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Parochialism and Non-co-operation: The Case of Poland's Opposition to EU Migration Policy

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Abstract

EU policy responses to the migration crisis caused by the Russian war against Ukraine challenge existing explanations of EU migration policy, which have typically leaned on economic rationales. This study leans on public attitudes to shed light on Poland's opposition to migration co-operation across three recent European migration crises: Syria (2015), Belarus (2021) and Ukraine (2022). Throughout these crises, Poland has become a significant migration border country and one of the top refugee-receiving countries. We build an analytical framework for exploring how the Polish government instrumentalised 'parochial attitudes' that prioritise sovereignty, locality and the in-group and exclude out-groups, and we analyse Poland's (op)position to EU co-operation on migration through this lens. Using survey data, policy documents, 83 media articles and 10 interviews with policy-makers and experts, we demonstrate that Poland's position on EU solidarity measures has remained static despite the dynamic, evolving circumstances and aligned with parochial attitudes amongst the public.

Keywords: attitudes; European Union; migration policy; parochialism; Poland; Ukraine

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine launched on 24 February 2022 has caused the largest migration crisis Europe has experienced since World War II (Commission, 2022a). The response offered by the EU and its member states to the mass inflow of Ukrainian refugees challenges some established expectations about EU migration co-operation. In this study, we explore how the Polish government's investment in parochial attitudes can contribute to our understanding of its opposition to migration co-operation in the EU. The concept of 'parochialism' highlights co-operation and solidarity within the in-group, people who share cultural, linguistic and religious traditions (Bernhard et al., 2006; Gruszczak, 2022; Schwartz-Shea and Simmons, 1991). It also underlines the exclusion of the out-group, which is recognised by its otherness and is often perceived as a threat. Parochial attitudes are particularly relevant in negotiations on immigration because migrants almost by definition are members of an out-group. Furthermore, in international negotiations on immigration policy, parochial attitudes also importantly support claims for sovereignty and oppose transfer of power from domestic to supranational arena. They promote locally-oriented solutions that complicate obtaining support for international solidarity.

What constitutes a fair distribution of migration-related responsibilities amongst EU member states has been heavily debated and has inspired much research. A dominant perspective is that the unequal distribution of refugees in the EU complicates arriving at a

political agreement (Biermann et al., 2018; Karageorgiou, 2019; Zaun, 2018, 2022). Such accounts have in common the underlying assumption that countries want to limit immigration because they perceive it as costly (Betts, 2003; Thielemann, 2017). The EU's response to the Ukraine crisis challenges this logic, and we argue for also considering parochial attitudes to account for recent developments in Poland.¹

Recent studies of EU policy-making have turned towards explanations that highlight public attitudes and their role in constraining policies towards asylum seekers and refugees (Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Ruhs, 2022; Van Hootegeem et al., 2020; Zaun, 2018). As European integration moved into new policy areas previously governed by the nation-states, postfunctionalist theory argues that EU integration itself has become a salient issue for public engagement (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2017; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). This means that decision-makers have to consider not just economic interest groups but also public opinion (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Postfunctionalism assumes that certain policy issues invoke the mass public's interest more than others, and migration is perhaps the prime example (Hooghe and Marks, 2018). The concept of parochialism concurs with this account and adds to it by raising expectations about which direction public attitudes will lean towards in a specific cultural context (Bernhard et al., 2006). This article builds on the concept of parochialism to shed light on hereto underexplored dimensions of member state preferences in EU migration policy. Consequently, the article explores Poland's opposition to EU migration co-operation by analysing how the government invested in parochial attitudes and supplied policies in line with these attitudes to gain popular support.

In the following, we first present an overview of existing accounts of parochialism, which cover one of two levels: attitudes held by individuals and modes of co-operation between states. Bridging this gap, we present our framework, advancing expectations that link individual attitudes with the government's position on European co-operation. We then present our methodology and data, before the three case studies of Poland's stance on EU migration policy in 2015 (Syria crisis), 2021 (Belarus crisis) and 2022 (Ukraine crisis) and concluding remarks.

I. Conceptualising Parochialism

Parochialism is the social mechanism of favouring the members of your own group (Bernhard et al., 2006). Parochial attitudes exist on the individual level, but scholarly work has focused on the implications of parochialism for European and international co-operation without adequately addressing how attitudes at the individual level translate into government positions in international negotiations. We translate individual-level attitudes into government positions in EU negotiations via a framework that conceptualises parochialism as a dynamic process in which the public's attitudes affect the government's policies and vice versa (i.e., a positive feedback loop). We build on expectations raised by previous research on parochialism on the individual and international levels.

Interstate co-operation is motivated by either universalist values, suggesting that all states should co-operate, or parochial values, suggesting that states should co-operate with

¹Notable exceptions to this distributional logic existed by 2015, when Hungary could have benefitted significantly from the redistribution of asylum seekers but voted against it (Zaun, 2022, p. 209).

those whom they perceive as in the same in-group (Schwartz-Shea and Simmons, 1991). In recent studies on European co-operation, parochialism is presented as one of four ideal types of European co-operation: a format in which the exclusive territorial sovereignty of each state is at the core, but co-operation exists between states because it is beneficial in certain cases (Buhari-Gulmez and Gulmez, 2022). This perspective highlights the sanctity of national sovereignty and territorial borders (Buhari-Gulmez and Gulmez, 2022). ‘Parochial Europe’ is an ‘(...) exclusive and nativist understanding of Europe in which European identity is defined in terms of a common civilization and Christianity’ (Öner, 2022, p. 63). It needs to be protected from ‘Others’, such as migrants and refugees, and particularly Muslims and Africans (Öner, 2022, p. 74). Buhari-Gulmez and Gulmez (2022) identified Poland as a member state envisaging a ‘Parochial Europe’. For it, sovereignty concerns remain central and co-operation with other member states is only relevant when Poland directly benefits, or when threats to Europe are perceived as a threat to Poland and only co-operation with the EU can eliminate that threat.

At the individual level, parochialism is associated with certain core values. The democratisation literature (see Inglehart, 1997; Welzel et al., 2003) highlights that certain cultural values – ‘deeply-instilled attitudes among the public of a society’ (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010, p. 1) – are stable and play an important role in societal transformations. Schwartz (2012; Schwartz and Bardi, 1997) has identified 10 basic values across cultures and finds certain stable patterns. On one end of the scale, individuals emphasise values of universalism and benevolence (so-called self-transcendence values), and on the other, individuals hold conformity/tradition and security in the highest regard (so-called conservation values). Whilst societies that have high levels of self-transcendence values would demonstrate openness to out-groups, high levels of conservationist values would not, and they would to a larger degree favour the in-group.

At the centre of our understanding of parochial dynamics is that governments are aware of existing underlying values in their public and, furthermore, that they can strategically leverage these. Certain core values are associated with parochial attitudes such as opposition to immigration (Tartakovsky and Walsh, 2016; Van Hoetegem et al., 2020), and whilst core values are stable and difficult to influence, attitudes are mouldable (Ruhs, 2022). Governments can gain popularity by successfully providing the public goods of ‘safety’ and ‘security’ to their citizens (Bauman, 2001). To capitalise on their ability to provide such goods, governments can invest in parochial attitudes by reformulating existing anxieties, fears and insecurities related to globalisation and immigration (Bauman, 2001; Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018). Parochial attitudes are therefore not given and static, but mouldable and possible to exploit in different contexts.

We conceptualise the government’s use of parochial attitudes as a dynamic process of supply and demand. In general terms, demand is determined by public opinion, and supply is governmental actions such as rhetoric, politics and policies. Existing core values facilitating parochial attitudes must exist for the government’s investments in parochial attitudes to succeed. If government actions strengthen parochialism amongst the public, a continuous positive feedback loop increases demand for a parochial stance. In turn, feeding this demand becomes more beneficial for the government because it increases public support. However, existing demand for parochial policies may pose a challenge for governments in international negotiations, where external actors may pressure them to adopt a co-operative stance and support solidarity measures.

II. Parochialism as Driver of Non-co-operation

Opposition to supranationalisation and migration follows from intra-group mechanisms in parochial communities, which are based on a sense of locality, and within-group altruism (Yamagishi and Mifune, 2016). Migration entails expanding the membership and its possible benefits to out-group members. Supranationalisation implies an extension of responsibility to other groups, perhaps to the detriment of the in-group. By co-operating on migration policy at the supranational level, states lose the ability to sovereignly maintain the exclusivity of the in-group. This does not align with the vision of a 'parochial Europe' that some nativist populist governments share (see more Koß and Seville, 2020; Öner, 2022; Zaun and Ripoll Servent, 2022).

Both these processes, supranationalisation and migration, defy the expectations raised by parochial in-group altruism and out-group hostility. However, under certain circumstances, co-operation on migration can be aligned with parochialism. If citizens consider migration a threat to the state and co-operation with the EU on migration could help mediate the threat, then migration co-operation could be in line with a parochial idea of Europe (Buhari-Gulmez and Gulmez, 2022). External migration shocks can potentially be framed as a threat to Europe and to the individual member state, depending on the distribution of migrants within the EU and the type of migration. The more different the migrant group is from the home population, the more easily the government can substantiate the public's fear by framing the group as an existential threat to their identity (Bauman, 2001). The government can invest in shaping immigration attitudes by engaging in negative rhetoric, even framing immigration as a physical safety threat by referencing acts of terrorism and violence (Bauman, 2001). This can create public demand for parochial 'immigration preferences' that include severely limiting access for migrants from a different ethnicity (Gruszczak, 2021). Delivering such immigration restrictive policies gains the government popular support. Similarly, the government can invest in parochial ideas of what the EU should be by suggesting that co-operation on migration is a threat to the state's sovereignty and gain domestic popularity by refusing to co-operate with the EU.

III. Tracing Parochial Arguments and Responses in Three Migration Crises

From our conceptualisation of parochialism as a dynamic process in which the government invests in parochial attitudes, we can derive some expectations about Poland's position on EU migration co-operation. Post-communist states, including Poland, score high on certain core values that are associated with parochial attitudes such as negative attitudes towards immigration (Schwartz, 2007; Tartakovsky and Walsh, 2016) and that have been demonstrated to fuel economic and cultural fears (Van Hootehem et al., 2020). We would expect that Poland would prefer not to pool any sovereignty by co-operating with the EU on migration and that they would only do so if they perceive EU co-operation as the only viable solution to alleviate a 'threat' to themselves. What constitutes a threat is decided by perceptions of how different the potential immigrant groups are, and whether the government invests in provoking parochial attitudes, against the EU or against immigration.

Table 1: List of Interviews.

1	Polish academic	21.07.2022	Online
2	Representative from Polish NGO	26.07.2022	Online
3	Polish think tank researcher	28.07.2022	Online
4	Representative from Commission	17.06.2022	Online
5	Expert from Poland	29.04.2022	Online
6	Representative from Commission	03.01.2023	Online
7	Representative from the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the EU	20.02.2023	Brussels
8	European External Action Service official	16.02.2023	Online
9	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations official	15.02.2021	Online
10	Representative from the Polish Ministry of the Interior and Administration	30.03.2023	Written response

Note: On request of the participants, some institutions remain undisclosed.

To explore these expectations, we investigate Poland's position on EU migration cooperation across three recent crises, which vary across two dimensions. The first dimension considers whether a crisis directly affected Poland or only other EU member states. The second dimension estimates public attitudes towards the migration groups the crises involve. We have operationalised this second dimension using polling data from the Polish Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS).² What we refer to as the 'Syria crisis'³ of 2015 did not directly affect Poland, and yet, the public held strong anti-immigration attitudes (CBOS, 2016b). During the Belarus crisis, which directly concerned Poland, the involved migrants faced again strong anti-immigration attitudes (CBOS, 2021a, 2021b). However, the migrants involved in the Ukraine crisis, which severely affected Poland, were not met with strong anti-immigration attitudes (CBOS, 2022a). At the time of writing, the Ukraine crisis is very much still unfolding; the analysis is based on developments to August 2022.

Using congruence analysis (Blatter and Blume, 2008), we evaluate the merit of parochialism in explaining the Polish position. We use official EU documents, including decisions from the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) and the Council of the European Union (the Council) and statements from the European Commission (hereafter Commission), to trace developments in EU migration policy and to find evidence of conflict with Poland. Moreover, our analysis is supported by 10 original interviews, conducted online and in person, with decision-makers and experts from Poland and the EU institutions (see Table 1).

To measure the demand side of parochial attitudes (i.e., public attitudes on migration issues), we use surveys conducted at the EU level (e.g., Chatham House, Eurobarometer and European Social Survey) and in Poland (CBOS). We draw conclusions about aggregated migration attitudes in Poland across the three crises from these data (see Facchini et al., 2008, p. 661). To investigate the supply side of government's actions responding

²See Appendix S1 for more information about our operationalisation of anti-immigration attitudes using CBOS surveys conducted across the three crises, in 2016, 2021 and 2022.

³The 'Syria crisis' is shorthand for the European migration shock that began in 2015 and was the result of various consecutive migration crises. This was a political crisis in the EU resulting from the member states' inability to agree on responses to increased migratory pressures not only from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan but also from the African countries (Zaun, 2018).

to parochial attitudes (i.e., communication and policies), we draw on substantial secondary literature thoroughly documenting how the Polish government and ruling party politicians referred to migrants as a threat during the Syria crisis (e.g., Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018; Gruszczak, 2021; Kabata and Jacobs, 2022; Strupiechowska, 2018). To investigate how the Polish government officials portrayed migrants during the more recent Belarus and Ukraine crises, we have conducted a summative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) of 83 articles from the two major Polish newspapers *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*, published from January 2021 to August 2022, using NVivo software (see Appendix S2). In news and in official government statements, we expect that the Polish government will present out-group migrants (Syria and Belarus crises) as a threat and in-group migrants (Ukraine war) as members of society. Furthermore, they would portray EU migration co-operation as a threat to their sovereignty in instances where co-operation would entail increased migration from the out-group into Poland, and they would prioritise independent, local solutions to these crises.

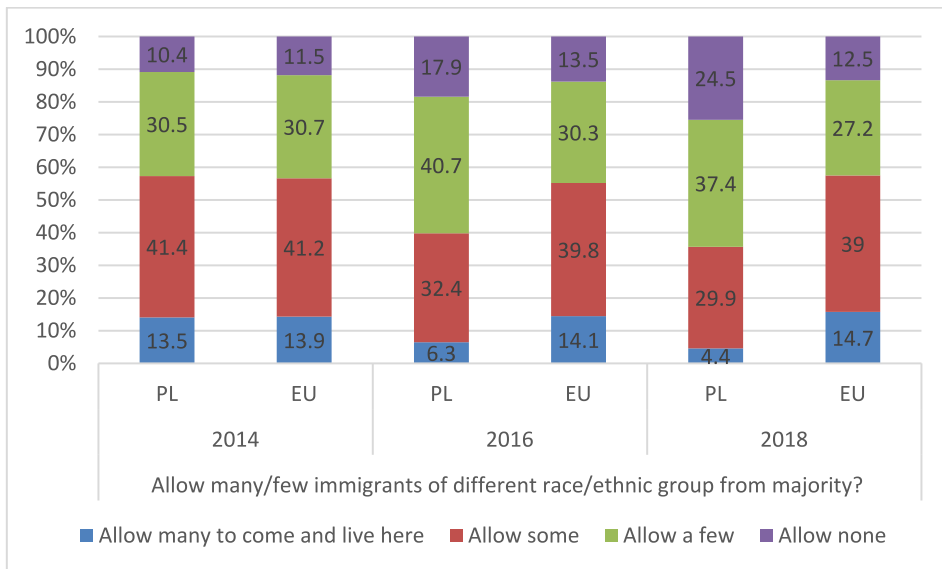
The Syria Crisis: Not Directly Impacted, and Opposing EU-Level Co-operation

In 2015, the EU experienced a rapid increase in immigration on its southern borders, with a record of 1.3 million people applying for asylum that year [European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), 2022]. On 14 September 2015, the European Council adopted a temporary and exceptional relocation mechanism from Italy and Greece to other member states (European Council, 2015). The then-Polish Prime Minister, Ewa Kopacz [Civil Platform Party (PO)], agreed to the temporary relocation scheme, but only for refugees and not economic migrants and only within Poland's limited hosting capacity (RMF24, 2015). The European Council vote on relocation took place 4 months after the Polish presidential elections and only a month before the Polish parliamentary elections. The increased media attention to the issue of migration in 2015 fuelled the Polish election campaigns (Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018). The Polish right-wing media targeted parochial attitudes and framed the humanitarian refugee crisis as a security crisis (Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018; Gruszczak, 2021). They highlighted the 'otherness' of the 2015 migrants, and the migrants were framed as a threat to Polish identity (Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018; Gruszczak, 2021, 2022; Kabata and Jacobs, 2022).

The Law and Justice Party (PiS) capitalised on the migration crisis in their election campaign in 2015 (Interviews 2 and 3; Kabata and Jacobs, 2022, pp. 10–12). After coming to power, they annulled the previous Polish government's agreement on relocation (Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018, p. 186). This created a conflict with the Commission, and in December 2017, Poland was, along with Slovakia and the Czech Republic, referred to the CJEU for not fulfilling their relocation requirements (Commission, 2017). The Polish government argued that the refugees entailed a security risk, for example, because of difficulty in proving with satisfactory confidence the identity and origin of applicants for international protection who could be relocated (CJEU, 2020). However, the CJEU claimed it was entirely possible for Poland to preserve the safety of its citizens by refusing to take individual applicants without rejecting the whole system (CJEU, 2020).

Following a PiS victory in parliamentary elections held on 25 October and the Paris terrorist attacks on 13 November, the media discourse intensified around security concerns (Kabata and Jacobs, 2022), and it encouraged values important for Poles, such as

Figure 1: Allow Many/Few Immigrants From Different Race/Ethnic Group From Majority? [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcms.13544)] [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcms.13544)]



Notes: EU, EU member states; PL, Poland (European Social Survey, 2014, 2016, 2018). The EU average is based on EU countries that participated in the European Social Survey each year. Italy did not participate in 2014, but it is still included in the 2016 and 2018 averages. A complete list of participating countries is available at <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/participating-countries.html> (accessed 30.08.2022).

faith and family (Strupiechowska, 2018, p. 140). Once in power, PiS actions further exacerbated parochial perceptions of supranationalism as a threat to Polish sovereignty. On 1 April 2016, the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish Parliament) adopted a resolution stating that the Polish state should have full power over the migration and asylum policy instruments it uses. At the same time, the resolution indicated that this is ‘of crucial importance, in the face of the growing tensions in society, which are caused by an excessive wave of migration from the Middle East to Europe’ (Sejm, 2016a).⁴ On 21 October 2016, the Sejm adopted another resolution claiming that any automatic refugee redistribution system contravened the EU’s subsidiarity principle (Sejm, 2016b).

Before the crisis, in 2014, Poland’s immigration preferences did not differ widely from other EU member states (Figure 1). Around 55% of Poles thought they should allow ‘many’ or ‘some’ ‘immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority’, compared with the EU average of 54% (European Social Survey, 2014). Ten per cent wanted to allow no outsider immigrants, indicating some demand for restrictive policies, but this was a smaller share of the population than the EU average at the time. However, by 2016, only 39% of Poles agreed that they should allow ‘many’ or ‘some’, whilst more than half wanted to ‘allow a few’ or to ‘allow none’ (Figure 1).

⁴All translations from Polish to English were made by the authors.

CBOS public opinion polls, which take place more frequently, also reflect this trend. According to the CBOS poll from May 2015, only 21% opposed of hosting refugees. Fifty-eight per cent favoured hosting refugees in Poland until they were able to return to their countries, and 14% favoured hosting the refugees and also allowing them to settle in Poland (CBOS, 2016a, p. 2). By August 2015, reluctance had grown to 38%, whilst 56% favoured welcoming them in Poland – at least temporarily. Reluctance kept increasing over the following months to a peak in April 2016 of 61%, shortly after the terrorist attacks in Brussels (CBOS, 2016a, p. 2).

These tendencies look different, however, when the survey specified that the refugees come from the Middle East and Africa and asked whether Poland should accept some of these refugees if they come to certain EU member states that are not able to handle this inflow. Already in May 2015,⁵ before the European migration crisis emerged, the majority of respondents were reluctant to accept refugees from these regions in Poland (53%, against 33% in favour). Between May 2015 and May 2016, support for accepting refugees from the Middle East and Africa decreased from 33% to 30%, whilst reluctance increased substantially, from 53% to 63% (CBOS, 2016a, p. 6). In May 2017, when the poll specifically asked about receiving refugees from ‘Muslim countries’, a majority opposed it (70%), and only 25% supported (CBOS, 2017, p. 2). The majority of respondents (65%) opposed hosting refugees even if this would entail significant loss of EU funds transferred to Poland (CBOS, 2017, p. 4).

One survey reveals that whilst 44% (23%) of Poles had a negative (positive) attitude towards Muslims in February 2015, only 12% responded that they personally knew a Muslim person (CBOS, 2015, pp. 2–3). This may serve as an example that these attitudes towards the ‘other’ are mostly imaginary and may be influenced by the government who can invest in parochial attitudes through rhetoric using the media (Strupiechowska, 2018, p. 143; Interview 2). Moreover, a Chatham House (2017) survey showed Poland as the most opposed to immigration from ‘mainly Muslim countries’. The significant changes in Poles’ attitudes after the 2015 migration crisis did not match the EU average in 2016 and 2018 (Figure 1), even though many EU states faced high migratory pressure at the time (Pszczółkowska, 2022; Van Hootegeem et al., 2020).

By 2018, 25% of Poles answered that they preferred ‘no immigrants from different race/ethnic group’, compared with 18% in 2016 (European Social Survey, 2018). In 2018, 45% of Poles listed immigration as the ‘most important issue facing the EU at the moment’ (EU average of 38%) (Eurobarometer, 2018). However, unlike many EU member states, Poles did not consider immigration amongst the most important issues facing their own country (Eurobarometer, 2018). Immigration was to a large degree understood as an EU issue, and not something impacting Poland, completely in line with the government’s rhetoric (Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018, p. 189).

Little suggests that immigration numbers in Poland caused the change in attitudes. Before 2015, migration was not a core issue for PiS (Interview 2). However, playing to parochial attitudes became the centre of their political campaign during the migration crisis. They had great success in mobilising people against the Commission’s relocation mechanism (Interview 2). This strategy likely played a role in increasing parochial attitudes as public reluctance to accept refugees from the Middle East and Africa in Poland was

⁵From this point CBOS regularly included the question in their polling.

growing and the PiS government's decision to not relocate refugees did not cause opposition from Polish society (see also Kabata and Jacobs, 2022, p. 11). The Polish government's rhetoric emphasised its opposition to mandatory relocation, that relocation is inefficient,⁶ that it may lead to the increased irregular migration to the EU instead of limiting it and that alternative solidarity measures could be used (Interview 7). Mobilisation against EU migration policy remained a key strategy for PiS in subsequent years, including the 2020 presidential election.

To summarise, during the Syria crisis, the PiS government portrayed the migrants primarily as a security threat. They opposed mandatory relocation that would allow this out-group entry into Poland, for which they received positive domestic ratings, at the detriment of relations with the EU.

The Belarus Crisis: A Major Border Country, Unwilling to Receive Support From the EU

During 2021, the number of irregular border crossings on the eastern border of the EU increased more than 10-fold (Frontex, 2021). This was an orchestrated migration crisis, whereby the Belarusian government transported third country nationals wanting access to the borders of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia (Frontex, 2021; Interview 4). Poland responded by increasing border patrols and building fences. By September, the situation was still not resolved and despite much criticism, Poland declared a state of emergency in an area 3 km from its border with Belarus (Pszczółkowska, 2022). They restricted access to the area, prohibited photography and limited information about activities in the zone (Polish Republic Service, 2021). The restrictions made documenting possible human rights abuses difficult and limited access to the area for civil society organisations offering food and aid (Reporting Democracy, 2021).

Polish authorities invested heavily in parochial attitudes by communicating the situation and the migrants involved as a threat to Polish society. Polish government officials mostly referred to the migrants from Belarus as 'migrants' (and sometimes as 'illegal migrants') and immigrants (and sometimes as 'illegal immigrants'). They also described them as 'refugees' (but sometimes as 'illegal refugees'). Some officials explained that 'migrants' are different to 'refugees' and that the migrants at the Belarusian border cannot be considered as (real) refugees (for the list of specific terms used by the officials, see Appendix S2). In addition, some representatives of the Polish government indicated threats to sovereignty, as well as security threats that some migrants could bring. For example, officials especially linked the migrants to Islamist terrorism in Western Europe or to sex crimes (Gazeta Wyborcza, 2021). They referred to the migration crisis of 2015 and stated that if they could successfully 'defend Poland', then they could do the same during the Belarus crisis. Polish government representatives also emphasised that these migrants often did not have a passport or an ID document, or that these documents were false, and that the identity of these people must be determined (Gazeta Wyborcza, 2021). Furthermore, Polish authorities assumed that migrants entered Belarus legally and thus were Belarus authorities' responsibility (Interview 7).

Poland perceived the orchestrated migration crisis as a border issue, which they consider a member state matter that they wanted to handle themselves (Interviews 4

⁶For example, the government claimed that the relocated individuals will most likely keep migrating, as they do not wish to stay in Poland.

and 6). Meanwhile, the Commission viewed it as an attack on the EU and offered measures to alleviate stresses on border states during the Belarus crisis. Lithuania requested assistance through the EU's civic protection mechanism, asking for shelter and relief items for migrants; Poland, amongst other member states, provided these items (Interview 9). Because Poland did not allow the migrants to cross their border, Poland had no need for such items, but they were happy to provide assistance to Lithuania (Interview 9). Similarly, when Lithuania and to some extent Latvia requested to use a simplified processing of applications for asylum, Poland signalled that they would not oppose it in the Council if this was something that their 'friends needed' (Interview 4).

Poland, instead, together with 11 other EU member states, demanded that the Commission develop common standards of protecting borders and financial support for the construction of barriers on the EU's external borders (Interviews 7 and 8). Such measures would strengthen the individual EU member states' ability to control their own borders. This is in line with Poland's parochial stance on EU (migration) co-operation: migration should remain a member state issue and no sovereignty should be transferred to the EU level. Poland did not request assistance from the EUAA or Frontex⁷ (Interviews 7, 8 and 10). Poland's reluctance to request such EU support was not from lack of familiarity. In fact, EUAA offices and Frontex headquarters are located in Warsaw (Interview 6), and Polish experts had experience in working with both institutions (Interview 7). And indeed, Polish officials explained that support from Frontex or the EUAA was simply not needed for Poland (Interview 7). Poland was able to independently hinder the out-group from getting into the country, and in line with parochial ideals of EU co-operation, Poland was not willing to give up any sovereignty for a threat they were able to handle themselves.

In contrast to the criticism raised by the international community and human rights groups, the majority of the Polish people supported their government's response to the Belarus crisis (Interviews 2 and 6). A public opinion poll conducted in September 2021 revealed that almost half (48%) opposed receiving refugees from 'countries affected by military conflicts' (42% in favour) (CBOS, 2021a, p. 2). Moreover, 52% (33% of respondents believed that Polish authorities should not (should) allow migrants staying on the Polish–Belarusian border to apply for asylum in Poland (CBOS, 2021a, p. 3). This opposition grew even stronger, to 58% in a December 2021 survey (CBOS, 2021b, p. 2). Furthermore, 66% of respondents supported building a wall on the Polish–Belarusian border to make its illegal crossing more difficult (CBOS, 2021b, p. 3).

To summarise, Polish authorities portrayed the Belarus crisis as a security threat and made efforts to make sure no migrants irregularly crossing the border with Belarus made it into Poland. This approach was well received by a significant part of the public; the government implemented it independently and in general without assistance from the relevant EU agencies.

The Ukraine Crisis: The Main Recipient Country and Reluctant Co-operator

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, millions of Ukrainians fled their homes and travelled towards the EU. As of 2 August 2022, 6.3

⁷However, Poland co-operated with Frontex in terms of data and information exchange, and the organisation of returns (Interview 10).

million Ukrainian refugees were registered in the EU (UNHCR, 2022). Poland shares a border with western Ukraine, and many Ukrainians were already living and working in Poland, with some 300,000 Ukrainian citizens holding valid Polish residence permits as of December 2021 (Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców, 2021). Compared with the migrants involved in previous crisis, Poland had more pre-existing legal obligations towards the Ukrainians, who as stipulated in the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement were allowed to move freely into Poland and to the rest of the EU (EU External Action Service, 2021). However, the Polish response to the crisis went well above any legal obligations. In the context of the crisis provoked by the Russian invasion, Poland quickly became the largest recipient of Ukrainian refugees, hosting more than 1.2 million of them by 2 August 2022 (UNHCR, 2022).

The Polish government prepared for the inflow of refugees from Ukraine by lifting COVID-19 travel restrictions and opening several closed border crossings (Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). In February 2022, unlike during the Belarus crisis, Poland decided to activate the civic protection mechanism to ask for medical, shelter and energy items (Interview 9). Poland facilitated migration flows and provided the Ukrainian refugees with the access to public services, such as health care and schooling for children (Interview 6) and, in some cities, they could use free public transportation and parking. Although the local authorities took part in organising accommodation and other support, much of the actual work of providing housing and integrating the Ukrainian refugees was taken by civil society organisations and individuals. The NGO community, individuals and families have offered significant assistance in a display of social solidarity (see more Jaroszewicz et al., 2022).

In the EU, the ‘Temporary Protection Directive’ from 2001, which had never before been activated, was on the table for the first time. The Temporary Protection Directive can be activated by qualified majority voting by the Council with the purpose of ‘providing temporary protection in the event of mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting balance of efforts between member states in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof’ (Council, 2022). The Directive provides those it covers with temporary access to a residency permit in their preferred EU member state and medical, social and labour rights (Commission, 2022a). Previous research on the Directive suggested that its adoption was unlikely because a qualified majority did not seem politically feasible (Genç and Şirin Öner, 2019, p. 15). However, the Council agreed unanimously to implement the Directive on 3–4 March 2022 (Council, 2022). Ahead of the vote, some speculated that Poland – who arguably had the most to gain from the Directive – would oppose its implementation (Interview 3). In the Council negotiations, Poland had insisted on amendments to the Commission’s proposal regarding the broad scope of covered individuals (Interviews 4 and 7). Poland was worried the Directive could serve as a pull factor, incentivising non-Ukrainians to travel to Poland (Interview 4). They also argued that a narrow scope would facilitate a more efficient identification of beneficiaries of temporary protection, which was central given the size of the influx (Interview 10). Moreover, Poland was already independently working on a national special act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine⁸ (Interview 10), which provided rights to Ukrainians who

⁸The act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine was adopted on 12 March 2022. See more information by the Polish Office for Foreigners: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/fd791ffb-c02b-4e99-b710-e8ed3a9a821b>.

wanted to stay in Poland, and they wanted to make sure the EU mechanism was not incompatible with it (Interview 7). The standstill on relocation negotiations continued during the Ukraine crisis. Neither Polish nor EU experts believed that Poland's firm position on relocation has changed, even though Poland in 2022 became the largest host country in Europe (Interviews 4, 5 and 7).

The Polish government could easily communicate to their public the liberal approach they adopted towards the Ukrainian migrants (Interview 5). In contrast with the names used by the government representatives towards migrants in the case of the previous two crises, this time around they usually referred to the migrants simply as 'refugees', 'Ukrainians', 'citizens of Ukraine' or 'people fleeing the war'. Less frequently, they were also called 'our guests', 'our neighbours' or 'our Ukrainian brothers' (see Appendix S2). The Polish government viewed openness to Ukrainians both as a moral imperative and as aligned with the public's interests (Interview 5). Ukrainians were to a larger degree considered part of the in-group, as they were already living in Polish society in large numbers before the full-scale Russian invasion. Indeed, Poles and Ukrainians share a significant ethnic, cultural and linguistic proximity, which helped make Ukrainian refugees' reception within the Polish society more acceptable to the public (Interview 1; Théroová, 2022). These cultural similarities (Interview 8), together with 'familiarisation' that started years before, made assisting Ukrainian refugees in Poland easier (Interview 7). Furthermore, in stark contrast with the two other analysed crises, the Polish government generally did not evoke security concerns when millions of Ukrainians crossed the border with Poland in a matter of a few months (Interview 1).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine had a significant impact on Polish public opinion on refugees from Ukraine. In the first CBOS poll on this question conducted in August 2015, in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea, 50% of respondents favoured accepting Ukrainian refugees in Poland, and 38% against it. This attitude remained rather stable throughout the next years, and in the last CBOS poll before the full-scale invasion (June 2018), 56% favoured accepting Ukrainian refugees in Poland (35% opposed). However, in the next poll concerning this question (March 2022),⁹ the great majority favoured letting the Ukrainian refugees come to Poland, 94% for and only 3% against (CBOS, 2022b, p. 6).

Polling data suggest that the public very much supported the government's approach to the Ukraine crisis. A survey conducted in Poland the day after the Russian invasion revealed that 90% believed that Ukrainians fleeing war should be accepted in Poland, with 58% agreeing that all refugees from Ukraine should be welcomed and 35% agreeing that only those most at risk and 'in need' of protection should be accepted (Commission, 2022b). Another survey was conducted just over a month later (CBOS, 2022c), when more than 1 million Ukrainians had already crossed the border to Poland (UNHCR, 2022). This second survey confirmed that 91% of Poles favoured accepting refugees from Ukraine (CBOS, 2022c, p. 2). This strong support for hosting Ukrainians remained stable over the next few months, with a May 2022 survey showing 89% favoured receiving Ukrainian refugees, and only 7% opposed it (CBOS, 2022a, p. 4).

⁹The question wording varied slightly now that the conflict had escalated.

Poland demonstrated great willingness to accept migrants from an in-group, which their population had ‘got used to’ as a constant presence (see Gruszczak, 2022, p. 119). In the situation of massive inflow of Ukrainian refugees, Polish central government had to rely on the support offered by local authorities, NGOs, families and individuals (see more, e.g., Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). A special survey conducted by the Commission in May 2022 demonstrates that, on average, more Poles agree that they feel sympathy towards Ukrainians compared with citizens of other EU member states (68% vs. 54%) (Flash Eurobarometer 506, 2022). This support is significant, considering the additional strain on Polish society that the open integration of the newcomers entailed, such as quick access to the Polish health care system, which was already struggling to provide for Polish citizens (Interview 6). In line with parochial attitudes, Poles displayed solidarity and openness to those they consider as part of the in-group, even when this entailed a certain degree of economic and societal costs.

Polish politicians have embraced their new role as the main host of Ukrainian refugees in Europe, and they leverage this position to demonstrate Poland’s strength and determination (Interview 5). In a matter of 2 weeks after the launch of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Polish government announced plans to allocate significant funds of around 1.7 billion Euros to the Ukrainians fleeing war, and they have received significant international and domestic media attention for this (see, e.g., Dziennik.pl, 2022; Reuters, 2022). The Polish government largely remained self-sufficient in its handling of the Ukrainian refugee crisis; they have, as of December 2022, not asked for EU assistance from Frontex or the EUAA (Interviews 6–8 and 10). However, Poland has since the invasion asked the EU for additional funding for their own efforts towards the Ukrainian refugees in Poland (Interviews 6–8).

To summarise, in line with expectations raised by parochialism, the Polish authorities presented the migrants from Ukraine as members of the in-group and as people with whom Poland should demonstrate solidarity. Poland welcomed Ukrainians quickly and independently of the EU. Simultaneously, they did not oppose EU co-operation – especially additional funding – and the temporary protection mechanism, provided it was limited in scope to only apply to Ukrainians or to people who received international protection status in Ukraine.

Conclusions

The Polish position on EU co-operation in migration policy has been stable since it took its reluctant stance after the elections in 2015. An EU official noted that the Polish position was cemented after the Syria crisis and has been stable ever since:

In my view, what 9/11 was to security policy in 2001, the 2015 crisis was to migration policy. You have policies and points of view before and after. But the Polish have been very, very constant in their position. (Interview 4)

In our article, we demonstrated how expectations derived from our conceptualisation of parochialism as a dynamic process where the government invests in parochial attitudes shed light on the unchanging position of the Polish government on co-operation with the EU in the area of migration and asylum despite changing circumstances. When faced with immigration of individuals from out-groups, the Polish government catered to, and further

exacerbated, anti-immigration attitudes. By investing in shaping public opinion on immigration concerning specific groups, they both created demand for restrictive policies and reaped electoral reward by delivering on these demands. However, when faced with immigration from neighbouring Ukraine, the government did not engage in such rhetoric and, instead, pursued a liberal policy towards this ‘in-group’. Despite huge numbers of migrants compared with the previous two crises, the Polish public remained positive to the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in Poland (as of August 2022). Even still, the exclusion of the out-group has remained a demand amongst the Polish public and government. The Polish government, even when in the position of the main refugee host country in the EU, continued to oppose any EU co-operation measures that could entail Poland accepting ‘out-group’ immigrants in the future.

Although this article has not explicitly addressed the role of the media, we believe they played an important role in facilitating the government’s spread of parochial attitudes (see, e.g., Strupiechowska, 2018; Zawadzka-Palucka, 2022). Further investigation into this is therefore encouraged to unpack how the government can successfully invest in parochial attitudes when faced migration from out-groups.

As parochial attitudes are connected with specific core values, exist at the individual level, promote locally oriented solutions and prioritise in-group in opposition to the out-groups, we assume that they may be prevalent not only in Poland but also elsewhere. Hence, the analytical framework centred on the concept of parochialism used in this article may prove useful in further studies seeking to understand political processes that deal with migration issues in the EU. We encourage studies that seek to reveal causal links between parochial attitudes in the public and member state government’s opposition to co-operation at the EU level.

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Data Availability Statement

Data are available on the European Social Survey (2014, 2016, 2018).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix S1. Supporting Information.

Appendix S2. Supporting Information.