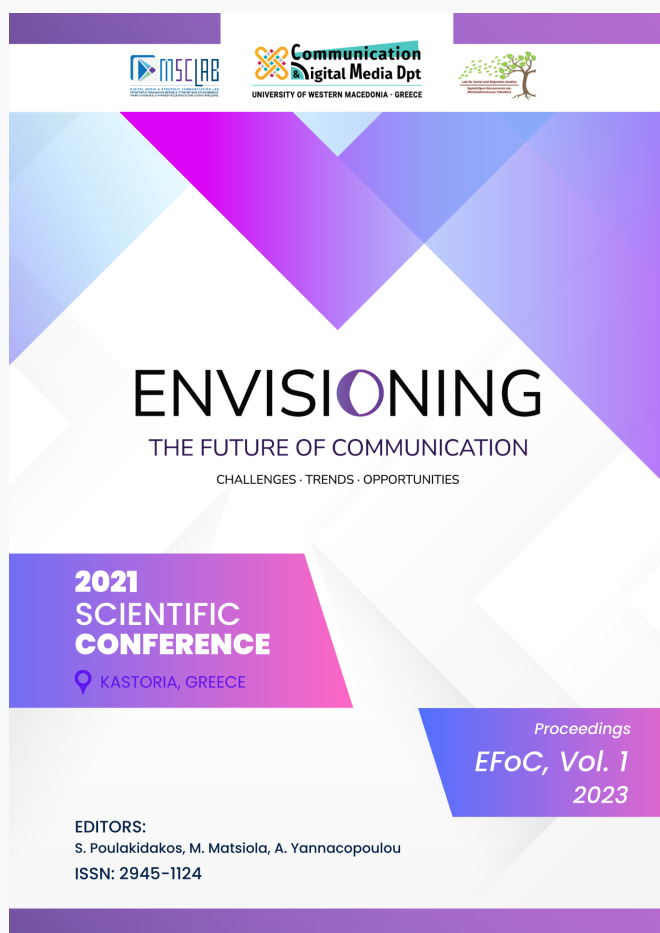


Envisioning the Future of Communication

Vol 1, No 1 (2023)

Envisioning the Future of Communication - Conference Proceedings vol.1



Public Support for European Disintegration

Nikolas Kouloglou, George Georgarakis

doi: [10.12681/efoc.5335](https://doi.org/10.12681/efoc.5335)

Copyright © 2023, Nikolas Kouloglou, George Georgarakis



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Public Support for European Disintegration: Cultural threat or Economic Hardship?

The cases of Greece and Italy between 2012 and 2019

Nikolas Kouloglou*
George N. Georgarakis†

Abstract

Since the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent immigration crisis, public opposition to European integration has increased in southern European countries. This disaffection against European integration has coincided with public support for far-right ideologies and parties in Greece and Italy, two southern countries that were hit hard by both crises. However, it is still unclear whether public attitudes toward European integration are driven by economic hardship or cultural concerns. To explore this question, we draw on data from the Eurobarometer between 2012 and 2019. This study aims to provide further evidence about the cultural and utilitarian foundations of the European public opinion.

Keywords: financial crisis, immigration crisis, Eurobarometer, public opinion, Italy, Greece.

Introduction

Since the 2009 Eurozone crisis and the 2015 immigration crisis, public support for far-right ideologies and opposition to the EU have increased in Europe, and in particular in the Southern EU member states. The rise of nationalist-Eurosceptic ideologies has manifested itself into the increase of public support for EU disintegration (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016). This dynamic was particularly salient in Greece and in Italy, two European countries, which were hit hard by both crises. In Greece, the eruption of the financial crisis had an impact on the rise of the far-right and anti-EU sentiments (Georgiadou, 2019; Halikiopoulou, 2020). Accordingly, in Italy the far-right is increasingly Eurosceptic (De Vries & Edwards, 2009) and in some cases even advocates for European disintegration (Mammone, 2015).

However, it is still unclear in the existing literature whether economic hardship or perceived cultural concerns are better predictors of public attitudes toward the EU. This article attempts to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the case of Greece and Italy between 2012 and 2019, during a period when both member states were struck considerably by the economic and the immigration crises. To investigate the correlates of public support for European (dis)integration we draw on cross-sectional and longitudinal data from the Eurobarometer. We find that economic evaluations trump opposition to immigration in predicting support for the

*Nikolas Kouloglou, Teaching and research fellow at Avignon University.

†George N. Georgarakis, Assistant adjunct professor at the University of Athens.

EU, especially in the Greek case, but as the immigration crisis continues to develop, anti-immigrant sentiments correlate with negative opinions about the EU at higher levels.

Ideology and European Disintegration

The ideological cleavage is traditionally considered to encompass and organize all major social divisions in Western European national politics (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). More recently, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2018) added a transnational dimension in this cleavage theory, which characterizes ideologies that are against external actors, who threaten the nation state, and against European integration in general. European disintegration is expressed by a traditional left-right cleavage, but also depends significantly on the status quo of the national welfare state (Brinegar & Jolly, 2005).

European Union's future can be put into question due to the rise of far-right ideologies and Eurosceptic parties (Lefkofridi & Schmitter, 2015; Schmitter, 2012). There are various nuances and degrees of Euroscepticism across the ideological spectrum. Indeed, some Eurosceptic parties reject the EU as a supranational entity altogether while others are advocating for its restructure (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016). Nevertheless, the far-right seems to respond to both economic hardship and perceived cultural threat. Far-right supporters converge on claims of national sovereignty not only as cultural but also as an economic response against external threats (Mazzoleni & Ivaldi, 2020), and they diverge from radical left supporters on the cultural concerns of the European integration (Brack, 2020). Both the Eurozone and migrant crisis enhanced these centrifugal pressures (Fabbrini, 2016; Schimmelfennig, 2018) as the rise of far-right Euroscepticism was a consequence of the fear of cultural and economic losses (Bremer & Schulte-Cloos, 2019; Lefkofridi & Michel, 2017).

Relevant literature lacks a clear consensus on what specific elements compose the core of far-right ideologies (Golder, 2016). Yet, there are common ideological features of the far-right supporters. In Greece, the nativism, populism and authoritarianism of Golden Dawn manifested itself in its 'social activism' including distribution of food or organization of blood donations "only for Greeks" (Dinas et al., 2019). Similarly, populist claims and nationalist discourse are the main aspects of the political rhetoric of *Forza Nuova* (Caiani & Kröll, 2017), *Lega Nord* and *CasaPound* (Froio & Gattinara, 2015) in Italy, three main actors of the far right. Apart from populist anti-systemic elements, the far-right agenda in Italy combines ethno-cultural nationalism, nativism, and social conservatism (Loch & Norocel, 2015; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2007).

Immigration and European Disintegration

The bulk of the relevant literature shows that the far-right appeals to and politically expresses citizens' anti-immigration and cultural concerns (Brunner & Kuhn, 2018; Edo et al., 2019; Halla et al., 2017; Harmon, 2018; Lonsky, 2021). Indeed, as far as the question of national

identity is concerned, a new cultural cleavage which opposes “open” positions of integration to “closed” positions of demarcation has an important impact on identity politics in European countries (Kriesi et al., 2008; Loch & Norocel, 2015). As Loch and Norocel (2015) argue, this cleavage involves an internal (immigration) and an external (European integration) dimension. Perceived cultural threats have a major role in the articulation of national identities as they trigger the rejection of different cultures and the protection of national ideals (Loch & Norocel, 2015). Indeed, far-right supporters often relate migrants with crime and terrorism and support the drastic restriction of immigration to reinforce national security and social order (Eller, 2017; Loch & Norocel, 2015).

In Greece, LAOS (Popular Orthodox Rally) and Golden Dawn based their political programs and rallies on an anti-immigration and anti-EU agenda (Dennison & Geddes, 2019; Ellinas, 2013; Georgiadou, 2019; Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2015). Most importantly, Golden Dawn advocated for an ethnic cleansing against outsiders, immigrants and external enemies who allegedly undermine the national interests of Greece (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2015). Similarly, anti-immigration discourses played a major role in the rise and strengthening of all Italian contemporary far-right parties (Davis & Deole, 2017) and shaped the electoral base of *Forza Nuova*, *Fiamma Tricolore* and *CasaPound* based on nativism and the rhetoric of protecting the national identity (Caiani & Kröll, 2017; Castelli Gattinara & Froio, 2016).

Economic Hardship and European Disintegration

Public support for European integration also has a utilitarian explanation. The main argument of this approach is based on the benefits of liberalization of the EU trade and the interaction of EU citizens with higher levels of income and human capital, especially in terms of education and professional skills (Kriesi et al., 2012; Tucker et al., 2002). Indeed, high-skilled workers and entrepreneurs with capital are more supportive of European integration than blue-collar workers (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). Since the Great Recession in 2008 and the Eurozone crisis one year later, economic insecurity clouded these benefits. The far-right saw an opportunity in this development and mobilized against globalization and the EU to blame them for the current economic insecurity (Lefkofridi & Michel, 2017).

The far-right represents a backlash against the globalization of the markets and seeks to extract political gains from the increasing divisions between the “winners” and “losers” of globalization (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Rueda, 2005). Most importantly, the latter express their grievances related to low job opportunities, lower incomes, and economic insecurity (Kriesi et al., 2008). The approach of economic grievances is widely supported especially at the individual level (Golder, 2016). People who support far-right ideologies often belong to lower socioeconomic groups and feel underrepresented by mainstream parties that express the interests and preferences of people with higher income (Bovens & Wille, 2017; Brils et al., 2020; Kriesi et al., 2008).

In Greece, the economic crisis has undermined trust in the traditional political system and served as a springboard to the emergence of the far-right (Ellinas, 2013). Following the outbreak of the financial crisis, economic and political hardship weakened the traditional bipartisan Greek system and prompted the rise and consolidation of far-right ideologies (Georgiadou, 2019). Moreover, Kriesi and Pappas (2015) argue that the economic crisis was a crucial element in the identity-building process of current far-right supporters in Italy. For instance, *CasaPound* interpreted the economic crisis as “a direct output of liberal capitalism” (Froio & Gattinara, 2015) and defined it as an obvious enemy causing the increase of unemployment and austerity measures.

Data and Methods

To test our argument, we turn to eleven representative surveys of the Greek and Italian population that cover the period between 2012 and 2019 (N = 22,322). All studies are part of the Eurobarometer (waves 77.3, 81.2, 83.3, 85.2, 86.2, 87.3, 88.3, 89.1, 90.3, 91.5 and 92.3)* and correspond to the annual surveys of 2012 and 2014-2019.† Due to the unavailability of common measures across these waves, we had to omit the 2013 Eurobarometer surveys and analyze data from 2012 and 2014 separately.

This seven-year period was critical for the decrease of public support for the European Union. On the one hand, the effects of the economic crisis of 2008 were still strong on the population of the European periphery. In fact, for both Greece and Italy the worst fiscal years in terms of Gross Domestic Product prior to COVID-19 were 2013-2016.‡ On the other hand, this period captures the European migrant crisis and the years that immediately precede it. In the EU, the migrant crisis peaked in 2015 but the pressure from massive migration flows is still felt in both countries.

Measuring anti-immigration sentiment and economic evaluations

Previous literature suggests that public support for the European Union hinges on identity-related factors as well as on utilitarian evaluations of the economy (for an overview, see Hobolt and de Vries, 2016). To gauge anti-immigration sentiments, we combine two items in an additive scale. The first question asks respondents whether they agree that immigrants contribute a lot to their country on a 4-point scale ranging from totally agree to totally disagree. The second item asks how respondents feel about immigration of people from outside the EU on a 5-point scale ranging from very positive to very negative.§

* Waves up to 88.3 were conducted by TNS ICAP, Athens, Greece and TNS Infratest, Milan, Italy. Beginning from wave 89.1 the surveys were carried out by Taylor Nelson Sofres Market Research, Athens, Greece and Kantar Italia, Milan, Italy.

† From 2016 to 2019 we draw on two waves per year.

‡ The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?locations=GR-IT>

§ This question is available only from 2015 onward. For this reason, we rely only on the first item in our analysis for 2012 and 2014.

Further, we measure socio-tropic and egocentric evaluations of the economy by constructing three additive scales. The first two scales tap into retrospective and prospective evaluations of the national and European economy by adding assessments of the current situation in national/European economy (measured on a 4-point scale) and relevant expectations for the next twelve months (measured on a 3-point scale). Accordingly, we gauge egocentric economic evaluations by adding two similar items that ask respondents about their assessment and expectations regarding their household finances.*

In addition to these variables, we account for respondents' ideology (measured on a 10-point scale),[†] sex, age, education, occupation, and self-reported belonging to the working class, the middle class, or the upper class of society.

Measuring support for the EU

The main dependent variable of interest is public support for the EU. In the Eurobarometer, the classic measure of public support for European integration is an item that asks respondents if their country's membership in the European Union is a "good thing," a "bad thing," or "neither good nor bad." However, this item is not available in any of the Eurobarometer waves we draw on. Moreover, the fact that this question is measured with a 3-point scale would make the regression analysis more complicated as the variable is neither continuous nor binary. To overcome these shortcomings, we create a 9-point scale that combines two items that arguably tap into the same construct. Indeed, the first item asks respondents to rate the image of the EU on a 5-point scale ranging from "very good" to "very bad" while the second question is a dummy that asks if respondents tend to trust or not to trust the EU.

Analytic Strategy

To test our central argument, we run a series of linear regressions. Because the 2012 and 2014 Eurobarometer surveys do not include the same measures as subsequent waves, we analyze these two cross-sectional studies separately. The set of regressors consists of anti-immigration sentiment, evaluations of national and European economy, evaluations of the household finances, ideology (only in 2014), sex, age, education, occupation, self-reported class identity and country fixed effects (with Greece being the base category). In a similar manner, we pool observations from 2015 to 2019 and fit a series of linear models that include year fixed effects in addition to the above predictors. In all regressions, the dependent variable is public support for the EU. Prior to be entered in the models, all variables were normalized to range from 0 to 1, and therefore coefficients should be interpreted as percentage points. Although our analysis

* The measure of expectations about respondents' household finances is not available in the 2012 Eurobarometer survey and therefore we only take into account their assessment of their current situation.

[†] Ideology is not measured in the 2012 Eurobarometer survey.

has a descriptive value, an important caveat is that in absence of random assignment, we cannot make any causal claims.

Empirical Results

Due to the fact that several questions have been excluded from the 2012-2019 Eurobarometer surveys, we organize the presentation of the empirical results in three sections. First, we show the results from the 2012 Eurobarometer survey separately for each country as well as by drawing on the pooled sample. Then, we proceed similarly for the 2014 survey. Finally, we offer the results corresponding to the 2015-2019 period.

Public support for the EU in Greece and Italy: 2012

Table 1 presents the correlates of public support for the EU in Greece and Italy in 2012. Note that this model does not control for ideology because it is not measured in the survey. In Model 1, only the Greek sample is analyzed. Although anti-immigrant sentiments are not associated with public support for the EU, positive economic evaluations seem to predict higher support. More specifically, favorable assessments of the national and European economy are correlated with public support for the EU at $b = 0.152$ ($p < 0.05$) and $b = 0.279$ ($p < 0.001$), respectively. Further, Greek citizens' view of the EU is associated with egocentric evaluations about the finances of their household ($b = 0.201$, $p < 0.001$) and their identification with higher social class ($b = 0.092$, $p < 0.05$).

Turning to Italy, Model 2 suggests that the correlates of public support for the EU are somewhat different than those in the Greek case. Indeed, Italians' anti-immigrant sentiments undermine public approval of the EU in a substantive manner ($b = -0.128$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, Italians base their views of the EU on positive assessments of the European economy ($b = 0.439$, $p < 0.001$) and their household finances ($b = 0.213$, $p < 0.001$) rather than on assessments of the national economy or their identification with higher social class.

Model 3 that draws on the pooled sample of Greek and Italian citizens corroborates that in 2012, opinions about the economy and not immigration play the dominant role in predicting higher support for the EU. Although anti-immigration sentiments are associated with lower support for the EU across both countries on average ($b = -0.080$, $p < 0.001$), assessments of the European economy ($b = 0.341$, $p < 0.001$), pocketbook evaluations ($b = 0.201$, $p < 0.001$) and self-identification with higher class ($b = 0.081$, $p < 0.01$) drive public opinion toward the EU.

Table 1. Anti-immigrant sentiment, Economic assessment, and Public Support for the EU in Greece and Italy (2012)

	Public Support for European Union (2012)		
	Model 1 (Greece)	Model 2 (Italy)	Model 3 (pooled)
Anti-immigrant sentiment	-0.028 (0.032)	-0.128*** (0.033)	-0.080*** (0.023)
Assessment of national economy	0.152* (0.064)	-0.024 (0.069)	0.079 (0.046)
Assessment of European economy	0.279*** (0.064)	0.439*** (0.068)	0.341*** (0.040)
Assessment of household finances	0.201*** (0.049)	0.213*** (0.043)	0.201*** (0.031)
Ideology	—	—	—
Ideology (sq)	—	—	—
Female	0.013 (0.020)	-0.015 (0.024)	-0.002 (0.015)
Age	0.028 (0.069)	0.011 (0.092)	0.039 (0.055)
Education	-0.287 (0.174)	0.199 (0.209)	-0.072 (0.133)
Social Class	0.092* (0.041)	0.080 (0.045)	0.081** (0.030)
Italy	—	—	-0.023 (0.016)
Constant	0.210*** (0.070)	0.179* (0.086)	0.206*** (0.054)
N	812	597	1,409
Adj. R ²	0.208	0.225	0.220
AIC	105.047	117.201	206.144
BIC	222.535	222.607	342.661

Note: Entries are OLS coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses). All models control for occupation. The p-values are based on a two-tailed test. All variables are rescaled to range from 0 to 1. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Public support for the EU in Greece and Italy: 2014

The results in Table 2 suggest that in 2014 there has been a shift in how the Greek and Italian public opinion evaluates the EU. Economic factors are still key in understanding the foundations of public support for the EU, but the negative effect of anti-immigration sentiments has become stronger. In Italy, opposition to immigration is a stronger predictor of low approval ratings for the EU than in Greece ($b = -0.230$, $p < 0.001$ vs. $b = -0.138$, $p < 0.001$) but the magnitude of this association is still relatively small in the pooled sample ($b = -0.171$, $p < 0.001$).

Contrary to Italians, Greek citizens who hold optimistic views about their national economy tend to express higher support for the EU ($b = 0.165$, $p < 0.05$). Although neither national public seems to take into account pocketbook evaluations, assessments of the European economy are still pivotal in whether Greeks and Italians put their confidence in the EU ($b = 0.301$, $p < 0.001$ and $b = 0.424$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). In fact, assessments of the European economy are the most important correlate of public support for the EU in the pooled sample ($b = 0.341$, $p < 0.001$) while self-identification with higher social class is a less powerful predictor ($b = 0.081$, $p < 0.01$).

In Greece, but not in Italy, the public is found to be divided across ideological lines on whether it supports the EU. Citizens who identify as right wing tend to be more in favor of the EU ($b = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$) but the relationship is not necessarily linear. Instead, people that position themselves in the extreme left or extreme right are less likely to be favorable toward the EU ($b = -0.414$, $p < 0.01$). Similar but less pronounced divisions are found across demographic characteristics. Women are less supportive of the EU ($b = -0.053$, $p < 0.05$) while older people are more supportive ($b = 0.199$, $p < 0.05$). These differences across levels of ideology and demographics in Greece are strong enough to drive the magnitude of associations in the pooled sample as well.

Table 2. Anti-immigrant sentiment, Economic assessment, and Public Support for the EU in Greece and Italy (2014)

	Public Support for European Union (2014)		
	Model 1 (Greece)	Model 2 (Italy)	Model 3 (pooled)
Anti-immigrant sentiment	-0.138*** (0.036)	-0.230*** (0.050)	-0.171*** (0.028)
Assessment of national economy	0.165* (0.070)	-0.033 (0.087)	0.094 (0.053)
Assessment of European economy	0.301*** (0.051)	0.424*** (0.078)	0.341*** (0.042)
Assessment of household finances	0.054 (0.066)	0.088 (0.075)	0.073 (0.048)
Ideology	0.624*** (0.157)	0.060 (0.161)	0.329** (0.111)
Ideology (sq)	-0.414** (0.145)	0.006 (0.159)	-0.191 (0.105)
Female	-0.053* (0.023)	-0.015 (0.031)	-0.037* (0.018)
Age	0.199* (0.079)	0.036 (0.113)	0.157* (0.064)
Education	0.108 (0.181)	0.275 (0.225)	0.202 (0.140)
Social Class	0.042 (0.047)	0.044 (0.060)	0.043 (0.036)
Italy	—	—	0.065*** (0.018)
Constant	-0.079 (0.080)	0.189 (0.102)	0.002 (0.063)
N	593	352	945
Adj. R ²	0.274	0.279	0.272
AIC	55.763	52.091	97.730
BIC	178.549	156.409	238.415

Note: Entries are OLS coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses). All models control for occupation. The p-values are based on a two-tailed test. All variables are rescaled to range from 0 to 1. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Public support for the EU in Greece and Italy: 2015-2019

The results from the last series of tests of our hypotheses are shown in Table 3. During the 2015-2019 period that covers the migration crisis, public support for the EU seems to depend almost equally on anti-immigrant attitudes and economic evaluations. Interestingly, Italians' opposition to immigration influences their opinions about the EU more so than that of Greeks ($b = -0.325$, $p < 0.001$ vs. $b = -0.204$, $p < 0.001$). In the pooled sample, anti-immigration

sentiments are the second strongest factor that predicts the rate of public support for the EU ($b = -0.251$, $p < 0.001$).

The results concerning economic evaluations follow a similar pattern as in previous years. In both countries, evaluations about the European economy and household finances are positively correlated with favorable opinions about the EU on average ($b = 0.324$, $p < 0.001$ and $b = 0.150$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). Further, self-identification with higher social class correlates with higher support for the EU both in each country separately and in the pooled sample ($b = 0.115$, $p < 0.001$). Greeks', but not Italians', rating of the EU also depends on their evaluations of their national economy ($b = 0.187$, $p < 0.001$).

Finally, the Greek public is found once again to be polarized across the levels of ideology. Indeed, right wing citizens are more likely to express favorable views about the EU ($b = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$) but those who place themselves in the extremes of the ideological spectrum are less supportive of the European project ($b = -0.128$, $p < 0.01$). Accordingly, in Italy education seems to be a stronger predictor of pro-EU attitudes than ideology with more educated Italians being in favor of the EU ($b = 0.124$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Anti-immigrant sentiment, Economic assessment, and Public Support for the EU in Greece and Italy (2015-2019)

	Public Support for European Union (2015-2019)		
	Model 1 (Greece)	Model 2 (Italy)	Model 3 (pooled)
Anti-immigrant sentiment	-0.204*** (0.016)	-0.325*** (0.017)	-0.251*** (0.011)
Assessment of national economy	0.187*** (0.021)	-0.044 (0.022)	0.095*** (0.015)
Assessment of European economy	0.273*** (0.017)	0.401*** (0.023)	0.324*** (0.013)
Assessment of household finances	0.103*** (0.020)	0.197*** (0.023)	0.150*** (0.015)
Ideology	0.281*** (0.052)	0.008 (0.055)	0.126** (0.038)
Ideology (sq)	-0.128** (0.049)	-0.090 (0.053)	-0.087* (0.036)
Female	0.006 (0.007)	0.009 (0.008)	0.009 (0.005)
Age	0.011 (0.028)	-0.034 (0.034)	0.006 (0.022)
Education	0.046 (0.055)	0.124* (0.058)	0.078* (0.040)
Social Class	0.111*** (0.018)	0.135*** (0.023)	0.115*** (0.014)
Italy	—	—	0.023*** (0.006)
2016	-0.051*** (0.013)	-0.057*** (0.015)	-0.054*** (0.010)
2017	-0.020 (0.013)	-0.049** (0.016)	-0.033** (0.010)
2018	-0.011 (0.013)	-0.074*** (0.015)	-0.039*** (0.010)
2019	-0.010 (0.013)	-0.073*** (0.015)	-0.036*** (0.010)
Constant	0.165*** (0.031)	0.365*** (0.036)	0.235*** (0.023)
N	5,847	4,261	10,108
Adj. R ²	0.236	0.342	0.293
AIC	1476.056	906.2933	2609.537
BIC	1696.288	1116.083	2855.053

Note: Entries are OLS coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses). All models control for occupation. The p -values are based on a two-tailed test. All variables are rescaled to range from 0 to 1. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion

The economic depression and the subsequent immigration crisis have negatively affected public support for the European project. The challenges that European publics face, especially in the periphery, have reduced the reservoir of goodwill that legitimizes European institutions and initiatives for greater integration. In this article, we sought to understand whether public support for the EU is based on economic concerns or cultural fears. To explore this question, we focused on Greece and Italy and drew on data from the Eurobarometer that cover the period from 2012 to 2019.

The results of our study suggest that economic concerns are more important than anti-immigration sentiments in predicting support for European (dis)integration. However, we report important differences both across countries and across years. Contrary to Greece, in Italy opposition to immigration was negatively correlated with supporting the EU even before the outbreak of the immigration crisis. After the outbreak, anti-immigration sentiments have been steadily growing stronger in both countries, undermining favorable attitudes toward the EU.

Turning to economic concerns, we find that evaluations about the European economy and household finances are prevalent predictors of pro-EU attitudes in Greece and Italy. Nevertheless, only the Greek public takes into account the state of the national economy when assessing the EU integration. This hints that the intensity of the Greek economic crisis has severely eroded Greeks' confidence in the EU. Further, Greeks but not Italians are highly polarized on ideological grounds about whether to support the EU. Rightwing individuals are more likely to express pro-European opinions, but the relationship is not monotonic. Instead, people that adhere to extreme ideologies, either right or left, are more critical toward the EU.

An important contribution of this article is that it highlights the divergent and convergent points between the Greek and Italian public. First, the anti-immigrant sentiment in Italy seems to be steadily increasing over the years between 2012 and 2019. In contrast, in Greece such tendencies appear after 2014 and most importantly after the outbreak of 2015. Second, the Greek public tends to place greater importance on the state of national economy regarding its (dis)affection of the EU. In Italy, national economic performance does not seem to be a criterion that predicts the evaluation of the EU. Third, support for the EU is strongly polarized on ideological grounds in Greece but not in Italy.

A caveat is that our findings can inform our understanding of public attitudes toward the EU prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since both countries took a heavy toll in terms of human and economic loss during the pandemic, future research should expand our analysis to investigate the roll of health concerns in shaping public support for the EU.

References

- Barone, G., D'Ignazio, A., de Blasio, G., & Naticchioni, P. (2016). Mr. Rossi, Mr. Hu and politics. The role of immigration in shaping natives' voting behavior. *Journal of Public Economics*, 136, 1–13.

- Becker, S. O., & Fetzer, T. (2016). Does Migration Cause Extreme Voting? In *CAGE Online Working Paper Series* (No. 306; CAGE Online Working Paper Series). Competitive Advantage in the Global Economy (CAGE) - The Warwick University.
- Bovens, M., & Wille, A. (2017). *Diploma Democracy: The Rise of Political Meritocracy* (Illustrated edition). Oxford University Press.
- Brack, N. (2020). Towards a unified anti-Europe narrative on the right and left? The challenge of Euroscepticism in the 2019 European elections. *Research & Politics*, 7(2), 2053168020952236.
- Bremer, B., & Schulte-Cloos, J. (2019). The Restructuring of British and German Party Politics in Times of Crisis. In H. Kriesi & S. Hutter (Eds.), *European Party Politics in Times of Crisis* (pp. 281–301). Cambridge University Press.
- Brils, T., Muis, J., & Gaidytė, T. (2020). Dissecting Electoral Support for the Far Right: A Comparison between Mature and Post-Communist European Democracies. *Government and Opposition*, 1–28.
- Brinegar, A. P., & Jolly, S. K. (2005). Location, Location, Location: National Contextual Factors and Public Support for European Integration. *European Union Politics*, 6(2), 155–180.
- Brunner, B., & Kuhn, A. (2018). Immigration, Cultural Distance and Natives' Attitudes Towards Immigrants: Evidence from Swiss Voting Results. *Kyklos*, 71(1), 28–58.
- Caiani, M., & Kröll, P. (2017). Nationalism and Populism in Radical Right Discourses in Italy and Germany. *Javnost - The Public*, 24, 1–19.
- Castelli Gattinara, P., & Froio, C. (2016). Direct Social Actions and Far Right Mobilization: The Relationship between ideas and action in the extreme right. *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 9(3), 1040–1066.
- Davis, L., & Deole, S. S. (2017). Immigration and the Rise of Far-right Parties in Europe. *Ifo DICE Report*, 15(4), 10–15.
- De Vries, C. E., & Edwards, E. E. (2009). Taking Europe To Its Extremes: Extremist Parties and Public Euroscepticism. *Party Politics*, 15(1), 5–28.
- Dennison, J., & Geddes, A. (2019). A Rising Tide? The Salience of Immigration and the Rise of Anti-Immigration Political Parties in Western Europe. *The Political Quarterly*, 90(1), 107–116.
- Dinas, E., Matakos, K., Xefteris, D., & Hangartner, D. (2019). Waking Up the Golden Dawn: Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Increase Support for Extreme-Right Parties? *Political Analysis*, 27(2), 244–254.
- Edo, A., Giesing, Y., Öztunc, J., & Poutvaara, P. (2019). Immigration and electoral support for the far-left and the far-right. *European Economic Review*, 115, 99–143.
- Eller, L. L. (2017). Explaining the Rise of Far-Right Political Parties in Europe. *Chancellor's Honors Program Projects*. 4
- Ellinas, A. A. (2013). *Full article: The Rise of Golden Dawn: The New Face of the Far Right in Greece*.
- Fabbrini, S. (2016). Beyond disintegration: Political and institutional prospects of the European Union. In *Social policy in the European Union: State of play 2016*.
- Froio, D. C., & Gattinara, D. P. C. (2015). Neo-fascist mobilization in contemporary Italy. Ideology and repertoire of action of CasaPound Italia. *Journal for Deradicalization*, 0(2), 86–118.
- Georgiadou, V. (2019). *The State of the Far Right in Greece*.

- Golder, M. (2016). Far Right Parties in Europe. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19(1), 477–497.
- Halikiopoulou, D. (2020). Economic Crisis, Poor Governance and the Rise of Populism: The Case of Greece. *Intereconomics*, 2020(1), 34–37.
- Halla, M., Wagner, A. F., & Zweimüller, J. (2017). Immigration and Voting for the Far Right. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 15(6), 1341–1385.
- Harmon, N. A. (2018). Immigration, Ethnic Diversity, and Political Outcomes: Evidence from Denmark. *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 120(4), 1043–1074.
- Hobolt, S. B., & de Vries, C. E. (2016). Public Support for European Integration. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19(1), 413–432.
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2018). Cleavage theory meets Europe's crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(1), 109–135.
- Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Dolezal, M., Helbling, M., Hoegliger, D., Hutter, S., & Wüest, B. (2012). Political conflict in western Europe. In Kriesi, Hanspeter; Grande, Edgar; Dolezal, Martin; Helbling, Marc; Hoegliger, Dominic; Hutter, Swen; Wüest, Bruno (2012). *Political conflict in western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cambridge University Press.
- Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschie, S., & Frey, T. (2008). *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kriesi, H., & Pappas, T. S. (2015). *European populism in the shadow of the great recession*. <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/36489>
- Lefkofridi, Z., & Michel, E. (2017). The Strains of Commitment The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies. In *The Electoral Politics of Solidarity: The Welfare Agendas of Radical Right Parties*. Oxford University Press.
- Lefkofridi, Z., & Schmitter, P. C. (2015). Transcending or Descending? European Integration in Times of Crisis. *European Political Science Review*, 7(1), 3–22.
- Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (1967). *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (First Edition). Free Press.
- Loch, D., & Norocel, O. C. (2015). The Populist Radical Right in Europe: A Xenophobic Voice in the Global Economic Crisis. In H.-J. Trenz, C. Ruzza, & V. Guiraudon (Eds.), *Europe's Prolonged Crisis* (pp. 251–269). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Lonsky, J. (2021). Does immigration decrease far-right popularity? Evidence from Finnish municipalities. *Journal of Population Economics*, 34(1), 97–139.
- Mammone, A. (2015). Rome in black (shirt): Far-right alliances in recent Italy. In *The European far right: Historical and contemporary perspectives* (Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) / Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Foundation), p. 29).
- Mazzoleni, O., & Ivaldi, G. (2020). Economic Populist Sovereignism and Electoral Support for Radical Right-Wing Populism. *Political Studies*, 0032321720958567.
- Mendez, I., & Cutillas, I. M. (2014). Has immigration affected Spanish presidential elections results? *Journal of Population Economics*, 27(1), 135–171.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge University Press.

- Rueda, D. (2005). Insider–Outsider Politics in Industrialized Democracies: The Challenge to Social Democratic Parties. *American Political Science Review*, 99(1), 61–74.
- Rydgren, J. (2007). The Sociology of the Radical Right. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33(1), 241–262.
- Schimmelfennig, F. (2018). European integration (theory) in times of crisis. A comparison of the euro and Schengen crises. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(7), 969–989.
- Schmitter, P. C. (2012). European Disintegration?: A Way Forward? *Journal of Democracy*, 23(4), 39–46.
- Schmitter, P. C., & Lefkofridi, Z. (2016). Neo-Functionalism as a Theory of Disintegration. *Chinese Political Science Review*, 1(1), 1–29.
- Tucker, J. A., Pacek, A. C., & Berinsky P, A. J. (2002). Transitional winners and losers: Attitudes toward EU membership in post-communist countries. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(3), 557–571.
- Vasilopoulou, S., & Halikiopoulou, D. (2015). The Rise of the Golden Dawn in the Context of the Greek Crisis. In S. Vasilopoulou & D. Halikiopoulou (Eds.), *The Golden Dawn's 'Nationalist Solution': Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Greece* (pp. 15–30). Palgrave Macmillan US.