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The Impact of the Refugee Crisis on Polish Perception of the European Union

Abstract: This paper investigates the effects of the migration crisis of 2015 on Polish attitudes to the European Union. Superficially, there seems to have been no significant impact: even though the migration crisis resulted in hitherto unprecedented tensions between Poland and the EU, as well as a robust anti-immigrant turn in Polish public opinion, this crisis had little or no effect on the standard survey gauges of EU favorability in Poland. However, based on a comparison between the results of pre- and post-crisis Eurobarometer surveys (EB82.3 and EB87.3), our analysis demonstrates that while the overall perception of the EU became only slightly less favorable between 2014 and 2017, a substantial shift in the structure of public opinion did occur. Concerns over immigration were not associated with perception of the EU before the crisis but became dominant predictors after 2015.

Keywords: migration crisis, EU perception, Poland, Eurobarometer, Structural Equation Modelling, GLM Univariate ANCOVA

Introduction

The major migration crisis that Europe faced in the summer of 2015 presented a sudden, strong, and largely unprecedented challenge to the hitherto reliably positive Polish perception of the European Union. In spite of periodic political turbulences, the preceding (first) decade of Poland's EU membership had proven relatively uneventful from the standpoint of domestic public opinion, even though the times were actually highly challenging for European integration (Habermas 2012; Touraine 2014), as well as for the European socio-economic model (Baranowski 2017; Götz 2012). Some controversies arose over the rights, duties, and desired influence of Poland as a member state during the debates about the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (Wilga 2008; Wyrozumska 2007), and with respect to the status of Poles as European citizens, for instance, with respect to Polish minority rights in Germany (Czachur 2010). Nevertheless, no large-scale or long-lasting crisis had emerged that could have brought the European project into any serious public doubt in Poland (Czachór 2017: 15–17). The migration crisis of 2015 interrupted this long-lasting pattern. Reacting to the fall-out of the attempts to relieve migrant concentrations on the so-called Balkan-route in the summer of 2015, the EU instituted a mandatory relocation scheme that obligated each EU country to receive a set number of refugees. Given the vis-

ibly strong anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment prevalent in Polish society, this EU pressure to accept refugees was received poorly by the Polish government and the Polish public alike, and was perceived as a threat to Polish national interests and values. It turned Polish public opinion against the EU on migration questions.

Domestically, the immigration issue would not only feature prominently among key public concerns but opposition to EU-mandated policies also became one of the winning arguments underpinning the ascendance in 2015 of the right wing of the Polish political scene. This produced an immediate crisis at the systemic level of foreign and European policy: following the elections of October 2015, the new Polish government, led by the right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS), chose to take a deliberate stand against the EU and refused to acknowledge some of its binding policy prescriptions ([Szczepiak 2017](#)). However, the crisis also had a clear social dimension, as the government's strong opposition to the EU's immigration policy seemed to fall in line with the popular mood. Thus, public opinion surveys registered a sizeable anti-immigrant sentiment shift in Poland, despite the obvious fact that almost no immigrants involved in the summer-of-2015 crisis ever appeared on Polish soil. For instance, in the fall of 2014 (EB82.3), only 44% of Polish respondents declared their opposition to immigration from outside the EU ([European Commission 2017b](#)), while in the spring of 2017 (EB87.3) such an opinion was expressed by 68% of survey participants ([European Commission 2017a](#)).¹ Similar patterns could be observed in other tracking surveys, such as the main Polish public opinion omnibus run by Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (CBOS): when asked about accepting refugees from war-torn countries in Poland, the fraction declaring opposition jumped from 21% in May 2015 to 61% in April 2016 and has since plateaued well north of 50% ([CBOS 2017](#)). Therefore, the immigration crisis put Polish public sentiment in direct opposition to EU prescriptions on an issue that both sides associated with a strong moral concern (human rights versus national sovereignty) and considered a high policy priority (assisting versus resisting migrants).

On the other hand, while the Polish public came to adhere broadly with the right-wing government position on the question of managing immigration, yet the very same public remained overwhelmingly and staunchly pro-European. The cooperative-to-antagonistic switch of the Polish government's positioning vis-à-vis the EU did not seem to have much of an impact on the standard survey gauges of the Polish public's support for EU membership. For example, EB surveys consistently placed Poland well above the EU average on most if not all dimensions of membership satisfaction and attachment, and when it comes to the specific question asked by CBOS concerning support for Poland's EU membership, the fraction of pro-EU answers continued to remain well over 80% in the period 2014–2017. This continuing pro-yet-anti stance amounts to something of a paradox. In spite of immigration becoming an issue of high public concern and being strongly conceived of as an EU-driven rather than a domestic problem, and in spite of the public being broadly in support of the national government's quest to oppose EU prescriptions on the grounds of

¹ Eurobarometer surveys rely on nationally representative probabilistic samples. For the respective surveys effective sample sizes were reported as 82.3—N = 1033, 87.3—1042; EB does not officially report its Response Rates; in terms of sample size EB surveys are similar to the standards set by the Polish CBOS.

national interest and sovereignty, the main trend indicators of EU favorability did not budge at the aggregate level.

Such an apparent disconnect seems surprising, as it would amount to a situation whereby an EU-associated issue of major political concern had no discernible impact on the public perception of the EU. We show, however, that a close examination of survey results does, in fact, demonstrate a clear shift in the structure of public support for European integration in Poland. Specifically, a comparison of EB surveys conducted before and after the 2015 crisis demonstrates that attitudes toward immigration became a key factor impacting EU perception in Poland and that this ascension forced other previously significant factors into the background. Our analysis of EB survey data provides evidence that pre-crisis opinions on migration had little or no bearing on Polish attitudes toward the EU, while in the post-crisis set-up, they came to exert significant and dominant influence.

The Immigration Crisis: Poland in the Regional Context

What happened in Poland was, to some extent, a variant of regional political dynamics in the face of the migration crisis. The Polish response to the 2015 crisis proved broadly consistent with moods in the rest of Eastern Europe, which espoused a complete refusal to accept refugees, based on arguments involving not so much perceived economic threats as the supposed essential cultural incompatibility of the newcomers with the host societies, in conjunction with an alleged link between the influx of refugees and terrorism (Mach and Styczyńska 2016: 27–29). While the force with which those sentiments came to be expressed in the public sphere may have been somewhat surprising, the rough outlines of a migrant-sceptic outlook in Eastern Europe were arguably well entrenched before the 2015 crisis (Bail 2008). Opposition to Brussels-mandated solutions to the immigrant influx could also have stemmed from the change, which these policies signalled, in Poland's role or position in the European Community: all of a sudden, Brussels expected the still “new” member states of Central and Eastern Europe to act not as consumers but as providers of solidarity, leading to heated disagreements over the meaning and normative implications of the concept (Grosse and Hetnarowicz 2016). Thus, at least to some extent, the migration crisis seems to have changed the received view of the EU: shifting it from a panacea and source of incoming transfers, toward being a community that requires sacrifices. Historically, the EU membership requirements, such as establishing a well-functioning market economy and a liberal-democratic state, were beneficial for the post-communist countries applying for membership (Moravcsik and Vachudova 2003; Sadurski 2004). However, in accord with Easton's (1965: 272–74) distinction between specific and diffuse system support, it might be observed that the migration crisis produced a specific challenge to diffuse membership support in a way that aligned economic concerns over the costs of managing immigration with an ingrained apprehensiveness with respect to cultural others.

Although it is worth exploring to what extent the 2015 crisis precipitated, escalated, or perhaps merely revealed regional rifts and cleavages within the EU (Agh 2016), there is actually something special about Poland when it comes to this particular crisis, even as—paradoxically—it pushed the country toward greater convergence with the Visegrád

Group in terms of attitudes to European integration. The Polish combination of high social support for EU membership with strong economic growth and political ascendancy after accession could be interpreted as output-oriented legitimacy, that is, holding the belief that the EU governs “for the people,” (Scharpf 1999: 5–6) while leaving policy details well below the horizon of public interest and glossing over questions of input, transparency, and accountability (Schmidt 2013). The events of 2015, however, challenged preconceived Polish notions concerning the meaning of member-state status and its effects on at least three aspects of output-driven legitimacy: the belief that the EU is an unambiguously beneficial enterprise in which to participate, optimism concerning Poland’s economic growth prospects within the EU, and trust in the EU’s institutional capacity for reasonable policy-making.

Those three aspects are strongly associated with the Polish experience of EU membership. First, when it comes to the clearly favorable public profile of the EU, the overwhelming political-party consensus in favor of membership and the prevailing high levels of public support for the EU must be emphasized. While political dissension in the post-communist period constituted the norm, one exception to the rule was that the prevalent Polish attitude to Europe had long involved the conviction that Poland is an inherently European country (Mach 1997) and the notion that EU membership is a political necessity. Post-accession public satisfaction with the EU had also proven exceptionally high, not only in Poland, but also among the rest of the New Member States (Cichocki and Jabkowski 2009). Second, the first decade of Poland’s EU membership was also a period of rapid yet sustained economic growth, despite the global Great Recession. According to World Bank data, Poland’s per capita GDP (PPP) almost doubled in the decade after the first year of full membership, having increased from USD 13.9k in 2005 to USD 26.9k in 2015). EU membership was considered instrumental in bringing about this growth through access to cohesion funding, the common market, and the boost to Polish credibility (Kolodziejczyk 2016). Given this seemingly smooth growth under EU tutelage, the public approach to EU policies was characterized by positive indifference, combining diffuse support with low interest in specifics, which seemed roughly resonant of what had once been known as permissive consensus. Heretofore, the EU was seen as a broadly beneficial force in little need of active public engagement (Cichocki 2011), or to put it in the terms proposed by Beetham and Lord (2014: 8–11), the legitimacy enjoyed by the EU was by consent rather than actual popular authorization. Third, when it comes to trust in political institutions, Poland exhibited an extreme variant of the broader regional pattern whereby low trust in domestic institutions coexists with comparatively high trust in European institutions (Heinisch 2017; Primožič and Bavec 2014).

With regard to attitudes to immigration, some evidence suggests that Poland used to be more welcoming than the regional Central and East European average. Poland has historically been a migrant-sending country with little experience with immigration. Since the eighteenth century, sizable numbers of Poles have consistently been emigrating to Western countries, and the most recent massive wave of outmigration was associated with joining the EU (Matkowska 2014: 124–30). In this respect, post-accession Poland was in tune with the larger trend of westward labor-force mobility among the citizens of the New Member States (Black, Engbersen and Okolski 2010). Consequently, the Polish public discourse on

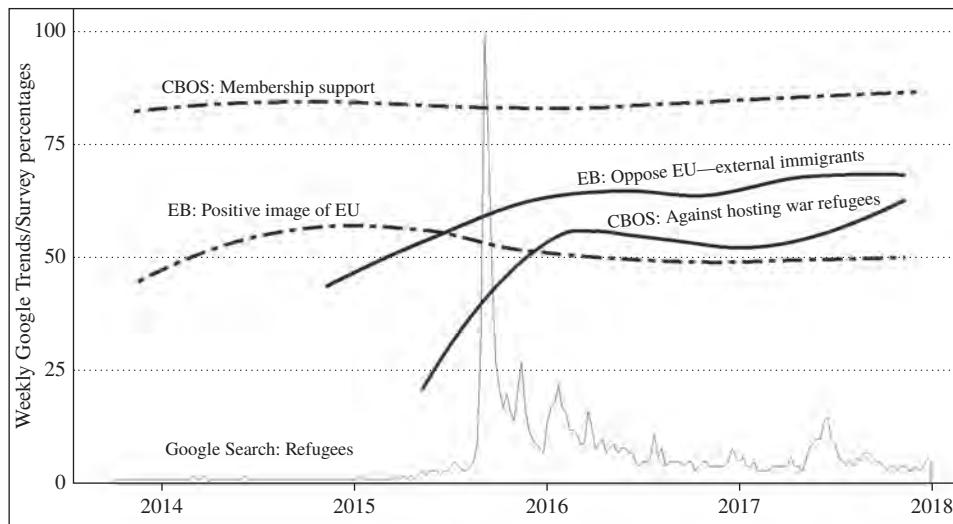
migration focused either on the effects of emigration on the domestic socio-economic situation or the conditions faced by the diaspora in destination countries. Thus, before the summer of 2015, there had been little public interest in incoming migration, given that immigration was almost nonexistent. This led to the curious results of cross-national analyses suggesting that Poles were less reluctant to receive migrants than the European average (Andrejuk 2015: 14–21; Meuleman, Davidov and Billiet 2009). These studies use data that were collected before the issue of immigration became a major concern in the Polish public sphere, and it seems reasonable to suspect that those results took the respondents' indifference or lack of attitude to immigration for acceptance.

Attitudes to Migration and Perception of the EU

As already mentioned, survey indicators of public support for Poland's EU membership did not decline despite decidedly more critical public discourse on European affairs and an accompaniment of social and political mobilization over the “immigration question”—which was especially fierce in regard to suggestions of Poland's participation in any migrant relocation schemes. At the same time, when it came to anything directly touching migration, the crisis-driven opinion shift was swift and strong—from detached to negatively engaged. This bifurcation of attitudes can be seen clearly in Figure 1, which presents the trend lines of two nationally representative tracking surveys: Eurobarometer and the domestic CBOS, superimposed on an area-graph of Google Trend data for the topic “refugees” [*uchodźcy*] on the Polish Internet. The weekly search-data exhibit a precipitous jump in early September 2015, with a slow build-up since May 2015 and a long tail going forward. Specifically, the peak of queries occurred in the week starting on September 6, accompanying the main debate over the mandatory relocation quotas formally agreed upon at the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on September 14, 2015. It is important to note that all this was happening during the Polish parliamentary election campaign and that the incumbent government committed a major policy turn at that time: having originally signed the anti-resettlement September 4th Joint Statement of the Visegrád Group, the Polish incumbent leadership then reconsidered its position under German and European pressure.

In contrast to indicators tracking attitudes to immigration, no obvious change in the measures of EU-perception can be ascertained in either CBOS or EB data. On the other hand, while establishing the baseline for immigration attitudes, it should be noted that the Eurobarometer introduced the “opposition to external immigrants” question in the fall of 2014, that is, before Poland entered its double-election year, with the presidential election scheduled for spring and parliamentary elections for the fall of 2015. Furthermore, the topic of refugees had not been prominent in the Polish public sphere at the time of the EB82.3 fieldwork, so despite the lack of prior data-points, this measurement can reasonably be treated as representative of the pre-crisis situation. Meanwhile, CBOS only started asking the “accepting refugees” question in response to rising concern with immigration in the immediate run-up to the refugee crisis. Here again, in spite of the lack of preceding data points, the first measurement may be considered broadly representative of the pre-crisis attitude levels.

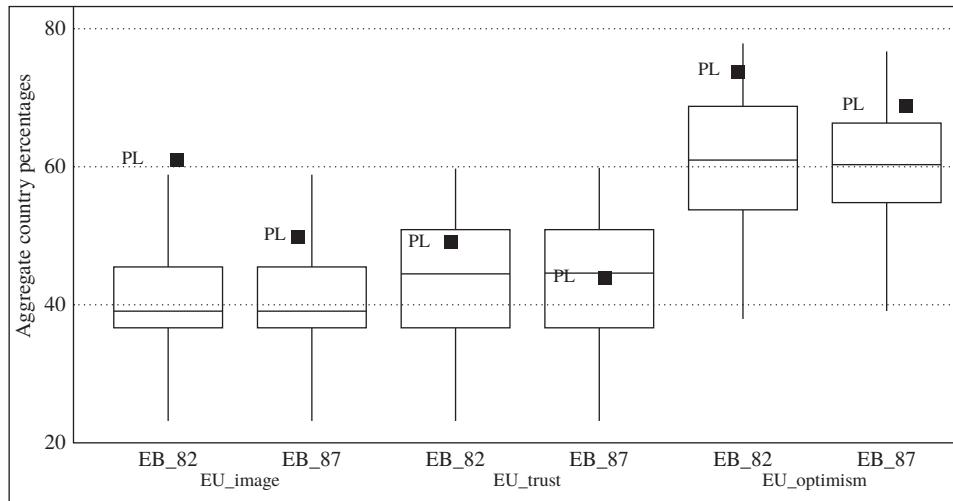
Figure 1

Immigration and EU perception in Poland 2014–2017

In order to break through the first-glance impression of there being no apparent relationship between the changing opinions on migration questions and the stable indicators of EU support, we decided to go beyond bivariate analyses of single variables. EU output legitimacy is a multi-faceted construct, and therefore, a measurement model allowing for its empirical investigation should also involve multiple indicators. For the sake of such analysis, we put forward a construct EU_perception, which takes into account three cognate dimensions of public opinion about the EU: (1) the present subjective evaluation of the EU, (2) the level of optimism about the EU's future, (3) overall trust in the EU project. Each of the three dimensions was operationalized with specific question-items that featured in both EB82.3. and EB87.3. The structure of the EU_perception construct was determined by theoretical considerations of the EU's output legitimacy in Poland, affected by the experience of the refugee crisis. It was also shaped by practical considerations related to (1) the availability of surveys conducted at relevant time points, and (2) stemming from the results of exploratory factor analysis, which indicated that some initially promising variables (e.g., attachment to the EU, a future outside of the EU) would not fit within the same measurement model. Figure 2 presents the country-level mean-percentages of EU_image (% of *fairly positive* and *very positive*), EU_trust (% of *tend to trust*), and EU_optimism (% of *very optimistic* and *fairly optimistic*), compared to the EU-median score.

At least three observations can be made about the distributions of the basic indicators. First, Poland typically scores above-average on all the indicators of EU_perception, despite the downward turn visible between EB82.3 and EB87.3. Second, while the EU-28 average has been stable, the consistently substantial differences between the values of individual country-level indicators should be noted. Third, when it comes to EU_image, the mean-percentage value of EB82.3 for Poland was actually a few percentage points higher than the long-run trend. Therefore, too much should not be read into this single-indicator value

Figure 2

Country-level values of underlying EU_perception indicators: EB82.3 and EB87.3

change. It should also be noted that the whole EB82.3 survey did in fact constitute the pinnacle of the positive trend in terms of perception of the EU in Poland, which had lasted for the few preceding waves.

Data, Measurement Models, and Statistical Methods

Data: Why the Eurobarometer?

Even though our analysis in the present paper is primarily concerned with public opinion shifts in Poland, the Eurobarometer remains a better choice for our purposes than any of the national tracking polls. Not only does it allow for contrastive positioning of Poland in the context of other EU member states at the descriptive level, but it also makes our close analysis of the Polish case comparison-ready with respect to any other countries or groups of countries. While our focus is limited to Poland and we did not test our constructs for any other country, this avenue is readily available as all the basic variables included in the analysis were present in all other EB-covered countries. Furthermore, relative to the Polish tracking polls, the Eurobarometer systematically includes a superior range of questions focused on opinions concerning European integration, which allow for probing various facets of the underlying attitude rather than relying on specific questions on membership support.

Choosing the EB as an empirical anchor for discussing attitudes to European integration is well motivated by the longitudinal character of the project, its geographical range, and thematic focus. First conducted in 1973, the survey has continued to produce studies providing insights into what Europeans think and how they feel about various aspects of European integration (cf., European Commission 1974). Due to the long-term, regular, and

standardized character of measurement combined with the public availability of the data, it also serves as a major resource for cross-country comparative social-scientific research. Still, despite its spatial and temporal breadth, the Eurobarometer is perhaps underutilized since, unlike many of its present-day competitors, it is not a methodology-driven project (Kohler 2007). In addition, some skepticism seems warranted given the fact that the Eurobarometer's contracting entity is the European Commission, which cannot be seen as entirely impartial with respect to the process of European integration (Aldrin 2010; Nissen 2014). Methodological reservations notwithstanding, the EB consistently provides periodic measurements for a range of important indicators for a fixed set of countries. Therefore, even if other academically driven projects provide data of superior quality, their measurements tend to be less frequent and to have inferior geographical coverage. When it comes to country-specific survey monitoring, such as that provided by CBOS in the case of Poland, these surveys are typically conducted with higher than biannual frequency, yet they remain nationally idiosyncratic and of little use for cross-country comparisons.

Measurement: Perception of the EU

In order to operationalize the construct EU_perception in terms of trust, image, and optimism, a Multi-Group Structural Equation Modeling (MGSEM) approach was employed (Byrne 2016; Jöreskog 1971; Konarski 2014). The resulting measurement model allowed the different data points to be compared as it was possible to establish their configural, metric, and scalar equivalence for EB82.3 and EB87.3 (Davidov et al. 2014; Milfont and Fischer 2010). This approach provides major advantages over the straightforward univariate approaches—not only does it allow for construct multidimensionality, but it is also equipped with unparalleled tools for equivalence-testing in order to find out whether time-series comparisons are legitimate in the first place. The MGSEM-based approach was also used to evaluate measurement models representing some of the constructs featuring as covariates in the General Linear Model Analysis of Covariance (GLM ANCOVA) analysis.

EU_perception is meant to represent the three pillars of EU output-legitimacy that had historically been strong in Poland and then came under stress during the 2015 crisis: the belief that the EU is an unambiguously beneficial enterprise in which to participate, optimism concerning Poland's growth prospects within the EU, and trust in the institutional capacities of the EU for reasonable policymaking. Empirically, the construct is based on three indicators derived from EB trend questions regarding the EU: institutional trust (EU_trust), present evaluation (EU_image), and future expectations (EU_optimism). The EU_perception measurement model is presented in Figure 3, while the questionnaire items corresponding to the three dimensions comprise the following:

- EU_trust: "I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: The European Union" (*response options and recoding rules: Tend to trust = 4; Tend not to trust = -1; DK/missing values = 0*);
- EU_image: "In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?" (*response options and recoding rules: Very positive or Fairly positive = 1; Fairly negative or Very negative = -1; Neutral or DK/missing value = 0*);
- EU_optimism: "Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the EU?" (*response options and recoding rules: Very optimistic or Fairly optimistic = 1; Fairly pessimistic or Very pessimistic = -1; DK/missing value = 0*).

Since the main goal of this study is to juxtapose response patterns at two contrastive time points, it was necessary to probe EU_perception for cross-study equivalence, that is, to test the assumption that the factor loadings and intercepts were equal across time. The chi-square test is the most commonly used diagnostic for MGSEMs; however, it proves highly sensitive to the sample size as it is prone to rejecting reasonable models when dealing with large samples (Reeskens and Hooghe 2008: 523), as in the case of EB surveys. Thus, instead of the chi-square test, we employ the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Norm Fit Index (NFI). RMSEA below 0.05 or the NFI above 0.9 indicate acceptable fit (Covert and Craiger 2000: 47). We also compute the Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to evaluate the reliability and convergent validity of the construct. CR values of 0.7 or higher indicate a reliable measurement, while the AVE value of 0.5 or higher indicates the validity of the latent construct (Huang et al. 2013: 219).

Figure 3

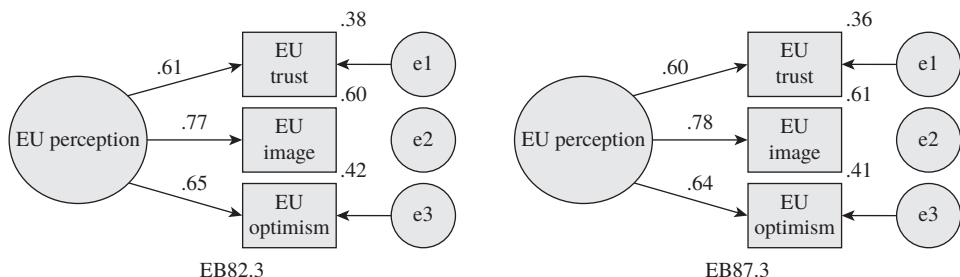
EU_perception measurement model: EB82.3 and EB87.3

Figure 3 presents standardized factor loadings (regression coefficients) as well as the square of regression coefficients (R^2 coefficients) for each of the three basic indicators, as well as e_i indicating the random error component for each equation. The multi-group model assuming factor loadings and intercepts to be identical across time exhibits a very good fit (RMSEA is less than 0.001, and NFI is equal to 0.998) warranting the conclusion that these three indicators measure the same concept in the same way in EB82.3 and EB87.3. Moreover, for both time points, the CR of EU_perception is higher than the reference value 0.7, which indicates a reliable measurement process. Notably, AVE is less than the 0.5 reference value (0.47 for EB82.3 and 0.46 for EB87.3). However, Fornell and Larcker (1981: 46) demonstrated that if AVE is less than 0.5, but composite reliability is higher than 0.6, the convergent validity of the considered construct should still be treated as adequate.

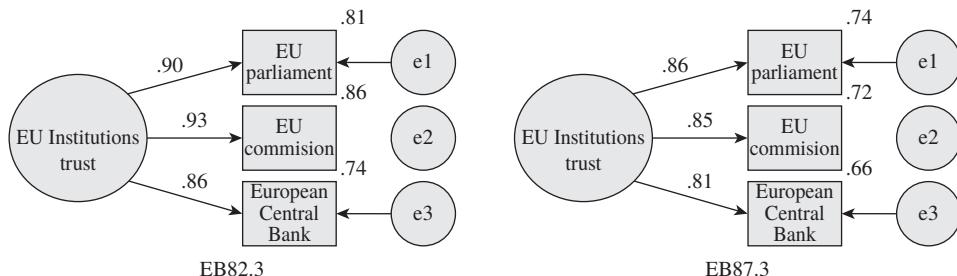
Measurement: Covariates, Factors, and Control Variables

Among independent variables, there are (1) covariates, that is, measures of institutional trust and evaluation of the present situation, (2) main factors, that is, immigration-associated variables, and (3) control variables. We discuss these variables below in this order.

Standard EB surveys contain tracking questions concerned with public trust in specific EU institutions, and these questionnaire items are separate from those concerned with trust

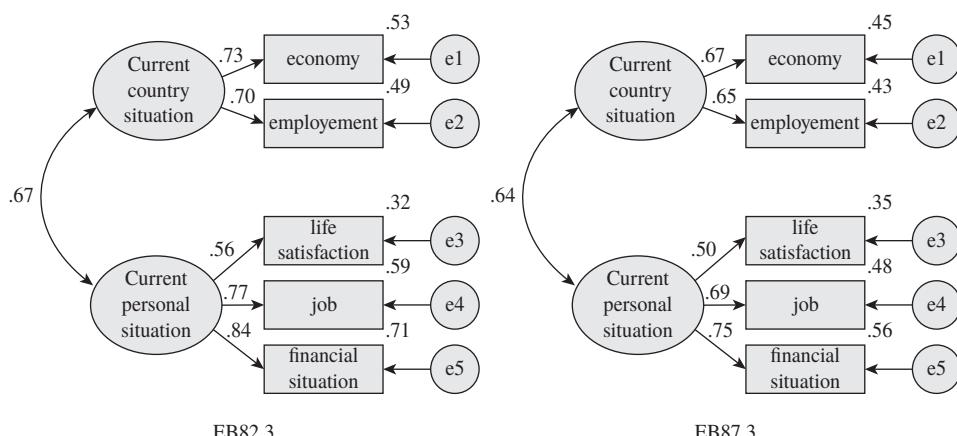
in the EU in general. The construct EU_institutions_trust was built upon three indicators of trust in the main institutions of the EU: the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank. It represents public trust in the capacity of the supranational institutions of the EU, as indicators of specific trust in institutions can be seen as proxy for a generalized evaluation of their efficiency (Levi and Stoker 2000).²

Figure 4
EU_institutions_trust measurement model: EB82.3 and EB87.3



When it comes to the evaluation of life situation, we distinguish between two closely related constructs: the individual (egocentric) and the collective (exocentric) evaluation. We tested a model where these two constructs are correlated, and obtained the following fit statistics: RMSEA < 0.001; NFI = 0.995; for EB82.3 (current personal: CR = 0.77; AVE = 0.54; current country CR = 0.68; AVE = 0.51) for EB87.3 (current personal: CR = 0.69; AVE = 0.43; current country CR = 0.61; AVE = 0.44)

Figure 5
Current_personal and Current_country_situation measurement model: EB82.3 and EB87.3



² The goodness of fit as well as the scalar equivalence of EU_institutions_trust has been tested along the lines described above: RMSEA < 0.001; NFI = 0.999; for EB82.3: CR = 0.72, AVE = 0.47; for EB87.3: CR = 0.72; AVE = 0.46.

Starting with EB82.3 in the fall of 2014, EB surveys have included trend questions concerned with the public perception of migration, distinguishing between within-EU (internal) immigration, and immigration from outside of the EU. This distinction is obviously derived from considerations of European citizenship. However, as was discovered previously through analyses of EB data, the formal legal contrast might not always have been discerned by the general public (McLaren 2001).

Internal/external immigration: “Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you: [Internal] Immigration of people from other EU Member States / [External] Immigration of people from outside the EU” (*response options and recoding rules: Very positive, Fairly positive = 1 (ref. cat.); Very negative, Fairly negative = -1; Neutral, DK/missing values = 0*);

Concerns over immigration are also registered indirectly, with the “most important problem” trend questions included in EB surveys, asking about two main issues facing the EU and the country at the moment. While such questions are commonly held as problematic indicators of attitudes due to salience effects (Krosnick 2018: 444–45), their tendency to overstate the importance of temporarily dominant talking points is an advantage when it comes to tracking the impact of events such as the 2015 crisis on public opinion.

Immigration: country and EU issue: “What do you think are the two most important issues facing [Country] (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment? / [EU] the EU at the moment?” (*response options and recoding rules: Not mentioned = 0, Mentioned = 1 (ref. cat.)*)

We also included the following socio-demographic characteristics as control variables: Gender (*Male; Female* (ref. cat.)), Age (*15–24; 25–39; 40–54; 54+* (ref. cat.)) and Type of Community (*Rural area/village; Small/middle town; Large town* (ref. cat.)).

Model

The GLM Univariate ANCOVA model allows for testing the impact on EU_perception of main factors, that is, immigration-associated variables, and of covariates, that is, measures of institutional trust and evaluation of the present situation, as well as control variables. The interaction between Current_personal and Current_country_situation has also been accounted for, in light of the fact that the conjoined measurement model presumes their correlation. For both EB82.3 and EB87.3, the same linear model is tested:

EU_perception =
Intercept
+ EU_institutions_trust
+ Current_personal_situation
+ Current_country_situation
+ Current_personal_situation*Current_country_situation
+ Opinion about internal immigration
+ Opinion about external immigration
+ Immigration: country & EU important issue
+ Gender + Age + Type of community

Results

Results included in Table 1 allow for singling out those factors and covariates that exert significant influence on EU_perception. The direction and strength of the effects are demon-

strated in **Table 2**. Within GLM Univariate ANCOVA, the interpretation of β coefficients is the same as in the case of simple multiple regression, that is, a one-unit increase in the level of any independent variable translates into a corresponding change in the level of the dependent variable. When it comes to categorical predictors, it is important to bear in mind that the β coefficient for a particular level of the variable is always interpreted in relation to the coefficient of the reference category. Note as well that the comparisons of β coefficients between the models estimated for EB82.3 and EB87.3 are warranted by the fact that we had established the metric invariance of the underlying latent constructs, as discussed earlier.

Table 1
GLM Univariate ANCOVA of covariates and factors effects on EU_perception

DV: EU perception		EB82.3		EB87.3	
		<i>F</i> -ratio	<i>p</i> -value	<i>F</i> -ratio	<i>p</i> -value
Covariates	EU institutions trust EB82.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1130}$	203.05	<0.001	414.46	<0.001
	Current_personal_situation EB82.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1130}$	6.45	0.011	1.29	0.257
	Current_country_situation EB82.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1130}$	29.21	<0.001	0.31	0.578
	Current_personal \times Current_country_situation EB82.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1130}$	8.08	0.005	0.10	0.749
Factors	Opinion about internal immigration EB82.3: $F_{df1=2; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=2; df2=1130}$	14.36	<0.001	16.81	<0.001
	Opinion about external immigration EB82.3: $F_{df1=2; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=2; df2=1130}$	1.90	0.150	8.64	<0.001
	Immigration: country & EU important issue EB82.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1130}$	0.45	0.504	8.11	<0.001
Controls	Gender EB82.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=1; df2=1130}$	3.31	0.069	0.26	0.608
	Age EB82.3: $F_{df1=3; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=3; df2=1130}$	4.55	0.004	2.48	0.060
	Type of community EB82.3: $F_{df1=2; df2=1079}$; EB87.3: $F_{df1=2; df2=1130}$	0.28	0.756	0.40	0.672
Adjusted <i>R</i> -Squared		0.412		0.364	

Table 1 clearly demonstrates that the structure of EU_perception predictors did undergo noteworthy shifts between the two time points of EB82.3 and EB87.3. Before the onset of the migration crisis, perception of the EU was significantly associated with EU_institutions_trust, Current_personal, and Current_country situation (and the interaction of those two variables), opinion on internal EU migration, and the respondent's age. At the same time, neither the opinion on external migration nor the perception of immigration as one of the most important problems exerted a significant influence on EU_perception. After the migration crisis, these immigration-related variables not only started to play a significant role but have also, in fact, crowded out the influence of other previously significant elements.

Table 2

Estimates of β parameters in GLM Univariate ANCOVA explaining covariates and factors impact on EU_perception

DV: EU perception		EB82.3		EB87.3	
		β	p-value	β	p-value
Covariates	EU_institutions_trust	0.787	<0.001	0.328	<0.001
	Current_personal_situation	0.146	0.011	0.097	0.257
	Current_country_situation	0.389	<0.001	-0.043	0.578
	Current_personal \times Current_country_situation	-0.082	0.005	0.011	0.749
Factors	Opinion about internal immigration				
	Negative	-0.152	<0.001	-0.122	<0.001
	Neutral	-0.100	0.013	-0.199	<0.001
	Positive—reference category	—	—	—	—
	Opinion about external immigration				
	Negative	-0.035	0.052	-0.104	<0.001
	Neutral	-0.035	0.375	-0.048	0.728
	Positive—reference category	—	—	—	—
	Immigration: country & EU important issue				
	Mentioned	0.055	0.504	-0.099	0.004
	Not mentioned—reference category	—	—	—	—
Controls	Gender				
	Male	-0.036	0.069	-0.011	0.514
	Female—reference category	—	—	—	—
	Age				
	15–24	0.112	<0.001	0.081	0.053
	25–39	0.017	0.521	-0.013	0.634
	40–54	0.009	0.745	-0.007	0.815
	54+—reference category	—	—	—	—
	Type of community				
	Rural area/village	-0.001	0.976	-0.017	0.518
	Small/middle town	-0.016	0.544	0.005	0.166
	Large town—reference category	—	—	—	—

When comparing β coefficients of EU_institutions_trust, it seems clear that while this variable retains a significant influence on EU_perception, the strength of the relationship is lower in EB87.3. Furthermore, before the 2015 crisis, a weak yet significant influence of the evaluation of both Current_personal and Current_country_situation could be attested, which subsequently ceased to be the case. When it comes to migration factors, respondents holding negative and neutral opinions about internal immigration had correspondingly lower scores on EU_perception in both measurements. However, it must be noted that while neither opinions on external immigration nor holding immigration to be an important problem were factors of any significance in EB82.3, all these variables would assume a strong and significant role in EB87.3. Thus, even though attitudes to the EU in Poland might seem stable and seemingly disconnected from the high levels of concern over immigration after the 2015 crisis, there is in fact strong evidence for post-crisis shifts in the determinants of Polish public opinion on European questions in the context of immigration concerns.

Summary

After the refugee crisis of 2015, Polish public opinion continued to favor EU membership strongly, yet this conviction now coexisted with strong if not outright vociferous opposition to specific EU-membership commitments resulting from the challenges of managing immigration. From the Polish perspective, the migration crisis led to the vital integration achievements becoming issues of public concern and criticism. Most notably, the Schengen area (as well as the broader freedom-of-movement principle), which had earlier been perceived as one of the greatest benefits of EU membership, came to be seen as complicit in the out-of-control migration flows and associated with other risk factors, including international terrorism (Murdock 2016: 74). The influx of immigrants, and especially Muslims, came to be framed in Poland in terms of an external threat akin to an invasion or raid, closely mirroring the discursive developments in Hungary (Goździak and Márton 2018). These systemic challenges quickly came to be translated into normative political questions concerning the fundamental presuppositions of the post-war liberal-democratic consensus, including both universal human rights (e.g., “the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (United Nations 1951)) and mainly European concerns with solidarity, openness, and tolerance toward other cultures. These concerns threatened the previously prevailing model of output-based legitimacy, whereby EU institutions were treated as efficient and trustworthy by default, even though the survey gauges of EU perception and favorability had yet to register any significant deterioration in Poland. This shift to viewing the EU through the prism of specific challenges has the potential to shift the perception of the process of European integration in the future.

Even though a superficial reading of standard indicators of public attitudes toward the EU fails to yield any firm indications of brewing trouble in Poland so far, our analysis provides evidence that the Polish perception of the EU has been affected by a definite shift in the structure of opinions, whereby attitudes to immigration have risen to the forefront of public concerns. Based on our investigation of the construct EU_perception, comprising indicators of EU image, optimism, and trust, it was possible to show that the overall level of positive perception of the EU has not been significantly affected in Poland by the animosities generated by the migration crisis of 2015. However, negative attitudes toward immigration became strong predictors of EU_perception after the eruption of the crisis, that is, Poles skeptical of the EU came to share concerns about the apparent mishandling of immigration policy at the European level.

Although little has changed on the surface of Polish public opinion, these underlying changes in the content of public support for the EU are important to monitor going forward. They may indicate the emergence of a new rallying call for Poles of a Eurosceptic persuasion, which could be politically targeted at those who, for the time being, still hold the EU in high regard despite having concerns over EU-led immigration policies. In the long-run, this could produce a deterioration of the hitherto unusually high levels of EU favorability in Poland through creating an aura of output illegitimacy. If strong concerns over EU immigration policies persist in the domestic public sphere, they could have the capacity to be dominant over other factors, such as life satisfaction or trust in specific European institutions. Furthermore, these concerns now seem firmly rooted in Pol-

ish public opinion and are thus ready-made for activation in response to any future EU crises.

Funding

This work was supported by the grant, “Reflecting Europeanisation: Cumulative Databases of Cross-Country Surveys as a Tool for Monitoring European Public Opinion Trends” from the National Science Centre Poland (grant no. 2018/31/B/HS6/00403).

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