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**Public Opinion on Migration within the European Union: A Statistical Analysis of the  
Key Factors**

*Bachelor's thesis*

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to investigate various economic, political and societal factors that influence public opinion regarding non-European Union migration into the European Union. By utilising the most up to date data sets available, the analysis within this study employs a multiple regression qualitative method to examine the impacts of variable indicators. These include indicators such as educational attainment, unemployment rates, GDP per capita and political stability.

The study's results reveal that societal conditions, such as interpersonal trust and educational attainment play the largest factor in the formation of public opinion regarding non-European Union migration into the European Union. Contrary to expectations, economic conditions, particularly unemployment and GDP per capita, do not have a significant statistical impact on public attitudes towards migration. This study concludes that a mutli-dimensitnal approach towards understanding what factors influence public opinion regarding non-EU migration is essential in order to fully understand the multifaceted nature that the topic has, and the implications these results have for policy makers that aim to address concerns that the public may have, while simultaneously fostering social cohesion in the context of migration.

## **Abstrakt**

Tato studie si klade za cíl prozkoumat různé ekonomické, politické a společenské faktory, které ovlivňují veřejné mínění ohledně migrace mimo Evropskou unii do Evropské unie. S využitím nejaktuálnějších dostupných datových souborů využívá analýza v rámci této studie kvalitativní metodu vícenásobné regrese ke zkoumání dopadů proměnných ukazatelů. Patří mezi ně ukazatele, jako je dosažené vzdělání, míra nezaměstnanosti, HDP na hlavu a politická stabilita.

Výsledky studie ukazují, že společenské podmínky, jako je mezilidská důvěra a dosažené vzdělání, hrají největší faktor při utváření veřejného mínění o migraci do Evropské unie mimo Evropskou unii. Ekonomické podmínky, zejména nezaměstnanost a HDP na obyvatele, nemají na rozdíl od očekávání významný statistický dopad na postoje veřejnosti k migraci. Tato studie dochází k závěru, že mnohorozměrný přístup k pochopení toho, jaké faktory ovlivňují veřejné mínění ohledně migrace mimo EU, je nezbytný pro plné pochopení mnohostranné povahy, kterou toto téma má, a důsledků, které tyto výsledky mají pro tvůrce politik, jejichž cílem je řešit obavy. a zároveň podporovat sociální soudržnost v kontextu migrace.

**Keywords**

Veřejný názor, Migrace, Evropská unie, politika, společnost

**Klíčová slova**

Veřejný názor, Migrace, Evropská unie, politika, společnost

**Extent of thesis: 59,619 Characters (Including spaces)**

## **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

In Prague on  
**21.07.2024**

Šimon Hájek

**Institute of Sociological Studies**  
**Bachelor's thesis proposal**

Migration as a Solution to Aging Societies; An Examination of the European Union's Solution to Europe's Demographic crisis.

The relevance of this topic supersedes any other in the discussion of the long term trajectory of European political and economic trajectory. It can be summed up neatly in the phrase attributed to Auguste Comte that 'Demography is Destiny', and yet despite this weight that such themes hold it is, the topic of demographics is rarely discussed at a fundamental level in the proverbial public square of discourse. That is not to say that no attention has been drawn to this issue, far from it

The objective of this thesis is to examine the consequences of an ageing European society, and analyse the effectiveness of current and theoretical policies which are being employed by the institutions of the European Union in order to offset these issues and if they offer European societies a long term solution to solving the issue of ageing societies.

Particularly this thesis aims to examine the policy of migration as a tool to solve the identified problems of ageing societies, and contrast it with natalist and technological based policies as an alternative means of solving the issues of an ageing society. Simultaneously an examination of both the feasibility and public appeal of policies is an important aspect in being able to provide an objective

As this is a topic with which I have a close affinity towards, I have read key texts in regards to European Demographics, from classics such as both volumes of Oswald Spengler's magnum opus 'Decline of the West' to more contemporary work of Douglas Murray's 'Strange Death of Europe'. Academic Works published by Cambridge, such as 'Trying to Reverse Demographic Decline: Pro-Natalist and Family Policies in Russia, Poland and Hungary'. Such works provide me with a foundation to build upon in the pursuit of achieving an holistic answer of the thesis.

In light of the geographic location selected for the thesis, there is a plethora of material



published directly from the European Union, with an undoubtedly helpful tool being the 'Demographic Outlook for the European Union' yearly publications as well as reports such as the '2022 Report on migration and asylum: The adoption of the migration asylum Pact remains key for lasting progress' for more specific policy related topics . Websites such as Politico and World Values Survey are a further useful tool for assessing the popularity of policies and in turn their long term feasibility.

There are several foreseeable problems when approaching the thesis. Notably, the nature of dealing with future events results in a degree of speculation, estimation and extrapolation of current trends. In turn there never can be complete certainty in any claim regarding the future, merely assumptions. Another foreseeable problem with any topic changed with such political gravitas is in regards to maintaining an unbiased, objective analysis. Both from within myself as well as from the academic works I shall be working with. Certain data which may be useful for my analysis, practically country specific may not be available, as countries prohibit such data from being published. Race in French censuses come to mind. Yet such issues can be overcome using alternative proxies to gain the necessary data set without using the variable of, to continue the example of France, race.

The methodology of the essay will invariably vary due to the breadth of the topic, yet will primarily really be a literature review based methodology with qualitative segments when discussing population projections and predictions. Additionally case studies shall be abated when specific phenomenon and policies emerge in European countries worthy of examination.

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## **Introduction**

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a growing debate surrounding attitudes towards migration into the European Union. Culminating with the 2015 Migration Crisis, the topic of migration solidified itself as a staple of European political and social discourse (D'Amato & Lucarelli 2019). More recently, the conflict in Ukraine and the subsequent migration outflow that had emerged as a result of the conflict have once again reinvigorated the public debate on the issue. Both sides of the political dichotomy have employed rhetoric to garner votes and supporters on the topic of migration in the upcoming European elections (Tsarhous 2024). The ability to understand what makes this rhetoric a powerful political talking point is all the more pressing. Consequently, the relevance of the study on the topic of analysing the key factors that drive public opinion towards migration within the European Union is not only relevant concerning recent political and social developments but also has a rooted significance within the wider European sphere of discourse.

The research aims of this study are to be able to quantify the impact that specific key factors have on public opinion formulation. Additionally, through the utilisation of data proxies, the study aims to explore which factors have the greatest contributing influence on public opinion formulation, while also examining which individual factors may have a theoretical foundation in the impact of public opinion regarding migration, yet do not show statistical significance. The study should be able, through the use of statistical models, to determine the impact individual factors manifested on respondents and as such act as a catalyst for further research.

The study analyses the factors affecting public opinion on migration within the European Union, using the supranational political and economic union as a boundary of geographic scope. Additionally, while the study does not have an explicit focus on any particular age range, the nature of the data sets results in only the working-age and elderly populations being represented within the data set. The study utilises a multifaceted approach in factor selection ranging from ones of a societal, economic and political character. This defined scope allows for greater analysis of identified factors and their possible consequences within the field of research.

The practical application of this study is found in its ability to isolate and evaluate specific factors influencing public opinion. This has the subsequent ability to inform decision-making

concerning public policies, as well as provide a quantitative analysis of the examined factors. Within the academic field, it provides a platform that may lead to further specialised research into the identified key factors in the future.

## **1. Research Design**

The main research aim of this study is to examine 6 selected factors that are hypothesised to influence public opinion concerning migration within the European Union. Of these 6 factors, it is hypothesised that certain indicators will increase the propensity of the national populations to support migration, while their inverse will reduce support.

This study employs a quantitative method of analysis in its results. This is done as the quantitative method allows the study to utilise the large data pools acquired by various European Union institutions and provide highly accurate, measurable and replicable results. However, when discussing the factors of inclusion in this study and their relevance, aspects of the qualitative method had been employed as well in the pursuit of a more detailed and nuanced answer in examining set factors' relevance.

### ***1.1 Data Collection***

This study employs data primarily from the European Statistical Office (Eurostat) which in turn obtains its own data sets from national-level statistical offices. The employment of representative data sets of all 27 EU member states ranges from the age of 15 and beyond. It is unrivalled in both the scope and sample size, being able to provide consistent yearly data updates on many of the data sets employed, noticeably, allowing for data sets to be utilised from as recently as 2023. An alternative source of data utilised within this study is the Eurobarometer, which although not a separate institution from Eurostat, has been providing opinion polling within the EU and as such possesses the expansive scope and quantity needed for this study. The utilisation of the same data sets throughout the study allows for consistency and future repeatability once time passes without differences in data collections and sample sizes. Eurobarometer employs a face-to-face approach when collecting opinion polling, with a guarantee of at least 1,000 respondents that are randomly selected. A smaller sample size is applied to those nations which have a population lower than 1 million. Additionally, Eurobarometer survey data has its opinion polling weighted in the pursuit of demographic and geographical representation.

When examining political affiliation, this paper employed the EU Political Barometer by the University Carlos III of Madrid. Its utilisation of artificial intelligence to acquire the latest political sentiments from all European Union member states is achieved by the filtering of political rhetoric acquired from social media. Subsequently, the data is quantified on a numerical scale allowing for consistent cross-examination of all member states political climates.

## ***1.2 Statistical Model***

This study employs in its results a simple linear regression as its statistical model to depict its findings. The primary focus of the study is on the initial effect of specific factors on public opinion. The consequence of this is that there is a consistent Y-axis. As such a simple linear regression has been selected as a suitable model in depicting the results. Additionally, the lower threshold of data entry required in a simple linear regression allows it to utilise only the most relevant data sources available. The simple linear regression lends itself well to depicting the results of the study as if the hypotheses are correct, then the linear nature of proportion increase or decrease in public opinion on migration should be visible between the member states.

A net migration sentiment score is used in order to have a balanced measurement of both positive and negative responses to the polling questions. This is done as a means of ensuring neither sentiment was being examined by the statistical model exclusively. The values of the Net Migration Sentiment Score also provide a benefit in its ease of interpretability. A positive score means that a majority of respondents within the given country hold a positive public opinion on migration. If the Net Migration Sentiment Score is 0 or around zero, it indicates a balanced view while a negative score indicates that the majority of respondents of the given country hold a negative public opinion on migration.

## ***1.3 Limitations and Ethical Considerations***

This study is expected to face limitations in data availability, relying on proxies of pre-existing data sets to assess determinant factors of public opinion of migration. Additionally, while the most extensive collection of data sets on the European Union is being employed, it is expected that not all data sets will originate from the same year. Fortunately, the nature of the topics and the data sets employed should mitigate this, as the continental

scale of the study means that dramatic shifts in public opinion are less frequent. In turn, this reduces the effect of the limitations.

While the data sets may be anonymous and projected at a national or continental scale, ethical considerations must be in place. It remains vital to adhere to data protection regulations. This is to ensure that the research paper does not perpetuate stereotypes or harm national groups.

## **2. Literature Review**

Broad developments have occurred within the field of research surrounding public opinion on migration since the end of the Second World War. With the initial streams of migration arriving in Western countries in the aftermath of the conflict, a need arose to understand the impact of public opinion on the new arrivals. Early examinations placed empathise particularly on the ability of immigrants to conform to native customs and practices (eg. Fairchild 1949) as the primary factor in influencing the native public opinion on migration. Under this theory, a predisposition of assimilation was placed on the migrational population. This was considered the greatest indicator of native public opinion on migration as a whole. While such attitudes could be considered one-dimensional by today's standards, the ability to assimilate into native society swiftly and effectively continues to be a widely recognised factor in shaping public opinion surrounding migration.

A significant breakthrough in the literature surrounding public opinion on migration was Simon's and Lynch's 1993 work (*A Comparative Assessment of Public Opinion toward Immigrants and Immigration Policies*) which acted as the first major multi-national comparison of its kind towards attitudes towards migration. The study, which focused on Anglophone countries, concluded that while national characteristics exist within all nations examined, the factors impacting public opinion do have some cross-national characteristics. These were expanded on with further research in the field and by the 2000s, a compressive school of thought originating from various sociological theories emerged (eg. Schlueter & Scheepers 2010, Menjívar 2010 ). Further development and expansion on the multifaceted nature of public opinion formation continues, a notable example of the emerging debates being the role of native accommodation to immigrant assimilation, as seen in “Assessing the effects of intergroup contact on immigration attitudes” by Berg (2024).

Rustenbach's 2010 "Sources of Negative Attitudes toward Immigrants in Europe: A Multi-Level Analysis" was an additional breakthrough in the sphere of public opinion towards migration as it acted as one of the first studies to incorporate numerous sources of factors influencing public opinion simultaneously. This is a good example of the progress that has been witnessed since the emergence of the topic of public opinion.

In this regard, this study aims to fill a gap identified within the respective academic literature. While a multi-factor approach acts as a useful method of analysis of various factors impacting public opinion, this study aims to examine these effects specifically within the scope of the European Union. This allows for greater analysis of regional variation than would be possible on a larger scale.

### ***2.1 Key Factors of Examination***

This study employs 6 key factors that it has identified as independent variables in the influencing of public opinion on the matter of migration within the European Union. These factors have been considered on a multitude of grounds. In part, the role these factors play within the broader academic dialogue surrounding migration opinion formation. Other considerations included the desire to maintain diversity in causation, employing factors rooted in not only social factors but also economic and political. This decision resulted in this study providing a multifaceted dimension in the discussion of factors influencing public opinion on migration.

### ***2.2 Economic Competition***

Within the respective literature, economic competition and general economic-related anxieties caused as a result of migration have been constant. Reader highlighted already in 1963 the impact immigration had on certain aspects of the labour market (Reder 1963). This impact endangered job security for some, resulting in economic competition. It is rooted in competition over scarce resources and opportunities and can be analysed on the individual level through hypotheses regarding employment. It is a well-documented and heartily debated factor in both academia as well as the wider public making it required inclusion when analysing.

Numerous studies have affirmed the innate competition that occurs between migrant populations and particularly low-skilled natives ( e.g. Altonji & Card 2018, Cadena 2013).

The link between economic competition and migrant populations may exist because of the inherent overrepresentation of the migratory population within the lower-skilled sources of unemployment. Therefore it may be possible that in the case of the European Union, certain natives are getting replaced in sources of employment by migrants. This is most commonly within the lowest segments of the labour pyramid. Yet studies on this topic show relatively indecisive outcomes, as witnessed in Longhi, Nijkamp and Poot's 2010 study in which "local wage and employment effects are very small" (Longhi, Nijkamp and Poot's 2010 ).

Ultimately, to examine factors shaping public opinion on migration, it does not matter if the root source is economic replacement, a fear of being economically replaced or both. The result is the same, that being that the native population that has traditionally inhabited the lowest aspects of the labour pyramid is most included in having their opinions on migration shaped by Economic Competition.

However the presence of economic competition alone does not inherently have to affect public opinion on migration. An alternative explanation for the particular emphasis on economic competition as a means of acting as a factor towards shaping public opinion towards migration resides in the manner in which the media depicts the issue. Specifically, the narrative of migration occurring in the pursuit of solely economic improvement (Kosho 2016). This may further influence public opinion on migration, particularly those who are worse off economically. Yet once again it ultimately does not matter when discussing the topic of factors towards shaping public opinion towards migration, since as with direct economic competition, the mere perception is sufficient in acting as a driving factor towards public opinion formulation.

### ***2.3 Societal Cohesion***

A greater sociological understanding of the impacts on public opinions towards migration has resulted in an increased emphasis on societal cohesion and its associated characteristics. The origins of societal cohesion are found in the works of Durkheim, which originate from the late 19th century (Pahl 1991). In these works, Durkheim interpreted societal cohesion as solidarity between individuals with noticeable social bonds and importantly lacking in the formation of social conflict (Fonseca, Lukosch and Brazier, 2019). Under such circumstances, there is evidence that such a state could result in having a more favourable opinion on migration. Firstly higher societal cohesion could result in better economic conditions, attracting many of the factors positively affecting negatively public opinion



concerning migration. Furthermore, academic literature on high interpersonal trust on the group level suggests greater openness to new ideas and the ability to cooperate and cooperate more effectively (Dirks 1999). When extrapolated to wider societal implications concerning migration, the greater openness towards out-groups and willingness to cooperate is predicted by the study.

Opposition to the hypothesis exists within the literature, however. Instead of acting as a positive indicator of public opinion, some academics and institutions warn of the opposite being the case. A study from 2020 concluded that “ On average, social trust is lower in more ethnically diverse contexts” ( Dinesen, Schaeffer & Sønderskov 2020 pg 461), indicating a potential for an adverse relationship between the hypothesis of social cohesion acting as a positive indicator for positive public opinion on migration. Additionally, the United Nations provides a degree of nuance to the phenomenon of societal cohesion. It identifies certain societies may maintain discrimination as an important aspect of their society and as such, in specific regional instances, societal cohesion could act as an exclusion factor that generates ingroup preferences rather than an indicator of positive opinion of the outgroup (UNCE 2023 pg. 4). Yet a shortcoming of the United Nations report in the context of the European Union is that as European values often conflict with the discriminatory tendencies, stronger societal cohesion may result in less rather than more discrimination.

While valid causes for caution exist in employing social cohesion as a factor for the evaluation of public opinion and migration, the indicators found within group-level psychology provide a good baseline towards the predicted outcomes of a wider opinion formulation. As such it acts as a key factor of analysis within the study.

## ***2.4 Contact Hypothesis***

Contact hypothesis is a hypothesis utilised within sociology, psychology and political theory amongst other social sciences that suggests when exposed under the correct circumstances to inter-group contact, set contact could result in a reduction in biases and negative sentiments previously held by the individual or group. The theory emerged in the 1950's with Allport, who suggested that if certain requirements are met, namely: equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities, then intergroup tensions would reduce with it. This is alongside the reduction in biases and negative sentiments (Allport, Clark, & Pettigrew, 1954, Pettigrew, Thomas F & Linda R

2005) felt towards outgroups. Since then research has indicated an extent to which the contact hypothesis functions, instead suggesting that a principle of “typically reduces prejudice” can be predicted from the Contact Hypothesis rather than a removal of biases as initially suggested (Paluck, Green & Green 2019). It is however important to note that this hypothesis is not universally accepted and has some opponents.

Detractors as well as some supporters of the contact hypothesis point out that under certain circumstances, inter-group contact has the inverse effect. If contact is established without the formation of trust, friendships and or other indicators of social cohesion, then prejudice and hostility may be reinforced rather than diminished (Fetzer 2000). When extended to their logical conclusion, theories such as the group position theory of discrimination emerge. Studies such as Bobo and Hutchings (1996) affirmed that “The more that members of a particular racial group feel collectively oppressed and unfairly treated by society, the more likely they are to perceive members of other groups as potential threats”. When detracting from the contact hypothesis, it is possible that native populations may experience an inverse relation between the increase in the percentage of migrant peoples and the sum of the total population and public opinion on migration.

Voter results in various European countries do however support the claims and assumptions put forward by the Contact Hypothesis. This is visible in the phenomenon where far-right parties garner the greatest amount of support in the most ethnically homogenous parts of the country. This can be seen in Germany’s AfD, which gained the most amount of votes in the more ethnically homogeneous regions of the former East Germany (Weisskircher 2020) or the case of the United Kingdom's support for the BNP was located mostly in the more ethnically homogeneous regions of the UK (Bowyer 2008). Consequently, this applicability of the contact theory should be used as a key factor in the formulation of public opinion on migration within the European Union.

## ***2.5 Education and Human Capital Theory***

Final Educational attainment influences the individuals' opinion in large part through adaptation to alternative narratives and viewpoints the higher the educational attainment level is achieved. This may be achieved through traditional primary, secondary and tertiary forms of education, yet also included within it are alternative forms of forms of qualifications. Ultimately, what these forms of education represent is the capital gain a person obtains

through the acquisition of set education and qualifications. These qualifications subsequently influence the opinion-forming of the individual through economic and social impacts.

Human Capital Theory emerged through the observation sociologists made surrounding the higher acceptance of migration population within a country by a native population when the individual's human capital, or education and qualification was greater. Since the emergence of the theory, 2 subsequent explanations have emerged for this phenomenon, though nuance is applied to each depending on the author, region and time period/scale. The initial explanation provided for the increased acceptance of migrants into a host country is predicated on the idea that as individuals gain qualifications and education, they are increasingly less likely to compete for employment opportunities. This results in not developing hostility and resentment toward the migration population (Mayda 2006). Additionally in this school of thought, the factors of wages emerge as a motivating factor, for as in the case of the European Union, the primary source of external, non-European migration possesses a skill mismatch in comparison to their native counterparts (Nieto, S., Matano, A., & Ramos, R. 2015). This could imply a higher wage for the native population, that is possessing a greater degree of human capital (Mayda 2006). This is also reflected in the anti-immigration sentiment, which has been traditionally felt greatest in areas with lower economic prospects and higher reliance on low-skilled employment (Markaki & Longhi 2013). The increase in economic competition between lower-skilled natives and immigrants increases fears of unemployment or the lowering of wages, motivating anti-immigration sentiment, something which has been documented well by many studies (eg. Rosolia & Porreca 2020). Yet of particular note is that lower education makes reskilling out of redundant professions more difficult, and opportunities are more limited. In turn, this results in ever greater protectiveness of one's employment. The higher educational attainment allows for greater career flexibility and combined with lower competition within the context of external EU migration, results in less economic incentive to adopt a hostile approach towards migration.

An alternative explanation emerges surrounding the Human Capital Theory, which emphasises the social impact, rather than the economic nature of obtaining qualifications. The process of gaining additional education results in a greater degree of exposure to alternative perspectives which in turn could result in a more tolerant outlook towards other races and religions. This acts as a process of gaining a more international worldview (Espenshade, T. J., & Calhoun, C. A. 1993). A recent study by Velásquez & Eger in 2022 concluded that an

additional factor towards this explanation is the resistance towards what they described as 'big events' as those of the 2015 European Migrant Crisis. Higher education protects individuals against whatever instinct exists to react strongly during such crises. Of particular note, some studies supporting this school of thought suggest that higher educational attainment results in support of immigration regardless of the economic considerations that are applied concerning the individual immigrant. The non-economic factors tend to play a greater role in formulating opinions on migration the greater the average education (Hainmueller & Hiscox 2007). In Hainmueller and Hiscox's study, up to 65% of factors relating to migration opinion were non-labour-related. Tolerance and a desire for cultural diversity emerged from one's education attainment (Hainmueller & Hiscox 2007 p. 402) according to the study.

It is conceivable that specifically because of the reduced economic competition migrants pose towards those with greater educational attainment, a luxury emerges in being able to consider non-labour-related factors. Conversely, it is those who are at greatest risk of directly feeling the economic consequences on the labour market due to their lower educational attainment that will be focused primarily on the labour aspect of human capital theory. Studies have shown that families place job security consistently as one of their most important social needs to be fulfilled (Labonté, Cobbett, Orsini, Spitzer, Schrecker & Ruckert 2015). Yet while such a state of affairs may be correct, it falters on one key statistic. If education levels influence labour prospects, those with lower labour prospects would be more inclined to view immigration negatively only when it threatened their respective segment of the labour pool. It would follow that if highly educated migrants migrated into a domestic economy, those with greater educational attainment would adopt the position currently held by those with lower educational attainment. Yet the statistics do not support this. There has been consistently a higher acceptance of EU migrants, who have on average had a higher level of educational attainment than their non-EU counterparts at all levels of education and incomes (Dennison & Dražanová 2018). This suggests that if the claim of labour market fears mattered most, the impacts should differ more based on expected immigrant skill levels. Education influences cultural values better explain the consistent link between higher education and pro-immigration views

Ultimately there is a reason why education is the most well-documented factor in the shaping of public opinion surrounding migration and in turn one of the most contested aspects of

debate surrounding public opinion formulation. Education is a lifelong factor that influences every aspect of an individual's life and cannot be changed easily beyond a certain age. This makes it a constant in an ever-evolving environment where other factors traditionally fluctuate significantly more.

## ***2.6. Sense of Security and Safety***

When discussing Sense of Security and Safety, it is important to note that the perception of Neighbourhood Security and Safety almost always outweighs the statistical probability of crime occurring in one's vicinity. It is the impression of safety that traditionally impacts negatively attitudes towards migration, and as such examinations of public sentiment towards the issues are more relevant than any “realistic crime measured” (Van Rijswijk, Hopkins & Johnston 2009). Sense of Security relates as a principal factor in public opinion because the introduction of migrant populations into an area creates a degree of uncertainty within the community, which at times has resulted in social ills associated in the area to be attributed to the migrant presence (Pattison 2022). The introduction of alienating forces within the community has the potential to elicit mistrust and isolation which may at times manifest itself negatively towards immigrant populations (Van Rijswijk, Hopkins & Johnston 2009). Some literature suggests that when minority communities make themselves salient towards the majority, a symbolic threat is attached towards them, with natives believing that the salient population poses a threat to their community (Van Rijswijk, Hopkins & Johnston 2009). The literature implies that there exists an asymmetrical impact on the levels of public opinion towards migration concerning the sense of security and safety.

As a consequence of the negative influence that an introduction of a migrational community may have on the sense of security and safety, the literature implies a negative relationship between the 2 communities. As such, a conclusion may be drawn that a higher percentage of those who feel safe in their communities are not affected by this social phenomenon. In turn, this implies that these respondents wouldn't be experiencing the negative sentiments associated with the loss of safety and security, causing a theoretically better opinion on the topic of migration.

## ***2.7 Political Affiliation***

Developments within the literature surrounding political affiliation as it relates to public opinion regarding migration coincide directly with the unprecedented rise in political rhetoric on migration. A somewhat clear left-right divide emerged within Europe which impacted all member states to varying extents. The rise of populist parties such as the Freedom Party (Austria), National Rally (France) and the Alternative for Germany (Germany) have mobilised significant popularity, in large part thanks to migrational rhetoric. Conversely, parties opposed to the rhetoric espoused and endorsed by the aforementioned parties have emerged and doubled down on their commitments towards the issue of migration. Notably, parties have reaffirmed and doubled down on their position towards migration, in part as a response to the rise in anti-immigration platforms. Such parties include Sinn Féin (Ireland), Alliance 90/The Greens (Germany) and the Social Democratic Party (Sweden). Consequently an exploration of the factors affecting the political affiliation and the impact it has as a predictive deterministic factor in shaping public opinion is paramount.

There has been a noticeable expansion in the scope of academic discussion surrounding the influence that political affiliation has on public opinion on immigration. In the past, studies have primarily focused on examining the sources of such attitudes and as such mainly focused on socio-economic and cultural factors. The work of Vrânceanu & Lachat (2021) has since widened the discussion drawing on the public opinion literature, expressing that both parties and policies are susceptible to influencing citizens' attitudes towards immigration. A noteworthy evolution and consideration when examining political affiliation is the lack of political uniformity in relation to political affiliation. Certain demographics are more susceptible to being influenced by their political affiliation in comparison to others. Generally speaking, if a political party an individual supports endorses migration, the individual is more likely to adopt a more favourable position towards the issue of migration. Yet it is important to note that such impacts are more widely felt when the individual political affiliation is associated with more 'radical' ideologies. This is witnessed in those affiliating with far-right political parties as well as green parties (Harteveld., Kokkonen., & Dahlberg. 2017). Yet the impact on one's position on immigration solely due to party affiliation isn't too significant, with Vrânceanu estimating around a 2-point shift when an individual affiliated with a political party witnesses set party change its position in favour of immigration (Vrânceanu & Lachat 2021 p17). Additionally, not all individuals are affected equally, with factors such as age,

income and education level influencing the impact of their political party affiliation. Generally, higher education levels are the most influential factor when determining the causal impact of a change in immigration stances due to a shift in the public position of an afflicted party. This can be explained by greater political literacy and considerably greater responsiveness to such changes in direction (Carr, Plum, & Howard 2015).

Lower average educational attainment however also plays an impact on one's position on immigration solely due to party affiliation. Traditionally, lower educational attainment has been associated with a greater shift in anti-immigration sentiment if there is a liberalisation of immigration policy (Harteveld., Kokkonen., & Dahlberg. 2017). This phenomenon extends towards the "thermostatic model" of public opinion-policy connection. This model espouses that when policies, positions and opinions of public figures change towards a certain direction, the affiliated public associated with the position loses support for it. Concerning public opinion surrounding migration, statistics support the position that public opinion becomes more sceptical of immigration when policies are liberalised or when the stocks of migrants increase over time (Vrânceanu & Lachat 2021). The consequential reactive nature witnessed within the 'thermostatic model' coincides well with the rise in the quantity of external migration into the European Union and with it the rise of migration as an issue of political discourse within the European Union.

What becomes visible is that lower educational attainment has a greater swift reactionary component to the impacts of policy and rhetoric change of their affiliated political party. Gradual reorientation of party ideology and stances, on the other hand, are more readily adopted as an individual's own when the individuals possess a higher education attainment level. Despite this observation, however, most literature (e.g. Vigneswaran & León 2023) affirms that there is a limit to the extent a top-down approach in relation to public opinion on migration has on the formulation of personal opinion. That being said, there are 2 noteworthy processes of analysis which can be gained from this factor. Firstly, while not significant in overall terms, public opinion is still shifted by the rhetoric of their political party and its affiliation, particularly in more radical political parties, on both sides of the ideological spectrum. This coincides with a rise in party popularity and success in election polling. In turn, one can expect the matter of political affiliation to become more important as time continues, since these more radical parties appear to be establishing themselves in certain countries of the European Union as serious political contenders. Secondly one can observe

that as alternative factors converge together in shaping public opinion on the issue of migration, the factor of political affliction becomes a synthesis of these issues. It acts as a clear demonstration of a convergence of many of the alternative factors and as such motivates an examination of any European country that exhibits any major statistical imbalances within the left and right political distinction.

### **3. Factor Methodology**

To be able to display the study's results, suitable data sets had to be selected to display the factor being examined. Yet limited data availability on topics resulted in the utilisation of data processed to symbiosis the broader phenomenon. Through examination and consideration of the available data pools on the European Union, 6 proxies were selected to act as determinant variables of examination within the statistical models. The proxies had to fulfil criteria of universal applicability within member states, as well as being readily quantifiable while retaining sufficient causal relations with the factor being examined.

When selecting a proxy to act as an independent variable for Education and Human Capital Theory, consideration had been placed on a variety of data pools, as the availability of education and qualification-related data sets within the European Union are plentiful. It was decided that the completion of tertiary education was a suitable proxy. This was on the grounds that it fulfilled the economic aspect of Human Capital Theory, as the individual would not be in direct competition with the majority of migrants arriving in the European Union. It was also suitable as it fulfilled the alternative explanation for the hypothesis, that being the non-labour factors. The study assumes that through the completion of tertiary education, the individual would have acquired the values associated with tertiary education, and in turn should hold more tolerant and pluralistic views. This assumption results in the hypothesis that the higher the percentage of the domestic population that has completed tertiary education, the more the nation will hold favourable views towards migration.

Numerous data sets could be employed while attempting to find a suitable proxy for the factor of Sense of Security and Safety. Ultimately an opinion poll on the question of "Feelings of safety when walking alone at night" was selected as the most suitable independent variable. As the sentiment of a populace, rather than any firm statistic, impacts shifts in public opinion more significantly, the study utilises an opinion poll. This is in favour of other proxies that could have been used, such as crime indicator indexes. Additionally, the



utilisation of an opinion poll question resulting in a percentage of respondents agreeing made it a consistent numerical value that could be applied to any nation. A hypothesis for the factor of a sense of security and safety maintained by the study is that the higher the percentage of respondents that answer positively to the independent variable, the higher the public opinion will be towards migration.

The most difficult quantifiable metric to find a suitable candidate to serve as a proxy was that of political affiliation. Several options were available, all of which possessed some significant drawbacks. While election results or party membership were possible solutions, the results were not universally applicable to all member states. Factors such as differing legislation, dates of elections and political systems and the lack of a unified quantifiable metric were perceived to make any proxy ill-suited. The EU Political Barometer was selected as the proxy as it solves many of the previously mentioned shortcomings. Through the utilisation of artificial intelligence, it provided results that were up-to-date and readability quantifiable. Through the utilisation of digital media, the data set is more dynamic and has a larger sample size than conventional data sets. A notable limitation of the data set is that through the utilisation of artificial intelligence, the process of data acquisition loses the transparency it would have had, had the data been acquired through traditional methods. The hypothesis for the study is that the more left-wing inclined a nation is, (using the EU Political Barometer values of 1-10, with 1 being the left-wing extreme and 10 being the right-wing extreme), the higher the public opinion will be towards migration.

Social cohesion as a factor of examination naturally inclined itself towards an opinion poll, as it relied on the sentiment of the population towards their surroundings. A percentage of those who answered favourably towards the question “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” was selected due to its consistency within member states and its percentage quantifiability. The hypothesis for this study is that the higher the percentage within a country of those who responded positively to the poll the higher the public opinion will be towards migration.

The study relies on demographic census data to act as a suitable proxy for the Contact Hypothesis. While limitations exist within the data pool, such as concentrations of third-country nationals, preventing contact with the native populations. Additionally, variations in citizenship laws, that result in the potential for overrepresentation or underrepresentation of third-country nationals within a specific member state. Yet rectifying

such issues would require a regional, multi-level analysis that is beyond the scope of this study. Consequently the application of the total percentage of third-country nationals as a total percentage of the nation's population possesses some limitations, yet it remained the best-suited proxy for the Contact Hypothesis within the study. This study hypothesised that the higher the percentage of the overall population that is considered a third-citizenship national, the higher the public opinion will be towards migration.

For the utilisation of a proxy for economic competition, the study selected the total percentage of the population in employment. As job opportunity acts as a suitable synthesis of other economic dynamics, it provides a suitable quantifiable metric to pan within the statistical model. The study recognises that numerous economic factors influence employment opportunity, yet for the purposes of the study, the lack of availability of employment is presumed to cause a reduction in public opinion towards those who pose the greatest economic competition. Consequently, the study presents a hypothesis for the factor that the higher the total percentage of the population employed within a nation, the higher the public opinion will be towards migration.

## **4. Results**

The results of this study are broken down into each of the respective 6 key factors and their influence on public opinion through the employment of the Net Migration Sentiment Score. The Net Migration Sentiment Score was created for the purposes of this study to facilitate a consistent representation of national sentiment towards migration. It has been created using the 2023 Eurobarometer Social Surveys opinion polling on the question of “Please tell whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you?

Immigration of people from outside the EU (%)” (Eurobarometer 2023). The net migration score was calculated by subtracting the percentage of negative responses from the percentage of positive responses. This resulted in a numerical value for each of the EU member states as well as a European Union mean that could be utilised within the statistical models.

Overall the results of the study provided an insight into the complexities of predicting the impact various may have on public opinion on migration. The results also warn of the risks that the applications of generalisation have on perceived similarities in factors, and how such findings do not result in similar outcomes

## 4.1 Economic Competition

When analysing the effects of Economic Competition on the public opinion of migration within the European Union, several results emerge. Contrary to both the hypothesis of the study as well as associated literature, there isn't statistical evidence that higher employment percentages, which are proxied as economic competition, have a positive relation with public opinion regarding migration. With a p-value of 0.3715, there is not enough statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Additionally, Figure 1 shows that with a very low R-squared value of only 0.03082, the results are only around a 3% variance in the Y.

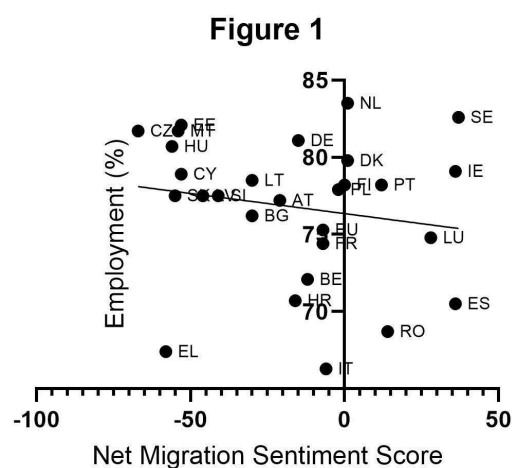


Fig. 1 Percentage of the employed population in relation to the Net migration Sentiment Score within EU member states

A possible explanation for these results are the economic considerations when formulating opinions on migration do not have as significant of an impact on the respondents' opinions regarding migration as alternative factors. Additionally, it is possible that the nations which are the largest recipients of migration do not have sufficiently large domestic populations that inhabit the same strata of the labour pyramid. As such, the minority which is faced with the prospect of economic competition is 'outpolled' by the majority. This alternative explanation is supported by nations that maintain below the European Union averages of employment percentages, yet retain a high support for migration, such as Spain.

## 4.2 Social Cohesion

While many of the results of this study provided insight into the factors that form public opinion surrounding migration, none so much as the impact of social cohesion. Figure 2 clearly shows the statistical significance and relation between higher social trust, which in turn is proxied as social cohesion more broadly, and support for migration within the European Union. With a p-value of 0.0005, we can interpret a statistically significant positive relation between the percentage of people who maintained interpersonal trust with neighbours and a positive net migration sentiment score. Additionally, the statistical model depicted in Figure 2 possessed a moderate R-squared value of 0.3868. This allows the study to utilise Figure 2 to assert that there is projective power in the hypothesis.

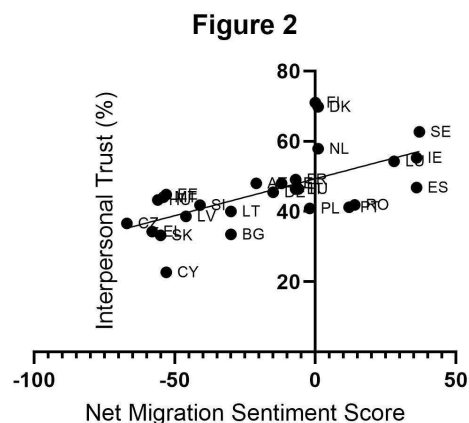


Fig. 2 Percentage of the respondents who answered positively to having interpersonal trust in relation to the Net migration Sentiment Score within EU member states

Yet despite the predictive power projected by Figure 2, certain outliers exist within the data set. Notably, the Nordic states of Denmark and Finland depicted the highest percentage of self-reported interpersonal trust; they did not match Sweden's positive values in the Net Migration Sentiment Score. Similarly, Cyprus, which had the lowest percentage of self-reported interpersonal trust did not score the lowest Net Migration Sentiment Score. An explanation for this divergence is that other factors such as cultural or historic additionally shaped public opinion on migration. This observation serves to outline that in spite of the

predictive power of the statistical method depicted in Figure 2, expectations of the hypothesis remain.

### 4.3 Contact Hypothesis

The results of the statistical method employed with the data set concerning Figure 3 contrast heavily with the theory it attempts to evaluate. With a wide range of results, Figure 3 cannot be considered a model that poses predictive power concerning the percentage of third-country nationals and the Net Migration Sentiment Score. With a p-value of 0.5560, there is little fit to the model without a slope. Additionally, the R-squared value of 0.01404 indicates that statically, the dependent variable does not explain much of the variance.

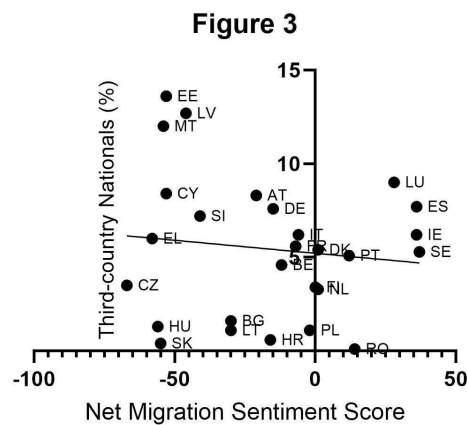


Fig. 3 Percentage of the third-country nationals as a total of the national population in relation to the Net migration Sentiment Score within EU member states

Despite the wide variations in the statistical findings, results can be still deduced from Figure 3. Notably, while Figure 3 does not support advocates of the Contact Hypothesis as a means of reducing biases and reducing inter-group tensions, it does not support the detractors either. In practice, what the results of Figure 3 display, is that there is significantly more nuance required with the hypothesis to test it accurately. It would likely require not only a regional-level analysis of the respective member states, something highlighted as a limitation already in the hypothesis section, but also the inclusion of variables and additional factors to fully encapsulate the complexities of inter-group relations.

#### 4.4 Education and Human Capital Theory

In the literature surrounding public opinion formation on immigration, education plays one of the most significant determinants in predicting one's response. As such the results obtained from this statistical analysis maintain particular significance to the study. The results of Figure 4 show evidence in favour of the hypothesis that a higher percentage of respondents completing a tertiary education would result in a higher Net Migration Sentiment Score. With a p-value of 0.02 suggesting a statistically significant relationship between the completion of tertiary education and Net Migration Sentiment Score. However, with an R-squared value of only 0.198, only limited attribution can be placed on the variance of the percentage of those who completed tertiary education.

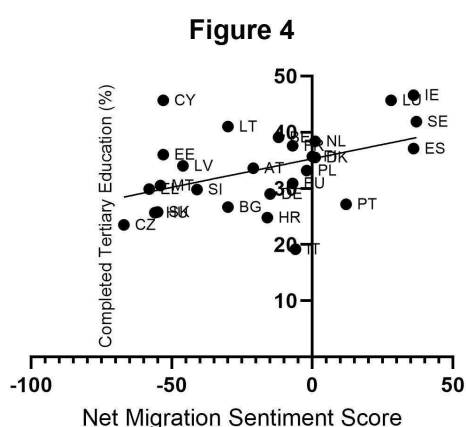


Fig. 4 Percentage of the population that completed tertiary education in relation to the Net migration Sentiment Score within EU member states

While education and Human Capital Theory is supported by Figure 4 and coincides with the academic literature as well as the hypothesis of the study, it is clear that through the low R-squared value, the connection between the 2 statistically not as significant as would initially appear. This may be in part due to the limitations of the statical model, as it cannot encapsulate all facets of effect that are experienced as a result of achieving a tertiary education. Alternatively, the explanation may line various cultural, social or economic regional differences within the member states that are not being taken into account. That being said, the statistical significance of the results is present and as such the study can

confirm that a key factor in the formation of public opinion in regards to migration within the EU can be attributed to higher educational attainment and greater human capital.

### 4.5 Sense of Security and Safety

The findings the study has made on the key factor of sense of Security are not supportive of the studies original hypotheses. The statistical model did not find any significant linear relationship between the sense of security and the Net Migration score. With a low R-squared value 0.01205, and a p-value of 0.5857, the study can conclude that under the used data sets, there is no statistical relation between the dependent and independent variables.

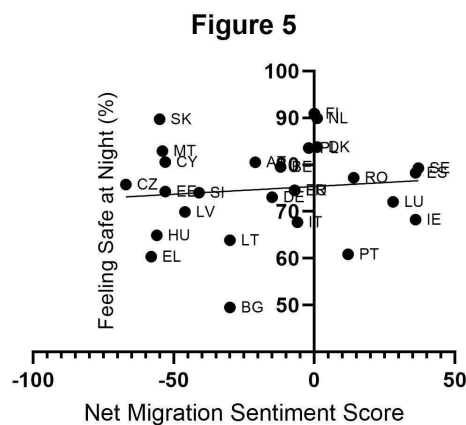


Fig. 5 Percentage of the respondents who answered positively to feeling safe at night in relation to the Net migration Sentiment Score within EU member states

A possible explanation between the disparity in statistical results and the hypothesis of the study. There may be an overemphasis on the significance of the sense of security and safety concerning the formation of public opinion on migration. This would manifest in the form of post hoc analyses that may lead to a biased interpretation of what formulates public opinion.

## 4.6 Political Affiliation

An upset in the hypotheses of the study alongside the broader academic literature related to public opinion on migration is present in Figure 6. With a very low R-squared value of 0.01020, there appears negligible statistical significance between the political affiliation within a member state and its value on the net migration sentiment score. The statistical method in Figure 6 suggests no statistical significance between Figure 6 and a model without any slope. This acts as a counterintuitive result when considering general political assumptions that are drawn regarding stances on migration within the traditional left-right political dichotomy.

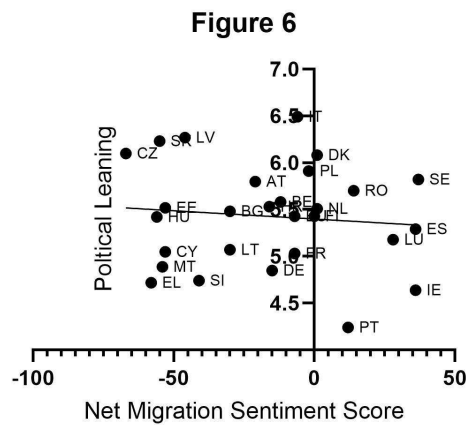


Fig. 6 National political affiliation in relation to the Net migration Sentiment Score within EU member states

There are possible explanations for the results displayed in Figure 6. Firstly, the data source utilised in determining the political leanings took into consideration all parliamentary political parties, and as such also those in opposition. If one adopts Vrânceanu & Lachats ‘thermostatic model (Vrânceanu & Lachats 2021), then it would be expected that the majority of shifts in public opinion affected by political affiliation would manifest during legislative change. As such, the inclusion of opposition parties within the EU political barometer alternates the results. However, that alone does not explain the upset. An additional explanation is that while a left-right dichotomy on issues of migration is common, it is not a contrast. Recent political developments in Germany show how left-wing parties may adopt anti-immigration rhetoric (Fürstenau, 2024). Conversely, parties which identify as right-wing may not have inherently negative positions on immigration.



It may be a shortcoming of the data set, as factors ranging from taxation to free market influence the EU political barometer data set. These variables, essential in determining the political position of the party in question, do not, ultimately help determine solely a political party's position on immigration, and as such influence the outcomes of the data set accordingly.

## **5. Discussion**

The primary goal of this study was the evaluation of identified key factors in shaping public opinion regarding migration within the European Union. To this end, notable findings can be inferred from the results gained from the statistical model. The majority of hypotheses made by the study were not supported by the statistical model. Of the 2 key factors which showed statistically significant relationships, there existed variance in the R - R-squared values. This indicated that although these key factors do have a linear influence on the formation of public opinion on migration, their influence isn't equal. Conversely, those factors, which did not have statistically significant relationships with the Net Migration Sentiment Score, varied in the extent to which they diverged from the slope. It is, however important to note, that such differences may be purely coincidental and further research into individual topics is needed in order to assess the impacts those factors had in the shaping of public opinion.

Relationships and patterns are visible throughout the results displayed in the statistical models. Notably, certain nationalities consistently performed on the edges of the spectrum, in spite of varying independent variables being employed. A notable example is Sweden, and to a lesser extent, inversely, nations of the former Warsaw Pact. The statistical models placed these nations in positions supporting the hypotheses presented within the study. It is important to note that many of the characteristics used in the hypotheses for higher public opinion on migration can be considered more broadly as signs of societal progress. As such caution must be placed when interpreting such patterns beyond the context of the study on ethical grounds, so as to not perpetuate national stereotypes.

As a majority of the hypotheses the study presented were not fulfilled, the study did not meet the expected outcomes. Of particular note are the results relating to Sense of Security and Safety. The noteworthiness of these results lies in the perceived similarity of the author

between the Sense of Security and Safety and Societal Cohesion. Hypotheses were made on an interpretation that both of the respective proxies for the Sense of Security and Safety and Societal Cohesion fall within a 'social' category. In turn, it was expected that many of the hidden influences that shift the polling of the proxies would be similar, resulting in a similar outcome in relation to the Net Migration Sentiment Score. This however was not displayed within the statistical model, which showed statistical significance only in relation to the factor of Societal Cohesion. While the results do not meet the hypothesis of the study, they nonetheless show the multidimensional nature of the factors that were analysed and can interpret particular influencers on these factors in future research.

Within the broader academic field, focusing on research relating to public opinion formulation in regard to migration, it can be concluded that this study acts as a statistical analysis that evaluates the theoretical factors that influence public opinion. With its results, it challenges aspects of research and theory that affirm the hypotheses tested within the study. It provides a multifaceted examination of individual factors that were identified as practically significant influences on the broader public opinion.

The implications of this study showcase that while individual factors may impact public opinion on migration, ultimately it cannot be attributed to factors in isolation. This study challenges pre-deterministic narratives that are presented by some authors on specific factors of influence in relation to public opinion through the utilisation of statistical models that conflict with the theoretical claims put forward.

The limitations of this study vary in complexity. The overarching limitation is inherent within the statistical model of a simple linear regression. These were known from the beginning as invariably caused by the statistical model. While the model proved useful in its ability to analyse individual key factors, it did not allow for multiple independent variables to be imputed. While desirable in so far as it allowed for easy identification of which factors had and which had not statistically significant influences on the Net Migration Sentiment Score, it did not allow for deeper and more nuanced analysis.

The broad scope of the analysis on the entirety of the European Union constrained analysis relating to specific regional or national characteristics that would have influenced not only the choice of proxy but also the factors being analysed. The broad scope and open-ended question of EU migration resulted in different nations interpreting the question differently

and as such modified their responses accordingly. This undoubtedly impacted the results to an extent, however, regional research would be required to find out its significance.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to analyse key factors influencing public opinion in relation to migration in the European Union. Utilising a qualitative-based analysis approach of key proxies relating to the factors affecting public opinion, it can be concluded that while some factors have statistical significance in relation to influencing public opinion, the majority in isolation do not. These results indicate that several independent variables are required to influence a respondent simultaneously in order for them to shift public opinion in relation to migration.

Individual factors have revealed a lack of interconnectedness which preceded similar factors, highlighting within the study the risks of the categorization of factors influencing public opinion within broad groupings. Perceived similarities in factors such as Education and Economic Competition on a theoretical ground do not reflect within the statistical analysis. On the same note, perceived similarities between the Sense of Security and Societal Cohesion produce unexpected results. As such, a key conclusion this study can draw from its findings is that factors influencing perceived similar societal and economic phenomena may vary greatly in their influences that cause set phenomena. The study therefore recommends the avoidance of larger groups when identifying factors on the formation of public opinion and instead to analyse each factor in an individual and multi-demineital form.

While the inconclusive results in a majority of the key factors identified within the study limit the generalizability of the results, the approach taken by the study provides additional insight into the need to approach complex social phenomena with particular care and consider the numerous factors that influence the formation of public opinion. This study provides a clear illustration that certain individual factors may influence public opinion on migration in line with the wider academic literature on the topic, yet it also raises the question through its statistical analyses about the stated affected theses, a factor may exert on the public opinion. In doing so, the study revises the ways in which certain key factors are identified as significant within the academic discourse and encourages a more holistic approach towards the topic of public opinion on migration within the European Union

Further research is needed to determine the relationship between various factors and their influence on public opinion on migration within the European Union. Particular emphasis is needed to be placed on research pertaining to a multi-dimensional factor, as this study highlights some of the limitations that exist when utilising a single proxy analysis. Additionally, research may be extended towards the examination of regional variation in public opinion on migration, in order to more accurately examine variants that exist domestically and have therefore not been able to be considered within the scope of this study.

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