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The European Union: The Transfer of Trust and Loyalty in a Meritocracy via the Five Waves of Enlargement

Abstract

The European Union (EU) faces a new wave of populism that opposes the traditional meritocratic system and highlights the breach of trust between citizens and civil servants. The breakdown in the citizens' trust for national and supranational institutions occurred at the same time as the loyalty of the civil servants diminished. This paper examines whether the rising populist movement can explicate the decline of trust and loyalty. Further, it highlights the five waves of EU enlargement to discern where and why the breach in trust is occurring. Utilizing information collected by the Eurobarometer, this paper uses new data that break down the statistics into the five key waves of EU enlargement and examines the notion of enlargement fatigue. The data explore the financial and societal influences that alter one's perspective of national and supranational institutions. Further, each Member State's position within the EU is evaluated in the context of assumed two-tiered membership, which is emphasized via the different waves of enlargement. The theoretical lens employed is neo-functionalism, as it provides an opportunity to examine the relationships between trust, loyalty, and enlargement through a new perspective. This paper concludes that populist movements are exploiting anxieties to promote their agenda, that citizens' trust in institutions is actually increasing, and that there is a correlation between low trust and new, unstable Member States. Overall, in the face of populist movements, local conflicts and media frenzies, European citizens most fervently desire a reliable governmental system for future generations.

Disciplines

Political Science

Keywords

European Union, EU, Populism, Enlargement, Meritocracy, Neo-functionalism, Historical Institutionalism, Trust, Loyalty, elite socialization, permissive consensus, political spillover

Cover Page Footnote

Dr. Andrea Wagner - I can never repay the kindness and guidance you have afforded me. Thank you.

Europe's traditional meritocratic system is challenged and opposed, causing instability and uncertainty within the socio-economic sphere. This political shift has occurred concurrently with the rise in populism that has been taking Member States in the EU by storm. The fundamental contention among activists in the populist sector is that elitist individuals and factions unjustly profit from the meritocracy, while the average citizen is neglected. Further, it is believed that as government officials rise through the ranks, their loyalty to their constituents wanes. However, their loyalty does not simply disintegrate into thin air—it is reallocated, specifically to the interests of supranational institutions of the EU, consequently producing a loyalty transfer among civil servants. The citizens demand to be acknowledged, understood, and fought for, which is why the core of the populist movement is a desire for loyalty to one's religion, ethnicity, and culture.¹

Ernst Haas' neo-functional theory incorporates a hypothesis of elite socialization, which explains the disconnect between civil servants and citizens.² The endogenous preferences of the elites form an unhealthy continuum of permissive consensus; it produces a state in which the civil servants are alienated from their roots and can no longer distinguish between what they, the citizens, or the EU wants. This has led to a reality wherein the citizens believe they are not objectively and justly represented, resulting in what the populists consider an inevitable lack of trust in the system and its officials. The definitive presence of a democratic deficit in the EU has forced its citizens to call into question the legitimacy and ordinance of its institutions.

Coinciding with the rise of populism are debates as to what defines a movement "populist" in function, when considering its assumed "mercurial nature."³ Cas Mudde, a political scientist often considered the authority on populism, provided a definition that is the assumption used for this paper:

[populism is] a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.⁴

¹ Ivan Krastev, "The Rise and Fall of European Meritocracy," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), January 2017, 3.

² Alec Stone Sweet, "Neofunctionalism and Supranational Governance (unabridged version)," *Faculty Scholarship Series* (2012): 5-8.

³ Ben Stanley, "The Thin Ideology of Populism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 1 (2008): 108.

⁴ Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543.

This definition provides opportunities to evaluate both left and right wing forms of populism. For the purpose of this paper, the right wing populist movement in Europe is specifically examined.

In the face of a populist movement and the allegations of ruptured trust stand daunting statistics that contradict the formidable assertions of the right wing leaders. While data indicate that trust is growing—not depleting—there remains validity in the arguments ventured by the populist factions. Many of the contentions pertain to who is properly represented by the EU and the Member States’ own governments. Populist leaders contend that continued enlargement—the acceptance of new Member States, which often takes place in regional waves—of the EU is the cause of their tribulations. Each wave of enlargement further cements the formation of a two-tiered membership structure. The countries that polled the lowest regarding trust are not surprisingly also at the bottom of the membership structure.⁵

When deciphering data, one must consider that the domestic struggles of individual Member States may alter States’ current perception of any authoritative institutions. For instance, amidst internal conflict, Greece and Spain collectively measure the lowest in terms of trust for their national governments and the EU. Another consideration is the socio-economic position of citizens, as their position is a major determinant in the formation of their trust.

In light of the fact that many of the allegations put forth by populist leaders hold limited merit, the question must be asked as to how they are achieving considerable traction across Europe. The answer lays in the minds of Europeans who are not given a voice by their current leaders; thus, they seek leadership from groups which share in their fears and vocalize their concerns. The following examination of the meritocratic system and analysis of European citizens’ perceptions of populism and enlargement situates the current political climate and hypothesizes on the future of the EU enlargement.

The Meritocratic System: Merit or Money

The EU has long been conceptualized as a meritocratic society, which leads to questions regarding what is exactly a meritocracy. In the simplest form, a meritocracy is a society in which individuals earn positions of power based on their merit—the best of the best succeed.⁶ In such a society, ordinary citizens disappear. Michael Young, who first coined the term “meritocracy,” expressed

⁵ Eurobarometer, “Designing Europe’s Future...,” *Public Opinion - European Commission* (June 2017): 9-81.

⁶ Ivan Krastev, “The Rise and Fall of European Meritocracy,” 1.

that a meritocracy in practice would be a “disaster” and produce “selfish and arrogant winners, [as well as] angry and desperate losers.”⁷ I argue that, in practice, a meritocracy promotes competition between individuals in a system where only some are equipped to compete. The privileged form the perspective that they deserve their status, as the system confirms they are indisputably the best.⁸ Concurrently, ordinary citizens blame their inability to achieve merit on the belief that the meritocratic system does not provide equal opportunities for everyone. I argue that the meritocratic system is concerning due to the fact that certain individuals and groups are better able to reap the rewards than others. The disparities are present between individuals who face frequent financial struggles and the upper classes, which have more financial freedom. When considering the relationship between trust and wealth, data from the Eurobarometer reveal that citizens who experience financial stability and surplus are the most likely to trust both their national government and the European Union (Figure 1).⁹

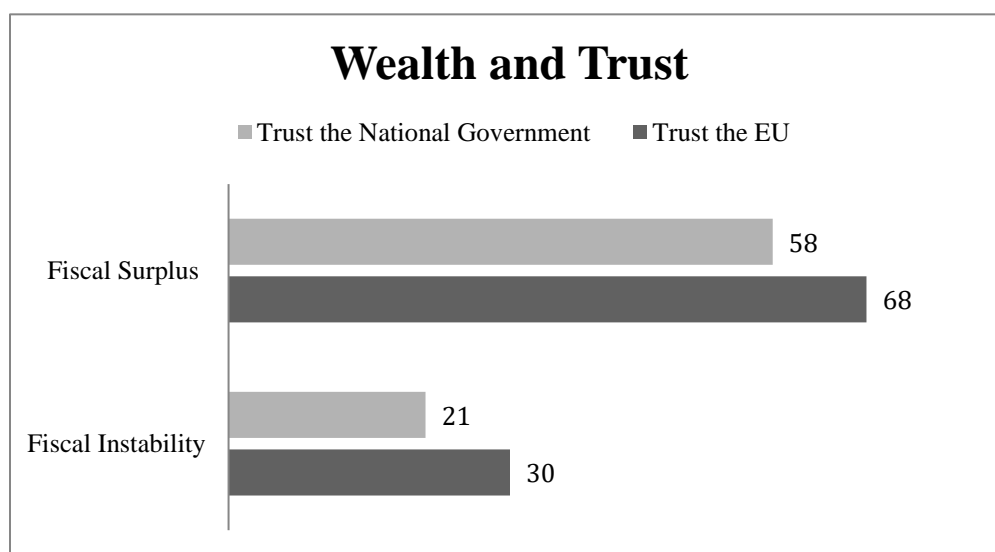


Figure 1. Data from Eurobarometer, “Designing Europe’s Future...”

⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Eurobarometer, “Designing Europe’s Future: Trust in institutions, Globalisation, Euro, Free trade and Solidarity,” *PublicOpinion - European Commission*, (June 2017): 9.

Meanwhile, those same wealthy individuals also believe the needs of people like them are taken into account and that they are properly represented in the current political system (Figure 2).¹⁰ These results suggest that economic polarization amongst citizens plays a major role in informing their perspectives of political institutions. The individuals who experience more economic security are more open to trusting the system, as they feel the current structure caters to their needs. It is very telling that individuals who do not have financial security

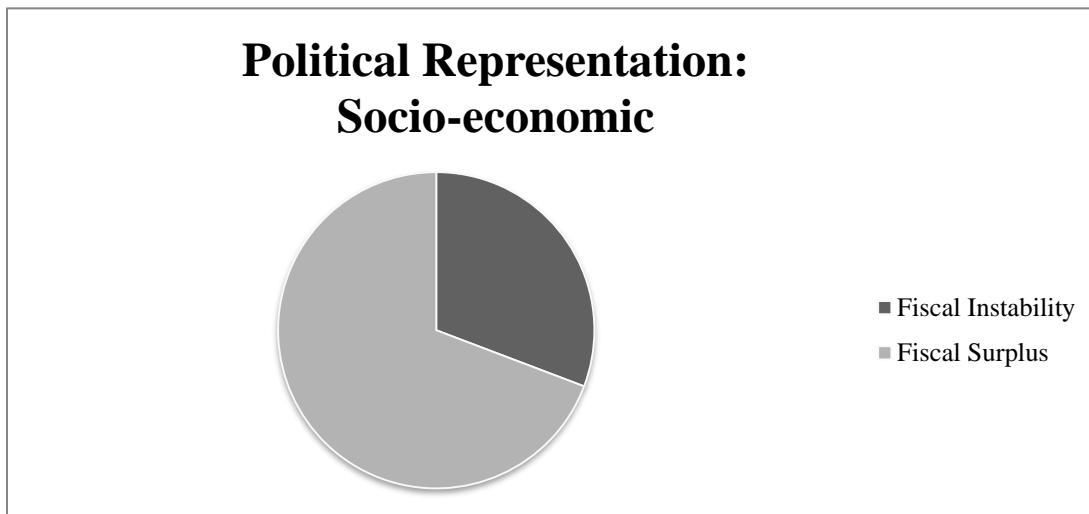


Figure 2. Data from Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe.”

also exhibit lower levels of trust and do not believe they are justly represented. These data convey that a citizen’s perception of a political system and its institutions is strongly influenced by that person’s economic position. Therefore, a true equilibrium between citizens of different socio-economic positions cannot be found, as they have different conceptions as to what is good and fair. This polarization creates a space in which populist movements can interject themselves, attracting citizens who are lower on the socio-economic ladder who think they are inadequately represented by the elites.

Populism: Support or Abort

Historically, populism was associated with undemocratic movements, but that is no longer the case; this new wave of populism superficially strives to force the government to better represent

¹⁰ Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe,” *PublicOpinion - European Commission* (December 2016): 81.

the citizens. Populist leaders pull at the heartstrings of the citizens—determining and exploiting their weaknesses. Entrenched in “emotional, simplistic and manipulative discourse directed at the ‘gut feelings’ of the people,” they are able to entice the general population into supporting them and deserting the current institutions.¹¹ It is evident that the citizens are unhappy with the current structure. However, what has been further revealed is that the people seek respective intimacy with their politicians over enhanced competency.¹² The reality is that many citizens are tired of feeling abandoned; they want politicians who promise to remain by their side during the tough times. They fear that the current civil servants are not loyal to them or their region. It is acknowledged that many citizens are tired of the status quo, and want to reinvigorate the EU with new leadership and direction. However, what is not evident is the direction in which the citizens desire to go, or who the leaders should be. The loud and widespread support of the populist movement, as represented by the media, may not be as prevalent as alleged. In a recent poll, 59% of the citizens in the EU28 are concerned about the rise of anti-establishment political parties that seek to disrupt the traditional elitist system.¹³ This poll indicates that these citizens are opposed to a populist movement, which calls for the cessation of the current institutional framework. As highlighted in Figure 3, each wave of enlargement shares this sentiment.

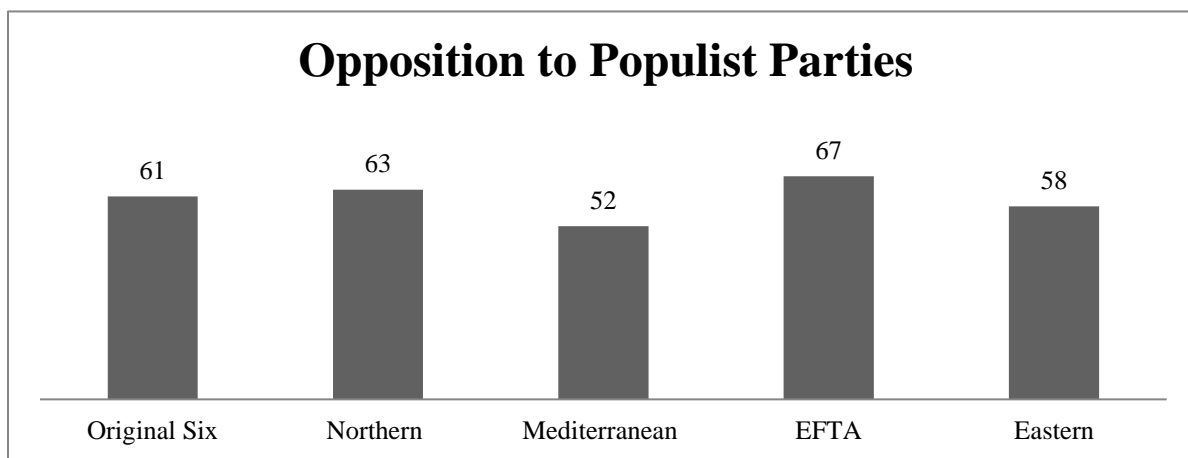


Figure 3. Data from Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe.” Percentage of the population in each wave of enlargement that opposes populist parties.

¹¹ Ivan Krastev, “The populist moment,” *Eurozine*. (September 18, 2007), <http://www.eurozine.com/the-populist-moment/>.

¹² Ivan Krastev, “The Rise and Fall of European Meritocracy,” 3.

¹³ Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe,” 83.

The Original Six,¹⁴ Northern,¹⁵ and EFTA¹⁶ enlargement show the most concern. Concurrently, the Mediterranean¹⁷ and Eastern¹⁸ sections polled lower—underlining their more significant discontent with the current structure. Citizens signify that they prefer an institution in which they know the rules of the game rather than one that is formulating its own.

Neo-functionalism

Ernst Haas was a German-American Political Scientist and the founder of neo-functionalism, a theory that explains regional cooperation and integration in the EU as well as the motivations behind political actors. Haas' theory contains two fundamental hypotheses that assist in explicating the recent loyalty transfer among EU civil servants: the political spillover effect and elite socialization that lead to a blind assumption of permissive consensus.

The spillover effect emphasizes that integration in one area will lead to further integration in other areas. In regard to civil servants, this suggests that the more entrenched they become with the EU institutions, the more alienated they will be from their past allegiances. Political spillover deals with the direct actions and consequences of political actors and interest groups as well as their reallocations of loyalty to supranational institutions. Therefore, deeper integration translates to stronger loyalty. This means that the further a civil servant is integrated into the EU, the more inclined that individual will be to allocate their loyalty to the EU's institutions. In this context, the process of elite socialization occurs when government officials form new preferences, which align with the ones of the EU, specifically when their loyalties are shifted away from their own polity to the supranational institutions. It is contended that as the civil servants enter the sector of elitism, they will become the sole driving force behind furthering European integration. This development severs the relationship between the governing elites and the citizens, producing a state of permissive consensus. In this state, the civil servants are so deeply enthralled with the institutional dispositions that they can no longer objectively represent the people. It is not necessarily intentional misrepresentation, but rather assumed consensus.

¹⁴ The Original Six includes: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands (1951).

¹⁵ The Northern wave includes: Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom (1973).

¹⁶ The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) wave includes: Austria, Finland, Sweden (1995).

¹⁷ The Mediterranean wave includes: Greece (1981), Spain & Portugal (1986).

¹⁸ The Eastern wave of enlargement includes: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia (2004), Bulgaria, Romania (2007), Croatia, (2013).

As the processes of political spillover and elite socialization take place, populist movements are solidifying their support. The citizens who believe their civil servants are no longer representing their interests are more likely to accept the messages promoted by populist actors. The populist movement recognizes that citizens want representatives who are familiar and trustworthy instead of a distant expert; through populism, alienated citizens have a voice and a promise of stability and loyalty.

Trust: Loyalty and Enlargement

Political spillover, elite socialization, and permissive consensus support the claim that the loyalty of civil servants is being transferred to the institutions of the EU. However, the act of transferring loyalty does not necessarily correlate with the loss of trust. It has been largely assumed that trust is decreasing across Europe because the populist movement is continually re-enforcing their claim that disloyalty equals distrust. In reality, trust has increased across each EU Member State over the last year. The citizen's trust in the EU has increased by 11%, and their trust of their own national government has increased by 9%.¹⁹ While this increase in trust directly contrasts the messaging of populist parties, it is important to remember context: trust levels in the EU are still low, despite the recent increase.

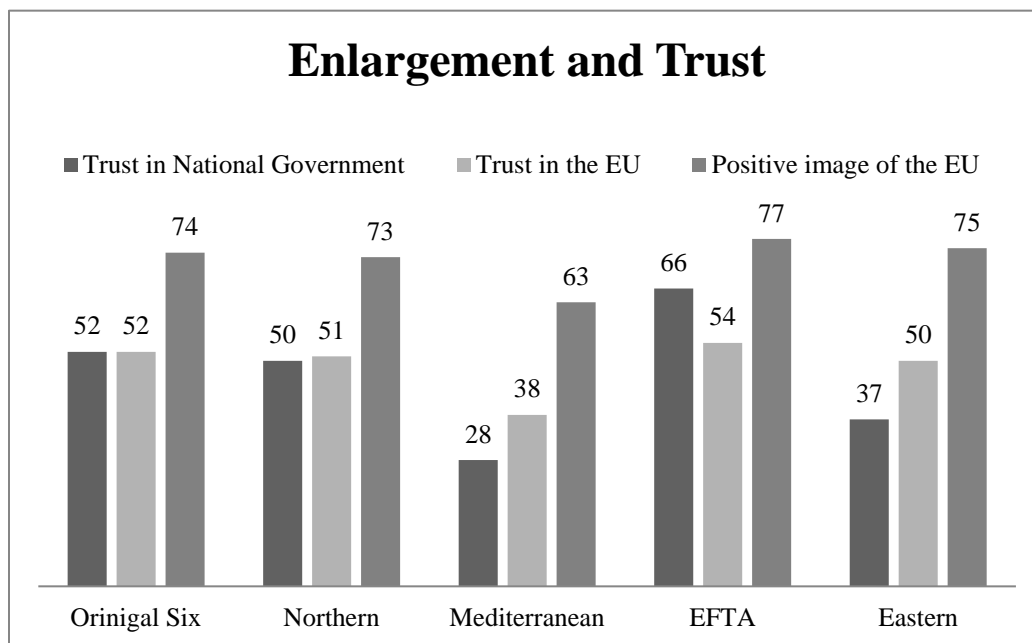


Figure 4. Data from Eurobarometer, "Designing Europe's Future." Data represents percentage of the population that holds each belief, respectively.

¹⁹ Eurobarometer, "Designing Europe's Future..." 4-9.

Figure 4 displays the varying levels of trust among the major waves of EU enlargement.²⁰ Trust across the EU for both national governments and the EU is relatively low. The relationship between trust and loyalty is multifaceted, which is why breaking down the levels of trust into each wave of enlargement is valuable. The Mediterranean wave—which saw an increase in trust—still polled particularly low. Two Mediterranean countries, Greece and Spain, polled extremely low, due to their localized concerns of corruption and civil unrest. The decrease in trust in Greece and Spain kept the Mediterranean wave at a low overall percentage. The Eastern portion is the most recent wave of enlargement. The data show they trust their own government significantly less than the EU—although they are still not extremely trusting of the EU. New Member States joined the EU because they are seeking stability and outside governance. Therefore, it is understandable that they currently hold lower levels of trust for their own government. Conversely, older Member States may hold higher levels of trust in both accounts because they have already received local benefits of the EU through their government. The issues facing new Member States cannot be resolved immediately, but many citizens desire fast results. This can lead to distrust when the current government is unable to produce the net benefits that were anticipated with EU membership. Populist movements use this to their advantage, promising faster and more focused results to the citizens.

The EFTA region boasts the highest levels of trust in both categories. Since these countries joined the EU they have always been referred to as unproblematic and as having made a smooth transition into the EU. The fact that they are trusting is reflective of their generally less polarizing and more peaceful experiences within and outside of their countries. The Original Six and the Northern wave are sitting right in the middle, with relatively similar trust levels to one another. As these countries are more established in the EU, their trust levels could reasonably be higher. However, many of these countries think they are constantly financially assisting other EU countries, which can lead the citizens to feel they are not dealt a fair deal. The culmination of these factors results in moderate trust levels.

The particularly interesting piece of data from Figure 4 is the fact that every single Member State has a more positive perception of the EU than they have trust in it. As will be discussed in more detail later, citizens in the EU tend to hold very positive outlooks on the future of the EU. Therefore, the citizens' positive image of the EU correlates to the fact that they believe in the

²⁰ Ibid.

foundation and goals of the institution—whereas the low levels of trust suggest that the EU is not currently meeting those goals.

These statistical results go against the arguments forged by populist parties, which brings one to question whether citizens are really supporting populist parties as much as is being portrayed. Populism is distinguished by the ‘us versus them’ argument, which means populists need to present current political climates as polarizing. However, if the claims of populist parties are not factually supported, the movement may be shorter than expected.

Through a neo-functional perspective, the wide increases of trust can be understood to be an acceptance of and desire for more European integration. The fact that citizens are starting to trust their own governments and the EU institutions more suggests that they are increasingly happy with the results integration has brought and are supportive of further integration.

Trust: All or Nothing

Trust is a fickle thing, it seems to come and go in surfeits. In the EU, trust is an all or nothing affair. Figure 5 demonstrates the correlation of trust and distrust between national governments and the EU.²¹ These results convey that citizens’ trust and distrust are often lodged together; if a

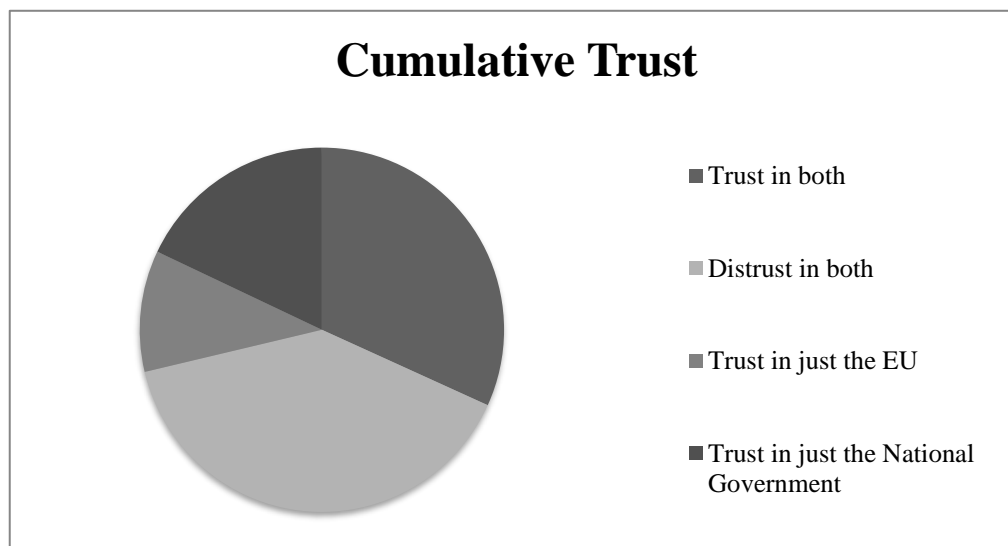


Figure 5. Data from Eurobarometer, “Designing Europe’s Future...”

²¹ Eurobarometer, “Designing Europe’s Future...,” 9.

citizen trusts one institution, they are most likely going to trust both. The other particularly interesting aspect is that cumulative distrust is higher than trust. Considering trust has risen across the EU over the last year, this data highlights the fact that citizens still hold generally pessimistic views of their own government and the EU. It can now be contended that feelings of trust or distrust towards one institution may be extended to all connected institutions or authoritative powers.

Legitimacy: Allegations and Alienation

Populists argue that the transfer of loyalty away from the citizens and one's Member State has broken the trust that was once there. It created a void that has now been filled with populist and anti-establishment rhetoric. The faltering trust, endogenous preferences, and elitist mentality cause the public to question the legitimacy of the EU and its institutions. The legitimacy or lack thereof has not been an overnight issue. In reality, it existed over 60 years ago when the EU was still the European Coal and Steel Community. It is a two-pronged problem: the EU has not done its due diligence in upholding its legitimacy and transparency, and the citizens were not actively and forcefully calling for it. Both groups became comfortable with the status quo and it has taken a resurgence of an innovative form of populism to wake the people and demand change. In order to assess concerns of legitimacy, scholars such as Vivienne Schmidt have developed methods that allow evaluations of all forms of legitimacy regarding the functions of the EU.

There are three primary methods to measure the legitimacy of the EU: input, output, and throughput legitimacy. Input legitimacy details the actions of the EU in response to the concerns of the citizens and output legitimacy refers to how effective the outcomes of EU policies are for the people.²² Throughput legitimacy, a new approach of examination introduced by Vivienne Schmidt, analyzes the "accountability, transparency and efficiency of the EU's decision making processes."²³ In essence, legitimacy concerns "[input *by* and *of* the people, output *for* the people] and throughput *with* the people."²⁴ The common factor in determining whether the actions of the EU are legitimate is the people. The method of input, output, and throughput should be relatively smooth and cohesive. However, the civil servants of the EU, through the assumption of permissive consensus, have been missing the very first step, which hinders the rest of the process. The

²² Vivien A Schmidt, "Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and 'Throughput,'" *Political Studies*, 61, no.1 (2013): 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

breakdown of the system occurs when the citizens are no longer justly represented and their trust begins to wane. The EU can re-establish its legitimate nature through adopting more inclusive policy actions. The Member States can involve their citizens in state altering decisions through referendums to restore their legitimacy. The concept of legitimacy can vary between people and institutions—the most important aspect is to ensure that the citizens do not feel alienated from their own country’s political system. Populist parties contest the legitimacy of the EU, arguing that citizens do not trust the institutions. However, the data has solidified that trust is increasing. Considered through a neo-functionalist lens, the increase in trust signifies a legitimization of the EU, which inevitably calls for deeper European integration.

Political Representation: Old and New

The proper representation of the citizens is vital to forming a successful political system. As discussed, there are discrepancies between the representations of different economic classes. Figure 1 depicted that individuals who are financially secure, and even extremely wealthy, believe they are receiving the best representation. Whereas citizens who are struggling financially, and who are conceivably posing a strain on the system and require the most assistance, believe they are not adequately represented. These patterns are eerily familiar—inducing a similar trend as seen in the meritocratic system; the elites formulated a structure that produces an oversight of ordinary citizens, with special attention allotted to the individuals at the top. Further, it endorses a two-tier citizenship system in which tangible merit is the only means used to quantify the value of an individual.

It is imperative to understand the interrelations between the institutions and the citizens. The populist movement began due to the lack of attention and resources provided to the citizens in a perceivably equal manner. However, it is also important to acknowledge the differing relations between the waves of enlargement and their political representation. The specific waves have unique histories that bind them together and have undoubtedly impacted their experiences within the EU and the nature of their national governments.

Figure 6 displays the responses citizens gave when asked whether they believed they were receiving proper political representation across the EU.²⁵ As expected, the Mediterranean and Eastern waves are polling the lowest as they feel their representatives are not justly fighting for

²⁵ Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe,” 79.

their needs. The Original Six, Northern, and the EFTA waves are moderately more satisfied with their representation. However, there are still significant numbers from all enlargement waves that are unhappy with the political system and contend that they are not being fought for. As the EU has expanded, its need to accommodate more people has also increased. Historically, the EU has approached enlargement in small doses, so it is understandable that the 2004 wave that brought forth ten new Member States was met with some skepticism. However, anti-integration activities used this as an opportunity to instill fear of the enlargement and suggest the EU and its citizens are experiencing enlargement fatigue.²⁶ The populist parties used the uncertainties and fears surrounding globalization and applied it broadly to enlargement in order to draw support away from the current institutions.

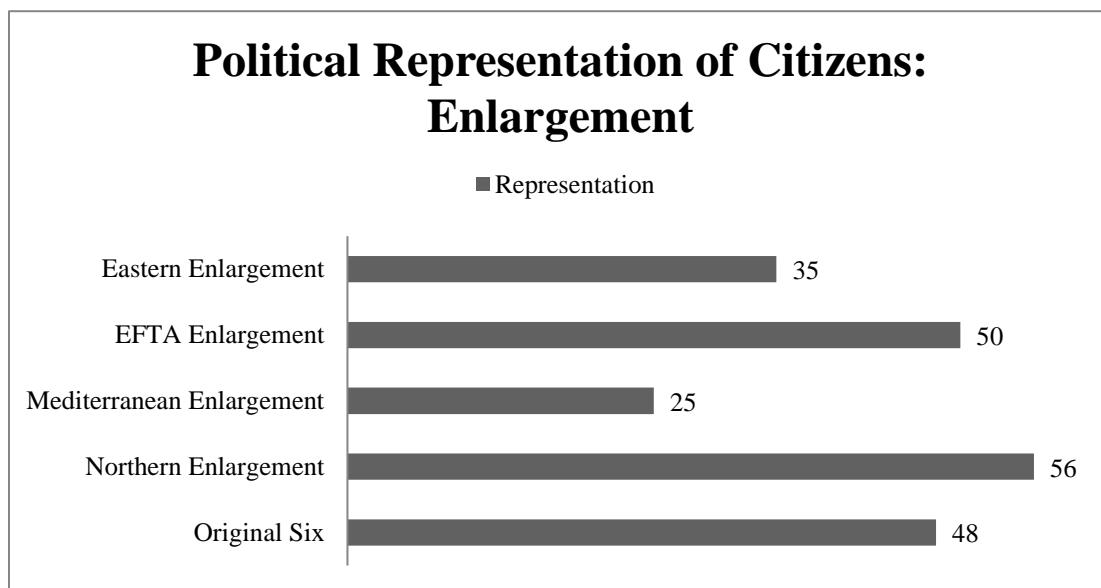


Figure 6. Data from Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe.” The numbers represent the percentage of the population in each wave of enlargement that believe the EU properly represents them.

Enlargement: Fatigue or Fear

Populist leaders, who were tired of the system changing—especially when it was not in their favour, introduced the concept of enlargement fatigue.²⁷ When examined through a historical institutionalist lens, it is noted how enlargement has created winners and losers, specifically when referring to the changes experienced by the institutions, and how power has been reallocated. The

²⁶ “A Case of Enlargement Fatigue,” *The Economist*, May 11, 2006.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

2004 Eastern enlargement increased competition within the EU; instead of having two Commissioners, each state only had one, and the membership within three years almost doubled. This left both the older and newer Member States feeling vulnerable and uncertain of their position. One of the significant factors that changed after the Eastern enlargement was portfolio distribution. Portfolios are assigned to Commissioners and dictate their responsibilities, and there is a desire to be assigned a more prestigious portfolio that covers high profile issues. The sudden expansion in Member States increased the competition and decreased the opportunity to be assigned a superior portfolio. This created contention, as the older states believed they deserved the best portfolios, yet the new states wanted a shot at the action. This has created a negative perception of enlargement, however, I argue the competition increases state engagement and fosters political innovation and excellence.

Nonetheless, the recent surge of Eastern enlargement initiated a two-tier membership structure in the EU. The natural winners are the older Member States that have a solid foundation in the EU and are frequently warranted advantages. Whereas the losers are the newer Member States who had impositions such as the Copenhagen Criteria and Agenda 2000 forced onto them. This not only made attaining their membership more challenging, but also, in practice holds them to a higher accord than the other Member States. The two-tiered membership highlights the asymmetrical power divide between certain Member States and the supranational institutions. The notion of two-tiered membership and winners and losers rings true when considering the data that has been examined. In all accounts, the Eastern wave of enlargement is clearly less content than the original EU members as it ranked towards the bottom in regard to trust, representation and future prospects of the EU.

It can be argued that despite the perceived negative aspects of the EU, the new members are evidently winning more than they are losing or else they would not have joined. However, the process of joining might be the exact problem. There is a certain level of permissive consensus utilized when joining the EU, and many contend that the citizens should be able to hold a referendum before making such a decision. Therefore, the low polling in the Eastern enlargement states might not be a reflection of the failures of the EU but rather of the contempt citizens feel towards being overlooked time and again by their own government. As for older Member States that claim enlargement has hindered their industries, it can be noted how “the 2004 enlargement

to the east has produced net benefits for Europe, increasing trade, investment and income.”²⁸ Despite the negative associations surrounding enlargement, it is apparent that enlargement can produce net benefits for all of the Member States—just not equally. The theory of neo-functionalism supports further enlargement of the EU, as this coincides with its goal of deeper European integration. In order to meet the neo-functionalist agenda, one of two things must occur: increased and widespread enlargement or focused efforts on deeper integration within the current Member States.

The EU: Present and Future

Amidst the contention surrounding issues of trust, loyalty, and enlargement, lays the question as to what the future of the EU holds. Specifically, what it holds for future generations in comparison to what the current citizens are experiencing. Ideally, as the EU grows, the countries within it become stronger, the citizens become more educated, and the entire system prospers. When questioned as to what the future holds for the EU, the citizens’ responses were surprisingly positive, particularly when compared to their current perspectives of the EU; it appears the citizens of the EU are hopeful that the future will be prosperous.²⁹

Figure 7 conveys the disparities between the present EU and the hopeful projections for the EU’s future.³⁰ The key observation is that, across the EU, the citizens believe that the generations after them will have better opportunities to succeed than they do. As is expected, the Mediterranean and Eastern waves of enlargement indicate that they have limited opportunities for success in the current institutional structure. Yet they also indicate that they believe the EU will bring forth a positive future for youth. However, it is unclear what the citizens believe will change from now to the future that will significantly change the fate of the people. In the neo-functionalist perspective, as integration deepens, the satisfaction of citizens and the ability for the EU to function properly will improve. Therefore, holding faith in the EU and the integration process will bring net benefits in the future. On the other hand, many citizens may simply hold out faith for two reasons: they believe in the EU project, or they simply think they have it tougher now than future

²⁸ “A Case of Enlargement Fatigue,” *The Economist*.

²⁹ Eurobarometer, “Future of Europe,” 94.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

generations will. Either way, the pessimistic and positive attributes of human nature make the unknown future look promising.

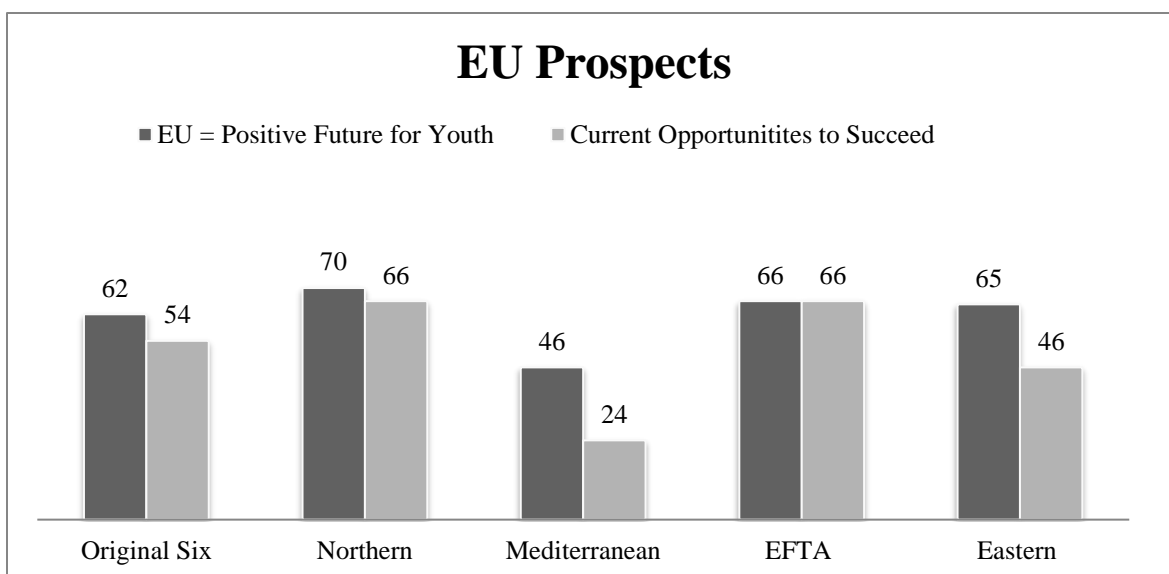


Figure 7. Data from Eurobarometer, "Future of Europe."

Conclusion

The citizens of the EU are in a peculiar position; they are not fully satisfied with the direction or actions of the EU, yet the majority of them do not want a populist movement to rescind the current institutions. When examined through a neo-functionalist lens, it is determined that the increase in trust towards the institutions signals both the legitimization of the EU, as well as a direct call for continued integration. Political spillover, which is resulting in a loyalty transfer, is not negative in this context as it is met with an increase in trust. This suggests that the elite socialization, which perpetuates permissive consensus, is not as despised by citizens as populists contend. As has become increasingly evident through the data examined, the arguments forged by populist parties are often not founded in facts but are rather a style of rhetoric intended to scare citizens into supporting them.

The meritocratic system perpetuates a merit-based order that most citizens consider out of touch. However, there are no proposed solutions, simply slamming fists and heightened contention. At this juncture, considering that citizens are becoming increasingly trusting of their own government and of the EU, it is reasonable to suggest that integration will continue forward

as it has. Even though it is undeniable that enlargement has created a two-tier membership in the EU, in most circumstances the benefits of membership outweigh the negatives. Therefore, the future will foreseeably bring forth more demands for enlargement, rather than populist or ‘Brexit’ style movements.

Citizens are optimistic about the future of the EU—even if they themselves are not receiving net benefits at this point. As an institution, the EU operates with a long-term vision where further integration will be met with cohesion and mutual gain. Unfortunately, the path to equilibrium is not clear, and populist movements instill a fear in citizens that detracts from the foundation and goals of the EU. Achieving a pareto-optimum state is an arduous feat, particularly in the context of all current and future Member States. Therefore, instead of furthering destructive discourse, the citizens must actively engage with the EU institutions and their own government to collectively form the reality they wish they currently possessed.

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