

The consistency of the link between EU scepticism and immigration issues. A descriptive analysis of party positions

by Pierre Van Wolleghem



October 2016

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The present paper is published in the framework of Fondazione ISMU's strategic line of research
Immigration and the future of Europe

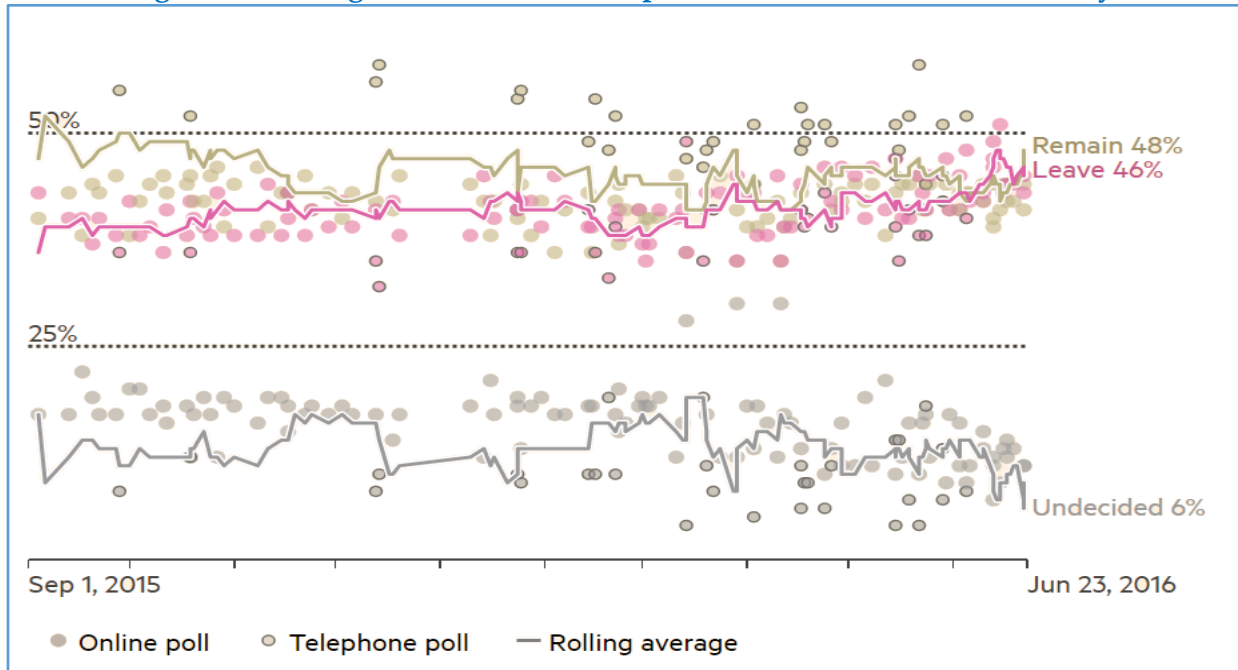
The Brexit referendum marked a no-return point in the history of the European construction. First member state ever to leave the Union, the UK was the theatre of a fierce campaign opposing positions on immigration to economic interests. Now that the anti-immigration camp seems to have won the game, this paper proposes to step back a little bit and consider the consistency of the link between EU scepticism and position on immigration for political parties across Europe and over the last ten years. I show that if the UK may well be a one-of-a-kind instance, the link between the two issues does exist across EU member states over time.

1. Introduction

It came as a surprise. On Friday 24 June 2016, early morning, the results of the referendum announced the victory of the Leave vote. Until the very last moment polls gave the precedence, however little the margin, to the Remain vote. The results came after a fierce and long campaign with the Remain defenders stressing the economic benefits of membership and the absolute uncertainty as to what would happen if the UK were to leave the Union (Independent, 2016). Their Leave opponents placed emphasis on the high level of immigration and the need for their country to recover its sovereignty (The Telegraph, 2016).

The role of political parties and their leaders have been of great importance in channelling (or lack of doing so) people's vote (Liddle, 2016). Ukip Farage called for UK's "Independence Day" whilst Tory Cameron emphasised the benefits of membership. Corbyn in the meantime longed to take up the race and when he finally did, he proved to be a weak and confusing campaigner (Liddle, 2016). In the space of a year of campaign though, the leave vote prospects seldom took over. As shown in figure 1, the forecasts considered altogether gave the Remain winning until the very last moment.

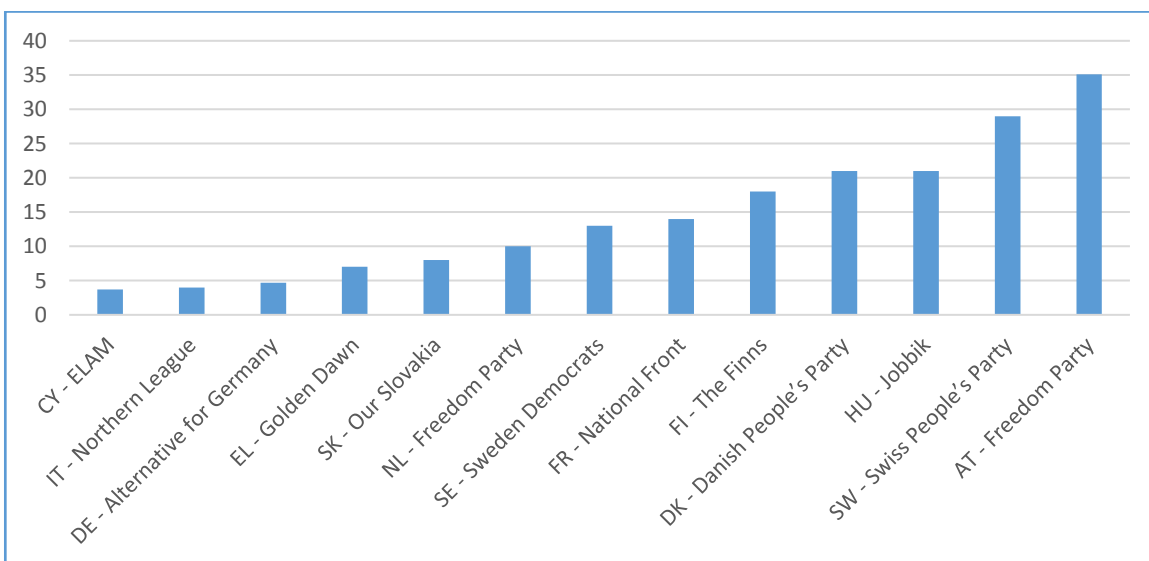
Figure 1 – Polling movements since September 2015 until referendum day



Source: Financial Times Research, available at: <https://fig.ft.com/sites/brexit-polling/>

With a tiny margin (51.9%), the vote Leave won, with immigration as a key motivation (Somerville, 2016). Hostility to diversity and the feeling not to have any control on influxes spurred UK citizens towards the exit. The henceforth infamous article 50 TEU, providing for the possibility to withdraw from the Union, have been invoked, giving by the same token momentum to other EU countries and/or parties nurturing similar fates. But if the UK is the first to actually cross the line, the tension between EU membership and immigration is spreading, translating into the rise of nationalist parties across Europe (see figure 2; see also BBC, 2016a; 2016b).

Figure 2 – Rise of Nationalism in Europe: Results of most recent national elections



Source: BBC, 23 May 2016 (BBC, 2016b)

In this short paper, I propose to go back in time and look at the relationship between European political parties' position on EU membership and on immigration in order to assess its consistency over time and space. I use the Chapel Hill Expert Survey trend file covering the years 2006-2014 (CHES; Bakker et al., 2015) and conduct different sorts of analysis. The first one is descriptive and looks into the absolute distribution of European political parties' preferences on the two issues mentioned (section 2). The second aimed at evaluating the degree of association between the two issues, controlling for other positions on different policy issues (section 3). Noting the absence of a significant effect of time on positions on EU integration, a third analysis considers the effect of time on positions on immigration policy (section 4). I provide a brief on the methods used in a fifth section and conclude in a sixth.

2. The link between position on EU integration and immigration for European political parties

Brexit has come as a shock across Europe and has rushed forth the saliency of the link between immigration and EU membership (Somerville, 2016). This section explores how much this link can be extended to political parties preference across Europe for the last decade. Figure 3 below plots parties' positions on the two issues without distinguishing (apart from UK parties) countries or date of data collection. Three observations are in order. Firstly, there is definitely a relationship between position on EU integration and immigration that runs across parties but such relationship is not linear (the curve suggests a quadratic function). In other words, parties that display mild preferences on how immigration should be restrictive or liberal (around 4 to 6 on the x axis) tend to be the champions of support to EU integration. Those parties that otherwise call for a more liberal immigration policy (towards 0 on the x axis), but especially the defenders of a restrictive immigration policy (towards 10 on the abscissa), lend much less (not to say none) support to EU integration. We see for UK parties for instance that the Ukip, leader of the anti-immigration campaign during the Brexit referendum, is located at the very end of the curve with very tough immigration policy preferences and minimum support for the EU. The Conservative party is not far up on the curve; the other parties display medium values with respect to the two policy issues.

A second observation lies in the fact that UK mainstream political parties are no exception among European parties. To the contrary, they are located with the bulk of data, rather close to the summary curve. Despite a deeply anchored Euroscepticism, UK's parties do not stand on a different footing than their counterparts across Europe, a worrisome statement when one considers the statements made by other European parties across Europe after the Leave victory. Notably, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the National Front in France, to name just these two examples, have called for a similar referendum.

The third observation that can be made here is that the Ukip drags the relationship further down with a hard (the hardest) stance on immigration policy and on EU inte-

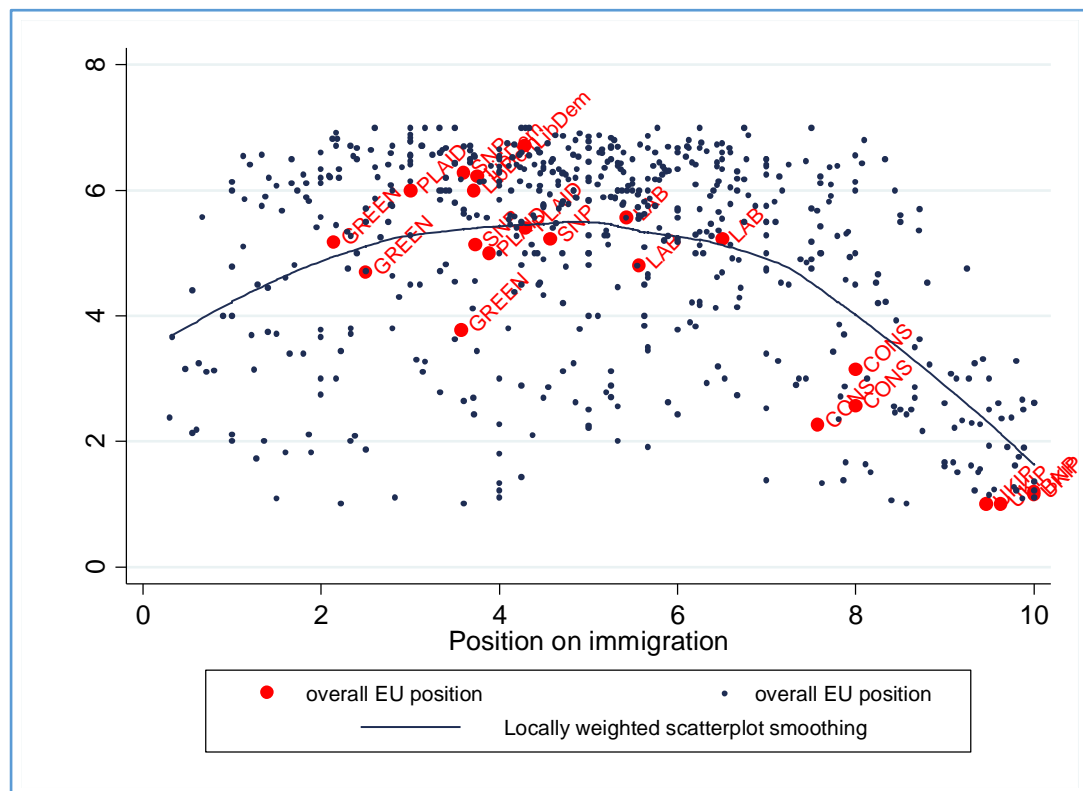
gration (see table 1). So, if mainstream parties' positions resemble other EU parties' positions, there may be something UK specific to the link between immigration and EU support.

Table 1 – The parties holding the hardest positions on EU integration and immigration policy

Country	Year	Party	Position on EU integration	Position on immigration
Greece	2014	Golden Dawn	1.1	10
France	2010	National Front	1.2	10
France	2014	National Front	1.2	9.8
France	2014	MPF	1.2	9.6
Netherlands	2010	Party for Freedom (PVV)	1.4	10
Netherlands	2014	Party for Freedom (PVV)	1.1	9.9
United Kingdom	2014	Ukip	1.1	10
United Kingdom	2010	British National Party	1.2	10
Sweden	2014	Sweden Democrats	1.3	9.8

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey

Figure 3 – Distribution of European political parties as a function of their policy preferences on EU integration and immigration, in 2006, 2010 and 2014, emphasis on UK parties



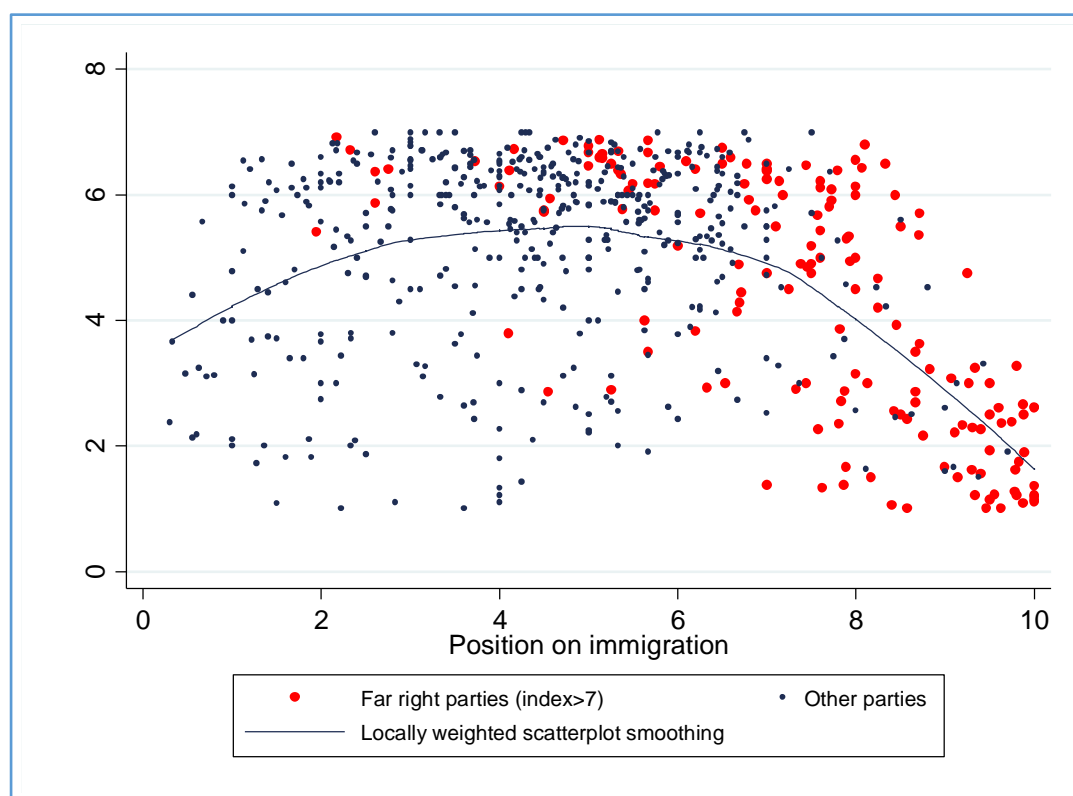
Source: own elaboration

Specific or not? A look at figure 4 supports and dismisses the hypothesis at the same time. Figure 4 considers European parties holding far right positions¹ in order to look at how they are placed with respect to the Ukip. The distribution of these parties suggests

¹ Far right parties are defined according to CHES variable on position on a left-right spectrum. Parties scoring higher or equal to seven are considered far right parties. Note for instance that Ukip scores at 7.25 on such axis.

that the link between position on immigration and on EU integration may well differ across Europe since many of these are not necessarily against EU integration or in favour of the toughest immigration policy. This is notably the case for the 5 red dots on the left-hand side of the graph. These parties are far right parties from Sweden, Lithuania and Finland. Differently, far right parties' positions on immigration are mostly placed above the central value (5) for immigration policy so that most of these are rather favourable to tough immigration policy. Interestingly though, these positions are not incompatible with support to the EU, echoing to Hofer, the leader of Austria's FPÖ, announcing that his party would not call a referendum on EU membership (BBC, 2016c). That being stated, and a fair deal of these positions are located in the bottom right-hand corner of the graph², following a tendency similar to that of the Ukip.

Figure 4 – Distribution of European political parties as a function of their policy preferences on EU integration and immigration, in 2006, 2010 and 2014, emphasis on far right parties



Source: own elaboration

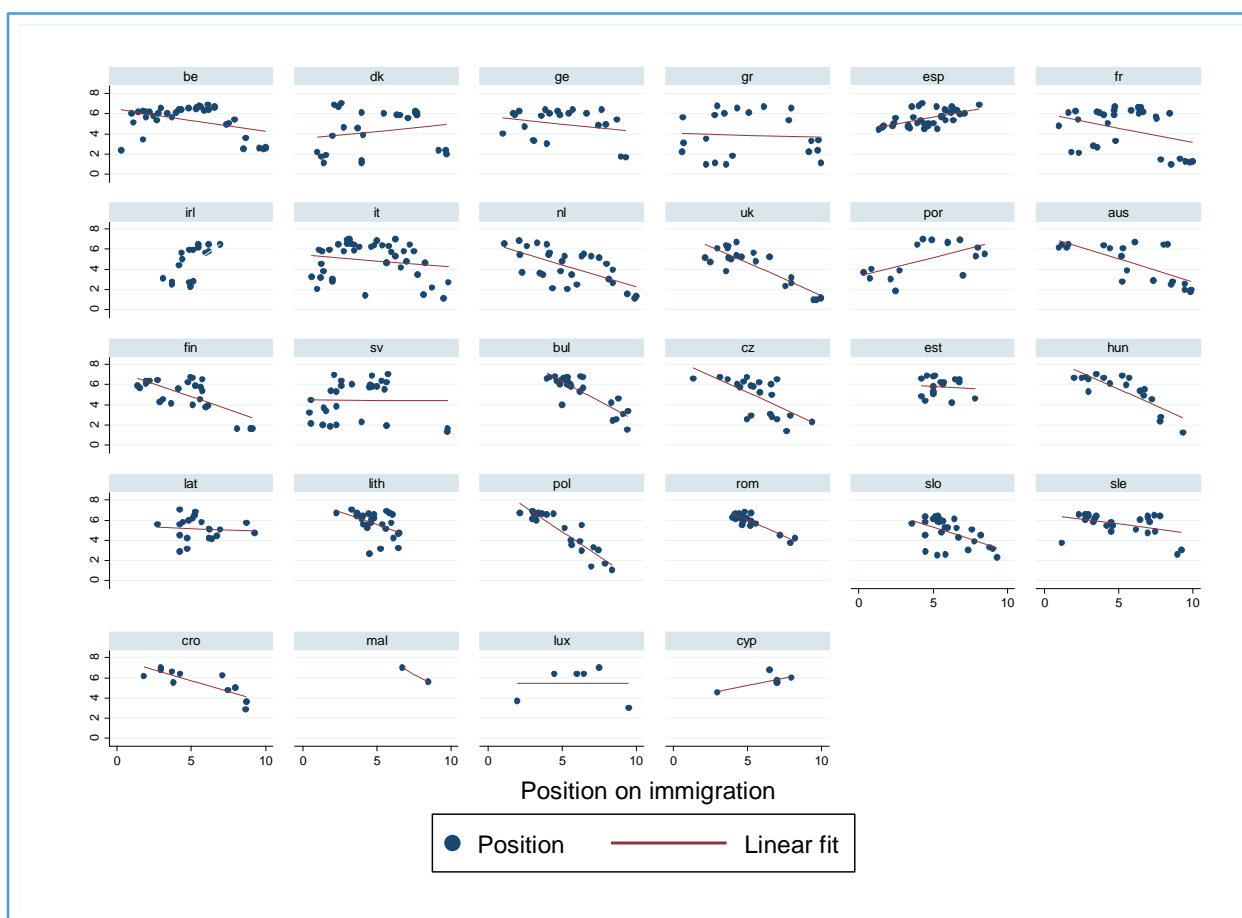
The question of knowing whether the relationship is a UK specific is not decided. As figure 4 suggests, the relationship between stance on EU integration and on immigration is likely to differ amongst countries. So shows figure 5 below. According to the member state, the linear fit of the relationship varies. Most of them display a negative slope (note that UK's slope is among the steepest), meaning that the tougher their position on im-

² With values on the ordinate lower than 3.5 and values on the abscissa greater than 5.

migration policy, the less they support EU integration. The Irish, Spanish and Portuguese case display an interesting counter-tendency with support to the EU increasing with tougher positions on immigration.

This statement motivates a deeper study of this relationship by hinting at the need to cluster observations by country. Then, Support for the EU is unlikely to be determined by position on immigration alone. Most likely, other factors, notably economic, affect positions on EU integration.

Figure 5 – Distribution of European political parties as a function of their policy preferences on EU integration and immigration, in 2006, 2010 and 2014, by countries



Source: own elaboration

3. Genuineness of the link between EU integration and positions on immigration

What to test for

This section proposes to test the genuineness of the link between these two issues and confront it to other plausible factors that could affect such relationship. In this section, I run a multilevel mixed effects regression³ in order to:

³ See next section for a detailed description and references for further information.

- a. Account for variation between countries, between parties lodged in these countries (in other words, data-points are clustered by country and party over time);
- b. Control for other plausible associations between EU support and other policy stances.

Different specifications of the model are tested in order to test the association of the dependent variable with position immigration and to appraise the robustness of the results. Since the Brexit campaign revolved around the conflict between anti-immigration stances and economic positions, the models tested confront the two plausible sets of explanations.

Evidently, a political party's position on the realisation of the internal market is likely to matter. The elimination of trade barrier but also the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour represent significant economic advantages. As a core element of the EU construction it is interesting to assess its association to support to the EU (and confront it to immigration policy).

Position on EU cohesion policy is also a fundamental aspect. Notably, it was expected to motivate the vote of Wales for the Remain side, which dramatically failed in the face of immigration issues. The EU cohesion policy (i.e. Structural Funds) must be controlled for for that it is an element thought to solve economic disparities across Europe and correct market inequalities for the accession of new member states. Old member states' parties are likely to be critical to it.

Position on redistribution summarises a general position that is regarded as a proxy for market-correcting stances (i.e. compensating disparities). Position on deregulation captures whether parties are defenders of a *laissez-faire* capitalism or rather if they prefer to it a regulated economy. Last but not least, overall position on the left-right spectrum is also considered with 0 being on the far left and 10 being on the far right.

As for the specifications, model (1) considers position on immigration and positions on EU internal market and EU cohesion policy in order to confront position on immigration and position on EU policies related to the functioning of the single market (market making with the variable on internal market; market correcting with the variable on cohesion policy). Model (1') is the same as model (1) except that it is run without the data-points relating to UK political parties, this in order to see how influential UK parties are on the coefficients. Model (2) includes the other variables enounced so as to confront immigration stances to other EU policies but also to other more general economic stances. Model (3) is similar to model (2) but comprises another operationalisation of time by including fixed effects for the single years of data collection. Table 2 below reports the results of the regressions.

Empirical results

Immigration proves to be significantly associated to position on EU integration with a coefficient statistically significant with 99% confidence (model 1 to 3). The hypothesis of a consistent link between immigration and Euroscepticism is thus confirmed. Dropping positions of UK parties (model 1') does not affect such relationship, nor does it affect its significance.

Table 2 – European political parties' position on EU integration and its associated variables, 2006-2010-2016

	Model (1)	Model (1') without UK	Model (2)	Model (3)
Immigration policy	-0.114 *** (0.014)	-0.111 *** (0.014)	-0.093 *** (0.021)	-0.092 *** (0.021)
Internal market	0.720 *** (0.027)	0.735 *** (0.027)	0.761 *** (0.038)	0.762 *** (0.039)
Cohesion policy	0.404 *** (0.035)	0.405 *** (0.037)	0.384 *** (0.038)	0.385 *** (0.038)
Left-right position			-0.019 (0.028)	-0.018 (0.029)
Redistribution			-0.010 (0.034)	-0.010 (0.034)
Deregulation			-0.015 (0.034)	-0.016 (0.034)
Time	-0.010 * (0.006)	-0.013 ** (0.006)	-0.010 * (0.006)	
Year 2: 2010				-0.067 (0.047)
Year 3: 2014				-0.081 * (0.048)
Constant	19.997 * (11.789)	26.72817 ** (12.071)	19.722 * (11.956)	-0.1585 (0.202)
Random effects				
Country				
Std.D cons.	0.214 (0.049)	0.217 (0.049)	0.215 (0.049)	0.215 (0.048)
Party				
Std.D year	5.01e-07 (6.94e-07)	5.52e-07 (7.02e-07)	4.23e-07 (5.56e-07)	1.31e-06 (0.000)
Std.D cons.	0.460 (0.034)	0.443 (0.034)	0.454 (0.034)	0.454 (0.039)
Std.D res.	0.429 (0.018)	0.432 (0.019)	0.430 (0.430)	0.430 (0.018)
Model fit				
Prob.> Wald chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Multilevel vs. li- near model; Prob.>chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Number of obs: 147; Number of groups: 25; Avg obs per group: 5.9

*** p<0.01 ** p<0.05 * p<0.1 Std.error in parenthesis

Such relationship is negative, meaning that the tougher the position on immigration, the less likely the support for EU integration. More precisely, an increase of 1 point on the immigration policy scale translates into a decrease of 0.114 point on the EU support scale. This association is valid over the period considered. That being said, the coefficient of immigration policy is decidedly lower than that of the position on internal market and that of the position on the cohesion policy; they are equally statistically significant but greater in magnitude. Therefore, parties that support the realisation of the internal market and/or the cohesion policy are more likely to support EU integration, too.

These three coefficients remain statistically significant and of a similar magnitude across models, suggesting the results obtained are robust to various specifications.

Interestingly, there proves to be very little effect of the position on the left-right spectrum on EU support once the other variables are controlled for. Such effect is negative but not statistically significant and of very little magnitude.

4. The effect of time on political parties positions (on immigration)

The results of the regressions in table 2 shows that time has little effect on party positions on EU integration⁴. Even though the coefficients are somewhat statistically significant, they are of very little magnitude. If I consider model (1) for instance, from one year of data collection to another (which in concrete terms means 4 years' time), the overall change in position is a decrease of 0.01 point on a 1 to 7 scale. This section explores the effect of time on parties' position.

Table 3 reports descriptive statistics as to variation within units; i.e. how much positions evolve over time for a given political party, on average. Since parties emerge or collapse, the number of data-points per party is not exactly 3 (see the T=x figure)⁵. That being said, over the years 2006-2014, change for a given party for position on EU integration is about 0.4 point (on a 1-7 scale) and 0.5 point (on a 0-10 scale) for position on immigration policy. These are rather small digits.

Table 3 – Position change within units, descriptive statistics

		Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max	Data-points
Position on EU integration	Overall	4.990	1.687	1.000	7.000	N= 949
	Within unit		0.403	3.153	7.045	n= 365
						T= 2.6
Position on immigration policy	Overall	5.176	2.278	0.300	10.000	N= 628
	Within unit		0.507	3.119	6.854	n= 306
						T= 2.1

Source: own elaboration. Note: N: total number of data-points; n: total number of parties; T: average number of data-points per party

To obtain better insights into this summary figure, table 4 lists all the parties for which their position on immigration policy has changed of more than 1 point in relation to

⁴ Running a regression with position on immigration policy as a unique dependent variable confirms the observation.

⁵ Note that there are some missing values as well in the bulk of data.

their mean. Only 25 parties out of 306 European parties display a dispersion around their mean greater than 1 point, none of which going beyond 2 points.

The little effect of time on parties' position is an interesting puzzle. Because positions do not seem to move much, changes in policy is unlikely due to changes in position but rather to changes in the saliency of the policy issue in question (see Alonso and Fonseca, 2011, in this respect).

Table 4 – Parties for which change in position on immigration is greater than 1 on a 0-10 scale over the observed period

Country	Party	Mean	Standard deviation
Belgium	PVDA	1.05	1.06
Denmark	FolkB	3.17	1.44
Greece	Pasok	4.14	1.06
Greece	ND	7.31	1.03
Spain	BNG	3.41	1.02
France	NC	5.69	1.38
Austria	OVP	7.5	1.21
Austria	LIF (NEOS)	2.6	1.98
Sweden	SAP	3.49	1.23
Sweden	C	4	1.86
Sweden	FP	4.22	1.86
Sweden	M	4.55	1.68
Sweden	KD	4.06	1.27
Sweden	JL	4.84	1.18
Czech Rp.	ODS	6.55	1.31
Czech Rp.	KSCM	6.22	1.07
Czech Rp.	KDU-CSL	6.03	1.34
Czech Rp.	SZ	3.07	1.71
Estonia	ERL	7.07	1.16
Hungary	SzDSz	2.75	1.06
Hungary	JOBBIK	8.57	1.08
Latvia	TB-LNNK (NA)	8.23	1.34
Latvia	SC (SDPS)	4.06	1.13
Lithuania	LLS (LiCS)	3.5	1.65
Lithuania	LVP (LVLS)	5.27	1.45

Source: own elaboration. Note: total number of parties considered: 306

5. A bit of method

Data

Data is drawn for the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES; Bakker *et al.*, 2015). For the purpose of this study, data is only available for the years 2006, 2010 and 2014, which gives a reasonable overview of party positions over the last ten years. The total number of data-points used for inference is 622. The CHES provides us with parties' positions

on a number of issues. It also provides ideological positions. Here, I am more interested on policy positions than ideological ones.

All positions are scale variables ranging either from 1 to 7 or from 0 to ten. This presents the advantage of having coefficients almost directly comparable. Position on EU integration, my dependent variable, ranges from 1 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly favours). Position on immigration ranges from 0 (strongly opposes tough immigration policy) to 10 (strongly favours tough policy). Position on the internal market ranges from 1 (strongly opposes) to 7 (strongly favours). Position on EU cohesion policy ranges from 1 (strongly opposes) to 7 (strongly favours). Position on redistribution ranges from 0 (strongly favours redistribution) to 10 (strongly opposes it). Position on deregulation ranges from 0 (strongly opposes deregulation) to 10 (strongly favours deregulation). Position on the left-right spectrum starts with 0 being on the far left and 10 being on the far right.

Time is modelled in two different ways. The variable called time measures the effect of the passage of time. The variable named Year \times measured the fixed effect of a certain data collection moment on the dependent variable.

Method of analysis for the regressions in table 2

The results expressed in table 2 come from the application of time-series cross-section methods to the CHES dataset (Beck, 2006). Namely, I implemented a multilevel mixed effect model accounting for the auto-correlation entailed by repeated observations nested within parties, themselves nested within countries. Time is also accounted for. Random effects are included for countries, parties and year. The second (random effects) and third (model fit) part of the table suggest that auto-correlation is well modelled and controlled for. The estimation technique is maximum likelihood, a standard technique for this sort of multilevel models.

6. Conclusion

If Brexit has come as a shock, the reasons advanced are by no means specific to the UK. Of course, the UK has its own history and a long-standing Euroscepticism. But the fierce campaign that tore apart the country for about a year highlighted a link between lack of support to EU integration and preference for a restrictive immigration policy. From an analytical standpoint, such link is evident since EU rimes with conferral of competences and therefore with sovereignty loss, a matter directly in question when it comes to immigration. That said, membership to the EU also presents advantages: member states economically stronger may expand their market-shares prospects whilst economically weaker member states may benefit from the cohesion policy, from the free circulation of their workers to more attractive markets, and from the freedom of circulation of capitals which facilitates relocation of European industries in their territories. In the case of Brexit, the anti-immigration argument seems to have won over economic interests.

Acknowledging the foregoing, this paper sheds some light on the consistency of the link between the two issues throughout Europe. I show notably that there is correlation

between support for EU integration and position on immigration across European parties, and that it is so even controlling for countries' specifics. If such relationship is established, it is comparatively weaker than with other policy issues, notably that on support for the internal market and for the EU cohesion policy. This statement holds over time; that is, the effect of time has little effect on support for the EU once we control for specific policy stances. A closer look at the effect of time on positions on immigration also shows that time has very little effect. This hints at the fact that what matters is not necessarily the position on a given issue but the salience of this very issue. What is now oftentimes and wrongly called an "asylum crisis" highlights the difficulties of EU member states to coordinate to face the phenomenon and points to a "European (decision-making) crisis" rather than an "asylum crisis". This inflation of crisis terminology places immigration at the forefront of Europeans' concerns; with a public opinion ever more receptive to the issue. Suffice to look at the results of Eurobarometers from Spring 2015 to Spring 2016⁶ to see how salient the issue has become for Europeans. Parties' positions have not necessarily changed. Instead, this is citizens' choices for their leaders that is changing, reshuffling the forces in presence (see BBC, 2016b for instance).

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⁶ But see also Eurobarometer 60, in 2004 that places immigration at the forefront of citizens' concerns.

ISMU Foundation is an independent research centre founded in 1992. It is committed to conducting research, as well as providing consultancy, training and education, in the area of migration and integration. To develop a better understanding of these phenomena, it provides its expertise to research projects on all aspects of multiculturalism in contemporary society.

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