opposition parties when it comes to decisions to oppose the governments' policy initiatives.

In terms of the last two actor types (Models III and IV), our expectations regarding the more limited impact on international actors' behavior compared to civil society elites' behavior are well supported by the data.

Table 10.2 *Actor-specific models predicting levels of support for government policies*

	Model I: government	Model II: opposition	Model III: international	Model IV: civil society
Opposition support				0.142 (3.65)***
L2.opposition support	-0.130 (2.87)**			
International support		-0.106 (1.97)*		0.107 (2.14)*
Civil society support		0.127 (2.80)**	0.069 (2.17)*	
Asylum	-0.192 (4.20)***	-0.068 (0.18)	-0.159 (1.56)	-0.188 (1.81)
Transit	-0.382 (2.92)**	0.748 (1.87)	-0.380 (2.10)*	-0.194 (2.60)**
Destination	-0.350 (9.00)***	0.151 (0.80)	-0.269 (2.19)*	0.034 (0.75)
Trend	-0.006 (2.03)*	0.001 (0.30)	-0.002 (1.16)	0.001 (0.52)
Mid-crisis	0.277 (3.21)**	0.024 (0.34)	0.031 (0.69)	-0.136 (2.35)*
Late-crisis	0.267 (2.53)*	-0.076 (0.88)	0.076 (1.26)	-0.045 (0.59)
Constant	0.569 (5.32)***	-0.556 (1.39)	0.383 (2.22)*	0.048 (0.59)
<i>N</i>	38	39	40	40
<i>n</i>	566	605	644	644
<i>R</i> ²	0.23	0.30	0.26	0.27
Rho	0.05	0	0.04	0.02
Fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Support by international actors appears to be independent of both government and opposition support, in line with our expectations that they cannot be seen as openly taking sides in domestic political conflict. Civil society elites' support, however, does affect international actors' behavior. Though the estimate is substantively smaller than the estimates found for government and opposition actors' behavior, it nevertheless suggests that international actors are emboldened in their criticism of national governments when notionally independent domestic groups step up their own criticism of the policy initiatives. Finally, the largest and most consistent estimates are found for the behavior of these civil society groups: The direction of their support follows the change in support of international and opposition groups. The legitimation logic that we expected to drive

the behavior of the three elite groups outside the governing elite is thus borne out most clearly for civil society groups by the data.

When thinking of these interaction patterns among elite groups that we have uncovered in the group-specific longitudinal analysis, a cautionary note is in order. By allowing for contemporaneous estimates due to the possibility of relatively quick reactions (within a month window) that may not show up in the lagged estimates, we opened up the possibility of simultaneity bias. The possibility of such simultaneous causation is especially pertinent when the reversal of the dependent and independent variables in the respective models produces similar estimates. In our models above, opposition–civil society interactions are a case in point. The impact of civil society support on opposition behavior and the impact of opposition support on civil society behavior are both estimated to play out simultaneously at a comparable magnitude. This may indeed be a sign of mutually legitimating dynamics between the respective parties, but more advanced longitudinal techniques, such as vector autoregressive (VAR) models, would be needed to disentangle the particular causal order among the elite groups' reaction pattern.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we sought to introduce a longitudinal perspective in the study of the policy debates of the refugee crisis at the national level. Specifically, we aimed to uncover the determinants of elite support – broadly understood – behind government policies in the context of the forty policy episodes that we study throughout the book. We have seen that somewhat surprisingly (partly due to the heterogenous nature of elite groups), the average level of support by the elite shows considerable volatility over the course of the policy episodes. We conjectured that some of this temporal fluctuation can be explained by three different sets of variables: the changing political and problem pressure that governments face, the contextual characteristics that may moderate this relationship, and the endogenous dynamics unfolding between different elite groups.

Though many of these drivers indeed turn out to be statistically significant and substantively important drivers of elite support, some of the patterns we have found partly or fully went against our prior expectations. Thus, far from the elite closing ranks behind government proposals as the “rally-around-the-flag” perspective may suggest, nongovernment elites rather use the strategic opportunity offered by mounting problem pressure to articulate opposition to these proposals and signal distance from governments as a result. However, this dynamic is mostly confined

to destination and transit states, and it is more prominent during debates on border controls and in the early phase of the crisis. By contrast, the impact of political pressure is largely in line with our expectations: In response to the growing strength of the radical right, the elite steps up dissent, with the strongest effect found, again, in destination states. A tentative explanation for why elites are particularly sensitive to these pressures in destination states is that these governments had the highest “degree of freedom” as far as the management of the crisis is concerned; hence, they proved the most vulnerable to domestic political conflict when the risk of policy failure became manifest.

In addition to responding to external pressure, elite groups were also shown to engage in strategic behavior with respect to each other. While dissenters within governments are responsive only to partisan opposition actors, the behavioral calculus among opposition, civil society, and international actors is more complex. In one way or another and to different degrees, they follow in each other’s footsteps and form a latent alliance against government proposals. An exception to this rule is the opposition’s reaction to international intervention: In response to criticism from international actors, opposition parties tend to side with governments, arguably in response to an increasingly critical public opinion of the EU’s and the international community’s management of the refugee crisis.

These strategic responses of various elite groups to each other add an important insight to one of our previous chapters ([Chapter 6](#)) on domestic conflict lines. We showed in that chapter that the bulk of the conflict played out between governments and (some of) their domestic and international opponents depending on a host of contextual characteristics of the episodes. What remained hidden in that analysis due to the lack of a longitudinal dimension is how these opponents dynamically interact. The inclusion of such a longitudinal dimension allowed us to shed light on this omission: The governments’ opponents systematically respond to each other’s expressed level of support to the government’s initiatives, albeit sometimes with substantial lags. Though the government, by virtue of its central role in the policy process, is indeed the main originator or the target of conflict, other actors hardly act in isolation when they decide on their response strategies.

An important limitation of this elite-focused analysis is its disproportionate focus on the supply side of the policy process. Though the inclusion of our two political pressure variables did incorporate public opinion as a potential driver of elite behavior, our dataset did not provide sufficiently rich and systematic information on the most visible and audible voices of public engagement: protest activity.

11 Dynamics of Politicization of Policymaking between Polity Levels

Introduction

In this chapter, we study the role of the EU and fellow member states in national policymaking during the refugee crisis. As we have already pointed out, the relationship between the EU and domestic politics has often been characterized as a two-level game. The two-level game concept is specifically related to international negotiations and captures the fact that international agreements have to be ratified at home. In the EU polity, however, the two-level game is not only or not even in the first place related to international negotiations. In the EU multilevel polity, the relationship between international and domestic politics is a two-way street, with international, that is, supra- and transnational, politics spilling over into domestic policymaking, and vice versa, domestic politics spilling over into EU policymaking. The interlocking of policymaking at the EU level with policymaking at the domestic level is particularly complex in a policy domain like asylum policy, where the EU and the member states share responsibility for policy. Moreover, such policymaking is complicated by the fact that the arena of cross-level policymaking in the EU is hardly structured by formal rules, which makes unilateral action by member states as likely as cooperative problem solving.¹

For our analysis of this two-level game in the refugee crisis, we shall distinguish between two types of interactions between EU agencies and the member states, which we have already introduced in the theory chapter: “top-down” interventions, when EU policymaking or policymaking in other member states intervenes in domestic policies of a given member state, and “bottom-up” interventions, when domestic policymaking influences EU politics or the politics of other member states. In addition, we shall subdivide each type of intervention based on the prevailing conflict that has triggered it – an international (supranational or transnational) or a domestic conflict. Scholars of European integration have

¹ See [Benz \(1992\)](#) for the discussion of a comparable situation in German federalism.

used the concept of “Europeanization” to assess the top-down effects of European interventions on domestic politics, that is, the “domestic adaptation to European integration” (Graziano and Vink 2006). This focus on top-down effects was a reaction to the long-term bottom-up focus on exploring the dynamics and potential outcomes of the European integration process (Börzel 2002: 193). Following Börzel (2002), we propose to study here both the ways in which member state governments attempt to shape European policy outcomes and the ways in which they adapt to European policies. In contrast to our predecessors, however, we focus not on the eventual effects of Europeanization on national policy outcomes² (although we come back to them in the conclusion of the chapter) but on the conflictual interactions between EU policymaking and policymaking in the member states.

First, we analyze the politicization of the forty national episodes in quantitative terms in order to show that episodes involving cross-level interventions are more highly politicized than purely domestic episodes. In a second step, we then choose episodes from four countries – Greece, Italy, Hungary, and Germany – to show in more detail how the cross-level interactions in the policymaking process operated during the refugee crisis.

A Typology of Cross-Level Interactions

Depending on the prevailing conflict, there are essentially two ways in which EU policymakers intervene in a top-down fashion in domestic politics. In the first way, there is a vertical conflict between the EU and a member state or a horizontal conflict between some member states with respect to the implementation of EU policy. The government of a given member state may fail to implement the joint EU policy, due to either lack of resources or lack of will. This is Börzel’s (2002) case of “foot-dragging.” Such behavior by a member state may lead to attempts on the part of EU agencies to directly intervene in the implementation of EU policy at the domestic level. Domestic policymakers may welcome such interventions as they increase their capacity to act, but they are more likely to resist them because such interventions tend to come with strings attached. In the domain of asylum policy, as we have seen, the Dublin

² In the domain of asylum policies, three types of Europeanization effects have been under investigation (Toshkov and de Haan 2013): a race-to-the-bottom effect (member states compete in order to discourage asylum seekers from choosing them over others), a convergence effect (the common asylum policy leads to a convergence of recognition rates in the member states), and a burden-sharing effect (an effect of the EU on the distribution of asylum seekers across member states).

regulation places a major burden on frontline states for the implementation of the policy, and it is the frontline states that experienced difficulties in assuming their responsibilities during the refugee crisis. These difficulties led the destination states together with EU agencies to push for direct EU interventions in the frontline states – to improve their reception capacity (establishment of hotspots) and their capacity to patrol the external borders (upscaling Frontex into the EBCG) or to prevent secondary migration within the EU (as in transnational border conflicts between member states). Greece above all has been the object of EU interventions of this type.

In the second version of top-down interventions, it is the outcome of domestic policymaking that triggers an EU intervention into domestic politics. In this case, there is no question of foot-dragging with respect to EU policy – what is at stake here is the implementation of domestic policy that is the result of unilateral domestic policymaking and that is incompatible with or explicitly violates EU policy. In this case, the EU intervention is designed to prevent the unilateral domestic policy from being implemented. In the domain of asylum policy, this type of intervention has been applied to some of the policies regarding asylum rules adopted by Hungary because of their disregard for the rule of law.

Depending on the prevailing type of conflict, there are also two types of bottom-up interventions by member states in EU politics. The first version reminds us of Börzel's "uploading" strategy, that is, a member state's strategy of pushing a policy at the EU level that reflects the member state's policy preferences and minimizes its implementation costs. Börzel conceived of this strategy, however, mainly in terms of regulation policies, while in the asylum policy domain during the refugee crisis, this kind of strategy applied above all to capacity building. According to this strategy, a member state unilaterally deals with an international challenge and adopts a policy that serves to substitute for the failure of the EU to adopt a joint policy to deal with the challenge in question. Bottom-up interventions by member state governments of this "self-help" type may be triggered by externalities created by a third country or by other member states. In the refugee crisis, this kind of intervention occurred in the case of frontline and transit states, which took a number of unilateral measures to police the external borders of the EU. Examples are the cases of Greece and Italy, which unilaterally had to deal with third countries – Turkey in the case of Greece and Libya in the case of Italy – in the absence of joint EU action. Hungary, too, built its own fences to unilaterally secure the external border of the EU, and Austria, in turn, organized the transnational cooperative effort to close the Balkan route as a substitute for the EU–Turkey agreement that had

yet to materialize. Internal border closures can also be considered as examples of this type of bottom-up interventions to the extent that one member state unilaterally takes “rebordering” measures, that is, closes its borders with another member state and/or pushes back refugees coming from another member state.

In the second version of bottom-up interventions, domestic policy-makers in some member states appeal to the EU and/or other member states to solve some domestic policy conflict. This appeal either calls for support in policy implementation (to alleviate the domestic burden) or attempts to signal that policy implementation at the domestic level is impossible because of too much domestic resistance. In the refugee crisis, it is the frontline and destination states that sought support for the redistribution of the refugees from the EU and the other member states. Germany above all sought the cooperation of its fellow member states for the accommodation of asylum seekers. Greece, as the frontline state most directly hit by refugee arrivals in summer and fall 2015, appealed to the EU for support to make up for its lack of capacity to deal with the inflow of refugees. The most conspicuous example of bottom-up signaling in reaction to EU measures during the refugee crisis is the Hungarian quota referendum, which was organized to send a message to the EU decision-makers that the EU’s relocation policy was incompatible with the situation in Hungarian domestic politics. Hungary’s use of domestic politics at the EU level most closely corresponds to what [Putnam \(1988\)](#) originally had in mind with the two-level game concept: Weakness at home is a strength on the international stage. Domestic conflict implies the impossibility of a government cooperating internationally: Its hands are tied, and it cannot participate in joint solutions such as the redistribution of refugees across member states. Note that the domestic conflict, as in the case of the Hungarian quota referendum, may be deliberately created by the government of the member state for the purpose of strengthening its position in EU-level negotiations.

For the empirical classification of the national episodes into top-down and bottom-up types, we rely on the information about EU and member state actors targeting actors from the respective other level – domestic actors targeting international (supra- and transnational) actors and vice versa. Since such cross-level targeting is comparatively rare, we chose a low threshold to distinguish episodes with cross-level interactions from purely domestic episodes: If more than 20 percent of the actions in a given episode target actors from the respective other level, we classify it as a cross-level episode. Among the cross-level episodes thus identified, bottom-up targeting prevailed empirically. To qualify for the top-down types, at least 40 percent of the cross-level targeting actions had to be

Table 11.1 Overview over the four types of cross-level policy interventions

Type of conflict	Type of intervention	
	Top-down	Bottom-up
International	<p><i>EU intervention in member state lacking capacity/willingness to implement EU policy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotspots, Turkey Border Conflict (Greece) • Border Control (Austria) • Brenner (Italy) 	<p><i>Member state intervention substituting unilaterally for EU policymaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fence Building, Legal Border Barrier (Hungary) • Port Closures, Mare Nostrum (Italy) • International Protection Bill, reception centers (Greece) • Balkan route (Austria) • Ventimiglia (Italy and France)
Domestic	<p><i>EU intervention in member state to rectify incompatible domestic policy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic Law, “Stop Soros” (Hungary) 	<p><i>Member state appealing for EU support/signaling incapacity to implement EU policy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quota referendum (Hungary) • Summer 2015 (Greece) • CDU-CSU Conflict (Germany) • Border Control (France)

top-down. Based on prevailing conflict types, international or domestic conflicts (see [Chapter 7](#)), we then classify top-down and bottom-up episodes into their respective versions (see [Table A11.1](#) in the appendix to this chapter for details).

[Table 11.1](#) provides an overview over the four types of cross-level policy interactions and presents the episodes that are classified into the corresponding types. Six episodes (15 percent) are of the top-down type, four of the first variant, triggered by EU policies, and two of the second variant, triggered by domestic policymaking. Thirteen episodes (33 percent) represent bottom-up cross-level interactions, nine of which were triggered by EU policymaking and four by domestic policymaking. The remaining twenty-one episodes (53 percent) are of a purely domestic type.

Note that the distinction between cross-level and purely domestic episodes is closely related to the policy domain and to the type of conflict. Thus, all top-down episodes deal with border control issues, and all except one of the bottom-up episodes (the Greek International Protection Bill) also deal with border control issues or with relocation. By contrast, only five of the twenty-one domestic episodes are concerned with border control – the Italian Sicurezza laws, the Calais case (in both France and the UK this episode hardly involved European actors at all), Swedish border control, and the German suspension of the Dublin rules.

In addition, two domestic episodes deal with resettlement/relocation – the British VPRS episode and the Swedish episode devoted to relocation between Swedish municipalities. Note that the very important case of the German suspension of the Dublin rules is misclassified by the rules applied here, that is, it is not classified as a cross-level episode. As we shall discuss in the [next chapter](#) in more detail, it is actually a case of a bottom-up cross-level episode, which we can see only when we link it systematically to the EU–Turkey agreement, an EU-level episode that was crucial for German policymaking during the crisis.

Cross-Level Politicization of Policymaking Episodes

This section presents a quantitative analysis of the politicization of the forty domestic policy episodes in order to show that cross-level episodes tend to be more highly politicized. The politicization of a policymaking episode is generally a function of exogenous and endogenous factors. Among the exogenous factors, as we have argued previously, the problem pressure and the political pressure exerted on the policymakers are crucial. The problem pressure is exogenous to the extent that the policymakers cannot influence the number of arrivals of refugees, at least not in the immediate term. The policy heritage – the combination of the responsibilities assigned to the member states by the prevailing EU policy and the limited resources available to come to terms with these responsibilities – is likely to restrict the options of the policymakers, especially in frontline and transit states. We expect the enormous problem pressure in these member states to contribute to the politicization of the policy episodes, independently of the political pressures.

The political pressure includes pressure from both domestic and international (supra- and transnational) politics. Domestic political pressure is likely to be endogenous to the domestic policymaking process. It may be driven by the national opposition, by domestic civil society actors, or by opposing factions within the country's governing parties. Top-down international pressure by EU agencies and by other member states is a more exogenous factor that is likely to add and run counter to this domestic pressure. As [Benz \(1992: 163f\)](#) has argued, linking domestic decision-making arenas with international arenas is likely to increase the conflict intensity of policymaking processes. Cross-level interactions introduce conflicts with supranational authorities and with other member states into domestic policymaking, which expands the scope of conflict and thus contributes to the politicization of national episodes. In particular, cross-level interactions may provide the government with an incentive to deliberately create domestic pressure to reinforce its position

in the cross-level policymaking process. The politicization of domestic policymaking episodes by the national government may provide it with the reason for why it is unable to comply with EU policy requirements or for why it is required to unilaterally adopt policies that are incompatible with EU policies.

To test these expectations, we have created a dataset where the episode month constitutes the unit of analysis, that is, each episode is broken down into monthly units for which we calculate the level of politicization. The independent variables are the characteristics of the episode (cross-level interaction [top-down, bottom-up, or purely domestic] and conflict type [international or domestic]), type of member state, phase of the crisis (pre- and post-EU–Turkey agreement), and problem pressure. [Table 11.2](#) presents the results of four increasingly complex regression models to explain the monthly politicization of the forty episodes. The first model includes only the characteristics of the episode, the second model adds the country type and the phase, the third model adds problem pressure, and the fourth model adds interactions between country type and phase.

Model 1 confirms the expectation that cross-level interactions increase the politicization of national policymaking episodes. Both top-down and bottom-up episodes are, on average, significantly more politicized than purely domestic episodes. Moreover, international conflicts are more highly politicized than domestic ones. The expansion of the scope of conflict beyond domestic politics apparently leads to an increase in politicization at the domestic level. Adding country type and phase in Model 2 doubles the R^2 from 0.10 to 0.18. Model 2 indicates that the politicization of the episodes has been greater in frontline states than in the other types of member states, a result that is attributable to the fact that all episodes in frontline states with the exception of one were characterized by cross-level interactions. Once we control for this effect, the effect of the cross-level interactions is considerably attenuated, and the effect of conflict type vanishes. The phase has, on average, no impact on politicization, which means that episodes before and after the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement were equally politicized.

Model 3 adds our indicator for problem pressure, which has a highly significant effect on politicization, independently of the effects of the indicators already included in Model 2. Adding problem pressure, however, hardly modifies the effects of the indicators previously introduced, which is to suggest that the greater politicization of the episodes in frontline states is attributable not only to problem pressure but also to some extent to endogenous political pressure. Nor does adding problem pressure modify the R^2 . Model 4 specifies that the increased politicization

Table 11.2 *Cross-level politicization of policymaking episodes: OLS-regression coefficient, t values, and significance levels*

	Model 1 b/t	Model 2 b/t	Model 3 b/t	Model 4 b/t
Top down	0.075*** (4.319)	0.046* (2.397)	0.043* (2.338)	0.055** (2.973)
Bottom up	0.045** (3.127)	0.028 (1.856)	0.033* (2.316)	0.051*** (3.480)
Others, ref				
Conflict type, international	0.033* (2.064)	-0.012 (-0.710)	-0.024 (-1.489)	-0.027 (-1.702)
Frontline		0.144*** (7.413)	0.131*** (7.092)	0.053* (2.247)
Transit		0.026 (1.829)	0.017 (1.168)	0.005 (0.254)
Open destination		-0.008 (-0.655)	-0.025* (-2.090)	-0.017 (-0.837)
Closed destination, ref phase 2		0.007 (0.742)	0.017 (1.731)	-0.010 (-0.732)
Problem pressure			0.338*** (3.913)	0.276** (2.882)
Phase 2, frontline				0.160*** (5.125)
Phase 2, transit				0.020 (0.861)
Phase 2, open destination				0.006 (0.232)
Phase2, closed destination, ref				
Constant	0.031*** (5.520)	0.025** (2.979)	0.017* (2.167)	0.026** (3.016)
Observations	592	592	580	580
aic	-905.19	-957.93	-1010.03	-1031.41
bic	-887.66	-922.86	-970.77	-979.05
R ²	0.10	0.18	0.19	0.22

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ b = regression coefficients; t = *t*-values; Ref = reference category

in the frontline states occurs mainly in the second phase, that is, after the peak of the crisis when the immediate problem pressure has become less pronounced. This is yet another indication that the politicization of the crisis in the frontline states was, to some extent at least, the endogenous result of domestic politics and only partly the result of exogenous problem pressure. Once we take the endogenous politicization in the

frontline states into account, the effect of the two cross-level interactions on the politicization of the episodes is again significantly enhanced. In other words, cross-level policymaking increases the politicization of the episodes in general and is not a specialty of the frontline states.

Having clarified this general point, we now turn to a detailed analysis of the variety of cross-level policymaking in the four member states, where it was most important during the refugee crisis. The Greek case will serve to illustrate both EU policy triggering top-down EU interventions to increase the domestic capacity of a frontline state to deal with the crisis and bottom-up demands of a frontline state for EU support. The case of Italy, our second frontline state, will focus on bottom-up efforts to substitute unilaterally for EU policy but will also feature an episode of top-down intervention by the EU to come to terms with externalities created by Italian policy for its neighbors. In contrast to the Greek case, the Italian example will show how factors endogenous to domestic policymaking are creating international conflicts and cross-level interactions. Third, the Hungarian case will above all serve to discuss top-down and bottom-up cross-level interactions that are rooted in conflicts endogenously created in domestic politics. Finally, the German episode will show how domestic policymaking in a member state can trigger EU policymaking in support of the member state.

Greece: The Frontline State Facing the Most Conspicuous International Interventions

Greece is the member state where intervention in domestic politics by EU agencies and governments from a third country (Turkey) and from other member states were most conspicuous. All five Greek episodes are characterized by international conflicts, which are associated either with top-down interventions in domestic politics or with bottom-up interventions of Greece at the EU level. Moreover, all Greek episodes respond to extraordinary problem pressure, given that Greece was the member states where the arrivals of refugees were concentrated, both in phase 1 and at the end of phase 2 of the crisis.

Phase 1: Summer 2015 and Hotspots

At the peak of the refugee crisis, the politicization of asylum policymaking in Greece was closely aligned with the politicization of the crisis at the EU level, as is shown by the left-hand graph in the first row of [Figure 11.1](#), which presents the politicization of the Greek episodes by phase and adds the politicization of the EU episodes (mostly focusing on

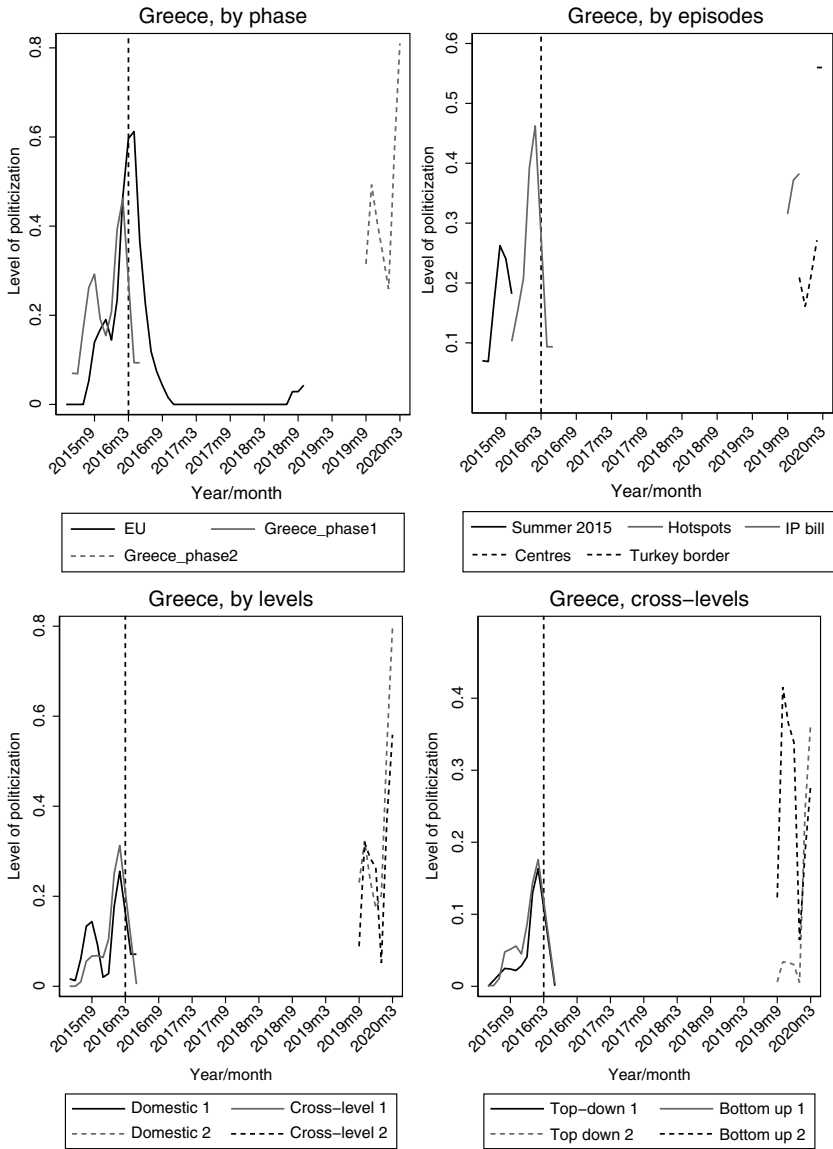


Figure 11.1 Politicization of Greek episodes

Hotspots, EBCG, Relocation and the EU–Turkey agreement) in phase 1. The negotiations related to the EU–Turkey agreement, and even more directly the elaboration of the hotspot approach and the transformation

of Frontex into the EBCG, were of immediate concern to Greece. Accordingly, Greek policymaking in summer and fall 2015 and in early 2016 took place in the shadow of EU policymaking.

In summer 2015, when Greece was first hit by the flood of refugee arrivals, the country was in fact preoccupied with the bailout process and not properly equipped and hardly willing to deal with the inflow of refugees (see [Chapter 4](#)). As is argued by [Nestoras \(2015: 19\)](#), the “intention to use the migration crisis in order to leverage some form of financial relief – extra funds or relaxed bailout terms – or simply to claim a moral high ground was evident from the beginning of Syriza’s term in power.”³ There was “an explicit attempt to connect the Euro-crisis with the migration crisis and bargain with Greece’s position as a gateway to Europe” (p. 20). Nestoras cites Defense Minister Panos Kammenos, the leader of Syriza’s far right coalition partner, who did not hold back when he threatened (in March 2015) to send migrants, including jihadists, to western Europe: “If Europe leaves us in the crisis, we will flood it with migrants.”⁴ In the summer 2015 episode, the Greek government appealed to the EU for funds to manage the refugees. But once the EU promised to deliver, Greece was unable to administer the promised funds. Only in mid-September did the Commission announce that it had received all the required documentation regarding the management of these funds and promised to process it as quickly as possible to release the first 30 million euros (of a total allotted sum of more than 500 million euros). The Greek ministers and deputy ministers responsible for migration and foreign affairs multiplied the declaratory statements and symbolic gestures, as did the EU commissioner for interior affairs and migration, Demetri Avramopoulos, a Greek, as well as an assortment of government and EU spokespersons. But nothing much actually happened. The Greek opposition was asking for the resignation of the minister of migration policy, criticizing the government for “deafening inaction” and “complete absence of a plan.” And on August 28, in the midst of the crisis, the whole government did, indeed, resign – but for reasons having to do with the bailout, not with the refugee crisis.

As is shown by the right-hand graph in the top row of [Figure 11.1](#), this first episode was immediately followed by the more intensely politicized episode of the hotspots. The latter episode is both an EU-level episode and a Greek episode, and it represents the most clear-cut case of a top-down intervention of EU agencies and fellow member states

³ Syriza came to power after it won the January 2015 elections.

⁴ *La minaccia di Kammenos alla Germania: “Se Ue ci abbandona, vi sommergeremo di migranti mescolati a jihadisti,”* La Repubblica of March 9, 2015.

in the domestic policymaking of a member state. What we present here is the politicization of the episode in Greece, which covers the period from October 2015, when the first deal to implement the hotspot policy was struck, to May 2016, when the final makeshift migrant camps were evacuated and the hotspot approach was fully implemented. The two graphs in the bottom row of [Figure 11.1](#) document that during this period, domestic and cross-level politicization developed in lock-step, reaching comparable levels. The same applies to top-down and bottom-up cross-level politicization.

At the end of summer 2015, domestic politics loomed large in Greece as the country was preparing for new elections, which were to take place on September 20. Moreover, domestic politics were still dominated by the issue of the bailout and the memorandum process. With the preceding government having resigned, it was up to the Greek president to perform the symbolic gestures in asylum policy during the interregnum. The new government, which was practically the same as the old one, took office immediately after the elections, at a moment when the European governments were in the thrall of the relocation issue, which they tried to resolve under German pressure. Under the pressure of the events, the exchanges between the new government and European officials, presidents, prime ministers, and ministers of other EU member states became ever more intense, not only at European summits but also in bilateral meetings on the phone and in person. European worthies came to visit Greece to inspect the sites and to get an idea of the proportions of the problem, while Greek officials intervened with the Commission and fellow ministers in other member states to explain the Greek predicament. The EU expected Greece to set up hotspots and promised its help in setting them up, but Greece was reluctant to do so because it was afraid that the hotspots would be perceived as an alternative to relocations. Several ministers proposed that an alternative could be to build the hotspots and refugee centers directly in Turkey. Of course, when Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras went to Ankara to explore the prospects of such a proposal, he found that the Turkish prime minister, Davutoglu, was afraid of the exact same trap, that is, that relocations would never happen once hotspots were set up, and was therefore similarly reluctant to construct them in Turkey, which meant that the hot potato returned again to Greece.

As time passed, the pressure on the Greek government to get things done – to construct the hotspots and to stop the inflow – increased. The Greek strategy of evading the issue – an example of Börzel’s “foot-dragging” – proved to be increasingly vulnerable to the demand from other member states to exclude it from the Schengen area and to the

determination of the Balkan countries to shut down their borders. Demands from the V4 countries for the removal of Greece from the Schengen area in December 2015 provoked a reply from the Greek minister of foreign affairs, who pointed out that the dimensions of the problem were bigger than any country of any size could handle and that it was unreasonable to expect a national solution from Greece for the joint problem. Greek protests notwithstanding, by the end of November 2015, the North Macedonian government started putting up a fence and sent police to the border, blocking the continuation of the flows along the Balkan route. Concurrently, the European institutional pressure on Greece to conform increased, and threats of excluding it temporarily from Schengen persisted. Eventually, at the end of January, the Commission gave Greece a three-month “warning” to fix the issues with border control and registration, or a temporary suspension from Schengen would be imposed. Moreover, at the West Balkan conference at the end of February 2016, under the leadership of Austria, the western Balkan countries – four EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia) and six candidate countries from the western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) – agreed to shut down their borders. They started to do so immediately after the conference.

Faced with this threat, in January 2016, Greece joined Germany in its efforts to come to an agreement with Turkey. At this point, Prime Minister Tsipras explicitly stated that the key to the refugee crisis was “transferring the focus of the refugee crisis management to Turkey.” By early February, the Greek government admitted Turkey to its list of “safe countries,” so the returns to Turkey could be legally unblocked. By mid-February 2016, Germany and the key EU actors, in turn, took the side of Greece in its struggle with the Balkan countries, with Chancellor Merkel, EU Council president Tusk, and EU Commission president Juncker declaring over a succession of days that Greece could not be left to fend for itself and that the solution of closing the Balkan route was not really a solution. The EU assumed a mediating role between the two “blocks” of member states that faced each other at this point, the “hard-line” transit and bystander states led by Austria, which wanted Greece to control its borders or be expelled from Schengen, and the more moderate western destination states, like Germany and France, which were more focused on the maintenance of Schengen.

With respect to the hotspots, the Greek government ended up taking some necessary steps. At the summit in mid-December, Prime Minister Tsipras assured German chancellor Merkel that the hotspots would be completed within the next two months. To this end, the government

mobilized the army to speed up their construction at the end of January 2016. Conscripts serving on Lesbos and the other islands assisted in the construction. Locals protested and blockaded the hotspot installations, but the mainstream opposition chose to mostly leave the refugee crisis outside of domestic political conflict. Eventually, the episode became a race to the finish line, to halt the refugee flows and set up the hotspots before Greece was expelled de facto or de jure from the Schengen zone. The EU–Turkey agreement was a huge relief to the tension, as was completion of the hotspots, owing much to the army’s assistance. It is not clear whether the hotspots and Frontex’s assistance would have been able to stem the tide of refugees without the agreement with Turkey that ground arrivals to a halt. The episode formally ended with the disbandment of the camp at Idomeni on the Macedonian border in late May 2016.

Phase 2: International Protection Bill, Reception Centers, and the Turkey Border Conflict

The three remaining Greek episodes all occurred within a short time span at the very end of the period covered by our analysis in late 2019/early 2020, and they are closely interrelated. As is shown in [Figure 11.1](#), all three episodes were very short and highly politicized, with domestic and international politicization again moving in lock-step. The first two of the episodes – the International Protection Bill and the reception centers – were dominated by bottom-up politicization, while in the last episode – the Turkey Border Conflict, the most highly politicized episode overall – top-down politicization prevailed. The separation of the three episodes is somewhat artificial, as they all took place against the background of mounting problem pressure, that is, increasing arrivals of refugees, overcrowded refugee camps on the Greek islands, and increasing tensions between Greece and Turkey. The latter were spurred by repeated threats of Turkish president Erdogan to “flood Europe with migrants,” but they had wider ramifications: The tensions between the two countries also involved issues about the limits of the maritime border, the Cyprus issue and sea energy fields near the island, as well as the ripples this created in their Middle Eastern alliances and interventions. For brevity’s sake, we focus here on the last episode – the Turkey Border Conflict. We shall discuss the other two episodes in the [following chapter](#).

The last Greek episode, the Turkey Border Conflict, is a top-down episode, mostly because of a combination of the intensified stand-off with Turkey and increasing supportive interventions by EU officials and fellow member states on behalf of Greece. Greece fought on two

fronts – with Turkey and with its European allies. The confrontation with Turkey was indeed critical in this short episode. It started only a couple of days after the previous episode – the island standoff on the detention centers – with the deterioration of the situation at the land border between the two countries. Turkish officials declared that Turkey “could no longer prevent refugees from illegally entering Greece.” During the night of February 28, 2020, a large number of refugees tried to cross the land borders but were prevented from doing so by Greek riot police and army units. Greece was accusing Turkey of “weaponizing the refugees,” while Turkey was accusing Greece of teargassing innocent people and even of killing or injuring multiple refugees with its indiscriminate use of force. Greece ramped up its frontier military presence as a response, while the Turkish minister of the interior on March 5 responded by sending 1,000 special forces units to Evros in order “to stop the efforts of the Greek army in obstructing migrants from crossing the borders.” While President Erdogan ratcheted up his rhetorical attacks on Greece, calling the Greek government “fascist and barbaric,” he showed a more pragmatic approach toward the EU. On March 11, he noted that he would retain the open border policy until the EU was ready to discuss financial assistance, visa liberalization, and a customs union with Turkey – objectives of the original EU–Turkey agreement that had fallen by the wayside.

While clashing with Turkey, the Greek government initiated a round of contacts with EU officials asking for their support in the effort to seal the Evros border. Commission president von der Leyen, European council president Michel, and EPP president Weber all expressed their support for Greece. The Greek government soon increased the resources for implementing its border closure, continuously sending more army and police units; asked Frontex to deploy its rapid intervention unit; and, most importantly, suspended the right to lodge asylum applications for a month. However, the flow of refugees toward the border continued unabated, turning the border into a conflict zone. Prime Minister Mitsotakis meanwhile made a symbolic helicopter visit to the border, accompanied by von der Leyen, Michel, and EP president Sassoli. In contrast to the hotspot episode in the first phase, Greece now found unwavering support not only from EU top officials, but also from Austria, Croatia, and the Netherlands, countries that had previously been protagonists in scolding Greece. The general secretary of the Austrian ÖVP went as far as pledging his “full support personally, materially and financially towards Greece and the Balkan countries, stating that Austria and Hungary would not be blackmailed by Erdogan.” The foreign minister of Austria rushed to meet his Greek colleague in Athens a few days later,

declaring that Greece was “defending its borders not against the thousands of miserable victims who have been manipulated by Turkey, but against Turkey’s cynical use of human suffering.” Austrian chancellor Kurz would also visit Athens to declare his unwavering support against Turkey’s cynical blackmail. Germany’s reaction was more measured. It emphasized that despite recent developments, in the medium-term what mattered was the maintenance of the EU–Turkey agreement. Chancellor Merkel, unlike the Austrians, simply called President Erdogan, telling him that piling pressure on the Greeks was the wrong way to proceed but also assuring him that if the Europeans were unwilling, Germany was ready to provide bilateral support to Turkey instead. Merkel and Mitsotakis discussed the ongoing crisis in Berlin and attempted to find a solution that satisfied both Greece and Turkey.

The episode ended with the exploding Covid-19 crisis. As this crisis took hold of everybody’s mind, the tone of the discussion started deescalating, with the Greek government declaring that there was a mutually advantageous solution, which lay in the improvement of some aspects of the EU–Turkey agreement of 2016. At the same time, border crossing attempts were scaled down, as fewer and fewer refugees appeared at the border, thus defusing the tension. As the borders generally closed down on both sides to contain the pandemic, on March 21, the last groups of refugees tried, unsuccessfully, to cross. The episode ended at the European level with Mitsotakis pleading for a renewal of the EU–Turkey agreement, a new agreement that would stipulate a flow of money inversely related to the flow of migrants rather than providing a lump sum to Turkey and that would guarantee a greater presence of Frontex at the Greek border.

Italy: A Frontline State Substituting Domestic Policy for Joint EU Solutions

Italy is the other frontline state in our country selection – a frontline state that was, however, much less affected by the refugee crisis of 2015–16 than Greece was. Four of the five Italian episodes concern cross-level interactions, mainly of the bottom-up type with prevailing international conflicts – the Mare Nostrum, Brenner, and Ventimiglia episodes during the first phase and the episode of Port Closures during the second phase. To these episodes should be added the EU–Libya conflict, an EU-level episode that was actually initiated by unilateral policy measures on the part of Italy. As is shown in the left-hand graph of [Figure 11.2](#), the Mare Nostrum episode and one of the border disputes (Ventimiglia) preceded the peak of the refugee crisis, while the other border dispute

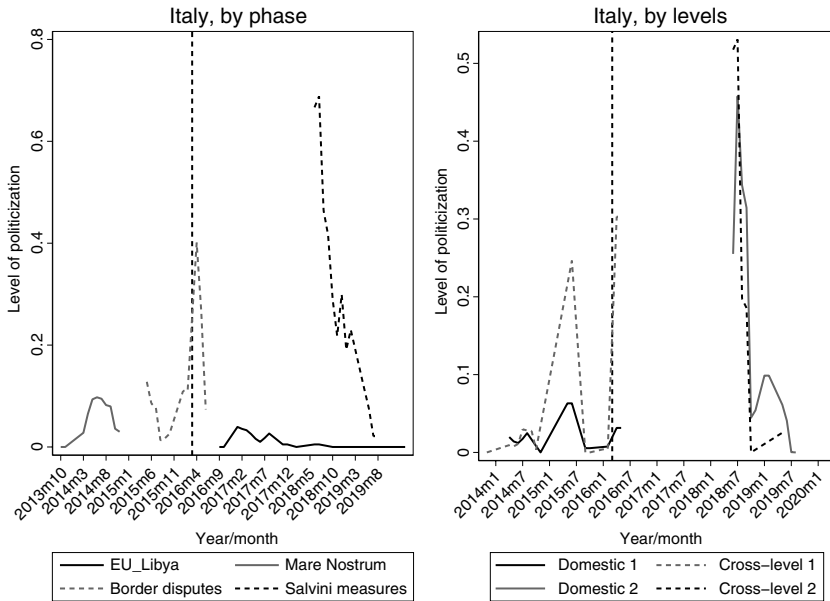


Figure 11.2 Politicization of Italian episodes

(Brenner) took place at the peak of the crisis. The most politicized episode, however, about Port Closures, occurred late in the second phase and was almost entirely unconnected to problem pressure exerted by the crisis. The right-hand graph of Figure 11.2 indicates that these episodes also gave rise to domestic politicization, but international politicization prevailed, except for the very last episode, the purely domestic episode concerning the Sicurezza decrees.

Phase 1: Mare Nostrum and Border Conflicts with Neighboring States

Already before the refugee crisis of 2015–16 hit Europe, Italy faced flows of refugees coming from northern Africa by boat across the Mediterranean. The first Italian episode, the year-long policy of Mare Nostrum, preceded the refugee crisis but was a harbinger of things to come. It represents a bottom-up attempt by Italy to solve a problem that a pan-Italian consensus considered to be a problem for joint EU operations. Initiated by the center left government of Letta, Mare Nostrum was a project that involved deploying the Italian armed forces and coast guard near the Strait of Sicily, with the dual objective of performing

humanitarian rescues and arresting human traffickers and smugglers. *Mare Nostrum* built on previously existing search and rescue schemes but greatly expanded the resources and personnel made available for such operations. It was enacted after a horrible shipwreck near the Strait of Sicily on October 3, 2013, left more than 360 drowned immigrants. *Mare Nostrum* operated for a year before it was partially replaced by a common smaller-scale EU project, the operation *Triton*.

This episode was characterized by constant Italian requests for EU intervention, the EU's reluctance to make more than a minimum effort, EU claims and admissions by Italian authorities that they were interpreting their Dublin duties creatively, and demands by the domestic opposition (Lega's Salvini) to stop rescue operations altogether and focus on building capacity and reception centers in Africa instead. Italian calls on the EU member states to take action were above all articulated by Prime Minister Renzi and Minister of the Interior Alfano but would be echoed across the entire Italian political system. The more he was pressured by the domestic opposition, the more pressure Alfano would put on the EU to come forward with a solution. Even Napolitano, the president of the republic, intervened to defend the record of *Mare Nostrum* but also to plead for European help. Eventually, another shipwreck near Lampedusa and a more concrete proposal by Alfano mobilized the EU to promise to launch an operation that would complement *Mare Nostrum*. In the end, Alfano unilaterally decided to substitute *Triton* for *Mare Nostrum*, while the responsible EU commissioner (Malmström) delivered only a smaller-scale operation that the EU member states could agree upon. The final outcome was a downgrade of the *Mare Nostrum* operation.

The second and third Italian episodes examined in phase 1 are transitional conflicts with neighboring EU member states over Italy's border control capacity and operations. The first of these two episode involves the Italian and French governments' confrontation over Ventimiglia, where a large number of refugees had gathered to attempt to pass over the French border. The practice of the Italian border police (to unofficially allow those crossings) and the practice of the French border police (to return immigrants to Italy in a move of dubious legality) was causing frictions between the two countries. The episode is concentrated in time, as almost all action occurred in June 2015, just before the eruption of the main European crisis, which served to shift attention elsewhere. Importantly, the Ventimiglia clash incited the EU to discuss the issue and agree on some basic principles. Thus, the episode gave rise to a three-way meeting between the ministers of the interior of Italy (Alfano), France (Cazeneuve), and Germany (De Maizière), where it was agreed that EU policy ought to be based on the twin pillars of responsibility

(to register and identify) and solidarity (to distribute and provide aid). While an overall agreement on EU policy was not reached at this point, the outlines of such an agreement were laid down, as the main part of the refugee crisis was about to begin. The same themes were discussed when French president Hollande and Italian prime minister Renzi met in Milan, where a second migrant camp had mushroomed at the train station. This top-level meeting helped smooth the two countries' differences and reduce the political tension. Eventually, the episode ended with the dismantling of the migrant camps, amid organized protests by Italian activists. With the spotlight moving elsewhere, the Ventimiglia camp was dismantled in a police operation three months later, on September 30, 2015.

A similar story, but without migrants actually camping near the border, took place in the clash between Italy and Austria during spring 2016 – the Brenner episode. In this episode, the EU Commission became involved, trying to mediate between the two member states, which makes it a top-down episode. The EU Commission had at first warned Italy about its lack of effort in tackling registration, but after the Austrian government's announcement that it was planning to increase controls at Brenner Pass or close it altogether, the Commission changed sides and berated the Austrians for not respecting the Schengen and Dublin treaties, in a barrage of statements by EU Commission President Juncker and migration commissioner Avramopoulos. It is important to understand that the Brenner Pass episode occurred at the peak of the crisis and escalated in the shadow of the Austrian presidential elections, where the candidate of the radical right, Norbert Hofer, triumphed in the first round (on April 24) and was expected to win the run-off (on May 22). Within such a context, there was much less tolerance for straying from the Dublin rules and much more readiness to act in a unilateral way. The Austrian government invoked reasons similar to the ones that had led to its southeast border closures in late 2015 – the lack of registration of migrants in Italy and Italy's unwillingness to adhere to the Dublin rules. Italian prime minister Renzi, in turn, claimed, among other things, that border closures and the widespread refusal to share the burdens of this epochal challenge put the union at risk. This confrontation was more long-lived and acrimonious than the French–Italian one, as it centered not on the semiformal actions of police bodies but on the official actions of two EU member state governments. In the end, in a manner similar to what happened to Greece, the Austrian chancellor reassured everyone that since the Italian authorities were ramping up their efforts to perform their duties on migration, the Brenner Pass – the bottleneck pass that links Austria and Italy – would remain open.

Later in 2016, the Mare Nostrum episode got some sort of a rerun with the EU–Libya agreement, one of our six EU-level episodes. Just as the EU operation Triton followed upon the earlier unilateral Italian operation, the EU–Libya agreement was closely linked to an earlier Italian policy response. Thus, in September 2016, the Italian center left government had reached an agreement with Libya’s national unity government to implement a series of urgent measures aimed at managing the migrant crisis and preventing deaths at sea. In February 2017, building on the Italian response, the Malta Declaration of the EU Council confirmed the cooperation with Libya and increased the funding of Libya’s efforts to stop the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean. Accordingly, the EU subsequently assisted the Libyan coast guard in intercepting and returning migrants to Libya. The episode was a low-key affair that was hardly politicized at all at the EU level, but it once again illustrates the bottom-up cross-level interaction where unilateral policy measures by a member state at first substitute for EU policy and are then taken over by the EU as its own policy.

The episode of Port Closures, the second most politicized of all national episodes, is yet another instance of unilateral Italian action undertaken in the absence of EU policymaking, but one that was much more contested by fellow member states. What characterizes this episode is that it was largely created for domestic political purposes in the absence of acute problem pressure. While it achieved the domestic electoral purposes of the Lega (its public support rose sharply as a result of the events linked to this episode; see [Figure 4.6](#)), it failed to incite the EU to support Italy.

When the new populist Italian government took office in early June 2018, just before the EU summit that was supposed to solve Merkel’s internal problems with Seehofer (see the section on Germany below), the new minister of the interior, Salvini, traveled to Libya for talks on the migrant crisis. He called for the establishment of asylum processing centers and “regional disembarkation platforms,” ideas that were prominent at the summit meeting but were subsequently rejected by Libya and its North African neighbors. Salvini, however, pursued his agenda of reducing arrivals, increasing expulsions, and cutting the costs for maintaining the alleged refugees in Italy – independently of the Libyan response. He did so by focusing on the rescue ships that brought refugees they had picked up in the Mediterranean to Italian ports.

Singlehandedly, Salvini politicized this issue by creating a series of incidents involving individual rescue ships. For a few months, the incidents with these ships filled the Italian news and drew the public’s attention to the migration issue. The series of events started with the case of the *Aquarius*, which Salvini faced only a few days after assuming the

post of minister of the interior. The *Aquarius*, a German NGO ship carrying 629 refugees, was trying to enter an Italian port after having been refused entry into Malta. Salvini announced that Italy was going to close its ports as well. Subsequent incidents involved the *Ubaldo Diciotti*, a vessel of the Italian coast guard, and the *Lifeline*, a ship flying the Dutch flag. Salvini refused to let the refugees on these ships disembark. More incidents with other ships followed. The episode was concluded with the final tour of the *Aquarius*, which was again denied docking rights by Italy and ended up in Malta. At this point, the ship was flying the Panamanian flag. Pressured by Italy, Panama recalled the ship's right to fly its flag, essentially ending the presence of NGO rescue boats in Italian waters. The episode of Italian Port Closures lasted until September and was then immediately followed by the one of the *Sicurezza* decrees, a purely domestic legislative episode also initiated by Salvini, which codified the ad hoc measures he had adopted during the summer to regulate flows, reception, and returns of refugees.

Domestically, the politicization of the port closures gave rise to great tensions between the two partners of the new populist coalition, with ministers of the M5S and the M5S president of the Chamber of Deputies distancing themselves from Salvini. But politicization also spilled over to the transnational and European levels, with other member states and the EU Commission responding in contrasting ways to the Italian port closures. On the one hand, in reaction to the first incident, the socialist Sanchez government in Spain said it would let the *Aquarius* disembark in Valencia. Commissioner Oettinger praised the Spaniards and announced that Europe should show more solidarity. No similar response materialized with regard to the *Ubaldo Diciotti*. For the *Lifeline*, an ad hoc agreement was reached for the ship to land in Malta and to distribute the immigrants aboard the ship among seven EU countries, Italy included. The main negative reaction came from French president Macron, who called the Italian stance cynical and irresponsible, while the Italian government retorted by calling Macron a hypocrite who had not offered to take any immigrants himself and had enforced much more rigid and cynical reception policies. Salvini did not miss a chance to remind Macron who was responsible for the situation in Libya, while Prime Minister Conte first canceled a planned visit to Paris and then went to Paris anyway. On the other hand, the Hungarian, Austrian, and Slovak governments supported Salvini, noting with pleasure his decisiveness in stopping the smuggling routes. The EU Commission meanwhile once again took a mediating stance, refusing to be involved in the transnational conflicts, expressing sympathy for Italian concerns, and trying to bring the new government to the table. However, the ad hoc decisions

to redistribute migrants from each ship did not result in a redesign of the Dublin agreement or any meaningful sharing scheme.

Hungary: A Variety of Cross-Level Interactions Rooted in Domestic Conflicts

All five Hungarian episodes involve cross-level interactions, though they were of varying types. Two episodes – the Fence Building and the Legal Border Barrier Amendment – refer to unilateral actions by Hungary to substitute for joint EU measures to protect the external border. Two episodes – the Civil Law of 2017 imposing a financial disclosure requirement on all NGOs receiving funding from abroad and the “Stop Soros” package of 2018 imposing an even more onerous special “migration tax” on all organizations deemed to aid immigrants – are domestic measures in Hungary that led to EU interventions to rectify domestic policy. The fifth episode – the quota referendum of 2016, the Hungarian response to the European attempt to introduce a relocation scheme – represents the case of a domestic policy signaling to the EU and the other member states domestic obstacles to the implementation of EU policy. The quota referendum was the most politicized Hungarian episode and the most politicized of all national episodes. Four of the five Hungarian episodes were highly politicized, even when compared to the high level of politicization of episodes in frontline states (see [Table 5.2](#)).

[Figure 11.3](#) presents the politicization of the Hungarian episodes. The left-hand graph compares the border control episodes (Fence Building and Legal Border Barrier Amendment) with the episodes addressing asylum rules (Quota Referendum, Civil Law, and Stop Soros) and with the EU episodes addressing asylum rules (Relocation and Dublin Reform). As we can see, at first, the Hungarian politicization of border control moves in parallel with the politicization of asylum rules at the EU level. The two developments, however, part ways as the crisis starts in earnest. Moreover, the politicization of asylum rules at the domestic level is completely uncoupled from the corresponding politicization at the EU level. It unfolds in three waves that correspond to the three episodes dealing with relocation quotas, Civil Law, and Soros. The politicization of the Hungarian asylum rules proves to have been much more intense than the politicization of these rules at the EU level and also more intense than the politicization of border controls, except for the very beginning of the crisis, when Hungary started with its fence building. Contrary to what we have observed in the frontline states, the Hungarian politicization essentially follows a domestic logic, as is illustrated by the right-hand graph of [Figure 11.3](#): Throughout the crisis, the domestic politicization has

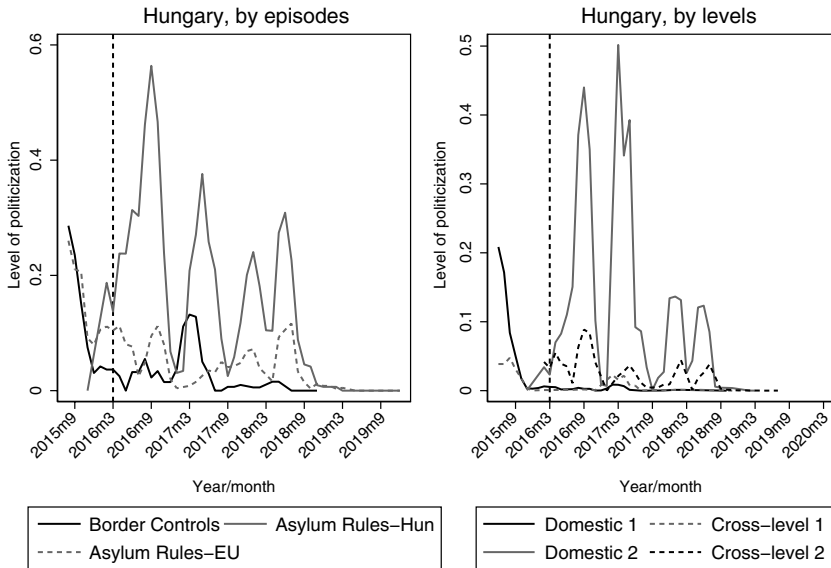


Figure 11.3 Politicization of the episodes in Hungary

been more intense than the cross-level politicization. We focus here on the bottom-up episodes, since the Hungarian top-down episodes (Fence Building and the Legal Border Barrier Amendment) have already been discussed in some detail in [Chapter 6](#).

The Quota Referendum

The Hungarian quota referendum was held on October 2, 2016. The government submitted the following highly biased question to citizens: “Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the relocation of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the National Assembly?” The referendum vote was preceded by an equally biased campaign. Eventually, 98.4 percent of those who voted answered no to the question, but in spite of the government’s relentless mobilization, turnout did not reach the required quorum of 50 percent. Nevertheless, the referendum marked a turning point both in Hungarian domestic politics and in the EU’s management of the refugee crisis. Domestically, it marked the final stand of Jobbik as the standard bearer of the Hungarian radical right. Internationally, even if the final turnout failed to pass the quorum, making the outcome constitutionally void, it laid bare the European right’s almost limitless potential to politicize

the EU's relocation scheme for domestic political purposes, which ultimately led to its demise. The referendum followed up on Hungary and Slovakia's joint appeal to the ECJ against the EU's relocation decision, which would eventually be upheld by the ECJ in September 2017.

The quota referendum is a bottom-up case of cross-level interactions rooted in domestic conflicts. It was designed "to send a clear message to Brussels that it is only up to the Hungarians, with whom they want to live in their country" (László Kövér, speaker of the National Assembly). The cross-level interactions in this case were mainly driven by the Hungarians themselves who attempted to signal to the EU the domestic opposition to the relocation scheme, while EU-level actors were comparatively silent in the debate. Roughly 6 percent of total actions were of the top-down type, a rather meager share considering that the episode as a whole was targeted against an EU-level decision. By contrast, no less than 20 percent of the actions involved bottom-up interactions. Although most of the EU-level actions were targeted against the proposal, the Hungarian government could rely on some degree of support from the EU and fellow member states. Thus, in the run-up to the vote, the Dutch migration minister, representing the rotating presidency of the EU, argued that it was up to the member states to find a way to discuss the decisions in Brussels. Manfred Weber, the president of the EPP in the EP, conceded that the will of the people always mattered and added that the Hungarian government had the right to ask its citizens for their opinion. Once the results of the vote became public, a European Commission spokesperson emphasized the "democratic will" of the Hungarian people, and Robert Fico, the Slovak prime minister holding the EU presidency at that time, stated that he considered the referendum to be a legitimate and democratic tool and that he fully accepted its outcome.

The Hungarian voices directed at Europe were numerous: Prime Minister Orbán announced that he initiated the referendum to prevent an EU compulsory quota system in violation of EU law. According to him, it was unacceptable to make decisions over the heads of the people that would greatly change the lives of future generations, as the admission quota would change the ethnic, cultural, and religious profile of Hungary and Europe. His decision to introduce a referendum vote was not against Europe, he claimed, but for the protection of European democracy. He said that he called the Hungarian voters to war so that there would be no mandatory relocation quota, and he likened the attempt of Brussels to determine whom Hungary should accept to the communist dictatorship. Szijjártó, the foreign minister, added that western European politicians always talked about the importance of democracy, and then, when a government asked its people for their opinion on an important issue,

they questioned the most democratic tool, the referendum: “What is this, if not double standards, hypocrisy and ambiguity?” According to him, the union’s proposal to penalize the rejection of quotas was “simple blackmail.”

Hungarian spokespersons not only defended democracy but also insisted on national sovereignty. Prime Minister Orbán claimed that a referendum was the only thing that could not be taken lightly in Brussels. According to him, if the Hungarian referendum was successful, Brussels would have to back down: “The Hungarian government wants a democratic European Union, whose internal relations, rules of life, ethnic composition and culture are determined by Europeans, not by a bureaucratic elite in Brussels acting against the will of the peoples of Europe.” He added that uncontrolled immigration was not a human rights issue but a security issue. After the vote, Prime Minister Orbán informed Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, by letter about the outcome of the quota referendum on October 2. The prime minister indicated that in order to enforce the will of the overwhelming majority of the participants in the referendum, the cabinet had decided to initiate an amendment to the constitution. In his letter, Orbán claimed that the amendment proposed by the government would be in full compliance with EU law.

Two Additional Episodes on Asylum Rules

The Civil Law and the Soros Law represent domestic conflicts that gave rise to disciplining top-down interventions on the part of the EU, since these laws violated fundamental European values. If the quota referendum was still directly connected to the EU-level politicization of the relocation scheme, the domestic politicization of the Civil Law and the Soros Law could no longer be credibly related to migrant flows as an existential threat to Hungary’s security and sovereignty and to interventions at the EU level. As a result, the grace period that characterized the Orbán government’s immediate response to the crisis turned into a domestic war of attrition between the government and civil society in which the latter could count on the unwavering support of the parliamentary opposition, EU actors, and civil society organizations themselves. With respect to cross-level interactions, both of these laws were challenged by infringement procedures launched by the European Commission. Moreover, the EP also took measures by accepting the Sargentini report, with a detailed list of the Hungarian government’s various infringements of the rule of law, including “Stop Soros”, in September 2018. Both the Civil Law and the “Stop Soros” Law were ultimately struck down by the European Court of Justice in 2020.

Germany: Seeking EU Support to Overcome Domestic Conflicts

Germany provides two episodes of domestic, intragovernmental conflicts that led the government to seek support from the EU to solve the domestic conflicts. The first example concerns the episode of the suspension of the Dublin regulation by Germany in September 2015. This episode is classified as a purely domestic episode, which is misleading because it is intimately linked to the EU–Turkey agreement, which served as the German chancellor’s plan B to come to terms with the domestic conflict that had been unleashed by her unprecedented decision to suspend the Dublin regulation and to admit refugees to Germany who had traveled from Greece across the Balkan route to ask for asylum in Germany. The episode of the EU–Turkey agreement is an EU-level episode – but one that was intensely discussed in Germany. According to the criteria applied to classify cross-level episodes, the German discussion of this agreement would qualify as a bottom-up cross-level episode: More than 40 percent of the actions reported in the German debate on the EU–Turkey agreement involved cross-level interactions, and the overwhelming majority of these cross-level interactions were of the bottom-up type. We shall discuss this episode in more detail in the [next chapter](#). The other example of intragovernmental German conflicts spilling over to the European level is the CDU-CSU Conflict in summer 2018, which also induced the German chancellor to seek support at the EU level to solve her differences with her coalition partners. This episode qualifies as a bottom-up cross-level episode rooted in domestic conflicts.

[Figure 11.4](#) shows the close alignment of German domestic politicization with the politicization of asylum rules (Relocation Quota and Dublin Reform) at the EU level during the first phase and then again in summer 2018. This alignment is a result of spillover processes from German policymaking to the EU level. In the first phase, as Germany attempted to come to terms with the crisis domestically, it at the same time put pressure on the other member states to get the relocation quota passed in the Council of Ministers in an attempt to share the burden of reception and integration of asylum seekers. It is only once Germany failed to obtain a relocation scheme from its fellow member states that it turned to an agreement with Turkey as the second best solution. The renewed alignment of German policymaking with the politicization of asylum rules at the EU level in summer 2018 is the result of yet another spillover of domestic German conflicts to the EU level. In both instances, it was mainly intragovernmental conflicts that led to the cross-level politicization of policymaking.

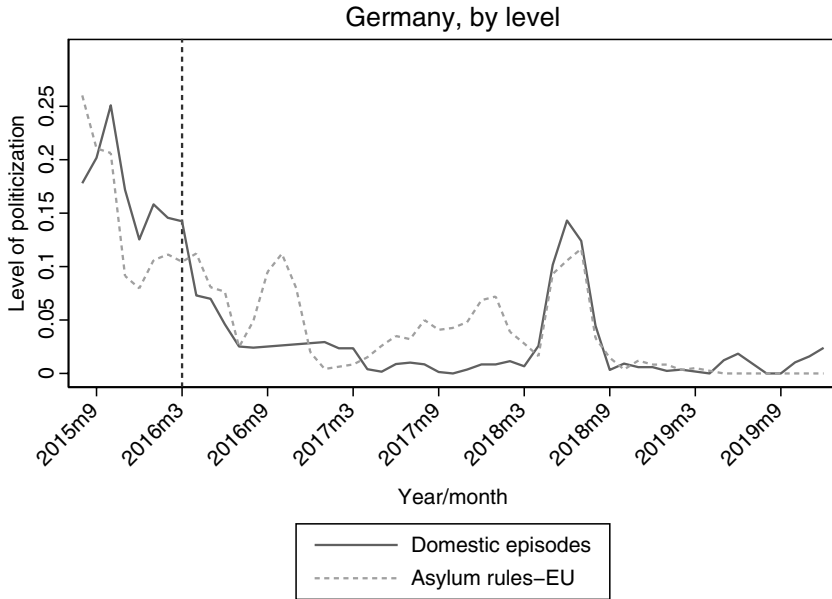


Figure 11.4 Politicization of German episodes and EU episodes concerning asylum rules

The border control issue returned to German politics when Horst Seehofer, the head of the CSU and the most vocal critic of Merkel's open-doors approach in 2015–16, became minister of the interior in Merkel's new grand coalition cabinet that took office in March 2018. It was Seehofer's attempt to implement his hardline asylum policy that gave rise to the second border control episode in Germany. In early June 2018, Seehofer insisted on turning back at the German border two categories of refugees: those who had already been registered in other countries and those against whom a reentry ban had been imposed in the past. He met with resistance on the part of Chancellor Merkel, who had legal and practical objections and pleaded for a coordinated European solution instead. The issue unleashed an open power struggle between the two, which developed into a highly politicized episode (although it does not register as such in [Table 5.2](#), because of its very short duration).

On June 18, 2018, Merkel asked Seehofer for a two-week timeout to solve the issue at the European level. More specifically, Merkel wanted to negotiate bilateral return agreements with Italy and Greece so that refugees could be returned in a coordinated manner, plus a "European solution" that she promised to offer as an alternative to Seehofer's approach

involving rejections at the border. A week and a half before the upcoming European summit, there was, however, little clarity about what such a “European solution” would look like. Merkel intensified cross-national negotiations in preparation for the upcoming summit. First, she seized upon the occasion of the Franco–German summit at Merseburg Castle on June 19 to discuss curbing migration with French president Emmanuel Macron. Macron assured Chancellor Merkel (CDU) of his support to find, “together with some other states,” solutions to sending back already registered refugees. Macron promised to speak to Italy’s new prime minister Giuseppe Conte, who had just taken office as the head of the Lega–M5S coalition government. Next, she relied on EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker for the organization of a preparatory summit of “interested states” in the run-up to the European summit of June 28–29. At the request of Merkel, Juncker invited the heads of state and government of sixteen particularly affected EU countries (among them Austria, Italy, France, Greece, Bulgaria, and Spain) to Brussels for a meeting a week before the summit of the European Council to discuss a “European solution” to the migration crisis.

Meanwhile, Seehofer insisted on sending a signal to the German public. He ordered that the federal police should, starting on July 1, reject refugees against whom a reentry ban had been imposed in the past, and he reiterated the proposal to reject refugees who had already been registered for asylum in another EU country. He threatened to break up the coalition if his plan were not adopted, and CSU parliamentary group leader Alexander Dobrindt no longer ruled out that the dispute over the refugee policy could mean the end of the union party comprised of CDU and CSU. The SPD, in turn, was urging the coalition partners CDU and CSU to resolve their asylum dispute before the next coalition committee meeting. Federal president Steinmeier (SPD) heavily criticized the conflict between CDU and CSU and supported Merkel’s plea for a joint EU solution to the conflict about the reform of the European migration policy.

In the government declaration in the Bundestag just before the European summit, Chancellor Merkel (CDU) spoke engagingly. She warned against a unilateral German solution and suggested that asylum policy could become a fateful issue for the future of Europe. Seehofer was not present in the plenum, and the CSU reacted coolly. At the summit in Brussels, Merkel fought for her job. At first, a compromise failed to materialize. Merkel met with massive resistance from Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte, who blocked all decisions that had been prepared in the run-up to the summit. He asked for a radically new policy, which would include abandoning the Dublin rule. Although Germany and Italy shared common interests as key frontline and destination

states, they failed to find a common ground at the meeting. While Conte was ready to understand the asylum issue as one concerning the whole of Europe, he refused to accept that the obligation to rescue people at sea implied the obligation to treat their asylum requests in the name of all of Europe. EU Council president Donald Tusk and EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker were then forced to cancel their scheduled press conference. Eventually, however, the heads of state arrived at an agreement: A concept for disembarkation platforms would have to be elaborated for refugees who had been rescued in the Mediterranean – this was a measure to reduce the attractiveness of the business model of smugglers (in response to an old Italian demand and building on an idea of Tusk). In addition, so-called controlled centers were to be built by member states on a voluntary basis, where decisions would be taken about who had a right to protection (an idea of Macron). The recognized refugees would be distributed over the member states – on a voluntary basis. However, much was still unclear about details and, as it turned out, the proposals remained a dead letter.

Merkel, however, was relieved. She had achieved little in terms of a solution to the migration crisis but a lot in terms of saving her chancellorship. At the press conference following the summit, she was asked whether the result of the summit was functionally equivalent to the immediate rejection of already registered refugees at the border (as demanded by Seehofer and the CSU). She claimed that if everything were to be implemented as discussed, the adopted proposal would be more than functionally equivalent and there would be real progress. Seehofer insisted that the summit solution was not functionally equivalent, but, surprisingly, in a direct meeting between the two on July 2, he and Merkel arrived at a compromise. Refugees who were caught at the border, although not allowed to enter or stay in Germany because they had been already rejected previously (a very small group indeed), were exempted from the compromise because Seehofer had already ordered the federal police to reject them at the border after July 1. Refugees who had already been registered in another country where they had asked for asylum (a larger, but still comparatively small, group of 35,000 persons per year) would be directly returned to the country responsible for them – but only if there was an agreement with the country in question. If there was no such agreement, they would be rejected at the border with Austria. Those refugees who were rejected were to be put into buildings of the federal police close to the border or in the transit zone of the Munich airport (the so-called transit centers).

Nobody knew exactly what the compromise implied in practice and whether it was legally possible to implement it. The SPD angrily opposed

the transit centers, and the opposition voiced a sharp critique. Austrian prime minister Sebastian Kurz, caught off guard by this asylum compromise, issued a sharp reaction: “We are certainly not ready to conclude contracts at the expense of Austria.” In a subsequent joint meeting, Seehofer and Kurz decided to increase the pressure on the Italian government to take back refugees who desired to go to Germany. Meeting shortly afterward, the interior ministers of Germany, Austria, and Italy tried to negotiate an agreement about the return of asylum seekers to Italy. Meanwhile, Merkel tried to accommodate the SPD, declaring that under the German constitution, asylum seekers could be held in transit centers for a maximum of two days. If the transfer to the country where they had already been registered was not successful within this lapse of time, they would have to be brought to regular facilities. Nevertheless, Seehofer considered his conflict with Chancellor Merkel about the refugee policy to be over: There were disagreements about content but no personal bad feelings, he claimed. They could “look each other in the eye” even after an argument. Seehofer justified his threat of resignation by claiming that he would not allow himself to be thrown out of office by a chancellor “who was Chancellor only because of me.” On July 10, he finally presented his “master plan” for migration policy for faster asylum procedures and more consistent deportations, which he had already announced in March, even before the new government was sworn in, but was prevented from publishing by the conflict with the chancellor. Facilitated by the EU-level interlude, the compromise in early July essentially served as a face-saving device for Merkel and Seehofer and did not change much in Germany’s asylum policy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we took a closer look at the cross-level episodes, which include roughly half of the national episodes of our study. This is a remarkably high share, which indicates that national asylum policymaking is taking place in the shadow of EU policymaking. These episodes have been more intensely politicized than purely domestic episodes, since they involved the expansion of conflict beyond the national borders both in a transnational and in a vertical direction. Cross-level episodes have either been rooted in domestic conflicts that expanded up into the international realm or in international conflicts that were closely associated with domestic politics. We have presented a fourfold typology of such cross-level episodes, which distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up cross-level interventions for both international and domestic conflicts. Top-down interventions involve attempts of EU agencies and/or fellow member states to impose EU policy implementation on

a defaulting member state – either by providing support or by imposing disciplinary measures – or to prevent a member state from implementing domestic policies that are incompatible with fundamental EU values. Support may be forthcoming in terms of capacity building (providing the member state with additional resources), in terms of regulation (adapting some policies to the needs of the member state), or in more exclusively symbolic terms. As we have seen, additional resources have been provided to Greece in the hotspot episode, and to Italy in the context of Triton and the EU–Libya agreement. Support has also been pledged in more symbolic terms, as in the case of Greece’s border conflict with Turkey and in the case of the German intragovernmental conflict in 2018. However, in regulatory terms, support for frontline and destination states has not been forthcoming, and several of the episodes just ended nowhere, with the attention of the public and policymakers turning elsewhere and leaving the issue lingering. Calling a defaulting member state back to order may include material sanctions but also punishments such as exclusion, shaming, and shunning, as is illustrated by the Hungarian Civil Law and “Stop Soros” episodes. In the refugee crisis, such measures have been ineffective.

Bottom-up interventions involve unilateral policy measures on the part of a member state to substitute for EU policies that have not been forthcoming, the appeal by a member state to the EU/fellow member states for help, or its signaling of the impossibility of implementing joint policies. Faced with unilateral measures by member states, the EU/fellow member states may attempt to mediate between the member state adopting the measure and other member states directly concerned by the externalities of the measure, as has occurred in several of the cases we have reviewed here (the border conflicts between member states, the Italian Port Closures). The EU may also attempt to develop a policy of its own that is able to build on and replace the unilateral policy of the member state in question, as in the cases of *Mare Nostrum*, the EU–Libya agreement, and the EU–Turkey agreement (which served to replace the unilateral Balkan Route Closure). But the unilateral action by a member state may also prevent the EU from adopting joint solutions and have a paralyzing effect, like the Hungarian quota referendum and the associated actions of the V4.

The intense cross-level interactions in the domestic episodes during the refugee crisis demonstrate the interdependencies between the member states and between the member states and the EU in this policy domain. At the same time, they also demonstrate the difficulties in coming to joint solutions, even under great pressure, and the amount of effort that it takes to search for joint policies in a polity that requires consensual decision-making.

Table A11.1 *Politicization of episode types*

Episode ID	C type ^a	Top-down	Episode ID	C type ^a	Bottom up	Episode ID	C type	Others
Turkey border conflict	V	0.56	Port Closures_it	V	0.51	Sicurezza Bis	N-G	0.15
Hotspots	T	0.22	Internat. Protection B.	V	0.37	Asylumlaw_fr	N-P	0.14
Summer 2015	N-P	0.15	Reception centres_gre	T	0.24	Righttointervene	N-P	0.11
Civil Law	N-S	0.13	Quota referendum_hu	N-P	0.22	Calais_fr	N-P	0.06
“Stop Soros”	N-P	0.07	Brenner_it	V	0.19	Immigrationact_2014	N-P	0.05
Bordercontrol_at	V	0.06	Ventimiglia_fr	V	0.14	Asylumpackage_de	N-G	0.05
Bordercontrol_swe	N-S	0.03	CDU-CSU_de	N-G	0.10	Asylumlaw_at	N-P	0.04
			Fence Building_hu	V	0.09	Integrationlaw_de	N-G	0.04
			Balkanroute_at	V	0.07	Immigrationact_2015	N-S	0.03
			Suspension of Dublin_de	N-G	0.07	Rightsofforeigners	N-P	0.03
			Mare Nostrum	T	0.05	Integrationlaw_at	N-G	0.02
			Ventimiglia_it	V	0.05	Municipalities	N-S	0.02
						Family Reunification (12/2018–07/2020)		
			Legal border barrier_hu	T	0.02	Family Reunification A.	N-P	0.02
			Bordercontrol_fr	N-P	0.02	Calais	N-S	0.02
						Residence Permits	N-P	0.01
						Dubs Amendment	N-P	0.01
						Deportation	N-S	0.01
						VPRS	N-P	0.01
						Police Powers	N-S	0.01
Mean: politicization		0.10			0.09			0.04
Mean: salience		0.09			0.08			0.04
Mean: polarization		0.47			0.44			0.31

^aConflict type: V = vertical, T = transnational, N-P = national-partisan, N-S = national-societal, N-G = national-intragovernmental.

12 Dynamics of Policymaking in the EU–Turkey Agreement

Introduction

In the [previous chapter](#), we analyzed the different ways national episodes are linked to the transnational and supranational levels. In this chapter, we shall analyze the different ways one and the same EU-level episode spills over to national-level decision-making. For this purpose, we have a closer look at the most important episode at the EU level – the EU–Turkey agreement, for which we coded the policymaking process not only based on international sources but also based on the national press in four of our eight member states. We selected the two countries most concerned by this agreement – Germany (as the open destination state that received the largest number of refugees) and Greece (as the frontline state where the largest number of refugees arrived during the peak of the crisis). In addition, we chose one transit state (Hungary) and one closed destination state (the UK). While Hungary was also directly concerned, since large numbers of refugees had crossed its territory before it closed it off by building fences at its southern borders, the UK as a nonmember of the Schengen area was least concerned by this episode. In comparing the national debates, we expect the episode to have been particularly salient in the media of the two most concerned members, and this is, indeed, the case. Of the 1,574 actions we coded based on the two types of press sources on this episode, roughly a third (34.6 percent) come from the Greek media, a sixth (17.8 percent) from the German media, an eighth (13.3 percent) from the Hungarian, and a sixteenth (6.4 percent) from British sources. The remainder (27.8 percent) were reported in the international press.

In the literature, the question of the Europeanization of the public debate in the member states has been prominent (e.g., [Koopmans and Statham 2010](#); [Risse-Kappen 2015](#)). In the [present chapter](#), we start by reversing the perspective. We ask, based on the EU–Turkey agreement, to what extent the debate on EU policymaking has been *domesticated* and to what extent the conflict configuration at the EU level is transformed in the national debate about an EU policymaking process. The [first section](#)

of the chapter is devoted to these questions. In addition, we attempt to show that the very same episode has very different implications for domestic policymaking. For this purpose, we zoom in on the politicization of the agreement in Germany and Greece in particular. In the two countries most concerned by the agreement, it gave rise to bottom-up attempts to solicit support from EU agencies and fellow member states. In the case of Germany, support for the EU–Turkey agreement was vital for the political survival of the chancellor: It allowed her to escape from the trap of her open-doors policy. If she was the driving force in negotiating this agreement with Turkey, she could clinch it only with the support of the EU authorities and all the other member states. Once the agreement had been concluded, the episode faded from the attention of the German public. In Greece, by contrast, support from the EU and the other member states was needed once the agreement had been concluded. For Greece, the agreement had an ambivalent character: While it successfully stopped the inflow of refugees, it left a large number of them stranded within Greek borders, and Greece could provide for them only with support from the EU and the other member states. In fact, the consequences of the agreement in Greece lingered for several years and led to two new domestic episodes at the very end of our observation period.

The Actors Involved in the Debate on the EU–Turkey Agreement

In [Chapter 7](#), we have seen that at the EU-level, member state governments and EU actors play a dominant role in the policymaking process and that international conflicts prevail. The member state governments provide the pivotal link between the domestic and the international levels of EU policymaking. Accordingly, we expect that the domestic debate on EU policymaking processes in a given member state places greater emphasis than the international debate does on the contribution of domestic actors from the state in question to the EU-level policymaking process. First, we expect that the national debate pays particular attention to the role of the member state's own government in EU-level policymaking. From the domestic point of view, it is the national executive that is the main representative of the national interest in the EU policymaking process. In addition, we expect other domestic actors to be more prominent in the national debate as well. EU policymaking is likely to be contested at the national level, that is, the scope of conflict expands to some national actors who do not become visible in the international debate but who have a role to play in the determination of the government's position in EU policymaking. In the domain of asylum policy,

these national actors are not expected to primarily include interest associations, as is posited by intergovernmentalists, but rather political parties and civil society organizations, as posited by postfunctionalists. Third, EU actors are key interlocutors of the national government in each member state, which implies that the greater focus on domestic actors is unlikely to be at the expense of EU actors. Instead, we expect the greater focus on domestic actors to reduce the focus on national actors from other member states. In this regard, the German government is likely to be a special case, given its key role in the management of the refugee crisis in general and in particular in the negotiation processes of the EU–Turkey agreement. In other words, we expect the German government to be more present than any other foreign government in the other member states as well.

Table 12.1 provides a first assessment of these expectations. The first part of the table shows that member state governments are generally

Table 12.1 *The distribution of actor types in the EU–Turkey episode, by level and country*

Actors	Country					Total
	EU	Germany	Greece	Hungary	UK	
(a) Broad categories						
EU	24.3	24.7	28.4	23.8	15.0	25.2
Member state governments	29.8	38.9	37.4	31.4	38.0	34.8
Other domestic actors	20.4	26.5	18.7	23.8	36.0	22.4
Turkey	20.2	7.8	8.4	19.1	7.0	12.9
Supranational	5.3	2.1	7.0	1.9	4.0	4.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	436	283	545	210	100	1,574
(b) Detailed						
EU	24.3	24.7	28.4	23.8	15.0	25.2
German government	9.9	21.2	5.5	9.1	8.0	10.2
Greek government	4.4	4.2	23.5	1.0	1.0	10.3
Hungarian government	1.4	1.8	0.6	12.9	3.0	2.8
UK government	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.5	17.0	1.3
Other government	13.8	11.7	7.9	8.1	9.0	10.3
Other Germany	3.4	18.4	0.6	3.3	1.0	5.0
Other Greece	1.8	0.7	6.4	2.4	0.0	3.2
Other Hungary	0.0	0.4	0.0	8.1	0.0	1.1
Other UK	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	26.0	1.7
Other member states	15.1	7.1	11.7	9.5	9.0	11.4
Turkey	20.2	7.8	8.4	19.1	7.0	12.9
Other supranational	5.3	2.1	7.0	1.9	4.0	4.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	436	283	545	210	100	1,574

even more prominent in the four national debates than in the debate at the EU level. But, as expected, this is not at the expense of a lesser representation of EU actors. Only in the UK debate are EU actors less present than in the international debate. This part of the table also confirms that, in addition to national governments, other domestic actors also get more attention in the national debates than in the debate at the EU level. The increased presence of national actors is particularly striking in the German and the UK debates. The national government is also very much present in the Greek debate, but other domestic actors participate comparatively rarely in Greece. Except for Hungary, the increased presence of domestic actors is above all at the expense of the third country, Turkey. The more detailed data in the second part of the table indicate that, as expected, the increased presence of domestic actors is also at the expense of actors from other member states (both governments and other actors), which are much more present in the EU-level debate than in the national debates. As expected, the German government is an exception in this respect, since it is, indeed, quite present not only at the EU level but also in the debates of the other member states. This is additional evidence for the exceptional role played by the German government in this EU episode.

Table 12.2 presents the target actors of the EU–Turkey debate at the different levels. Three types of actors predominate as targets – EU actors, Turkey (except in the UK debate), and the national government

Table 12.2 *The distribution of target actor types in the EU–Turkey episode, by level and country*

Target actors	Country					Total
	EU	Germany	Greece	Hungary	UK	
EU	38.5	21.1	32.7	39.2	36.4	31.9
German government	5.2	20.2	0.4	5.4	0.0	7.7
Greek government	2.3	6.4	20.8	3.1	0.0	9.6
Hungarian government	0.0	0.9	0.4	2.3	0.0	0.8
UK government	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	36.4	0.5
Other government	6.3	2.8	3.1	4.6	9.1	4.0
Other Germany	0.6	2.8	0.0	3.9	0.0	1.5
Other Greece	1.2	0.0	1.2	2.3	0.0	1.0
Other Hungary	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.1
Other member states	9.8	2.8	3.5	7.7	0.0	5.3
Turkey	36.2	43.1	33.1	30.8	18.2	35.9
Supranational	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	174	218	260	130	11	793

Table 12.3 *Executive decision-making in the EU–Turkey agreement by level and country, share of top leaders^a*

Top leaders from ...	Country					Total
	EU	Germany	Greece	Hungary	UK	
EU	<i>3.7</i>	<i>5.3</i>	<i>4.0</i>	<i>5.2</i>	<i>5.0</i>	4.4
Germany	6.7	10.6	3.9	4.8	7.0	6.2
Greece	1.8	0.7	8.8	0.0	1.0	3.8
Hungary	0.9	0.0	0.6	<i>5.7</i>	3.0	1.4
UK	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.0	0.5
Turkey	8.9	2.8	4.0	9.5	6.0	6.0
Other individuals	51.4	60.1	53.0	51.9	63.0	54.3
No names	26.6	20.5	25.7	22.9	7.0	23.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	436	283	545	210	100	1,574

^aMajor actors in bold, secondary actors in italic

(except in the Hungarian debate). Other domestic actors are essentially irrelevant as target actors. A more detailed analysis shows that, with the exception of Hungary, these other domestic actors mainly target the national government, which underlines the key role of the national government in linking the national debate to EU-level policymaking. Note that the Hungarian government seems to fulfill this linkage role to a lesser extent than the governments of the other member states do. Germany, in turn, is exceptional to the extent that Turkey constitutes by far the most important target in the German debate, which once again reflects the fact that it was German actors, above all the German chancellor, who directly negotiated with Turkey. The relative absence of Turkey as a target actor in the UK, by contrast, points to the relative lack of importance of the episode for the UK.

The key role of Germany in this episode also becomes apparent if we consider the role of top leaders in the decision-making process for this episode. As Table 12.3 shows, national top leaders dominate the national debates in every country except Hungary, where the two top leaders from Turkey – President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Davutoğlu – are even more present than the Hungarian prime minister, Orbán. Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, not only dominates in Germany, together with EU top leaders – Juncker, the Commission president, and Tusk, the president of the European Council – she also dominates at the EU level, together with the two Turkish top leaders. She accounts for no less than 6.7 percent of the actions reported at the EU-level (compared to her accounting for 4.6 percent of the actions in

all the EU-level episodes taken together; see [Table 7.3](#)) and also has a strong presence in the national press of the other member states. In the German debate, she is responsible for 10.6 percent of the actions. This confirms Merkel's key role in this episode. In the other countries, the prime ministers also dominate – Alexis Tsipras in Greece (8.8 percent of the Greek actions), Victor Orbán in Hungary (5.7 percent of the Hungarian actions), and David Cameron in the UK (8.0 percent of the UK actions).

The exceptional role of German actors in this episode is also confirmed once we consider the role of the various actors in the different phases of the policymaking process. To be sure, EU actors dominate all the stages of this process, as can be seen from [Table 12.4](#). But German actors were responsible for no less than one fourth of the actions in the negotiation phase, most of which were accounted for by the German top leader, and, together with EU and Turkish actors, German actors also dominated the claims making. By contrast, actors from Greece were responsible for the bulk of the actions in the implementation phase. This contrast between the engagement of German and Greek actors indicates the different significance of the episode for the two countries most concerned. For Germany, the episode became less relevant once the agreement had been concluded, while it took on its greatest significance for Greece in the implementation phase.

Finally, we compare the conflict configurations at the EU level with the configurations that we observe based on the national debates. At the EU level, we found previously that the EU–Turkey episode was characterized by the conflict between the EU/its member states and Turkey (see [Chapter 7](#)). As is shown in [Table 12.5](#), the same conflict structure emerges from the German and the Hungarian debates. In the case of the Greek debate, this conflict is still the most pronounced, but it appears to be much weaker than in the EU or in the German and Hungarian debates.¹ This is quite surprising, given the fact that the Greek debate of the EU–Turkey episode was by far the most salient one. As it turns out, however, the Greek debate was far less conflictive than the debates in the other countries. In terms of polarization, too, it was the least polarized of all the debates compared. The Greeks covered this episode a lot, but overwhelmingly in positive or neutral terms. There was less critique of the agreement in the Greek debate than in the other countries. This may not be so surprising after all, given that Greece was the main beneficiary of the agreement.

¹ We do not report on British conflict intensity because there were too few instances of target actors to warrant any reliable analysis.

Table 12.4 *Role of actors from different countries by policy stage, percentages^a*

Actor country	Policy_stage					Total
	Claims (+nonstate)	Proposal	Negotiation	Adoption	Implementation	
EU	21.4	51.4	42.0	56.6	26.1	25.2
Greece	12.7	2.9	8.7	10.5	39.2	14.7
Germany	16.3	11.4	24.6	6.6	6.5	15.1
Other member states	18.9	14.3	1.5	7.9	3.9	16.1
Turkey–Libya	15.9	14.3	14.5	14.5	14.4	15.6
other	14.8	5.7	8.7	4.0	9.8	13.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	1,241	35	69	76	153	1,574

^aMajor actors in bold, secondary actors in italic and bold

Table 12.5 Conflict scores for the dominant conflict lines, by episode^a

	EU member state	Trans-national	EU/ member state–third country	EU/ member state–international organization	EU/ member state–civil society	Intra-EU
EU	0.04	0.02	0.28	0.02	0.08	0.01
Germany	0.05	0.11	0.28	0.02	0.04	0.00
Greece	0.08	0.02	0.13	0.05	0.04	0.02
Hungary	0.08	0.04	0.30	0.02	0.01	0.02

^aMajor conflict lines are in bold, and minor conflict lines are in italic-bold.

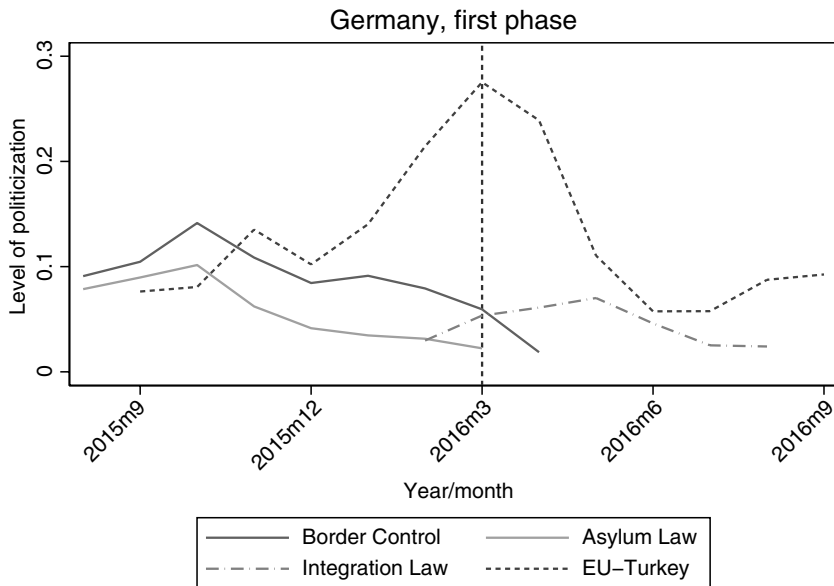


Figure 12.1 Politicization of German episodes, phase 1

The Politicization of the EU–Turkey Agreement in Germany

Compared to the German national episodes, the German debate of the EU–Turkey episode was much more politicized. This is shown by [Figure 12.1](#), which presents the politicization of the three purely domestic episodes in Germany during the first phase – the suspension of the Dublin regulation (the case of Border Control), the revision of the Asylum Law, and the introduction of the Integration Law – in relation to the politicization of the EU–Turkey agreement in Germany.

Table 12.6 *The salience of the different types of actors in the four episodes of phase 1: percentages*

Actors	Episode				
	Asylum Rules	Integration Law	Border Control	EU–Turkey	Total
International actors	0.0	0.0	12.7	51.6	23.9
Merkel	8.1	2.3	15.6	10.6	10.2
National government+	40.4	27.9	16.8	14.1	22.5
Government coalition partners	37.3	47.7	39.3	9.5	27.9
Opposition–civil society	14.3	22.1	15.6	14.1	15.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	86	173	161	283	703

The politicization of crisis policymaking in Germany starts with the suspension of the Dublin regulation and the revision of the asylum law, which run largely in parallel. After an early peak in fall 2015, the intensity of the politicization of these two episodes subsequently declines and reaches very low levels as they end. The episode of the Integration Law is generally little politicized. By contrast, the EU–Turkey agreement has already been more politicized than the domestic episodes in late fall 2015 and, at its peak in spring 2016, reached a level that was far beyond German domestic episodes and comparable to some of the highest levels of politicization of domestic episodes in the frontline states.

Table 12.6 indicates the salience of the different types of actors in the four episodes in phase 1. It distinguishes between international actors – including the EU, Turkey and other governments, and domestic actors – the chancellor, the national government (including other national institutions such as regional governments), and the government coalition partners – the CDU-CSU (senior coalition partner) and the SPD (junior coalition partner) as well as the combined opposition and civil society organizations (CSOs). As the table shows, the relevant actors vary considerably by type of episode. In the case of the EU–Turkey agreement, the public debate was dominated by international actors: Roughly half of the actions reported on the policymaking process about this agreement were accounted for by international actors – EU actors (24.7 percent), other member state governments or supranational actors (19.1 percent; most prominent among them being the governments of Greece, Austria, and Hungary, and other supranational actors), and Turkey (7.8 percent). The other half of the actions in this episode is roughly equally divided between the chancellor, government actors, governing parties,

opposition parties, and CSOs. This cast of actors differs sharply from the domestic episodes, where the international actors are only marginally present (Border Control) or entirely absent (Asylum Rules and Integration Law). In the domestic episodes, the governing parties prevail, together with the government in the cases of Asylum Rules and Integration Law, with the opposition and CSOs taking the secondary role.

It is noteworthy that Chancellor Merkel played an outside role in the EU–Turkey agreement and in the episode on border control, where she accounts for roughly the same share of actions as the rest of her government. As the driving force behind the suspension of the Dublin regulation and the EU–Turkey agreement, she is most conspicuously present in these two episodes, where she provided the linchpin between the two levels of the decision-making process. Note, however, that she was not omnipresent in all episodes of crisis decision-making, as is illustrated by the integration law, where the specialists of the policy subsystem remained in charge and she played only a minor role. This is to suggest that even under crisis conditions, crisis policymaking does not always shift to the top executive. In the case of the German integration law – a legislative novelty for Germany that the SPD, the junior coalition partner, had demanded and that had been in the making for a long time – the crisis actually provided the window of opportunity to finally get it done.

As already mentioned, the EU–Turkey agreement was the German chancellor’s plan B for alleviating the German burden of hosting asylum seekers once the relocation mechanism had failed. Germany, and the German chancellor in particular, were heavily involved in the decision-making process for this agreement, as is documented in the previous tables. As outlined in [Chapter 5](#), Chancellor Angela Merkel had made the unprecedented decision to keep the borders open for refugees during the night of September 4, 2015. Her decision meant that Germany suspended the Dublin regulation for Syrian refugees. Germany did reintroduce identity checks for refugees at the border on September 14, but no one who applied for asylum was refused entry. Subsequently, in spite of massive internal critique, Chancellor Merkel kept insisting on her open-doors policy.

Merkel’s decision to suspend the Dublin regulation was immediately criticized by representatives of foreign governments, members of her own party, and members of the opposition, which led Merkel to defend her decision in repeated public statements. Thus, members of the Austrian and Hungarian governments accused Germany of attracting the floods of Syrian refugees by keeping its doors open. Prime Minister Orbán declared that refugees were “Germany’s not Europe’s problem.” Critique also came from the EU: In December, Donald Tusk,

the president of the EC, called for a reversal of the chancellor's refugee policies. He demanded that the Dublin rules be respected and called on European states to limit the influx of refugees coming to Europe. "We can't run away from our commitments. Not even Germany," he declared. Domestic critique came above all from Merkel's own party, especially from Horst Seehofer, the leader of the CSU and prime minister of Bavaria. Seehofer went as far as threatening to file a complaint of unconstitutionality against the chancellor's decision to open German borders for refugees (see the case study in [Chapter 6](#)).

Domestically, the chancellor defended herself by describing the refugee crisis as a great national duty, comparing it to the challenges posed by the reunification of Germany and drawing parallels between the refugee crisis and the Eurozone crisis. She reiterated her optimistic stance: "I will say it again and again. We can and we will do it." She also appealed to the German public by appearing in the famous TV talk show *Anne Will* one Sunday night in early October. Internationally, she originally (in mid-September 2015) appealed to the other member states for help and asked for a joint EU summit, pointing out that there was a need to discuss border controls with Greece and Turkey and to address the conflicts in the countries of origin. She promised that Germany would lead by example, that is, by taking in more refugees than the quota requirement stipulated. In return, she expected that other member states would follow with their more limited means. In a speech before in the European Parliament in early October, she appealed to European values and called for more support for refugees.

It was only after the failure of the relocation scheme in late September that support from Turkey became the crucial plan B for Merkel. On October 18, she traveled to Ankara to meet President Erdoğan to negotiate what was then still called the joint action plan, which had been elaborated by Frans Timmermans, the EU Commission's vice president. From this point on, she systematically pursued an agreement with Turkey. In November, she intensified her efforts at the G20 meeting in Turkey, where she discussed a "quota solution" with Turkish prime minister Davutoğlu. While the German coalition partners continued to battle over the asylum packages, Merkel called for a concerted action at the European level, pointing out that without the help of Turkey, the number of refugees coming to Germany would not be reduced. On November 24, at yet another European summit on the refugee crisis, European heads of state met with President Erdoğan, and Merkel declared that Turkey would be a key partner in finding a solution to the crisis but failed to find an agreement. In the new year, Merkel pursued the negotiations with Turkey. Thus, she and Turkish prime minister

Davutoğlu met with their cabinets in Berlin for the first German–Turkish government consultations on January 22, a meeting that ended without any new resolutions. While the V4 countries, together with Austria and Bulgaria, opted for closing the Balkan route, Merkel continued to single-mindedly bet on a deal with Turkey. Thus, at the EU summit on February 18, she demanded that negotiations with Turkey be continued. Eventually, the EU–Turkey summit in early March was the turning point, and in the final rounds of negotiations in the first half of March, Merkel played a crucial role.

After its adoption, the agreement was criticized by the domestic opposition from the left and by CSOs as well as international NGOs such as Amnesty International. In response to such critique, Merkel again traveled to Turkey. In April, she went to visit a refugee camp on the Turkish border with Syria; in May, she went to meet President Erdoğan. She wanted to provide evidence that the agreement was sensible and working as planned, to reassure the Turkish president of Germany's commitment to the agreement, and to voluntarily accept additional contingents of refugees. In May 2016, she continued to defend the agreement before the German public on TV, invoking the humanitarian responsibility of the EU.

The Politicization of the EU–Turkey Agreement in Greece

Greece is the other member state where the EU–Turkey agreement has been heavily politicized. [Figure 12.2](#) presents the politicization of the Greek episodes in phase 1. However, even if the agreement was heavily politicized in Greece, its politicization did not reach the level of the politicization of the hotspot episode to which it was closely linked. As we have already observed above, the EU–Turkey agreement episode in Greece was not very conflict intensive and comparatively little polarized. This is not to say that there was no opposition to the agreement: Civil society organizations; the radical left opposition; and even parts of Syriza, the governing party, criticized the implications of the deal for refugees in Greece. But the EU proved to be generally highly supportive, Turkey proceeded to implement its part of the deal, and Greece also received support from other international actors. Domestically, the Greek prime minister defended the agreement, as did the government and the mainstream opposition.

[Table 12.7](#) presents the salience of the various types of actors in the three Greek episodes during phase 1. The dominance of international

Table 12.7 *The salience of the different types of actors in the three episodes of phase 1: percentages*

Actors	Episode			Total
	Summer 2015	Hotspots	EU–Turkey	
International	43.1	42.7	64.6	54.5
Tsipras	7.2	8.1	8.8	8.3
National government+	28.8	24.6	13.4	19.2
Government parties	4.6	0.3	0.6	1.1
Opposition–Civil society	16.3	24.3	12.7	16.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>n</i>	153	321	545	1,019

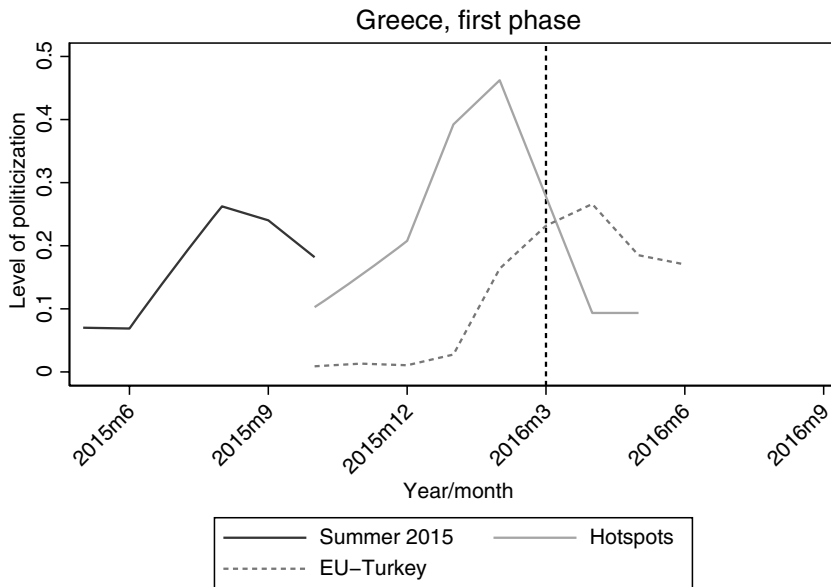


Figure 12.2 Politicization of Greek episodes, phase 1

actors is striking not only in the EU–Turkey episode, where international actors account for almost two thirds of the actions, but also in the two domestic episodes that we have already discussed in the [previous chapter](#). Compared to Germany, the national government and especially the governing parties generally play a more limited role, which again confirms the extent to which Greece was the object of top-down interventions in this first phase of the crisis. As for the Greek prime

minister, he is conspicuously present in all the three episodes, although his position is somewhat less prominent than the position of the German chancellor in the two episodes where she was most important.

Phase 1: The Management of the Refugees Trapped in Greece

The Greek debate before the adoption of the agreement was closely intertwined with the creation of the hotspots and of an EU border and coast guard capable of controlling the EU borders between Greece and Turkey. Greece was fighting on two fronts: On the one hand, it was struggling with Turkey, accusing it of supporting people smugglers, with Turkey replying that it was doing what was possible and claiming that it was stopping 500 persons every day. Repeatedly, the Turkish President turned to threatening not only Greece but the European leaders as well that he would flood the EU with refugees if the EU did not offer Turkey a better deal for its support in managing the refugee crisis. On the other hand, Greece was struggling with the other European member states, which reminded it of its responsibilities as a frontline state. When the agreement was eventually reached, it was perceived to be a diplomatic success of Greece (and Cyprus) by Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras. He claimed that Greece had achieved the best available deal with regard to the refugee issue, but he also warned that the agreement would be difficult to implement and that a key condition for its success would be a reduction in refugee flows. The main opposition party, ND, agreed, calling the agreement a “positive step.” But it added that the agreement had to be implemented effectively, and it had some doubts about the government’s capacity to do so.

Greece’s prime minister warned that the number of refugees crossing the border to Greece could not be limited unless the smugglers on the Turkish side of the border were stopped. EU migration commissioner Avramopoulos asked the EU to increase pressure on Turkey to crack down on smugglers. Turkish and Greek officials serving as liaison officers were installed on both sides to monitor the deal. And Turkey did, indeed, abide by the agreement. As a matter of fact, the number of arrivals dropped sharply after the agreement was signed: While the average number of arrivals was around 2,000 per day in January and February 2016, it fell to 130 in April 2016. If Greece had counted more than 860,000 arrivals in 2015, the number of arrivals dropped to 36,000 in the year after the deal was signed, before climbing again to nearly 75,000 in 2019. In addition, the number of dead and missing migrants in the Aegean Sea decreased from 1,175 cases in the 20 months before the agreement to 310 in the period after its adoption in March 2016 until

March 2019.² In spite of a lot of frustration on the Turkish side, this centerpiece of the agreement held.

On the Greek side, after the adoption of the agreement, the debate focused on its implementation, which put great pressure on the country. Economically battered by the Euro area crisis, Greece did not have the capacity to deal with the large number of refugees who were now trapped in the country as a result of the agreement. The hotspots on the islands were no longer open facilities where refugees passed through on their way to northern Europe; rather, the refugees were now confined to these camps. As a result of the agreement, roughly 60,000 refugees were stranded in Greece – in the camps on the islands, in the port of Piraeus, and at the Greek northern border in Idomeni. Overcrowding in substandard living conditions and destitution became an integral part of the asylum process in Greece, contrary to reception obligations and human rights standards of the member states. This situation was heavily criticized by NGOs. Thus, a few days after the conclusion of the agreement, Doctors Without Borders (*Médecins Sans Frontières*), one of the key nongovernmental organizations helping refugees and migrants arriving in Greece, announced that it would stop all activities linked to the hotspots on the Greek islands of Lesbos and Samos. The NGO said its decision was prompted by its objections to the agreement, which it described as a “cynical mechanism” that jeopardized asylum and showed “contempt” for humanitarian needs. The NGO had also temporarily withdrawn from the refugee camp in Idomeni, this time citing concerns about the safety of its staff. One month later, it was the turn of Oxfam to denounce the European Union for its failure to deliver a fair and safe system for receiving refugees in Greece: “Europe has created this mess and it needs to fix it in a way that respects people’s rights and dignity.” Oxfam highlighted problems at the overcrowded hotspots on Lesbos (*Moria*), where riots had occurred at that time. In addition, the UNHCR expressed its disapproval and suspended cooperation in harsh terms: “UNHCR has till now been supporting the authorities in the so-called hotspots on the Greek islands, where refugees and migrants were received, assisted, and registered. Under the new provisions, these sites have now become detention facilities. Accordingly, and in line with our policy on opposing mandatory detention, we have suspended some of our activities at all closed centres on the islands. This includes provision of transport to and from these sites. However, UNHCR will maintain a presence to carry out protection monitoring, to ensure that refugee and

² www.migrationpolicy.org/print/17035; European Commission: EU-Turkey statement. Three years on. March 2019.

human rights standards are upheld, and to provide information on the rights and procedures to seek asylum.”³

In order to implement the EU–Turkey agreement for the return of refugees from Greece to Turkey and to speed up the procedures pertaining to asylum requests, Greece’s parliament, under high time pressure, adopted an asylum amendment bill on April 1 that adapted the Greek legislation to the EU directive on asylum procedures. It also introduced provisions for registering refugees, allowing them to find work and to qualify for international protection. In addition, immediately after the adoption of the agreement, Greece had appealed to its European partners for logistic help to implement the deal. In response to such calls for help, the Commission had immediately started coordinating the implementation of the agreement, and the EU border agency Frontex called on the EU member states to provide 1,500 police and 50 readmissions experts. On April 1, approximately 350 Frontex officers from Germany, France, Portugal, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania arrived on Lesbos to assist in the readmission process for the refugees and migrants. In the end, 397 police and 47 readmission experts were actually provided.

However, the situation on the islands hardly improved. By the end of May, the mayor of Lesbos, one of the islands most affected by refugee flows, urged the government to speed up the asylum application procedure, as the extended stay of refugees and migrants on the island was causing stress and frictions for applicants. “The delay of the asylum procedures requires de facto that refugees stay in Lesbos for a long time. This creates frustration and friction between our guests, some of which have already turned to delinquency, given the lack of money and fear of their possible readmission to Turkey,” the mayor wrote in a letter to the government. The mayor of another island, Chios, accused the government of ignoring the gravity of the situation, especially after the NGOs had left and nobody knew how to deal with the situation.

While the overall responsibility for managing migration flows in Greece rested with the Greek authorities, the Commission and EU member states continued to provide support to the Greek authorities in the implementation of the EU–Turkey agreement to improve migration management and reception conditions in Greece. EU actions focused in particular on helping to alleviate the situation on the Greek islands. By 2019, over 2.07 billion euro in EU funding had been allocated to Greece to support migration management since the start of 2015, including 816 million euro in emergency assistance and over 643 million

³ <https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/the-eu-turkey-agreement-on-migration-and-asylum-false-pretences-or-a-fools-bargain/>

euro for projects under the EU Emergency Support Instrument. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the European Asylum Support Office deployed staff on the ground in Greece to support the Greek authorities. The Commission also deployed a team in Athens and ensured a permanent presence on the hotspot islands. Since 2016, a permanent Commission representative has been stationed on both Samos and Lesbos to support the Greek and international partners on the ground.⁴

Phase 2: International Protection Bill and Reception Centers

Nevertheless, the situation for refugees in Greece remained tense. Two of the three Greek episodes that occurred within a short time span at the very end of the period covered by our analysis in late 2019/early 2020 and that we introduced in the [previous chapter](#) (see [Figure 11.1](#)) – the International Protection Bill and the reception centers, once again concerned the management of the refugees in Greece. By the time these episodes took place, the situation in the camps on the Greek islands had hardly improved at all. As pointed out in the [previous chapter](#), these two episodes were dominated by bottom-up cross-level politicization. Together with the Turkey Border Conflict, which we discussed in the [previous chapter](#), they took place against the background of mounting problem pressure, that is, increasing arrivals of refugees, overcrowded refugee camps on the Greek islands, and increasing tensions between Greece and Turkey.

The first of the two interlinked episodes concerns the International Protection Bill (IPB), the first act related to immigration policy adopted by the recently elected New Democracy government. The bill was not directly concerned with border control; rather, it was designed to streamline domestic Greek asylum rules, once again attempting to improve and accelerate the asylum and return processes. Among other things, the bill was intended to relieve the pressure on the islands and to construct new “closed” centers for rejected asylum seekers, who would be confined to these new centers. The domestic debate of the bill was dominated by civil society organizations claiming that it contravened international law and would not work anyway, but to no avail – the bill passed without much ado in parliament. However, resistance to some of the bill’s provisions continued among the islanders in Lesbos, Chios, and other afflicted islands, who were wary of the prospect of getting new “closed” centers in their neighborhoods. Regional and municipal authorities demanded

⁴ European Commission: EU-Turkey statement. Three years on. March 2019.

that after five years of shouldering the problem, the easternmost islands should be unburdened from refugee reception. The domestic debate was accompanied by an intense international debate: At the same time as it introduced the bill, the government was trying to entice and contain Turkey and to get support from the other European member states. On the one hand, it accused Turkey of gradually allowing more migrants to slip through its borders to get more concessions from Europe, and it appealed to Turkey for support of a commonly beneficial solution to the problem. On the other hand, it multiplied meetings with representatives of fellow member states in order to raise their awareness of the imminent threat at the border with Turkey and to induce them to share the burden. The other member states responded by providing assurances or by pointing out that the key was to return nonrecognized asylum seekers to Turkey as envisaged under the EU–Turkey agreement.

The domestic conflict with the islanders intensified in the second episode, which was focused on the detention centers on the islands. The regional authorities of the Northern Aegean, where most centers were to be built, adopted a collision course with the national government, engaging in protest participation as well as judicial challenges to the government's plans. They feared that once built, the centers would sprawl like Moria on Lesbos and consolidate the image of the islands as "migrant barracks." It did not help that the government decided to expropriate real estate on the islands to build the new centers. The standoff between the government and the islanders culminated in a confrontation of far right and far left groups, each opposing the hotspots for their own reasons, with riot police that had been sent to supervise and protect the start of the construction process. Faced with a sort of low-key guerilla warfare, the government eventually retreated, asking the riot police to return to Athens and promising to delay the construction of the centers and to "consult" with local authorities.

At the same time, the international conflict continued, with the Greek government continuing to fight an international bottom-up battle on two fronts. On the one hand, Greece continued to blame Turkey for using the refugees to blackmail the European Union. The Turkish government responded by criticizing Greece for manipulating the data concerning the refugee crisis, for its inhumane treatment of the migrants, as well as for pushing illegal migrants back to the Turkish borders. On the latter points, Turkey was joined by the UNHCR, which warned that the conditions in the Greek reception centers were awful, asked Greece to make sure that the new asylum procedures were in line with international law, and pointed out that the UN was generally opposed to detention centers for asylum seekers. In addition, in April 2020, Amnesty International

and many others documented how Greece systematically used “push-backs” and other human rights abuses to prevent refugees from entering the EU.⁵ On the other hand, the Greek government both criticized its European partners for their lack of solidarity (e.g., for their lack of willingness to accommodate 3,000 unaccompanied migrant minors) and asked for a reform of the Dublin regulation, as well as for EU support for decongesting the islands, for financing the new accommodation and pre-departure units, for border controls by boosting Frontex, and for returning rejected asylum seekers to Afghanistan. In the European Council’s debates on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which were going on at the time, the Greek government fought for increasing the funds for migration/refugees.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown how an EU policymaking episode is domesticated in national policymaking, and how this works out differently depending on the member state. We have compared the debates in four member states and then zoomed in on the debates in the two member states most concerned. For Germany, this episode was instrumental in solving a domestic conflict between the chancellor and the governing parties, including her own party. Once the agreement was sealed, the German debate did not entirely subside, but its intensity lessened and eventually faded out. The Greek debate, by contrast, picked up shortly before the conclusion of the agreement and then stayed intense during the implementation phase. Several years after the agreement had been concluded, it gave rise to new domestic episodes in Greece, since the problems it created for Greece continued to remain unsolved.

While the EU–Turkey Deal stopped the inflow of refugees, it did not work out as expected in other respects, with important implications for Greece. According to the deal, all refugees who would enter Greece after March 20, and those whose asylum applications were not accepted, would be returned to Turkey on chartered ships. However, the return of refugees to Turkey developed only sluggishly and despite the rapid adaptation of Greek asylum law to the new situation, only 2,441 migrants had been returned three years after the signing of the agreement.⁶ Also, the promise of one-to-one resettlements did not work out as expected: From March 2016 to March 2021, only slightly more than 28,000 Syrian refugees were resettled in the European Union from Turkey, far short of the

⁵ www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/4307/2021/en/

⁶ European Commission: EU-Turkey statement. Three years on. March 2019.

maximum 72,000 outlined in the deal. Discussions of bringing Turkey into the European Union and easing visa processes for Turks meanwhile mostly stalled, as President Erdoğan's government increasingly turned authoritarian after the coup in summer 2016. The agreement did not usher in a period of harmonization of EU–Turkish relationships. As we have seen in the [previous chapter](#), in early 2020, Turkey's president moved to reopen the border for refugees, using Turkey's geopolitical position as a buffer between Syria and Europe to put renewed pressure on the EU and on Greece in particular.

But the deal succeeded in externalizing a significant part of the management of the EU's refugee crisis to Turkey. In exchange for stopping the flow of refugees to the EU, it provided Turkey with 6 billion euros to arrange for the refugees if not with the other goods it originally promised. The exchange of funds for the management of refugees, the part of the EU–Turkey Deal that worked, provided a blueprint for other externalization agreements – with Libya and Morocco. Moreover, the *New Pact on Migration and Asylum* presented by the European Commission on September 23, 2020, assigned a prominent place to cooperation with third countries of origin and transit of migrations flows.⁷ The German presidency progress report on key elements of a European migration and asylum policy stated in 2020 that “action on promoting and advancing tailor-made partnerships with key third countries needs to be taken without further delay and with the aim to show tangible results.”⁸ In the eyes of some critics, however, the new pact only proposed “more of the same,” which they did not consider to be enough to improve the EU's management of its external borders.⁹

On its fifth anniversary in spring 2021, leaders in both Turkey and Europe suggested that the agreement would endure in some form or another. Commission president von der Leyen and European Council president Charles Michel met with President Erdoğan in Ankara on April 6 and signaled that additional funding for Turkey was forthcoming, as long as the country continued upholding its end of the agreement.¹⁰ In June 2021, a new 3.5 billion euro package for Turkey was on the table of the Commission, to be disbursed until 2024.¹¹ The proposal included an

⁷ <https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/eu-cooperation-on-migration-with-partner-countries-within-the-new-pact-new-instruments-for-a-new-paradigm/>

⁸ www.eu2020.de/blob/2427378/79ff059a5f9cea1ed904aaaf5cc15fa36/12-15-pm-viko-jha-fortschrittsbericht-en-data.pdf

⁹ www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Policy-paper-64-Kirisci.pdf

¹⁰ www.migrationpolicy.org/print/17035

¹¹ Valentina Pop, FT Europe Express, FT@newsletters.ft.com, June 23, 2021: Amnesty International reports “systematic pushbacks” on eve of EU summit.

additional 2.2 billion euro for Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The commission wanted to “gradually move from humanitarian priorities to socio-economic support and development,” according to the draft text. This would include “funding for migration management and border control,” precisely the areas rights activists and parliament have flagged as being of serious concern. Meanwhile, the reception camps for asylum seekers on the Greek islands of Leros and Kos were almost empty, and on Samos and Chios only a few hundred migrants remained. Only on Lesbos did 5,000 migrants continue to live in a provisional tent camp with a capacity of 8,000 people.¹²

¹² NZZ-e-paper, June 24, 2021.

Part IV

Outcomes and Conclusion

13 Policy-Specific Conflict Configurations on the Demand Side

Introduction

In this chapter, we analyze the transnational and domestic conflict configurations on the demand side, that is, among citizens of the European member states. As we argued in the introduction, similar to coming-together federations, the conflict structure in the EU is dominated by the *territorial* dimension. This dimension produces two lines of conflict: a vertical one, focused on the powers of the polity center vis-à-vis those of the member states, and a horizontal one, revolving around the specific interests of these member states. But the European integration process does not only pit countries against the European center and against each other, it also pits citizens with diverging views of this process against each other within each country. Viewed from the perspective of the general public, we can analyze the extent to which citizens from different countries are divided between themselves and how they are divided among themselves within each country. We shall first analyze the transnational conflicts between citizens from different countries and then focus on the conflicts between citizens within countries.

We expect the transnational conflicts between citizens from different member states to be closely related to the country-specific experiences in the refugee crisis and in the years following the crisis. By contrast, we expect the within-country conflicts among citizens to be rooted in a broader divide between cosmopolitans and communitarians, which is based on structural developments that go beyond the experience of the refugee crisis. In terms of horizontal transnational conflicts, we first resort to our categorization of the variety of EU member states at the onset of the crisis that we introduced in [Chapter 2](#) and have used throughout the book. We expect the perspective of the general public to be shaped by the type of states they are living in: frontline, transit, open destination, closed destination, or bystander states. The criteria underlying this typology such as the countries' policy heritage, their geographical location on general migration trajectories in Europe, and their

immediate crisis experience are expected to have shaped the citizens' experiences during the crisis and their preferences for policy in the aftermath of the crisis. We do not study how each of these different aspects have affected public opinion but instead assume that they are reflected in the differences observed between country types. Second, beyond the general country types, we especially expect the policy positions adopted by the policymakers during the crisis to have shaped the citizens' policy preferences, as it is well known that policymakers and their parties are opinion-forming actors of great importance (Zaller 1992; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Slothuus and Bisgaard 2021). We expect the citizens of frontline states to oppose the citizens of transit, destination, and bystander states because the former countries would benefit most from a reform of asylum policy designed to increase transnational burden sharing. At the same time, we also expect the citizens of the Visegrad 4 (V4) countries – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia – to be the most divergent from those in frontline states, since they have been most mobilized by policymakers against policies designed to increase transnational burden sharing during the refugee crisis. Given the great impact of the mobilization of the V4 on the populations in eastern Europe, it is likely that the citizens of other eastern European bystander states will share the positions of the citizens in the V4 countries.

Turning to the within-country conflicts, we have argued in Chapter 2 that the European integration process can be viewed as part and parcel of a larger process of globalization that restructures national politics in terms of a new structuring conflict (or cleavage) that opposes cosmopolitans-universalists and nationalists-communitarians. The new structuring conflict raises fundamental issues of rule and belonging and taps into various sources of conflicts about national identity, sovereignty, and solidarity. The emerging divide concerns above all conflicts about the influx of migrants, competing supranational sources of authority, and international economic competition. Scholars have used different labels to refer to this new structuring conflict – from GAL-TAN (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002), independence-integration (Bartolini 2005b), integration-demarcation (Kriesi et al. 2008), universalism-communitarianism (Bornschiefer 2010), cosmopolitanism-communitarianism (Zürn and Wilde 2016), and cosmopolitanism-parochialism (De Vries 2017) to the transnational cleavage (Hooghe and Marks 2018) and the cleavage between sovereignty and Europeanism (Fabbrini 2019: 62f). However, what they all emphasize is that the new divide constitutes a break with the period of “permissive consensus” and that conflicts over Europe have been transferred from the backrooms of political decision-making to the public sphere. At the same time, the new conflict leads to a renaissance of

nationalism (and a desolidarization process between nation-states) and a politicization of national political, economic, and cultural boundaries.

These authors agree that the new divide is above all articulated based on two types of issues – immigration and European integration – and that it mainly concerns cultural-political, not economic, aspects of these issues. For multiple reasons – programmatic constraints, internal divisions, incumbency, and so forth – the mobilization potential created by this new conflict has been neglected and avoided (depoliticized) by the mainstream parties (De Vries and van de Wardt 2011; Green-Pedersen 2012; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Netjes and Binnema 2007; Sitter 2001; Steenbergen and Scott 2004). Consequently, voters turned to new parties with distinctive profiles for their articulation. Over the past decades, it was first the cosmopolitan side that mobilized. In the aftermath of the “cultural revolution” in the 1960s and 1970s, radical left and green parties mobilized the social-cultural segments of the new middle class in the name of cultural liberalism, environmental protection, and multiculturalism. The cultural revolution also transformed the social democratic parties, which, in the process, have become essentially middle-class parties in almost all countries of western Europe (e.g., Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Kitschelt 1994).

In a second wave of mobilization starting in the 1980s and 1990s, it has been mainly the parties of the radical right that have mobilized the heterogeneous set of the losers of globalization (Kriesi et al. 2008) and their concerns about immigration and European integration. These parties were mainly newly rising challengers, but in some countries such as Austria and Switzerland, they consisted of transformed established center right parties. These parties all endorse a xenophobic form of nationalism that can be called nativist (Mudde 2007), claiming that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the “nation”). Accordingly, the vote for these parties has been shown to be above all an anti-immigration vote (Oesch 2008) and, to some extent, a vote against Europe (Schulte-Cloos 2018; Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013) and against the cultural liberalism of the left that has increasingly shaped Western societies (Ignazi 2003; Inglehart and Norris 2016).

The green parties on the one hand and the radical right parties on the other hand mainly rose in northwestern Europe. They have become established forces in the national party systems of their respective countries, even if, for various reasons, the radical right broke through in some of them belatedly. In southern Europe, up to the most recent past, with the exception of the Italian Lega Nord (Betz 1993), radical right parties have not been able to gain a foothold. The impact of the new conflict has been more limited in the countries of southern Europe – for reasons that

have to do with their political legacy (long-lasting authoritarian regimes and strong communist parties, i.e., a strong “old” left), with their having been emigration countries until more recently, and with the fact that the return to Europe after the authoritarian period was perceived as a return to Western civilization (Diez Medrano 2003). However, under the impact of the combined economic and political crises that shook southern Europe in the more recent past (Hutter and Kriesi 2019a), new parties of the radical left (but hardly any green parties) have surged in Greece, Spain, and (to a more limited extent) Portugal. More recently, parties of the radical right also rose in Italy (Lega) and Spain (Vox). In central–eastern Europe, both types of radical parties have so far been rather weak or transient, due to the communist heritage and the low level of institutionalization of the party system. Instead, in this part of Europe, we have witnessed a radicalization of mainstream parties – of the center right (e.g., in Hungary [Fidesz], Poland [PiS], and the Czech Republic [ODS]) and the center left (e.g., in Romania [PSD]) – which have defended positions previously adopted by the radical right in western Europe.

At the domestic level, we expect that the conflicts are indeed shaped by attitudes about immigration and European integration and that these attitudes are most clearly articulated by the parties taking a nationalist position (the radical right and the conservative–nationalist right in some countries) on the one hand and those taking a cosmopolitan position (the Greens and the radical left) on the other hand. Overall, we shall show that domestic conflicts are more polarizing than transnational conflicts, which is to suggest that the potential for further transnational conflicts is, indeed, quite large. In general, the opponents to immigration are crucial for making asylum policy: If they dominate in some member states, they can induce their governments to legitimately block transnational burden sharing. In line with this argument, we shall see that the more restrictive policies are more likely to be supported than policies that aim at transnational burden sharing.

Measurement

This chapter uses data collected as part of an original cross-national survey fielded in sixteen EU member states in June and July 2021, covering all five types of states we are interested in.¹ The national samples were obtained using a quota design based on gender, age, area of residence,

¹ The sixteen states are Austria, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

and education and consist of around 800 respondents per country, amounting to a total of 13,095 respondents. The survey's larger scope was the study of attitudes related to the multiple crises that have hit the EU since 2008 (such as the financial and sovereign debt crisis, Brexit, and Covid-19) and within this scope, the survey included a section focusing specifically on the refugee crisis. This section consisted of multiple items ranging from attitudes toward migrants and immigration more generally, to performance evaluations of the national governments and the EU in the refugee crisis, to evaluations of specific policies proposed or adopted during the refugee crisis. Additionally, the survey included a host of general political attitudes, enabling our in-depth analysis of the conflict configurations surrounding policies in the refugee crisis. The timing of the survey in the aftermath of the refugee crisis also provides us with two advantages. First, it allows us to compare all the policies that have been proposed or adopted during the different phases of the crisis. Second, rather than measuring agreement with these policies at the peak of the crisis, when respondents might be biased in favor of one policy or another due to contingent considerations, asking them about their evaluations of policies in the aftermath of the crisis allows for a more considered assessment of these policies. In what follows, we describe the items used in detail, as well as the measures employed for systematically comparing conflict configurations between and within countries.

To measure attitudes toward policies, we include a series of six items tapping into agreement with all major types of policies that have been proposed or adopted at the EU level but also policies adopted by member states. The EU policies taken into consideration are (1) the relocation quota, requiring countries to accommodate a share of refugees; (2) relocation compensation, requiring countries to pay compensation to other countries that accommodate refugees; (3) external bordering through EBCG, investing in reinforcing external borders by reinforcing the border and coast guard; (4) Dublin regulation, requiring refugees to be accommodated by the country through which they first entered Europe and in which they were first registered; and (5) externalization, pursuing deals with third countries (such as Turkey and Libya) via financial and other incentives. To this we add as sixth category concerning international policies of member states: (6) internal border control, reinforcing countries' internal borders by improving border surveillance, building fences, or pushing back migrants by force.

For measuring immigration attitudes, we use a series of eight items tapping into views about the impact of immigrants in several areas (economy, culture, criminality, overall quality of life) and into the degree to which each country should allow various groups of people to come and

live there (same race/ethnic group, different race/ethnic group, poorer countries outside Europe, poorer countries inside Europe). This combination of items for measuring immigration attitudes has already been applied in a cross-national setting in the framework of various waves of the European Social Survey (ESS). As the items are all related conceptually and load onto a single factor with Eigenvalue of higher than 1, we combine them into a single index of pro- and anti-immigration attitudes. Beyond immigration attitudes, we also expect party allegiance to be an important driver of within-country conflicts on policy. For measuring party allegiances, we use a standard vote recall question and recode parties in our sixteen countries into eight different party families: radical left, green, social democrats, liberal, conservative-Christian-democratic, radical right, other, and nonvoters. Finally, we also include Euroscepticism, which is measured by a question on whether European integration has gone too far or should be pushed forward.

We examine descriptively the conflict configurations in four different ways. First, we present the kernel-smoothed distributions of the policy-specific attitudes in the different countries and domestic groups. Second, we estimate levels of policy polarization across different groups in terms of country types, pro-/anti-immigration attitudes, party family, and Euroscepticism and focus the bulk of our analysis on summary polarization measures across these groups. The polarization measure we use is based on the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (KS) statistic (see [Marsaglia, Tsang, and Wang 2003](#); [Siegel 1956](#): 127–136), which quantifies the distance between the empirical distribution functions of two samples. Our choice of the KS statistic is guided by three arguments: First, since we cannot assume a specific shape (e.g., normal) of the distributions of policy agreement across the different groups, this statistic offers a distribution-free alternative to other, parametric measures of distance (e.g., Bhattacharyya distance); second, the KS statistic can be used as a metric, which means it is symmetric (distance between distribution A and B is the same as distance between distribution B and A) and has a finite range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating larger distances between the compared distributions; and third, the statistic detects a wider range of differences between two distributions than simply comparing summary statistics such as the mean or the median.

Finally, we attempt to reduce the complex conflict configurations by relying on multidimensional scaling (MDS) procedures. These procedures are designed to place the different entities (in our case, member states, as well as social groups defined by their immigration attitudes and partisanship) in a low-dimensional (typically two-dimensional) space. The distances between the entities in the resulting space reproduce their

policy distances as closely as possible. The substantive meaning of the spatial dimensions lies in the eyes of the beholder; one relies on the raw data to come up with an interpretation of the dimensions, but of course this is more art than statistics. Finally, we also use ordinary regression analysis to show how the two types of conflicts relate to each other.

Transnational Conflict Configurations

Transnational Polarization

To explore the horizontal line of conflict between member states among the citizens, we start by looking at the distribution of support in our main country types in order to examine the direction of the attitudes toward selected policies (Figure 13.1). Generally, regardless of policy type, we notice that the public in frontline and transit states differs the most from the public in other states in terms of policy support. With respect to relocation (Figure 13.1a), in frontline states, the attitude distribution is heavily skewed in favor of the relocation quota, which is unsurprising because relocation policies would alleviate their immediate burden. By contrast, in transit states, the public is most opposed to the relocation quota, as these states are neither immediately affected by the problem pressure nor ultimate destinations of the migrant flows. The distribution of support is very similar in destination states, of both the closed and open kind, and in bystander states, with respondents being somewhat more positive toward the policy but with a large neutral share of respondents. With regard to the Dublin regulation (Figure 13.1b), again unsurprisingly, respondents in frontline states are the ones most opposed to it, followed by those in the transit states. By contrast, those in the bystander and destination states are rather neutral. Finally, Figures 13.1c and 13.1d indicate that external bordering via the reinforcement of the EBCG and externalization via deals with third countries are the least polarizing policies on the demand side, with similar distributions across all country types that are all heavily skewed toward neutral-positive attitudes. Transit states are the only ones that slightly diverge in the sense that they have an even higher share of positive attitudes toward these policies than other country types do.

To further explore the transnational line of conflict between member states on the demand side, we construct measures of polarization between countries by policy type for each country in our dataset. This allows us to analyze the contentiousness of policies more systematically but also to observe patterns that might go beyond our general five country types by looking at each country individually and identifying potential coalitions. Table 13.1 presents the average KS distance between the

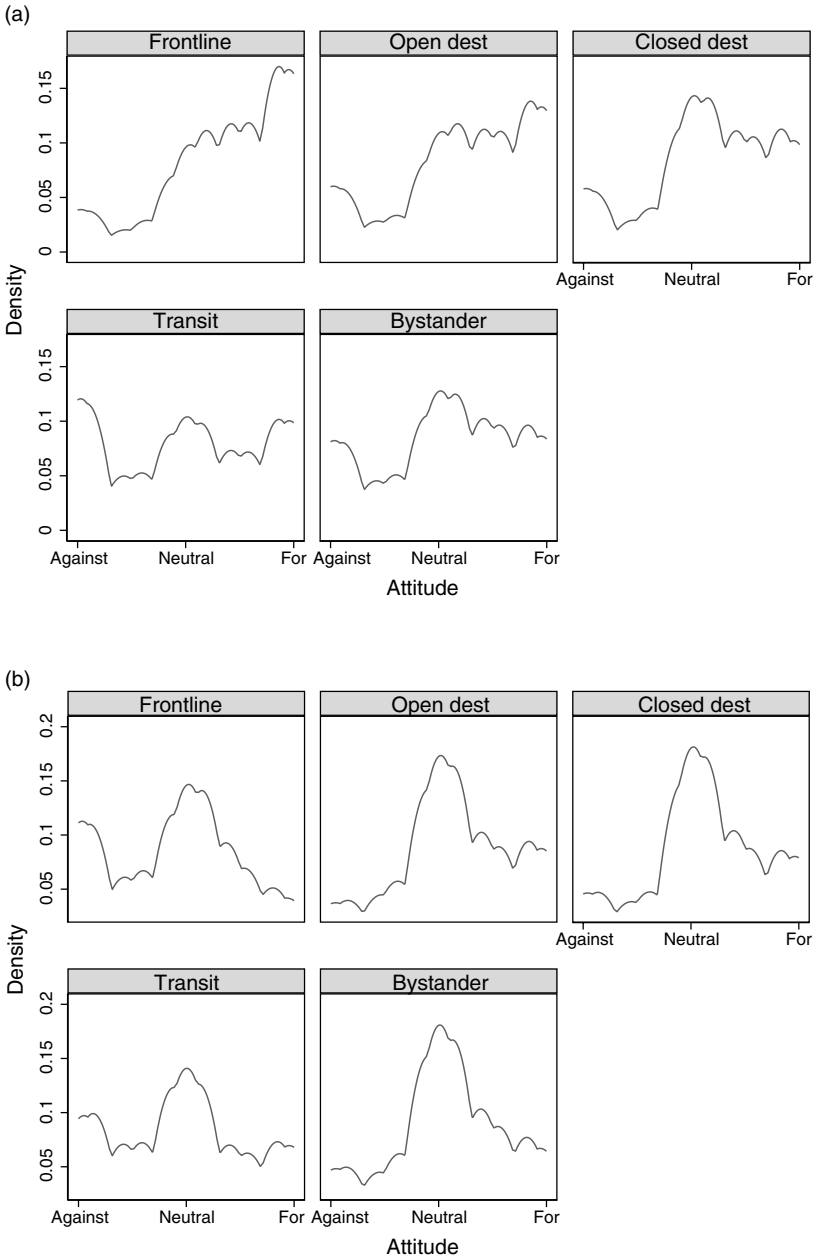


Figure 13.1 Policy-specific distribution of support, by country type. (a) Relocation quota; (b) Dublin regulation; (c) EBCG; (d) externalization

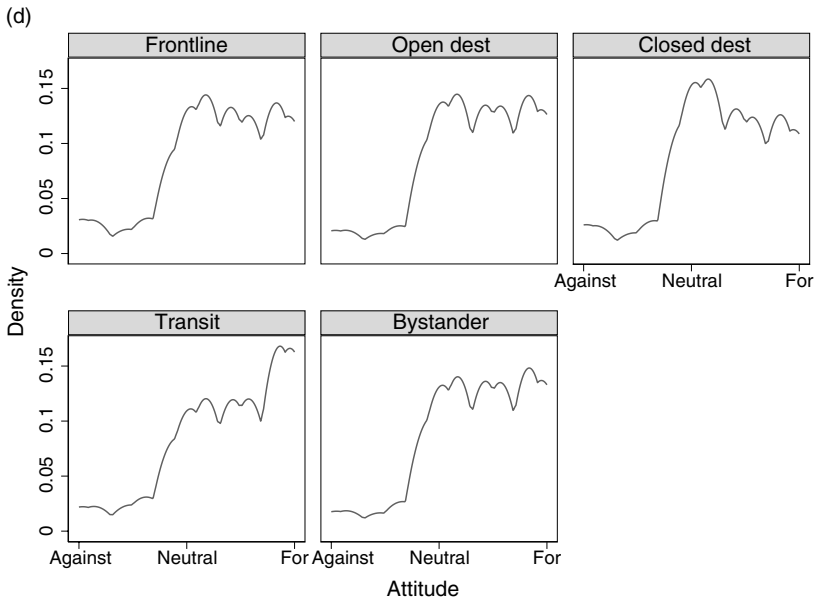
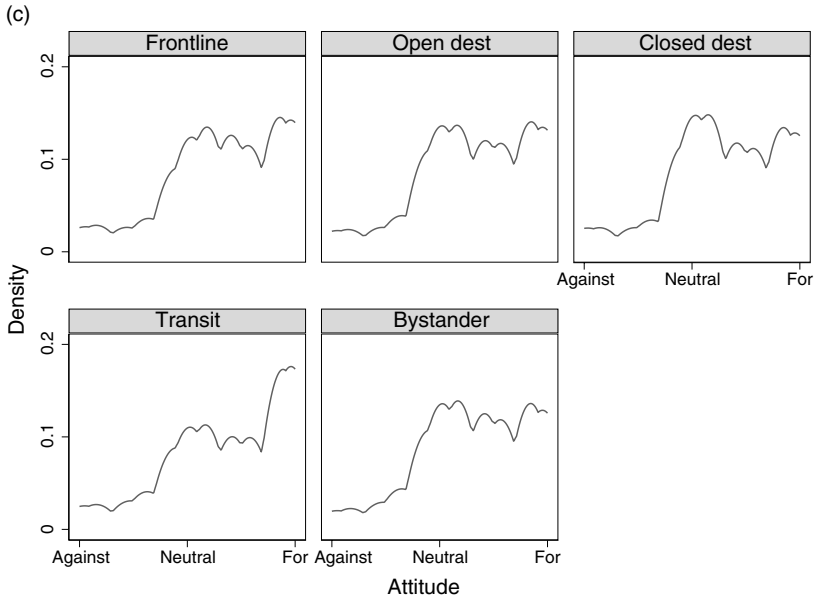


Figure 13.1 (cont.)

Table 13.1 *Transnational polarization by policy and country, Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic^a*

Type	Country	Quota	Compensation	Dublin	EBCG	Internal border	Externalize
Frontline	Spain	0.14	0.13	0.13	0.10	0.08	0.09
	Italy	0.26	0.23	0.15	0.10	0.10	0.11
	Greece	0.21	0.18	0.21	0.13	0.08	0.08
Open destination	Sweden	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.10	0.10	0.08
	Germany	0.19	0.18	0.12	0.09	0.08	0.08
	Netherlands	0.15	0.17	0.14	0.12	0.09	0.11
Closed destination	UK	0.17	0.16	0.21	0.10	0.10	0.08
	France	0.15	0.14	0.13	0.08	0.10	0.12
Transit	Hungary	0.23	0.28	0.17	0.10	0.09	0.11
	Austria	0.16	0.13	0.13	0.11	0.09	0.07
Bystander	Ireland	0.16	0.13	0.14	0.16	0.12	0.08
	Finland	0.15	0.14	0.18	0.12	0.09	0.10
	Romania	0.13	0.17	0.12	0.09	0.12	0.08
	Latvia	0.31	0.25	0.11	0.18	0.10	0.12
	Poland	0.21	0.23	0.13	0.09	0.10	0.09
	Portugal	0.15	0.14	0.14	0.19	0.21	0.08
	Average	0.18	0.18	0.15	0.12	0.10	0.09

^aThe KS distances in the dataset represent averages over the fifteen distances between each selected country and the other fifteen countries. Values in bold represent county average KS distances higher than the overall average KS distance for a particular policy.

distribution of policy support of each country versus the other fifteen countries in the dataset. Higher values indicate countries that are most dissimilar to the other countries when it comes to a particular policy.

Indeed, in line with the visual insights from [Figure 13.1](#), the relocation policies (quota and compensation) have been the most contested between member states, followed closely by the Dublin regulation. By contrast, internal bordering and externalization appear to be the least divisive issues between member states at the demand level. This difference in the divisiveness of policies on the demand side closely follows the patterns on the supply side and the actual policy outcomes of these proposals. While internal burden sharing based on quota and compensation proposals had failed, with countries being highly divided on the issue, externalization based on deals with third countries (such as the EU–Turkey agreement was eventually (one of) the arguably successful policies. Therefore, the EU-Turkey episode, which dominated most of the peak phase of the crisis and was the single most politicized policy decision taken during this crisis (see [Chapter 4](#)), left a positive legacy among the public – most likely due to its successful implementation: In the aftermath of the crisis, externalization to third countries appears as the least polarizing option on the demand side.

Beyond these general patterns, countries also diverge according to their type and centrality in the crisis. While the distance measure used here does not tell us the direction of the country-specific deviations (for or against the policy) from the mean, we can interpret these deviations based on the insights from [Figure 13.1](#). With regard to relocation, we see that several frontline states (Italy and Greece), bystander states (Latvia and Poland), and transit states (Hungary) appear to be most polarized. As is already apparent from [Figure 13.1](#), it is above all citizens in Italy and Greece, as the most affected frontline states, who favor these policies because they would reduce their immediate burden, whereas bystander and transit countries are the most opposed to these policies. Going beyond our country types, we see more specifically that not all transit and bystander states are polarized to the same degree. Together with Latvia, Hungary and Poland stand out the most. This indicates that the pattern observed at the level of decision-makers during the crisis, when the resistance of the Visegrad group (V4) was formed against relocation, persists among the citizen public in the aftermath of the crisis.

Among the destination states, public opinion in Germany is the most transnationally polarized with respect to relocation, even if to a lesser extent than public opinion in Latvia, Poland, and Hungary. This is unsurprising, given the centrality of Germany in the relocation debate. With regard to the Dublin regulation, the countries whose positions

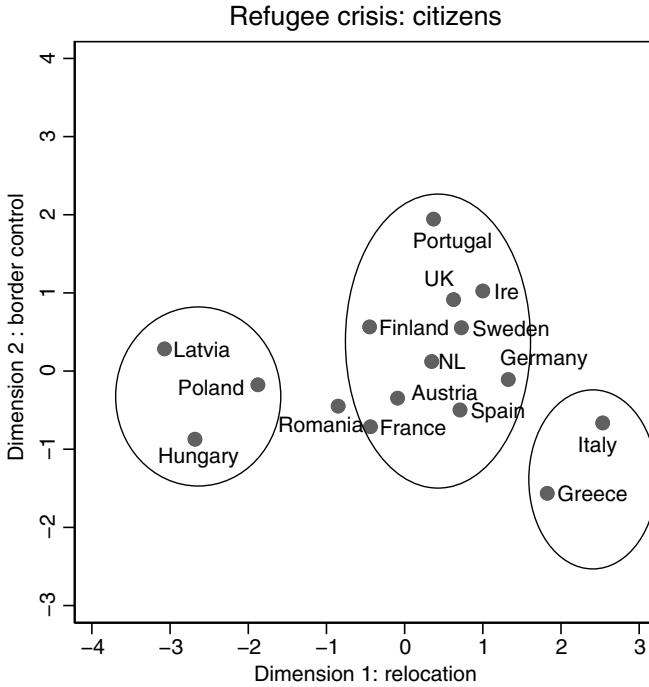


Figure 13.2 Transnational conflict configuration according to citizens' policy positions in the refugee crisis: MDS solution

stand out the most are Greece and the UK, the former suffering directly from its dysfunctionality, whereas the latter, a geographically insulated, closed destination state, benefited most from shifting the burden to any other state along the migration routes. Finally, with regard to internal and external bordering (EBCG) and externalization, we see smaller deviations, with most countries having similar distributions in terms of agreement with these policies, with the exception of some bystander states (in particular Portugal), which seem to deviate the most when it comes to agreement with these issues.

In Figure 13.2, we examine the transnational conflict configuration via multidimensional scaling in a bidimensional space determined by attitudes toward relocation (*x*-axis) and attitudes toward border control (*y*-axis). This representation of the transnational conflict configurations confirms that the relocation policy is structuring the space the most. We have less variation among the member states on the border control dimension and hardly any with regard to externalization. The horizontal

alignment of member states in terms of relocation shows three clusters of countries. On the left-hand side, opposed to relocation, we have members of the Visegrad group – Hungary and Poland (joined by Latvia) – as the most vocal opponents of relocation, whereas on the right-hand pro-relocation side, we have the two frontline states most heavily hit by the crisis – Italy and Greece.

All in all, our analysis of transnational conflict reveals that most of these conflicts on the demand side are being structured around the relocation debate (involving either quotas or compensation), while other policies involving external or internal bordering or externalization are comparatively less polarizing at the transnational level. Patterns on the supply-side level are mirrored by the perspective of the general public even in the aftermath of the crisis, being clearly structured around country types and coalitions with frontline states and the Visegrad group at opposing poles of the debate.

Domestic Conflict Configurations: Immigration Attitudes and Partisan Support

We study the domestic conflict configurations from two perspectives. On the one hand, we focus on the configurations defined by immigration-related attitudes, and on the other hand, we analyze the conflicts between party families. The configurations between groups with pro- and anti-immigration attitudes define the political potentials for mobilization by the political parties. These conflicts between attitudinal groups remain latent as long as they are not mobilized by political actors. Among possible political actors, we study only parties. However, parties are among the key actors when it comes to the mobilization of immigration-related attitudes. The divisions between attitudinal groups is expected to be larger than the corresponding polarization between parties, as parties offer bundles of issue positions, and immigration is only one of many relevant issues.

Distribution of Immigration Attitudes

For our study of the refugee crisis, it is above all immigration-related attitudes that can be expected to determine the policy-specific substantive demands. Consistent with earlier work, these attitudes vary considerably across countries as well as across time, which allows for context-specific politicization of the underlying structural conflict between cosmopolitans and communitarians in each of the different member states. We shall first consider the policy-specific conflict configurations in the

Table 13.2 *Immigration attitudes by country (ordered by share against)*

Country	Against	Neutral	Pro
Greece	54.2	18.8	27.1
Hungary	50.6	19.8	29.7
Latvia	48.0	26.9	25.1
France	48.0	21.6	30.4
Austria	43.7	18.7	37.6
Sweden	40.2	19.8	40.1
Netherlands	39.7	23.2	37.0
Finland	38.9	18.5	42.6
Germany	35.1	19.9	45.0
Italy	32.3	20.1	47.6
Spain	30.5	22.0	47.5
Poland	29.7	21.1	49.2
Romania	27.7	23.4	48.9
UK	27.4	22.1	50.5
Ireland	19.6	16.2	64.3
Portugal	16.9	19.6	63.5
Total	36.5	20.7	42.8

sixteen countries based on the immigration attitudes, before presenting the respective conflict configurations based on the partisan preferences of the voters in the different member states.

Based on our factor for immigration-related attitudes, we have created three categories of citizens: those opposing immigration, those having a rather neutral attitude with respect to immigration, and those favoring immigration.² Table 13.2 presents the immigration attitudes by member states, which are ordered from the country most opposed to immigration to the country most favorable to immigration. These distributions reflect the situation in summer 2021. Overall, there is a slight plurality of 42.8 percent of citizens favoring immigration, compared to 36.5 percent opposing it. However, the countries differ considerably in this respect. There are a number of countries where pro-immigration groups constitute a minority, while a plurality of the citizens oppose immigration. Importantly, the rank order of the countries in Table 13.2 does not align well with the different types of states we have distinguished throughout this study based on their experience during the refugee crisis.

² The three categories are operationalized as follows: neutral attitude (factor scores of ± 0.25 standard deviation around the mean [=0]), opposing attitude (factor scores smaller than -0.25 standard deviation), and favorable attitudes (factor scores larger than $+0.25$ standard deviation).

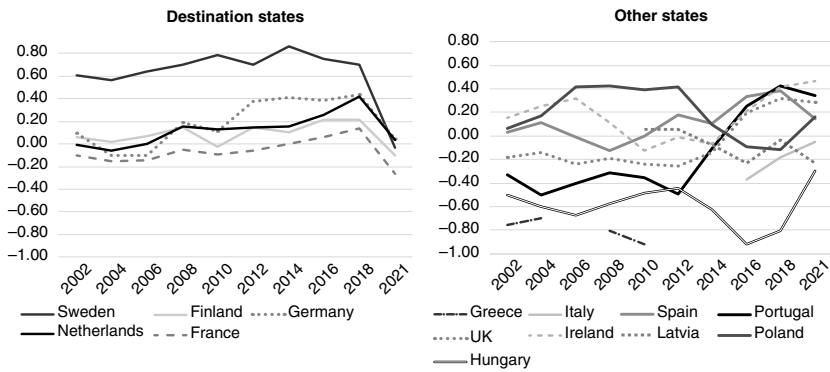


Figure 13.3 Development of immigration attitudes over time, mean factor scores by country

Thus, among the member states most opposed to immigration we find an eastern European bystander state (Latvia), a frontline state (Greece), a transit state (Hungary), and a destination state (France). Among the countries most favorable to immigration are four bystander states from different geographical regions of Europe (Ireland, Portugal, Romania, and Poland) as well as the UK, a restrictive destination state.

We have also created a factor for immigration attitudes that is directly comparable to the factor that we obtain based on ESS data. The ESS data cover the period 2002–2018 for most of our sixteen countries, allowing us to compare the current immigration attitudes to attitudes reaching back to 2002. Figure 13.3 presents the development of immigration attitudes over time. In this figure, the countries have been grouped according to their over-time patterns. The first graph includes three open destination states (Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden), a closed destination state (France), and a bystander state (Finland). The support for immigration has varied across these five countries in the past, but in all these countries, it has collapsed in the past few years. The collapse occurred after 2018, that is, at a moment when the refugee crisis was already a past memory. The collapse was most striking in Sweden, which used to be by far the country most favorable to immigration. By summer 2021, the support for immigration in Sweden had converged with the support in Germany, Finland, and the Netherlands below the mid-point of the scale. Table 13.3 shows that the collapse in Sweden occurred across the political spectrum, even if the radical left proved to be somewhat more resistant to the general movement against immigration than the rest of the parties. At the same time, the share of

Table 13.3 *The case of Sweden*

Family_vote	2018		2021		Mean
	Mean	Share	Mean	Share	2021–2018
Radical left	1.09	0.21	0.79	0.11	–0.30
Green	1.33	0.06	0.39	0.04	–0.94
Social Democrats	0.82	0.30	0.17	0.34	–0.65
Liberal	0.83	0.07	–0.02	0.03	–0.81
Conservative-Christian-Democrats	0.52	0.24	–0.21	0.22	–0.71
Radical right	–0.31	0.11	–0.99	0.26	–0.68
Total	0.71	1	–0.11	1	–0.82
<i>n</i>		1,287		526	

the radical right, the party most opposed to immigration, has more than doubled in Sweden.

The second graph in [Figure 13.3](#) shows the countries where the support for immigration has been rather stable or has improved more recently, albeit from very different levels. This is a mixed group of countries that includes bystander states (Ireland, Poland, and Portugal), frontline states (Greece and Italy), a transit state (Hungary), and a closed destination state (the UK) but not a single open destination state. In two of these countries (Hungary and Italy), support for immigration reached a low point in 2016, at the height of the refugee crisis, from which it recovered in the more recent past. The contrasting developments in the two sets of countries led to a convergence of immigration attitudes in the countries under study: The standard deviation of the country means fell from 0.37 in 2018 to 0.30 in 2021.³

To account for these contrasting developments, we have calculated the correlation between the share of the citizens in a given country that considers immigration one of the most important problems facing their country and/or the EU and the level of immigration attitudes in 2021: This correlation is negative and substantial (–0.71), which means that the greater the salience of immigration in a given country in 2021, the lower the support for immigration. The refugee crisis has been most salient in open destination and transit states.

Asked which crisis before the Covid-19 pandemic had been the greatest threat for the survival of the European Union – the refugee, financial, poverty/unemployment, or Brexit crisis – 41 percent of the citizens in

³ Between 2002 and 2018, the corresponding standard deviation always varied between 0.32 (2002) and 0.41 (2008, 2010, and 2016).

open destination and 43 percent of those in transit states mentioned the refugee crisis, compared to only 21 percent in frontline states, 28 percent in restrictive destination states, and 30 percent in bystander states. Since the refugee crisis, the salience of immigration issues has, if anything, increased once again. Not only roughly one third (32 percent) considered the refugee crisis as the most threatening crisis retrospectively, but by summer 2021, almost half (47 percent) of the citizens in our sixteen countries considered immigration as one of the most important problems facing their country and/or the EU. The salience of immigration had increased in all countries except Sweden and Germany (the two most important destination countries in the crisis); Austria and Hungary (the transit states); and Poland (a member of the V4), where it had already been very high previously.

Policy Support by Immigration Attitude

Table 13.4 presents the domestic policy-specific polarization between pro- and anti-immigration groups. The policies are arranged from left to right as in the previous table. As can be seen, similar to the transnational level, the relocation quota (and the related compensatory measures) are the most polarized policies. External and internal border control measures are also highly polarized, while the Dublin regulation and even more so externalization are less polarized among attitudinal groups. Compared to the conflict configurations between countries, the level of polarization is, however, generally considerably higher between the attitudinal potentials within the member states. This means that the latent conflict potential has not been fully mobilized in transnational conflicts. As we shall see, even at the domestic level, this potential has not been fully mobilized.

Looking at country differences, there is a strong possibility of conflict between pro- and anti-immigration groups with respect to relocation quotas in some countries. Thus, polarization between attitudinal groups is highest in France, a restrictive destination state, and in the transit and bystander states. It is somewhat lower in the open destination states and much lower in the frontline states of Greece and Italy. As is illustrated by Figure 13.4a for some selected countries, pro-immigration groups are generally in favor of relocation quotas, which means that domestic polarization is high where anti-immigration groups oppose such quotas. With the exception of frontline states like Greece and Italy, this is the case in all types of countries. Citizens who are in favor of immigration see quotas as a possible measure to accommodate refugees in an equitable way. Citizens who are opposed to immigration do not wish to adopt policies,

Table 13.4 *Domestic polarization between pro- and anti-immigration groups, by policy and country, Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic^a*

Type	Country	Quota	Compensation	Dublin	EBCG	Internal border	Externalize
Frontline	Spain	0.37	0.30	0.33	0.30	0.35	0.19
	Italy	0.20	0.21	0.33	0.42	0.31	0.18
	Greece	0.22	0.23	0.20	0.39	0.39	0.13
Open destination	Sweden	0.40	0.32	0.22	0.52	0.35	0.21
	Germany	0.40	0.32	0.19	0.40	0.43	0.12
	Netherlands	0.45	0.37	0.11	0.30	0.23	0.13
Closed destination	UK	0.33	0.30	0.28	0.43	0.40	0.20
	France	0.59	0.48	0.29	0.45	0.37	0.18
Transit	Hungary	0.52	0.43	0.13	0.31	0.42	0.07
	Austria	0.58	0.42	0.23	0.44	0.43	0.08
Bystanders	Ireland	0.50	0.43	0.16	0.30	0.32	0.15
	Finland	0.52	0.45	0.15	0.43	0.39	0.18
	Romania	0.41	0.40	0.18	0.16	0.18	0.13
	Latvia	0.47	0.43	0.22	0.26	0.32	0.08
	Poland	0.42	0.38	0.16	0.16	0.22	0.18
	Portugal	0.45	0.42	0.10	0.28	0.27	0.12
	Average	0.43	0.37	0.20	0.35	0.34	0.15

^aThe KS distances in the dataset represent distances between the pro-immigration and the anti-immigration group within each selected country. Values in bold represent county KS distances higher than the overall average KS distance for a particular policy.

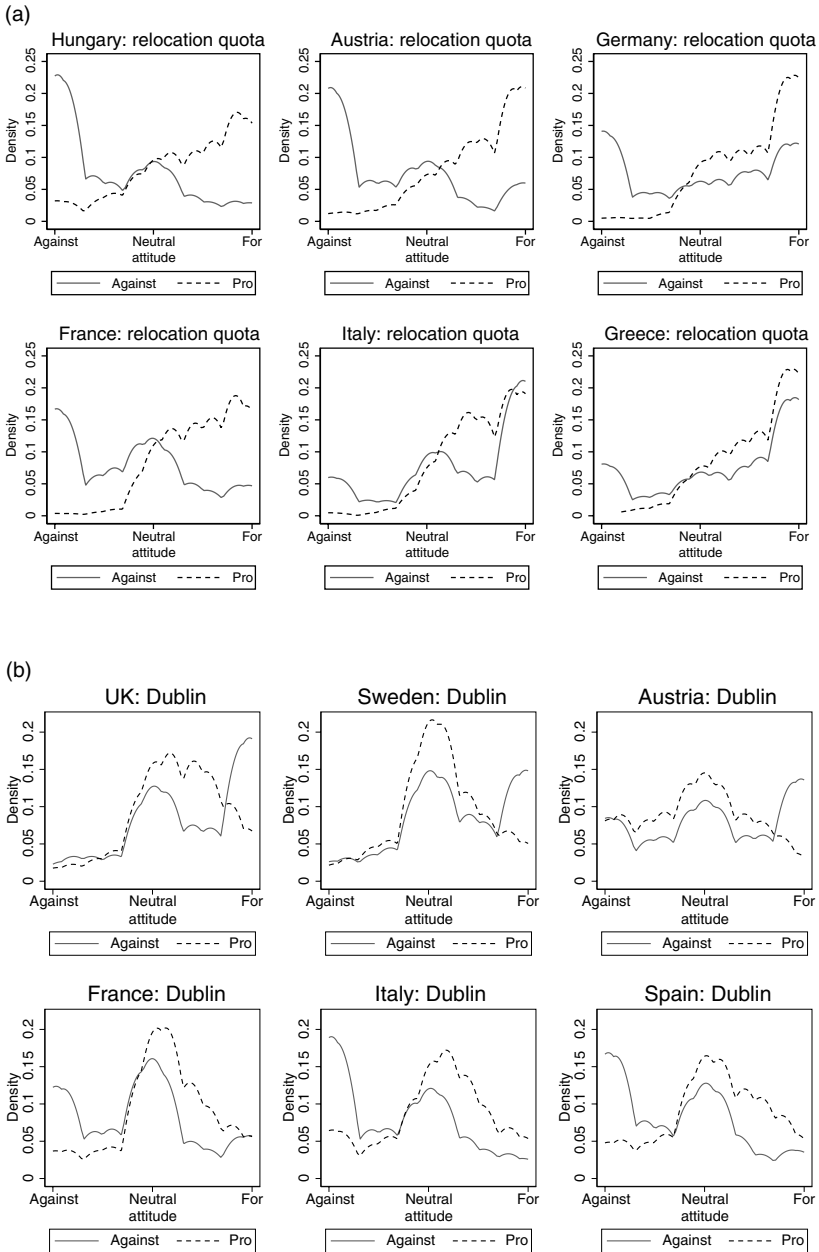


Figure 13.4 Policy support by immigration attitudes. (a) Relocation quota: support; (b) Dublin regulation; (c) external border control; (d) internal border control; (e) externalization

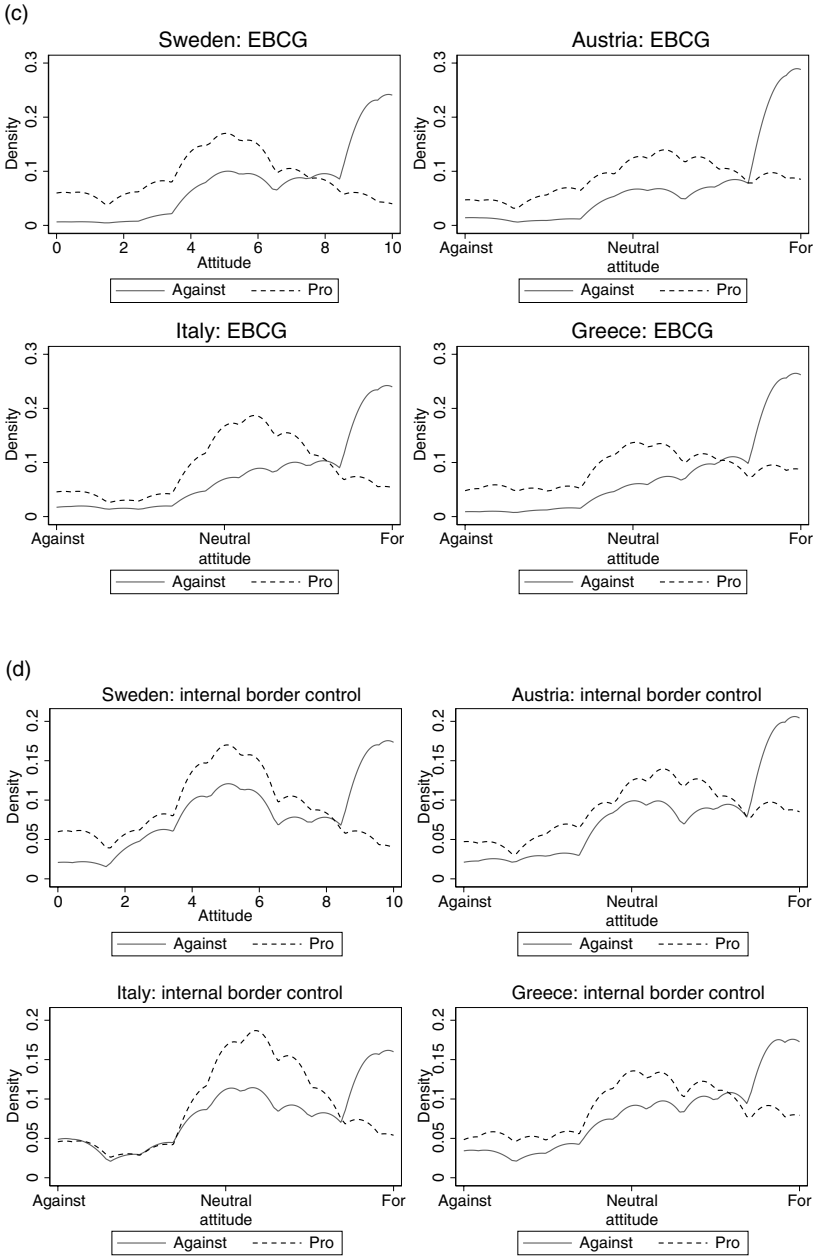


Figure 13.4 (cont.)

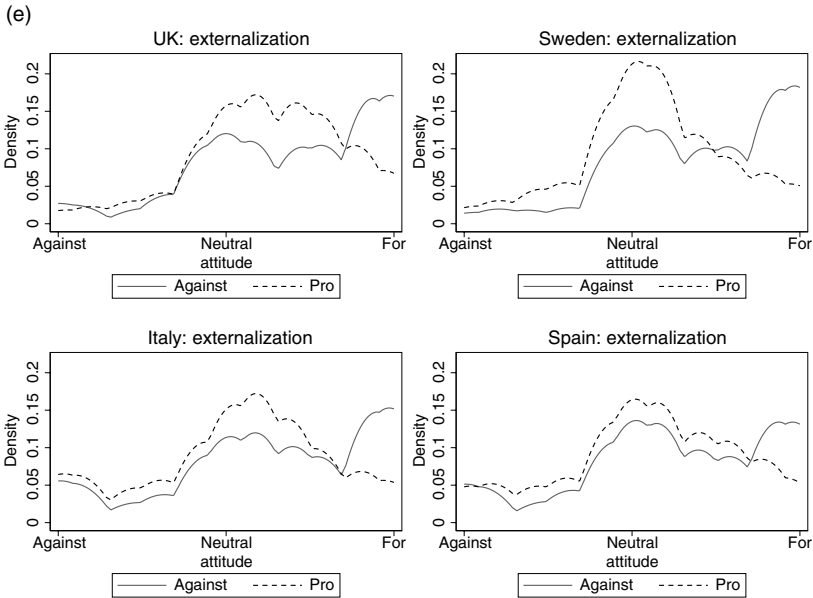


Figure 13.4 (cont.)

such as relocation quotas, that allow refugees to stay in Europe. The anti-immigration citizens in frontline states are an exception, most likely because their countries would benefit from relocation schemes.

With regard to the Dublin regulation (Figure 13.4b), the positions of the pro-immigration groups are not quite clear: Large parts of these groups take a neutral position in all types of countries. Even the opponents of immigration are somewhat uncertain about this regulation, but clear-cut minorities among them support it in destination and transit states (the UK, Sweden, and Austria are examples) where the regulation is intended to keep refugees out, and oppose it in frontline states (Spain and Italy) where the regulation is intended to keep refugees in the country, and in France (whose opponents to immigration behave in this case like opponents in frontline states). By contrast, with regard to border control measures, the position of pro-immigration groups is not so clear, while they are generally supported by opponents of immigration, as is illustrated by Figures 13.4c and 13.4d. Externalization (Figure 13.4e), finally, is generally supported by both groups, but to a somewhat greater extent by the opponents to immigration, especially in destination states like the UK and Sweden.

Overall, this analysis clarifies that it is the opponents to immigration who could be decisive for the policy options in the EU member states.

They oppose relocation quotas and, in frontline states, the Dublin regulation, which creates potential obstacles for these solutions. Given that they constitute large minorities or even a plurality in many countries – above all in transit states; in Latvia, Greece, and France; but also in open destination states like Sweden and the Netherlands – the governments of the respective member states are legitimately opposing these policy proposals. By contrast, the opponents to immigration are much more favorably disposed to externalization and internal and external border controls. While the pro-immigration groups are not as supportive of the latter policies, they are not clearly opposed to them, which makes this type of solution potentially more consensual.

In addition to immigration attitudes, we have also analyzed the political potential of Euroscepticism (not shown here due to space considerations). The twin issues – immigration and European integration – solicit similar conflict configurations in the member states, which is why we do not pursue the European integration attitudes any further here.

Policy Support by Party Family

Chapter 6 has shown that partisan conflicts are the most likely venue for the articulation of conflicts about refugee-related policy episodes in member states. Table 13.5 presents the overall polarization between voters from different party families with respect to the six policies in comparison to transnational polarization and domestic polarization by attitudes. As expected, attitudinal groups are more polarized than are political parties. In particular, the partisan conflicts are more attenuated with regard to relocation, but also with regard to border control. In contrast, there are few differences between attitudinal and partisan polarization concerning the Dublin regulation and externalization.

Table 13.5 *Comparison of overall polarization, transnationally and domestically by attitudes and party family, across policies: Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic*

Level	Quota	Compen- sation	Dublin	EBCG	Internal border	Externalize
Transnational	0.18	0.17	0.15	0.12	0.10	0.09
Domestic: attitudes	0.43	0.37	0.20	0.35	0.34	0.15
Domestic: partisan	0.24	0.22	0.18	0.22	0.24	0.18

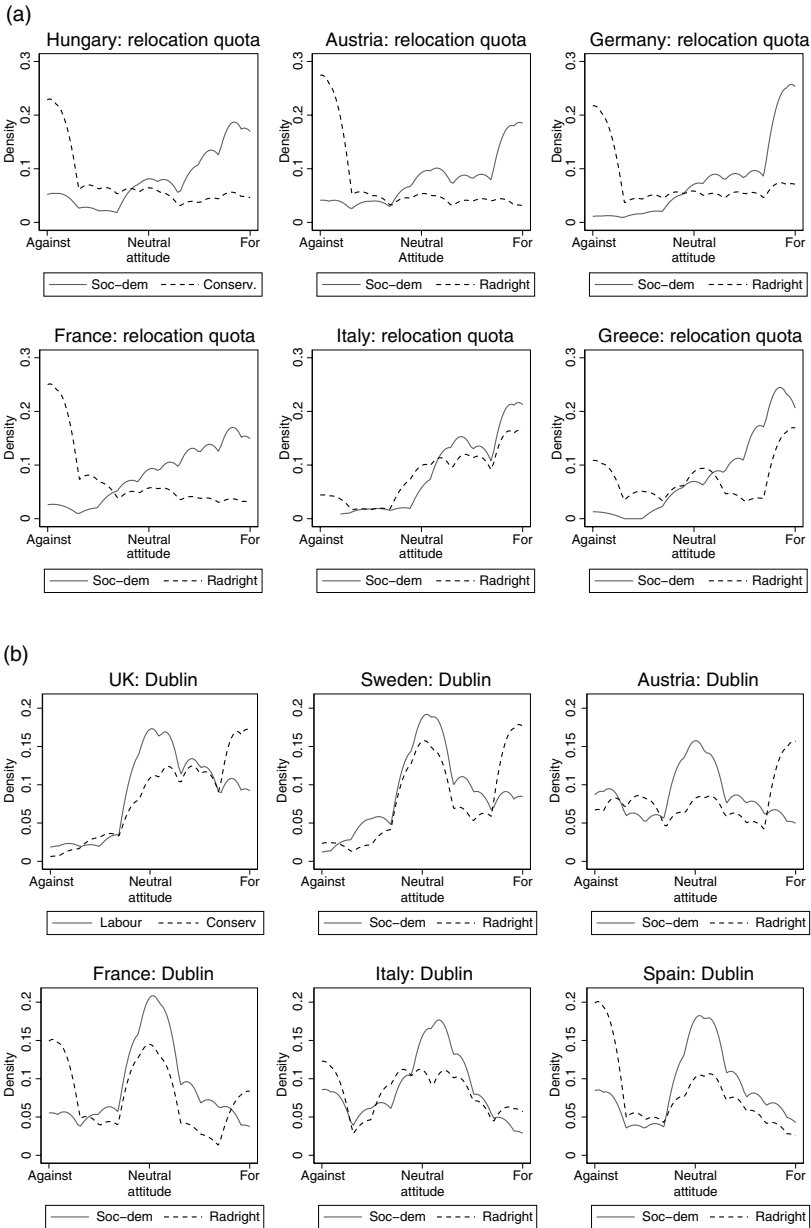


Figure 13.5 Policy support by party family. (a) Relocation quota; (b) Dublin regulation

However, even if they are less polarized than the attitudinal groups, note that policy-specific partisan conflicts are still a lot more polarized than the corresponding transnational conflicts, which confirms the critical role of domestic opposition to EU policy proposals.

Considering the country differences in detail, with respect to relocation quotas, the partisan conflict remains intense between the left and the right in all countries except frontline states. This is shown in [Figure 13.5a](#), where we present the distribution of policy-specific attitudes for the center left (social democrats) and the radical right (or the national-conservative right in countries without a significant radical right) for some selected countries. There is also a reduced but still important conflict with respect to border control (not shown). The radical right is embracing border control internally and externally, while the center left is not adopting clear-cut positions in this regard. Greece is exceptional to the extent that, in this country, not only the radical right but also the center left is in favor of the reinforcement of the external borders, while it is the radical left (Syriza) that opposes this measure to some extent. By contrast, with respect to the Dublin regulation and externalization, we do not find any attenuation of partisan conflicts compared to attitudinal polarization. In line with the previous results, the left is uncertain about this regulation, while the radical right tends to embrace it in destination and transit states but oppose it in frontline states ([Figure 13.5b](#)). Externalization, which was the least contested between attitudinal groups, turns out to be more contested between parties than between attitudinal groups in closed destination states, transit states, and Poland (not shown). In destination states, the right is somewhat more in favor of externalization than the left is. By contrast, in frontline states, there is hardly any difference between the two opposing sides, as they both tend to support externalization to the same extent.

Overall, we can conclude that domestic partisan polarization between the left and right, while less pronounced than attitudinal polarization, is still very intense. Moreover, there are fewer differences between the policy domains in terms of partisan polarization than in terms of attitudinal polarization. Finally, partisan polarization is particularly pronounced in the closed destination states.

Transnational and Domestic Policy-Specific Conflict Configurations Combined

In this section, we analyze the joint configuration of the transnational and domestic conflicts by way of regression. [Figure 13.6](#) presents the corresponding results in graphical form. For each policy, there are three

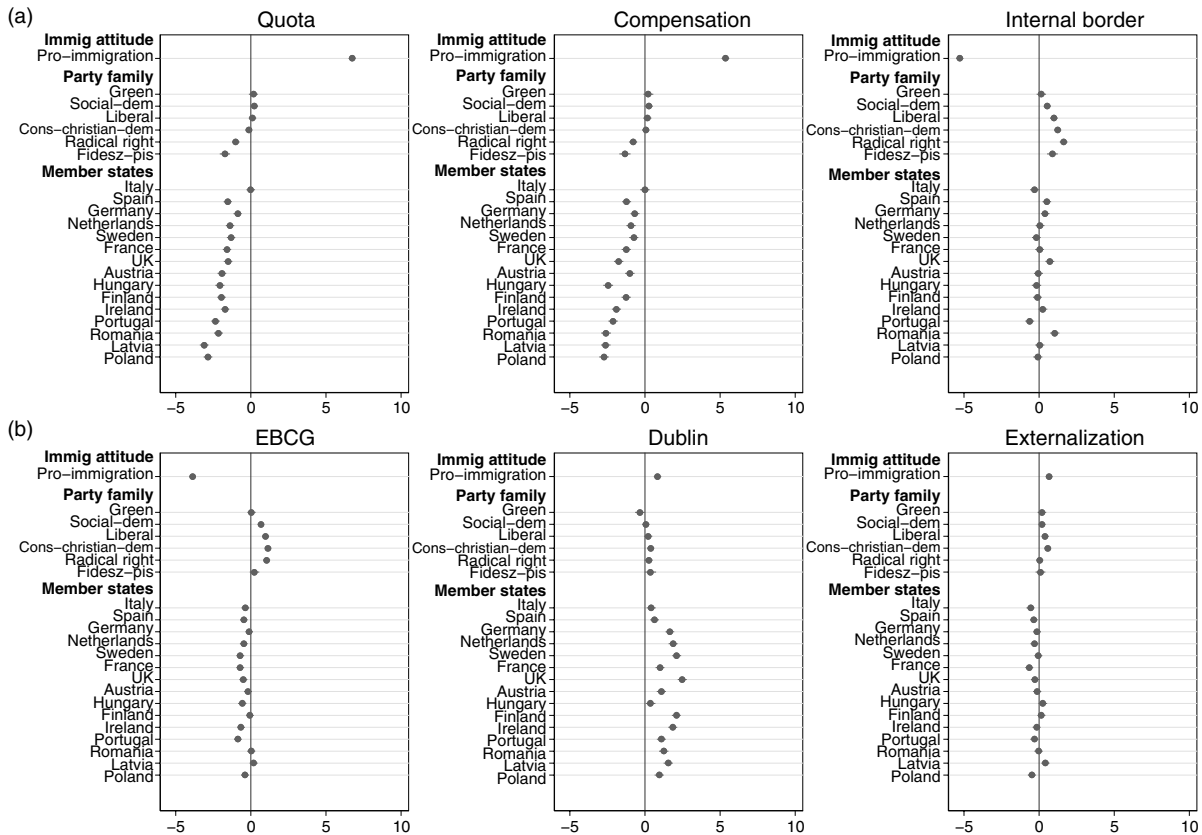


Figure 13.6 Transnational and domestic conflict configurations according to citizens' policy positions in the refugee crisis: OLS regression coefficients

types of effects – attitudinal effects, party family effects (with a specific effect for Fidesz and PiS), and country effects. The bigger an effect parameter in this graph, the more closely the corresponding aspect is associated with the conflict about a given policy. All effects are the net effects, controlling for the effects of the other aspects. Thus, the attitudinal effects represent the remaining effects of the immigration attitudes that have not been mobilized by the domestic parties. The country effects represent the levels of policy support in the different countries that are not attributable to immigration attitudes and to partisan conflicts in the respective countries but correspond to the aggregate policy position of the country's citizens irrespective of these aspects. Greece, a key front-line state, is the reference category for the country effects, which means that the country effects indicate to what extent the population in a given country differs from the Greeks. Except for the immigration attitude, all variables are dummies, which means that the effects correspond to the impact on the 0 to 10 scale of the policy assessment. The immigration attitude has also been rescaled to the 0 to 1 range, which means that the effects shown correspond to the maximum effect of these attitudes.

Let us first consider the relocation quotas and the corresponding compensation proposals: Here, all three factors strongly contribute to the conflict. The pattern of results is very similar for the two types of proposals. First, the attitudinal conflict is the main driver of these attitudes, even if we control for partisan and country effects. People who support immigration are in favor of quotas, and people who oppose immigration are against them. The very strong effect of immigration attitudes implies that the partisan mobilization here has been weak, and this issue could become much more politicized in the future. This is to suggest that, given the widespread opposition to immigration across Europe, further pursuing policies involving quotas and related proposals is likely to be met with widespread contestation. In partisan terms, with the exception of the radical right, there are few differences between party families with respect to quotas. It is the radical right that gives political voice to the opposition to quotas. The only exceptions to this pattern occur in Hungary and Poland, where Fidesz and PiS, officially two conservative parties, are even more opposed to quotas than is the radical right. In terms of between-country differences, Italy and Greece are the two nations that really stand out. Italy and Greece have – by far – the highest support for quotas. This is not simply a frontline country effect, as support for quotas is significantly lower in Spain.

Internal border controls and the reinforcement of external borders (EBCG) are also strongly associated with immigration attitudes, but these policies are preferred by immigration opponents. Accordingly,

parties on the right are more supportive of such policies than are parties on the left. For these policies, however, Fidesz and PiS do not stick out as much as they did for quotas and compensations. There are hardly any country differences with regard to internal border controls, except that the British and the Romanians perceive them in a somewhat more positive light than the other Europeans do, and the Portuguese are somewhat more critical in this respect. Country differences are also more contained in terms of reinforcing external borders, but populations of destination and bystander states tend to be slightly more critical of such policies than Greeks, Italians, and Germans are.

In contrast to the four previous policies, assessments of the Dublin regulation are hardly associated with immigration attitudes in general. Partisan differences are also generally rather small. With regard to this policy, country differences dominate. All countries, even Spain, are more in favor of this regulation than are the Hungarians and the citizens of the two frontline states most hit by the crisis. Finally, as we have already seen, externalization is least structured by the three effects we are considering here. It is slightly more favored by people holding pro-immigration attitudes. Liberal and conservative parties are somewhat more supportive of such policies, and there are no systematic country patterns.

We have run separate regressions with an interaction term to account for possible different effects of immigration attitudes in frontline states. Figure 13.7 presents these differences for the six policy proposals. Two

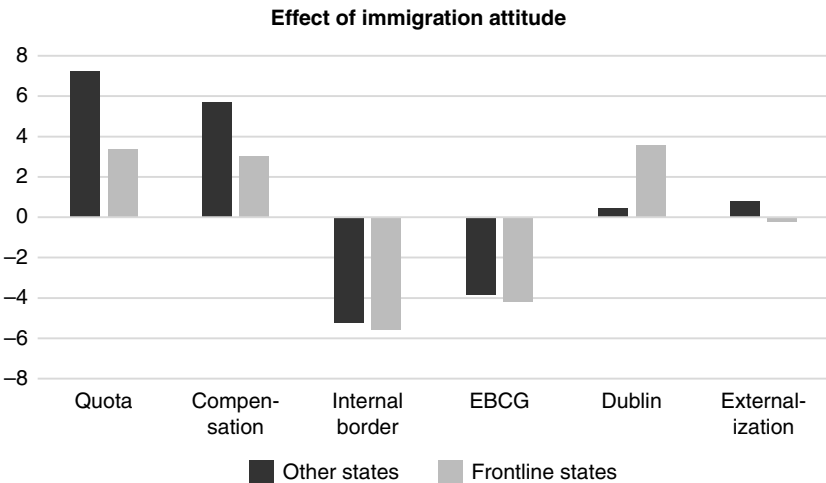


Figure 13.7 The effect of immigration attitudes on the six policy positions in frontline states and other states

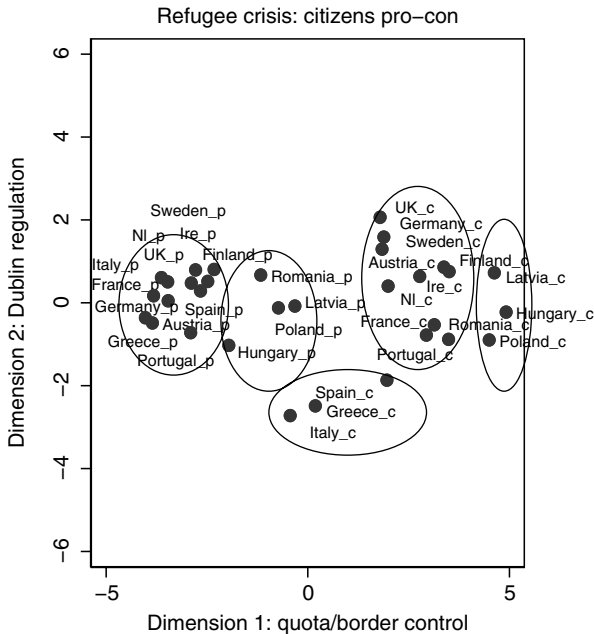


Figure 13.8 Transnational and domestic conflict configurations according to citizens' policy positions (p = pro/c = contra immigration) in the refugee crisis and immigration attitudes: MDS solution

results stand out. On the one hand, the effect of immigration attitudes on the policy assessment is clearly reduced in the frontline states for quotas and compensatory measures because, as we have seen, even those who oppose immigration are also rather in favor of quotas. On the other hand, while immigration attitudes have no effect on the assessment of the Dublin regulation in most countries, this regulation is clearly more accepted by people holding pro-immigration attitudes in frontline states.

Next, we present the joint distribution of conflict configurations based on multidimensional scaling (MDS). While the regression approach analyzes the configurations policy by policy, MDS techniques allow for a configurational analysis that takes into account all the policies at the same time. We first present the combination based on immigration attitudes (Figure 13.8) before turning to the combination based on partisan conflicts (Figure 13.9). The configuration based on attitudes has a dominant horizontal dimension representing the major policies that have been adopted during the crisis – relocation quota and internal and external border control measures, and a secondary vertical dimension

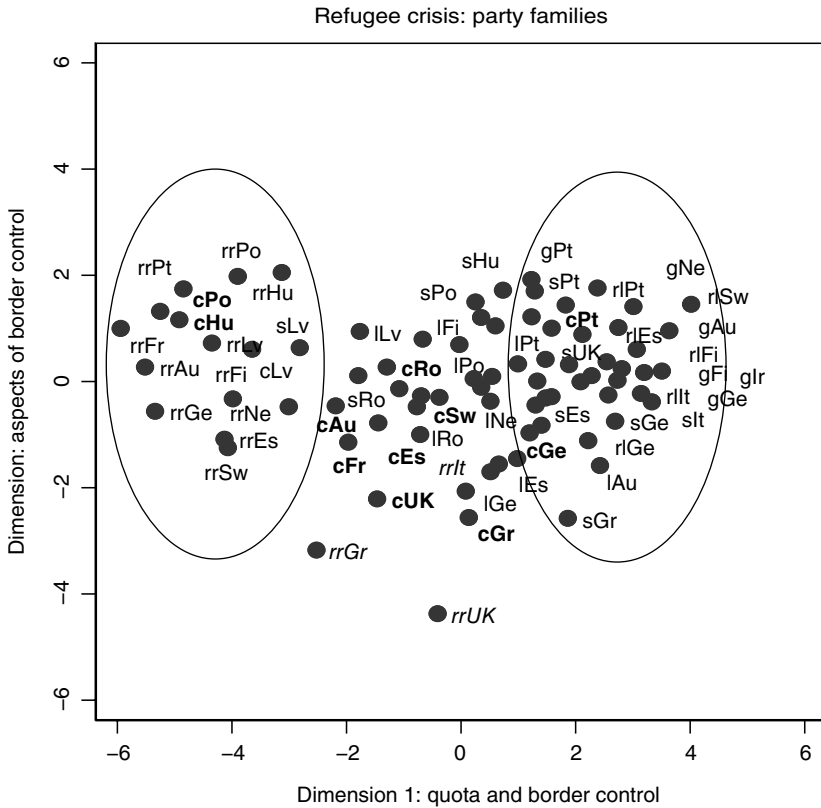


Figure 13.9 Transnational and domestic conflict configurations according to citizens' policy positions in the refugee crisis and party families: MDS solution^a

^aNot all parties are labeled so as to avoid cluttering: rr = radical right, c = conservative/Christian-democrats, l = liberals, g = greens, s = social democrats, rl = radical left; conservative/Christian-democrats in bold, deviant radical right parties in italic.

representing above all the failed Dublin regulation. The most consensual policy – externalization – hardly contributes to the structuring of the joint space, nor does the Dublin regulation contribute to the structuring of the joint space with party families.

As we have seen, supporters of immigration tend to be in favor of quotas and against border controls, while opponents of immigration tend to be against quotas and in favor of border controls. The attitudinal divide clearly trumps the divide between member states, which again

documents that the potential for further politicization has not yet been fully exploited by the political forces in Europe. The divide between member states is secondary to the attitudinal divide, which is reflected by the fact that each attitudinal camp is further divided into two groups of countries, with the eastern European supporters and opponents of immigration forming separate groups that are less favorable to the major policies than are western and southern Europeans. On the vertical dimension of the attitudinal space, which mostly represents the Dublin regulation, the opponents to immigration from the southern European frontline states form a separate cluster: They take a middling position on the main dimension, mainly because they are less opposed to relocation quotas than are opponents of immigration in other countries. At the same time, they are the group that is most opposed to the Dublin regulation. By contrast, those who oppose immigration in destination states like the UK, Germany, or Sweden are the groups most in favor of this regulation. Note that the second dimension does not contribute much to the structuring of the space in terms of immigration attitudes.

As for the combination of conflicts between partisan families with transnational conflicts, the dominant horizontal dimension is the same as in the previous graph, but the vertical dimension is not so much related to the Dublin regulation. Instead, it refers to aspects of border control that do not always go together with positions on quotas in some countries. On the horizontal dimension, in most of the countries, the radical right is opposed to the left (radical left, greens, and social democrats). Importantly, the radical right also includes the conservative parties in Hungary (Fidesz) and Poland (PiS). The conservative parties are marked in bold in the graph in order to show that they are spread considerably across the horizontal axis. While most of them are located in the middle of the space, with the Austrian conservatives closest to the cluster of the radical opponents of burden sharing, note that the German CDU as well as the Portuguese conservatives (together with some liberal parties) are part of the left cluster that favors burden sharing. As we already saw in [Chapter 4](#) and as we shall see in the [following chapter](#), the conservative/Christian-democratic parties have reacted quite differently to the refugee crisis in the different countries, which is reflected in their voters' policy positions – as we can see here. On the other hand, the radical right in the two frontline states (Greece and Italy) is not part of the radical opponent cluster; rather, it is situated in the middle of the space, given that it is also rather favorable to quota schemes. On the vertical dimension, there are party families in some countries that differ with respect to the positions on border control – some oppose some aspects of border controls, while others generally support border controls. In the group opposing border

controls, we find Portuguese parties across the entire spectrum and center left and center right parties from eastern Europe, while the group supporting border controls includes mainly right-wing parties from the frontline states and the UK but also the center left party from Greece and the German liberals.

Conclusion

In terms of transnational conflicts, we have found the expected opposition between the frontline states (Greece and Italy) on the one hand and the V4 countries (augmented by eastern European bystander states) on the other hand. The contrasting stance of the policymakers from these countries during the refugee crisis is reflected in their voters' positions. Citizens from western European destination, transit, and bystander states generally take more moderate positions on the main dimension of conflict, which is defined by relocation policies. At the domestic level, we found the expected opposition between nationalists and cosmopolitans, which is politically articulated by the radical right and some nationalist-conservative parties on the one side and by the left and some parties of the mainstream right on the other side. We found that the same dimension structures the debate at the national and at the EU level. The domestic polarization appears to be more intense than the transnational one, especially in terms of immigration attitudes. When analyzing the combined transnational and domestic conflict configuration, this is reflected in the greater structuring capacity of domestic conflicts. Transnational conflicts appear as secondary to the domestic attitudinal conflicts, where they form a subdivision of the two attitudinal camps, and they are also secondary to the domestic partisan conflicts, where they divide the partisan camps with regard to some aspects of the border control policies. The transnational conflicts are ultimately rooted in the domestic conflict structure of the member states, where the opponents of immigration constitute the critical factor. In some key countries, they make up a plurality or even a majority of the population, which is mobilized by radical right and nationalist-conservative parties, depending on the country.

The implications for European policymakers in the domain of asylum policy are quite clear. The conflict potentials of immigration policies have not yet been fully mobilized. They are very large and have markedly increased in the destination states of northwestern Europe over the past few years. This means that policymakers are facing very strong constraints in terms of what is possible in this policy domain. As long as the critical underlying attitudinal potentials are not fully mobilized and

as long as the parties mobilizing the opponents to immigration do not constitute the dominant coalition partner in government, joint solutions at the European level remain possible even in the most contested policy domains. However, when opponents to immigration become dominant in a given country and the parties mobilizing them become the dominant coalition partner or the exclusive governing party, as has been the case in Hungary and Poland (and other eastern European countries), the respective member states can legitimately prevent joint solutions, even if such solutions are supported by most of the other member states and, above all, by the frontline states. Given this state of affairs, relocation schemes do not appear to be a politically feasible option at the moment we collected our survey data (June–July 2021). The Dublin regulation benefits from the fact that even voters in the frontline states do not seem to be aware of what this policy exactly implies. However, voters in frontline states are well aware that their burden is not sufficiently shared by the other member states. Finally, the more restrictive policies of border control and externalization receive more support. Externalization policies are least contested.

14 The Electoral Consequences of the Refugee Crisis

Introduction

In this chapter, we examine the electoral repercussions of the refugee crisis. At a first level, we study in depth the effects of the refugee crisis on political conflict across our selected countries, namely the ways in which the salience of the immigration issue has increased and restructured European politics. Moreover, we wish to gain further insight into the drivers of changing patterns of politicization. If, as we assume, immigration became a more salient topic electorally after the refugee crisis, we aim to identify the parties that spearheaded this change in our set of countries.

Finally, we want to qualitatively examine the possible associations between the trends we observe in salience and polarization, of immigration on the supply side with the corresponding trends in electoral terms. We would like to check, at least qualitatively, whether there is a relationship between the electoral performance of parties and their changing positions and prioritization of immigration during the electoral campaigns following the refugee crisis. While we understand that the latter is a much more multifaceted phenomenon, which requires further analysis, we shall show that there are some interesting patterns, particularly on the right of the political spectrum, linking the politicization of immigration and electoral outcomes.

Party-System Dynamics after the Refugee Crisis

Our main questions are related to the previous chapters but focusing on a different temporal and spatial dimension. In this chapter, we aim to understand who politicizes immigration *during election campaigns*, rather than at the time of policymaking, and shed some light on who avoids the issue and what the political dynamics in each country are. We already concluded in [Chapter 4](#) that the policy politicization dynamics vary per country and party-system, and here we want to analyze whether and to

what degree this also applies to election campaigns. We expect that in such campaigns, too, existing party-system configurations and the parties' strategies in each country should be crucial for the electoral repercussions of the refugee crisis.

Our first focus is on issue *salience* as an indicator of how much parties focus on immigration compared to other issues and how big a part of the electoral "space" this issue occupies. This is linked to theories of issue ownership (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; van der Brug 2004; Budge and Farlie 1983; Green and Hobolt 2008; Petrocik 1996), which stress that parties strategically emphasize issues on which they possess either a credible reputation or a record of competence and past alignment with voter preferences. Each party in each election must decide whether to further stress a given issue, maintain its issue-specific discourse from the last election, or avoid the issue altogether (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015; Sigelman and Buell 2004). We expect the party's strategy to generally depend on patterns of issue ownership and past record. On the issue of immigration, conservatives and even more so radical right parties tend to be more engaged and recognized as competent and aligned with public preferences (Dennison and Goodwin 2015; Pardos-Prado, Lancee, and Sagarzazu 2014); hence, we expect them to be the parties emphasizing this issue. By contrast, social-democratic and leftist parties are expected to generally avoid the issue, as it is not one of their core strengths with the electorate. Finally, we have no expectations for green and liberal parties: On the one hand, their typically cosmopolitan outlook might lure them to the issue, while on the other hand, like more traditional left-wing parties, they might be inclined to avoid taking potentially unpopular positions.

Additionally, we expect that the refugee crisis has not affected only the salience of immigration on an electoral and partisan level, but also the *positioning* of parties on the issue. Immigration rose to prominence in recent decades in European political discourse (Kriesi et al. 2012), and there is an ongoing question as to what the response to "issue entrepreneurs" (De Vries and Hobolt 2020), that is, parties of the radical right that rose on the back of this and other cultural issues, should be from the side of mainstream parties. Meguid (2005b) notes that mainstream parties are faced with a choice to either adopt an "adversarial" stance, that is, increase their distance on the issue relative to the radical right's position, or an "accommodative" stance, that is, decrease that distance and potentially also co-opt radical right parties in government. Bale (2003) suggests the accommodative tactic is far more frequent for conservative parties. It is convenient for them, even if they may lose votes, since it

allows the size of a government coalition that is more favorable for their agenda to expand. Empirically, [Alfonso and Fonseca \(2012\)](#) indeed find that conservative parties tend to converge toward an anti-immigration stance, irrespective of the existence or pressure of radical right parties, as the issue has potential electoral yields for them, a finding corroborated by [Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup \(2008\)](#) and [Pardos-Prado et al. \(2015\)](#). [Abou-Chadi \(2016\)](#) provides a more nuanced picture, showing that conservative parties tend to adopt more radical positions under pressure from the radical right, as they both compete for attracting disenchanted voters of the left with a more culturally conservative stance on immigration.

Our study expands the current literature by zooming in on a period during which some of the assumptions held by contemporary scholars have been challenged. First, assumptions that the radical right parties could be contained as a junior coalition partner with a few policy concessions have been put into question. Indeed, in a number of key European countries, such as France, Italy, Austria, and Sweden, radical right parties have mushroomed to such a degree that they are directly threatening or have already outflanked the conservative parties. Secondly, with immigration increasingly coming under the spotlight in the aftermath of the refugee crisis and, as shown in [Chapter 4](#), having become the core concern of a majority of European voters at least temporarily, the potential losses to the far right might multiply and threaten substantially the mainstream parties not only on the left but also on the right. We posit therefore that mainstream parties, and particularly conservative ones, are likely to converge toward an anti-immigration consensus, moving their positions on the issue toward more radical stances, especially in cases where the radical right had already had a significant presence before the refugee crisis.

Operationalization of Key Measures

For the study of the shifts in the parties' issue salience and positioning and their electoral repercussions, we utilize our core-sentence dataset, which was introduced in [Chapter 3](#) ([Hadj Abdou, Bale, and Geddes 2022](#); [Hutter, Kriesi, and Hutter 2019](#); [Kleinnijenhuis, de Ridder, and Rietberg 1997](#)), which records the claims and discourses of parties as depicted in the written press during electoral campaigns. Regarding the type of metrics we produce from the database, we propose to study shifts in salience by three key measures: party-system or systemic salience of immigration, interparty salience in immigration discourse, and intra-party salience of immigration.

To clarify, the first metric, that is, the systemic indicator, measures the total number of sentences dedicated to immigration, for or against, in one national electoral campaign as a share of the total number of sentences in the respective campaign. Simply put, the systemic indicator measures how salient the issue of immigration was during a campaign, providing us with a raw metric to compare demand-side salience, which was already examined in [Chapter 4](#), and supply-side salience in the elections before and after the refugee crisis.

The second metric, *interparty* salience, is one component of issue ownership. While we typically use the share of a party's sentences on a given issue over the total number of its sentences addressing various issues, we also want to examine salience and issue ownership from a relative perspective. Thus, the interparty metric measures the share of all the sentences addressed to the issue of immigration by a given party, compared to the corresponding shares of the other parties or party families. Rather straightforwardly, we assume that the higher a party's share of the sentences revolving around immigration, the higher the probability that it is attempting to "own" the issue and/or render it salient.

However, this relative share does not capture all aspects of the salience of immigration for a given party. Especially due to the fact that we use the written press as a source, which tends to prioritize mainstream parties, this measure might distort how voters perceive parties and electoral campaigns, particularly now that social media have become an important source of accessing news. Therefore, we also use the standard metric of salience and issue ownership, that is, a metric that detects how the parties frame themselves, by measuring the sentences involving immigration *within* a party's discourse, a measure we call the *intraparty* salience of immigration. That is, in this case, we ask how much of their electoral campaign parties spend on the issue of immigration compared to other issues, hopefully providing us with an indication of how closely parties are associated with this issue in a given campaign. We think the two measures of inter- and intraparty salience are complementary; the former provides a snapshot of the relative weight of each party in the campaign for a given issue, while the latter takes into account the various means that might be used to acquire an image of a party's priorities and focuses more closely on the salience of an issue for the party itself.

With regard to positioning, the operationalization is more straightforward. We measure each party or party family's position as the average position they have on the issue, aggregating the positions for all sentences to result in an average value ranging from -1 to 1. We also

weigh the aggregated positions by each party's overall salience in the campaign, to avoid skewing the results too much in favor of extreme, but fringe parties that do not appear frequently in the public sphere. We then represent this visually as a diagram, placing the parties on an anti-/pro-immigration axis.

In terms of positioning, we also differentiate party families based on their shift in position. We have already noted that we mostly distinguish between "accommodative" and "adversarial" stances, but overall, the change in a party's positioning before and after the refugee crisis can be characterized in four ways. Accommodation refers to the assumption of an anti-immigration stance, moving further toward the radical right's opposition to immigration. An adversarial stance, to the contrary, is attributed to a party that becomes more pro-immigration during and after the refugee crisis. In addition to those two basic types, there is also the possibility of no discernible movement, that is a fixed pro- or anti-immigration position for a party that hardly budged during the crisis. The final possibility is one of avoidance of the issue, and this is assigned to parties that barely talk about it. While avoiding the issue before and after the crisis is formally equivalent to "no movement," we keep those two outcomes separate, as we feel that maintaining a distinct positive or negative attitude toward migration is different from not having a position on migration at all.

Furthermore, we also briefly differentiate between the *systemic* outcomes for each party-system, depending on the relative and absolute movement of the parties' positions on the issue of immigration. Here, there are four main outcomes: *convergence*, in which the parties abandon extreme positions and converge in their relative positions towards each other; *divergence*, in which the parties' relative positions grow more distant; *stability*, when their relative and absolute positions remain the same; and, finally, *drift*, when their relative positions do not change, but their absolute positions do, but move in the same direction.

We proceed by splitting parties into party families. For the categorization of parties into party families, we rely on the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow 2021) but merge Christian-democrat and conservative parties into a unified "conservative" category. In the countries we study, there are six main party families present, namely the radical right, the conservatives, the liberals, the greens, the social democrats, and the radical left. Additionally, there is a leftover "others" category, which includes the Movimento 5 Stelle and some fringe parties in Austria and Hungary. We should also note here that we limit our study to seven of the eight countries included in most of our chapters, as we unfortunately have no electoral campaign data for Sweden.

Salience and Party-System Dynamics of Immigration in Electoral Campaigns

Before we delve into the supply side on the issue of immigration, we would like to remind the reader that the parties that raised the issue were responding to a surge in demand as well. As we have already mentioned in the previous chapters, the refugee crisis was an event that caught the attention of the European public. Immigration was perceived as one of the most important problems for European voters as the refugee crisis deepened, but its salience varied between the types of countries. As presented in [Figure 4.5](#), in the open destination and transit countries – Germany, Sweden, Hungary, and Austria – the issue rose sharply in salience in the minds of the public. By contrast, in the other four countries, our frontline and closed destination countries – Italy, Greece, the UK, and France – the public salience of the issue presented some different patterns, with either less steep increases or even no increases at all, as in the case of France.

A main question we want to address is whether these demand-side patterns are aligned with supply-side changes. More specifically, we examine three aspects of the supply side: first, whether the salience of immigration rose in electoral campaigns in line with demand-side patterns; second, how this relationship was affected by the timing of the elections, that is, by how close to the actual refugee crisis they were held; and third, whether this was any different for the frontline and closed destination countries that did not exhibit the same kind of rise in salience of immigration.

A first way to approach these questions is to measure the systemic salience of immigration in electoral campaigns. In line with previous research on the topic, we notice in all countries upward trends in the overall electoral salience of immigration after the refugee crisis, which is broadly in line with what we witnessed on the demand side, as shown in [Figure 14.1](#).

In Germany in particular and in Austria and Hungary to a lesser degree, the election immediately after the refugee crisis was characterized by an increasing party focus on the issue of immigration. In Hungary and Austria, the share of issues that concerned immigration jumped from a precrisis average of approximately 5 percent to, respectively, 9 and 12 percent of all campaign issues, while in Germany, the effect was even greater, with immigration rising from 3 percent precrisis to 18 percent in the election that immediately followed, in October 2017.¹ Overall, this

¹ The Austrian elections were one month earlier, while the Hungarian ones were in April 2018.

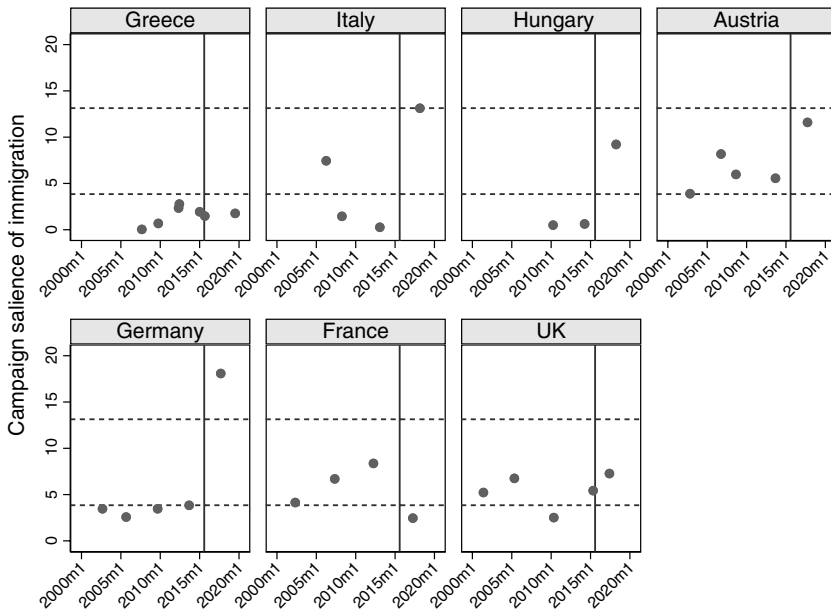


Figure 14.1 The salience of immigration, measured as a share of immigration issues over total issues

Note: The dotted lines are the mean electoral campaign salience of immigration for the seven countries, and the upper line is the second standard deviation. For Sweden, we have no core-sentence data. The vertical line signifies the time of the peak of the refugee crisis (August 2015).

trend is in line with the demand-side surge in concerns about immigration that was witnessed in those countries around that time.

The other country presenting a noticeable rise was Italy. The gradual climb of immigration as an important concern of Italians between the elections of 2013 and 2018 was matched with a rise in supply-side salience. By contrast, in the UK, a rise in the salience of immigration is barely noticeable, but any movement is complicated due to the way this issue was embedded in the wider Brexit discourse in any case.

There are two countries in which migration does not rise in salience at all. In Greece, in the aftermath of the refugee crisis, despite the country being at the forefront of the refugee exodus, the salience of the issue remained low, below the EU average, as people were still not ranking immigration as one of their top concerns, and parties did not prioritize the issue in the campaign discourse. Additionally, while the first election

occurred exactly one month after the most massive refugee wave, in September 2015, the electorate and parties were too preoccupied with the economic state of affairs, while the next election was held four years later, in 2019, quite far timewise from the peak of the refugee crisis. Finally, France is the country that defies the general trend, with the salience of the issue diminishing in the election right after the refugee crisis. Temporal distance cannot explain the trend here, as it was the first country, apart from Greece, to actually hold elections after the crisis. Instead, we should probably perceive this as being in accordance with the relative stability of the French demand side, as the issue gained traction with neither parties nor voters postcrisis. As we shall see, even the Front National, the party one would expect to raise the banner of anti-immigration, did not allocate the bulk of its time to the issue.

While salience is one key metric of a possible increase in the interest in immigration, due to the refugee crisis, we cannot solely rely on it. It could be the case that salience has remained the same, but the average position of parties has shifted or polarization, that is, the distance between the parties' positions on the issue, has increased, as immigration became a more conflictual issue due to the refugee crisis. In any given election, the number of issues parties are called to opine on are plentiful, and their salience in the press might not be entirely indicative of political conflict; thus, positions need to be taken into account. In [Figure 14.2](#), we present the average position of each party-system over time, for each election, on the issue of immigration.

The results in [Figure 14.2](#) provide a mixed image of the relationship between salience and average position. The average weighted position varies considerably from country to country and from election to election. The observations occupy almost the entire range of possible values, even if there is a strong cluster of cases with slightly negative values. Thus, the overall average is negative, at -0.31 , with 75 percent of the observations being negative. With regard to its trend, there are again contradictory tendencies. In Greece and France, the average position tilted very slightly toward a favorable view on immigration after the refugee crisis, albeit in an environment of very low salience. The same was true in Hungary for the most recent election but starting from an already very negative value, for an issue that was additionally almost nonexistent in previous campaigns. In Germany and Italy, where the issue was more salient, the trend is in reverse, with the average position returning closer to the mean after it had drifted upward before the refugee crisis. It should also be noted from the figure that certain countries tend to oscillate more, like Germany and Greece, while for others, the average position tends to be more stable

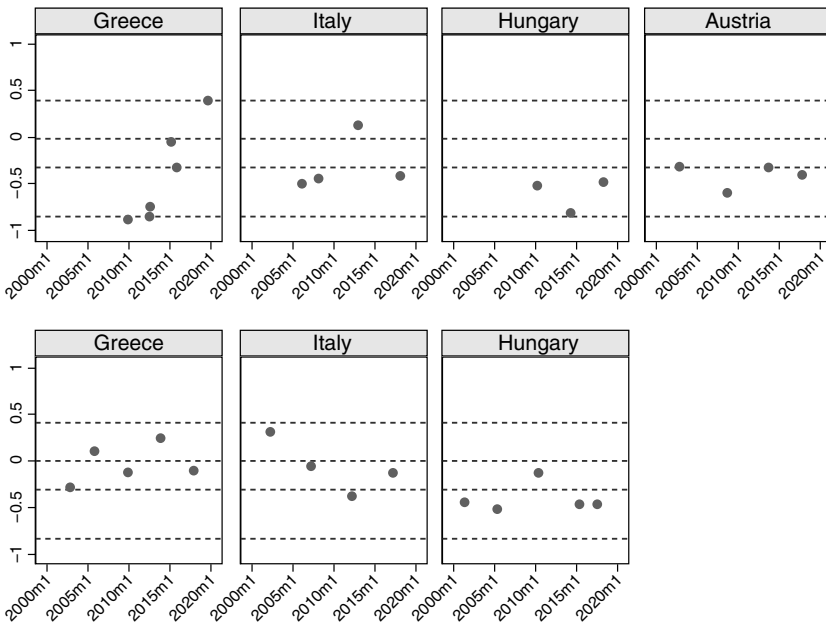


Figure 14.2 Average weighted position of each party-system across time
 Note: The weights correspond to our salience metric presented above, as each party was weighed by its presence in the public sphere to avoid depicting an average position skewed by smaller fringe parties. Average position can vary from -1 to 1 , with negative values signifying more consistent anti-immigration stances. Again, the dotted lines represent the mean, zero, and the values at 2 standard deviations away from the mean.

over time, fixed at low negative values, forming an established anti-immigration consensus in the party-system, as is the case for Austria, Hungary, and Italy.

While there is this impression of relative stability on average position for most countries, we should not be entirely certain that this meant the status quo was maintained after the refugee crisis. Instead, we should perceive the results of Figure 14.2 as a bridge, in order to discuss the different pathways of individual parties that can produce an outcome of relative aggregate stability. These indicators are strongly subject to composition effects: Stable average positions can be a product of parties not changing their position, but, as we noted, they could also be a product of convergence, that is, left-wing parties moving slightly toward anti-immigration positions (an “accommodative stance”), with right-wing

parties concurrently moving toward more pro-immigration positions. The same may apply to the value of the average position itself, which in most country gravitates toward zero and mostly lies in the low negative values. This could be a product of either parties assuming juxtaposed positions or of a party-system convergence toward a median position. Studying the patterns of behavior of particular party families and parties more closely will help us differentiate between these cases.

We should note, however, before concluding this section that the variables we use that might explain *policy* are not really associated with phenomena on the supply side of politics. The proximity to the refugee crisis, which we theorized as a potential driver of politicization, seems to merely have a loose relationship with salience. There are some cases where proximity seems to correlate well with immigration salience (high salience, close proximity in Germany 2017 – low salience, lack of proximity in Greece 2019), but in general, there are several important cases (Greece 2015, France 2017, and Italy or Hungary 2018) that are not in line with expectations. Our other variables, such as country type and problem pressure, do not show much association with supply-side patterns either. The two frontline states (Italy and Greece) exhibit completely diverse behaviors, while closed destination states like France and the UK also differ greatly from one another.

Decomposing Interparty Salience

We therefore turn toward the core of what we want to examine in this chapter, that is, the political supply of individual parties in each system, another version of political pressure, and how that might have affected the reconfiguration of party-systems. We already saw that political pressure, in terms of public salience and radical right polling percentages, differed a lot depending on the context of each country ([Chapter 4](#)) and that different types of policies were politicized to varying degrees ([Chapter 5](#)). But did any of these policy debates reverberate in the electoral campaigns that mostly occurred a few years after the refugee crisis had reached its peak? Was there a shift of existing parties on the issue of immigration, or did smaller parties that focused on immigration, positively or negatively, mushroom compared to their past trajectory? Which parties tried to “own” the issue? We already saw that in certain countries, the issue gained salience and the average position moved, albeit slightly. We now aim to understand who the drivers of those shifts were, their characteristics, and how they differed from one country to another.

Perhaps the most surprising lack of legacy of the refugee crisis is that it did not lead to the creation of new parties that focus specifically on

immigration, even in countries where the radical right was weak or absent. The closest example to such a new party would be the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which pivoted hard toward immigration issues in the 2017 German elections. However, while the party was a new addition to Germany's parliament, it was not a new addition to its political system, as it had narrowly missed the electoral threshold of 5 percent in the previous elections, albeit with a completely different agenda, focusing on Euroscepticism (Bremer and Schulte-Cloos 2019b). In substantive terms, the AfD had pivoted so hard toward anti-immigration in the wake of the refugee crisis that the party's public image had changed considerably since the previous election. Apart from that, the only additions to the party-systems of our seven-country sample are either fringe parties in central and eastern Europe (Hungary and Austria) or the newly emerging La République en Marche (ReM) in France, the party of President Macron, which was, however, the product of a politician who had already served in the upper echelons of the French Republic as a minister of the economy and industry. Despite the lack of new parties, it is worth examining where the rise in salience in five out of seven countries came from. As we saw (Figure 14.1), apart from Greece and France, immigration became clearly more salient in electoral campaigns after the crisis in four of our countries, and marginally in the UK.

We can take a first glimpse of who politicized immigration in Figure 14.3, which presents what we call the interparty salience on the issue of immigration, that is, the shares of core sentences that correspond to each party family in each country per election on the issue of immigration. Figure 14.3 should be read in conjunction with Figure 14.1, showing the overall electoral salience of immigration as an issue. From the combination of the two graphs, some interesting patterns emerge, indicating both the past path of immigration politicization and developments after the refugee crisis.

In general, in all of the countries, there are three party families involved in the discussion around immigration, the outcomes being different permutations of interactions between them – the social democrats (or the radical left in Greece, which has effectively replaced them), the conservatives, and the radical right. Given that the conservatives are highly present in electoral campaigns in all countries, as shown in Figure 14.3, there are three different combinations that emerge: a first scenario where the conservatives are the sole party engaged in the issue, as in Hungary (see also Chapter 4); a second scenario where conflict occurs mainly between two party families, usually the two mainstream right and left ones; and finally, a triparty engagement scenario, which pits all three families against each other. As we see in Figure 14.3, the presence of the

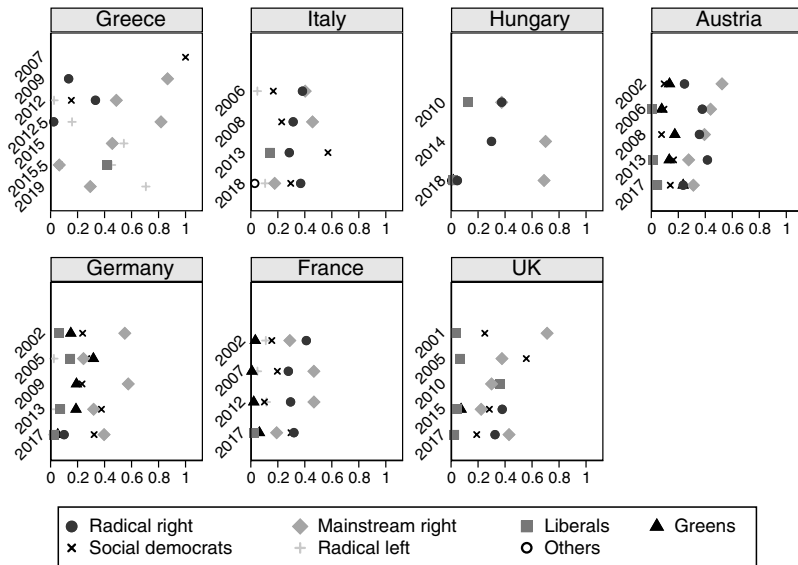


Figure 14.3 Intersparty salience for each party family on immigration issues per election, 2002–2020

other party families is sporadic in the immigration discourse and virtually nonexistent for all countries after the refugee crisis. Liberals and greens do not frequently raise the issue in the public sphere, either because they do not prioritize the issue or the media do not cover them extensively with regard to immigration.

The first type of configuration occurs only in Hungary. The immigration issue, especially after the refugee crisis, was dominated by Fidesz, Orbán’s party. The privileged access of Orbán’s party to the media and his prioritization of immigration as a flagship issue are starkly portrayed in Figure 14.3 and also discussed in Chapter 4, as Orbán’s party captured approximately 80 percent of all immigration-related themes. The duality evidenced in previous elections, as the issue was shared between Jobbik and Fidesz, completely vanished in the 2018 elections, as Fidesz became the sole owner of the issue of immigration.

In Greece and Germany, two parties engaged in conflict around immigration: the CDU-CSU coalition, that is, the conservatives and the social democrats in Germany, and Syriza, a radical left/social democrat hybrid, and New Democracy in Greece. In both countries, the radical right was boycotted by the press. In Germany, there is a taboo on talking about the radical right, and the relatively new AfD was shunned by the press.

In Greece, meanwhile, there was a blanket ban on Golden Dawn coverage after 2013 and the party's involvement in the murder of a Greek antifascist singer, as the party's leadership was under trial. As the radical right disappeared from the spotlight, the conservatives could afford to abandon their accommodative strategy and focus less on the matter, resulting in the very low salience of the issue in Greece. This is a common puzzle for our book, that is, how there was so little salience for the issue in the epicenter of the crisis, but now we have enough evidence to understand the reasons: Apart from the focus on economic issues under the bailout, the party-system dynamics changed due to the disappearance of the radical right from the public spotlight.²

In the other countries, after the refugee crisis, all three party families competed on the issue to a certain extent. On the one end, we find Austria and the UK, where the issue is almost entirely owned by the right bloc and the main actors are the mainstream and radical right, while on the other end there are France and Italy, where the conflict is mainly between the social democrats and the radical right, with the conservatives receding from the spotlight, at the time that the latter's electoral fortunes waned considerably.

Decomposing Intraparty Salience of Immigration

Apart from the interparty salience, we also measure how emblematic the issue of immigration was for parties, as an indication of how much the voters identified them with the issue, that is, as another component of issue ownership. [Figure 14.4](#) presents the intraparty (family) salience of immigration, that is, the share of core sentences of each party family on the issue of immigration.

The Hungarian and Austrian cases stick out, as in both countries, in the elections after the refugee crisis, the conservatives dramatically increased their preoccupation with immigration during the electoral campaign and, coupled with the share of sentences they produced on the issue, can be reliably identified as the issue owners. By contrast, there are three cases in which the conservatives appear to provide scant attention to the issue of immigration, namely the UK, Greece, and France. As noted already, this outcome is, however, due to the different contextual

² It is generally true that for most of the radical right parties, our data are relatively scarce, with a limited number of sentences attributed to each of them, as they do not generally feature much in the written press. However, there is a significant quantitative difference between Greece and the other countries, as the main radical right party is almost completely absent from the Greek written press.

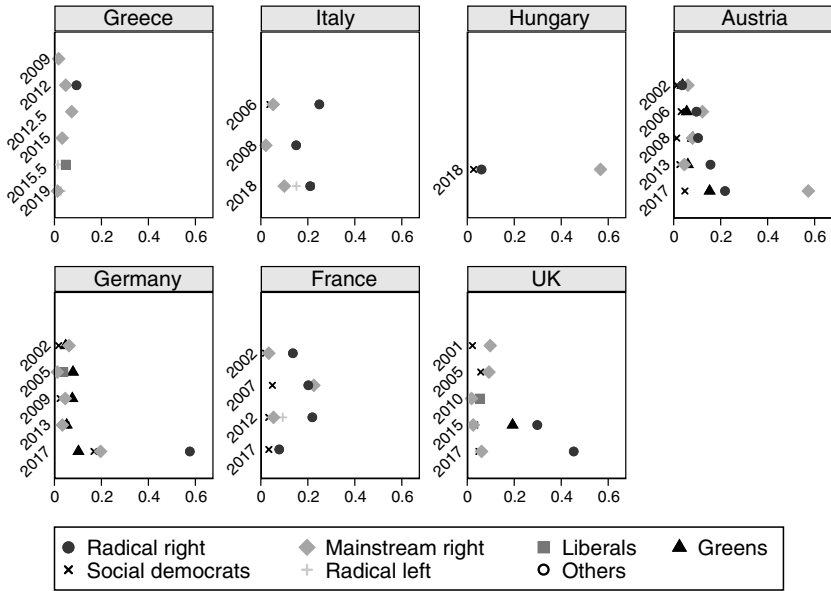


Figure 14.4 Share of core sentences of each party that refer to immigration, 2002–2019

Note: We have included only party families with at least ten actions in this graph so as to now present parties whose results might have been based on a very low and possibly nonrepresentative sample of sentences. Thus, some party families are missing in each country, and in Hungary, two elections are missing because no party family passed the threshold in 2010 and 2014.

characteristics and party strategies available to each party in those countries. Whereas in Greece, as we noted, the accommodation of the radical right ended because there was a blanket ban on Golden Dawn coverage, in the case of the UK, it should be remembered that immigration could not be entirely separated from the Brexit issue, which was what dominated the attention of media and the Conservatives’ headquarters. While the party did not spend much of its time stressing its immigration position, it did spend most of its time on delivering Brexit, an issue that was closely linked to immigration control, at least in the minds of many right-wing voters that the party needed to regain from UKIP. In France, finally, the issue simply did not feature in the campaign, which revolved mostly around Europe and economic issues, leaving no space left for the issue to Marine Le Pen’s party. Thus, we could say that in Greece and the UK, the conservatives continued to be the issue owners, while in

France, the radical right owned immigration. But in all cases, it should be remembered that the issue was not salient.

In Italy, a similar trend occurred, and even if the conservatives did not disappear, Figures 14.3 and 14.4 paint a clear picture of the issue as a battlefield mainly between the nationalists of the radical right, consisting of the Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, and the social democrats and social liberals of the Partito Democratico. Those two parties therefore constituted the main poles and issue owners of each position in Italy, outflanking Berlusconi's declining party.

Finally, the most striking case is Germany, where Figure 14.4 somewhat corrects Figure 14.3. Whereas the AfD occupied a very small part of the discourse on immigration, as shown in Figure 14.3, given that the party did not feature prominently in the public sphere, it nevertheless barely spoke of anything else, as almost 60 percent of its core sentences contained references to immigration (see Figure 14.4). As such, intra-party salience indicates that voters in Germany, who also have recourse to social media and sources of information other than the mainstream written press, sense that the AfD actually is the issue owner.

Beyond the type of competition on the issue, we wanted to examine the *drivers* of the rise in salience, wherever they existed, after the refugee crisis. It is now evident that there are differing patterns in this matter, too. However, in most cases where we witnessed a rise in the electoral salience of immigration, the social democrats and left parties clearly avoided immigration issues, apart from maybe Italy and the UK. Even in the latter countries, though, the share of sentences of those parties compared to other parties decreased (see Figure 14.3). The same is true for Greece, albeit from a much higher level. Only in France was this countered, as the PS greatly increased the salience of immigration in its discourse,³ even if the electoral results afterward might have vindicated the more silent stance of its peer parties elsewhere.

In all the countries included in the study, the combined share of the conservatives and radical right increased to a certain extent. But this is where trends diverge: In Hungary, Austria, and the UK, we witnessed the *displacement* of the radical right by the conservatives in the public discourse about immigration after the refugee crisis. In these cases, the share of immigration-related utterances was reduced for the radical right, with the center right dominating the discourse to varying degrees

³ It was the PS specifically to which the high level of salience of immigration for the left in France 2017 should be attributed, as Melenchon's FI barely touched the issue – 29 percent of the PS's core sentences were about immigration compared to barely 3 percent of Melenchon's combination.

in each of these countries. Hungary was the most extreme, in line with the estimates provided by [Bíró-Nagy \(2022\)](#), but the trend was similar in all three countries. The same applied to Greece, even if marginally, with the caveat that the radical right was not present in the press there and that the salience of the issue, as well as the share of the conservatives, was low to begin with. Meanwhile, in France and Italy, the opposite happened: Both metrics point to the radical right as the main standard-bearer of immigration issues and in fact, in both countries, the relative gap between the radical right and conservatives in interparty salience increased in favor of the radical right.

Decomposing Issue Position

Apart from salience, parties also compete on positioning on the issue of immigration. Whereas issue ownership can give us an indication of the potential winners and losers of the issue's uneven emergence, parties also need to occupy a distinct position on the issue to effectively convert their issue ownership into electoral gains ([Abou-Chadi 2016](#)). In [Figure 14.5](#), we see the average position of each of the party families on the immigration issue for each election. [Figure 14.5](#) demonstrates some overall expected results. In general, the parties are aligned according to our theoretical expectations, that is, the right and radical right are positioned toward the anti-immigration side, while greens, liberals, social democrats, and the radical left are leaning toward the pro-immigration side, with Italy, Germany, and France⁴ being the most characteristic cases.

Some conclusions can still be drawn, however, even if most parties' behavior is as expected. While our previous discussion highlighted the reasons immigration did not become a very salient issue in Greece, [Figure 14.5](#) indicates its latent structuring potential, as the mainstream party families are completely polarized on the issue, a configuration remaining stable throughout the years, with the conservatives adopting an extreme anti-immigration stance and the radical left (Syriza) an extreme pro-immigration position.

For Hungary, which we have also marked as a case of political reshuffle after the refugee crisis, we note again that Fidesz not only raised the attention it paid to immigration but effectively outflanked the radical right Jobbik's position on the issue, taking the most extreme anti-immigration stance toward an issue that became much more salient in

⁴ Again, it is interesting how far apart from the FN mainstream French parties were in the critical election of 2002 and how the right especially moderated that position afterward, particularly under Sarkozy.

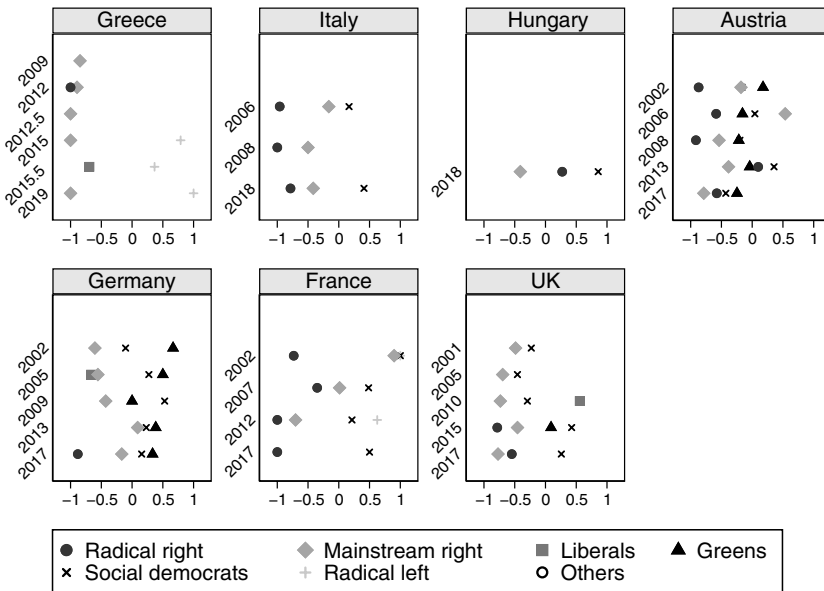


Figure 14.5 Average party family positions on immigration per election, 2002–2019

Note: Again, we have included only party families with at least ten actions for this graph, as to now show positions that might have been erroneous due to a low sample of sentences. Positions toward the left of the figure lean more toward an anti-immigration direction, while positions toward the right are more pro-immigration.

that election compared to the one before the refugee crisis. Hungary’s high polarization occurs mainly because of Orbán’s juxtaposition to a host of centrist and leftist parties, which take him on with a distinct pro-immigration stance. As such, much like Greece’s setting, Hungary’s distinct juxtaposition of party families is a product of two mainstream party families, maintaining almost opposite positions on the issue, at a much higher level of salience, however.

The same applies for Austria and the UK. In the former, conservative prime minister Kurz also adopted a position equivalent to the one of the FPÖ, in a country where all the competitors of the radical right turned more anti-immigration (a case of *drift*), compared to the previous election, which explains the large drop in average position for Austria seen in Figure 14.2. By essentially standing still in a shifting landscape, the Austrian radical right may have lost its luster as the main anti-immigration pole. In the UK, too, the Conservatives, who anyway always

held a distinctly extreme anti-immigration position, competed closely with the radical right party on the issue, during a time when the Labour party had become, under the Corbyn leadership after 2015, more liberal on immigration. As we saw, the conservatives did not dedicate a significant amount of their campaign to the issue, only enough so that they would make their position distinct and equally salient to UKIP's. The British pattern of party-system dynamics, therefore, unlike Austria's, is one in which the parties started diverging from each other after Corbyn was elected, as the Conservatives moved further to the right, and Labour moved further to the left. Rather than a pattern of drift that would result in a lower average position, as in the case of Austria, the pattern in the UK was one of divergence, resulting in a similar average position due to diverging relative positions.

Overall, [Figures 14.3–14.5](#), even though they point to different party-system equilibria, indicate the existence of three countries, namely Austria, Hungary, and the UK,⁵ all with a distinct legacy of closure, where the common theme is that of the conservatives prioritizing the immigration issue after the refugee crisis; adopting or maintaining extreme positions on the issue; and effectively competing with the radical right, depriving it of breathing air.

Unlike those countries, the French and German political landscapes were highly polarized by the radical right's extreme position, forcefully assuming the mantle of the anti-immigration party owning the issue, with the conservatives diverging from their radical right counterparts. While in France the systemic polarization remained stable during the refugee crisis, in Germany, the addition of the AfD led to a pattern of divergence. Finally, Italy was a case of relative systemic stability, as the average position of each party family hardly moved in the 2018 elections, right after the refugee crisis, as, similarly to Greece, polarization along the left–right axis continued after the crisis.

Following the theoretical framework we introduced previously, inspired by [Meguid \(2005b\)](#), [Table 14.1](#) summarizes the patterns of positional movement and issue ownership we have explored so far. Each party essentially has three choices: (1) accommodate the radical right's position, moving closer to it; (2) oppose it by moving further away from it; or (3) stay put or, as noted, altogether avoid the issue. Some of the cases are ambivalent, as the Greek conservatives and all UK mainstream parties can be categorized as cases of avoidance rather than accommodation, but due to those parties' monopolization of the anti-immigration

⁵ By omission of the radical right, one could include Greece in this triplet.

Table 14.1 *Patterns of party family positioning toward the radical right and issue ownership of immigration in the elections after the refugee crisis*

Country	Conservatives	Center left	Anti-immigration issue owner
Greece	Accommodative	No movement	Conservatives
Italy	No movement	No movement	Radical right
Hungary	Accommodative	Avoidance	Conservatives
Austria	Accommodative	Accommodative	Conservatives
Germany	No movement	No movement	Radical right
France	Avoidance	No movement	Radical right
UK	Accommodative	No movement	Conservatives

position, we label their tactics as accommodative, even if at a very low level of salience. Additionally, we note in the last column the owner of the anti-immigration position in each country. While there were parties that arguably might have owned the issue from a pro-immigration or moderate position, such as Syriza in Greece or the CDU in Germany, due to their much higher interparty salience compared to other parties, we mainly focus on who owns the anti-immigration position because this is likely the most effective electoral strategy in this context.

Electoral Outcomes and Party Dynamics

Table 14.2 summarizes the electoral fortunes of each party family in the election immediately after the refugee crisis. While we cannot draw any rigorous conclusions from the association between the electoral trends and the patterns we noted above, it is worth commenting on the possible links between those strategies and the electoral fortunes of parties.

Who are the winners and losers of the elections after the refugee crisis? We see that this depends heavily on the context: In Italy, Germany, France, and Sweden, the radical right made noticeable electoral inroads, whereas the conservatives suffered. By contrast, in Greece, Hungary, Austria, and the UK, the conservatives increased their vote share, whereas the radical right performed poorly. What is common in all the countries, apart from the UK, is that the mainstream left-wing party, no matter its strategy, fared poorly compared to the previous election.⁶ Only the radicalized Labour party under Corbyn improved its electoral

⁶ In Greece, we consider Syriza, which is nominally a radical left party, as part of the mainstream left, based on its outsized electoral influence after 2012.

Table 14.2 *Vote changes per party family, comparing the election immediately before and after the refugee crisis*

	Radical right	Mainstream right	Liberals	Greens	Social democrats	Radical left	Others
Greece	-4.1	11.8	-6.1	—	1.8	-2.3	—
Italy	15.7	-8.1	-5.7	—	-6.1	0.2	7.1
Hungary	-1.2	4.4	3.7	1.7	-8.3	-0.3	1.7
Austria	-3.8	7.5	-0.3	-4.2	0.0	-0.3	—
Germany	7.9	-8.6	5.9	0.5	-5.2	0.6	.
France	7.2	-7.2	14.9	-2.3	-22.3	8.4	1.3
UK	-10.8	5.8	-0.5	-2.2	9.6	—	—
Sweden	4.6	-1.8	2.6	-2.5	-2.7	2.3	—
Average	1.9	0.5	1.8	-1.5	-4.2	1.2	3.4
Median	1.7	1.3	1.2	-2.3	-4.0	0.2	1.7
Std. dev.	8.5	7.9	6.8	2.2	9.2	3.4	3.2

performance, albeit not by a wide enough margin to allow it to win first place and form a government.

In general, the mainstream left and the greens to a lesser extent were the consistent electoral losers during the refugee crisis, almost irrespective of the stance they held. Their losses ranged from 2 to 22 percent. While it is evidently simplistic to attribute those losses to their stance on the immigration position, given the long-term trend of the center left's decline and the internal turmoil in the extreme case of France, it is clear that the refugee crisis at least did not help them at all with improving their electoral performance.

For the right block, we can see that a zero-sum gain game occurred: Wherever the conservatives were reinforced, the radical right lost and vice versa. We can speculate that there is a tighter association between positioning and ownership of the issue and their electoral performance for this political block. In all four cases where the conservatives emphasized the issue and adopted an accommodative strategy toward the radical right, they were rewarded. A consistent winning strategy of the conservatives emerges particularly from Austria⁷ and Hungary, where the respective parties chose to compete and engage with the issue (Figure 14.3), render it salient and make it an identifying feature of their

⁷ We should note, however, that the ÖVP's gains over the FPÖ in Austria cannot only be relegated to its stance on migration, as the Ibiza scandal that rocked the FPÖ at the time probably precipitated many of those losses too. Nevertheless, the scandal could also be seen as an opportunity for the ÖVP to poach disillusioned FPÖ voters if it approached their positions on migration somewhat.

campaign (Figure 14.4), and assume a distinct and clear position (Figure 14.5) that ended with a clear electoral victory. This is in contrast to the recent work of Abou-Chadi et al. (2022), which posits that a rise in the salience of immigration, even when accompanied by accommodative tactics by conservative parties, could not be expected to lead to improved electoral performances for the radical right. This does not seem to be the case when we look at the aggregate fortunes of parties in our sample. More in line with Bíró-Nagy (2022), we find that conservative parties that emphasized immigration did well, even if several confounding factors – such as press boycotts in Greece, suppressed press freedom in Hungary, and radical right scandals in Austria – might have also contributed to this outcome.

There are two more cases in which the conservatives improved their electoral performance: Greece in 2019 and the UK in 2017, where both parties adopted *part* of their peers' strategy in Austria and Hungary. As is evident in Figures 14.3 and 14.5, while the UK and Greek conservative parties held a distinct position and increased their relative share in the immigration discourse, neither of them raised the issue to their main preoccupation, but in fact stressed it very little compared to other issues, as shown in Figure 14.4. Additionally, both parties did not really pursue an accommodative strategy, as they already held a fairly extreme position in past elections. However, in both countries, there are mitigating circumstances, as the specificities of the arrest and trial of Golden Dawn in Greece and the Brexit debate in the UK led to a particularistic political competition in which the radical right was absent in the former and superseded in the latter.

Therefore, those conservative parties that had the most consistent anti-immigration profile, prioritized the issue, and did not waver on their position gained the most, while mainstream parties of the right that followed an adversarial, avoidance, or no-movement strategy did not fare equally well, with France and Italy being the most catastrophic examples for the conservatives.

The Italian case is a paradigmatic one in which the electoral result did not bode well for the conservatives, as they saw their vote percentages plummet and those of the radical right increase. In both France and Italy, the radical right parties essentially supplanted their mainstream counterparts as the main right-wing parties. Again, though, these are only loose associations, given that there are many more factors at work, such as the internal issues among the Italian conservatives and their unique quality of being tied up so closely with the personality of Berlusconi and their decline in association with the evolution of Berlusconi's judicial and other problems.

Still, the Italian case remains instructive, as perhaps the most straightforward one: Immigration was an issue that rose in importance consistently in recent years, both on the demand side (Figure 4.5) and the supply side (Figure 14.1), and after the refugee crisis, an anti-immigration consensus emerged (Figure 14.2). The radical right became the party family that acquired the lion's share of attention on the issue (Figure 14.3), dedicated more time to this issue than any other party family (Figure 14.4) and expressed the most distinct anti-immigration position, even if still close to the centre of the Italian party-system on the issue (Figure 14.5). Its electoral rise (Table 14.2), and especially its continuing ascent in the polls, after the elections of 2018 can be construed as being associated with all these trends, given the evidence provided here about its stance regarding immigration. In essence, the Lega and FdI followed a strategy similar to their "mainstream" right-wing peers in Hungary and Austria and reaped the benefits accordingly.

France almost resembled this case, but it lacked the critical element of the FN becoming identified more closely with the migration issue. Unlike the conservatives in Hungary and Austria and the Italian Lega, the FN, either by choice or because it was forced to follow the other parties' agenda, spent much more of its time with questions on the economy and Europe, which proved to be a less advantageous issue domain for the party than immigration. As can be seen in Figures 14.1, France was the only country where the issue of immigration declined in significance after the refugee crisis. This was because the mainstream and centrist parties did not refer to it⁸ but also because the FN did not do so either (Figure 14.3). Instead, it waged a rear-guard war on the merits of the Euro currency, which pitted it against its main competitor, Emmanuel Macron. Perhaps this was a deliberate choice because the party felt that immigration was not gaining as much traction with the French public (Figure 4.5), but it was nevertheless a unique choice when compared to most of its peers elsewhere in Europe.

Finally, the German case also shows the perils of the rising salience of immigration for ambivalent center right parties. While the German CDU did make an effort to speak more about migration (Figure 14.3), it did so while being much more on the defensive about it compared to its Austrian peers, for example. Whereas Kurz had provided his credentials to the Austrian audience, initiating continuous efforts to shut down immigration routes and talking incessantly about the issue, the

⁸ And for that matter, neither did the radical left, with Melenchon's FI spending only 2 percent of its time on immigration issues.

German CDU, under Merkel, had to bear with the legacy of “we can do it,” as well as a much more permissive immigration policy than part of its electorate was apparently willing to put up with. As shown in [Figures 14.4 and 14.5](#), the German CDU was not only much closer to centrist/leftist parties on immigration than the AfD, but, unlike its Austrian peers, it also failed or simply could not credibly make this its flagship issue. Moreover, the AfD essentially became identified as *the* immigration party, despite its low relative salience on the issue, as more than 60 percent of its total discourse concerned immigration. While its presence in the media was not extensive, whoever detected the party’s presence anywhere probably saw it in association with immigration. As with the other parties that succeeded on this issue, the three crucial factors of adopting a distinct position, remaining on message, and stressing it as much as possible were present and accomplished.

The Legacy of the Refugee Crisis

As the refugee crisis fades from memory, it has left some important and lasting marks on the European political landscape. The impact of this crisis was not a wholesale transformation of party-systems in some countries, as happened during the Eurozone crisis ([Kriesi and Hutter 2019](#)), but it is in line with our characterization of this crisis as one that was cumulative and expected, much like an avalanche: Unlike the Eurozone crisis, which caught several actors by surprise or forced them to adopt untenable and unpopular positions, the refugee crisis allowed much more room for strategic choices by parties, who could see the potential political impact of the issue and either shield against it or try to exploit it, more or less successfully, depending on the case.

The refugee crisis, especially compared to the Eurozone crisis, had different effects. Mainstream actors in most countries could not only weather the storm but also profit from it. Unlike the Eurozone crisis, which essentially doomed the mainstream parties of the afflicted countries, the refugee crisis had an effect that varied according to the electoral and political strategies each party adopted. It is also noteworthy that the political developments in each country were obviously affected by the respective policies (e.g., the “we can do it” policy or the hard-liner stance of Orbán), but overall, they do not present any pattern regarding the type of countries we have identified so far in terms of destination, frontline, and so on. Nor do they correlate too closely with problem pressure or temporal proximity of the elections to the crisis. Whereas in the Eurozone crisis the degree of party-system transformation tended to follow the economic impact of the situation, in this case,

the relationship between outcomes and causes was much looser. As we saw, party-systems followed completely different patterns of politicization of the refugee crisis, with some going through a homogeneous drift of positions, while others witnessed convergence or divergence of positions. What this renders salient is the *strategic* element of the refugee crisis, as party leadership during the time of the crisis and existing party-system conflict constellations and paths were much more crucial for the eventual outcomes.

As such, it was not necessarily a crisis of profound transformation, but a crisis of *opportunity*, as various actors mobilized to profit from the increased salience attributed to the immigration issue by the mainstream media and European electorates. The most salient pattern is one of *drift*: first, a drift of the attention paid to immigration, as more parties, particularly on the right-wing part of the political spectrum, rushed to capitalize on the issue and prioritized it in their campaign discourse and second, a drift toward the right, as shown in [Table 14.2](#). Unmistakeably, after the refugee crisis in all of the seven countries examined here but one (the UK), the first election after the refugee crisis was accompanied by a noticeable increase in the combined percentages of conservative and radical right parties, as well as a simultaneous drop in the combined left and liberal/centrist vote.⁹

As we saw, however, the drivers of the politicization and those who reaped benefits from this drift were not necessarily the same in every country but were instead the parties that were ready and able to seize the opportunity. [Table 14.2](#) almost presents a picture of stability, notwithstanding the continuing decline of the social democratic parties, but this conceals differing patterns depending on the set of countries. More specifically, we identified a group of countries, particularly Hungary and Austria, but also Greece and the UK, where the conservative parties displaced the radical right, both in terms of politicizing the issue, in the sense of rendering it salient and assuming a distinct position and in the first two cases, in terms both of identifying with it and of electoral gains.

On the other hand, there were other countries, like Italy and Germany (and, we might add, Sweden), where the radical right made advances at the expense of the conservatives, capitalizing on the latter's diluted position and record on immigration and, especially in the cases of Italy

⁹ Even if to get this for Germany, one has to add the FDP to the host of right-wing parties, a choice that could be justified due to the party's hardening stance on the immigration issue. In [Table 1](#), the party is included in the Greens/Liberals category however, hence the results here suggest Germany was a small outlier too.

and France, also on the overall decline and turmoil in the ranks of the conservative parties. Overall, the discourse shifted toward the right as, where they were successful, mainstream parties adopted positions toward the extreme end of the anti-immigration spectrum, and in cases in which they were not successful, they were hit hard by the radical right's advances. However, in the end, notwithstanding the family that they belonged to, there was a commonality among all countries: Right-wing actors that were persistent on their anti-immigration message and "owned" the issue enjoyed electoral gains at the expense of their proximate party families and the left.

15 Conclusion

This volume set out to study the policymaking and politics in the EU multilevel polity during the 2015–16 refugee crisis. We asked how policymakers in the EU and its member states tried to come to terms with the crisis situation they faced in 2015–16 and how they dealt with the fall-out of the crisis in its aftermath. The refugee crisis of 2015–16 was not the first crisis of its kind, but it still hit the EU and its member states unprepared and led to internal strife and an incoherent and eventually unsustainable policy response. The puzzle we are trying to elucidate in our study of the refugee crisis is why key decision-makers like the German chancellor came to be trapped in a desperate situation at the peak of the crisis, and why she and her fellow heads of government, together with the EU authorities proved to be unable to come to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The answer to this puzzle is important because the EU's resilience, or at least the resilience of one of its main pillars, the commitment to free movement, was put to a heavy test by the refugee crisis and, retrospectively (in summer 2021), this crisis was considered to have been the “most serious threat to the survival of the European Union” in the decade before the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic by the European public overall and by the public in the destination states of northwestern Europe in particular.

For answering our key puzzle, we embedded the policymaking in the refugee crisis in a broader theoretical framework, the “polity approach” to European integration (Ferrera et al. 2022), which treats the EU as a compound polity composed of nation-states. As we set out in the introduction, this approach distinguishes three key long-term macro-processes – the three B's of polity formation: boundary building (bounding), center formation (binding), and system maintenance (bonding). Over the period of centuries, the combination of these three processes led to the consolidation of the European nation-states, each of which is the idiosyncratic product of the varying conditions of state formation across the continent. The process of European integration has shifted the three types of processes to the supranational level, adding an additional layer

of polity formation to the level of the nation-states. The addition of the supranational layer to the system of European nation-states constitutes a unique form of polity formation with highly uncertain outcomes.

At the core of the emerging compound polity lies a fundamental tension between the integration process, which is predicated upon the removal of boundaries among the preexisting system of states, and the national, democratic, and welfare features of the states, which are predicated upon their continued control over redistributive capacities, cultural symbols, and political authority (Bartolini 2005: 368, 375). In the refugee crisis, the tension between the integration process and the destructuring of the national polities became particularly critical, given that it put into question the internal and external boundaries of the compound polity. The combination of the lack of a joint policy on border control, outdated asylum policies, the adoption of unilateral national policies to deal with the crisis, and the member states' resistance to share the common burden meant that what should have been a routine policy problem challenged the bounding, the binding, and ultimately the bonding of the EU member states, putting into evidence the fundamental tensions in the EU's architecture.

The challenge of the refugee crisis focused on bounding, but it had important implications for binding and bonding, for which bounding is a precondition. The outcome of the crisis was, in Schimmelfennig's (2021) terms, a form of "defensive integration," that is, a combination of measures of mainly internal rebordering (the resurrection of barriers between member states or their exit from common policies or the EU altogether) with external rebordering (the creation and guarding of "joint" external EU borders). "Defensive integration" can be characterized as a limited, minimum common denominator solution to the refugee crisis (see Jones, Daniel Kelemen, and Meunier 2021; Lavenex 2018; Biermann et al. 2017). The goal of our study was to trace the policymaking processes that account for this outcome. In our view, the basic tension at the core of the EU polity shaped the policymaking at both levels of the compound polity and limited its capacity to take far-reaching decisions. As we have argued, this tension was exacerbated in the asylum policy domain, since it rendered issues concerning national sovereignty highly salient and mobilized political forces defending the national sovereignty of the member states, in line with the postfunctionalist notion of "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Based on our analysis of the refugee crisis and contrary to some received wisdom, we do not see any contradiction between the failing-forward approach and the postfunctionalist approach. Rather, we see them as complementary and contributing to the understanding of the outcome of this particular crisis (see Ferrara and Kriesi 2021).

For the analysis of how policymakers reacted to the challenge of the refugee crisis domestically and internationally, we took as our starting point two sets of factors – the policy-specific institutional context, that is, the policy heritage and the institutionalized decision mode, and the crisis situation defined in terms of problem pressure and political pressure. Our results show that policymaking in the crisis was to a large extent, although by no means exclusively, a response to the specific situation the member states and the EU faced in late summer 2015 – a situation characterized by a combination of limited EU policy-specific competences and an asymmetrical distribution of crisis pressures. The low capacity and lack of policy resources of EU institutions in asylum policy made crisis resolution highly dependent on decision-making in inter-governmental fora. At the same time, the uneven distribution of policy capacities and crisis pressures among the EU member states resulted in a highly politicized mixture of conflicts both at the transnational and the national level, which constrained the potential for intergovernmental agreement, coordination, and joint action and resulted in minimum common denominator solutions. We contend that in a different crisis situation, policymaking would have taken a different course, the policy outcome would have been less constrained, and supranational institutions would have been likely to have played a more important role – in line with more neofunctionalist or federalist accounts (see [Ferrara and Kriesi 2021](#)).

By applying a combination of tools from comparative politics and policy analysis to the study of policymaking in the EU polity, we showed how, in the absence of generally accepted rules, EU policymaking in the refugee crisis developed in an uncoordinated, ad hoc way that served to poison transnational relationships among member states beyond the narrow confines of asylum policy and led to the formation of transnational coalitions, which are likely to haunt EU policymaking far beyond the refugee crisis. By distinguishing between five types of member states, based on the way they were affected by the crisis, and by systematically analyzing the domestic and international (trans- and supranational) conflicts triggered by the resulting configuration of member states, our approach provides a comprehensive account of the crisis. In particular, we analyzed the reciprocal relationship between domestic and international conflicts in the two-level game of EU policymaking: On the one hand, we documented the multiple ways in which international conflicts spilled over into domestic policymaking, where they exacerbated partisan conflicts articulating the transnational cleavage. On the other hand, we showed how domestic partisan conflicts and unilateral national reactions to the crisis spilled over into the intergovernmental and supranational arena,

where they exacerbated transnational and vertical conflicts between member states and the EU.

With regard to crisis outcomes, our results underscore continuity. In spite of the pressure exerted by the crisis, the EU and its member states proved unable to reform the defective asylum policy. Instead, they reinforced the external borders and externalized the problem solution to third countries, which provided some respite. By relying on “defensive integration,” they have been buying time. The dysfunctional common asylum system has been left untouched. Continuity also prevails with regard to the conflict potentials of migration and asylum policies, which continue to be large and have even markedly increased during the crisis. The incapacity to reform the common asylum policy risks the reactivation of these potentials at any moment in time. Importantly, the political parties on the right that are ready to mobilize these potentials have been reinforced by the general drift toward the right resulting from the refugee crisis.

Compared to previous accounts, our approach has the advantage of tying the individual pieces together within one and the same theoretical and empirical framework by systematically linking policymaking at the two levels of the EU polity and by consistently focusing on the prevailing conflict configurations at each level individually and at both levels jointly. In this concluding chapter, we summarize our theoretical and methodological contribution and provide some further detail on our main findings. We conclude with an afterthought regarding the new refugee crisis that hit the EU as a result of the war in Ukraine.

Our Approach to Studying the Refugee Crisis

Our theoretical approach to studying the refugee crisis is based on the perspective of the EU as a compound polity of nation-states involving interdependent vertical relations between member states and the EU authorities, as well as transnational relations between the member states themselves. The two-level structure invites political structuring at both the supranational level of the EU and the national level of the member states and produces two lines of international conflicts. The vertical conflict line opposes the polity’s center – the EU – to the member states, whereas the horizontal conflict revolves around the specific interests of the member states and involves conflicts between and within member states. These conflicts do not occur in a vacuum. Thus, the fundamental tension between the integration process and the destructuring of the national polities becomes particularly critical in crisis situations. We highlighted two sets of factors for the explanation of the policy

outcome – the policy-specific institutional context within the compound polity (the policy domain-specific competence distribution and the institutionalized decision-making procedures governing the crisis interventions) and the characteristics of the crisis situation (the crisis-specific distribution of problem and political pressures). Our core argument is that the asymmetric distribution of crisis pressures across member states combined with the limited competence of the EU agencies in the asylum policy domain and the demanding consensus requirements goes a long way toward explaining the outcome of crisis policymaking in this case. The main focus of our volume lies in the investigation of the kind of conflicts that were triggered by this particular combination of factors, the way these conflicts were politicized, and how they influenced the policy output and political outcomes of the crisis.

To analyze the conflicts within the refugee crisis, we relied on three key concepts: political structuring, politicization, and conflict intensity. Political structuring refers to the structural preconditions that allow the expression of voice, which include both the nature of the EU polity and the specifics of the crisis situation. Politicization corresponds to the expansion of the scope of conflict in terms of issue salience and the polarization of the actors' issue-specific positions within these structural preconditions, and conflict intensity bears on the specific types of actions undertaken by the actors to defend their positions in the policymaking process during the crisis.

In operational terms, to measure these concepts and explore the relation between them, we employed an ambitious empirical approach. The central tool of analysis upon which our study is based uses policy process analysis (PPA), a method that builds on political claims analysis (PCA) (Koopmans and Statham 1999) and that we developed further for the purposes of this study. This method relies on the systematic coding of media data for capturing the policymaking and politics surrounding policy debates. We applied this method to individual policy episodes within selected countries and the EU. For each episode, PPA captures indicators related to the actors involved in the policy debate, the forms of action they engage in, the arena where the actions take place, the issues addressed, and the frames used to address them. PPA allows for the measurement of our key concepts of politicization and conflict intensity both statically and over time. At the same time, PPA supplies detailed qualitative data, which allowed us to illustrate the systematic quantitative results with narrative accounts of our episodes.

In democracies, policymaking is not only playing out in the public, it is also constrained by public opinion and the public debate. In the EU, public opinion is still a mainly national opinion, and the public debate is

still a mainly national debate. To the extent that they focus on the same policy episodes at the EU level, the national debates are Europeanized, but the debate about a EU-level episode may also be domesticated as a result of the specific incidence of the episode on a given member state (see [Chapter 12](#)). The domesticated debate on European episodes and the domestic debate on national episodes, in turn, may be consequential for EU policymaking. Whatever the status of the public constraint – nationally specific or Europeanized – the exclusive focus on the supply side of policymaking of PPA neglects features related more specifically to the demand side of public opinion and vote intentions. Therefore, we complemented our PPA dataset with a variety of original datasets involving different methods of data collection depending on the elements of the crisis on which we zoom in. At various points across our study, we employed core-sentence analysis (CSA) for studying political competition dynamics in election campaigns, survey data for capturing public opinion on migration, and speech analysis for studying rhetorical devices employed by key center right and far right actors during the crisis.

The Crisis Context and the Unfolding of Policy Episodes

Our first set of insights relates to the characteristics of the policy-specific institutional context and its impact on the subsequent unfolding of the policy episodes. In the first place, policymaking is embedded in the domain-specific policy legacies: As argued by historical institutionalism, past policies create a situation of path dependence that limits the available choices for policymakers in the crisis situation. From this point of view, it is important that the refugee crisis of 2015–16 was not the first refugee crisis in Europe. Other such crises have preceded this one and have shaped the policy heritage at both the EU and the national level, which in turn was what the decision-makers relied upon when the problem pressure and the political pressure kept mounting during the summer and early fall of 2015. As [Geddes \(2021\)](#) argues, policymakers' past experiences with crises in the migration domain generally shape their representations of what is normal about migration. Perceptions of normality, in turn, define what they know how to do and what they think they are expected to do next.

Crucially, in the asylum policy domain, responsibility is shared between the EU and the member states. In asylum policy, the mixture of interdependence and independence of the member states imposes reciprocal constraints on the decision-makers at each level of the EU polity. The limited competence of the EU in this domain posed a great challenge for policymaking in the crisis, a challenge that was enhanced by the diversity

of the domain-specific policy legacies in the member states. As a result of the lack of harmonization of minimum standards between member states and of the deficient capacity of some national asylum systems, the entire CEAS rested on what has been called an organized hypocrisy (Krasner 1999; Lavenex 2018; van Middelaar 2019: 103ff).

Second, the characteristics of the crisis situation proved to be decisive for the policymaking in the various episodes. Thus, the problem structure of this crisis implied a high degree of urgency but only a limited degree of uncertainty. The refugee movements were predictable, but little was done to prevent escalation. The core of the CEAS, the Dublin and Schengen regulations, proved unsuited to channel the inflows. The EU Commission was, indeed, preparing for the advent of the crisis, but when it arrived in full force in September 2015, it still hit the member states unprepared and required responses under conditions of high urgency. It was the external shock of mass displacements that created the urgency for the decision-makers at the national and EU levels. This shock came to a head in the summer and fall of 2015. Crucially as well, the shock was asymmetrical: While some member states hardly experienced any problem pressure at all during the crisis, it was the least prepared among them (such as Greece and Hungary) that were hit particularly hard. The asymmetrical distribution of problem-solving capacity and problem pressure across member states, combined with the independence that member states have retained in asylum policymaking, made joint responses particularly difficult.

The variation of the policy heritage combined with the variable problem and political pressure exerted by the crisis created a complex configuration of transnational interests, aligning EU countries into four types: frontline states (Greece and Italy), transit states (Austria and Hungary), open destination states (Germany and Sweden), and closed destination states (France and the UK), as well as a residual category of bystander states that have hardly been affected by the crisis at all (Chapter 4). This typology guided our analysis, although we are conscious of the fact that even within the same type, the crisis experience varied to a considerable extent. Thus, among the frontline states, Greece experienced a sudden and explosive shock of inflow, while Italy faced small but reoccurring shocks, which had already started before the refugee crisis of 2015–16 and continued during 2017 and 2018. In spite of such variations, the interests of the states of a given type more or less aligned during the crisis. However, interests also converged across some types. Thus, the most important adversarial coalition that was forged in the crisis, the Visegrad 4 coalition, was composed of a transit state (Hungary) and three bystander

states (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia), which shared a common opposition to relocation schemes.

Political pressure added to the predicament of a number of key member states. This type of pressure is indicated by the salience of the migration issue in public opinion and by the presence of a radical right challenger party. In terms of the salience of the issue in public opinion, political pressure was added to the problem pressure in precisely those member states where the latter was greatest. In addition, in the two transit states (Austria and Hungary), the government came under pressure from the radical right, which had already been strong before the crisis, whereas in the two open destination states (Germany and Sweden), the originally weak radical right achieved an electoral breakthrough at the time the crisis hit. Under the cumulation of problem and political pressure, open destination and transit states became major protagonists in the management of the crisis. The combined pressure became particularly important in the case of Germany – because of its size and influence, which enabled it to take the lead in common initiatives. Confirming the public goods literature (Thielemann 2018: 69), Germany came to shoulder a disproportionate part of the common burden, since it had potentially more to lose (in absolute terms) from the nonprovision of the public good in terms of stability and security, and since it was also able to unilaterally make a significant contribution to the provision of the good.

Biermann et al. (2017) acknowledge the asymmetrical nature of this crisis, but they distinguish between only two types of member states – those affected by the crisis and those unaffected by it. This simple dichotomy does not do justice to the complexity of the interest configuration among the member states during the crisis. In the short run, the transit and open destination states shared a common interest in stopping the inflow at the external borders, which aligned them with the frontline states but placed them in opposition to the restrictive destination and the bystander states, which were not directly affected by the inflow. However, with regard to the accommodation of asylum seekers, the position of the transit states was more ambiguous, since they clearly benefited from the secondary movements of the refugees within the EU. Moreover, the interests of the frontline and destination states were not fully aligned with each other either: If they shared a common interest in the short run, they were on opposing ends with regard to the reform of the CEAS. Together with the other member states, open destination states were in favor of restoring the Dublin regulation, which attributes responsibility for accommodating incoming refugees to the frontline states. By contrast, the priority of the frontline states was to reform the CEAS such that they would no longer have to assume the entire responsibility for accommodating the inflow

Table 15.1 *Summary of member state characteristics*

Type of state	Crisis situation				Prevailing conflicts		
	Policy heritage: capacity	Policy heritage: openness	Problem press	Political press	Primary	Secondary	Politicization
Frontline							
Greece	Low	Closed	High	Low	International	—	High (late)
Italy	Medium	Medium	High	High	International	—	High (late)
Transit							
Hungary	Low	Closed	High	High	International	Part/soc	High (peak)
Austria	Medium	Medium	High	High	International	Intragov	High (peak)
Open destination							
Germany	High	Open	High	High	Intragovernmental	International	High (peak)
Sweden	High	Open	High	High	Partisan	Societal	High (peak)
Closed destination							
France	Low	Closed	Low	Low	Partisan	—	Low
UK	Low	Closed	Low	Low	Partisan	Societal	Low

of new arrivals. [Table 15.1](#) summarizes the crisis situation in the eight member states of our study and also provides some information about conflict structures and politicization – to which we now turn.

Actors and Their Conflict Structures

Given the crisis situation, we identified the configurations of actors who attempted to deal with the crisis and the conflict structures between them at both levels of the EU polity. Member state governments proved to be the pivotal actors in the two-level game of policymaking at both levels of this polity. In line with expectations, it is executive decision-making led by representatives of member state governments that prevailed in the policymaking episodes during the refugee crisis. At the EU level, international conflicts involving members states and their key executives (with a dominant role played by Germany and its chancellor) predominated ([Chapter 7](#)), while at the domestic level, governments faced essentially four types of conflicts: international, partisan, societal (represented above all by NGOs defending humanitarian rights), and intragovernmental conflicts – with the first two being more common than the latter two ([Chapter 6](#)).

In line with our theoretical framework, international conflicts include both vertical oppositions between member states and the EU (supranational conflicts) and horizontal ones between various groups of member states (transnational conflicts) or between member states and third countries (externalization conflicts). As the crisis progressed at the EU level, these conflicts coalesced into two camps that express the emerging integration–demarcation cleavage – the EU core coalition (including destination and frontline states in addition to EU actors in their quest for burden sharing) and the sovereignty coalition (including transit and bystander states preventing any form of burden sharing or policy reform). The reduction of the complex interest structure among member states to such a simple, binary configuration is a result of the onslaught of the sovereignty coalition, which succeeded in sidelining all other conflicts between member states. In addition to this major dimension of conflict, a secondary dimension also contributes to the structuration of conflict at the EU level – a humanitarian–realist dimension opposing a coalition of civil society actors, international organizations (UNHCR), and domestic opposition parties (demanding a more humanitarian policy approach) to the executive-dominated realism of the member states and the EU authorities.

At the domestic level, the parallel presence of the four types of conflict lines constitutes perhaps the most important feature of the refugee crisis. In contrast to the EU-level conflicts that largely unfolded between

member states and EU institutions, the domestic debates revealed a much more complex reality with a diverse set of actors involved. Throughout the refugee crisis, governments were trapped in a two-level game, with their bargaining power in the European arena conditioned by the type and the intensity of conflict they faced from domestic stakeholders. However, the prevalence of the four conflict types varied according to the type of member state. International conflicts prevailed in frontline states, which were mainly concerned with border controls during the crisis. International conflicts about border control were also characteristic for transit states in the first two periods of the crisis but lost importance in these states during the third period, when the governments of the transit states turned to primarily domestic issues: Hungary's government started to exploit the refugee issue for its own political purposes, which gave rise to partisan and societal conflicts, and the Austrian government turned to retrenchment of asylum rules, which involved intragovernmental conflicts. In both types of destination states, international conflicts were of lesser importance. Even if, in these states, too, the most decisive measures concerned border controls – keeping the borders open (in Germany) or closing them down (in the other three), the episodes were mostly dealing with the retrenchment of asylum rules. Accordingly, intragovernmental conflicts prevailed in Germany, partisan conflicts in France, and partisan conflicts in combination with societal conflicts in Sweden and the UK.

At the domestic level, international conflicts result from the interdependence of the member states and their embedding into the framework of the common EU asylum policy. They arose in border controls episodes in which national governments opposed EU actors, the governments of other member states and of third countries, and/or other supranational institutions such as the UN over what were usually unilaterally rebordering measures. Such conflicts stand out from the rest, with more than double the level of politicization and support behind governments. Thus, the involvement of international actors seems to simultaneously lead to higher levels of politicization and to higher levels of government support as it draws in a broader group of participants but at the same time tends to mute criticism from domestic opponents.

Among the domestic opponents, mainstream opposition parties emerged as the most important adversaries of national governments, although on occasion they were joined by challenger parties from the radical left and especially from the radical right. Surprisingly, during the refugee crisis, the radical right has not played a unique role in articulating the integration–demarcation cleavage at the domestic level. When further zooming in on partisan conflicts between the national governments

and the opposition, but also within the government itself (Chapter 8), we focused on two critical aspects of government composition – fragmentation and ideology. Unsurprisingly, as governments in the member states covered by our study range from monolithic single-party governments (the Fidesz government in Hungary and the Mitsotakis government in Greece) to grand coalitions (in Germany and Austria), fragmentation was closely associated with intragovernmental conflicts. Some of these coalitions were further fragmented on ideological grounds, as we have witnessed in the case of the M5S–Lega coalition in Italy. However, overall, the ideological makeup of the government was only weakly related to the intensity of the partisan conflict and did not play a crucial role in determining its substantive content. In substantive terms, it is rather the ideological orientation of the partisan opposition that turned out to be decisive. When the opposition comes from the radical right – and to a lesser extent, from the center right – it tends to be justified with security–sovereignty–identitarian arguments, while opposition from the center left tends to be justified with humanitarian–solidaristic–democratic arguments.

In order to better understand how they justify their opposition to the reception (accommodation) of refugees, we analyzed in more detail the arguments and frames used by right-wing actors during the refugee crisis. As we have pointed out in Chapter 9, the opponents to immigration have to deal with the challenge of humanitarian arguments in favor of the protection of refugees. To come to terms with this challenge, anti-immigration actors, predominantly from the right, are complementing their rhetoric with frames that correspond to Hirschman's (1991) rhetoric of reaction. They argue that the aid provided to refugees is bringing about perverse outcomes; resulting in more human tragedy than it averts; and that, concurrently, it places our societies in grave jeopardy due to the social changes brought about by the refugee inflow. Analyzing the discourse employed by radical and mainstream right parties, our results underline that, apart from a common focus on security frames (with the exception of the British Conservatives), there is virtually no convergence of their rhetoric in a transnational radical right discourse. However, even if they do not deploy a common rhetorical and framing template, they share a common pool of arguments, from which they liberally borrow a wide array of frames and themes, depending on their country's context, the political competition, and the issues that were dominant when the crisis was introduced in their respective countries. The result is a sort of kaleidoscope through which different patterns and permutations of arguments and frames present themselves as each party sees fit, depending on its strategic calculus and the country's status quo.

Dynamics of Policymaking across Polity Levels

Regarding the general unfolding of the policy episodes (Chapter 5), it proved to be useful to distinguish between three periods – the precrisis period, which started in early 2013 with the initiation of the first episode in our set and lasted until August 2015, when the crisis situation became acute; the peak period, lasting from September 2015 until the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement in March 2016; and the postpeak period, which extended over several years from April 2016 up to the spring of 2020. The politicization of the crisis reached its apex during the peak period, at both levels. For the EU, politicization is single peaked at the time of the EU–Turkey agreement; for the member states, there are two peaks, one at the moment the crisis exploded in September 2015 and another at the time of the adoption of the EU–Turkey agreement. More limited peaks follow in the third phase at the level of the member states.

The overall level of politicization is a direct response to problem and political pressures in the crisis situation. However, if we go to the level of the individual member states, the association between pressure and politicization at the peak of the crisis turns out to be close only in the two open destination states and in one of the transit states (Austria), and only for two of the three indicators for pressure. The reason is that policy episodes were politicized not only by pressure in the crisis situation but also by factors endogenous to politics, which became increasingly important as the crisis progressed. Among these factors we noted the anticipating reactions of policymakers, the strategies of political entrepreneurs (especially important in Germany, Italy, and Hungary) designed to create a crisis situation where there was none (anymore) for political purposes, key triggering events such as terrorist attacks (important in both Germany and France), the legislative cycle (as in the strategies of the new ministers of the interior, Salvini and Seehofer, and in one of the three late episodes in Greece), and in general the endogenous dynamics of policy reactions to the crisis once they have been set in motion. In the special case of Hungary, three of the five episodes occurred after the crisis peaked and problem pressure ceased to exist. These episodes all refer to measures that the Fidesz government under Viktor Orbán introduced in its attempt to outbid its radical right competitor as a defender of the national cause.

Our detailed analysis of support for government policies by elite actors, broadly understood (including governments, opposition parties, civil society organizations, and international actors), shows variation over the course of the episodes. The results indicate that far from the elite closing ranks behind government proposals as the “rally-around-the-flag”

perspective would lead us to expect, elite groups appear to have distanced themselves from the government initiatives in response to mounting problem pressure (Chapter 10). Depending on the context, elite groups used the strategic opportunity offered by mounting problem pressure to signal opposition to the governments' proposals and, in response to the pressure exerted by the growing strength of the radical right, to step up dissent. The elite response proved to be particularly critical during the first two phases of the crisis, in destination states, and in episodes related to asylum policies (rather than border controls). In terms of endogenous effects, the analysis of elite support confirms that elite groups engaged in strategic behavior in reaction to other parts of the elite. While dissenters within governments were responsive only to partisan opposition actors, the behavioral calculus among opposition, civil society, and international actors was more complex. In one way or another and to different degrees, the governments' opponents systematically responded to each other's expressed level of support for the government's initiatives, albeit sometimes with substantial lags. Though the government, by virtue of its central role in the policy process, was, indeed, the main originator or target of conflict, other actors hardly acted in isolation and followed in each other's footsteps when attacking the government's policies.

We analyzed in detail the dynamics of cross-level episodes (around half of all the episodes), which are characterized by the expansion of conflict beyond the national political space, that is, by a particularly high intensity of politicization, and which demonstrate the interdependence of the two levels of policymaking in the EU polity (Chapter 11). Border closures and the relocation issue gave rise to a large number of such episodes, which all result from the spillover effects created by unilateral actions on the part of some member state or by inaction on the part of the EU within the EU policy framework. Such episodes refer to both top-down and bottom-up cross-level interventions in conflicts originating either at the international or the domestic level. Top-down interventions involve both regulations and capacity building, and they occur in conflicts about the (lack of) implementation of EU policies in individual member states or in conflicts arising from ("deviating") domestic policies violating EU policy. Bottom-up interventions involve unilateral policy measures on the part of individual member states to substitute for EU policy that has not been forthcoming and subsequent attempts to "upload" this policy to the EU level. In addition, they include unilateral measures designed to signal to the EU and other member states the domestic incapacity to implement EU policy or unilateral appeals for support/mediation in some domestic/bilateral policy conflict.

We have illustrated the great variety of cross-level dynamics with the four member states that played a particularly prominent role during the crisis. Greece served to illustrate both “top down” EU interventions to increase the domestic capacity of a “foot-dragging” frontline state to deal with the crisis (in the Hotspot episode) and “bottom-up” demands of a frontline state for support by the EU (in the border conflict with Turkey). The case of Italy, our second frontline state, focused on “bottom-up” (“self-help”) efforts to substitute unilaterally for EU policy (Mare Nostrum and the EU–Libya agreement) and subsequent attempts to upload the unilateral measures to the EU, but it also featured episodes of top-down interventions by the EU to come to terms with externalities created by Italian policy for its neighbors (in the border conflicts with France and Austria and the conflicts created by the Port Closures). In contrast to the Greek case, the Italian examples show how factors endogenous to domestic policymaking are creating international conflicts and cross-level interactions. The Hungarian case served to illustrate unilateral “self-help” actions (the Fence Building and the Legal Border Barrier Amendment) substituting for EU policies, as well as conflicts endogenously created in domestic politics, which led to top-down interventions attempting to punish “deviating” policies (the Civil Law and the “Stop Soros” legislation) and to bottom-up “signaling” of the incapacity (“our hands are tied”) to implement EU policy (the quota referendum). The German episode (the CDU–CSU Conflict), finally, illustrated the appeal of a member state to the EU for help in resolving a domestic conflict and showed how domestic policymaking can trigger symbolic gestures of EU policymaking in support of a member state government.

Among the great variety of cross-levels episodes, the most important for our study is the EU–Turkey Deal due to its intense salience, centrality, and consequences (Chapter 12). In order to show how an EU policymaking episode is domesticated in national policymaking, we coded this episode at both the EU level based on international sources and in four of our eight member states – Germany, Greece, Hungary, and the UK – based on the national press. Our results indicate that the very same agreement had very different implications in terms of conflict and domestic policymaking in different countries. At the EU level, the dominant conflict line in the EU–Turkey episode opposed the EU/its member states and Turkey. While the episode was hardly noticed in the UK at all, this conflict structure also emerges from the German and the Hungarian debates. In Germany, the agreement allowed Chancellor Merkel to escape from the trap of her open-doors policy. In Greece, by contrast, this conflict appeared much weaker, despite the episode’s great

salience in this frontline state. The Greek debate was far less conflictive and polarized than the debates in the other countries. While the Greeks covered this episode a lot, they did so in overwhelmingly positive or neutral terms. Moreover, as the agreement faded from the attention of the German public once it had been concluded, in Greece, it had an ambivalent and lingering character: It successfully stopped the inflow of refugees, but it left many refugees stranded within Greek borders, whom Greece could only provide for with EU support.

The Political Outcomes of the Crisis

We have argued that the characteristics of the crisis situation in combination with the policy-specific institutional context generate distinct patterns of policymaking in the EU. This implies that we cannot easily generalize from one crisis to another. In the refugee crisis, the low capacity and lack of resources of supranational institutions in the asylum policy domain made crisis resolution highly dependent on intergovernmental decision-making. At the same time, the potential for agreement in intergovernmental negotiations was constrained by the asymmetrical distribution of crisis pressures among member states. The combination of asymmetrical incidence and joint competence between EU and member states proved to be particularly critical for joint solutions. As pointed out by [Ferrara and Kriesi \(2021: 13\)](#) and as documented throughout this volume, such a setting renders joint policymaking initiatives and collective action solutions difficult and, instead, leads to unilateral reactions on the part of member states, the spillover effects of which unleash and exacerbate transnational conflicts and give rise to a complex web of cross-level interactions to come to terms with these conflicts. As a result of these difficulties, the EU has found only stop-gap solutions to the refugee crisis and still tries to reform its dysfunctional common asylum policy.

Hardly any integration steps resulted from the crisis with respect to the reform of the rules for a common asylum policy ([Börzel and Risse 2018](#)). Instead, the crisis led to the extension of essentially intergovernmental protectionist policies limiting access to the CEAS ([Lavenex 2018](#)). Externalization and reinforcement of the external borders temporarily stopped the inflow of refugees. The EU–Turkey agreement was the key measure to bring the flow of refugees into the EU to a temporary stop. As [Lavenex \(2018\)](#) has pointed out, however, the externalization of the policy to Turkey and Libya, countries that are not or not fully party to the Geneva Convention, amounted to the circumvention of EU standards. Moreover, the non-legally-binding EU–Turkey “statement”

eschews fundamental principles of accountability and of the rule of law. The “statement” was an informal deal concluded by the EU member states in their capacity as independent legal subjects. This has been “failing forward” in the direction of “defensive integration” – a combination of reinforcing external and internal borders.

This policy response did not stray very far from the well-known policy heritage in the asylum policy domain. EU asylum policymaking remained prone to continuity rather than change (Ripoll Servent and Zaun 2020), and the same can be said of national policymaking. Despite crises often acting as “windows of opportunity,” the breakdown of the EU’s asylum system in the 2015–16 crisis triggered the same kind of response as in past crises – namely, a shift of responsibility outward and a reinforcement of external border control at the EU level (Guiraudon 2018). At the national level, it led to the reintroduction of border controls at the domestic borders and to the further retrenchment of asylum policy across the member states. In general, the measures introduced during the crisis were consistent with an approach at the national and EU levels that can be traced back for more than two decades (Geddes, Hadj Abdou, and Brumat 2020). In this policy domain, the EU seems to be stuck in a “sub-optimal equilibrium” (see Hix and Hoyland 2022: 363).

In fall 2020, five years after the peak of the refugee crisis, the new Commission under President Ursula von der Leyen presented a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, a comprehensive proposal for the reform of the EU’s migration and asylum policy designed to provide for a long-term solution fully grounded in European values and international law. The proposed pact proved to be deficient, however, and at the time of this writing (September 2022), none of its provisions has been implemented yet. Crucially, the key proposal for a “Regulation of asylum and migration management” left the core principles of Dublin III unchanged. In particular, the responsibility of the country of first entry into the EU still remained in place. Unsurprisingly, the ministers of the interior of the southern European frontline states heavily criticized this unchanged distribution of responsibilities, and critics like ECRE (2021: 6) pointed out that “it is inherently paradoxical to maintain a system which generates unfairness that has to be corrected through solidarity mechanisms.”

In June 2022, twenty-one months after the launching of the new pact and in the midst of a new refugee crisis linked to the war in Ukraine (see below), the European Commission announced that member states had agreed to start implementing a voluntary mechanism offering relocations, financial support, and other measures for member

states in need.¹ The French presidency claimed that this “Solidarity Declaration” was a first step in the gradual implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. According to the Commission, this declaration was to provide a voluntary, simple, and predictable solidarity mechanism designed to support the member states most affected in the Mediterranean as well as other member states under pressure, including states on the western Atlantic route. This declaration, however, was no more than a declaration of intent, and of very limited scope, indeed: It promised to relocate only 10,000 asylum seekers per year, and only a dozen member states declared their willingness to accommodate them. Hungary, Poland, Austria, and the Baltic states continued to reject any kind of solidarity mechanism.²

Meanwhile, the pressure exerted by asylum seekers on the European borders had temporarily decreased because of the Covid pandemic. In 2020, the number of first applications for asylum in Europe was as low as it had not been since 2013. At the same time, the refugee issue largely disappeared from public attention, which was now fully focused on the pandemic and its consequences. But the lull proved to be only temporary. In 2021, the pressure returned once again as the border crossings on the Balkan route increased, as did crossings on the Mediterranean route. Rescue ships like the *Geo Barents*, the *Sea-Watch 3*, the *Ocean Viking*, and the Italian coast guard continued to rescue hundreds of migrants in distress at sea.³ The situation continued to be in flux, far from a state of equilibrium.

In addition, a series of incidents revealed Europe’s continued vulnerability to the weaponization of migration flows by third countries. Thus, in May 2021, the Moroccan authorities, in reaction to what they perceived as a lack of Spanish support on the issue of Western Sahara, opened the gates at the border with Spain’s North African enclave Ceuta, letting pass some 8,000 refugees of mostly Moroccan origin. The influx, the biggest in recent Spanish history, created a political crisis in Spain. Even more seriously, in summer 2021, Belorussian dictator Alexander Lukashenko used asylum seekers from Middle Eastern war zones to put pressure on the EU in reaction to the sanctions the EU had imposed on Belarus following his fraudulent 2020 reelection. Lukashenko’s first target was Lithuania, followed by Poland. In this most blatant example

¹ European Commission 2022. Migration and Asylum: Commission welcomes today’s progress in the Council on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, Press Release, Brussels, June 22, 2022

² See NZZ, June 11, 2022.

³ See, for example, NZZ, August 24, 2021; October 23, 2021; November 18, 2021; February 23, 2022; May 31, 2022.

of coercive diplomacy, Lukashenko used displaced people as a weapon against the EU in an attempt to exploit its deep transnational divisions and public fears of uncontrolled immigration.⁴ However, he miscalculated: Lithuania and Poland both built fences at their respective borders with Belorussia and manned the borders to defend the fences. Thus, in the thinly populated border area between Poland and Belorussia, 15,000 Polish border guards, police officers, and soldiers ended up facing the thousands of migrants from the Middle East who, instigated by Belorussian officials, tried to break through the fences.⁵ Whereas the EU Commission had once chided its member state governments for building fences at its external borders, it now supported the fence building with enhanced sanctions against Belorussia. The EU's resolve eventually induced the Belorussian dictator to back down, and many of the Middle Eastern asylum seekers returned to their home countries.

Finally, while the EU expected Turkey to stand by its commitments and to deliver on all elements of the agreement,⁶ the fragility of the agreement was demonstrated by the events in spring 2020, when Turkey unilaterally tried to break it by inciting refugees to cross the Greek border – an episode that we have analyzed in detail in [Chapter 11](#). After the passage of the Covid-19 crisis, in spring 2022, President Erdogan increased the pressure on the Greek border once again, threatening Greece with an invasion of asylum seekers.⁷ In reaction to this increased pressure, the Greek border guards had prevented no fewer than 154,000 people from crossing the river Evros at the Turkish–Greek border during the first eight months of 2022.

In the absence of a sustainable policy to resolve the problem pressure, the refugee crisis did nothing to solve the underlying conflicts between and within member states. The uncoordinated, ad hoc way in which EU policymaking developed during the refugee crisis served to poison transnational relationships among member states beyond the narrow confines of asylum policy and led to the formation of transnational coalitions, which are likely to haunt EU policymaking far beyond the refugee crisis. Thus, the key adversarial coalition that took shape during the refugee crisis – the sovereignty coalition of the Visegrad 4 countries – reappeared and solidified in the subsequent rule-of-law and Covid-19 crises. The

⁴ See FT, December 5, 2022.

⁵ See NZZ, November 11, 2021.

⁶ European Commission (COM 2021, 590 final, 9/29/2021). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social committee and the Committee of the regions on the Report on Migration and Asylum, p. 17.

⁷ See NZZ, September 7, 2022.

seeds for the conflicts in the later crisis were sown in the refugee crisis, and in that sense, the policy failures in the refugee crisis created a latent potential for a polity crisis of the EU. In fact, the transnational conflicts that characterized policymaking during the refugee crisis were exploited by the respective governments in Hungary and Poland to transform their political regimes into illiberal democracies, which created the subsequent rule-of-law crisis (Bohle, Greskovits, and Naczyk 2023).

The refugee crisis also exacerbated the existing conflict lines in public opinion (Chapter 13). As our analysis of public opinion in the aftermath of the crisis showed, the policy-specific conflicts in the public are above all structured by the relocation debate and by the Dublin Reform, while the prevailing policies involving external or internal bordering or externalization are comparatively consensual. At the transnational level, the opposition between the frontline and destination states on the one hand and the V4 countries on the other is mirrored in public opinion. At the domestic level, we find the expected opposition between nationalists and cosmopolitans that is politically articulated by the radical right and some nationalist-conservative parties on the one side and by the left and some parties of the mainstream right on the other side. Comparing the two levels, our results show that conflicts surrounding asylum policy are more intense at the domestic level between supporters and opponents of migration than between various types of countries. Generally, our results suggest that the conflict potentials of immigration policies, rather than being fully mobilized or alleviated, are still large and have markedly increased over the past few years, especially in the destination states of northwestern Europe. The large opposition to immigration in some member states is bound to constrain the options available to policymakers as it is likely to constitute a major obstacle to joint solutions.

The refugee crisis also had electoral repercussions (Chapter 14). While it did not give rise to a wholesale transformation of party-systems in any country, as was the case in the Eurozone crisis, the refugee crisis did make room for various actors that were able to profit from the increased salience of the immigration issue. In contrast to the Eurozone crisis, which caught several actors by surprise or forced them to adopt untenable and unpopular positions, the refugee crisis with its cumulative and expected nature allowed much more room for strategic choices by parties that were able to anticipate the potential political impact of the crisis and react strategically to the country-specific crisis situation. The most salient pattern of transformation our results underline is one of drift toward the right more generally, as more parties on this side of the spectrum rushed to capitalize on the issue and prioritized it in their campaign discourse. Even if this pattern of drift enhances the impression of

stability, the transformation of the party system is still apparent in some countries, as right-wing actors who persisted in their anti-immigration message enjoyed electoral gains at the expense of their proximate competitors and of the left. In some countries, such as Hungary, Austria, the UK, and Greece, nationalist conservative parties displaced the radical right, while in others, such as Italy, Germany, France, and Sweden, the radical right increased its vote share at the expense of the mainstream right.

The drift to the nationalist-conservative right as well as the exacerbation of the domestic conflict between nationalists and cosmopolitans and of the transnational conflicts between a sovereignty coalition and a core coalition bent on further integration suggests that the refugee crisis has undermined the solidarity between member states in the EU. Far from contributing to further bonding, the way this crisis has been managed by the EU and its member states has left the core issues unresolved and rendered future problem-solving more difficult.

An Afterthought

If the 2015–16 refugee crisis was not the first one, it will not be the last one either. On February 24, 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine, which triggered the greatest refugee inflow into the EU ever. Until the end of May 2023, more than 8 million refugees from Ukraine had been recorded across Europe.⁸ Faced with the enormous number of inflowing refugees, the EU reacted very rapidly: On March 2, the Commission proposed the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive granting temporary protection to all those fleeing the war, meaning that the Ukrainian refugees were to be given residence permits and to have access to education and to the labor market.⁹ On March 4, the Council activated this proposal.¹⁰ This was the first time the Temporary Protection Directive, which had been adopted in 2001, was activated.¹¹ By the end of May 2023, of the 8 million refugees who had fled from Ukraine to Europe, a

⁸ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> (last updated on May 23, 2023).

⁹ European Commission, 2 March 2022, Press release. Ukraine: Commission proposes temporary protection for people fleeing the war in Ukraine and guidelines for border checks.

¹⁰ Council implementing decisions 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection.

¹¹ Council directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.

large number had returned to Ukraine, 1.4 million had stayed in Poland, and 3 million had moved on to other European countries – 1 million of them to Germany.

Compared to these numbers, the previous waves of refugees seeking protection in the EU pale to a considerable extent. Thus, at the end of 2019, the EU had hosted some 2.6 million refugees, equivalent to 0.6 percent of its population.¹² Still, the earlier inflows of refugees into Europe led to a much greater politicization, that is, greater salience and polarization, and deeper political conflicts between and within EU member states than the much more massive inflow of Ukrainian refugees. Following [Moise, Dennison, and Kriesi \(2023\)](#), we can explain the different reaction of Europeans to Ukrainian refugees with the extraordinary event of having a war on their doorstep, which fundamentally shaped their perspectives on refugees fleeing that war. Europeans are less likely to be aware of the exact circumstances of refugees from the Middle East and Africa. In turn, the fact that Europeans are much more accepting of Ukrainian refugees than they were of Syrian refugees and they currently are of refugees from Afghanistan or Somalia is likely to constitute an important reason why elites have managed to stay united in their strong support for refugees in the Ukrainian case.

We believe that it would be helpful to start the debate about a joint solution to the asylum conundrum with the recognition of the restricted proportion and the partially temporary nature of the overall problem. It would also be helpful to remind ourselves of the disproportionate political consequences of a failure to come to terms with this problem. As we have seen in our account of the refugee crisis, the potential for exploitation by political elites of the issues linked to refugees and asylum seekers is huge and is actually shamelessly used by political entrepreneurs from the right in various member states. Given the importance of the integration–demarcation conflict in the European party systems, the maintenance of the European asylum system in spite of its obvious inadequacy during the crisis constitutes a latent time bomb that might explode at any moment if inflows of unwanted groups of asylum seekers increase again and the issue becomes once again more salient.

Given this state of affairs, the search for a solution should not be left to the experts of the policy domain but should become the responsibility of the chief executives at the EU level and in member state governments. The goal is to regain control over the flows of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe in a sustainable way. Proposals to this purpose, outside

¹² European Commission (COM 2020, 609 final, 9/23/2020). Communication from the Commission on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

of the box of the specialists of justice and home affairs, do exist (e.g., [Koopmans 2023](#)). To be sure, given the deep conflicts between and within member states, a joint solution will not be easy to find, but if, in a sufficiently large number of member states, the moderates on both sides of the domestic political divide are able to jump over their respective shadows, a political compromise may be possible.

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