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Crisis situation and crisis policymaking: a comparison of Germany and Hungary in two refugee crises

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ABSTRACT

Why was policymaking in the 2015–16 refugee crisis so conflictual, while policymaking in the Ukrainian refugee crisis of 2022 proved consensual? We argue that the crisis situation – the problem pressure, policy-specific institutional context of crisis policymaking at the EU level, and the resulting political pressure – made a crucial difference. Based on a Policy Process Analysis (PPA) dataset that systematically tracks the policy debate, we test and corroborate our argument by comparing the policymaking in two countries that differ sharply in their domestic asylum policies and their attitudes toward the EU: Hungary and Germany. However, the country-specific contexts still make a difference: in spite of the similarity regarding crisis-specific policymaking in the two countries, the policy outcome varies between them, independently of the crisis, as a result of the differences in domestic asylum policies and EU attitudes.

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KEYWORDS Refugee crisis; Hungary; Germany; European Union; temporary protection directive; crisis policymaking

Introduction

In this paper, we compare the policymaking of two EU member states – Germany and Hungary – during two refugee crises – the 2015–16 crisis and the 2022 Ukraine crisis. We ask whether the crises generated a conflictual or consensual decision-making and whether the policy outcome was accommodating. With Hungary and Germany, we select two countries for our comparison, which both experienced conflictual crisis policymaking in 2015–16 and consensual policymaking in 2022, but whose policy outcome was country-specific in both crises: while Germany pursued an accommodating policy in both crises,

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Hungary's domestic policy was non-accommodating in 2015–16 and, at best, partially accommodating in 2022. In 2015–16, Hungary refused to accommodate any refugees and obstructed the European relocation scheme for sharing the burden of the refugees (Bíró-Nagy, 2021; Kriesi *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, Germany had taken in a large share of the asylum-seekers arriving in Europe at the time and actively pursued a shared European solution to the crisis (Alexander, 2017; Kriesi *et al.*, 2024; Laubenthal, 2019). In 2022, Hungary opened its borders for Ukrainian refugees but did not provide sufficient accommodation for them, continued to reject other refugees, and opposed other policies related to the war at the EU level (Korkut & Fazekas, 2023; Nagy, 2023), while Germany supported both refugees and other EU-level policies.

This combination of crisis-specific policymaking with country-specific policy outcomes is puzzling. We argue that the crisis situation, determined by the nature of each crisis (i.e., the wars and resulting refugee types), made the crucial difference for the policymaking in the two crises, while the country differences account for the different policy outcomes across crises. We spell out the mechanisms that led to conflictual policymaking in 2015–16 and consensual policymaking in 2022. The context trigger of the crisis, the Syrian Civil War in 2015, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 influenced the crisis situation, which in turn impacted policymaking. The crisis context affects the outcome through three related mechanisms that form the crisis situation. The first is the *problem pressure*, namely the inflow of refugees. We note a large inflow in both crises but an even more significant one in 2022, putting tremendous pressure on the EU and its member states in the initial weeks of the crisis. However, the profile of the refugees in the Ukraine crisis was much more acceptable to public opinion than their profile in the previous crisis. The second is the *policy-specific institutional context* of decision-making at the EU level. Due to the extreme problem pressure, but even more so due to the EU's geopolitical involvement in the Russian war in Ukraine, EU leaders acted quickly in the Ukraine crisis – they quickly activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), whereas they were unable to adopt a joint solution in the 2015–16 crisis (Biermann *et al.*, 2019; Kriesi *et al.*, 2024; Lavenex, 2018; Scipioni, 2018). Problem pressure has a direct effect on *political pressure*, which is exerted by public opinion and political entrepreneurs: political pressure is exerted by the salience of the issue in the public, which provides an opportunity for its mobilisation by political entrepreneurs. However, the effect of problem pressure on political pressure is also mediated by the institutional context at the EU level, which may attenuate or enhance this effect. Public opinion was favourable to the support of refugees in Germany in both crises, but in Hungary, it was more favourable to Ukrainians in 2022 than it was to Syrian refugees in 2015–16 (Letki *et al.*, 2024; Pepinsky *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, the key political entrepreneur who used the refugee crisis in 2015–16 for his own political purposes, the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán (Bíró-Nagy, 2021), chose not to politicise the

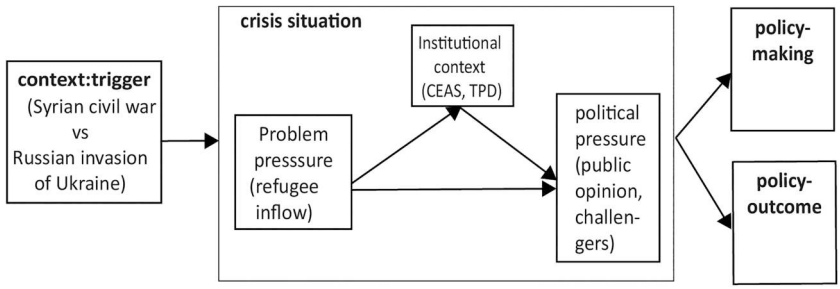

Figure 1. Main argument.

2022 crisis. We argue that his decision not to do so in 2022 was influenced by the institutional context (the TPD) at the EU level and the rather favourable public opinion in Hungary.[1]

In spite of the basic similarities of the crisis situations across the two countries, two factors endogenous to the country-specific political contexts distinguish them and make a big difference in the policy outcome, even if they had only a limited impact on the level of conflict in crisis-specific policymaking. On the one hand, problem pressure and political pressure vary according to the country-specific context. Thus, problem pressure differed between the two countries to the extent that Germany was an open destination state with an accommodating policy legacy. In contrast, as a result of its basically non-accommodating policy legacy, Hungary turned out to be a transit state with an, at best, partially accommodating policy even in the Ukraine crisis. On the other hand, the government's policies about the EU generally differed markedly between the two countries in both crises – Germany generally supported EU policies, whereas Hungary generally opposed them. Figure 1 summarises the gist of our argument.

We shall first elaborate our theoretical argument, which we illustrate by comparing the two refugee crises but which is intended to be more general. Next, we document the differences in the crisis situations of the two countries across the two crises. Then, we describe our empirical approach and present the results regarding crisis policymaking – its salience, type of crisis management, the salience of the type of actors involved, the conflict configurations, and the role played by the respective governments. Finally, we conclude with a summary and a brief discussion of our findings.

Theoretical considerations illustrated by the two refugee crises

The overall rationale

A crisis situation corresponds to an extraordinary moment of urgency and uncertainty, which poses an immediate threat to the proper functioning of

Table 1. Crisis outcome by crisis situation and country.

Crisis situation	Germany: pro-EU government, accommodating domestic policy	Hungary: anti-EU government, non-accommodating domestic policy
2015–2016 refugee crisis: High problem pressure High political pressure No joint EU decision-making	Conflictual policymaking, accommodation	Conflictual policymaking, no accommodation
2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis: High problem pressure Low political pressure Joint EU decision-making	Consensual policymaking, accommodation	Consensual policymaking, partial accommodation

the policy domain challenged by the crisis and possibly to the polity as such. Crucially, the crisis situations in 2015–16 and 2022 differed, whereas the country contexts remained more or less stable across the crisis situations. Table 1 provides a summary of our study design. We apply a paired comparison version of a most-different-systems-design. The two countries we study differ regarding their embedding in the EU polity and their domestic asylum policy. However, the two countries are confronted with the same exogenous shock in each crisis, which leads to similar policymaking per crisis. The shared crisis conditions of a given crisis override the differences between the two countries and align their policymaking in each crisis, leading to a conflictual process in the first and a consensual one in the second. A consensual process implies that the key actors involved in national policymaking – EU polity actors, national government, opposition, and civil society actors all support the government's policy, while conflictual policymaking implies that the government's policy meets with intense opposition from the other types of actors involved in the process. The policy outcomes, nevertheless, remain different and in line with the different contexts of the two countries, except that Hungary partially deviates from its non-accommodating approach in the 2022 crisis, as we shall see.

The crisis-specific problem pressure

When we refer to problem pressure, we do so from the point of view of the politicians who are expected to respond to the crisis with adequate solutions. Regarding problem pressure, we can distinguish between its origin (external vs. endogenous), its intensity (existential vs. non-existential), and its distribution (symmetrical vs. asymmetrical). At the origin of both crises was an exogenous shock. However, the crises significantly differed in the other

two respects. In the 2015–16 refugee crisis, the problem pressure was arguably less existential than in the Ukraine war, and it was more asymmetrically distributed. Both conditions made consensual policymaking much more likely in the Ukraine than in the 2015–16 crisis.

In the Ukrainian crisis, the immediate threat of the Russian attack posed an existential threat to the EU and all its member states, even if the threat to the eastern member states was more intense – a threat that triggered the security logic (Kelemen & McNamara, 2021) and a rally-around-the-flag effect (Truchlewski *et al.*, 2023), which, in turn, facilitated the consensus for a joint response. While the refugee aspect of the Ukraine crisis was not existential, refugee policy was tied in with the broader geopolitical struggle the EU was engaged in. The EU could not maintain the legitimacy of its aid to Ukraine and sanctions on Russia without also assisting refugees. Moreover, Ukraine also aspires to EU membership and frames its struggle with Russia as a struggle to join the liberal Western world and escape autocracy and corruption. Aiding Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees was, therefore, an essential step for the EU to assert both its hard and soft power.

Faced with a war of aggression on its border, the EU has taken an active, if indirect, role in the conflict by sanctioning Russia, supporting Ukraine financially and militarily, and taking in the vast majority of Ukrainian refugees. Policy towards refugees was in large part shaped by the geopolitical stance of EU countries and by the sympathy that Europeans showed to their neighbours, whom they perceived to have been unjustly attacked. It has been demonstrated that Europeans' views on Ukrainian refugees are, in large part, shaped by individual perceptions of the war (Moise *et al.*, 2024). The indirect impact of the war on the perceptions of refugees, compared to 2015–2016, was that it put the refugee aspect in second place, as both elites and public opinion focused more intensively on military aid, sanctions, and the ensuing cost-of-living crisis.

Figure 2 shows a measure of the comparative salience of the war and the refugee aspect for Hungary and Germany. It plots Google Trends data for the two countries for 'Refugee' and 'War' from 2010 until December 2023. Three patterns stand out. The first is the much higher salience, at least by this measure, of refugees in the 2015–2016 crisis than in 2022 (where we see about a third of the search interest compared to the previous period). The second is the much higher salience of war than the refugee aspect in 2022. Refugees have about a quarter of the interest at the peak in February and March 2022 for Germany and even less for Hungary. Notably, the salience of refugees quickly returns to prewar levels after the first two months of the war. On the other hand, the salience of the war drops but maintains a high level of interest. Finally, in 2015–2016 and 2022, refugees were much more salient (about twice as much) in Germany compared to Hungary. This likely reflects the higher problem pressure in Germany.

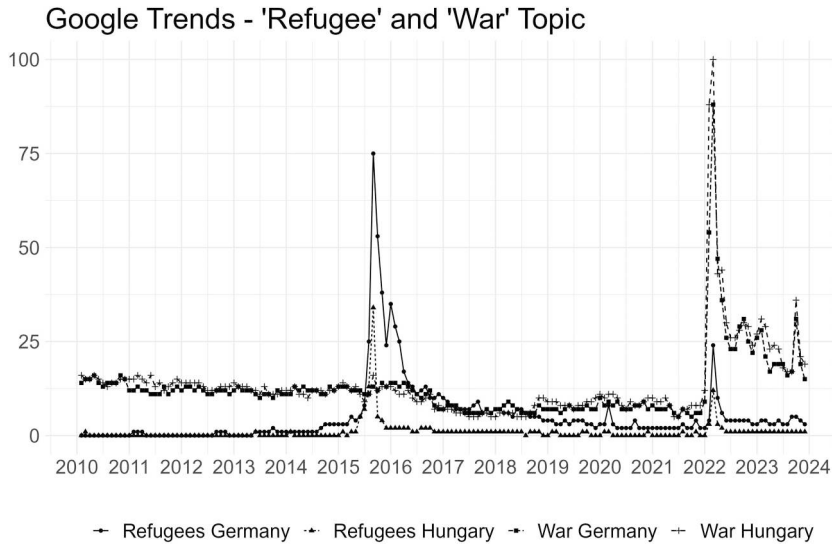

Figure 2. Salience of refugees and war.

Notably, if the threat in the Ukraine crisis was generally more existential, the specific profile of the refugees in this crisis reduced the relative danger emanating from them. While in 2015–2016, most refugees were male, younger, and predominantly Muslim, in 2022, the majority of Ukrainian refugees were female, children, Christian, and white. Specific to Hungary, which found itself as a frontline state in 2022, many of the refugees, especially in the first waves, were Transcarpathian Hungarians. Thus, in both Hungary and Germany, Ukrainian refugees did not conform to the previously built hate narratives against Muslims. They were, therefore, much more challenging to politicise and enjoyed greater public support.

Figure 3 shows comparable survey data from the Eurobarometer from 2016 and 2023 on the share of respondents in each country who believe that their country should take in refugees. We see a stark contrast in support for taking in refugees in 2016, with only about a quarter of Hungarian respondents being in favour, compared to almost 80 per cent of Germans. While support in Germany slightly declined by 2023, it was still remarkably high. In Hungary, however, support nearly doubled, reaching a majority of about 57 per cent. The question asked in the Eurobarometer does not mention which refugee type to accept. Still, it is plausible to assume that some respondents considered Ukrainian refugees in 2023.

Figure 4 uses survey data from March 2022 to show support for two refugee groups, Ukrainians and Afghans, broken down by ideological camps in both Germany and Hungary. We see that public opinion overwhelmingly supports Ukrainian refugees in both countries. In Germany, we

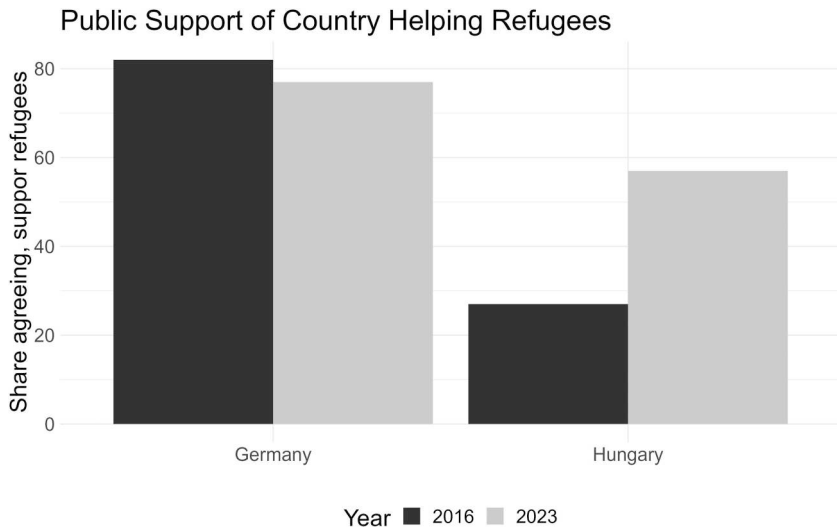

Figure 3. Eurobarometer – support for refugees.

observe a slight decrease in support for respondents who are more to the right, but support remains high. In Hungary, both the left and the right show increased support for Ukrainians. Support for Afghan refugees, however, drops precipitously for voters more to the right and far right. The latter effect is more substantial for Germany, where the left has much higher levels of support for Afghan refugees. In line with the results of

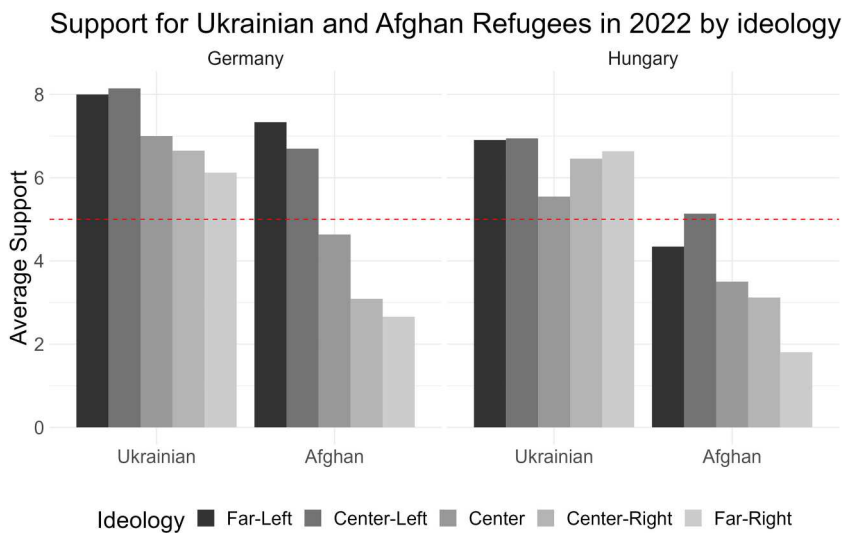

Figure 4. Support for different refugee groups.

Letki *et al.* (2024) and Pepinsky *et al.* (2024) and with the 'solidarity bias' which Weber *et al.* (2023) found for the Ukraine refugee crisis, we conclude from this data that both the context of the war and the refugee profile resulted in high public support for Ukrainian refugees.

The policy-specific institutional context in the compound EU-polity

In the compound EU polity, national crisis policymaking is embedded into crisis policymaking at the EU level. Depending on whether there is consensus for a joint approach at the EU level or not, crisis policymaking at the domestic level is expected to be more or less conflictual. If the EU decides on a joint approach, all member states are likely to implement this collaborative approach. If, by contrast, the EU fails to adopt a common strategy, unilateral action by the member states is to be expected, with serious externalities (or spillover effects) for other member states, which are expected to retaliate in kind. In this case, EU authorities can be expected to intervene to resolve the resulting conflicts between member states.

Crisis policymaking in the compound polity is policy-specific, and whether or not a joint solution is adopted depends on the policy-specific competence distribution between the levels of the polity. Without going into the details of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), let us remind ourselves that its core element, the Dublin regulation, renders border states responsible for any asylum-seeker entering the Schengen area through their territory.[2] In the refugee crisis of 2015–16, this regulation shifted the obligation of accepting and integrating asylum seekers to the southern European frontline states, where they first arrived in the EU. However, as we know, the bulk of asylum seekers did not stay in these frontline states but continued their journey towards the north of Europe. These secondary movements crossed transit states (e.g., Hungary) and ended up in open destination states (e.g., Germany). In contrast, closed destination states (e.g., France and the UK) or bystander states (e.g., Poland, Portugal) were hardly concerned by these movements. This *asymmetrical* distribution of the problem pressure, combined with the non-existential threat and the unfavourable profile of the refugees in the 2015–16 crisis, made adopting a joint EU solution very difficult. The attempt to share the burden of accommodating refugees between the member states by adopting an internal relocation scheme failed miserably in the fall of 2015 because of the obstruction of the Visegrad 4 coalition, of which Hungary was the most vocal member (Kriesi *et al.*, 2024; van Middelaar, 2019; Zaun & Servent, 2023). Only the adoption of a Plan B – the externalisation of the solution to the non-member Turkey put a stop to the inflow of refugees.

By contrast, in the Ukraine crisis, the Dublin regulation was suspended by the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which was rapidly activated and

rendered the distinction between frontline, transit, and destination states inoperative. An agreement on the TPD was reached within one week. Following the call of the home affairs ministers, on 27 February 2022, the Commission rapidly proposed activating the TPD. This directive was adopted in 2001 and was well suited to address the new crisis situation, but it had never been applied before. On 4 March 2022, the Council of Interior Ministers unanimously adopted the implementing decision for the first time. The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24 created a situation where the usual concerns of the member states were no longer relevant. Thus, no member state disputed that the Ukrainian displacement was a situation of 'massive influx' (more than 650'000 people had reached the EU by 1 March 2022, and the Commission estimated that more than 6.5 million Ukrainians could become displaced by the conflict). Also, as most Ukrainians came in with a passport that gave them visa-free entry for 90 days, the EU had to prepare for day 91.[3] Moreover, since Russia motivated its invasion of Ukraine, among other things, with its disapproval of Ukraine integrating into NATO and the EU, the latter had an immediate stake in this war as well. In addition, as we have seen, public opinion hardly posed a constraint in this case. Finally, there was no third country to stop the arrival of displaced persons. One may ask why Hungary did not veto the activation of the TPD as it launched its veto against other EU measures against the Russian attack on Ukraine – a question to which we shall return below.

The activation of the TPD has allowed displaced persons fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine to enjoy a set of harmonised rights across the Union, including residency rights, the possibility to engage in employed or self-employed activities, access to suitable accommodation, access to education for persons under 18 years old, the necessary social welfare assistance, medical or other assistance, and means of subsistence, and legal guardianship for unaccompanied minors.

As a result of this much more consensual context in the Ukraine crisis, we also expect national policymaking to have been much more consensual than in the previous crisis. There is one caveat to this broad expectation, however: the Europeanization literature (see the summary by Treib, 2014) and the related, more recent literature on differentiated policy implementation (see Zhelyazkova *et al.* (2024)) document that member states have a certain amount of discretion and autonomy in the implementation of EU directives. Thus, Zhelyazkova (2024) shows that for an earlier phase in European asylum policy (2006–2013), increased domestic politicisation and differentiated integration increased the governments' autonomy to pursue restrictive policy preferences during the national implementation of EU directives. Even if the TPD provides a consensual EU policy context, member state governments still had a lot of discretion, especially concerning the daily allowances for refugees, which varied greatly between member states and likely influenced

refugees' decisions about where to go. We shall develop this point further when we discuss the Hungarian case for the Ukraine refugee crisis.

The crisis-specific political pressure

Conflict configurations that emerge in the crisis determine opportunities and constraints of the national policymaking process. National policymaking must confront not only supranational authorities at the EU level and the governments of other member states (transnational relations) but also possible domestic opposition. Domestic partisan contestation is crucial in asylum policy. Short-term executive-led crisis management has activated opposition from both pro-demarcation (for nationalistic reasons) and pro-integration (for humanitarian reasons) forces in the party system and beyond. Partisan opposition is mobilised by opposition parties, government parties, or even cabinet members (Kriesi *et al.*, 2024).

More specifically, in the asylum policy domain, crises generally constitute a golden opportunity for the radical right to mobilise its nationalist constituencies against the admission and integration of refugees in its own country, including opposition to any joint schemes of international burden-sharing which would increase the number of refugees to be admitted on the national territory. In this policy domain, the radical right can usually count on a favourable mobilisation potential, given that public opinion tends to be highly critical of illegal immigrants, which is how the radical right easily frames asylum-seekers. Thus, in Germany, the AfD rose during the refugee crisis of 2015–16, mobilising latent structural potentials when the crisis rendered immigration issues salient. In addition to the radical right, the mainstream opposition is also likely to pin the government into the corner either by accusing it of doing too little in coming to terms with asylum-seeker flows (nationalist opposition) or of excesses and inhumane treatment of asylum-seekers (humanitarian opposition from the left, joined by civil society). Given that the Fidesz government was pursuing an anti-accommodation policy in 2015–16, it was the pro-immigration opposition that primarily mobilised against its policies.

As a result of the altered EU context and the favourable public opinion towards the different types of refugees in the Ukraine crisis, we do not expect similar partisan conflicts in this crisis. The favourable public opinion towards the Ukrainian refugees did not allow the far right to mobilise voters against refugees in the way it had done in 2015–2016. Moreover, the adoption of the TPD implied that all member states, including Germany and Hungary, were opening their borders to Ukrainian refugees. Thus, the more forthcoming stance of the Hungarian government did not provide many incentives for the pro-humanitarian partisan opposition to mobilise against government policy. Instead, we expect the Ukraine crisis

to have given rise to conflicts between the various administrative units and the civil society actors involved in implementing the TPD. These conflicts are, however, likely to be less intense than the partisan conflicts since they are more problem-oriented and less ideological. As a result of the different crisis situations, we expect national policymaking to have generally been much less conflictual in the Ukraine crisis than in the 2015–16 crisis.

Differences in the crisis situations in the two countries

Problem pressure: an open destination vs a transit state

In the 2015–16 episode, Hungary was a transit state, while Germany was an open destination state (Kriesi *et al.*, 2024). Germany maintained its status in 2022, while Hungary, at first sight, became a frontline state. Its status as a frontline is expected to have increased the problem pressure for Hungary in 2022 compared to 2015–16. In Germany, the cumulation of Ukrainian and other asylum applications is also expected to have increased the problem pressure in 2022 compared to 2015–16. These expectations are borne out for Germany but not for Hungary, as illustrated by Figure 5, which shows the number of yearly asylum applications for both countries. For 2022 and 2023, we added the data on Temporary Protection applications, which indicates the number of Ukrainian applicants separately. We observe that, indeed, for Germany, problem pressure was higher in 2022–23 than in 2015–16. Importantly, in addition to Ukrainian refugees, Germany was still receiving other asylum applications, and it had to deal with the large

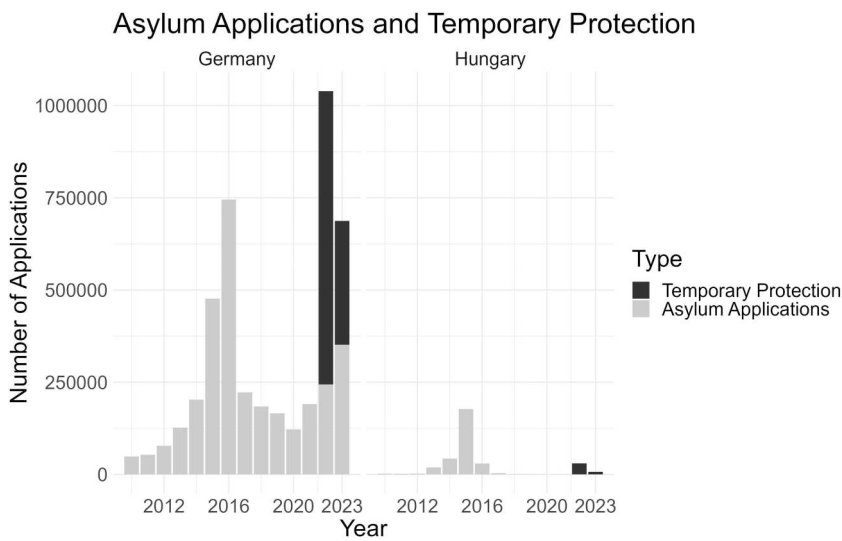

Figure 5. Asylum and temporary protection applications.

number of non-Ukrainian refugees it had taken in during the previous crisis. This leads us to expect that the German debate in 2022 was not exclusively focused on Ukrainian refugees but targeted other refugee types as well. Moreover, this also leads us to expect a higher level of conflict in Germany than in Hungary in 2022 because, as we have seen, the accommodation of the non-Ukrainian refugees meets with more resistance in the population and is politically much more contested.

In Hungary, the total number of applicants was far smaller in 2022–23 than in 2015–16. As a result of the total dismantling of the Hungarian asylum system, there were only 30 non-Ukrainian applicants, and the number of Ukrainian applicants was comparatively limited. Instead, the country saw a large number of refugees transiting. By December of 2022, the number of crossings reported by the Hungarian Border Police had amounted to 3.9 million, of which 2 million were directly from Ukraine, and 1.9 were crossing through Romania (UNHCR, 2023). Of these vast numbers, however, only 34,845 had registered for temporary protection by the end of February 2024.[4] As a result, Hungary remained a transit state. The share of Ukrainian refugees Hungary accommodated as a percentage of its population (0.4 per cent) is the fourth lowest in Europe (only France, Italy, and Greece have lower shares) and compares negatively with the shares accommodated by other eastern European states (Czechia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Latvia, and Slovakia), which all accommodated more than 2 per cent of their population. Only Romania, another frontline state, was less accommodating than these countries, but the number of Ukrainian refugees it took in still amounts to 0.8 per cent of its population. This de facto deviation of Hungary from the common EU policy is more serious than its minor formal deviation from the consensual EU rules in 2022: it excluded non-Ukrainian nationals from temporary protection. This measure concerned only a few people.[5] Germany, by contrast, accommodated the largest number of Ukrainian refugees – 1,280,000 by February 2024, or 1.5 per cent of its population, followed by Poland, which had recorded 16 million crossings[6] and accommodated 957,200 Ukrainian refugees by the end of February 2024.

Public opinion: constraining in Hungary but enabling in Germany

As we have seen, both the context of the war and the profile of the refugees have resulted in a marked shift in public opinion attitudes towards the Ukrainians compared to previous refugee waves. The change in public opinion in Hungary is particularly relevant, contrasting with the uniquely critical Hungarian public opinion about Ukraine. Arguably, this discrepancy is associated with the tactics of Hungarian PM Orbán, who positioned himself antagonistically to Ukraine and the EU in the conflict but not to refugees. Orbán attacked Zelenski, Ukraine, and the US and EU response, but not refugees. His pro-

Russian stance, unique in the EU, estranged Orbán from his former V4-ally Poland in the Ukrainian crisis. The war caught Orbán in a situation where the EU supported the victim. At the same time, he was tied to the aggressor, Russia, by his ideological closeness to Putin's Russia and Hungary's economic (energy) dependence on Russia (Madlovics & Magyar, 2023). He had to come to terms with the sympathy of Hungarian civil society for the refugees and with the de-legitimation of his Russian ally. As Madlovics and Magyar (2023) explain, he did so by building on the fear-creating potential of the war. He successfully claimed that his 'peace-seeking' government would keep Hungary out of the war while the 'war-mongering' opposition would take Hungary to war.

The effect of Orbán's efforts before and after the invasion is that most Hungarians had a favourable view of Putin and supported Hungary's position as a mediator between East and West. Orbán's power to shape the narrative of the war can be seen in the data on Hungarians' opinions about the war. In a poll conducted in the first weeks of the war, 78 per cent of Hungarians and 64 per cent of Fidesz voters did not consider the war justified (Sándor, 2022). But this changed as Orbán, using the state media apparatus, consistently portrayed the war as an internal affair in the post-Soviet space, arguing that the Hungarian national interest was to stay out, prioritise its energy needs, and prevent sanctions that could damage the economy. He rode this message to electoral victory only a month after the start of the war. By that point, only 56 per cent of Hungarians and 37 per cent of Fidesz voters did not consider the war justified (Hann, 2022).

It served Orbán's interest to delegitimize Ukraine and the Western response and legitimize Russia, but this strategy did not extend to refugees. As we saw, he could not quickly mobilise the narratives used against previous waves of refugees. While the public could be swayed to focus on national interest and not support aid and weapons to Ukraine, there was less leeway to present Ukrainian refugees, primarily women, and children, some of them ethnic Hungarians, as a threat. In addition, Orbán likely agreed to the TPD as part of a longer-term bargaining strategy, as he still wanted to get back some of the frozen EU resources. As we show below, Orbán, indeed, tried to use refugees as a bargaining chip to ask for EU funds.

Policymaking

Our empirical approach

The primary data source for our comparative analysis of politics and policymaking is Policy Process Analysis (PPA) data. PPA tracks the politics and policymaking surrounding policy debates in a given country by systematically coding media data (Bojar *et al.*, 2023). The method captures the public side

of policy debates as revealed in the media. Systematic hand coding creates indicators for various aspects of policymaking. Our systematic coding of the policy debate for both Germany and Hungary allows us to directly compare the policymaking and conflict in the two time periods.

The first step in constructing the PPA dataset was defining and gathering the media corpus to be analyzed. We used the news aggregator platform Factiva for document retrieval as it provides access to many media outlets, allowing for systematic country comparison together with transparent and replicable selection criteria on the source. For each country, we aimed to select one major newspaper left of centre and one right of centre regarding ideological leaning. For Germany we selected the 'Süddeutsche Zeitung' and 'Die Welt'. For Hungary, however, we only used 'Index,' given the scarcity of independent news sources. After selecting the news sources, the second decision related to corpus construction consists of identifying the keywords used to retrieve articles. We selected keywords in close collaboration with native-language-speaking coders. 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. After constructing the corpus, the last step in the PPA coding process consists of manual action coding.

The unit of observation at the level at which the data is collected is an action. An action is '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). Actions can be steps in the policymaking process, such as verbal claims, protest events, policy decisions, and other types of actions. 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: the arena where the action takes place, its (procedural) form, its (substantive) type of engagement with the policy, its policy support, its positive, negative, or neutral stance vis-a-vis target actors, the organisational characteristics of the actor undertaking them and of the target actors, the issues the actors engage with, and the normative frames used by actors to present their positions to the public (Bojar *et al.*, 2023).

To illustrate the coding procedure, let's take the example of the letter Viktor Orbán wrote to Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, in March 2022, in which he asked for money from the Commission, money the EU withheld from the Resilience and Recovery Fund. Hungary would use the money to strengthen national defense, border protection, and care for refugees, as well as to alleviate the economic damage caused by the war. This action was coded as a policy claim; the action form was the letter from the actor Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary. The coded target actor is the European Commission and its President; the issue refers to the money for aiding Hungary with migration (we focus on the policy-specific

aspect of the letter). The action is undertaken in support of this issue, and the letter is formally neutral with regard to the EU Commission.

Based on this data, we construct three indicators to characterise the broad political dynamic. We capture the *salience* of policymaking by measuring the number of distinct actions occurring in a given period. In addition, we operationalise the *support of government policies* by the share of actions that side with the government's policy and *conflict intensity* with a composite index that captures both the actors' stance towards the target actor and the contentiousness of action undertaken by the actor.

Policymaking at the national level: the tasks of crisis management in the two crises

Policymaking in both crises was highly salient in each country. Thus, compared to the 2015–16 policymaking episodes, policymaking in the Ukraine crisis in Hungary was just as salient as the quota referendum episode – the single most salient of all the episodes in the eight countries studied by Kriesi *et al.* (2024), but it was much more concentrated in time. Its salience was enormous in early March, just after the war had started on February 24. Crisis-related actions in Hungary peaked already in the week from February 27 to March 5, with more than 40 per cent of the entire episode's action concentrated in this one week. Afterward, the salience of crisis-related policymaking declined, and after the Hungarian elections, which took place on April 3, the episode more or less subsided. In Germany, if policymaking in the 2015–16 crisis was less salient than in Hungary, it was still very prominent. During the Ukraine crisis, German policymaking was similarly salient as in Hungary but less concentrated in time, among other things, because it also covered refugee-related issues not dealing with Ukraine. In Germany, more than half of the actions occurred after the end of March, including all actions unrelated to the Ukraine crisis.

In line with expectations, the character of policymaking at the domestic level and the conflict configurations it created vary, however, markedly from one crisis to the other. Most importantly, the crisis management tasks and policies adopted strongly differ in the two crises. In 2015–16, each member state was initially left to its own devices and unilaterally resorted to border control and asylum retrenchment measures. The two countries we selected for this study differed strongly in their approach to mastering the crisis (Kriesi *et al.*, 2024). Hungary, as a transit state, built a fence at its southern borders, massively tightened its asylum policy, organised a referendum against the EU relocation policy, and imposed constraints on NGOs supporting refugees. Germany, as an open destination state, adopted a much more accommodating approach, even if, at the same time, it also tightened its asylum legislation. Famously, German Chancellor Angela Merkel took

the unprecedented decision on the night of September 4, 2015, to keep the borders open for refugees. More specifically, Germany suspended the Dublin regulation for Syrian refugees.

As we have seen in the Ukraine refugee crisis in 2022, the crisis situation was entirely different in both countries. The domestic tasks in the member states now consisted of implementing the standard approach of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) up to 2025. By activating the TPD, member states agreed to initially grant immediate protection to those coming under its scope for one year until 4 March 2023, but the scheme could be prolonged twice until March 2025. The directive called for solidarity among EU member states to ensure a proper implementation of temporary protection. Member states should cooperate regarding their reception capacity and transfers of displaced persons from one state to another, seeking a 'balance of effort' throughout the Union (Luyten, 2022).

The differences in the tasks set for managing the crises are reflected in the issues addressed by the crisis policymaking in the two countries during the two crises, as shown in Table 2. In Hungary, distribution quotas (the quota referendum), punitive measures (the financial disclosure and stop Soros measures), fence building, and the management of flows (legal border barrier) dominated in 2015–16. By contrast, in 2022, crisis management focused on assistance and support of refugees. In Germany, the management of the flows against the background of the Dublin regulation, return operations, acceptance rules (two reforms of asylum law), and assistance-support (adoption of an integration law) were most conspicuous in the earlier crisis. In 2022, the implementation of the TPD was equally predominant in Germany even if the German crisis management was less focused thematically than the Hungarian one: assistance support, educational measures, and housing together make up roughly half of all the actions undertaken. The broader spectrum of issues addressed in Germany in 2022 is, among other things, a result of the fact that the German debate was not exclusively

Table 2. Issues addressed by country and crisis, percentages.

Issues	Hungary 2015–16	Hungary 2022	Germany 2015–16	Germany 2022	Total
Distribution quotas	**32.3**	0.0	3.2	8.0	17.6
Control-punitive measures	**31.4**	1.4	4.3	0.8	16.8
Fences-border closure	**25.3**	0.0	3.8	0.0	13.4
Flows-transit-Dublin	**7.4**	2.8	**21.1**	**6.8**	9.9
Return operations	0.2	0.0	**23.2**	**9.2**	6.7
Acceptance rules	1.9	4.5	**17.1**	**11.6**	7.0
Assistance-support	0.2	**75.8**	**12.1**	**14.8**	16.5
Educational measures	0.0	6.4	2.5	**11.2**	2.8
Housing	0.0	0.0	0.0	**23.6**	2.6
others	1.4	9.2	12.6	14.0	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	1,131	359	555	250	2,295

focused on the new inflow of refugees from Ukraine but also included measures dealing with issues related to the earlier waves. Thus, return operations, an issue that did not concern Ukrainian refugees in 2022, still constituted an essential part of the German debate. Almost one-fifth of German crisis management in 2022 was concerned with issues unrelated to the new inflow of Ukrainian refugees. In Hungary, by contrast, we hardly encountered any actions related to refugees from earlier waves, which reflects that Hungary barely took in any refugees before 2022.

Given the differences in the tasks in the two crises, the relative weight of policy decision-making and policy implementation also varies. In the 2022 crisis, policy implementation was much more salient in both countries than in the previous crisis. In Germany, the share of action dealing with implementation increased from 23.1 to 57.1 per cent, and in Hungary, from 41.3 to 68.2 per cent. The difference between the crises is more significant in Germany than in Hungary because one of the episodes in Hungary's earlier crisis, fence building, was essentially an implementation episode.

The relative salience of actors

The relative salience of the various actors involved changed in comparable ways from one crisis to another, again in line with expectations. This is shown in Table 3. In 2015–16, in both countries, policymaking was dominated by the national governments and political parties – mainly governing parties in Germany and governing and opposition parties together with civil society actors in Hungary. Other national actors played a subsidiary role. By contrast, the implementation of the TPD in 2022 increased the importance of regional and local actors and civil society actors at the expense of the national government and parties. This, again, applies to both countries but to a greater extent to Germany, where many refugees had to be accommodated in the local communities for a longer period. Regional and local authorities and civil

Table 3. The relative salience of the actor types by crisis and country: percentages.

	Hungary 2015–16	Germany 2015–16	Hungary 2022	Germany 2022	Total
EU polity	8.8	6.3	5.2	0.3	6.6
National government	**31.2**	**35.6**	**40.3**	**16.7**	32.0
regional-local actors	9.3	11.2	**17.8**	**43.5**	15.1
governing party	**17.9**	**32.0**	3.3	8.4	18.3
opposition	**18.8**	**9.2**	6.6	11.0	13.6
civil society-migrants	**11.0**	5.2	**19.2**	**18.4**	11.5
others	3.0	0.6	7.7	1.7	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100
n	1,204	654	365	299	2,522

society actors were responsible for this task. In Hungary, the importance of these actors increased as well in 2022, but the national government remained the most important actor. It was even more central in 2022 than in 2015–16. The local and regional governments were less involved since Hungary was again a transit state, with most refugees moving on to other member states.

Policymaking at the national level: conflict configurations

As expected, given the differences in the crisis and the resulting tasks in the two countries, the crisis management proved to be much less conflictual in 2022 than in the 2015–16 crisis. Our two key indicators tell a similar story, as is shown in Figure 6 and Table 4. On the one hand, in both countries, the mean support of the policies adopted by crisis policymaking increased massively from 2015–16 to 2022. In Hungary, it did so from a low level to almost unanimous support. In Germany, the level of support was generally lower than in Hungary in both crises. In the earlier crisis, opposition prevailed. Still, support also increased to the same extent[7] – from low-level opposition to medium-level support. Conversely, the mean conflict intensity of crisis management decreased in both countries from the previous refugee crisis to the more recent one, massively in Hungary and to a more limited extent in Germany.[8] In Table 4, we provide an additional effect for the non-Ukraine-related issues in Germany during the 2022 crisis. This effect is highly significantly negative for support and very positive for conflict

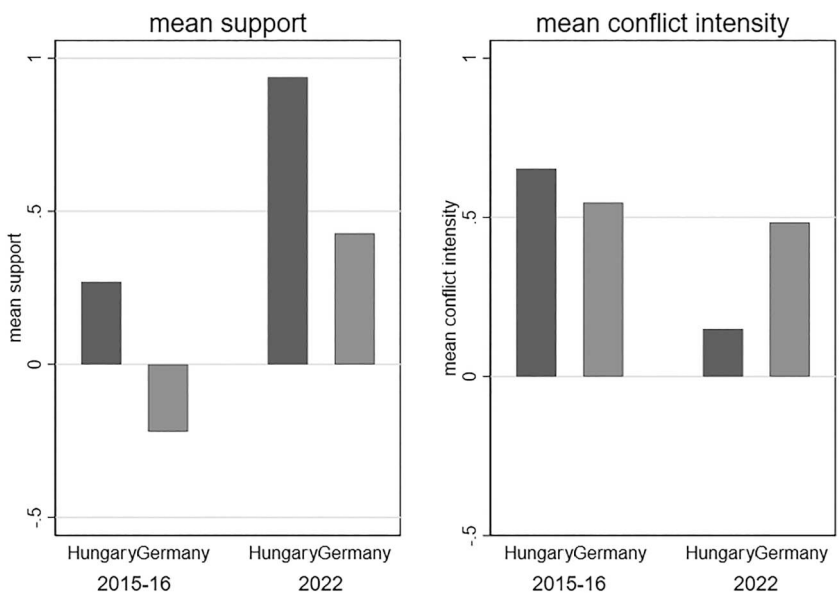

Figure 6. Average support and conflict intensity by crisis and country.

Table 4. Determinants of support and conflict intensity: OLS-regression coefficients, *t*-values, and significance levels.

	Support b/t	Conflict intensity b/t
Country (Germany)	−0.490***	−0.107***
	(−12.288)	(−6.451)
Crisis (2022)	0.752***	−0.089***
	(12.058)	(−3.420)
Interaction crisis*country	−0.084	−0.415***
(Hungary*2022)	(−1.063)	(−12.565)
Non-Ukrainian issues	−0.485***	0.125***
in Germany	(−4.200)	(2.588)
Constant	0.270***	0.653***
	(11.436)	(66.392)
n	2521	2524
r2	0.17	0.20

intensity, which suggests that, in Germany, the management of non-Ukraine-related refugee issues was still more conflictual in 2022 than the management of the refugees from Ukraine.

While the management of refugees in both countries was much more conflictual in 2015–16, the type of conflicts was quite different, as seen in Figure 7, which presents the support and conflict intensity in the two countries during the two crises by actor type.[9] To simplify the presentation, all EU-polity actors (i.e., supranational actors and governments of other member states) are lumped together, as are all domestic governmental actors (i.e., national governments, local and regional governments, and governing parties). This leaves us with four actor types – EU-polity actors, government, opposition, and civil society actors, including migrants and intergovernmental organisations (such as UNHCR). As shown by Figure 7, in Hungary's 2015–16 crisis, the government actors, who almost unanimously defended the government's position, were confronted by all the other actors who massively (if not unanimously) opposed the government's policies. The government clashed with EU actors, the domestic opposition, and the domestic civil society. Conflict intensity was high among all types of actors.

In Germany, government actors were also confronted with resistance from the opposition and civil society. Still, the EU actors were more ambivalent concerning the government's policies than in the Hungarian case. However, what distinguished Germany from Hungary in the earlier crisis was that the German government was internally divided. The division manifested itself between the coalition partners SPD and CDU-CSU, within the senior governing party (CDU-CSU), and the cabinet. Chancellor Merkel's open-door policy was particularly contested within her party and her government. Nevertheless, conflicts with the opposition and civil society were even more intense than conflicts within the government, as seen in the second part of Figure 7.

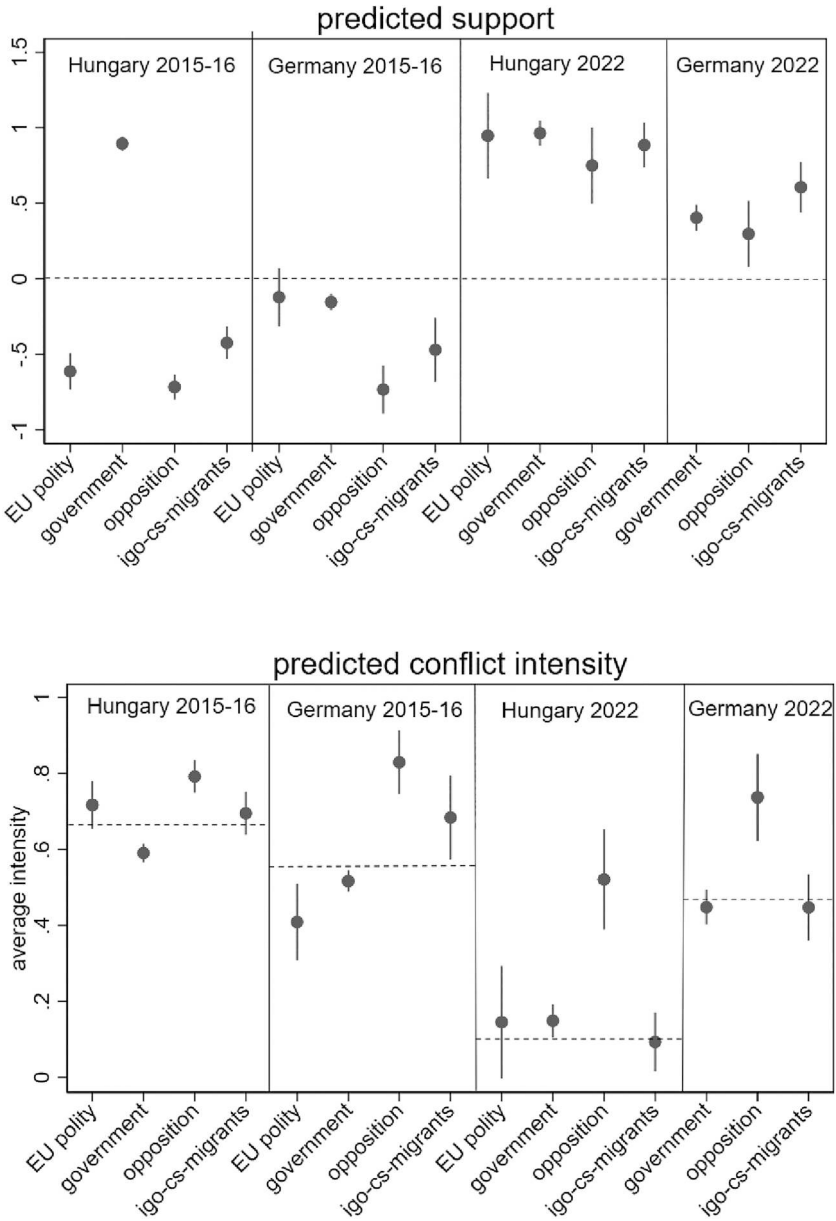

Figure 7. Support for measures taken and conflict intensity by actor type, country, and crisis.

In the 2022 crisis, all Hungarian actors were aligned in full support of the measures, which resulted from the reversal of the government's position: it no longer fought the incoming refugees but, as we have seen, took a supportive stance. The opposition was still quite conflictual concerning the

government's actions but fully supported the accommodation of refugees. In Germany, all actors endorsed the government's actions to a similar extent, but a bit more hesitatingly than in Hungary, and the opposition (now the CDU-CSU) remained highly conflictual both about the government and about the refugees.

The reversal of the Hungarian government's position and the absence of intra-governmental conflicts in Germany led to similar conflict configurations in the two countries in 2022. However, a more detailed qualitative analysis reveals more subtle differences in the configurations, which we shall consider for the governments in a final empirical step.

The role of the governments in the 2022 crisis

As we observed (Table 3), the national government remained the critical actor in Hungary. Even if the Hungarian government supported the accommodation of refugees, Hungary's capacity to deal with the inflow of refugees was minimal, given that the government had all but dismantled its asylum system in the past. As a result, civil society provided the heavy lifting of the implementation of the TPD in Hungary. Thus, UNHCR reports that local authorities and civil society actors were crucial in dealing with the Ukrainian refugee crisis in Hungary.[10] However, as is observed by Tóth and Bernát (2023, p. 292), the 'solidarity that has developed from individual and NGO actions quickly died out, because most of the population saw the organisation of institutional assistance as a state task, which people are willing to replace only temporarily'. But the state did very little to fulfil this task. At the end of March 2022, when half a million refugees had already flowed into Hungary, a government spokesperson claimed that the government was helping in cooperation with the six largest charitable organisations, each receiving HUF 500 million in support.[11] What sounds like a large amount of money for each charity corresponds to roughly 1.5 million euros, multiplied by six to 9 million euros – a rather modest amount for providing support for half a million refugees who were in the country at the time.[12] This indicates that the Hungarian government half-heartedly complied with the TPD. It did not provide much support for the Ukrainian refugees, and it did not change its policies concerning other refugees at all. All others who would appeal for asylum were still treated as 'illegal migrants' (Nagy, 2023, p. 157). For Ukrainians, the state and local authorities have come to cover certain services; however, the availability, extent, or quality of these services was generally insufficient (Tóth & Bernát, 2023). There were plenty of areas where care or assistance was not available at a sufficient level, and the monthly allowance of roughly 50 euros was too little to survive even in a country like Hungary. Nagy (2023) calls the Hungarian asylum policy for Ukrainians a 'camouflage'. Hungary 'tacitly facilitated the

Ukrainians' protection but did not put any institutions in place for their long-term reception' (Korkut & Fazekas, 2023, p. 23).

This did not prevent the Hungarian government from instrumentalizing its limited effort to get some recognition from Ukraine and the EU. Thus, it pointed out that it helped the Ukrainian refugees despite its poor relationship with the Ukrainian government and that it did not get the support from the EU that it was entitled to expect, given its enormous effort for refugees. Concerning Ukraine, Orbán emphasised, 'it does not matter what disputes we had with the Ukrainians before, for example, regarding the Hungarian minority, because they are now in trouble, that is why we are helping them'.[13] A few days later, a government spokesperson, Miklós Soltész, pointed out that the government provided much support despite Ukrainian politics not being friendly to Transcarpathian Hungarians.[14] Concerning the EU, after a meeting of the Council of EU Foreign Ministers, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister, pointed out that many people recognised the efforts that Hungary and Poland were making. At the same time, he drew attention to the fact that while they were talking about the enormous burdens, they were withholding EU funds from these two countries.[15] On March 18, Prime Minister Orbán wrote a letter to the Commission President asking the European Commission to disburse all EU funds allocated to the country, including the loan under the Recovery and Resilience Fund, to help handle the Ukrainian refugee crisis.[16] Hungary

> would use the money to strengthen the national defense, border protection and care for refugees, and to alleviate the economic damage caused by the war, rather than to alleviate the damage caused by the epidemic and other measures approved in the summer of 2020.[17]

In Germany, the practical accommodation of the incoming Ukrainian refugees was the key preoccupation of policymakers. The national government dominated policymaking much less in the Ukrainian crisis, while the local and regional governments played a significant role (see Table 3). Initially, the governments at all levels were very forthcoming in taking up Ukrainians. Thus, the Minister of the Interior, Nancy Faeser, declared on March 7 that Germany would take in all refugees from Ukraine, regardless of their nationality: 'We want to save lives. It doesn't depend on the passport'.[18] All federal states offered support from the first minute, and there was 'an overwhelming willingness to help' from private individuals.[19] This general readiness to help needed to be 'coordinated as best as possible' by the federal states and municipalities, a task that turned out to be quite tricky, however, and led to conflicts between the various levels of government.

First, there were problems with registration, given the large number of arrivals. Then, controversies arose about the distribution and accommodation of

the refugees. Distribution involved questions about whether the so-called Königstein key, the traditional distribution mechanism in Germany, which takes population size and economic strength into account, was still applicable. Moreover, municipalities and regional governments asked for better coordination and more money. By mid-March, the anger about the lack of financial commitments from the federal and state governments for accommodation and care was growing in the municipalities.[20] Eventually, the local and regional governments reached their limits: more and more individual municipalities, districts, or entire federal states were imposing freezes on the admission of refugees from Ukraine.[21] The calls for help from the federal government were getting alarming. Thus, the Mayor of Berlin, Franziska Giffey (SPD), warned the government in October, on behalf of the capital but also on behalf of Hamburg and Bremen city-states, that 'especially we city-states and especially Berlin as the main 'attraction point' for Ukrainian refugees have almost exhausted our capacities'.[22]

Conclusion

In this article, we asked why the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022 generated a different level of conflict and backlash than the 2015–16 refugee crisis. We focused on two countries that differ in their domestic asylum policy and their view of the EU to show that the crisis situation proved decisive for the character of policymaking in both countries. Both Hungary and Germany, despite all their differences, experienced conflictual crisis policymaking in 2015–16 and consensual policymaking in 2022. In Germany, the conflict was primarily within the governing coalition between the CDU and CSU and between the government and the opposition. In Hungary, there was a conflict between the government and the opposition. In 2022, both countries showed a more consensual management of the crisis, at least up to this writing. Let us concede that this might change once the Temporary Protection Directive expires in March 2025 and the bulk of the Ukrainian refugees prefer to stay in Germany.

We showed that the crisis situation, triggered by the wars and resulting refugee types, explains the similarity in policymaking between the two countries in a given crisis. Within the same type of crisis – a refugee crisis, the way individual EU member states deal with the crisis crucially depends on the crisis situation, which, from the point of view of the member state, is largely exogenously given – by the policy-specific EU context (CEAS and Dublin regulation vs TPD), the problem pressure (refugee inflow) and the political pressure, i.e., primarily by public opinion which depends on the type of refugee and, in turn, creates the opportunity for political parties to politicise the crisis for their own purposes or not. In spite of the basic similarities of the crisis situations across the two countries, the country contexts differed for

endogenous political reasons, which explains why the policy outcome was still country-specific in both crises.

Our findings contribute to the discussion about the applicability of the grand theories of European integration to the analysis of specific crises (e.g., Ferrara & Kriesi, 2022; Hooghe & Marks, 2019; Jones *et al.*, 2021; Schimmelfennig, 2018). The question is not only which theory is best applicable to which type of crisis, but the question of the applicability is also raised with regard to different versions of a given type of crisis. Our argument claims that the nature of the crisis situation rather than the factors put forward by the grand theories determine the way the crisis is managed by policymaking in the EU.

While our argument is primarily structural, it is not deterministic. We have shown how the crisis situation shaped the incentives of the main actors in both periods, but it still left them with some maneuvering space, which they used to their own devices. Thus, conflict at the EU level allowed Orbán to politicise refugees in 2015–16, while the profile of refugees permitted him to argue that they presented a threat to Hungarian culture. He could not make the same claims in 2022, given the overwhelming consensus at the EU level (where he lost the support of Poland and the other V4 countries) and support for Ukrainian refugees among Hungarians. However, even if it kept the border open for Ukrainian refugees by providing only minimal support and making it difficult for them to live in Hungary, the Hungarian government still only partially complied with the TPD. Moreover, Orbàn was still able to shift public opinion on Ukraine and Russia to block aid and weapons. In the case of Germany, the position of the German government in 2015–16 was primarily driven by the actions of Angela Merkel, who decided to suspend the Dublin accord despite backlash within her governing coalition. Even if the crisis situation did not leave her with much choice when she took her original decision, it was her choice to stick to it despite fierce opposition from all sides. Having conceded that agency had a role to play in both versions of the refugee crisis, we would, however, maintain that the leading actors in both crises were rather concerned with containing the fall-out of the crisis than with exploiting it to aggrandise their power, as is claimed by some representatives of the crisis management literature (Rhinard, 2019) or of the emergency politics literature (White, 2020).

Notes

1. One might object that the consensual character of policymaking in the 2022 crisis may not be the result of the adoption of the TPD at the EU level but may have made this adoption possible in the first place. After all, as we shall see, the TPD was activated unanimously. In other words, it may be that consensual policymaking did not follow from the crisis situation but was part of it. There is no

doubt that the character of the problem pressure facilitated the consensual activation of the TPD at the EU level. This is part of our argument. We argue, however, that the activation of the TPD reduced political pressure in the member states, which facilitated consensual policymaking at the domestic level.

2. The Schengen area includes the EU member states minus Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland and Romania, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
3. Ylva Johansson, the European Commissioner for home affairs on 28 February 2022.
4. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=594548.
5. https://opiniojuris.org/2022/04/11/temporary-protection-poland-and-hungary-once-again-creating-their-own-rules-in-breach-of-eu-law/.
6. The figures for crossings represent the total number of individual crossings of the border, and as such is much higher than the total number of refugees registered and settled in EU countries. This is because many refugees crossed and returned, while others made multiple crossings.
7. This is indicated by the fact that the interaction effect between country and crisis is not significant in the support column of Table 4.
8. This is again indicated by the interaction effect between country and crisis, which is now significant and negative in the conflict intensity column of Table 4.
9. This figure is based on OLS-regressions, which also include indicators for crisis and country, as well as the interactions between these indicators and the actor type, including three-way interactions: see Table A1 in the Appendix.
10. https://reliefweb.int/report/hungary/unhcr-hungary-ukraine-refugee-situation-operational-update-15-june-31-august-2022, see also Nagy (2023, p. 151), Tóth and Bernát (2023, p. 283ff.) and Korkut and Fazekas (2023, p. 23).
11. INDXHU0020220325ei3p00001, 25 March 2022 (INDXHU stands for Index, our news source from Hungary).
12. See also footnote 3.
13. INDXHU0020220326ei3q0002y, 26 March 2022.
14. INDXHU0020220419ei4j000jv, 19 April 2022.
15. INDXHU0020220321ei3l0008d.
16. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/orban-asks-eu-funds-help-hungary-amid-refugee-crisis-2022-03-22/.
17. INDXHU0020220322ei3m000e9.
18. SDDZ000020220307ei370000y (SDDZ refers to Süddeutsche Zeitung, our centre-left source for Germany).
19. SDDZ000020220308ei380000s.
20. SDDZ000020220317ei3h00009.
21. SDDZ000020220801ei810000w.
22. DWELT00020221024eiao00010.

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