

Not all crises are alike: Crisis concerns and anti- establishment attitudes in comparative perspective

Political Studies

1–24

© The Author(s) 2026



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00323217261442716

journals.sagepub.com/home/psx**Andrea Pedrazzani¹**  **and Ugur Sumbul¹** 

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between crisis concerns and conspiracy-related and populist attitudes, viewed as facets of anti-establishment sentiment. Research shows that crises can trigger fear, uncertainty, and loss of control, making individuals more receptive to conspiracism and populism, as both provide simple explanations for complex problems. Yet most studies have treated ‘crisis’ as a uniform concept, whether linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, the economy, or migration, overlooking how different crises may resonate differently with citizens. We refine this understanding by analysing concerns across five domains: Covid-19, the climate crisis, the immigration emergency, the Russia–Ukraine war, and the energy crisis, assessing their distinctive effects on three facets of anti-establishment attitudes. Drawing on survey data from seven European countries, our findings reveal variation in perceptions of different crises and their associations with conspiracism and populism. Since not all crises are equally associated with the spread of anti-establishment attitudes, this nuanced analysis highlights the need for more tailored approaches to understanding crises and their political consequences.

Keywords

crisis, crisis concerns, anti-establishment, conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy mentality, conspiracism, populism

Accepted: 16 March 2026

Introduction

The last two decades have been marked by the rise of anti-establishment attitudes across the globe in the context of growing distrust towards elites, institutions, and mainstream political actors (Barr, 2009; van Kessel, 2015). These sentiments manifest across multiple

¹Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, Italy

Corresponding author:

Andrea Pedrazzani, Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, Via Conservatorio 7, 20122 Milano, Italy.

Email: andrea.pedrazzani@unimi.it

dimensions, including conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy mentality, and populist attitudes, together forming a constellation of scepticism and discontent with established political orders (Enders and Uscinski, 2021). One particular salient factor has been identified as ‘crisis situations’ amplifying feelings of resentment and providing fertile ground for the development of anti-establishment attitudes (Moffitt, 2015; van Prooijen, 2020; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). However, existing studies on the effects of crises on anti-establishment attitudes often treat the notion in a uniform manner, failing to account for how different crises may evoke distinct psychological and emotional responses, thereby shaping the nature and intensity of anti-establishment attitudes in diverse ways (e.g. Abadi et al., 2024; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017; for a recent exception, see Endtricht and Kanol, 2024).

This article seeks to address this gap by examining the relationship between concerns about five crises – the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, the immigration emergency, the Russia–Ukraine war, and the energy crisis – and anti-establishment attitudes, operationalised as conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy mentality, and populism. By focusing on these three dimensions through an analysis of the five crises, we intend to provide a more nuanced understanding of the association between crisis concerns and anti-establishment attitudes. In this regard, the article seeks to contribute to the literature by contesting the monolithic treatment of crisis perceptions and emphasising rather their divergent relation to anti-establishment dispositions. While much of the existing literature assumes that crises foster generalised distrust or discontent, we argue that the type of crisis matters, as different crises can generate varying levels of uncertainty and urgency among individuals. Moreover, the way each crisis is framed in political debate also shapes these reactions.

We test a set of hypotheses on the differentiated relationships between different crisis perceptions and anti-establishment attitudes against comparative data from mass surveys fielded in seven European countries in 2024. Unlike the almost uniform treatment of the concept of crisis in the literature, our results reveal a pattern of differentiation in their translation to anti-establishment attitudes. In this way, our research contributes to the literature by offering a more nuanced analysis of crisis perceptions, highlighting the need for tailored analyses to understand the dynamics of different crises and their potentially varying translation to anti-establishment attitudes. Beyond its theoretical contributions, our study also carries important policy implications, for example regarding how phenomena like immigration are framed, as framing by political actors can either mitigate or fuel their association with anti-establishment attitudes.

This article is organised as follows. The next two sections set out the theoretical framework and formulate the hypotheses, respectively. The subsequent section presents the data, the operationalisation of variables, and the methods used, while the following section illustrates our findings. The final section concludes.

Theoretical framework

The relationship between crises and anti-establishment attitudes is widely discussed in the literature. Crises are considered a prominent factor for belief in conspiracy theories. This is partly based on the idea that crises represent uncontrollable situations that act as a source of uncertainty and anxiety among people, generating the need for reducing these feelings by forming immediate judgements usually referred to as ‘cognitive closure’ (Marchlewska et al., 2018). The cognitive need for explanation is likely heightened in times of crisis, leading to certain psychological motives – such as epistemic, existential,

and social – discussed in the literature, contributing to a greater susceptibility to conspiracy theories as a means of seeking understanding (Douglas et al., 2017). In such situations, it is deemed easier to attribute responsibility to hostile groups by holding them accountable for the secret conspiracy formation as the root cause of the crisis (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Thus, crises might increase the sense of loss of control, making people gravitate more towards conspiracies as coherent and meaningful explanations as a means of ‘sense making’ in the face of an existential threat compared to the discomfort and uncertainty emanating from crisis situations (Dow et al., 2023; Schöpfer et al., 2023; van Prooijen, 2020).

Likewise, populist attitudes tend to flourish in times of crises, as they are consistently associated with heightened concern about the future of one’s group or country, often accompanied by emotions such as anger, protest, and insecurity, as well as a general sense of pessimism about the condition of society (Maher et al., 2022). Scholars argue that perceptions of crisis serve not only as a background condition, but also as a constitutive element of populist discourse (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). Thus, populism often flourishes in contexts of perceived crisis, and rhetorical strategies employed in populist framing of crises not only represent a reaction, but also their active construction and amplification as a key aspect of ‘the performative aspect of crisis politics’ (Brubaker, 2017; Charalambous et al., 2025; Moffitt, 2015). However, despite frequent references and the well-established link between crises and anti-establishment attitudes, it is also unclear whether and how different crisis characteristics foster such attitudes.

Not all crises are the same. For the purposes of this article, we argue that certain crises generate particularly high levels of uncertainty and a sense of urgency among individuals, while others do so to a much lesser extent. Building on Pierson’s (2004) typology, Kriesi, Ferrera, and Schelkle (2021) classify crises according to two temporal dimensions: the time horizon in which critical events occur (sudden and unexpected vs cumulative and foreseeable) and the time horizon in which their effects unfold (immediate vs delayed) (see also Anderson, 2021). They argue that crises that occur suddenly and unexpectedly tend to generate greater uncertainty among the public than those that emerge gradually through cumulative and anticipated processes. Likewise, crises that have short-term effects tend to create a stronger sense of urgency – a perception of an emergency situation – than those whose consequences develop over a longer period. We posit that such uncertainty and urgency often provide the context in which anti-establishment attitudes develop.

Our argument on the temporality of crises as a potential differentiation factor in their perceptions does not contradict but rather complements arguments on the cognitive underpinnings of anti-establishment sentiments. The psychological literature suggests that aversive feelings experienced during crises trigger desires to satisfy important psychological motives: epistemic (e.g. the desire for understanding, accuracy, and subjective certainty), existential (e.g. the desire for control and security), and social (e.g. the desire to maintain a positive image of the self or group) (Douglas et al., 2019). These feelings can lead individuals to adopt conspiracy-related and populist attitudes. Building on this psychological research and integrating it with the literature on different types of crises, we argue that not all crises generate equivalent responses among individuals. Specifically, crises that are sudden, unexpected, and produce immediate effects generate particularly acute feelings of uncertainty and urgency. These heightened states, in turn, amplify the desire to satisfy key psychological motives – especially epistemic needs (understanding) and existential needs (control and security).

Following these insights, the next paragraphs discuss the five crises considered in this article and classify them according to the two temporal dimensions outlined above. An additional factor we take into account is that different crises are framed in different ways by actors such as political parties or the media. This allows us to derive hypotheses about how different crises are likely to be associated with anti-establishment attitudes.

The Covid-19 crisis

Covid-19 spread suddenly and unexpectedly, creating high uncertainty among populations in Europe and beyond. Its immediate consequences generated a sense of emergency, with people expecting urgent action from policymakers (Kriesi, 2024; Kriesi et al., 2021). This situation – directly affecting people’s health, mobility, the economy, and daily life – heightened public anxiety and made individuals more receptive to alternative explanations, including conspiratorial thinking and populist rhetoric. This is because the feelings experienced during crises like Covid-19, where it is unclear what the future may hold, can stimulate a need to understand and a need to feel safe and secure, needs that are served by anti-establishment arguments.

The pandemic emerged as a global crisis, marked by an extraordinary proliferation of anti-establishment attitudes. Uncertainty, scepticism towards governmental and scientific institutions, and individual grievances were found as key factors associated with belief in pandemic-related conspiracy theories (Pellegrini et al., 2021). Existential motivations like regaining control and reducing anxiety were also highlighted as driving forces behind such beliefs (Imhoff and Lamberty, 2020). During the pandemic, anti-establishment narratives portrayed Covid-19 either as exaggerated or as a result of purposeful manipulation for political and economic gains, reinforcing a broader conspiracy mentality surrounding the event (EU DisinfoLab, 2020; Imhoff and Lamberty, 2020). The combination of an invisible but immediate threat, constantly evolving scientific guidance, and strict governmental interventions fostered the proliferation of conspiracy beliefs, particularly about the origins of the pandemic, intentions of the actors held responsible, and strategies to contain and cure it, especially regarding vaccines (De Coninck et al., 2021; Winter et al., 2022).

The climate crisis

If health crises like Covid-19 are a typical example of shocking events that occur suddenly and have immediate effects, the climate crisis has very different characteristics. Climate change can be thought of as a ‘slow-burning crisis’ (Seabrooke and Tsingou, 2019), which Pierson (2004: 80–81) himself – referring to it as global warming – took as a typical example of events with long-term causes and effects. Both the causes of climate change – the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere – and its effects – starting with the rise in global temperatures – are slow-moving processes. Climate change comes about gradually and cumulatively, not from an unexpected shock that suddenly focuses everyone’s attention on the crisis and generates high uncertainty. Its consequences will unfold over a very long period – and would continue to unfold for some time even if emissions ceased tomorrow – thus not creating a sudden emergency situation.¹ According to our framework, these are not the conditions typically associated with the emergence of anti-establishment attitudes.

Looking at the literature, one would not typically expect concern about climate change to be associated with anti-establishment dispositions. Conspiratorial beliefs are often anchored in climate change denial and linked to scepticism towards elites, scientists, and environmental activists; lower concern for the environment; reduced intentions to take action (Biddlestone et al., 2022; Douglas and Sutton, 2015); and are fuelled by industry-backed misinformation campaigns (Cook, 2019; Lewandowsky, 2021). Also factors like political ideology and elite cues have been regarded as indicative of climate change denial (Lewandowsky, 2021; Lewandowsky et al., 2013). At the individual level, conspiracy beliefs on climate change tend to be more prevalent among politically conservative individuals who perceive climate policies as threats to personal freedom and economic stability and who also hold populist attitudes and distrust towards scientists (Stockemer and Bordeleau, 2024; Uscinski et al., 2017).² At the party level, although there is widespread scientific consensus on the existence of the crisis, it is still primarily green and left-wing parties that seek to place climate-related issues at the centre of the political agenda (Grant and Tilley, 2019; Spoon et al., 2014).

The immigration crisis

In the case of the immigration emergency, we can think of a challenge that develops in cumulative and foreseeable ways, but whose immediate effects create a sense of urgency and call for quick action (Kriesi et al., 2021). Although mass migration flows into the EU space have long antecedents and are not new, the waves beginning in 2015 with the refugee crisis can be considered a tipping point in this long-term process (Anderson, 2021) and represented a moment of shock that required a rapid and immediate response from policymakers (Kriesi, 2024). Immigration may well drive people to seek explanations, to feel they lack control over their environment, and to maintain a positive image of themselves or the in-group they belong to vis-à-vis the out-group of immigrants.

The issue of immigration and its depiction as a crisis have long been fertile ground for anti-establishment attitudes, especially considering its portrayal as an existential threat to European societies. Anti-immigrant conspiracy beliefs often emerge in settings where economic anxiety, national identity concerns, and media framing accentuate threat perceptions (Lutz and Bitschnau, 2023). The ‘Great Replacement’ theory, suggesting European elites’ deliberate intentions to replace native populations with – mostly Muslim – immigrants, has become a widespread conspiracy narrative often articulated by the radical right to fuel xenophobic attitudes (Bergmann, 2021). Thus, often framed politically as a covert plan orchestrated by global elites to undermine national sovereignty and populations (Mondon and Winter, 2020), concerns for immigration have been found as a consistent indicator correlating positively with the endorsement of conspiratorial thinking (Gaston and Uscinski, 2018).

The immigration emergency differs from crises like Covid-19 not only because it was not unexpected, but also because of its political framing, as its salience is often strategically constructed through political discourse – especially by radical right parties – rather than arising from direct personal impact. While some individuals experience migration directly – as residents of areas with large influxes – many others perceive immigration as a crisis mainly through media and political narratives. The topic of immigration is often discursively framed as a threat to national identity and security, making it particularly potent for populist narratives that portray elites as disconnected from the concerns of ‘ordinary people’ while fuelling xenophobic conspiracy beliefs (Jolley et al., 2020).

This aligns with previous findings arguing that crises framed as threats to cultural identity rather than to direct personal security may also result in heightened populist sentiments and a rejection of mainstream political elites (Gaston and Uscinski, 2018; Lutz and Bitschnau, 2023).

The Russia–Ukraine war

The Russia–Ukraine war started in February 2022 cannot be easily placed within the Pierson/Kriesi-Ferrera-Schelkle's typology. Although it occurred suddenly and had immediate effects, the invasion of Ukraine is unlikely to have generated uncertainty and a sense of urgency uniformly across Europe. Concerns about a close military threat depend largely on geographical proximity to Russia or Ukraine. In Eastern Europe, concerns over security and territorial integrity have heightened due to the direct military threat, while in Western Europe and beyond, the war is more often perceived through its economic and geopolitical consequences (Genschel, 2022, 2025; Fernández et al., 2023). Thus, international conflicts are more likely to be perceived through the prisms of ideology and media influence rather than direct personal encounters, especially for individuals living in distant places (Mazepus et al., 2023).

With regard to anti-establishment attitudes, earlier research on wartime misinformation suggested a higher likelihood for conflict-related conspiracy beliefs to thrive in polarised environments due to low levels of trust in mainstream narratives (Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019). Likewise, research on misinformation and propaganda in conflict settings highlighted the use of conspiracy theories by both state and non-state actors to justify military operations and weaken opponents (Bennett and Livingston, 2020). Scholars suggested that fake news and conspiracy theories have been utilised by Russian state media as part of propaganda since 2014, portraying Ukraine as a puppet of Western elites, engaging in bioweapon research, staging attacks against Russia to manipulate global opinion, or depicting its soldiers as 'fascist executioners' killing people of Russian descent (Jankowicz, 2020). Moreover, Western audiences were found to be susceptible to conspiracy theories about the war, speculating about NATO's involvement in provoking the war for geopolitical or economic gain (Hameleers et al., 2024; Radnitz, 2023; Zilinsky et al., 2024). The war's salience is further amplified through media coverage and political framing, and in some cases, it has reinforced populist sentiments by instilling contempt in global institutions and mainstream global elites (Oleinik, 2024a, 2024b).

The energy crisis

One of the most pronounced effects of the war has been the potential emergence of a Europe-wide energy crisis, marked by the disruption of energy supply chains, rising prices, and heightened concerns about winter heating. In terms of its time horizon, the energy crisis occurred suddenly and unexpectedly, creating high uncertainty among public opinion, and produced immediate effects that required prompt policy responses, thereby generating a sense of urgency. We can thus argue that the prospect of an energy crisis has provided fertile ground for anti-establishment reasoning. Because of the direct economic hardship caused by rising fuel prices and heating costs, the immediate and tangible consequences of an energy shortage for citizens' daily lives and household well-being might be expected to translate into anti-establishment attitudes. Economic hardship has historically been a strong predictor of such attitudes, often prompting individuals to

attribute responsibility to political elites for mismanagement (Abts and Rogenhofer, 2024; Droste, 2021; Rooduijn, 2018). This is largely because crises that affect issues like basic economic stability or energy security tend to elicit strong public reactions, as they threaten the immediate material well-being of individuals (Lewin et al., 2023). In other words, anti-establishment attitudes can help satisfy the social-psychological motives – especially the desires for understanding and for control and security – that emerge during crises like the energy crisis.

Previous research on energy-related conspiracies highlighted fossil fuel interest groups historically promote conspiracies on climate change and energy to influence public opinion and policy debates (McCright and Dunlap, 2011). Such energy-related conspiracies often centre around claims that governments and elites deliberately induce shortages to increase dependence on renewable energy sources or to benefit particular industries (Hornsey et al., 2018). Recent scholarship, especially regarding energy supply and security in Europe amid the war in Ukraine, has linked the impact of Russian propaganda networks to the spread of conspiracy narratives portraying Western efforts to manipulate energy markets as a rationale for sanctions against Russia (Yang et al., 2024).

Hypotheses

Unlike the almost unidimensional treatment of the notion of crisis in the extant literature, we suggest that crisis perceptions are likely to bear diverse relations to anti-establishment dispositions. This is because, as discussed above, not all crises generate the uncertainty and sense of urgency that constitute fertile conditions for the development of anti-establishment attitudes such as conspiracism and populism. In terms of the time-based typology discussed above, we hypothesise that only those crises that occur suddenly and unexpectedly and/or have immediate effects on people's lives create such conditions. Hence, across Europe, individuals concerned with these types of crises are expected to exhibit more pronounced anti-establishment attitudes. This applies to three of the five crises considered here: the Covid-19 pandemic, the immigration emergency, and the energy crisis. Accordingly, our first hypothesis is as follows:

H1. Individual concern about Covid-19, the immigration emergency, and the energy crisis will be positively associated with anti-establishment attitudes.

With regard to the other two crises – climate change and the Russia–Ukraine war – we do not posit a positive association between crisis concern and anti-establishment attitudes across Europe. Since the climate crisis unfolds slowly and has delayed effects, we should not expect to observe a positive association between concern for climate change and anti-establishment dispositions. Moreover, the fact that climate change has become a mainstream issue in party competition (Dickson and Hobolt, 2024; Honeker and Spoon, 2025), with anti-establishment positions often coinciding with climate change denial, could even lead us to expect a negative relation between concern for climate change and anti-establishment attitudes. As for the Russia–Ukraine war, the geographical location of the conflict does not pose an immediate threat across all of Europe, which leads us not to expect a positive association between concern for the war and anti-establishment attitudes.³ In this case, as well, given the almost unanimous support for Ukraine among mainstream parties (Hooghe et al., 2024), we might even anticipate

that concern for the war is negatively associated with anti-establishment attitudes. Therefore, our second hypothesis is as follows:

H2. Individual concern about the climate crisis and the Russia–Ukraine war will be negatively associated with anti-establishment attitudes.

The third hypothesis we put forward focuses on the relation between individuals' ideological positions and the anti-establishment attitudes they develop.⁴ Radical political ideologies are often characterised by a rejection of the political mainstream based on their critique of liberal democracy, globalism, and political elites (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Mudde, 2007). This is especially more pronounced among the radical right, often framing mainstream politicians as corrupt and detached from 'the people', reinforcing distrust in institutions (Rydgren, 2018), whereas the radical left's anti-establishment discourse often targets economic elites rather than the entire political system (March and Mudde, 2005). Previous research suggests a strong and positive correlation between the endorsement of anti-establishment attitudes and aligning with radical right ideology based on the negative portrayal of the political elite and their intentions (Hameleers, 2021; Hameleers et al., 2018; see also Imhoff et al., 2022). Therefore, we expect a higher likelihood of the endorsement of anti-establishment attitudes among individuals with radical ideologies, particularly among those on the radical right:

H3. Individuals who identify with radical political ideologies, especially those on the radical right, are more likely to endorse anti-establishment attitudes than those with moderate or mainstream ideological orientations.

Our last two hypotheses rely on the argument that concern about specific crises is associated in different ways with anti-establishment attitudes depending on individuals' ideological leanings. This is because crises differ not only in the degrees of uncertainty and urgency they generate, but also in the ways they are framed within political discourse. Certain crises touch on issues that are central to particular political ideologies, whereas others may be considered more politically 'neutral'. For example, the immigration emergency clearly concerns an issue at the core of right-wing, conservative ideologies, while the climate crisis involves themes traditionally central to left-wing, progressive perspectives. Importantly, when forming their perceptions and concerns about these crises, citizens receive cues from the political parties that mobilise them – mainly from right-wing parties in the case of immigration (Gessler and Hunger, 2022; Hutter and Kriesi, 2022) and from green and left-wing parties in the case of climate-related issues (Grant and Tilley, 2019; Spoon et al., 2014). In addition, cues may also come from parties that traditionally counter-mobilise on certain issues, as radical right parties have recently begun to do with regard to climate change (Dickson and Hobolt, 2024; Honeker and Spoon, 2025).

According to H1, we expected that individuals more concerned about the immigration emergency would display stronger anti-establishment attitudes than those less concerned. However, we may argue that heightened concern about immigration will not strongly correlate with anti-establishment attitudes among individuals whose ideology already emphasises that issue. Rather, it will be more markedly associated with anti-establishment attitudes among individuals whose ideological orientation does not focus as heavily on that crisis. In other words, among those on the radical right, being more or

less concerned about immigration should not significantly affect the development of anti-establishment attitudes – as they already hold an ideology centred around the immigration issue. However, among individuals with centrist or left-wing ideological positions, perceiving a threat to national identity and security due to immigrants is more likely to be associated with anti-establishment attitudes. We thus hypothesise the following:

H4. The (positive) association between concern about the immigration emergency and anti-establishment attitudes should be weaker among individuals with a radical right ideology and stronger among individuals with a centrist or left-wing ideological position.

In H2, we expected less pronounced anti-establishment sentiments among individuals who are more concerned about climate change. However, recent studies suggest that those with a radical right ideology differ from the rest when it comes to this issue. In particular, Crulli and Zulianello (2025) demonstrate that (populist) radical right voters care much less about climate change compared to all other voters (see also Sælen and McCright, 2025). This is because climate change is perceived as an issue emphasised by cosmopolitan elites and established scientific knowledge, and one that transcends domestic politics by being intrinsically transnational – features that clash with the core ideological tenets of the radical right. As a consequence, we may expect right-wing individuals not to display a negative correlation between concern about the climate crisis and anti-establishment attitudes. Hence, we formulate our final hypothesis:

H5. The (negative) association between concern about the climate crisis and anti-establishment attitudes should be absent among individuals with a more radical right-wing ideology.

The other crises considered here – Covid-19, the energy crisis, and the Russia–Ukraine war – are not traditionally central to, or the negative target of, any particular political ideology. As such, they are less politically framed, and party cues are less prominent (see, for example, Vezzoni et al., 2022 on Covid-19 in Italy). Therefore, in the case of these crises, we do not hypothesise or test any specific interaction between crisis concern and ideology.⁵

Data and methods

For our analyses, we use an original cross-sectional dataset covering seven European countries – France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom – collected as part of the project SUSPECTS – StUdying SuPply, demand, and Endorsement of Conspiracy TheorieS in six European countries (Mancosu et al., 2025). The sample consists of 17,551 respondents – around 2500 from each country – who were questioned in the summer of 2024 using the computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) method. In each country, case selection was carried out to reproduce the quotas of the main socio-demographic variables (gender, age, and geographical area).

The dependent variables are anti-establishment attitudes measured across three dimensions: conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy mentality, and populism. In doing so, we follow

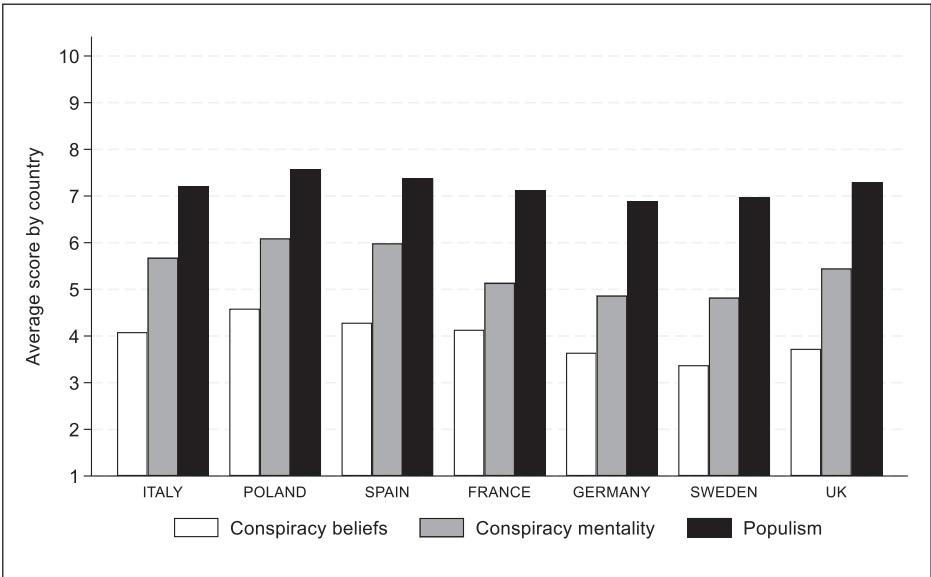


Figure 1. Distribution of anti-establishment attitudes in seven European countries.

previous research that conceptualises conspiracism and populism under the broader notion of anti-establishment sentiments (Abadi et al., 2024; see also Castanho Silva et al., 2017; Mancosu et al., 2017).⁶ Our measure of conspiracy mentality summarises five items that capture a generalised worldview suspecting conspiracies at play, while our indicator of conspiracy beliefs summarises endorsement of a set of specific conspiracy theories.⁷ Populism is operationalised following Akkerman et al.’s (2013) populist attitudes scale. Each of these three dimensions is measured on a scale from 1 to 10. Higher values indicate a higher likelihood of endorsing anti-establishment attitudes. Figure 1 displays the average levels of the three dependent variables by country. The graph indicates some variation across the seven European countries examined: anti-establishment sentiments are, on average, more prevalent in Poland and Spain and less common in Germany and Sweden.

The main independent variables of the research are crisis concerns measured across five different crises – Covid-19, climate, immigration emergency, the Russia–Ukraine war, and the energy crisis. Items measuring crisis concerns have a scale of 1 to 10, where higher values show a higher level of concern. Figure 2 displays, by country, the average levels of concern for the five crises considered. The graphs reveal that Covid-19 is the crisis about which individuals in Europe are least concerned (unsurprisingly, given that the data were collected in 2024). Moreover, there is noticeable cross-country variation in the extent to which public opinion is concerned about each specific crisis.

To test H3–H5, we include a six-category variable on political ideology (left, centre-left, centre, centre-right, right, and not located). Models also incorporate a set of socio-economic and political control variables. Socio-economic variables consist of a five-category variable on employment status and a dummy indicating whether respondents reported that their personal economic situation had worsened in the last 6 months (coded 1), as opposed to having improved or remained the same (coded 0).

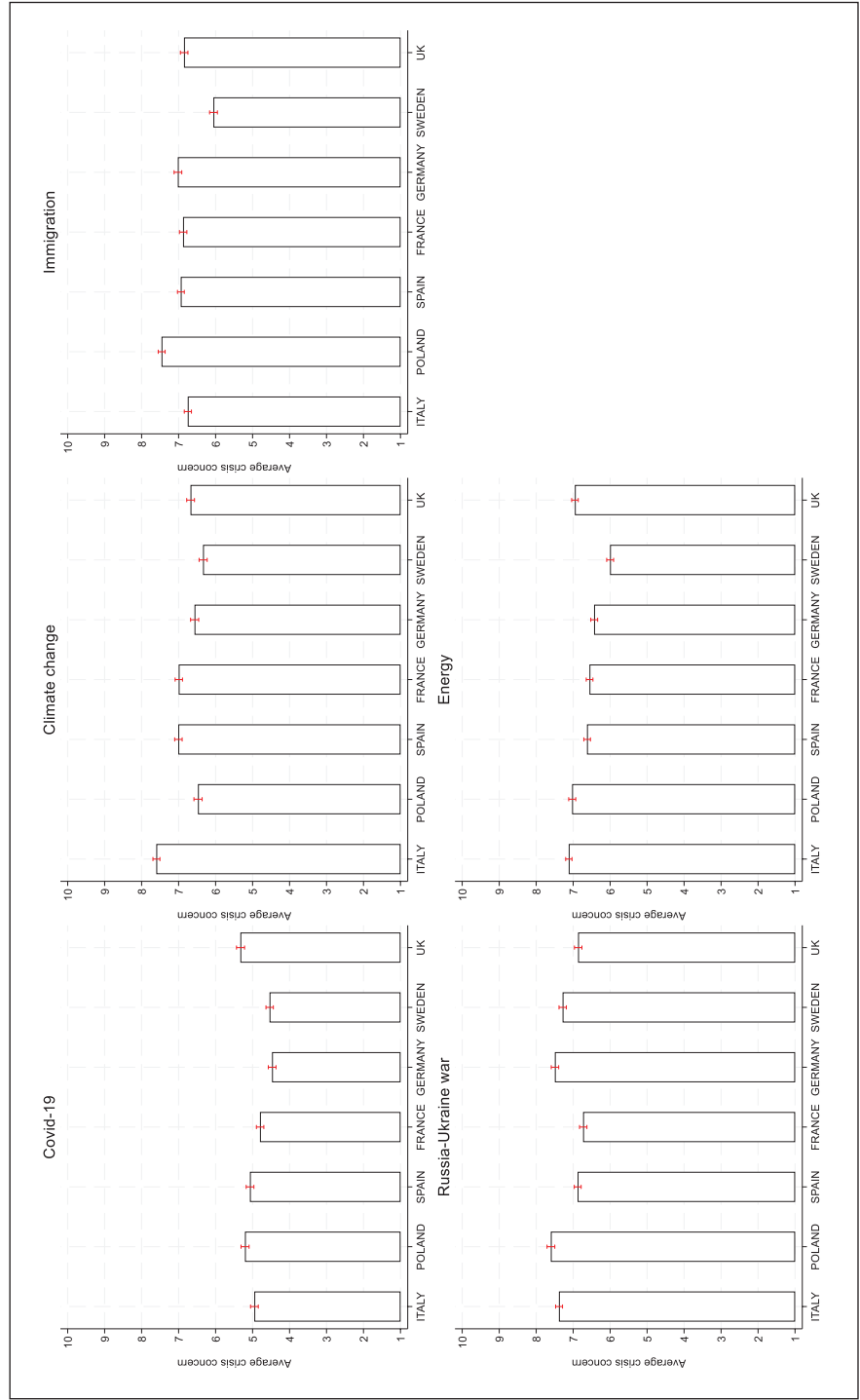


Figure 2. Distribution of concern about different crises in seven European countries.

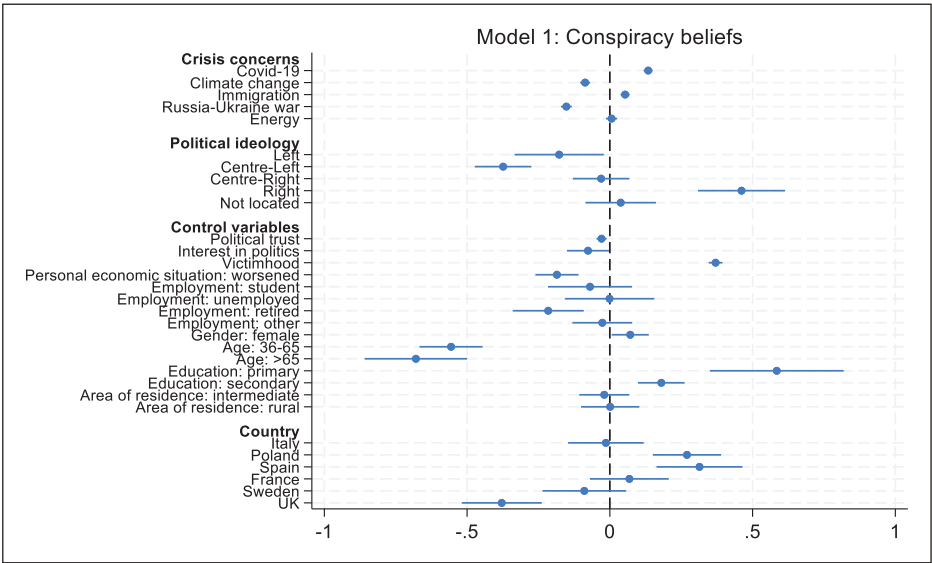


Figure 3. Relationship between conspiracy beliefs and concern about different crises in seven European countries. The reported coefficients were estimated from Model 1 in Supplemental Table A2.

Political variables comprise an item on political trust combining trust in the national parliament and in the local and regional institutions, a binary variable on interest in politics, and an index of victimhood made up of five items ranging from 1 to 10. As further control variables, we include a three-category measure of area of residence (urban, rural, or intermediate), along with standard socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, and education.⁸

All our models are OLS regressions with country fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the respondents’ area of residence (NUTS2 level). In using an OLS setup to analyse the relationship between crisis concerns (treated here as independent variables) and anti-establishment dispositions (treated as dependent variables), we acknowledge that we cannot fully disentangle the direction of the causal relationship between these two types of attitudes. On the one hand, our analysis does not aim to unpack the complex processes through which attitudes form (see Saris and Sniderman, 2004); rather, we rely on the well-established literature that assumes crisis situations tend to foster anti-establishment attitudes (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). On the other hand, we try to avoid using excessively ‘causal’ terminology throughout the text. Moreover, we acknowledge that, while our data are cross-sectional, we would need longitudinal data to properly disentangle the causal relationship between crisis concerns and anti-establishment attitudes.

Empirical analysis and results

The results of our analysis are illustrated graphically in Figures 3–5, which show the regression coefficients for Models 1–3, with 95% confidence intervals. Full regression results are reported in the appendix (Supplemental Table A2). In each of these three models, the covariates included on the right-hand side of the equation are the same, while the

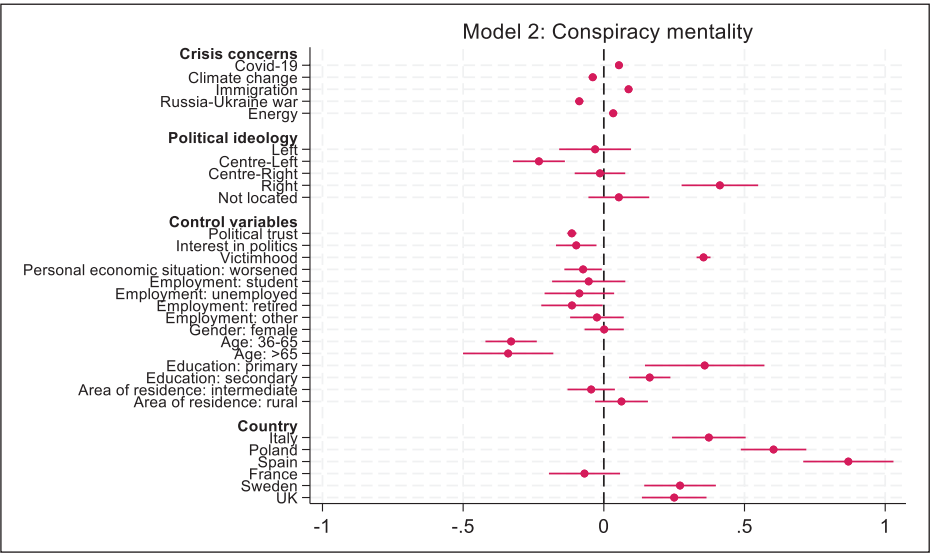


Figure 4. Relationship between conspiracy mentality and concern about different crises in seven European countries. The reported coefficients were estimated from Model 2 in Supplemental Table A2.

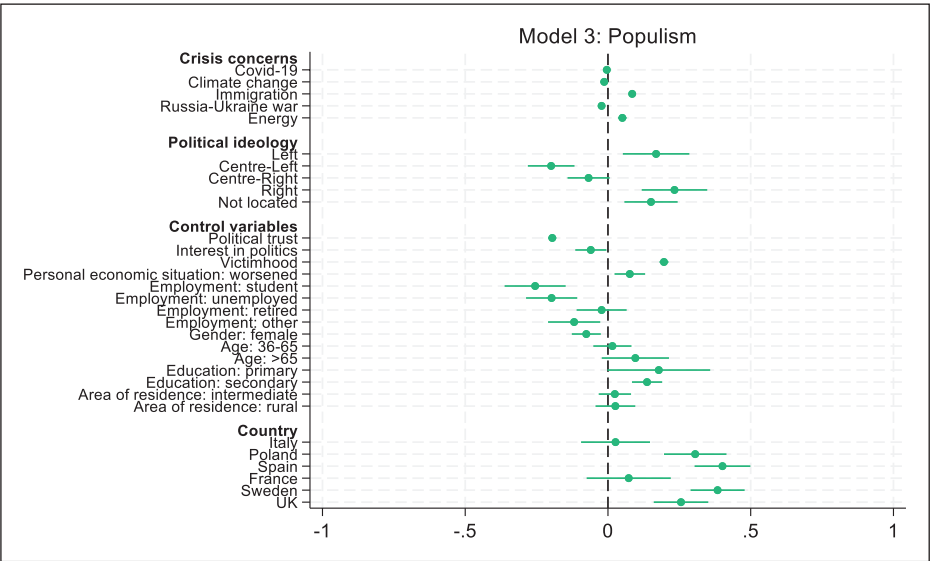


Figure 5. Relationship between populism and concern about different crises in seven European countries. The reported coefficients were estimated from Model 3 in Supplemental Table A2.

dependent variable varies. The outcome variable captures conspiracy beliefs in Model 1, conspiracy mentality in Model 2, and populist attitudes in Model 3.⁹

Taken together, the data indicate that not all types of crises have the potential to translate into anti-establishment attitudes. More precisely, our findings support H1, which

posits that individual concern about crises that generate high uncertainty and a sense of urgency is positively associated with anti-establishment attitudes. Specifically, we find a positive association between concern about Covid-19 and both conspiracy beliefs and conspiracy mentality; a positive association between concern about the energy shortage and both conspiracy mentality and populist attitudes; and a positive association between concern about immigration and all three types of anti-establishment attitudes.

Such a pattern is not observed in the case of climate change and the Russia–Ukraine war. As expected under H2, individuals who are more concerned about these two crises are less likely to believe in conspiracy theories, to display a conspiratorial mind-set, or to be populist. As discussed above, this may be related to the fact that climate change and the war in Ukraine are not ‘fast-burning’ crises capable of generating high levels of uncertainty and urgency across Europe. Another important factor regards the way in which these crises have been framed in political discourse. In most European countries, concern about the war in Ukraine – particularly the threat posed by Russia – and about the climate crisis are (or have become) mainstream issues. They are topics emphasised by most major parties and governments, rather than by actors at the fringes of the party system. Consider, for instance, the widespread military aid provided to Ukraine by European governments or EU-level initiatives such as the European Green Deal.

The different findings associated with concern about an energy crisis and concern about the Russia–Ukraine war offer an intriguing illustration of how perceptions of urgency and uncertainty can translate into anti-establishment sentiments. Although the energy crisis is related to the war in Ukraine, anti-establishment attitudes among citizens display a negative correlation with concern for the war itself but a positive correlation with concern for an energy crisis. This corroborates the idea that the differing natures of crises can lead to perceptual discrepancies even within distinct facets of the same phenomenon, depending on levels of uncertainty, urgency, and tangible effects.

According to H3, we expected anti-establishment attitudes to be more spread among individuals located at the extremes of the left-right scale, especially on the far right. This is exactly what we find in the case of populism – a relationship that follows a U-shaped pattern. In the case of conspiracy-related attitudes, this U-shape is less pronounced on the left. These findings align with existing literature highlighting that individuals at the extreme ends of the political spectrum are more likely to embrace anti-establishment attitudes. It is attributed to a tendency among those with radical political ideologies to prefer simplistic explanations and political solutions as a means of making sense of events and managing feelings of uncertainty and fear (Imhoff et al., 2022; van Prooijen et al., 2015). Thus, Manicheism – known as perceiving politics as a battle between ‘good and evil’ – is regarded as a common view shared by both left and right ideological extremes, characterised by mutual distrust and the demonisation of groups and ideas seen as outsiders (Imhoff et al., 2022: 393). The curvilinear relationship between political ideology and anti-establishment sentiments, which we found to be more pronounced in relation to populism, also confirms previous research on populist conspiracism, where Manicheism serves as an underlying factor in the belief in conspiracy theories (Castanho Silva et al., 2017; van Prooijen et al., 2022).

Of course, extreme left-wingers and extreme right-wingers may differ in the ‘target’ of their anti-establishment attitudes. For example, left extremists are more likely to believe in conspiracies about multinationals and other issues concerning capitalism, while right extremists are more prone to perceive conspiracies about issues like immigration (Douglas et al., 2017).

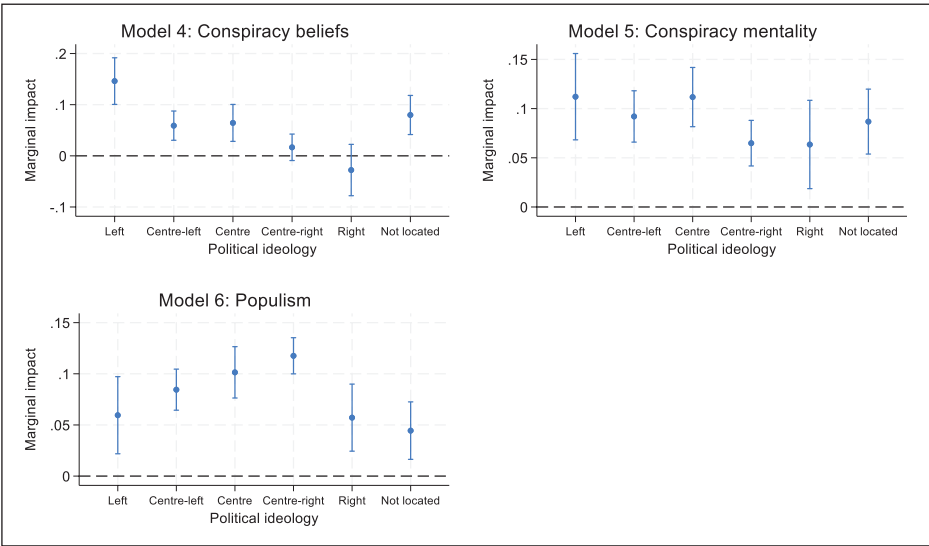


Figure 6. Marginal impact of concern about the immigration emergency on anti-establishment attitudes, by political ideology. The reported coefficients were estimated from Models 4-6 in Supplemental Table A3.

Let us also note that, as other studies have shown, our data reveal that anti-establishment sentiments – especially conspiracy-related ones – are more widespread on the extreme right than on the extreme left (van Prooijen et al., 2015). This may also be related to the fact that right-wingers tend to display personality predispositions more conducive to conspiracy thinking as an existential need to manage uncertainty (Jost et al., 2003).

H4 and H5 hypothesise an interaction between concern about specific crises and individuals’ ideological positions. To test these hypotheses, we ran a set of regression models in which concern about the immigration emergency or climate change is interacted with the political ideology variable. While the full regression coefficients are reported in the appendix (Supplemental Tables A3–A4), here we illustrate the interaction results graphically (Figures 6 and 7).

Starting with H4, as expected, we find that the (positive) association between concern about immigration and anti-establishment attitudes is weaker among those with a right-wing ideology and stronger among individuals with centrist or left-wing positions. This pattern is especially clear in the case of conspiracy beliefs, but much less so for populism (Figure 6). In other words, among right-wing individuals, there is no statistically significant association between concern about immigration – an issue that is already salient for them¹⁰ – and conspiracism. In contrast, among other groups, including left-wing individuals, those who feel more threatened by immigrants are more likely to express conspiracy-related attitudes.

We also find support for H5, which posits that there should be no negative association between concern about the climate crisis and anti-establishment dispositions among individuals with a more radical right-wing ideology. Here again, the pattern is clearer when we focus on conspiracy-related attitudes (Figure 7). Unlike the rest of the population, among right-wing individuals we find no statistically significant association between climate concern and either conspiracy beliefs or conspiratorial mentality. As discussed

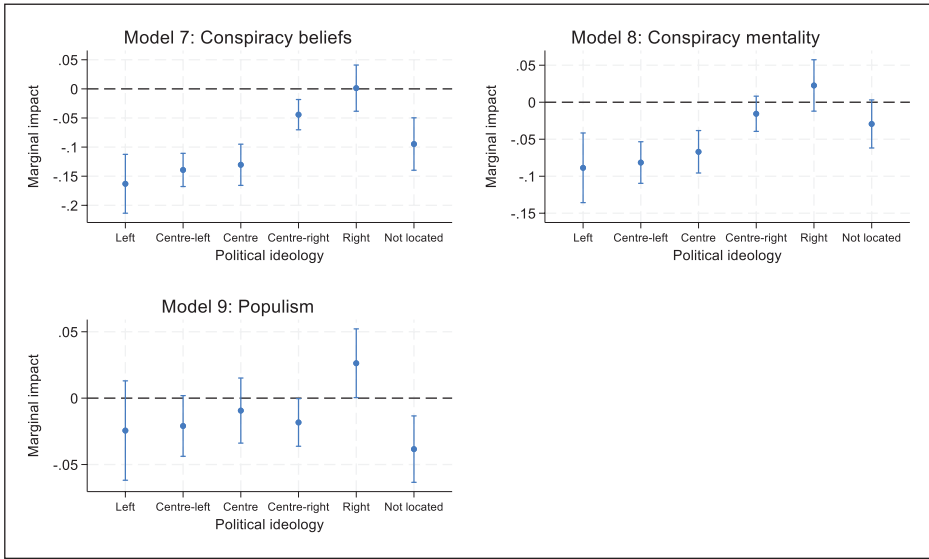


Figure 7. Marginal impact of concern about climate change on anti-establishment attitudes, by political ideology. The reported coefficients were estimated from Models 7-9 in Supplemental Table A4.

above, this may be due to the relatively low level of concern these individuals express about climate change.¹¹ Outside the right-wing group, however, the association between climate concern and conspiracy-related attitudes becomes increasingly negative as we move from right to left on the ideological spectrum. In other words, for centrist and left-wing individuals, concern about climate change corresponds to a more mainstream rather than anti-establishment perspective. Anti-establishment stances on climate change are often associated with denial of the issue. Once again, this aligns with the idea that climate change has become a mainstream issue in political discourse.

Therefore, while our findings on the relationship between political ideology and anti-establishment sentiments indicating curvilinearity are consistent with the literature, the interaction results present an intriguing and significant element to consider when researching crises and anti-establishment attitudes, particularly in terms of the importance of an issue's 'embeddedness' within the host ideology for its perception as either mainstream or a crisis.

Regarding the control variables included in the models, Figures 3–5 show that conspiracy-related attitudes are more common among younger individuals, whereas populist attitudes are more frequent among older individuals (see also Abadi et al., 2024). As for gender, in line with previous research, men appear to be more populist than women (see Harteveld et al., 2015; Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Spierings and Zaslove, 2017). In addition, the propensity to develop anti-establishment attitudes decreases with higher levels of education. Regarding employment status, compared to employed individuals, retirees are less likely to hold conspiracy-related attitudes but more likely to express populist ones – a finding that is consistent with the observed age effect. Moreover, unemployed individuals tend to be less populist than those who are employed. The divergent roles of unemployment and retirement also reflect the complexity of life-stage and structural

vulnerabilities in shaping discontent. Nevertheless, individual economic evaluations are not consistently linked to anti-establishment attitudes. Those who perceived a deterioration are not systematically more likely to endorse anti-establishment attitudes than those who reported stability or improvement: they tend to be more populist but, counterintuitively, also less likely to believe in conspiracy theories. This complicates the prevalent claim that economic distress directly incites political animosity across the board. Finally, as largely expected, anti-establishment orientations are positively associated with feelings of victimhood and negatively associated with political trust and interest in politics.

Discussion and conclusion

This article has examined the relationship between crisis perceptions and anti-establishment attitudes across three dimensions: conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy mentality, and populism. In doing so, we have attempted to integrate the psychological literature on the motives that trigger anti-establishment attitudes with the political science research on different types of crises. We have challenged the often-assumed unidimensional treatment of crises as exerting an almost homogeneous effect on anti-establishment sentiments. Instead, we suggested that largely because of the varying degrees of uncertainty and urgency they generate in public opinion, different crises are likely to exhibit different patterns of association with anti-establishment attitudes. Our findings support this core argument, highlighting distinct relationships between the two phenomena. Specifically, we found that crises that occur suddenly and unexpectedly and/or have immediate effects on individuals – such as Covid-19, immigration, and energy – are positively associated with two or more facets of anti-establishment attitudes. Notably, concern about immigration stands out as the most consistent predictor, having a positive correlation with all three facets of anti-establishment attitudes. This might be read as the enduring capacity of immigration as a focal point for various aspects of scepticism and political resentment cutting across both its conspiratorial and populist modes of expression.

Not all crises operate in this way. We hypothesised and found a negative correlation between concerns about crises that do not generate widespread uncertainty and urgency across Europe – the Russia–Ukraine conflict and climate change – and anti-establishment attitudes. Our results also underscore the importance of elite cues and discursive mainstreaming. In most European countries, support for Ukraine and action on climate change have been institutionally consolidated, framed not as controversial issues but as shared political and moral imperatives. In this context, expressing concern about these crises may signal alignment with dominant political narratives rather than resistance to them.¹² These findings suggest that crisis perceptions are likely to trigger anti-establishment reactions when the crises are framed as threatening or mismanaged by elites – not when institutionally embraced.

It could be argued that issues like climate change and the Russia–Ukraine war have been depoliticised – that is, they have been framed as problems that admit only one solution and removed from the sphere of political conflict and public debate. In the case of the war, depoliticising tendencies took place soon after it started: across most European countries, public backing for assisting Ukraine was wide (Moise and Wang, 2025); mainstream parties firmly supported military aid to Ukraine (Holesch and Martill, 2026); several radical right and radical left parties that had previously shown pro-Russian sympathies adopted more assertive stances towards Russia (Holesch et al., 2024); and radical right populist parties in office persisted in depoliticising the issue notwithstanding growing

public war fatigue (Cladi, 2026). Consistent with this, our data document that higher concern about the conflict is negatively associated with conspiracy-related attitudes and with populism, regardless of individuals' ideological leanings. The depoliticisation argument can also be applied to the issue of climate change, although our findings show that on this issue there are specific patterns for radical right individuals.

Finally, our findings on ideology further emphasise the interplay between structural positions and attitudinal dynamics. Populist attitudes follow a clear U-shaped curve, peaking on both ends of the left-right spectrum, while conspiracy beliefs are somewhat more prevalent on the right. The interaction analyses yield particularly illuminating results. For immigration, concern is more strongly associated with conspiracy beliefs among left-wing and centrist individuals – a reminder that even groups traditionally less characterised by anti-establishment rhetoric may adopt such views when they perceive personal or social threat. Among centrists and leftists, concern about climate change is instead associated with lower levels of conspiratorial thinking, underscoring the mainstream nature of environmental discourse in those parts of the spectrum.

In this regard, right-wing individuals emerge as a somewhat distinct group. They are more anti-establishment than other ideological groups (and also more than those who do not locate themselves on the left-right axis). Interestingly, their propensity to express anti-establishment attitudes does not depend on concerns about crises such as immigration and climate change.

The findings of this research have several implications for the study of crises and anti-establishment attitudes in contemporary democracies. Most importantly, they caution against treating crises as uniform drivers of anti-establishment sentiments. Instead, the research points to the potential for differentiated effects, depending on the uncertainty and tangibility produced by their temporal and cognitive underpinnings. This serves as a call for scholars to consider these dynamics, particularly when examining domestic perceptions of crises, even if their scale is international. In addition, factors such as discursive framing, political ownership, and the embeddedness of an issue within the host ideology are important considerations.

Moreover, for those concerned about limiting the spread of anti-establishment attitudes among the population, it is crucial to prevent certain crises from being framed and perceived as 'fast-burning' – that is, as crises that erupt suddenly and unexpectedly with immediate effects. Of course, events such as pandemics or energy shocks can hardly be framed otherwise, given their nature. However, immigration is a phenomenon that does not necessarily unfold suddenly or unexpectedly, nor does it necessarily have immediately tangible consequences on individuals' lives in the way that a virus or energy shortage does. Rather, it is largely the way immigration has been politically framed – especially by right-wing parties – that creates a sense of urgency and uncertainty among citizens, thereby translating into anti-establishment attitudes. This, in turn, can fuel the negative consequences often associated with conspiracism and anti-establishment attitudes more generally: lower political participation, diminished trust in institutions, disillusionment with politicians and scientists, erosion of social capital, and so on (Douglas et al., 2019). Thus, to the extent that policymakers wish to limit the spread of conspiracist and populist attitudes associated with concerns about immigration, they should strive to prevent people from perceiving immigration as threatening their sense of control.

Regarding the limitations of our study, we acknowledge that our data do not allow us to fully determine the causal direction between crisis concerns and anti-establishment attitudes. Future studies could employ longitudinal data to better establish the directionality of

this relationship. Another possible approach would be to rely on non-attitudinal indicators measuring the salience of different crises for individuals.

Altogether, this study contributes to a growing body of research calling for a disaggregated view of crises while embarking on their relation to anti-establishment attitudes. Crisis perceptions do influence political worldviews, but not uniformly. Rather than seeing crises as almost uniform triggers of anti-establishment attitudes, future research should focus on the framing, salience, and political ownership of crises, as well as how different psychological and ideological predispositions mediate their impact. In doing so, we may better understand the conditions under which public discontent transforms into political resentment – or remains within the bounds of institutional legitimacy.

Acknowledgement

Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Joint Sessions of Workshops of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) in Prague, May 20–23, 2025, and at the Parties, Voters & Elections Seminar Series, University of Milan, June 9, 2025. We thank Reinhard Heinisch, Michael Škvrňák, Alessandro Pellegata, Jessica Rosco, and all other participants, as well as two anonymous referees, for their helpful comments and suggestions.

ORCID iDs

Andrea Pedrazzani  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1262-2686>

Ugur Sumbul  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0825-2408>

Ethical considerations

The Bio-Ethics Review Committee at the University of Turin (responsible for the survey) approved our project involving interviews (Prot. n. 0610843) on 30 April 2024. All respondents provided written consent before the interviews began.

Informed consent statements

All respondents provided written consent before the interviews began.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (grant number 20229RRCJW_003).

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability statement

The authors are available to provide detailed information on how the data can be obtained once the article is accepted for online publication.

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Our intention here is not to downplay the threats posed by climate change. Of course, individuals directly affected by extreme weather events such as heat waves, wildfires, floods and droughts are more likely to perceive the crisis as a proximate threat and demand policy action (Bromley-Trujillo and Poe, 2018).
2. It is important to underline that in this article, we are not interested in explaining the drivers of belief in climate change conspiracy theories, but rather in assessing whether anti-establishment attitudes such as conspiracism are associated with concern about climate change.
3. One might expect to observe such a positive association in countries geographically closer to the war, such as Poland in our sample. However, our analyses do not reveal any notable difference between Poland and the other six countries. To check if Poland presents some peculiarities in terms of the association between crisis concerns and anti-establishment attitudes, we re-ran the same regression models presented in the fifth section using only Polish respondents (N=2357). Generally speaking, what we found in Poland regarding most hypotheses is consistent with our findings in the pooled dataset. Only in the case of H4 (see below) were findings in Poland slightly different from the general ones, possibly related to the specificities of the party system.
4. Although not particularly novel, H3 serves as a preliminary step before turning to the final two hypotheses.
5. As a robustness check, we ran a set of regression models in which concern about Covid-19, the Russia–Ukraine war, and the energy crisis is interacted with the left-right variable. The findings (available upon request) show that, generally speaking, concern about these crises translates into anti-establishment attitudes regardless of one's ideology. This can be seen especially in the case of the war in Ukraine. Whether individuals lean to the left, the centre, or the right, or do not locate themselves on the spectrum, higher concern about the conflict is negatively associated with conspiracy-related attitudes and with populism, albeit to a lower degree.
6. In this regard, Wood and Douglas (2019: 249) talk about 'outsiderdom', or separation from mainstream society.
7. Items used to build our measure of conspiracy mentality were chosen based on Brotherton et al. (2013), while items regarding specific conspiracy beliefs were selected following pre-tests conducted in a pilot study.
8. Table A1 in the appendix provides comprehensive details on variable operationalisation, including survey question wording, response categories, and (for the dependent variables) Cronbach's alpha coefficients.
9. In the models, reference categories are: 'centre' for political ideology, 'employed' for employment, '18–35' for age, 'tertiary' for education, 'urban' for area of residence, and 'Germany' for countries.
10. Our data show that right-wing individuals, with an average score of 8.19, are the group expressing the highest level of concern about the immigration emergency.
11. With an average score of 5.84, right-wing individuals are the group least concerned about climate change. A t test indicates that this value is statistically lower than the average level of concern observed in the rest of the population (6.93). This finding is consistent with Crulli and Zulianello's (2025) analysis.
12. Not surprisingly, in our data, individuals more concerned about these crises tend to trust political institutions more. The correlation between trust and concern about the climate crisis is 0.22 ($p < 0.001$), while the correlation between trust and concern about the war is 0.19 ($p < 0.001$).

References

- Abadi D, Van Prooijen JW, Krouwel A, et al. (2024) Anti-establishment sentiments: Realistic and symbolic threat appraisals predict populist attitudes and conspiracy mentality. *Cognition and Emotion* 38(8): 1246–1260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2024.2360584>
- Abts K and Rogenhofer JM (2024) Three-pronged resentment: How status insecurity, relative deprivation, and powerlessness mediate between social positions and populist attitudes. *American Behavioral Scientist* 69(14): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642241240362>
- Akkerman A, Mudde C and Zaslove A (2013) How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative Political Studies* 47(9): 1324–1353. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013512600>
- Anderson JJ (2021) A series of unfortunate events: Crisis response and the European Union after 2008. In: Riddervold M, Trondal J and Newsome A (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp.765–789.
- Barr RR (2009) Populists, outsiders and anti-establishment politics. *Party Politics* 15(1): 29–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068808097890>

- Bennett WL and Livingston S (2020) A brief history of the disinformation age: Information wars and the decline of institutional authority. In: Bennett WL and Livingston S (eds) *The Disinformation Age*. Cambridge University Press, pp.3–42.
- Bergmann E (2021) The Eurabia conspiracy theory. In: Önnersfors A and Krouwel A (eds) *Europe: Continent of Conspiracies*. Routledge, pp.36–53.
- Biddlestone M, Azevedo F and Van Der Linden S (2022) Climate of conspiracy: A meta-analysis of the consequences of belief in conspiracy theories about climate change. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 46: 101390. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101390>
- Bromley-Trujillo R and Poe J (2018) The importance of salience: Public opinion and state policy action on climate change. *Journal of Public Policy* 40(2): 280–304. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X18000375>
- Brotherton R, French CC and Pickering AD (2013) Measuring belief in conspiracy theories: The generic conspiracist beliefs scale. *Frontiers in Psychology* 4: e00279. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00279>
- Brubaker R (2017) Why populism? *Theory and Society* 46(5): 357–385. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-017-9301-7>
- Castanho Silva B, Vegetti F and Littvay L (2017) The elite is up to something: Exploring the relation between populism and belief in conspiracy theories. *Swiss Political Science Review* 23: 423–443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12270>
- Charalambous G, Conti N and Pedrazzani A (2025) The policy profile of populist parties in Europe: Policy purposeful with the competitive advantage of crises. *Politics*. Epub ahead of print 12 March. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02633957251321058>
- Cladi L (2026) Italian foreign policy between Ukraine and Gaza: Politicisation and war fatigue from Draghi to Meloni. *Journal of European Integration* 48(2): 311–328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2026.2616332>
- Cook J (2019) Understanding and countering misinformation about climate change. In: Chiluba I and Samoilenko S (eds) *Handbook of Research on Deception, Fake News, and Misinformation Online*. IGI-Global, pp.281–306.
- Crulli M and Zulianello M (2025) Not really concerned? Populist radical right voters and climate change. *Environmental Politics*. Epub ahead of print 22 May. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2506344>
- De Coninck D, Frissen T, Matthijs K, et al. (2021) Beliefs in conspiracy theories and misinformation about covid-19: Comparative perspectives on the role of anxiety, depression and exposure to and trust in information sources. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12: 646394. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.646394>
- Dickson ZP and Hobolt SB (2024) Going against the grain: Climate change as a wedge issue for the radical right. *Comparative Political Studies* 58(8): 1733–1759.
- Douglas KM and Sutton RM (2015) Climate change: Why the conspiracy theories are dangerous. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 71(2): 98–106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096340215571908>
- Douglas KM, Sutton RM and Cichocka A (2017) The psychology of conspiracy theories. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 26(6): 538–542. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417718261>
- Douglas KM, Uscinski JE, Sutton RM, et al. (2019) Understanding conspiracy theories. *Political Psychology* 40: 3–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12568>
- Dow BJ, Menon T, Wang CS, et al. (2023) Sense of control and conspiracy perceptions: Generative directions on a well-worn path. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 47: 101389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101389>
- Droste L (2021) Feeling left behind by political decision-makers: Anti-establishment sentiment in contemporary democracies. *Politics and Governance* 9(3): 288–300. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i3.3949>
- Eatwell R and Goodwin MJ (2018) *National Populism: The Revolt against Liberal Democracy*. Pelican.
- Egelhofer JL and Lecheler S (2019) Fake news as a two-dimensional phenomenon: A framework and research agenda. *Annals of the International Communication Association* 43(2): 97–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2019.1602782>
- Enders AM and Uscinski JE (2021) Are misinformation, antiscientific claims, and conspiracy theories for political extremists? *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 24(4): 583–605. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430220960805>
- Endticht R and Kanol E (2024) Conspiracy beliefs and negative attitudes towards outgroups in times of crises: Experimental evidence from Germany. *PLoS ONE* 19(11): e0312418. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0312418>
- EU DisinfoLab (2020) COVID-19 conspiracy theories: Comparative trends in Italy, France, and Spain (EU DisinfoLab Working Paper). Available at: https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/20200512_conspiracies_covid19.pdf

- Fernández Ó, Vandendriessche M, Saz-Carranza A, et al. (2023) The impact of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine on public perceptions of EU security and defence integration: A big data analysis. *Journal of European Integration* 45(3): 463–485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2023.2183392>
- Gaston S and Uscinski J (2018) Out of the shadows: Conspiracy thinking on immigration (report). *Henry Jackson society centre for social & political risk*. Available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/out-of-the-shadows-conspiracy-thinking-on-immigration/>
- Genschel P (2022) Bellicist integration? The war in Ukraine, the European Union and core state powers. *Journal of European Public Policy* 29(12): 1885–1900. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2141823>
- Genschel P (2025) Conclusion – external threat and internal divisions: How the war in Ukraine shapes mass politics in the EU. *European Union Politics* 26: 442–450. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165251318963>
- Gessler T and Hunger S (2022) How the refugee crisis and radical right parties shape party competition on immigration. *Political Science Research and Methods* 10(3): 524–544. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2021.64>
- Grant ZP and Tilley J (2019) Fertile soil: Explaining variation in the success of green parties. *West European Politics* 42(3): 495–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2018.1521673>
- Hameleers M (2021) They are selling themselves out to the enemy! The content and effects of populist conspiracy theories. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 33(1): 38–56. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edaa004>
- Hameleers M, Bos L and De Vreese CH (2018) “They did it”: The effects of emotionalized blame attribution in populist communication. *Communication Research* 44(6): 870–900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650216644026>
- Hameleers M, Tulin M, De Vreese C, et al. (2024) Mistakenly misinformed or intentionally deceived? Mis- and disinformation perceptions on the Russian war in Ukraine among citizens in 19 countries. *European Journal of Political Research* 63(4): 1642–1654. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12646>
- Harteveld E, Van Der Brug W, Dahlberg S, et al. (2015) The gender gap in populist radical-right voting: Examining the demand side in Western and Eastern Europe. *Patterns of Prejudice* 49(1–2): 103–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1024399>
- Holesch A and Martill B (2026) War fatigue? The politicisation of the Ukraine War. *Journal of European Integration* 48(2): 167–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2026.2615100>
- Holesch A, Zagórski P and Ramiro L (2024) European radical left foreign policy after the invasion of Ukraine: Shifts in assertiveness towards Russia. *Political Research Exchange* 6(1): 2350245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2024.2350245>
- Honeker A and Spoon J-J (2025) This land is our land: Radical right parties and the environmental issue in Europe. *Party Politics*. Epub ahead of print 6 June. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688251347882>
- Hooghe L, Marks G, Bakker R, et al. (2024) The Russian Threat and the consolidation of the west: How populism and EU-Skepticism shape party support for Ukraine. *European Union Politics* 25(3): 459–482.
- Hornsey MJ, Harris EA and Fielding KS (2018) Relationships among conspiratorial beliefs, conservatism and climate scepticism across nations. *Nature Climate Change* 8(7): 614–620. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0157-2>
- Hutter S and Kriesi H (2022) Politicising immigration in times of crisis. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48(2): 341–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1853902>
- Imhoff R and Lamberty P (2020) A bioweapon or a hoax? The link between distinct conspiracy beliefs about the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak and pandemic behaviour. *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 11(8): 1110–1118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550620934692>
- Imhoff R, Zimmer F, Klein O, et al. (2022) Conspiracy mentality and political orientation across 26 countries. *Nature Human Behaviour* 6(3): 392–403. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01258-7>
- Inglehart R and Norris P (2016) Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2818659>
- Jankowicz N (2020) *How to Lose the Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict*. I.B. Tauris.
- Jolley D, Meleady R and Douglas KM (2020) Exposure to intergroup conspiracy theories promotes prejudice which spreads across groups. *British Journal of Psychology* 111(1): 17–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12385>
- Jost JT, Glaser J, Kruglanski AW, et al. (2003) Political conservatism as motivated social cognition. *Psychological Bulletin* 129(3): 339–375. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339>
- Kriesi H (2024) *Crisis Policymaking in the EU: The Covid-19 Crisis and the Refugee Crisis 2015–16 Compared*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009549462>
- Kriesi H, Ferrera M and Schelkle W (2021) The theoretical framework of SOLID – A research agenda. Working Paper. Available at: <https://solid-erc.eu/app/uploads/2020/12/Theoretical-Framework-SOLID.pdf>

- Lewandowsky S (2021) Climate change disinformation and how to combat it. *Annual Review of Public Health* 42: 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-102409>
- Lewandowsky S, Gignac GE and Oberauer K (2013) The role of conspiracist ideation and worldviews in predicting rejection of science. *PLoS ONE* 8(10): e0075637. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0075637>
- Lewin AC, Shamaï M and Novikov S (2023) Surviving in crisis mode: The effect of material hardship and social support on emotional wellbeing among people in poverty during covid-19. *Social Indicators Research* 165(1): 245–265. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-022-03011-7>
- Lutz P and Bitschnau M (2023) Misperceptions about immigration: Reviewing their nature, motivations and determinants. *British Journal of Political Science* 53(2): 674–689. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000084>
- McCright AM and Dunlap RE (2011) Cool dudes: The denial of climate change among conservative white males in the United States. *Global Environmental Change* 21(4): 1163–1172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.06.003>
- Maher PJ, Lüders A, Erisen E, et al. (2022) The many guises of populism and crisis: Introduction to the special issue on populism and global crises. *Political Psychology* 43(5): 819–826. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12840>
- Mancosu M, Vassallo S and Vezzoni C (2017) Believing in conspiracy theories: Evidence from an exploratory analysis of Italian survey data. *South European Society and Politics* 22(3): 327–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2017.1359894>
- Mancosu M, Vassallo S, Pedrazzani A, et al. (2025) SUSPECTS: Supply, demand, and communication of conspiracy theories in comparative perspective. *Italian Political Science* 20(1): 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.69101/IPS.2025.20.1.4>
- March L and Mudde C (2005) What's left of the radical left? The European radical left after 1989: Decline and mutation. *Comparative European Politics* 3(1): 23–49. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cmp.6110052>
- Marchlewska M, Cichocka A and Kossowska M (2018) Addicted to answers: Need for cognitive closure and the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48(2): 109–117. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2308>
- Mazeus H, Osmudsen M, Bang-Petersen M, et al. (2023) Information battleground: Conflict perceptions motivate the belief in and sharing of misinformation about the Adversary. *PLoS ONE* 18(3): e0282308. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0282308>
- Moffitt B (2015) How to perform crisis: A model for understanding the key role of crisis in contemporary populism. *Government and Opposition* 50(2): 189–217. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2014.13>
- Moffitt B and Tormey S (2014) Rethinking populism: Politics, mediatization and political style. *Political Studies* 62(2): 381–397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12032>
- Moise AD and Wang C (2025) Appeasement or solidarity? Uncovering the drivers of European public opinion on the EU's foreign policy. *European Union Politics* 26(2): 296–309. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165251318950>
- Mondon A and Winter A (2020) *Reactionary Democracy: How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream*. Verso.
- Mudde C (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Oleinik A (2024a) *A Comparative Analysis of Political and Media Discourses about Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*. Springer Nature.
- Oleinik A (2024b) Putting discourses about the war in Ukraine on a map: How different is everyone's story? *International Politics*. Epub ahead of print 2 April. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00564-x>
- Pellegrini V, Giacomantonio M, De Cristofaro V, et al. (2021) Is covid-19 a natural event? Covid-19 pandemic and conspiracy beliefs. *Personality and Individual Differences* 181: 111011. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.111011>
- Pierson P (2004) *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton University Press.
- Radnitz S (2023) Conspiracy theories and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *Russian Analytical Digest* 299: 11–14. <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000625073>
- Rooduijn M (2018) What unites the voter bases of populist parties? Comparing the electorates of 15 populist parties. *European Political Science Review* 10(3): 351–368. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773917000145>
- Rydgren J (2018) The radical right: An introduction. In: Rydgren J (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*. Oxford University Press, pp.1–16.
- Sælen HG and McCright AM (2025) What explains the relationship between populist radical right attitudes and opposition to climate policy? Structural vs. ideological factors. *Environmental Politics*. Epub ahead of print 2 September. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2553951>

- Saris WE and Sniderman PM (eds) (2004) *Studies in Public Opinion: Attitudes, Nonattitudes, Measurement Error, and Change*. Princeton University Press.
- Schöpfer C, Abatista AGF, Fuhrer J, et al. (2023) ‘Where there are villains, there will be heroes’: Belief in conspiracy theories as an existential tool to fulfill the need for meaning. *Personality and Individual Differences* 200: 111900. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2022.111900>
- Seabrooke L and Tsingou E (2019) Europe’s fast-and slow-burning crises. *Journal of European Public Policy* 26(3): 468–481.
- Spierings N and Zaslove A (2017) Gender, populist attitudes, and voting: Explaining the gender gap in voting for populist radical right and populist radical left parties. *West European Politics* 40(4): 821–847. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1287448>
- Spoon J, Hobolt SB and De Vries CE (2014) Going green: Explaining issue competition on the environment. *European Journal of Political Research* 53(2): 363–380. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12032>
- Stockemer D and Bordeleau J-N (2024) Understanding climate change conspiracy beliefs: A comparative outlook. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-162>
- Uscinski JE, Douglas K and Lewandowsky S (2017) Climate change conspiracy theories. In: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.328>
- van Kessel S (2015) Populist parties across Europe. In: Van Kessel S (ed.) *Populist Parties in Europe: Agents of Discontent?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.33–73.
- Van Prooijen J-W (2020) An existential threat model of conspiracy theories. *European Psychologist* 25(1): 16–25.
- Van Prooijen J-W and Douglas KM (2017) Conspiracy theories as part of history: The role of societal crisis situations. *Memory Studies* 10(3): 323–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017701615>
- Van Prooijen J-W, Cohen Rodrigues T, Bunzel C, et al. (2022) Populist gullibility: Conspiracy theories, news credibility, bullshit receptivity, and paranormal belief. *Political Psychology* 43(6): 1061–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12802>
- Van Prooijen J-W, Krouwel APM and Pollet T (2015) Political extremism predicts belief in conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6(5): 570–578.
- Vezzoni C, Dotti Sani GM, Chiesi AM, et al. (2022) Where does the coronavirus come from? On the mechanisms underlying the endorsement of conspiracy theories on the origin of SARS-CoV. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* 52(1): 51–65.
- Winter T, Riordan BC, Scarf D, et al. (2022) Conspiracy beliefs and distrust of science predict reluctance of vaccine uptake of politically right-wing citizens. *Vaccine* 40(12): 1896–1903. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2022.01.039>
- Wood MJ and Douglas KM (2019) Conspiracy theory psychology. individual differences, worldviews, and states of mind. In: Uscinski JE (ed.) *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*. Oxford University Press, pp.245–256.
- Yang Y, McCabe S and Hindman M (2024) Does Russian propaganda lead or follow? Topic coverage, user engagement, and RT and Sputnik’s agenda influence on us media. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 30(4): 956–979. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612241271074>
- Zilinsky J, Theocharis Y, Pradel F, et al. (2024) Justifying an invasion: When is disinformation successful? *Political Communication* 41(6): 965–986. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2024.2352483>

Author biographies

Andrea Pedrazzani is Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan. His research focuses on law making, executive-legislative relations, representation and political institutions. He has published in journals such as *European Journal of Political Research*, *West European Politics*, *European Political Science Review*, *Party Politics*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly* and *South European Society and Politics*.

Ugur Sumbul holds a PhD in Political Studies from the University of Milan (2024). His research interests lie at the intersection of political sociology and psychology, with a particular focus on resentful dynamics of public opinion concerning populism, Euroscepticism, conspiracy theories, and the radical right. He has previously served as a postdoctoral research assistant at the University of Milan, working on the supply and demand of conspiracy theories in Europe.