# Not in my House: EU-citizenship among East-Central European Citizens: Comparative Analyses

## GERT PICKEL AND SUSANNE PICKEL

**Abstract:** *The successes of right-wing populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as a repeated distancing from the European Union, raise the question of whether there is such a thing as European citizenship at all. Citizenship is not understood as formal nationality, but as a sense of belonging. This ties in with the considerations of political cultural research. This article uses representative surveys to address the question: What about European Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe? The results show that the feeling of belonging to the European Union in Eastern and Central Europe is better than its reputation and not lower than in Western Europe. However, there are differences in the recognition of plurality between the majority (not all) of Eastern European states compared to the majority of Western European states. In particular, the integration of Muslims is more strongly rejected. The same applies to the social acceptance of homosexuality. This partly explains the success of right-wing populists in Central and Eastern Europe and marks a certain cultural difference, which is primarily directed against a wet model of democracy that is considered too open to plurality. In short: Central and Eastern Europeans also see themselves as Europeans and EU members, but their ideas of a European democracy differ from Western ideas – especially in peripheral regions.*

**Keywords:** *citizenship, political culture, Eastern Europe, political community, nationalism*

## Introduction – Citizenship, Political Community and Nationalism

The recent debates between the European Union and Hungary or Poland show conflicts regarding the acceptance of the rights of the European Union to shape the politics in East-Central European countries. These rights and admonitions regarding democratic processes on the political level are vehemently rejected and reference is made to their own sovereignty (Pytlas et al. 2019). Only the financing of their own projects by the European Union seems to be desired. This is perhaps understandable in view of the recent detachment from the supremacy of the Soviet Union and the process of a (new) nation building after 1989. But at the same time the current developments highlight problems of a common identity and European citizenship (Hooghe – Marks 2004; Karolewski 2009). Thus, politicians of right-wing populist parties in Poland and Hungary can rely on their nationalist defensiveness to carry a return among their citizens (Górak-Sosnowska 2016). Especially when political positions are directed against a higher plurality through migration or on the issue of sexual and gender diversity, the approval of many citizens seems certain. The latest election results point in this direction. It almost seems as if the projection of all of one's ills onto the external enemy, the European Union, is the model of success par excellence for nationalist right-wing populist politics. When election posters in Hungary depict not Russia's attack on Ukraine but the European Union's measures as a detonated bomb for Hungary, it becomes clear that a common European identity at the level of politicians still seems a long way off.

The good election results at least raise doubts about a closer attachment of Central European and Eastern European citizens to the European Union. Whether this is a matter of fundamental Euroscepticism or a desire for sovereignty can be left open for the time being (Hooghe – Marks 2005). But what about European citizenship? Do Central and Eastern European citizens, once they have enjoyed the financial benefits of the European Union, turn away from it? And is it more the money of the European Union that they want and less the (democratic) values? These observations lead us to pursue the following research question:

*What about European Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe?*

Our thesis is that especially in Central and Eastern Europe, derived from the abovementioned political positions of the leading politicians of various Eastern European parties, the sense of belonging to the European Union is particularly weak. A complementary thesis is that especially in peripheral areas, such as rural areas, the sense of belonging to the European Union is particularly low. Which leads to a second question:

*Is the sense of belonging to the European Union particularly weak in rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe?*

The concept of the periphery can be debated. It is not self-evident; one has to define the periphery. With regard to the European Union, it would even be possible to define the Eastern European countries in relation to Brussels as periphery. This would even have a historical anchoring, as the work of Charles Tilly (1990) on the city belt and Stein and Rokkan (1967) show. We thus use a relatively simple, spatial understanding of periphery and exclude economic or other forms of periphery here. For practical reasons (insufficient data, different research question), we do not deal with complex inner peripheries in this paper (Di Toni et al. 2020).

The aspect of perceived belonging links the question to political culture research, specifically the aspect of political *community* (Easton 1975). It is seen as a central basis for the stability of a political system. It can also be applied to the supranational entity of the European Union, as shown in the work of Kohler Koch (Kohler-Koch et al. 2004), Hix (2008), and Lorenz and Anders (2021). With the concept of political community, the concept also fits into considerations of the European Union itself as a democratic political system where different political support can be studied.

We try to capture citizenship, or the feeling of belonging to the European Union, with the help of various survey data. The Eurobarometer 93.1 (2020) with its focus on European Citizenship and the Special Eurobarometer 493 on Discrimination of the Eurobarometer study series serve as our basis. In their surveys, they take Central and Eastern European countries into account in greater numbers and focus on the topic of citizenship or recognition of plurality.

## Political culture research as an approach to citizenship

According to classical political culture research, political culture refers to the *attitudes and value orientations of* the citizens of a (usually nationally conceived) collective that are *oriented toward political objects* (Almond – Verba 1963; Pickel – Pickel 2006). In this respect, political cultural research always addresses the level of belonging and citizenship. A political culture is the *collective set of attitudes and value orientations toward the political system and value orientations of the citizens of a country,* which from their point of view are a consequence of historical processes and collectively similar individual socialisation. A political culture depicts the subjective side of politics in a community without, however, placing the attitudes of individual citizens at the centre of consideration. This collective statement is achieved through the representatively surveyed beliefs of citizens. The *central substantive goal of* political culture research is to capture the subjective conditions that promote or endanger the *stability of* a (democratic)

political system. In the absence of at least a positive-neutral attitude toward the political system, it is subject to the risk of collapse in the event of a crisis (regardless of whether the crisis is economic, political or social) (Rose – Chin 2001). The majority of citizens are no longer willing to actively stand up for the current system and follow the existing rules and norms (Allmond – Verba 1963; Easton 1979; Pickel – Pickel 2006).

Since political culture is strongly value-based and undergoes its constitution through socialisation, a political culture usually develops slowly. In line with the considerations of value change research, these are processes that sometimes take place over generations (Inglehart 1979). Political objects can be valued in principle or in the short term and performance. Seymour M. Lipset (1959, 1981) focused his attention on the interplay between legitimacy and effectiveness evaluation. Legitimacy maps the fundamental belief in the legitimacy of the political system. It embodies a diffuse attitude of individuals toward the political system, usually accumulated over a long period of time (already beginning in socialisation), which has a high degree of inertia toward outside influences and a high degree of consistency. Effectiveness is a subjective assessment of the concrete performance of the system and its actors. Perceptions of effectiveness can be divided between political and economic. Problems at the level of the general political order of a system, such as a legitimacy crisis of democracy, arise when effectiveness problems cannot be solved in the long run or there are fundamental doubts about the values of democracy (Watanuki et al. 1975; Pharr – Putnam 2000).

Citizenship comes into play in the political culture approach primarily through the ideas of David Easton (Easton 1965). He sees the feeling of belonging and a bond to a political community as essential for its survival. Easton systematises the form and goal of the relationship between citizens and political objects with his concept of *political support,* an attitude with which a person orients himself toward a political object. Like the term political culture, political support is an analytical rather than an evaluative term. All political objects, according to Easton, can be positively or negatively supported. For a political regime to maintain persistence, positive political support must predominate among the population. Support is received by the political regime when the demands of citizens on the system are met. Easton (1965: 171–225) identifies three objects of political support, from which the *political community* is the most interesting here. The term comprises the members of a political system and their basic value patterns. A sense of community and an overarching sense of belonging and attachment to the collective (usually the nation) and the individuals living within it are the basis of this component of the political order, which also manifests itself in mutual loyalty among community members (Easton 1975).[1]

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1   The other two objects of support are the political regime and the political authorities. *'Political regime'* refers to the institutions themselves, i.e. the office roles rather than the specific role-holders. Political

Easton differentiates into the components of legitimacy and trust. Legitimacy is the product of citizens' perceived congruence of their own values and ideas about the political system with its structure. Trust involves the hope for a 'common good orientation' of these objects or of the people supporting them and is based on socialisation experiences and generalised *output* experiences. Citizenship is one of the long-term components of legitimacy. At the same time, this understanding of citizenship differs from concepts of formal belonging that focus solely on legal citizenship (Faulks 2000). However, this understanding is not far removed from liberal postmodern approaches, which accord a greater role to citizens' feelings and self-assessments of their subjective affiliation (Gibert 1997; Ivic 2011). However, political culture research focuses more on national objects, something that global or postmodern approaches to citizenship tend to avoid. For Eastern Europe, European citizenship has so far mostly been studied with regional limitations. Both similarities to and differences between Western Europe and among the Eastern European countries can be found (Coffe – van der Lippe 2009; Show – Stiks 2012). The focus of the analysis is not on formal belonging, but on the affective feeling and self-assessment of belonging relying on the political culture approach.

Easton's conception in particular was adapted for the European Union (Kohler-Koch et al. 2004). In addition to looking at the support of the political system of the European Union and measuring its effectiveness, the focus was strongly on the discussion of an output legitimacy (Scharpf 1999) versus an input legitimacy. Thus, the so-called legitimacy crisis of the European Union was judged as either existing or non-existing with reference to these two aspects. The discussion on Euroscepticism can also be classified here (Boomgaarden et al. 2011; de Vries 2018; Hooghe – Marks 2007; Leruth et al. 2017). Citizenship and belonging always play a role here, especially in the contrast between European and national citizenship.

However, work related to identity should also be mentioned here (Jamieson 2002; Maas 2007, among others). Specifically, the expression of Eastern European Euroscepticism can also be understood as an inquiry into the assumption of European Citizenship (Taggart – Szczerbiak 2002). Despite many pronouncements of the European Union aimed at the political community of the European Union, empirical research on the issue of political community and citizenship remains underdeveloped compared to other aspects of the political culture of the European Union (see Westle – Segatti 2016). This shows that among the large number of Eurobarometers, surveys of the European Union, only two specialised surveys on citizenship have been conducted. The most recent of them will now be the basis for the empirical analysis.

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support of *political authorities* applies to the holders of political authority roles. They receive political support because of the acceptance of the decisions they make. Citizens' assessments result from their satisfaction with the *outputs of* the political system or political authorities (Pickel – Pickel 2006: 80–81).

## Data material used for the article

In order to deal with EU citizenship, we need comparative data for Europe on the one hand, and on the other hand questions that focus on the political community and certain value relationships in the European Union. The analyses presented here draw on data from the Eurobarometer 93.1 survey conducted in 2020 (survey period July to August 2020).[2] This study explicitly addresses the aspect of citizenship in the European Union and surveys all member states of the European Union, as well as its accession candidates, with regard to feelings of belonging. For the analyses, the focus is on the Eastern European and Central European member states of the European Union. For reasons of clarity, no differentiation between the Western European member states is made, and the mean value of the EU-27 is used as a reference point. The data on citizenship are supplemented by 91.4 Eurobarometer Study 493 (survey period March 2019), which was collected in 2019. It has a focus on discrimination and differentiation from other cultural and social groups. This provides a look at the value level of belonging.

For current results, data from the Eurobarometer 97.1 (survey period February to March 2022), which were the most recent available at the time of writing, are included in the analyses at one point.[3] Both surveys interviewed more than 30,000 people, each with between 1000 and 2000 people representative for each country. An overview of the variables used can be determined in each case in the documents of the European Union. We also use the data from the European Values Study for an analysis, as there are no corresponding options for the Eurobarometer. The corresponding data explanations can be found on the website of the European Values Study (https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/). As a method of analysis, comparative plots of frequencies are predominantly used. One multivariate analysis (regression analysis) is included. At appropriate points, bivariate correlation analyses are presented to compress correlation results. The data were kindly provided by the GESIS data archive.
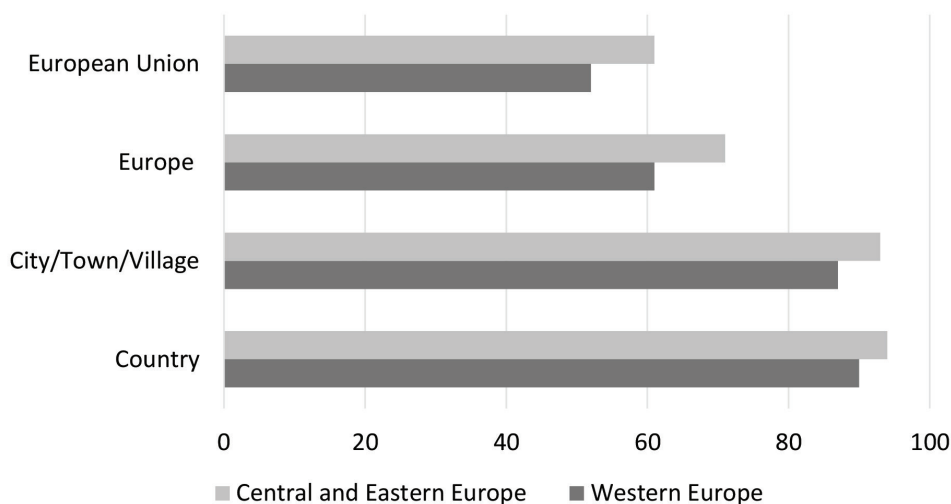
## Citizenship in intra-European comparison

Belonging to a political community can be ascertained from the attachment to and identification with a political community expressed in surveys. The data from Eurobarometer Study 93.1 from 2020 are useful in this respect, as they specifically ask about the attachment of the citizens of the EU member states to the European Union. Since they also ask about attachment to other objects of identification, they offer opportunities for comparison. If we look at the attachment globally

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2    Basic data available at https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2262.

3    Basic data available at https://fra.europa.eu/en/databases/anti-muslim-hatred/node/6580.

across the member states, divided into Western Europe and Eastern and Central Europe, the result is a ranking of the sense of belonging. The highest level of attachment is to one's own nation in virtually all of the countries studied. It is even slightly stronger in Eastern and Central Europe than in Western Europe. This is followed almost equally by a sense of belonging to one's immediate personal environment (Chart 1). If nationality is a global identification, proximity is probably due to personal circumstances. Compared with this sense of attachment, attachment to Europe and the European Union falls behind. Attachment to the European Union is the weakest of the four political communities surveyed.
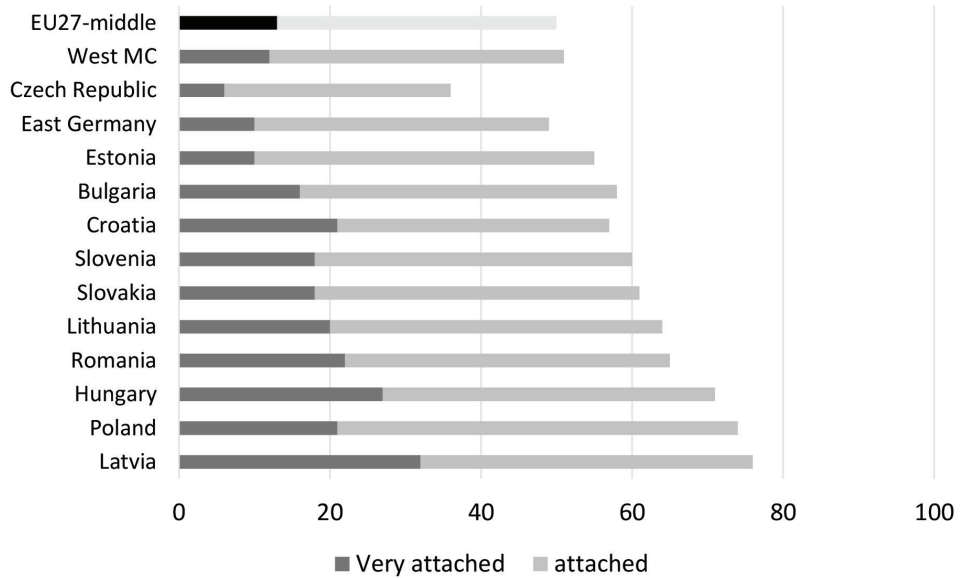
**Chart 1: Spheres of connectedness in comparison 2020**



Source: Authors' own calculations Eurobarometer 93.1; n=32,446; in percent of affirmative responses; 'Please tell me how strongly you feel connected to <>'; West MC = West European Member Countries.

After all, the solidarity ratings for the European Union are between 50 and 60 percent. In a global comparison between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, attachment to the European Union is higher on average in the Eastern European countries than in Western Europe. The same applies to all other objects of attachment. On a general level, this contradicts the hypothesis put forward at the outset of lower connectedness in Eastern and Central Europe. However, it is also clear from Chart 1 that national interests take precedence over European interests. This applies to Western, Central and Eastern Europe. In the following, let's take a closer look at the attachment to the European Union in a country comparison. The result is better than expected after the many discussions on the legitimacy crisis of the European Union. Only the Czech Republic and eastern Germany are below the average for all members of the European Union.

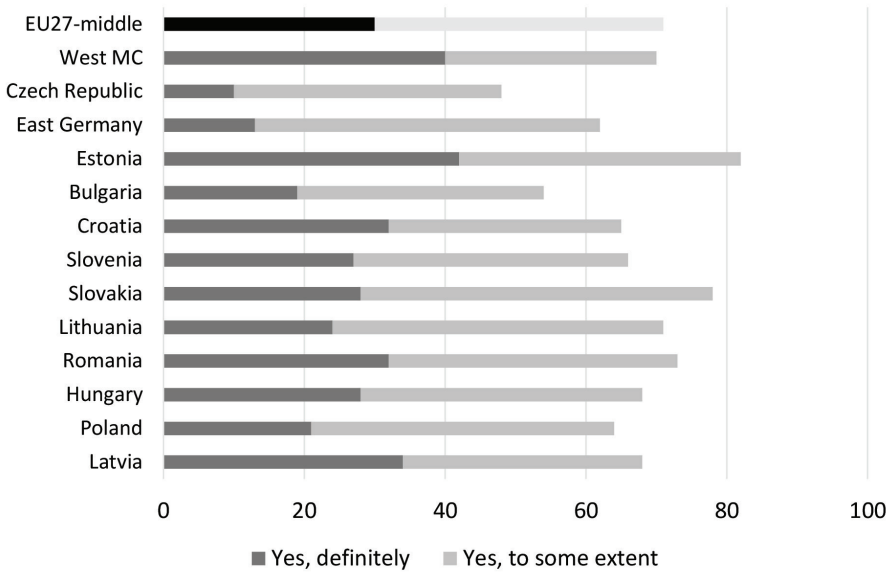**Chart 2: Attachment to the European Union 2020**



Source: Authors' own calculations Eurobarometer 93.1; n=32,446; in percent of affirmative responses; 'Please tell me how strongly you feel connected to the European Union'; West MC = West European Member Countries.

More than half of the citizens in these two countries do not see themselves as connected to the European Union. Particularly in the Central European states of Poland and Hungary, which are often in the spotlight, citizens' attachment to the European Union is high (Chart 2). The same applies to Latvia. Overall, it is not possible to speak of a fundamental distance only among Eastern Europeans and Central Europeans. Certainly, the level of attachment to the European Union is nowhere near that of one's own nation (91% on average for all EU states) or to Europe (58% on average for all EU states), but one cannot speak of a far-reaching distance with this result. Nor is there any clear logic to explain the differences in the attachment of the various Eastern and Central European states to the European Union. It is just as economically successful countries, such as Poland or Hungary, that show high levels of attachment, as Estonia and eastern Germany, which show lower values. Now this is only a single question on connectedness, and a relatively general one at that. In Eurobarometer 93.1, three more explicit questions were asked with reference to EU citizenship. Of particular interest is the question on the extent to which citizens of Central and Eastern European countries classify themselves as EU citizens (Chart 3).

This time, several Central and Eastern European countries are below the EU average. However, apart from the citizens of the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, it

**Chart 3: Self-assessment as EU Citizens**



Source: Authors' own calculations Eurobarometer 93.1; n=32,446; in percent of agreeing answers; Statement = 'You feel like an EU-Citizen'; Four-Point-Scale to answer; West MC = West European Member Countries.

is only to a small extent. Identification with the European Union is particularly strong in Estonia. We have left the arrangement as in chart 2, which shows that the self-attributions of an EU citizenship are by no means parallel to the preceding attachment question. Here, too, it is difficult to discern a systematic pattern.
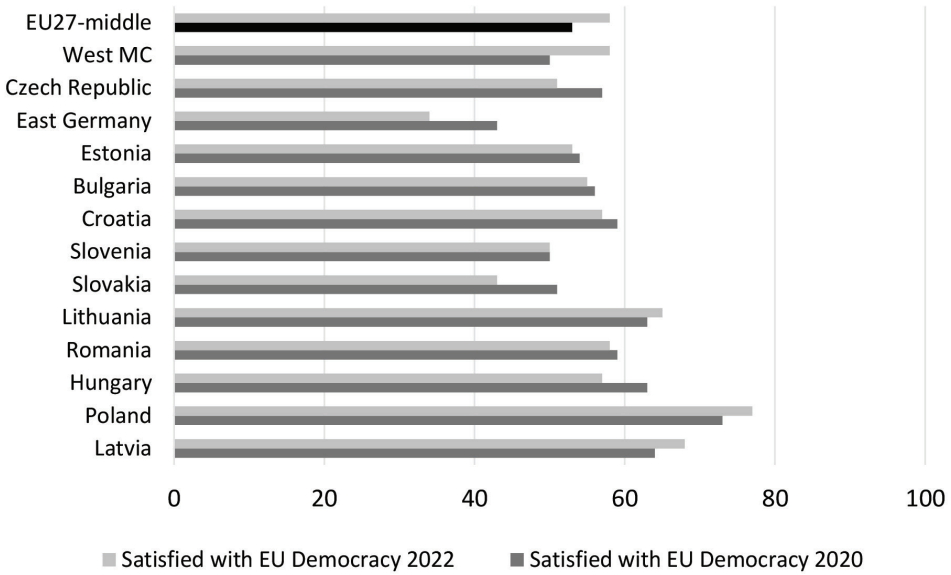
Looking at the results from Chart 2 and Chart 3 together, no above-average distance from the European Union as a reference community can be detected among citizens in Central Europe and Eastern Europe. This high level of attachment is surprising in view of the public discussions. Less surprising, perhaps, is the attachment from a historical perspective. Thus, above all, the desire to belong to Europe drives perceived affiliation with the European Union (Pearson's r-correlation=.81). Accordingly, on the side of the political community, one can speak of a European identity in slightly more than half of the citizens in the member states, and for almost as many even of the feeling of belonging to the political community of the European Union. Whether the figure of 50–60 percent is to be considered high or low is in the eye of the interpreter. As a substitute for a national identity, however, attachment to the European Union is probably not enough.

If we follow the path of political culture research, we can still ask the question of satisfaction with the current democracy in the European Union. In this way,

we leave the level of diffuse support for the political community in the direction of diffuse-specific support for the political system of the European Union. But even in this aspect, the assessment of democracy in the European Union is not really unfavourable. On the contrary, citizens in Poland in particular are very satisfied with democracy in the European Union in 2020 – despite some political disputes with the EU. Certainly, these values may have changed by 2023, but this is not obvious. As evidence of the generally high stability, with minor deviations, in the response behaviour of the population, the most recent results from Eurobarometer 97.1 from the beginning of 2022 are integrated in chart 4.

If the data from Eurobarometer 93.1 can be trusted, and there is nothing to suggest otherwise, attachment to the European Union is hardly any different in almost all Eastern European countries than in Western Europe. At least at the level of the political community, Western Europeans cannot play a blame game – at least as far as citizens in Eastern Europe and Central Europe are concerned. There is no question, however, that attachment to the European Union visibly takes a back seat to a sense of belonging to other collectives and identities. This is true for all countries in Europe. And the number of citizens who feel connected to the European Union tend to hover around half of the populations – in Western Europe, in Central Europe and in Eastern Europe.

**Chart 4: Satisfaction with democracy in the European Union**



Source: Authors' own calculations Eurobarometer 93.1 (2020); n=32,446; Eurobarometer 97.1 (2022), n=26502; in percent of affirmative responses; West MC = West European Member Countries.

It can be concluded from this that when there is a collision between national and European identity, attachment to Europe will usually take a back seat. However, the extent to which this affects the sharing of value orientations is still an open question. It is also a question of how one imagines the European Union on the value level (Weßels 2016).

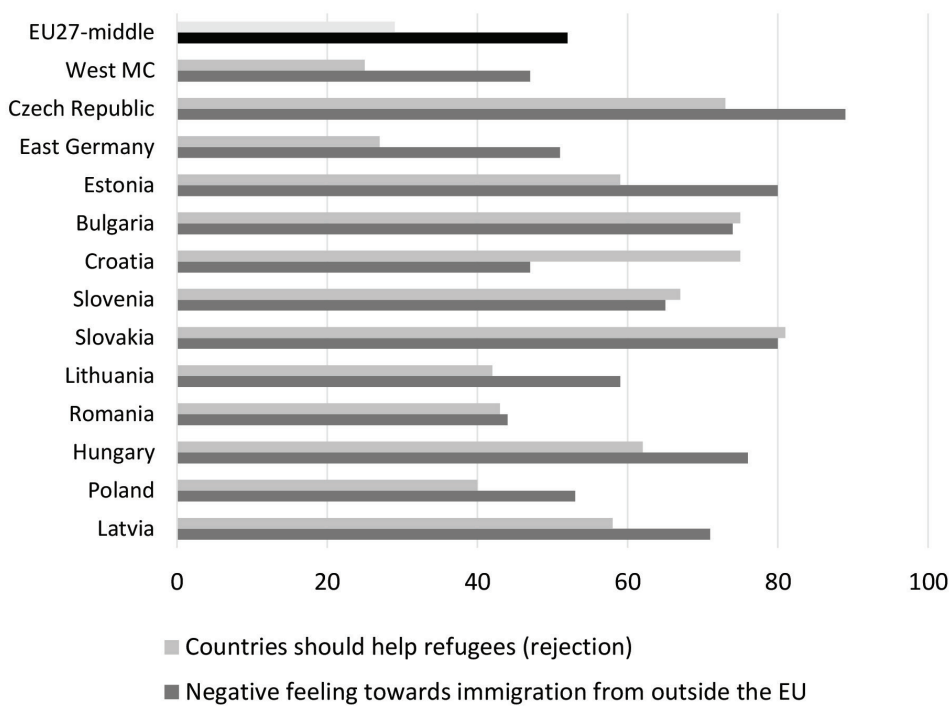## Differences in values and political issues of contention

The attachment of Central and Eastern European citizens to the European Union now does not seem to match the partly right-wing populist policies of some Eastern European states. This is shown by various norm control procedures of the European Union, such as towards Poland and Hungary (Pappas 2019; Muno – Pfeiffer 2022). But how can it now be that with more than half of Hungarians and Poles being citizens of the European Union, these policy discrepancies are nevertheless seen again and again? One possible explanation for this discrepancy lies in the image of the desired European Union. More precisely, it is in a different attitude of Central and Eastern Europeans towards the values of diversity, plurality and variety established in Western Europe. Thus, borrowing from Western European understandings, the latter values are seen as central to liberal democracies and a European democracy in the European Union (Ferrin – Kriesi 2016). These attitudes can be examined in terms of two aspects – first, the acceptance of (Muslim) migration, and second, openness to new sexual and gender diversity. Both issues embody the strongest changes in the European Union and of social modernisation processes, and include claims of a general acceptance – also in relation to universally seen human rights. However, the right-wing populist election campaigns in Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, to name but a few, have used both Muslim migration and rejection of same-sex lifestyles or even transsexuality to shape – and often win – their elections.

But how do citizens feel about these two complexes of values-based politics. Let us start with the immigration of Muslim migrants from outside the European Union, which is controversial almost everywhere in the European Union.[4] As it turns out, the attitudes in the population reflect a conflict within the political top of the European Union. On average in the member states of the European Union, the rejection of help for refugees or negative feelings towards immigration from states outside the European Union is already around half of the citizens. In most countries in Eastern Europe, the rejection of refugees is once again significantly higher than the average of the member states of the European Union. But there are differences also in Eastern Europe. Of course, these attitudes also depend on how affected people are by refugee migration, as the more moderate

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4    At this point, it must be pointed out that rejection of other migrant groups, such as people from Ukraine, has hardly been a problem. If it is, then the rejection is based on the religious affiliation marked as foreign, from which a cultural difference is derived.

results in some countries in Southeastern Europe (Romania, Croatia) reflect. The strongest rejection of migration is found in the Czech Republic. But also in Latvia, Hungary and Slovakia, there is a far-reaching majority with attitudes rejecting refugees and immigration.

**Chart 5: Attitudes toward immigration in comparison of EU member states**
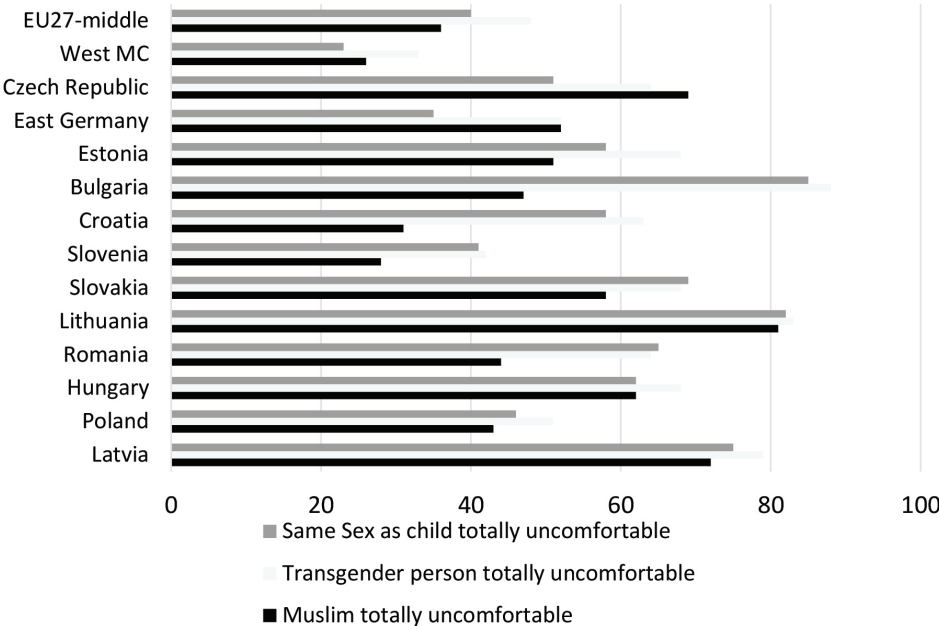


Source: Authors' own calculations Eurobarometer 93.1; n=32,446; in percent of affirmative responses; West MC = West European Member Countries.

Now, one could argue that these are legitimate attitudes toward migration, which is often also branded as illegal. It becomes more problematic when – also in the course of such debates – certain groups come under general suspicion and are exposed to prejudice. This raises the question of the extent to which citizens in the European states are prepared to support the European Union's policy of plurality and recognition of human rights, beyond a commitment to the European Union.

At this point, data from the Special Eurobarometer 493, which surveys the acceptance of Muslims and other minorities and social groups, can help us. The question asks how one would rate it if one's own daughter or son brought home

a Muslim, a person of the same sex or a transgender person as a love interest. Apart from Slovenia, the social distance – because this is what we measure with this question – towards Muslims is significantly above the average of the member states in all Central and Eastern European EU countries (also Mohiuddin 2017). Social distance is particularly strong in Latvia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic. But in Hungary and Slovakia, around 60 percent of citizens also feel totally uncomfortable. Even more striking is the rejection of transgender persons or persons of the same sex. In Bulgaria in particular, and again as well as Lithuania and Latvia, there is a very high social distance here, which goes as high as 80 percent uncomfortable. This value is also massively higher in all Central and Eastern European states than in the EU-27 average or the member states in Western Europe (23–33%).

**Chart 6: Social distance to Muslims, homosexuality and transgender people**



- Same Sex as child totally uncomfortable
- Transgender person totally uncomfortable
- Muslim totally uncomfortable

Source: Authors' own calculations; Special Eurobarometer 493 (2019); Discrimination; n=32,446; in percent of agree responses; Question: 'How would you feel if your child brought home a <> as a love interest? Shown = totally uncomfortable' (references: partially uncomfortable, totally comfortable); West MC = West European Member Countries.

It becomes clear that the rejection of migration, especially but not only in Central and Eastern Europe, has to do with Muslim migrants. Muslims who are perceived as foreign are seen as not fitting into each country's society, and

accordingly people do not want them in the country and certainly not in their own families (Öztürk – Pickel 2021). Corresponding election campaigns can accordingly draw on a broad potential and exacerbate the situation by branding the foreign group. In addition, the European Union is portrayed as an actor that is responsible for the immigration of Muslims to Europe and, in the worst case, even deliberately promotes it. However, it is also true that attitudes in the Eastern European countries differ greatly in some cases. Slovenia and Croatia in particular are at or just below the average level of rejection in Western Europe. This is despite the fact that they have been key transit countries for migration in recent years. Just as there is a general impression that the rejection of Muslim migrants and Muslims is stronger in Eastern Europe, there is also a considerable differentiation.

The same can be said for sexual and gender diversity. Again, this is a central right-wing populist campaign issue that is promised in Central and Eastern Europe, and here too the European Union and 'the West' are seen as importers of what is interpreted as a disease rather than gender and sexual self-

**Chart 7: Attitudes toward same sex relationships**



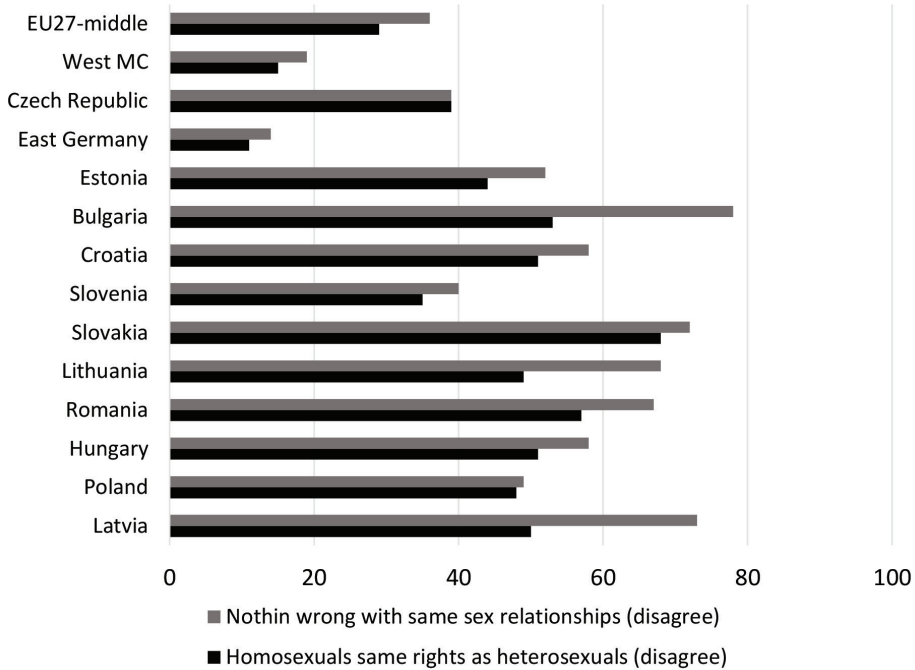■ Nothin wrong with same sex relationships (disagree)

■ Homosexuals same rights as heterosexuals (disagree)

Source: Authors' own calculations; Special Eurobarometer 493 (2019); Discrimination; n=32,446; in percent agreeing to the above items; West MC = West European Member Countries.

-determination. This was already evident in Chart 6, but is shown again when asking directly about guaranteeing rights for homosexual couples or whether homosexuality should be considered normal (Chart 7). The results are not quite as pronounced outside of personal proximity, but between half (Estonia) and two-thirds (Slovakia, Latvia) of citizens oppose equal rights for homosexuals and find some things wrong with same-sex partnerships. Slovenia falls slightly out of the overall picture again, with a slightly lower rejection of sexual and gender diversity. It is possible that modernisation processes are contributing to greater acceptance here, as these have been most successful in Slovenia out of all the Eastern European countries (Pollack et al. 2003; Pickel et al. 2006). The rejection of homosexuality is particularly pronounced in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Latvia.

Here too, there is diversity in the Eastern European states, albeit limited diversity in view of the consistently higher values compared to the Western European EU member states and the EU's overall means. The view of these selected findings on attitudes towards homosexuality and transgender could be substantiated with further data from Eurobarometer 493. But since the result is basically always the same, we will leave it at the presented graphs. What becomes clear is that in the Eastern European and Central European member states, we find clear problems with sexual and gender diversity, as well as with Muslims. Country variations arise due to the thematisation of right-wing populist political elites, a proliferation of religious norms, but also historical traditions (Öztürk – Pickel 2019). The rejection of Muslims is proving to be a key element in the electoral success of right-wing populists. The relationships have already been documented elsewhere (Öztürk – Pickel 2019, 2021). As an example, here is an analysis using the European Values Surveys and an assessment of right--wing parties (Table 1).

The result is as simple as it is convincing. Even if other prejudices and resentments also have their place in the arsenal of right-wing populists' enemy images, anti-Islam and anti-Muslim resentments are more important for the electoral success of right-wing populist parties than anti-feminist positions or regressive sexual norms – which is by no means to downplay their relevance for right-wing world views. Nonetheless, it is rather prejudices reinforced by threat perceptions (Pickel – Yendell 2016) that drive voters into the hands of right-wing populist parties. Several studies show that the enemy images of the European Union and 'Islam' as well as an exclusionary nationalism are closely interwoven and, in their combination, represent the normal case among voters of right-wing populist parties (Stockemer et al. 2019). Against the background of the question of European citizenship, such results must at least be problematised.

**Table 1: The effect of a rejection of Muslim neighbours and alternative explanatory fact...**

| Country (parties) | Bulgaria NFSB, Volya, Ataka & IMRO | Poland KORWIN, Kukiz'15 & PiS | Slovakia L'SNS, SNS & SR |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Identifica... |
| *Rejection of Muslim neighbours (Ref.: no)* | -.078** | .127*** | -.008 |
| **Distrust in national political institutions** | .143** | -.494*** | .037 |
| **Distrust in the European Union** | -.003 | .502*** | .133** |
| **Exclusionary nationalism** | -.027 | .059 | .133*** |
| **Anti-egalitarian gender relations** | -.064 | .071* | -.085 |
| **Anti-liberal sexual norms** | -.006 | .107*** | .022 |
| **Economic deprivation (Ref.: no)** | -.079 | .039 | .022 |
| **High educational qualification (Ref.: other qualifications)** | -.093*** | -.069** | -.043 |
| **Biological sex (Ref.: Women)** | .077*** | .014 | .049** |
| **Generation X (Ref.: Millennials)** | .016 | -.079* | -.055 |
| **Baby Boomers (Ref.: Millennials)** | -.021 | -.093** | -.088*** |
| **Interwar generation (Ref.: Millennials)** | -.013 | -.138** | -.180*** |
| **Likelihood ratio test** | 35.88*** | 274.81*** | 50.91*** |
| **Pseudo R-square** | .083 | .353 | .054 |
| **Observations** | 666 | 538 | 991 |

Source: EVS 2020 – The PopuList 2.0 (Roodujn et al. 2019). Note: The table shows the results of logistic regressions. Th...

## Periphery and generational change in EU citizenship?

One of the questions posed in the introduction was to what extent a situation that can be classified as periphery leads to differences in identification with the European Union. As a regional periphery, one can draw on many things, including the constructions of persons themselves. Here, we follow the idea of differentiating between urban and rural areas and consider rural areas as possibly peripheral. Other forms of periphery were omitted here. For the sake of clarity and simplification, we try to do this using cumulative correlations for Western and Eastern or Central Europe. In doing so, we are aware that we are putting aside the differentiations we have made so far. However, analyses not carried out here for reasons of space also showed a stability of results at country level.

For attachment to the European Union, no significant result emerges when differentiating along rural area or urban area. Or, in other words, citizens of rural regions considered peripheral do not differ in their attachment to the

tion with a right-wing populist or extreme right-wing party

| | Estonia EKRE | Slovenia SDS & SNS | Cheh Rep. SPD & Dawn | Hungary FIDESZ, Jobbik & KDNP | Croatia HDSSB & HSP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | .092*** | .003 | .059*** | .122*** | .012 |
| | .291*** | .383*** | .068 | -.626*** | -.011 |
| | .221*** | -.151* | .131*** | .302*** | .059* |
| | .059 | .124* | .016 | .148*** | .070*** |
| | -.084 | .140* | -.064 | .116* | -.016 |
| | .019 | .049** | .021 | .057*** | .001 |
| | -.049 | -.036 | -.020 | .032 | -.018 |
| | .012 | -.057 | -.019 | -.022 | .020 |
| | .108*** | -.019 | .008 | .008 | .007 |
| | .027 | .036 | -.037 | .013 | -.004 |
| | .067* | -.101* | -.045 | -.048 | -.007 |
| | .051 | -.171*** | -.106*** | -.043 | (-) |
| | 105.40*** | 42.55*** | 53.30*** | 347.15*** | 21.54** |
| | .245 | .082 | .119 | .321 | .105 |
| | 508 | 473 | 853 | 876 | 732 |

he entries are average marginal effects. * <.10, ** <.05, *** <.01 (see Öztürk – Pickel 78–80).

European Union from citizens in urban areas. There is no effect of peripheral location on the feeling of attachment to the European Union, but – as Table 2 shows – there is an effect of age. Attachment to the European Union increases significantly and statistically significantly among young people in Western Europe and in Eastern Europe. The difference between younger and older citizens is greater in Eastern Europe. Thus, it is the following generations that see themselves more strongly connected with the European Union and the European idea. As far as the acceptance of plural developments is concerned, the correlations with age also give some hope for the near future.

There are clear correlations in Western Europe and in Central and Eastern Europe: Younger people are more willing to recognise Muslims, but also sexual and gender diversity, even in their (future) family. Of course, it remains to be seen how this actually works in concrete cases, but a generational shift in values is discernible. In Eastern and Central Europe, this shift is even slightly higher than in Western Europe. At present, it is not possible to determine whether bio-

**Table 2: Connectedness EU by rural periphery and age (correlation)**

| | Age | | | Rural area | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Western Europe | Middle and Eastern Europe | | Western Europe | Middle and Eastern Europe |
| Attached to European Union | -.05** | -.09** | | n.s. | +.03* |
| Feel to be EU-citizen | -.09** | -.16** | | n.s. | n.s. |
| Positive Feeling towards immigration from outside EU | -.17** | -.15** | | -.03* | n.s. |
| Country should help refugees | -.12** | n.s. | | -.02* | n.s. |
| Love relationship Muslim (uncomfortable) | +.14** | +.13** | | +.11** | +.05** |
| Love relationship Same Sex (uncomfortable) | +.11** | +.14** | | +.03** | +.06** |
| Love relationship Transgender (uncomfortable) | +.10** | +.13** | | +.04** | +.03** |
| Homosexuals same rights as heterosexuals | -.11** | -.15** | | -.03** | -.11** |

Source: Authors' own calculations Eurobarometer 93.1 and 91.4; n=32,446; Pearson's R-product moment correlations; only significant values shown; p<.05; n.s. = not significant; *=p<.05; **p<.001.

graphical effects are perhaps counteracting the generational effects, but there is much to suggest a change in values in these aspects, which is likely to lead to a change in gender relations such as an increasing recognition of sexual and gender diversity (Inglehart – Welzel 2005; Inglehart – Norris 2003).

For the first time, the attitudes toward plurality and diversity also show differences between EU citizens living in rural areas and those living in the city or suburbs. In rural areas, a tendency toward reticence or even rejection of increasing plurality with regard to people of the Muslim faith or sexual and gender diversity is evident in virtually all states of the European Union. Whether this is an expression of a self-perceived peripherality or a higher degree of traditionality and distance from modernisation processes cannot be clarified to the last point, but both are undoubtedly reasons for these empirical discrepancies.[5]

## Conclusion – European Citizenship with Differences in the Recognition of Plurality

European Union citizenship in Eastern and Central Europe is better than its reputation. Citizens in Central and Eastern European states are just as likely to feel connected to the European Union as those in Western European member states or the average of European Union states. Thus, one has to reject the first thesis of the article. In spite of the partly anti-European Union policies that can be observed in some Central European states, e.g. in Hungary, the citizens

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5    Unfortunately, the relevant variables were not included in the data sets used, which is why an examination could not be carried out. However, comparable analyses with the European Values Surveys point in this direction (Pickel – Pickel 2023).

are hardly different from those in Western Europe in terms of their citizenship. This does not mean that we can assume a complete, even far-reaching sense of belonging. Although the figures for almost all Central and Eastern European countries show slight surpluses in the number of citizens identifying with the European Union, whether this is already the clear majority of identifying persons desired by political culture research and democracy research can be viewed critically (Diamond 1999) – especially since one must assume that in case of conflict the affiliation to one's own nation usually outweighs the affiliation to the European Union. If there is no conflict, then a multiple identity that takes into account the nation, one's own place of residence and the European Union is possible for just under 60 percent of Europeans.

Differences can be found elsewhere. Ideas about one's own community and democracy differ between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe primarily along the lines of exclusions of minorities and the understanding of who belongs to a political community. In Central and Eastern Europe, with variations across countries, there is a stronger rejection of Muslim migration and also sexual and gender diversity than in the Western European member states. These attitudes correspond with right-wing populist statements and corresponding policies when the possibility exists due to access to power. The rejection of Muslim migration and sexual and gender diversity have established themselves as conflict issues. One could almost say that both issues are among the central mobilisation themes of Eastern European right-wing populists, who, unlike Western European right-wing populists, have found their way to power (also Brubaker 2017; Pytlas 2016; Öztürk – Pickel 2019, 2021). At the same time, the acceptance of Muslim migration and sexual and gender diversity characterise the growth of plurality and pluralisation in Europe. Mostly both are accepted or tolerated to varying degrees.

Rejection of Muslim migration, social distance from Muslims in general, and difficulties with homosexuality and transgender people are clearly stronger in Central and Eastern Europe than in the average of Western European member states. Thus, the conflict of values that exists between traditionally minded people and proponents of pluralisation widens to a discrepancy between Western European and Central and Eastern European member states. Right-wing populists use this prevailing defensiveness among the population against Muslim migration and sexual and gender diversification for mobilisation and electoral success (also Eatwell –Goodwin 2018; Pytlas 2016; Öztürk – Pickel 2019). In doing so, they paint a picture of the European Union as a community that wants to forcibly change its values and pave the way for both Muslims and transgender activists to enter Central and Eastern European countries.

If we look at the possibly peripheral rural areas, the perceived affiliations are hardly different from those in the large cities and suburbs. Only the rejection of plurality is somewhat stronger than in the average of the states. It is clear that there are generational differences. The younger generations in particular, even

more so in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, are identifying more and more strongly with the European Union. This result, which is hopeful for the future of the European Union, is accompanied by greater openness in the younger age cohorts to the many forms of pluralisation. Young Central and Eastern Europeans in particular are increasingly comfortable with a plural society. However, they make up only a small proportion in the Central and Eastern European countries, which are predominantly sceptical about pluralism.

If one takes the – certainly still limited – findings presented together, then citizenship in the European Union is characterised by the desire to belong to Europe, with simultaneous rejection of a pluralisation that is seen as too far-reaching and contrary to one's own values. These attitudes are not uniform in Eastern Europe, but differ from country to country. This differentiation should also be noted as a result. The togetherness of plurality and liberal democracy is seen as prescribed by a Western-dominated European Union – and sometimes rejected. This does not diminish the affiliation with the European Union, but opposes it with its own understanding of democracy (guided democracy) and classification as the better Europeans defending Europe. This process becomes stronger under conditions that are interpreted as peripheral. Above all, plurality is rejected. Here, too, people see themselves as the last place to protect Europe against decay and that is why they are members of the European Union. This does not mean that you feel like a European, but EU citizenship is often difficult for citizens of many Eastern European countries due to the differences in attitudes towards Muslims and sexual and gender diversity.

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**Gert Pickel** *is full professor at the Department of Sociology of Religion and Church, Faculty of Theology, Leipzig University. His research is dedicated to political culture research, sociology of religion and democratization. He leads the partial institute of the Research Center of social cohesion in Leipzig and leads the joint project 'racism in institutions'. E-mail: pickel@rz.uni-leipzig.de*

**Susanne Pickel** *is full professor at the Department of political science at the Faculty of social sciences of the University of Duisburg-Essen. Her research is dedicated to political culture research, research on democracy and democratization and survey methods. She leads the joint project 'radical Islam versus radical anti-Islam'. E-mail: susanne.pickel@uni-due.de*