

**THE ‘CULTURE OF CONSENSUS’ UNDER STRAIN:
Quantifying Conflicts and Coalitions in the Council of the EU
in Times of Crises, 2015–2023**

By
Tamás László

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Public Policy

In partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts in Public Policy

Supervisor: Evelyne Hübscher

Vienna, Austria

2025

Copyright Notice

Copyright © Tamás László, 2025. The ‘Culture of Consensus’ under Strain: Quantifying Conflicts and Coalitions in the Council of the EU in Times of Crises, 2015–2023. This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives \(CC BY-NC-ND\) 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) license.



For bibliographic and reference purposes this thesis/dissertation should be referred to as:
László, Tamás. 2025. The ‘Culture of Consensus’ under Strain: Quantifying Conflicts and Coalitions in the Council of the EU in Times of Crises, 2015–2023. MA thesis, Department of Public Policy, Central European University, Vienna.

Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, **Tamás László**, candidate for the MA degree in Public Policy declare herewith that the present thesis titled “The ‘Culture of Consensus’ under Strain: Quantifying Conflicts and Coalitions in the Council of the EU in Times of Crises, 2015–2023” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography.

I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 09 June 2025

Tamás László

Abstract

This thesis investigates the dynamics of contestation within the Council of the European Union during a period marked by multiple crises between 2015 and 2023. It aims to bridge two main branches of literature: on the one hand, the internal decision-making processes of the Council, and on the other, the emerging body of research on EU crises. This approach provides new empirical insights into how crises affect voting behaviour and coalition formation in high-level intergovernmental policymaking. To test theoretical expectations, I rely on a freshly collected and previously unexplored dataset of 21,952 roll-call votes cast by member states across 784 legislative acts, gathered using web scraping techniques. The findings challenge the prevailing assumption of increasing polarisation during crises by demonstrating that the ‘culture of consensus’ largely endured despite the ‘polycrisis.’ However, there is evidence of increasing coalition-based contestation, predominantly driven by a group of Eastern member states adopting strategic approaches to form a blocking minority. Overall, the voting behaviour of member states reveals a stable East–West divide.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Evelyne, not only for her constant support and guidance throughout my research but also for her open-mindedness when discussing innovative ideas and patience as I worked toward conclusive findings. Her balance of academic rigour and personal warmth made this process genuinely enjoyable and strengthened my enthusiasm for social science research.

Among the most important skills I developed during the past year were quantitative research methods, which I partially relied on in this thesis. Therefore, I would also like to sincerely thank the professors who supported me on this learning journey by offering excellent courses as part of the Quantitative Policy Analysis specialisation: Ljubica Nedelkoska, Anand Murugesan, Mihály Fazekas, and Alexis Diamond. All of them contributed greatly to my personal and professional development and were incredibly patient and generous when sharing their knowledge and providing guidance. None of them ever left any of my questions unanswered, even though I constantly had plenty.

Any imperfections in this thesis are entirely my own, serving as a vivid reminder of the importance of remaining curious and committed to continuous learning.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
VOTING IN THE COUNCIL IN TIMES OF CRISIS	4
Voting and coalitions in the Council of the EU	4
When intergovernmental bargaining meets crisis: an understudied link	8
METHODOLOGY	13
Data and pre-processing steps	13
Limitations and mitigating strategies.....	15
Quantitative methods.....	18
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	20
A Macro-Level Approach to Transnational Dynamics in the Council	20
Analysis of the substance of contestations.....	22
Analysis of the strategy of contestations	27
A Sectoral Approach to Transnational Dynamics in the Council	35
Justice and Home Affairs.....	35
Environment.....	37
Agriculture and Fisheries.....	39
CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	41
REFERENCES.....	46

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Reallocation of legislative acts into policy domains	15
Figure 1. Legislative activity and contestation rates in the Council by presidency term, 2015–2023.....	22
<i>Figure 2. Legislative procedures and contestation by policy area, 2015–2023.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Figure 3. Share of dissenting votes by policy area and presidency, 2015–2023.....</i>	<i>25</i>
Figure 4. Heatmap of oppositional votes by country and policy domain, 2015–2023	26
Figure 5. Average size of dissenting coalitions by policy main, 2015–2023	27
Figure 6. Frequency of oppositional voting in the Council, 2015–2023	29
Figure 7. Size of dissenting coalitions in the Council across presidencies, 2015–2023.....	31
<i>Figure 8. Hierarchical clusters of joint oppositional voting in the Council, 2015–2023</i>	<i>32</i>
Figure 9. Network of countries most frequently contesting majority decisions together, 2015–2023.....	33
Figure 10. Multidimensional scaling projection of EU member states’ voting behaviour in the Council, 2015–2023.....	34
Figure 11. Frequency of oppositional voting in the Justice and Home Affairs domain, 2015–2023.....	36
Figure 12. Network of countries most frequently contesting majority decisions together in the Justice and Home Affairs policy domain, 2015–2023.....	37
Figure 13. Frequency of oppositional voting in the Environment domain, 2019–2023.....	38
Figure 14. Network of countries most frequently contesting majority decisions together in the Environment policy domain, 2019–2023.....	39
Figure 15. Frequency of oppositional voting in the Agriculture and Fisheries domain, 2015–2023.....	40

List of Abbreviations

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
EU	European Union
FI	Finland
FR	France
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom

Introduction

Over the past decades, the European integration has faced the most severe crisis since its establishment after the Second World War. A series of both internal and external, overlapping and interconnected crises have hit the EU with unprecedented intensity — among others, the migration and refugee crisis, Brexit, the crisis of Euro-Atlantic relations, the rule of law crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the climate crisis. Existential challenges have arisen at all levels of the EU's institutional structure and in nearly all policy sectors, threatening the very foundations of the European project. This period, beginning with the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, is widely referred to both by political leaders and scholars alike as a 'polycrisis' (Juncker 2016; Zeitlin et al. 2019). This phenomenon and its effects on the EU's development have gained rapidly expanding scholarly attention across various policy domains, timeframes, policy-making patterns, and institutional levels, growing into a sub-discipline in its own right (Cross 2017; Riddervold, Trondal, and Newsome 2021; Roos and Schade 2024).

However, one field of study seems to have remained largely unreflective of the consequences of EU crises, despite its evident connections to them: the quantitative approach to high-level intergovernmental decision-making in the EU. While scholars have employed various methodological strategies to examine member state voting behaviour in the most decisive EU legislative body – the intergovernmental Council of the EU (hereinafter referred to as the Council or Council of Ministers) – attempts drawing on findings stemming from the EU crisis literature remain relatively scarce.

Three key considerations render special importance to examining horizontal dynamics in the Council in the face of recent crises. First, the Council is widely considered to be the most influential legislative body of the EU (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006), where the most

important policy decisions, including those related to crisis management, are made. Second, while previous research has shown that, despite public discourse being dominated by transnational tensions, more than 96% of the votes cast by national governments in the Council are typically in favour of the majority decision (Pircher and Farjam 2021; Pourebrahimi, Hosli, and Roozendaal 2023, 309), one of the main theoretical expectations about crises is that they increase polarisation among member states, potentially threatening the long-prevailing ‘culture of consensus’ (Schelkle 2017). Third, examining member state voting behaviour in the Council provides insights into how national governments’ interests differ on sectoral issues, what kinds of coalitions they form with one another, and to what extent they consider themselves self-reliant or interdependent.

This thesis aims to bridge this gap by examining member state voting behaviour in the Council during a period of intense crisis pressure. To this end, I present a newly collected and previously uncharted dataset comprising the roll-call votes of all member states in the Council of Ministers between 2015 and 2023, totalling 21,952 individual votes cast by member states on 784 legislative acts. Since this dataset allows for policy domain-specific investigation of national governments’ voting records, I pay particular attention to three EU policy domains – Justice and Home Affairs, Environment, and Agriculture and Fisheries – that have been heavily affected by recent crises. These three domains are suitable for more detailed analysis because (1) during the period of interest, enough proposals were voted on in these policy fields to allow quantitative analysis, and (2) they represent decisions belonging to relatively clearly identifiable sectors, compared to broader and less distinguishable ones such as Finance or Economy.

In doing so, four research questions will guide my investigation:

- Does the ‘polycrisis’ bring increased conflict into the transnational dynamics of the EU? (RQ1)

- Do national governments form coalitions more frequently under crisis conditions?
(RQ2)
- Is there an increase in contestation in policy domains affected by crisis pressures?
(RQ3)
- Do governments adjust their coalition formation strategies based on their sectoral interests? (RQ4)

What follows contains four main sections. Section I provides a literature review of the most relevant studies examining member state voting behaviour in the Council, alongside the growing literature on EU crises. It also assesses the scarce attempts made so far to connect their findings. Section II describes the data collection method employed and the main characteristics of the data set, as well as limitations stemming from the nature of the data and mitigation strategies. Section III presents the analytical results and evaluates them in light of the research questions. Section IV summarises the main findings, referring back to the research goals, and identifies avenues for future research.

Voting in the Council in Times of Crises

In this section, I will review the most relevant findings from the two main areas of research that this thesis seeks to bridge. Additionally, I will briefly introduce the Council's role among EU institutions and outline its key features. First, I focus on the Council of the EU and the most important findings related to it; then, I turn to the main results reached by scholars studying contemporary EU crises, with the aim of formulating hypotheses related to the research questions introduced above.

Voting and coalitions in the Council of the EU

The academic study of how high-level policy decisions are made, and what kinds of considerations influence politicians' behaviour in democratic legislatures, has long been a prominent field within political science. One of the pioneers of this approach was Mayhew (1974), whose analysis of the US Congress moved beyond institutional procedures to examine the often rather self-interested motives of individual decision-makers. The behavioural revolution in the study of national legislatures also brought European parliaments under similar examination (see, for example, Blondel 1973). As the European Union has expanded both geographically and in its influence over everyday policies, increasing scholarly attention has been paid to analysing the internal dynamics of its legislative bodies (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007; Schendelen 1996).

The Council is widely regarded as the most influential EU legislative body (Westlake and Galloway 2004). Since the Treaty of Lisbon (hereafter referred to interchangeably as 'Lisbon' or 'the Treaty of Lisbon'),¹ the vast majority of EU law has been made through the so-called Ordinary Legislative Procedure in the framework of which the Council exercises its powers.

¹ Treaty of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community, 2007/C 306/01, European Union, 13 December 2007, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2007:306:TOC>

The European Commission holds the exclusive right to initiate legislative proposals, which are then discussed by the two co-legislators: the Council and the European Parliament. Proposals adopted by the required majority in both bodies become EU law. In this process, the Council represents the interests of the member states. It meets in ten different configurations based on domain-specific functional areas, each composed of national government ministers responsible for relevant policy field. The member state holding the rotating presidency of the Council, which changes every six months, also plays a crucial role in shaping the decision-making agenda and facilitating negotiations.

While further details of the Council's internal bureaucratic procedures fall outside the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that the long-prevailing 'culture of consensus' within the Council is at least partially the result of institutionalised procedures of deliberation (Heisenberg 2005). Before the final voting procedure among national ministers takes place, proposals are discussed in specialised expert bodies, the so-called Working Parties. If agreement is reached, the proposal moves to the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), which is composed of the member states' ambassadors in Brussels. If the required majority supports the adoption of the legislative act, it is discussed by the relevant configuration of the Council. For a proposal to be adopted, it must receive the support of the qualified majority² of member states.

Comprehensive descriptive studies of the Council were first published in the 1990s (see, for example, Westlake 1995). However, due to the bureaucratic nature of the Council's decision-making and its limited transparency, little was known about its internal dynamics until the early 2000s (Mattila 2004, 30). As the Council moved to increase the transparency of its procedures (Westlake 1995, 148–151), researchers began employing various methods to understand its

² The Treaty of Lisbon defined qualified majority as a double majority, a rule that entered into force on 1 November 2014. For a proposal to be adopted by the Council, it must be supported by at least 55% of member states, representing at least 65% of the EU population (Van Aken 2012). A blocking minority requires at least four member states representing more than 35% of participating member states plus one, which can prevent the adoption of a proposal.

intergovernmental legislative dynamics more precisely. While some scholars adopted interview-based qualitative approaches (Lewis 2008; Kaeding and Selck 2005), quantitative studies examining national governments' voting behaviour became increasingly prevalent in this field.

Most of the quantitative studies conducted so far have focused on Council voting patterns, primarily aiming to: (1) identify explanatory variables that account for member state voting behaviour (Bailer, Mattila, and Schneider 2015; Hosli, Mattila, and Uriot 2011; Mattila 2004; Van Gruisen, Vangerven, and Crombez 2019); (2) assess the extent and strength of the Council's 'consensus culture' (Hagemann 2007; Heisenberg 2005; Mattila and Lane 2001); and (3) uncover tensions and (dissenting) coalitions among national governments (Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse 2007; Kaeding and Selck 2005; Mattila 2008; 2009; Plechanovová 2011; Van Aken 2012).

Regarding the strength of the 'culture of consensus', most studies have concluded that despite the qualified majority requirement for the adoption of legislative acts, the vast majority of cases were decided by consensus (Häge 2013; Thomson 2009; Van Aken 2012). For example, Häge finds that around 80% of the decisions made in the Council between 1994 and 2006 were adopted by consensus (Häge 2013, 484), while Van Aken (2012, 42) reports an even higher rate, 90% for the period between 1995 and 2010, remaining consistent even after the 2004 enlargement.

Studies investigating explanatory variables of member state voting behaviour can be further divided into three main groups. First, early research adopted a geographical–geopolitical approach to identifying cleavages between member states. For instance, Mattila and Lane (2001) found that larger member states were more likely to vote against the majority, while also identifying a North–South divide in governments' voting behaviour. Other studies concluded that the voting patterns of older member states and those that joined in the 2004

enlargement showed substantial differences (Hosli, Mattila, and Uriot 2011). Second, another group of studies has found that relatively rough economic factors – such as sectoral employment rates, GDP per capita, and the volume of financial contributions to the EU budget – explain governments’ voting behaviour more precisely (Bailer, Mattila, and Schneider 2015; Schneider and Baltz 2007). A third branch of research examined the effect of political–ideological affiliation of governments and their domestic oppositions on voting behaviour (Mattila 2004; Pircher and Farjam 2021; Hagemann and Høyland 2008). Among these researchers, Mattila (2004) found that right-wing governments voted more frequently against proposals supported by the majority than left-wing ones, while Pircher and Farjam (2021) concluded that both Eurosceptic politicisation at the national level and the left–right ideological positions of governments and opposition parties help explain member states’ voting behaviour across different policy domains.

These findings are essential to understanding the general dynamics of decision-making in the Council. However, in contrast to these approaches, which aim to identify explanatory factors behind government voting behaviour, this thesis investigates changes in transnational polarisation within the Council: specifically, the rates of contestation of majority decisions, both overall and by policy sector. Furthermore, it examines shifts in coalition patterns and coalition composition under the conditions of ‘polycrisis’.

Studies that have investigated dissenting coalitions in the Council, that is, coalitions comprising member states jointly voting against majority decisions, are especially useful in assessing contemporary trends (see more detailed references to these studies in the section ‘Discussion of the Results’). These findings reveal a picture of remarkable change over time. Although relatively rarely noted in the literature, Mattila (2009) and Hayes-Renshaw et al. (2006) found that until the mid-2000s, a group of Nordic countries formed a stable dissenting coalition, with Sweden casting oppositional votes most frequently. From the end of this period until the mid-

2010s, the United Kingdom became most consistently opposed to decisions in the Council, with Ireland and Denmark joining it in a coalition of an ad hoc nature (Pircher and Farjam 2021). The most recent development identified in the literature is the formation of a coalition by a small number of Eastern member states, the Visegrad Group, consisting of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, shortly after the beginning of the 2015 refugee crisis (Pircher and Farjam 2021, 11).

To date, only a limited number of recent studies have closely examined the Council's internal dynamics specifically in the context of the various crisis pressures that have confronted the EU, representing the most significant institutional challenges over the past two decades. These crises have placed unprecedented strain on decision-making processes within the Council. In the following section, I provide a review of the most relevant and insightful literature on EU crises, drawing on their findings to develop hypotheses for the following sections.

When intergovernmental bargaining meets crisis: an understudied link

The assumption that domain-level or sectoral shocks have a direct effect on decision-making in the Council is more or less explicitly acknowledged throughout the literature. Numerous studies have examined Council voting records using a sectoral approach, demonstrating that attention to individual policy areas, and not only the overall volume of legislative processes, is essential (Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse 2007, 35). Other research also found that economic factors (Bailer, Mattila, and Schneider 2015) and the political characteristics of member states (Pircher and Farjam 2021) explain voting behaviour to significantly different extents across policy domains, further highlighting the importance of adopting a domain-specific perspective. However, while it is widely recognised that the 'polycrisis' has posed a major challenge to the EU and transformed its institutions and decision-making processes (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter 2015; Vollaard 2018), attempts to integrate the insights from

the literature on EU crises into the study of the Council's decision-making patterns have been relatively scarce.

There are two widely recognised aspects regarding the effect of multiple overlapping and interconnected crises on intergovernmental decision-making. First, crises are expected to expose member states to asymmetrical burdens of various kinds, but predominantly economic stress, which contributes to increasing transnational tensions and disparities that manifest in intergovernmental bargaining (Genovese and Schneider 2020; Wasserfallen et al. 2019). Second, as a consequence of these crisis pressures, political tensions intensify at the member-state level (Zürn 2016; de Wilde and Lord 2016), typically leading to changes in voter behaviour and/or the rise of Euroscepticism, which places direct pressure on national governments to change their positions on major policy issues (Hobolt and Wratil 2020; Wratil and Hobolt 2019).

These findings lead to the assumption that, in times of strong crises pressures, transnational dissent and conflict increase. Applying this to the focus of this thesis, concerning RQ1, I expect the overall rates of contestation of the Council's decisions to rise steadily throughout the entire period of interest (H1). Since crisis pressures are assumed to contribute to polarisation among member states and impose asymmetrical burdens on national governments, I further expect that coalition formation in the Council's decision-making becomes more frequent. Accordingly, my second hypothesis, relating RQ2, is that the formation of dissenting coalitions will become more frequent compared to cases when single member states oppose legislative acts (H2).

To formulate domain-specific assumptions relating to my research questions, a deeper engagement with the literature is required, particularly that which has drawn more explicit connections between crises and decision-making dynamics within the Council of the EU. I identified three such contributions by Roos (2019), Pircher and Farjam (2021), and Bojar and Kriesi (2023). Roos (2019) specifically investigated the effects of the asylum and border crisis

and observed that it has brought political conflict within EU institutions to the forefront. In response, different groups of countries began coordinating their behaviour more closely in the Council, indicating that the crisis had direct influence on voting patterns in the Justice and Home Affairs domain. Pircher and Farjam (2021), meanwhile, argued that the post-Lisbon era has seen increased politicisation in national politics, driven by constant crisis pressures, which has filtered into the Council's legislative procedures, making political factors key explanatory variables for member states' voting behaviour. While the latter authors establish a direct theoretical link between crisis pressures and decision-making dynamics in the Council, they do not adopt a more nuanced approach to how different crises affect governments' voting behaviour in distinct ways across various policy domains.

So far, Bojar and Kriesi (2023) offered the most sophisticated approach to individual crises' impacts on different policy domains, analysing the implications of the refugee and COVID-19 crises for the Council's internal dynamics. Building on Ferrara and Kriesi's (2022) theoretical framework, they argue that two factors mainly determine the 'decision-making scenarios' that apply when the Council engages in crisis management. The first factor is 'policy heritage', referring to the vertical division of power between supranational actors and member states. They suggest that policy areas where the EU holds strong competences are more resilient to crisis pressures, as supranational institutions use their authority to implement collective crisis management measures, even when polarisation prevails among member states. However, sectors lacking strong EU competencies are more vulnerable when member states face asymmetrical burdens due to crises. The second factor influencing transnational crisis management dynamics is the spatial distribution of crisis pressures. Ferrara and Kriesi (2022) argue that crises imposing asymmetrical burdens on member states tend to lead to an increase in polarisation, whereas symmetrical crisis pressures create interdependence among EU countries, paving the way to close transnational cooperation and collective crisis management.

According to this theory, the combination of the strength of supranational capacities and the nature of crisis pressures leads to different types of crisis management dynamics in EU institutions and, therefore, has the potential to be converted into empirical expectations.

Relying on these findings, I now turn to the policy domains and their associated crises identified in the introduction as suitable for empirical analysis: namely, the fields of Justice and Home Affairs, Environment, and Agriculture and Fisheries.

The domain of Justice and Home Affairs, hit by the refugee crisis in 2015, closely fits the criteria for low supranational capacity as already identified by Ferrara and Kriesi (2022, 1361–1363). Since both EU competence and institutional resources are at low levels in this area, the potential for collective crisis management was highly dependent on the outcomes of transnational bargaining. However, as the spatial character of the crisis was also marked by strong asymmetry, I expect, concerning RQ3, that the contestation rate in the policy domain of Justice and Home Affairs shows a consistently growing trend starting in 2015 (H3).

In the field of Environment policy, although the symptoms of the climate crisis have long been present, it was only in February 2019 that the Council of the EU characterised it as “a direct and existential threat, which will spare no country” (Consilium 2019). This framing of the crisis recognises the symmetrical nature of the burdens placed directly on the policy domain of Environment. On the other hand, the EU’s supranational competences in this field remain limited (Siddi 2020). Thus, while crisis management is expected to depend on transnational fora, the interdependence of member states suggests that governments would choose to collaborate closely (Ferrara and Kriesi 2022). Therefore, in the policy domain of Environment, I expect a high share of consensual legislative decisions and a low level of contestation (H4).

Finally, the domain of Agriculture and Fisheries was not hit by a single, discrete crisis but has nonetheless been affected by a series of overlapping ones. At the same time, it remains one of

the most integrated areas of EU activity, characterised by strong supranational capacities, and redistributive powers (Papadopoulos 2015), that have the potential for collective measure even in times of increasing polarisation at the national level. Therefore, I expect the legislative processes in the field of Agriculture and Fisheries to be highly consensual, with low rates of contestation (H5).

Methodology

This section describes the data source containing the final voting results of the Council of the EU, the data collection method used to prepare a large volume of legislative decisions for analysis, and the pre-processing steps taken to enable substantive inferences.

Data and pre-processing steps

The data set used in this thesis comprises the most important characteristics of all ordinary legislative processes during which the Council explicitly voted on proposals and adopted legislation under the qualified majority rule from January 2015 to December 2023. This adds up to a total of 21,952 individual votes cast by member states on 784 legislative acts.

As part of a significant step towards improved transparency, the Council of the EU (2025) made all votes recorded by national governments available in a public register since December 2009. Although the database can be filtered on the website, a dataset including large volumes of legislative procedures cannot be accessed directly. Therefore, I employed a web scraping approach using Python. Specifically, I automated data extraction from the public register for the period between 2015 and 2023 using the Selenium library to navigate through paginated results and retrieve full HTML content. I then parsed the HTML pages, relying on the library BeautifulSoup to extract relevant metadata for each legislative act. After carrying out additional cleaning and pre-processing steps on the raw data using an R script, I transformed the resulting data into a format ready for analysis. The resulting dataset contains the voting records of all member states on all legislative acts – including, among others, regulations, directives, decisions, and positions – along with the date of each vote, the policy domain of each legislative act as identified in the Council’s public register, the Council presidency in which the voting procedure took place and the member state holding the presidency at the time.

Member states' positions on legislative acts can take four different forms: (1) votes in favour, (2) abstentions, (3) votes against, and (4) non-participation. Under the high threshold of the qualified majority rule, abstentions have practically the same effect as votes against, differing only in their symbolic or diplomatic tone. Therefore, in the dataset, I group abstentions and votes against under the same category and refer to them collectively as dissenting or oppositional votes in the analysis. Non-participation appears in the dataset only when member states have negotiated opt-outs from specific areas of EU legislation and are thus not involved in those legislative decisions. There are 155 such cases of non-participation out of a total of 21,952 votes, all cast by three member states: the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark.

Since the Council's classification of legislative procedures into policy areas resulted in a high number of domains, some with a low number of proposals that weakened interpretability, I regrouped certain domains into broader categories, as illustrated by Table 1. This was done by reviewing the titles and content of legislative procedures to ensure that closely related policy domains were combined organically. I avoided merging domains that showed substantially different levels of contestation without clear content similarities. Moreover, policy areas with fewer than 10 cases between 2015 and 2023, and those that could not be meaningfully merged into larger groups without remaining below this threshold, were merged into the category "Others".

Table 1. Reallocation of legislative acts into policy domains

Regrouped policy areas	Council reference categories
Justice and Home Affairs	Justice and Home Affairs
Institutional	Institutional
Economy	Economy
Health	Health
Environment	Environment
Energy	Energy
Foreign Affairs	Foreign Affairs
Transport and Telecommunications	Transport
	Telecommunications
Finances and Budget	Finances
Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Industry	Internal market
	Consumer Affairs
	Industry
Agriculture and Fisheries	Agriculture
	Fisheries
Employment and Social Policy	Employment
	Social Policy
Others	Others
	Youth
	Education
	Culture
	Research
	Space

Limitations and mitigating strategies

I identified four key limitations to the resulting data set described above that place both the data and the resulting inferences into a more nuanced context. In what follows, I outline each of these limitations and discuss interpretative strategies or theoretical considerations that help to mitigate their significance.

First, the Council's public register, serving as the primary data source, only contains legislative procedures that resulted in the adoption of legislative proposals and excludes cases where a proposal failed to gather the required majority under the qualified majority system. Although this has been identified as a limitation by several authors (see, for example, Mattila 2008, 26; Pircher and Farjam 2021, 7), I believe that the nature and informal rules of decision-making in the Council reduce the significance of this concern. The reason is the risk-averse strategy of the member states holding the presidency, who have the authority to shape the voting agenda

(Van Gruisen, Vangerven, and Crombez 2019). In practice, due to the lengthy process leading up to a formal vote in the Council, the presiding minister is likely to be well informed about the key debates, points of contention, and member states likely to oppose a given proposal even before the actual vote takes place. Since the effectiveness of a presidency is typically assessed by the number of proposals adopted, there is a strong incentive to avoid bringing forward highly controversial initiatives that are likely to fail. As a result, contrary to Mattila's assumption (2004, 31) regarding a downward bias in the recorded level of dissent, I argue that formal votes that fail to achieve a qualified majority – and are therefore not included in the dataset – are very rare.

However, this characteristic of the data obtained from the Council's register poses another methodological challenge, specifically regarding legislative procedures requiring unanimity. In these cases, a single oppositional vote would lead to the failure of the proposal and, as a result, its exclusion from the public register. Including such procedures in the analysis would therefore distort the perception of dissent in the Council by skewing the data toward greater consensus. For this reason, I excluded all procedures that required unanimity from the dataset. During the period between 2015 and 2023, these cases accounted for approximately 7.4% of all legislative procedures, most of which concerned financial decisions. The remaining 92.6% of cases were conducted under the qualified majority rule.

Second, due to the bureaucratic complexity and lengthy nature of the EU's legislative process, both within the Council and across EU institutions, horizontal conflicts between member states may not be immediately reflected in voting outcomes. As a result, the analysis requires a degree of open-mindedness and attentiveness to broader patterns rather than isolated events. With this in mind, I use Council presidencies as the unit of empirical analysis. These half-year cycles serve as a more organic time frame that better captures evolving dynamics, rather than focusing on a small set of individual proposals. This approach is also more prevalently used in the

literature, in contrast to annual aggregation, which potentially obscures more nuanced trends and reduces the likelihood of detecting emerging patterns in member state behaviour.

Third, due to the complexity of legislative proposals and the strategic bargaining behaviour of member states, it is not empirically possible to isolate the effects of individual horizontal conflicts within the larger trends. As Mattila and Lane (2001) note, member states often form coalitions by linking their votes or may oppose a proposal as a negotiation tactic to influence outcomes on other legislative acts. This once again highlights the importance of analysing aggregated data, which provides a more robust picture of institutional dynamics and overall member state preferences.

One common strategy in the literature is to examine the full dataset without distinguishing between policy domains in order to identify broader dissenting coalitions within the EU (see, for example, Mattila 2004; 2009; Pourebrahimi, Hosli, and Roozendaal 2023).

In the approach adopted in this thesis, policy domains are of primary importance, as they provide the basis for linking specific crises to observable trends in the policy areas most directly affected. This approach, however, rests on a relatively strong assumption, the roots of which have been discussed in the literature review. To state this plainly, the following analysis assumes that consistent patterns of contestation within specific policy domains, particularly those directly affected by ongoing crises, are at least partially driven by the pressures and dynamics induced by those crises.

Fourth, member states that chose to refrain from recording their opposition to the majority can still express their dissent by issuing formal country statements, which are not included in this dataset. These statements allow governments to voice concerns or clarify their position without blocking the adoption of a legislative act.

Excluding such statements helps avoid two significant methodological issues: (1) country statements do not necessarily reflect opposition, given their varied content and tone, therefore, they are difficult to interpret and quantify reliably; and (2) their publication is uneven across policy areas, in contrast to formal votes, which provide a more standardized and comparable measure of member state preferences. However, the role of country statements in Council decision-making is not entirely unexplored. Several studies have developed approaches to analyse their content and implications (see, for example, Arregui and Thomson 2014; Hagemann 2007; Hagemann, Bailer, and Herzog 2019). Nevertheless, the exclusion of country statements enables this analysis to focus on the most explicit and consequential forms of contestation, supporting a clearer examination of horizontal tensions in Council decision-making.

Quantitative methods

To address the research questions, I employ several quantitative techniques. The most straightforward among these is the use of descriptive statistical methods, which involve filtering and segmenting the data to capture relevant patterns in legislative contestation rates. These methods allow for a general exploration of the data and help identify broad trends in legislative behaviour within the Council. The interpretation of these descriptive findings is often intuitive, especially when supported by appropriate visualisations such as bar charts, line graphs, geographical maps, and heatmaps. These tools facilitate a clearer understanding of the frequency, distribution, and sectoral variation of oppositional voting across time and member states, and directly contribute to answering some of the research questions.

I use hierarchical cluster analysis to identify and visualise groups of member states based on how frequently they cast dissenting votes together. This method calculates pairwise dissimilarities and iteratively merges the most similar clusters. The most typical visualisation

technique for this method is the dendrogram. Due to the binary nature of the member state positions on legislative acts (they can be easily simplified into two categories: votes in favour and against), this method has existing applications in the literature on coalition patterns in the Council (see, for example, Hayes-Renshaw, Van Aken, and Wallace 2006). The main contribution of cluster analysis in this context is that it helps break down complex coalition and alignment patterns into simple member state groups.

I employ a Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) technique to create an intuitively interpretable visual representation of the complex relationships in member states' voting behaviour, based on aggregated voting records. The resulting two-dimensional, almost roadmap-like figure helps visualise the relative similarities and distances between member states, offering insights into patterns of coalition formation and conflict. The MDS technique is especially helpful for this purpose, as it captures and displays complex relational data in a relatively simple spatial format (Kruskal and Wish 1978). The application of this method already has roots in the analysis of coalition patterns within EU institutions (see, for example, Naurin and Lindahl 2008; König and Pöter 2001; Thomson, Boerefijn, and Stokman 2004).

Finally, I rely on Social Network Analysis (Wasserman and Faust 1994) to identify member states that most frequently opposed majority decisions in the Council together. I use this technique on both the aggregated and sectoral data to uncover the core members of dissenting coalitions. While this method is prevalently used in the social sciences, particularly in sociology and political science, and especially in the study of legislative behaviour (see, for example, Morales-Bader et al. 2023; Fowler 2006), I know of no previous attempt to apply it in the context of to member state voting records in the Council.

Results and Discussion

In this section, I present the results of the quantitative approach to internal dynamics of the Council, relying on the data described in the previous section. I do this in two main parts, as required by the research questions. First, I provide a macro-level analysis of the Council of the EU's legislative processes using aggregated data. This allows for the identification of general patterns of contestation and coalition formation across time. In the second part, I adopt a sectoral perspective by clustering the data into specific policy domains. This enables a closer examination of how crisis pressures may have influenced transnational dynamics differently across the policy domains of the Justice and Home Affairs, Environment, and Agriculture and Fisheries.

A Macro-Level Approach to Transnational Dynamics in the Council

As guided by the research questions, I present the results on the aggregated voting records of the Council in two sub-sections. First, I examine the substance of oppositional voting in the Council, meaning a comparison across policy domains of legislative procedures. Second, I explore the strategy of contestation, focusing on patterns of coalition formation and the roles different member states play in shaping transnational dynamics.

Between 2015 and 2023, the Council explicitly voted on 784 legislative acts, among which 274 procedures were contested, that is, at least one member state recorded a vote against the adoption of the proposal or abstained. The overall contestation rate, therefore, amounted to 35%. This means a remarkable increase compared to the 16% contested decisions that studies found in the pre-Lisbon era (Bailer, Mattila, and Schneider 2015), while it is almost identical to the 36% contestation rate that Pircher and Farjam (2021) reported for the period between 2010 and 2019. Thus, although the share of explicitly contested legislative procedures between

2015 and 2023 ranged from 5.6% to 71.4% across presidencies, the general multi-year trend seems to be relatively consistent after the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

While, as illustrated in Figure 1, there is no overall trend of increasing contestation during this period, several tension-intensive phases can be identified, particularly the Luxembourg Presidency (second half of 2015), the Bulgarian Presidency (first half of 2018), the Finnish Presidency (second half of 2019), and the Swedish Presidency (first half of 2023), which were marked by especially high levels of contestation. In contrast, the period between 2020 and 2022, beginning with the Croatian Presidency and ending with the Spanish Presidency, was marked by a greater prevalence of consensus. This suggests that, although crises can contribute to waves of tension among member states, they do not necessarily manifest immediately in the lengthy EU legislative process. Therefore, it can be concluded that the assumption made in H1 does not hold. While there is a possibility that transnational tensions intensify as a result of growing crisis pressures, as suggested by the theoretical literature, and they affect certain policy domains and/or proposals, this trend does not hold when it comes to the overall ‘culture of consensus’. Furthermore, the data suggest that the overall rate of consensual decision-making in the Council of Ministers is untouched by contemporary crises.

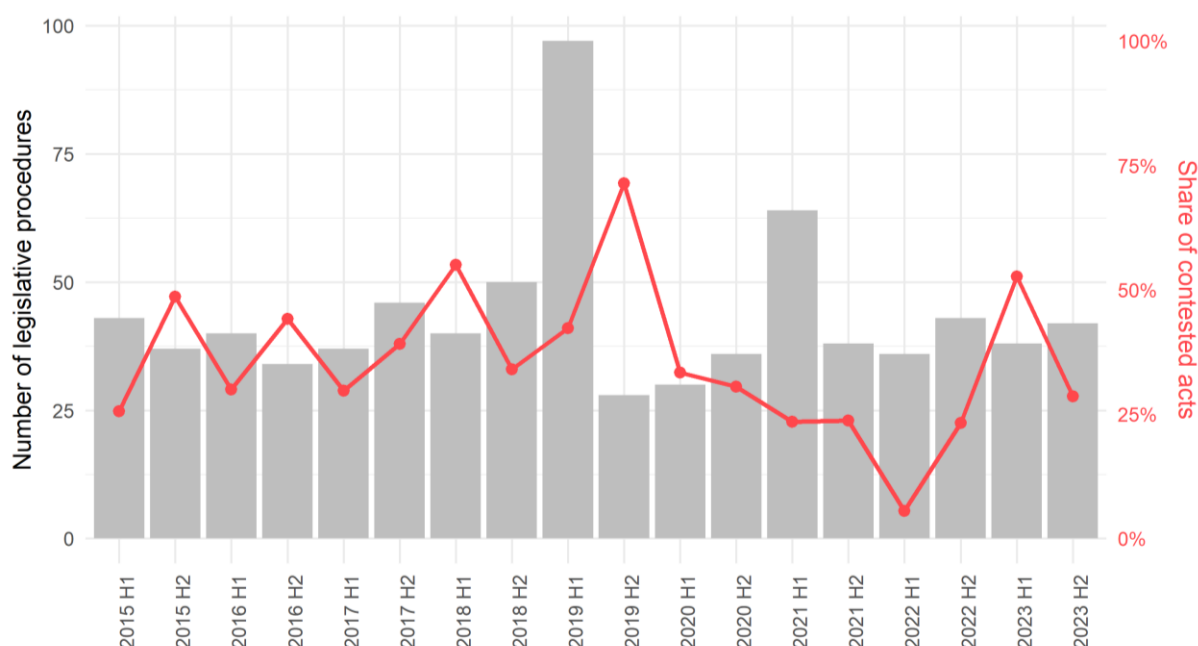


Figure 1. Legislative activity and contestation rates in the Council by presidency term, 2015–2023

Analysis of the substance of contestations

In this subsection, I examine the substantive dimensions of oppositional voting in the Council by comparing contestation rates across policy domains. The aim is to identify whether certain sectors are more prone to dissent than others and how these patterns evolve over time.

As illustrated in Figure 2, in the period between 2015 and 2023, the highest levels of contestation occurred in the policy domains of Employment and Social Policy, and Environment, where an unprecedented share, nearly two-thirds of all legislative acts, were contested. This indicates, on the one hand, a concentration of oppositional votes in a small number of policy domains, and on the other, a shift in the most contested fields compared to previous periods. While studies in the pre-Lisbon era identified Agriculture, the Internal Market, and Transport as the most contested areas (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006, 56; Van Aken 2012, 35), Pircher and Farjam (2021) reported that during the 2010–2019 period, Environment topped the list with a contestation rate of 52%.

Between 2015 and 2023, around one-third of legislative acts were contested in the domains of Justice and Home Affairs, Transport and Telecommunications, and Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Industry. The contestation rates in these fields show relative stability throughout the post-Lisbon era. A notable shift can therefore be observed, with the climate and energy crisis gaining prominence and the European Commission's increased activism in the crisis management process, making Environment the most contested domain. This is further reinforced by the growing importance of energy policy following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which made it a central area of EU-level crisis management. While further reflection is needed after the investigation of sector-specific data, these results suggest that, contrary to the theoretical expectations summarised in H4, Environment has become one of the most contested policy fields among member state representatives.

The high level of contestation in Employment and Social Policy potentially reflects the impact of recent economic shocks and the cost-of-living crisis. These developments have pushed the EU's legislative activity into policy fields where the EU holds only coordinating or shared competences under the Treaties. Yet, despite dissent from some member states, a stable qualified majority continues to support further coordination in these domains. As Pircher and Farjam (2021) argue, this highlights that policy-making and contestation at the EU level are more flexible and less path-dependent than previously assumed (Hayes-Renshaw et al. 2006, 184).

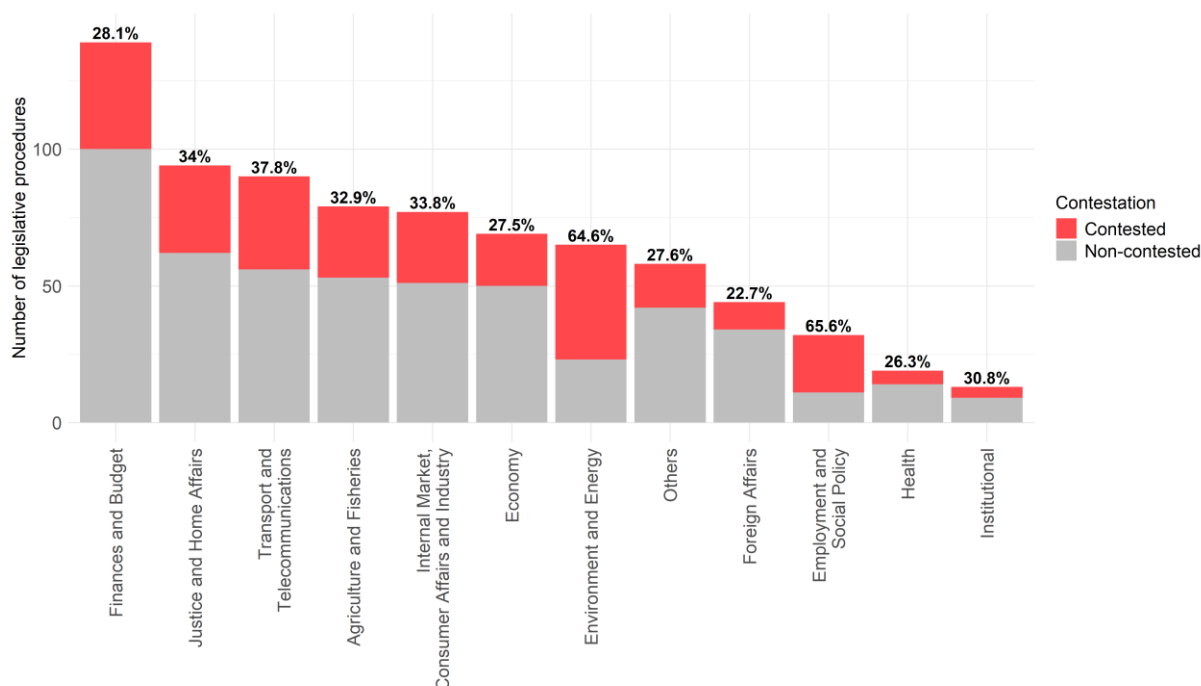


Figure 2. Legislative procedures and contestation by policy area, 2015–2023

A more detailed examination of the trends between 2015 and 2023 reveals that the policy domain of Agriculture and Fisheries, which was among the most contested areas in the pre-Lisbon era, experienced a gradual decline in divisiveness, as shown by Figure 3. This result seems to support H5, which reflects the theoretical assumption that legislation in policy domains characterised by strong supranational capacity remains highly consensual even under conditions of rising tension between member states. In contrast, a clear rising trend in contestation can be seen in the domains of Employment and Social Policy, and Justice and Home Affairs. While the trend is not entirely consistent across presidencies, these results are in line with the expectation that the Justice and Home Affairs domain, which is characterised by low levels of supranational capacity and high levels of spatial asymmetry, typically exhibits a decline in consensual decision-making when hit by crisis. Meanwhile, the policy field of Environment consistently experienced a high level of contestation throughout the entire period. While this still does not suggest that H4 holds, it paints a more nuanced picture: while

Environment consistently remains a highly contested domain, it did not become so in parallel with becoming a focus area of the EU's legislative activity.

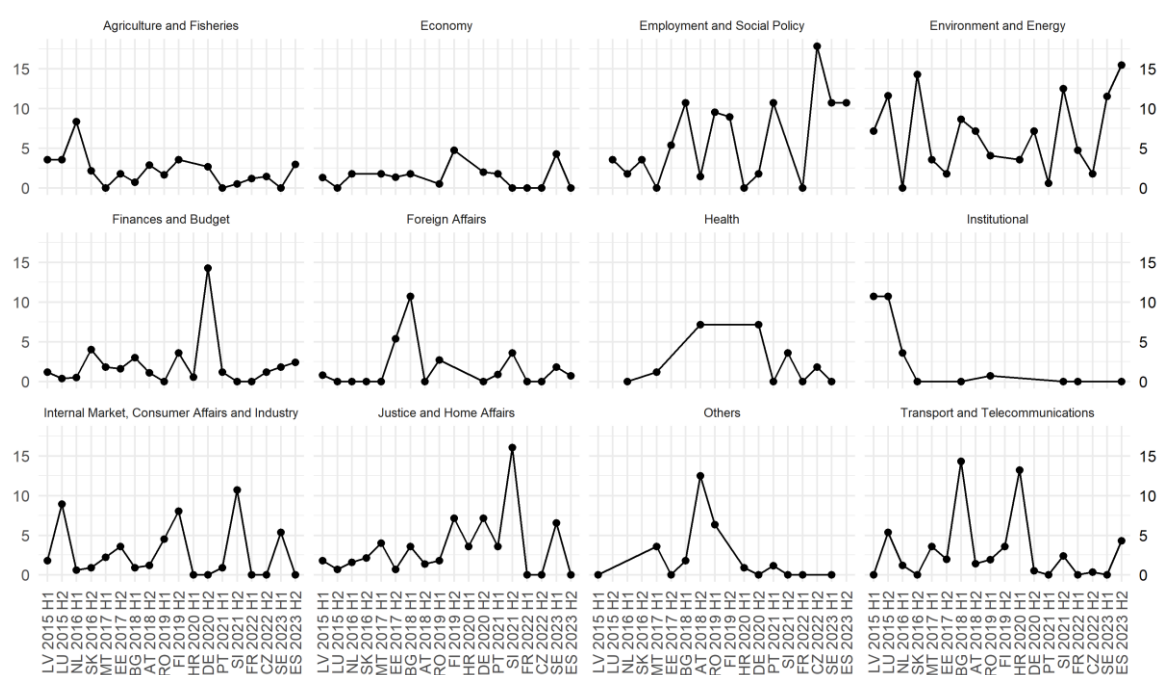


Figure 3. Share of dissenting votes by policy area and presidency, 2015–2023

When considering differences between member states, the data suggest that the level of opposition is highest in the United Kingdom, even though its representatives only participated in the decisions of the Council of Ministers until January 2020. However, in the two most contested policy areas, the greatest number of oppositional votes was cast by a group of Eastern member states. Similar to the 2010–2019 period, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria opposed majority decisions most frequently on environmental and energy issues, closely followed by Slovakia. Regarding employment and social policy, Hungary cast the most dissenting votes, followed by Poland and the United Kingdom. In the field of Justice and Home Affairs, Austria and Poland recorded the highest number of oppositional votes, with Hungary and the United Kingdom following closely. Austria and Germany also rank high in opposing legislative acts in the Justice and Home Affairs domain, as well as legislative acts concerning the internal market, consumer affairs, and industry domains. Interestingly, in the traditionally more

contested domain of agriculture and fisheries, Western member states such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany, alongside Hungary and Latvia, were among those casting the most oppositional votes.



Figure 4. Heatmap of oppositional votes by country and policy domain, 2015–2023

Note: Colours are normalised within each policy area, with green indicating below-average dissent, white representing average levels, and red showing above-average dissent. Darker shades of red and green indicate stronger deviations from the average.

Contestation in different policy areas is also associated with different oppositional strategies employed by national governments. As Figure 5 illustrates, the domains of Environment and Employment and Social Policy are not only the most contested areas, but also those in which contestation typically involves a larger dissenting coalition of member states. On average, around three member states dissent jointly when opposition occurs in these domains. In

contrast, in the fields of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Economy, Health, and Agriculture and Fisheries, it is quite common for opposition to majority decisions to come from single, isolated member states. Therefore, it can be concluded that the question posed by RQ4 can be answered positively: national governments do apply different oppositional strategies across different policy domains. While this matter requires further academic attention, there seems to be a positive relation between contestation rates of policy domains and the average size of dissenting coalitions. If confirmed, this would mean that in highly contested policy domains, it is typically not a single member state opposing majority decisions, but coalitions relatively large in size.

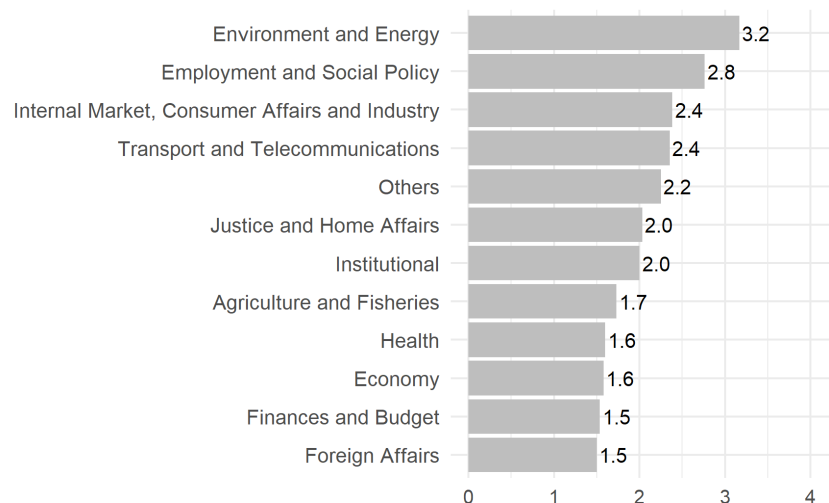


Figure 5. Average size of dissenting coalitions by policy main, 2015–2023

Analysis of the strategy of contestations

This subsection explores how member states engage strategically in contesting majority decisions within the Council. Rather than opposing legislation individually, governments typically seek to avoid isolation by aligning with others to form dissenting coalitions (Mattila 2009). Analysing these coalition patterns and the roles played by individual member states

offers insight into the broader transnational dynamics underpinning oppositional behaviour in the Council.

Looking at dissenting vote frequency at the member state level, Figure 6 below illustrates how patterns of opposition evolved during the period of interest. Over the entire 2015–2023 period, the United Kingdom had the highest rate of contestation, continuing a trend that began in the mid-2000s, when it overtook a group of northern member states, including Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands (Mattila 2009; Hayes-Renshaw et al. 2006).

A relatively new pattern of contestation, first noted by Pircher and Farjam (2021), is the shift from Northern to Eastern member states in the highest numbers of dissenting votes cast. While northern countries still had high levels of contestation until the mid-2010s, the 2015 refugee crisis marked a turning point, after which oppositional voting began to concentrate among the Visegrad Group. As shown in Figure x, until 2019, several Western European member states, most notably Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium, also contested Council decisions with relatively high frequency.

Between 2019 and 2023, however, the dominance of a small number of Eastern member states in dissenting votes became even more pronounced. In this period, Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria together cast more than one-third of all dissenting votes. In contrast, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria showed significantly lower levels of contestation compared to the first nine presidency terms of the period of interest. Notably, there was also an increase in dissenting votes from the Baltic states and Sweden in the latter half of the period.

Meanwhile, Southern European countries exhibited remarkably low levels of opposition, a trend that declined even further in the second nine presidency terms. The developments also challenge Mattila's (2004) earlier conclusion, drawn based on data from the late 1990s, that

larger member states are more likely to oppose majority decisions, as the largest four member states (excluding the UK) cast less than 1% of all oppositional votes during the 2015–2023 period.

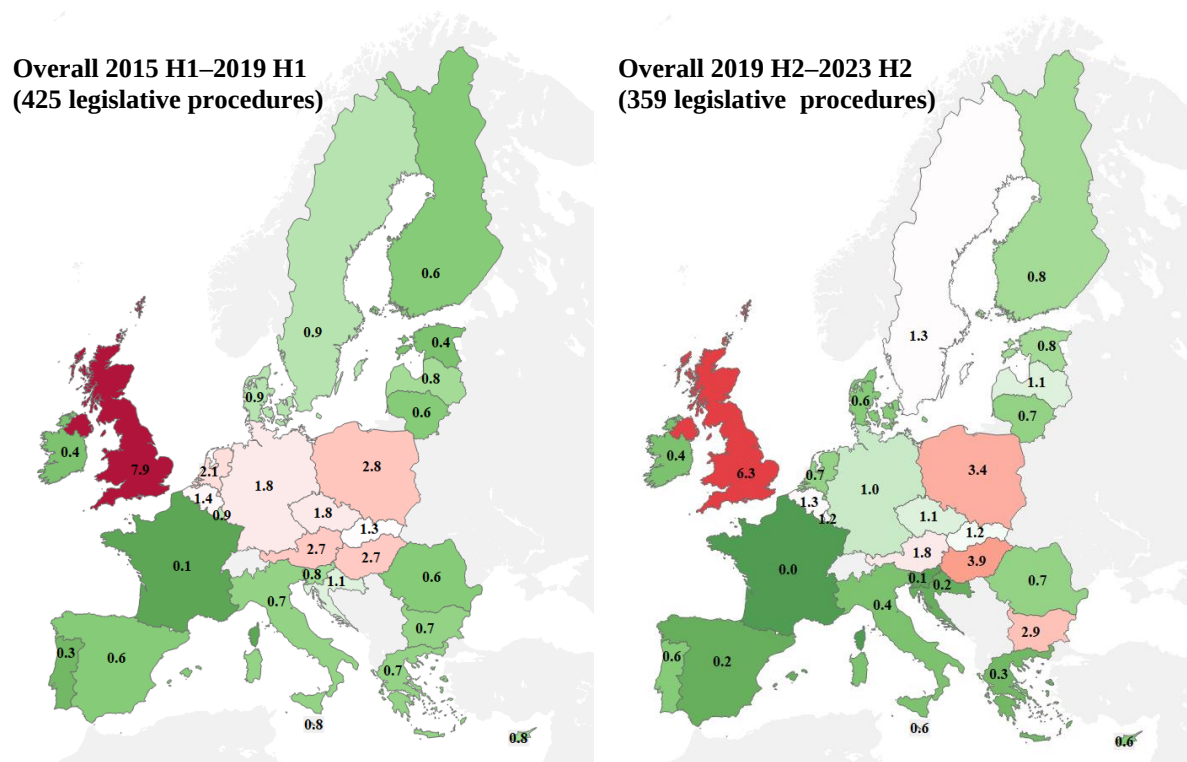


Figure 6. Frequency of oppositional voting in the Council, 2015–2023

Note: The darker the shade of green used to mark a country, the lower its rate of dissenting votes. White indicates values close to the average, while red highlights countries where dissenting votes occur more frequently than average.

When looking beyond sheer dissenting frequencies and examining national governments' dissenting strategies, we can observe that although the general pattern of frequent single-member-state opposition persisted during the 2015–2023 period, with 54% of all contestations involving only one dissenting member state, a closer look at dissenting coalitions across Council presidencies reveals a decreasing trend in isolated contestations. As Figure 7 below shows, dissenting coalitions of all sizes became more frequent over time, suggesting that after 2017, governments increasingly adopted more strategic and coordinated approaches to opposing legislative acts approved by the majority. Notably, in seven of the 18 presidencies between 2015 and 2023, member states were involved in joint dissent more often than

individual opposition. Given that, as previously discussed, most of these contestations were cast by a small group of Eastern member states, this pattern may reflect either continuous opposition by these governments based on policy issues or strategic attempts to build a blocking minority in response to the stability of ‘consensus culture’ backed by the double majority of member states.

Most existing studies have reported that in approximately half of all contested cases before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, only a single member state had opposed majority decisions (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006; Mattila 2008; Van Aken 2012). However, as Mattila (2008) observed, the years following the 2004 enlargement showed a significant rise in dissenting coalitions, reducing the share of single-state contestations to around one-third. According to Pircher and Farjam (2021), this pattern shifted again in the post-Lisbon period: during 2010–2019, in the majority of contested cases, a single member state continued to oppose the legislative act on its own. The growing share of relatively large dissenting coalitions, therefore, signals a recent change in oppositional strategies opposing member states rely on.

These results provide support for the assumption included in H2: the formation of a coalition of increasing sizes has become more frequent during the period of interest.

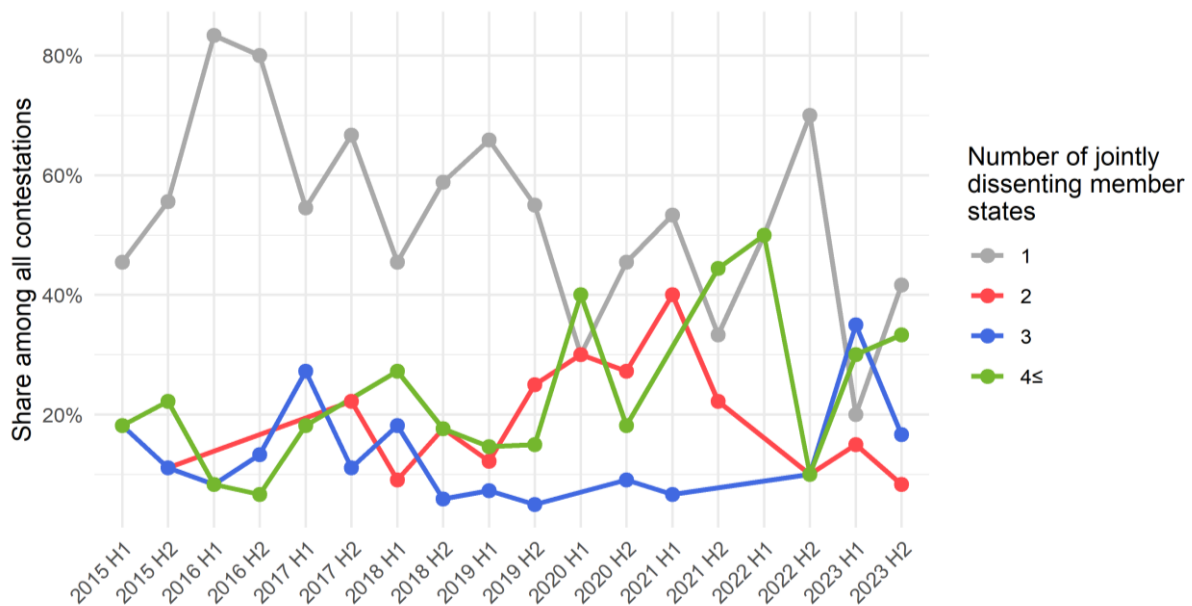


Figure 7. Size of dissenting coalitions in the Council across presidencies, 2015–2023

Turning to member states employing similar voting behaviour, Figure 8³ presents the hierarchical clustering of member states' voting behaviour, grouping countries based on the frequency with which they jointly opposed majority decisions in the Council. Based on the patterns of joint dissent, four main clusters can be identified. The most internally cohesive cluster comprises the four Visegrad countries, along with Bulgaria, which frequently vote in opposition together. A second cluster includes three smaller sub-groups of member states that also often dissent jointly: the Baltic states, Italy and Romania, and Cyprus and Malta. A third, smaller cluster consists of three Southern European countries, Spain, Greece, and Croatia. The largest fourth cluster encompasses several strongly connected country pairs, such as Austria and Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, and Ireland and Luxembourg, forming a larger and broader coalition of member states that usually form the majority behind legislative acts.

³ One of the advantages of hierarchical clustering is that it does not require the number of clusters to be predetermined, thereby limiting the involvement of researcher discretion. Nevertheless, in the dendrogram, four clusters are highlighted in different colours. This number of clusters was determined using both the so-called Silhouette Analysis and the Elbow Method. The results of both approaches, silhouette width and within-cluster dissimilarity, indicated that, in this case, four clusters capture the structure of voting coalitions most accurately.

These findings indicate that, compared to the pre-2010 period (Van Aken 2012), the once-stable dissenting coalitions among Northern member states have fragmented, while a new, more cohesive opposition group has emerged among Eastern member states. Notably, the similarity in the voting behaviour of Germany and Austria has remained consistent since the early 2000s.

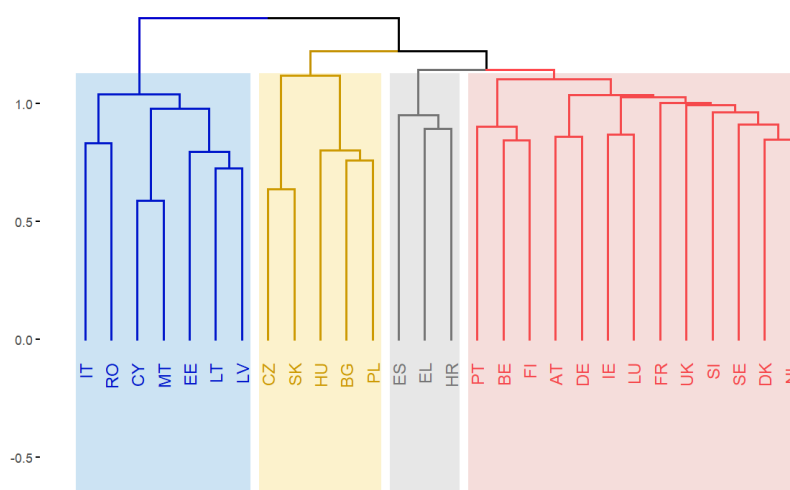


Figure 8. Hierarchical clusters of joint oppositional voting in the Council, 2015–2023

The network of countries most frequently contesting majority decisions together, illustrated in Figure X below, reveals that Hungary and Poland form the strongest dissenting pair, recording the highest number of joint oppositional votes in the Council between 2015 and 2023. They jointly opposed majority decisions 22 times, which represents approximately 40% of each of their total dissenting votes during the 2015–2023 period. Bulgaria shows the strongest link to this core dissenting pair, yet it does not maintain similarly strong dissenting ties with other member states.

Both Hungary and Poland also display relatively frequent joint opposition with a second layer of member states. Hungary often dissents alongside the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, and Sweden, while Poland has notable joint contestation patterns with Latvia, Belgium, and Romania. Beyond these, two additional dissenting coalitions stand out for their relative strength

and independence from the core Hungary-Poland axis: the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and Austria and Germany.

Interestingly, despite the United Kingdom casting the highest number of oppositional votes in the period of interest, it does not exhibit strong dissenting ties with any other member state. This suggests that the UK did not actively pursue coalition-building or blocking minorities before its withdrawal from the European Union, but rather dissented in a largely unilateral and non-strategic manner.

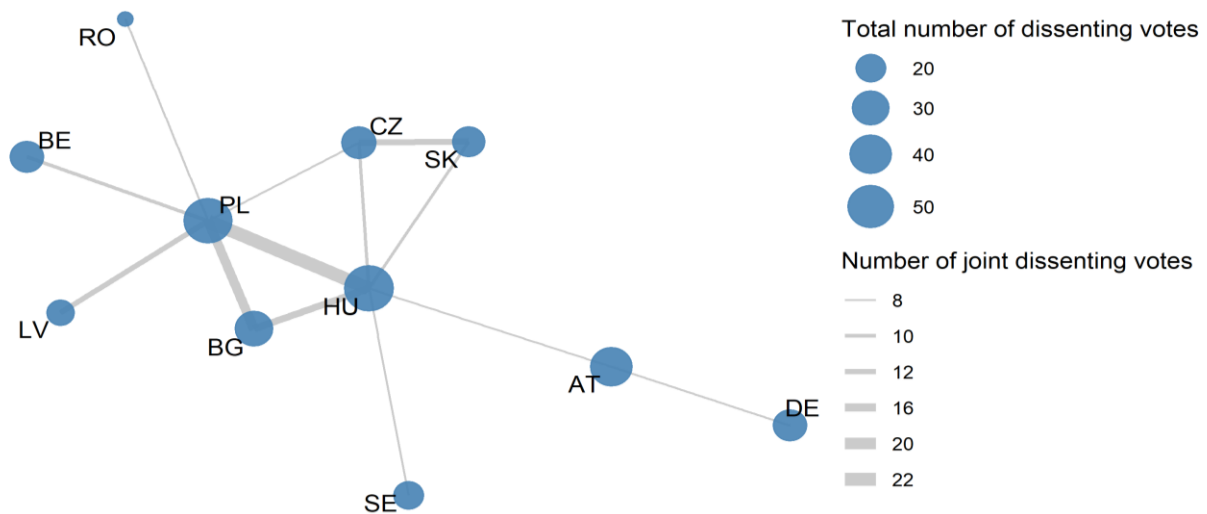


Figure 9. Network of countries most frequently contesting majority decisions together, 2015–2023

Another way to analyse the voting behaviour of member states is through multidimensional scaling, as it is visualised by Figure 10.⁴ The proximity of countries in the two-dimensional space indicates the degree of similarity in their voting patterns. The clusters identified through hierarchical clustering appear to be largely consistent in this representation as well. A notable emerging pattern is a clear divide between newer and older, Western and Eastern member

⁴ The figure must be interpreted with caution. Since the data include a large number of voting procedures with many connections among a relatively high number of units, the political arrangements cannot be fully captured in two dimensions. The accuracy of this two-dimensional picture can be assessed using the so-called Stress-1 value, which quantifies how well the distances in the low-dimensional space preserve the original dissimilarities. A lower stress value indicates a better fit. In this case, the Stress-1 value is 0.31, indicating relatively high stress and potential distortions. This means that while the solution provides an easily interpretable figure and a general overview of similarities in voting behaviour, nuances on the plot should not be interpreted. The analysis indicates that eight dimensions would be needed to capture the full variation in the data. To facilitate cautious interpretation, the colours of the member state bubbles reflect their cluster affiliation based on the hierarchical clustering shown in Figure 8.

states: most of the former are located in the upper-right section of the space, while the majority of the newer and Eastern member states cluster in the bottom-left.

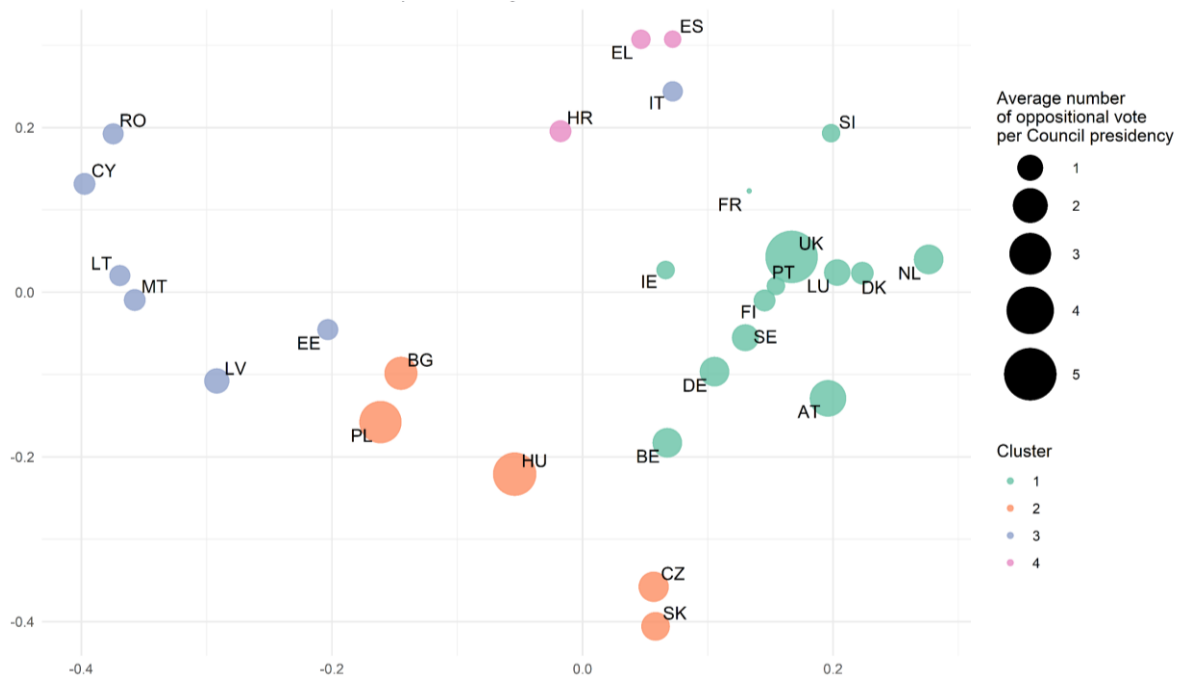


Figure 10. Multidimensional scaling projection of EU member states' voting behaviour in the Council, 2015–2023

Note: The proximity of member state bubbles indicates similarity in voting behaviour. Their colour represents cluster membership based on joint oppositional voting frequency, as determined by the hierarchical clustering shown in Figure 7. The size of each bubble reflects the country's average oppositional frequency per presidency.

A Sectoral Approach to Transnational Dynamics in the Council

Building on the aggregated findings, this section shifts focus to examine transnational dynamics through a sectoral approach. Given that crisis pressures and legislative behaviour often vary significantly across policy domains, analysing contestation patterns by sector allows for a more nuanced understanding of how member states adapt to different institutional and political conditions.

Justice and Home Affairs

As discussed earlier, the domain of Justice and Home Affairs was the most directly affected by one of the most severe and polarising crises to hit the EU in recent decades. Theoretical expectations lead to the assumption that this area of Council legislative activity contains a high level of contestation (H3).

As we have seen, oppositional voting frequency seems to show substantially different patterns in the Justice and Home Affairs domain as compared to the aggregated data. As illustrated by Figure 11, the number of countries casting oppositional votes more than the average is relatively high in this domain.

While the countries of the Visegrad Group remain among the most frequently dissenting member states besides the United Kingdom, Germany and Austria cast opposing votes relatively frequently. This further supports the assumption that member states have strong sectoral-level policy preferences even at the EU level, and adjust their voting behaviour accordingly.

2015–2023
(90 legislative procedures)

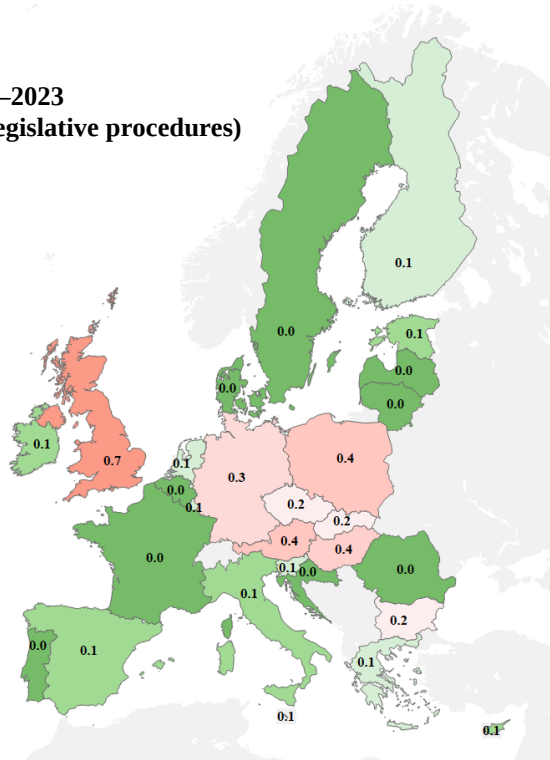


Figure 11. Frequency of oppositional voting in the Justice and Home Affairs domain, 2015–2023

Note: The darker the shade of green used to mark a country, the lower its rate of dissenting votes. White indicates values close to the average, while red highlights countries where dissenting votes occur more frequently than average.

However, by assessing the strength of dissenting coalitions, as illustrated by Figure 12, it can be concluded that the countries belonging to the Visegrad Group, along with Bulgaria, engaged in a strategic approach to dissent. While Poland and Hungary coordinated their behaviour most closely, Bulgaria joined this pair on three occasions. The Czech Republic and Slovakia, although separate from these countries, also coordinated their dissenting behaviour as a pair.

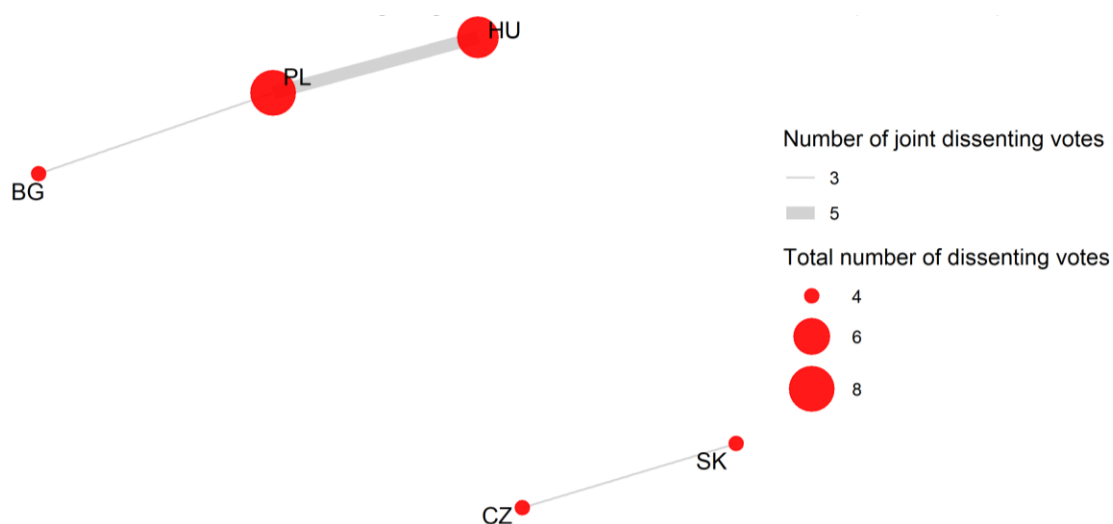


Figure 12. Network of countries most frequently contesting majority decisions together in the Justice and Home Affairs policy domain, 2015–2023

The data therefore provide evidence that, in the Justice and Home Affairs domain, the relatively low average size of dissenting coalitions is attributable to the fact that most countries expressing dissent against majority decisions did so individually. In contrast, a group of Eastern member states adopted a more strategic approach to contestation, potentially with the intention of forming a stable blocking minority. As Bojar and Kriesi (2023) observed, there were several instances in which this strategy succeeded, and legislation relating to border management and migration issues could not be adopted following the onset of the 2015 crisis.

Environment

The climate crisis that affected the Environment domain was unique in several respects, as previously noted, largely due to its slow-burning nature. Theoretical expectations (H4) anticipated low levels of contestation in this area, primarily because the climate crisis is characterised by symmetrical pressure across member states. However, contrary to expectations, this domain has become the single most contested one since 2015.

Oppositional voting frequencies at the member state level since 2019 – when the Council began framing the climate crisis as an existential threat of symmetrical nature – reveal previously unobserved patterns, as illustrated in Figure 13. In addition to Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary,

which have most frequently cast dissenting votes, Belgium and Sweden also show surprisingly high levels of opposition. I believe this observation deserves further scholarly attention, particularly in exploring why environmental legislation has become so divisive among EU member states and identifying the specific legislative acts and cleavages that have contributed to such high levels of contestation.

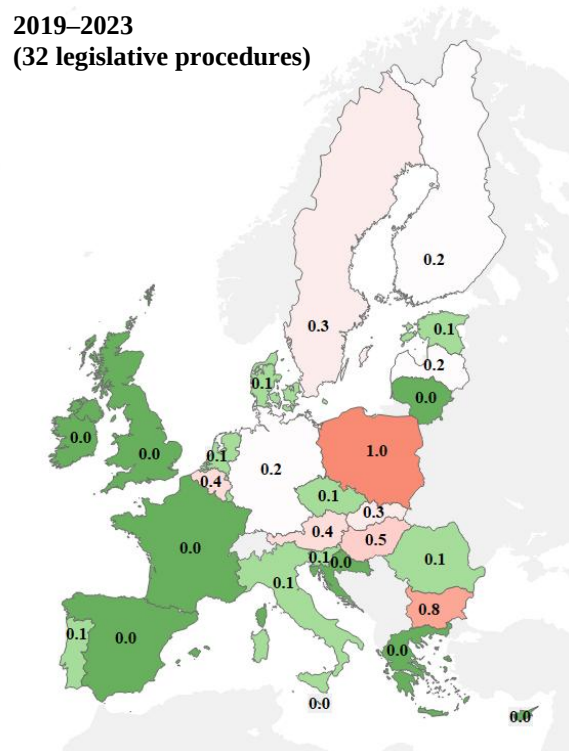


Figure 13. Frequency of oppositional voting in the Environment domain, 2019–2023

Note: The darker the shade of green used to mark a country, the lower its rate of dissenting votes. White indicates values close to the average, while red highlights countries where dissenting votes occur more frequently than average.

The results of the Social Network Analysis, illustrated in Figure 14, also reveal some important aspects. Interestingly, Belgium not only cast a relatively high number of dissenting votes but also engaged in a coalition with Poland, an alignment that appears relatively unlikely given prevailing theoretical expectations in the field of environmental policy.

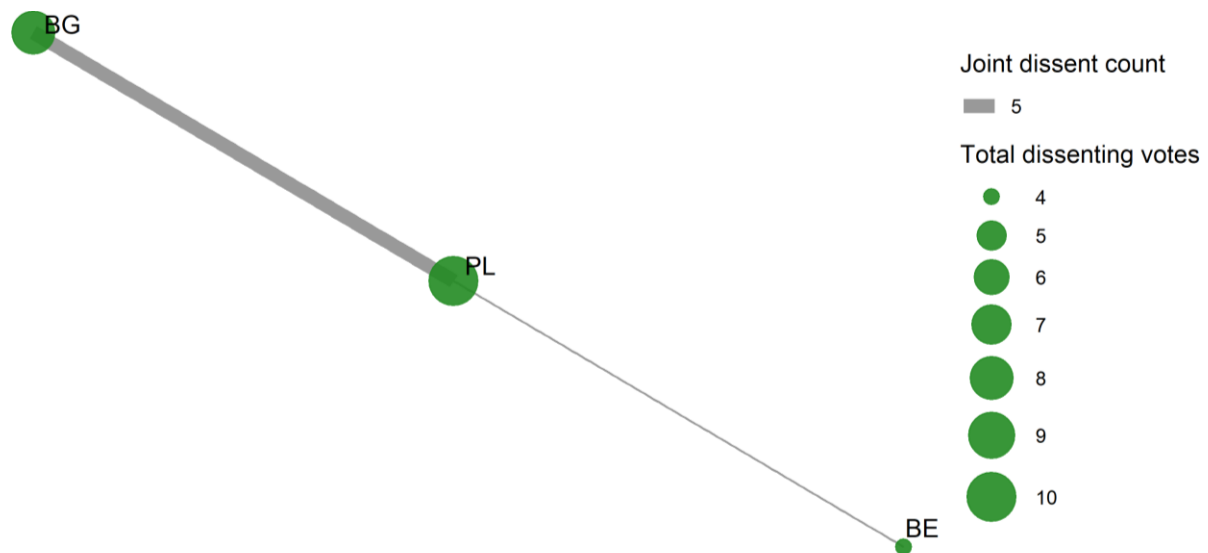


Figure 14. Network of countries most frequently contesting majority decisions together in the Environment policy domain, 2019–2023

Agriculture and Fisheries

Finally, in the domain of Agriculture and Fisheries, theoretical expectations suggested that, due to the high level of supranational capacity, low rates of contestation would be expected (H3) – a pattern already confirmed by the sectoral-level data presented earlier. Among the observed domains, Agriculture and Fisheries appear to be the only one in which the majority of dissenting votes did not come from Eastern member states, but rather from older Western countries. It can therefore be assumed that this pattern may be partly explained by the fact that this policy area is historically one of the earliest domains of European integration. Nevertheless, the data once again confirm that member states exhibit significantly different voting behaviours across policy areas, highlighting the importance of a sectoral approach once again.

2015–2023
(78 legislative procedures)

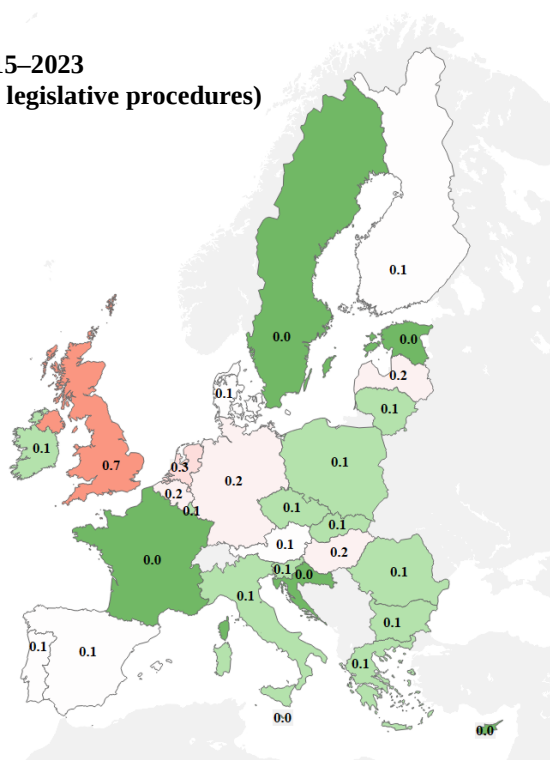


Figure 15. Frequency of oppositional voting in the Agriculture and Fisheries domain, 2015–2023

Note: The darker the shade of green used to mark a country, the lower its rate of dissenting votes. White indicates values close to the average, while red highlights countries where dissenting votes occur more frequently than average.

Interestingly, despite the relatively high number of dissenting votes cast in the domain of Agriculture and Fisheries, there were no instances in which at least two countries jointly opposed the majority decision. Every contestation was thus initiated by a single member state. While this question requires further investigation beyond the scope of this thesis, an educated guess can be made that dissenting strategies vary not only by policy area but also by member state. The observations suggest that coalition formation is more characteristic of Eastern member states' approach to interest representation, whereas older Western member states tend to dissent individually, more frequently following their sector-specific interests without forming consistent coalitions across policy domains.

Conclusion and Prospects for Future Research

This thesis aimed to contribute to the still limited body of literature attempting to bridge the gap between two well-established branches of research: on the one hand, studies examining the internal dynamics of decision-making within the Council of the European Union; and on the other, the findings of the recently and rapidly expanding literature on EU crises. While the evident connections between these two fields are more or less explicitly acknowledged within each, the complex interrelations between their findings offer considerable scope for further study.

To this end, I drew upon the literature addressing the effects of crises on EU integration and operationalised key assumptions into empirically testable expectations regarding the voting records of all EU member states in the Council of the EU during a period characterised by constant crisis pressures. These assumptions were tested using a newly collected and previously uncharted dataset comprising the roll-call votes of all member states in the Council of Ministers between 2015 and 2023, amounting to 21,952 individual votes on 784 legislative acts. To analyse the data, I employed a range of quantitative techniques, including descriptive statistics, hierarchical clustering, multidimensional scaling, and social network analysis.

In this final section of the thesis, I will first summarise the main findings concerning the research questions. Then, I will identify potential avenues for future research.

The investigation of this thesis was guided by research questions concerned with identifying key areas where the gap between the two major branches of the literature could be narrowed. These questions also served to break down the broader topic into more manageable components, each aimed at testing relatively concrete assumptions.

RQ1 examined whether the most widely recognised assumption about the political impact of crises and crisis management, namely, an overall increase in polarisation, can be observed in

the Council's legislative procedures. In the context of the Council's decision-making processes, the share of contested legislative acts can serve as a 'metric' of polarisation. However, the results of the data analysis do not support the notion of a steadily increasing level of dissent among national governments. This finding suggests that, although public discourse is often dominated by narratives of division and fragmentation, the 'polycrisis' did not fundamentally disrupt the long-standing 'culture of consensus'. Nor did it undermine the overall functioning of high-level intergovernmental policy-making within the Council.

RQ2 focused on coalition patterns within the Council, aiming to investigate whether governments have increasingly engaged with like-minded and like-interested partners to pursue their policy preferences along transnational lines of division. My findings provide quantitative evidence that the average size of dissenting coalitions – that is, the number of countries jointly contesting majority decisions – has indeed shown a growing trend over time. Notably, coalitions comprising at least four member states have increased significantly. This marks a meaningful development, particularly in light of earlier research, which consistently found that contestation was predominantly limited to individual member states dissenting alone.

The analysis further reveals that this trend is largely driven by a small group of Eastern member states – primarily Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria – which have started adopting a more strategic approach to contestation. In the context of existing literature, this can be interpreted as an intentional effort to form a stable blocking minority in order to assert their interests within the Council. While such efforts were not always successful, mainly due to their limited voting power, these countries were occasionally joined by others in an ad hoc manner, enabling them to block specific controversial decisions in certain policy areas, such as in the domain of Justice and Home Affairs.

One finding that could inform future empirical analysis and theoretical reflection is that coalition-based contestation appears to be predominantly an Eastern European strategy. In contrast, older Western member states tend to oppose majority decisions individually, more often acting alone to promote their sector-specific interests.

Following RQ 3, I examined policy domains to determine whether there is a general trend of increasing contestation in response to intense and polarising crisis pressures. The findings in this area are primarily exploratory in nature, due to limitations of the data set used: the Council's classification of policy domains is relatively broad and does not allow for precise identification of decisions that directly addressed crisis management measures. Nevertheless, a somewhat unexpected pattern emerged. The Environment domain, where a high degree of consensus was theoretically expected, displayed a larger share of contestation than the Justice and Home Affairs domain, despite the latter having been directly affected by one of the most polarising crises of recent decades: the refugee and border crisis.

Finally, RQ4 guided the investigation of whether there is evidence that governments adjust their voting behaviour according to policy domain. If confirmed, this would suggest that governments' expressed preferences have an 'objective foundation' (as phrased by Bailer, Mattila, and Schneider, 2015), rather than being merely driven by ideological alignments or rising domestic Euroscepticism.

The findings showed that patterns of voting behaviour indeed vary significantly across policy domains. First, the composition of member states dissenting from majority decisions differs substantially between areas. For example, while contestation in the Environment domain was primarily driven by Eastern member states, dissent in Agriculture and Fisheries was most frequently expressed by Western countries.

Second, dissenting coalition patterns also vary across policy domains. Justice and Home Affairs, for instance, was characterised by relatively stable coalition structures, whereas Agriculture and Fisheries exhibited no such coalition-building. As discussed earlier, this points towards diverging strategic approaches to contestation between Eastern and Western member states. This geographical divide was further reflected in the aggregated voting behaviour, as demonstrated through multidimensional scaling analysis.

Since this research investigated an understudied link, the potential pathways for future exploration are numerous. Therefore, I will limit myself here to outlining the most significant limitation of my approach and the possible avenues for further investigation that follow from it.

The most significant methodological constraint concerns the level of abstraction at which legislative proposals are analysed. While I adopted both an aggregate and sectoral approach to studying the Council's legislative processes, I often realised that, in order to address more specific and pressing questions at the level of individual proposals, the Council's broad policy domain classifications are insufficient. To overcome this limitation, both qualitative and more refined quantitative approaches could be employed.

On the qualitative side, conducting interviews with national ministers or officials directly involved in Council negotiations could uncover patterns and motivations that are only observable from the 'ground level'. On the quantitative side, a more nuanced content analysis of legislative proposals, such as coding for the relative weight or salience of specific policy issues within each act, could enable the investigation of voting behaviour with greater precision and thematic relevance.

Future research should therefore focus on proposal-level trends to gain a deeper understanding of how specific policy content influences contestation dynamics in the Council.

To conclude, I believe that future research should focus more closely on proposal-level trends in order to develop a deeper understanding of how the specific content of legislative acts influences contestation dynamics within the Council of the European Union.

References

- Arregui, Javier, and Robert Thomson. 2014. 'Domestic Adjustment Costs, Interdependence and Dissent in the Council of the European Union'. *European Journal of Political Research* 53 (4): 692–708. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12060>.
- Bailer, Stefanie, Mikko Mattila, and Gerald Schneider. 2015. 'Money Makes the EU Go Round: The Objective Foundations of Conflict in the Council of Ministers'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 53 (3): 437–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12194>.
- Bickerton, Christopher J., Dermot Hodson, and Uwe Puetter. 2015. 'The New Intergovernmentalism: European Integration in the Post-Maastricht Era'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 53 (4): 703–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12212>.
- Blondel, Jean. 1973. *Comparative Legislatures*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bojar, Abel, and Hanspeter Kriesi. 2023. 'Policymaking in the EU under Crisis Conditions: Covid and Refugee Crises Compared'. *Comparative European Politics* 21 (4): 427–47. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-023-00349-1>.
- Consilium. 2019. 'Foreign Affairs Council, 18/02/2019'. Consilium. 2019. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2019/02/18/>.
- Council of the EU. 2025. 'Search for Voting Results'. Transparency: Search for Voting Results. 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/general-secretariat/corporate-policies/transparency/voting-results/>.
- Cross, Mai'a K. Davis. 2017. *The Politics of Crisis in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316556498>.
- Ferrara, Federico Maria, and Hanspeter Kriesi. 2022. 'Crisis Pressures and European Integration'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 29 (9): 1351–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1966079>.
- Fowler, James H. 2006. 'Connecting the Congress: A Study of Cosponsorship Networks'. *Political Analysis* 14 (4): 456–87. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpi002>.

- Genovese, Federica, and Gerald Schneider. 2020. 'Smoke with Fire: Financial Crises and the Demand for Parliamentary Oversight in the European Union'. *The Review of International Organizations* 15 (3): 633–65. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-020-09383-0>.
- Hagemann, Sara, and Bjorn Hoyland. 2008. 'Parties in the Council?' *Journal of European Public Policy* 15 (8): 1205–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802407714>.
- Hagemann, Sara, and J De Clerck-Sachsse. 2007. 'Old Rules, New Game: Decision-Making in the Council of Ministers after the 2004 Enlargement'. Centre for European Policy Studies. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/38612/SR%202007-03%20Old%20rules%20new%20game%20.pdf>.
- Hagemann, Sara, Stefanie Bailer, and Alexander Herzog. 2019. 'Signals to Their Parliaments? Governments' Use of Votes and Policy Statements in the EU Council'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 57 (3): 634–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12844>.
- Hagemann, Sara. 2007. 'Applying Ideal Point Estimation Methods to the Council of Ministers'. *European Union Politics* 8 (2): 279–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116507076433>.
- Hayes-Renshaw, Fiona, and Helen Wallace. 2006. *The Council of Ministers*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hayes-Renshaw, Fiona, Wim Van Aken, and Helen Wallace. 2006. 'When and Why the EU Council of Ministers Votes Explicitly*'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 44 (1): 161–94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00618.x>.
- Heisenberg, Dorothee. 2005. 'The Institution of "Consensus" in the European Union: Formal versus Informal Decision-making in the Council'. *European Journal of Political Research* 44 (1): 65–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2005.00219.x>.
- Hix, Simon, Abdul G. Noury, and Gérard Roland. 2007. *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*. Themes in European Governance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491955>.
- Hobolt, Sara B., and Christopher and Wratil. 2020. 'Contestation and Responsiveness in EU Council Deliberations'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 27 (3): 362–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1712454>.

- Hosli, Madeleine O., Mikko Mattila, and Marc Uriot. 2011. 'Voting in the Council of the European Union after the 2004 Enlargement: A Comparison of Old and New Member States'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 49 (6): 1249–70. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2011.02196.x>.
- Juncker, Jean-Claude. 2016. 'Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Annual General Meeting of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV)'. European Commission. 2016. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_16_2293.
- Kaeding, Michael, and Torsten J. Selck. 2005. 'Mapping Out Political Europe: Coalition Patterns in EU Decision-Making'. *International Political Science Review* 26 (3): 271–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512105053785>.
- König, Thomas, and Mirja Pöter. 2001. 'Examining the EU Legislative Process: The Relative Importance of Agenda and Veto Power'. *European Union Politics* 2 (3): 329–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116501002003004>.
- Kruskal, Joseph B., and Myron Wish. 1978. *Multidimensional Scaling*. SAGE.
- Lewis, Jeffrey. 2008. 'Strategic Bargaining, Norms and Deliberation'. In *Unveiling the Council of the European Union: Games Governments Play in Brussels*, edited by Daniel Naurin and Helen Wallace, 165–84. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230583788_9.
- Lewis, Jeffrey. 2019. 'EU Council Networks and the "Tradition" of Consensus'. In *Decentring European Governance*. Routledge.
- Mattila, Mikko, and Jan-Erik Lane. 2001. 'Why Unanimity in the Council?: A Roll Call Analysis of Council Voting'. *European Union Politics* 2 (1): 31–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116501002001002>.
- Mattila, Mikko. 2004. 'Contested Decisions: Empirical Analysis of Voting in the European Union Council of Ministers'. *European Journal of Political Research* 43 (1): 29–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00144.x>.
- Mattila, Mikko. 2008. 'Voting and Coalitions in the Council after the Enlargement'. In *Unveiling the Council of the European Union: Games Governments Play in Brussels*, edited by Daniel Naurin and Helen Wallace, 23–35. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230583788_2.

- Mattila, Mikko. 2009. 'Roll Call Analysis of Voting in the European Union Council of Ministers after the 2004 Enlargement'. *European Journal of Political Research* 48 (6): 840–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.01850.x>.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven London: Yale University Press.
- Morales-Bader, Diego, Ramón D. Castillo, Ralf F. A. Cox, and Carlos Ascencio-Garrido. 2023. 'Parliamentary Roll-Call Voting as a Complex Dynamical System: The Case of Chile'. *PLOS ONE* 18 (4): e0281837. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0281837>.
- Naurin, Daniel, and Rutger Lindahl. 2008. 'East-North-South: Coalition-Building in the Council before and after Enlargement'. In *Unveiling the Council of the European Union*, edited by Daniel Naurin and Helen Wallace, 64–78. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230583788_4.
- Papadopoulos, Apostolos G. 2015. 'The Impact of the CAP on Agriculture and Rural Areas of EU Member States'. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy: A Triannual Journal of Agrarian South Network and CARES* 4 (1): 22–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2277976015574054>.
- Pircher, Brigitte, and Mike Farjam. 2021. 'Oppositional Voting in the Council of the EU between 2010 and 2019: Evidence for Differentiated Politicisation'. *European Union Politics* 22 (3): 472–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165211004754>.
- Plechanovová, Běla. 2011. 'The EU Council Enlarged: North-South-East or Core-Periphery?' *European Union Politics* 12 (1): 87–106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116510390720>.
- Pourebrahimi, Arash, Madeleine O. Hosli, and Peter van Roozendaal. 2023. 'Explaining Contestation: Votes in the Council of the European Union'. In *Advances in Collective Decision Making: Interdisciplinary Perspectives for the 21st Century*, edited by Sascha Kurz, Nicola Maaser, and Alexander Mayer, 301–19. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-21696-1_18.
- Riddervold, Marianne, Jarle Trondal, and Akasemi Newsome, eds. 2021. *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-51791-5>.

- Roos, Christof. 2019. 'Opposition or Consensus in the Justice and Home Affairs Council? The How and Why of Increasing Member State Contestation over EU Policy'. *Journal of European Integration* 41 (5): 569–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2018.1537269>.
- Roos, Mechthild, and Daniel Schade, eds. 2024. *The EU under Strain? Current Crises Shaping European Union Politics*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Schelkle, Waltraud. 2017. *The Political Economy of Monetary Solidarity: Understanding the Euro Experiment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198717935.001.0001>.
- Schendelen, M.P.C.M. Van. 1996. 'The Council Decides': Does the Council Decide?'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 34 (4): 531–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.1996.tb00589.x>.
- Schneider, Gerald, Finke, Daniel, and Konstantin and Baltz. 2007. 'With a Little Help from the State: Interest Intermediation in the Domestic Pre-Negotiations of EU Legislation'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 14 (3): 444–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760701243814>.
- Siddi, Marco. 2020. 'The European Green Deal: Assessing Its Current State and Future Implementation'. FIN. <https://iris.unica.it/handle/11584/313484>.
- Thomson, Robert, Jovanka Boerefijn, and Frans Stokman. 2004. 'Actor Alignments in European Union Decision Making'. *European Journal of Political Research* 43 (2): 237–61. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00153.x>.
- Van Aken, Wim. 2012. *Voting in the Council of the European Union: Contested Decision-Making in the EU Council of Ministers (1995-2010)*. Stockholm: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS).
- Van Gruisen, Philippe, Pieterjan Vangerven, and Christophe Crombez. 2019. 'Voting Behavior in the Council of the European Union: The Effect of the Trio Presidency'. *Political Science Research and Methods* 7 (3): 489–504. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2017.10>.
- Vollaard, Hans. 2018. *European Disintegration*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-41465-6>.

- Wasserfallen, Fabio, Dirk Leuffen, Zdenek Kudrna, and Hanno Degner. 2019. 'Analysing European Union Decision-Making during the Eurozone Crisis with New Data'. *European Union Politics* 20 (1): 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116518814954>.
- Wasserman, Stanley, and Katherine Faust. 1994. *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*. Cambridge University Press.
- Westlake, Martin, and David Galloway. 2004. *The Council of the European Union*. John Harper.
- Westlake, Martin. 1995. *The Council of the European Union*. London: Cartermill.
- Wilde, Pieter de, and Christopher Lord. 2016. 'Assessing Actually-Existing Trajectories of EU Politicisation'. *West European Politics* 39 (1): 145–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1081508>.
- Wrtil, Christopher, and Sara B Hobolt. 2019. 'Public Deliberations in the Council of the European Union: Introducing and Validating DICEU'. *European Union Politics* 20 (3): 511–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116519839152>.
- Zeitlin, Jonathan, Francesco Nicoli, and Brigid Laffan. 2019. 'Introduction: The European Union beyond the Polycrisis? Integration and Politicization in an Age of Shifting Cleavages'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 26 (7): 963–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1619803>.
- Zürn, Michael. 2016. 'Opening up Europe: Next Steps in Politicisation Research'. *West European Politics* 39 (1): 164–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1081513>.