



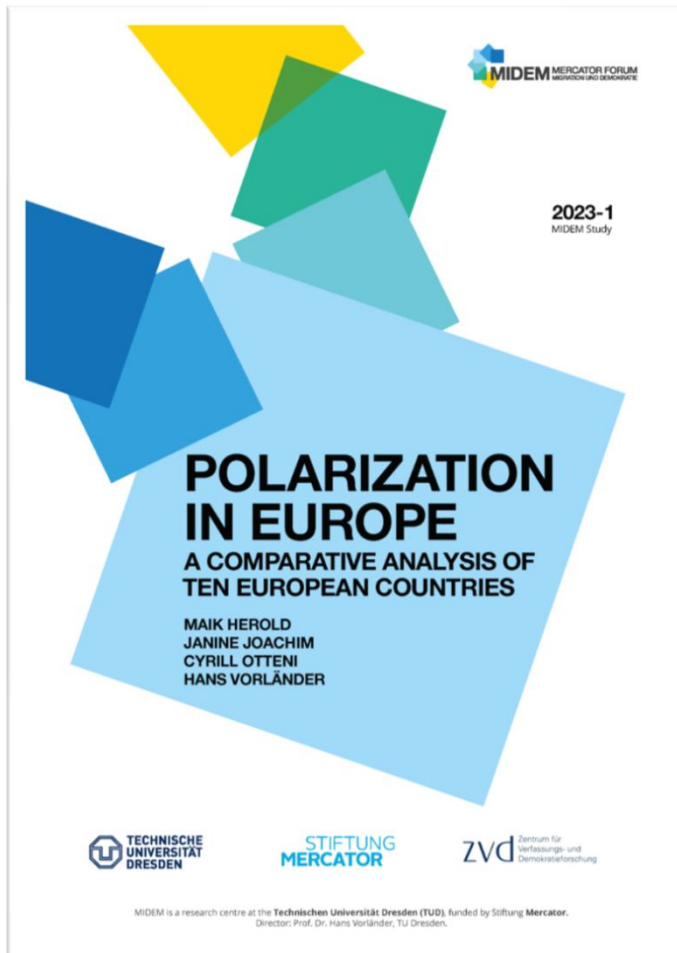
Affective Polarization in Europe

Maik Herold

10th October 2023, Villa Vigoni



Study 2023: Polarization in Europe



Download via:

<https://forum-midem.de/publikationen/>

Contact:

Maik Herold

maik.herold@tu-dresden.de

Janine Joachim

janine.joachim@tu-dresden.de

Cyrill Otteni

cyrill.otteni@tu-dresden.de

Hans Vorländer

hans.vorlaender@tu-dresden.de

Director MIDEM/ TU Dresden



CONTENT



1. Conceptualization

- What is polarization? What is affective polarization?
- How to measure affective polarization?
- Our study: methodology

2. Results

- What degree of affective polarization can be observed in different countries?
- Which social groups show the highest amount of affective polarization?
- What do high rates of affective polarization actually mean?
- How does affective polarization influence a democracy?
- Which issues have the highest potential to cause (political/societal) divisions?

What is Polarization?



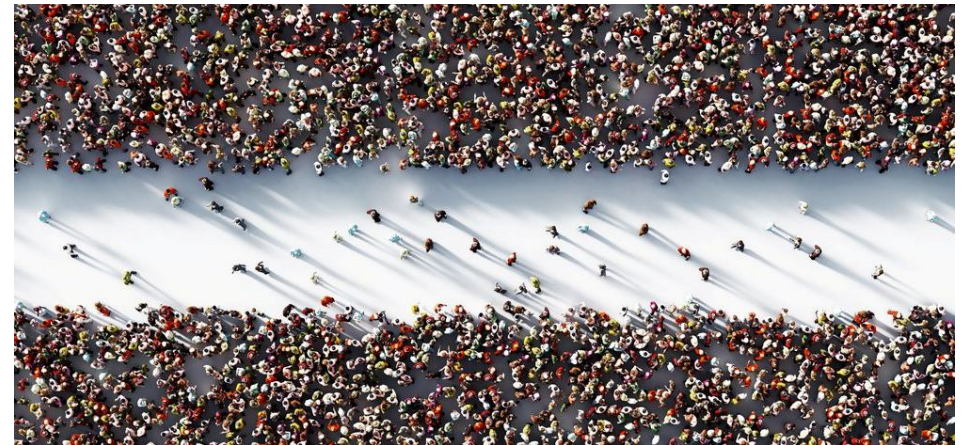
Natural science as a model?



Group formation, ideologization, erosion of social cohesion?



Emotion, aversion, confrontation?



Fractures and divisions within societies?

What is Affective Polarization?

- the extent to which people with opposing views are rejected or condemned
- high affective polarization refers to:
 - strong affinity toward people who hold similar views, and
 - strong dislike of people who hold divergent views on an issue

Types of Measuring on Affective Polarization

- Original: focus on U.S. party (partisan) research (Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2015)
- Recently: increasing research in the context of multiparty systems (Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2021)
- New approaches: application to political issues (Wagner/Eberl 2022; Hobolt et al. 2021; Hartevelde et al. 2023)

What is Affective Polarization?

- the extent to which people with opposing views are rejected or condemned
- high affective polarization refers to:
 - strong affinity toward people who hold similar views, and
 - strong dislike of people who hold divergent views on an issue

Types of Measuring on Affective Polarization

- Original: focus on U.S. party (partisan) research (Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2015)
- Recently: increasing research in the context of multiparty systems (Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2021)
- New approaches: application to political issues (Wagner/Eberl 2022; Hobolt et al. 2021; Hartevelde et al. 2023)

What is Affective Polarization?

- the extent to which people with opposing views are rejected or condemned
- high affective polarization refers to:
 - strong affinity toward people who hold similar views, and
 - strong dislike of people who hold divergent views on an issue

Types of Measuring on Affective Polarization

- Original: focus on U.S. party (partisan) research
(Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2015)
- Recently: increasing research in the context of multiparty systems
(Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2021)
- New approaches: application to political issues
(Wagner/Eberl 2022; Hobolt et al. 2021; Hartevelde et al. 2023)

Measuring Affective Polarization

- Defining antagonistic groups
- Self-positioning
- Evaluating opposing opinion groups (instrument: `feeling thermometer`)
- Calculating the absolute value of the distance between the evaluations

Example: Immigration

„Immigration opportunities for foreigners should be eased“

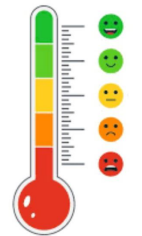
„Immigration opportunities for foreigners should be restricted“

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

„People who think that immigration opportunities for foreigners should be eased“

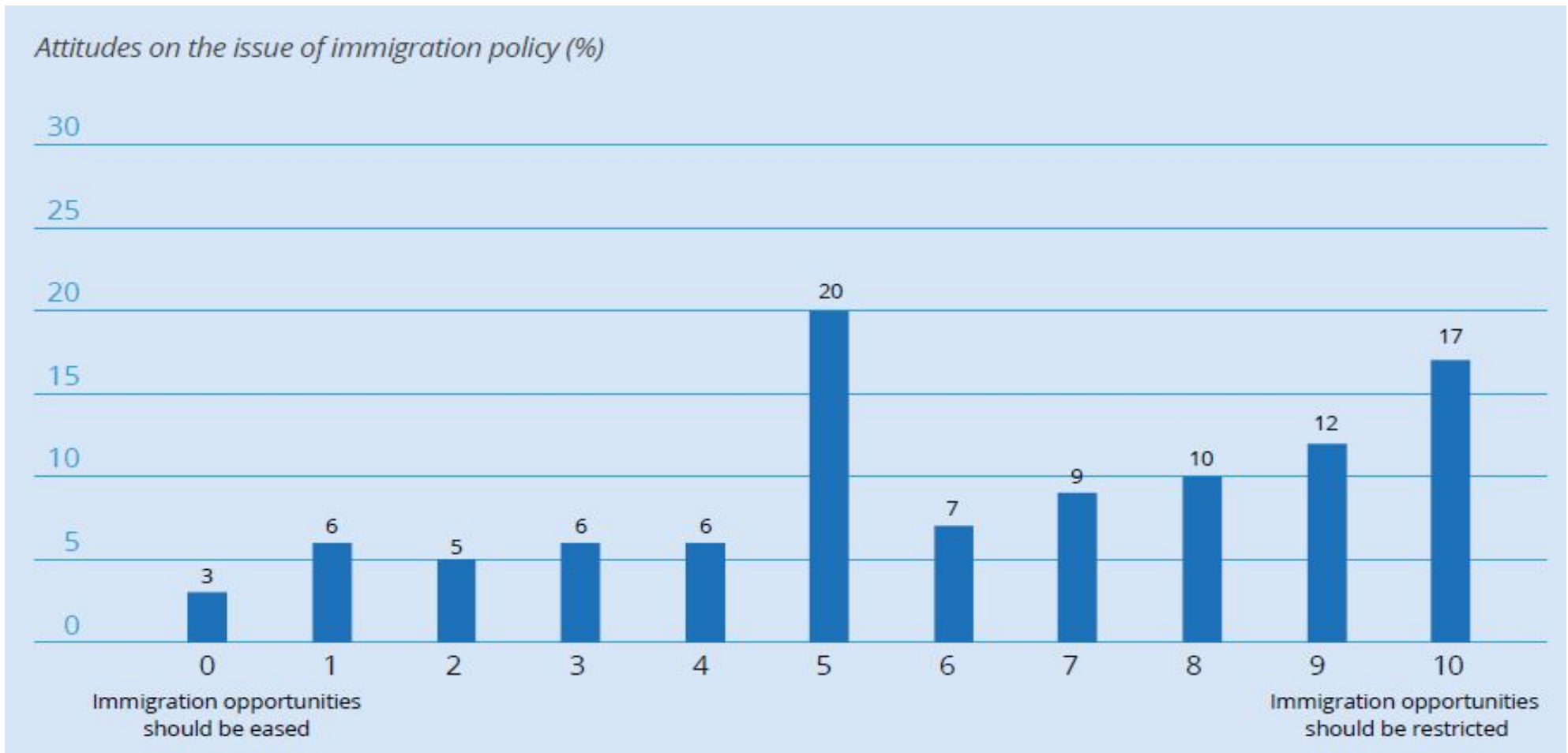


„People who think that immigration opportunities for foreigners should be restricted“



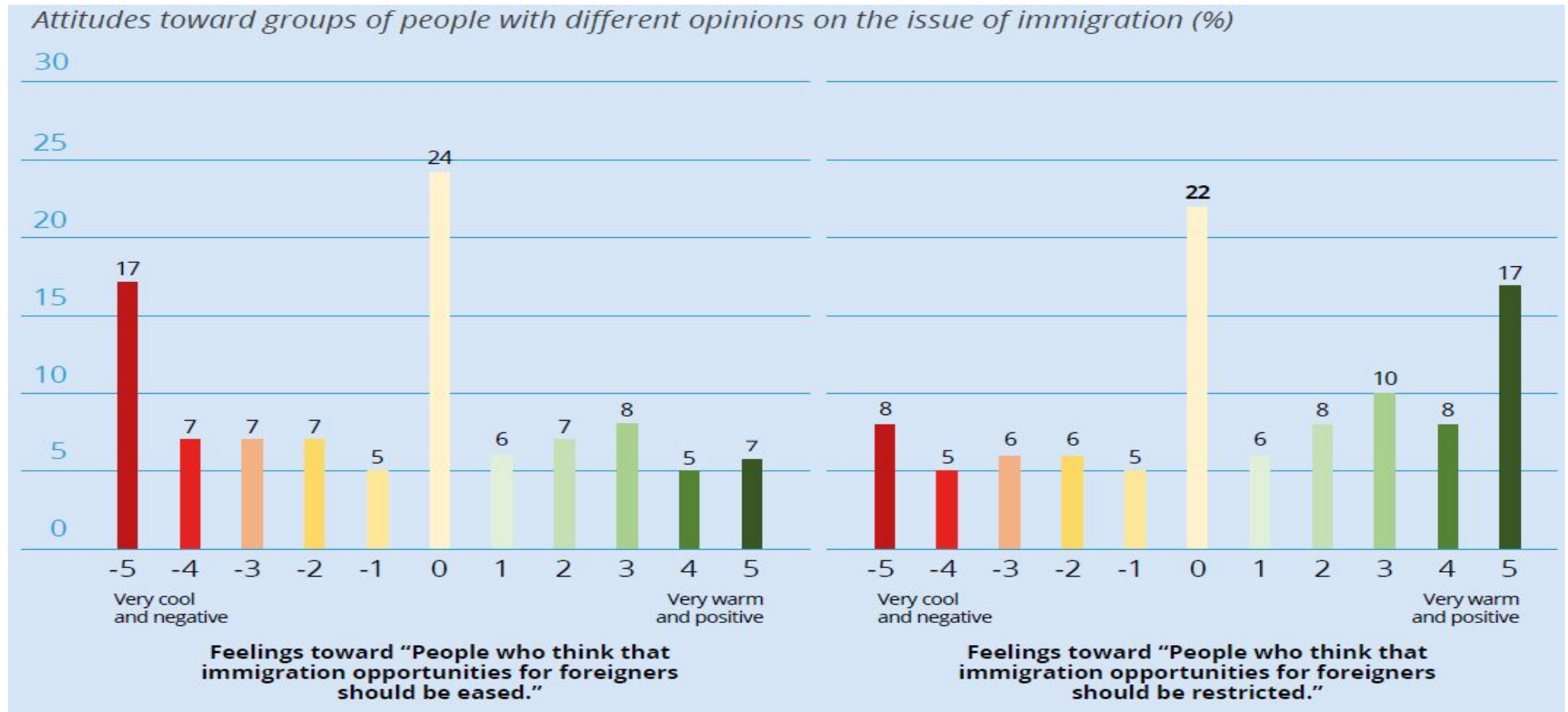
$$AP_j = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{n=1}^N (|Feeling_{ijGroup1} - Feeling_{ijGroup2}|)$$

Self-positioning



Question: "There are different opinions on the issue of immigration. Where would you place your personal opinion here?" Respondents were asked to position themselves between "0 - Immigration opportunities for foreigners should be eased" and "10 - Immigration opportunities for foreigners should be restricted." Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449).

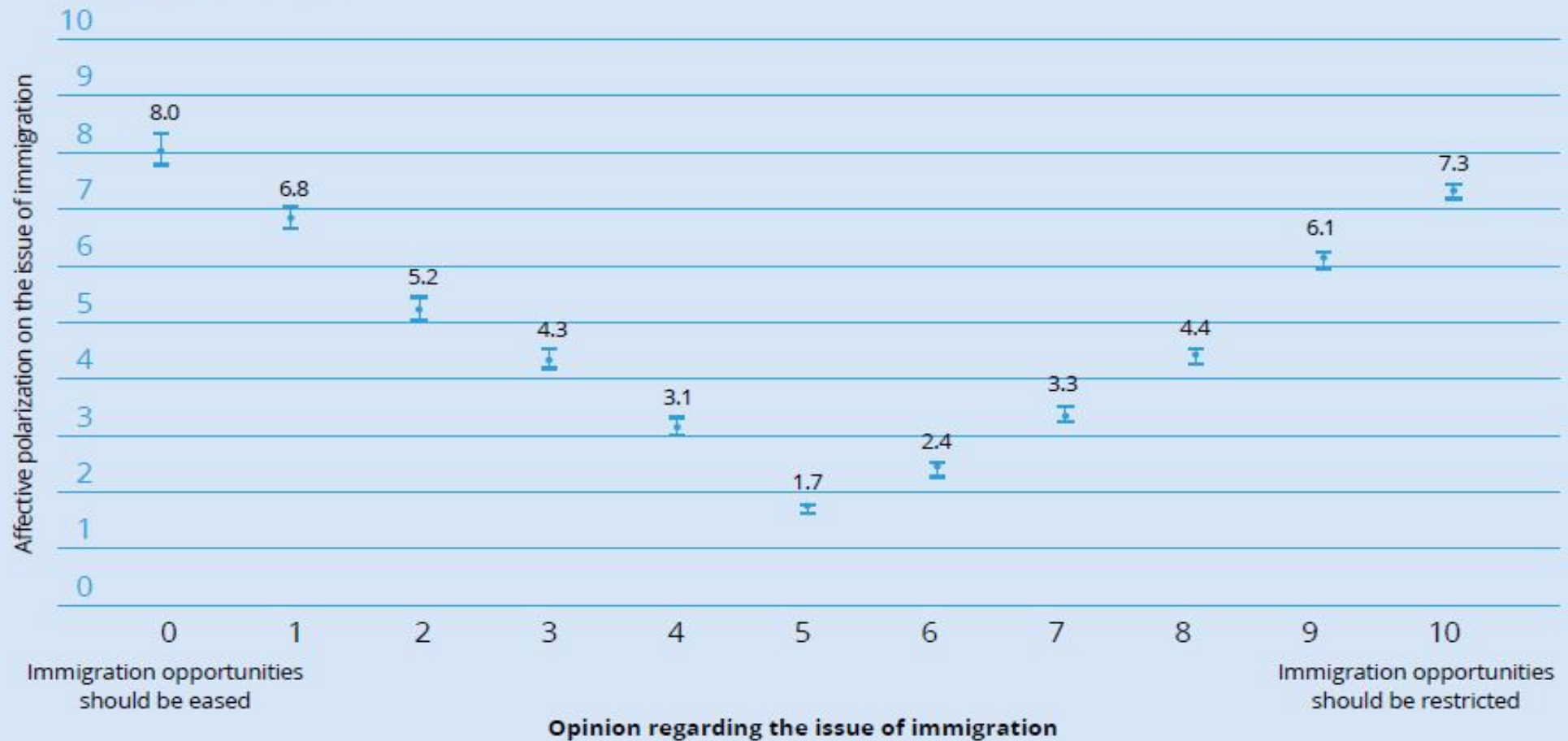
Evaluating Opposing Opinion Groups



Note: Distribution of responses to the question: "When you think of other people in [country] with their different opinions on the issue of immigration, how do you feel about each of the following groups of people?" Respondents were asked to position themselves between "-5 Very cool and negative" and "+5 Very warm and positive" with respect to each group. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449).

Affective Polarization and Self-positioning

Average level of affective polarization according to self-positioning on the issue of immigration (average scores and confidence intervals)



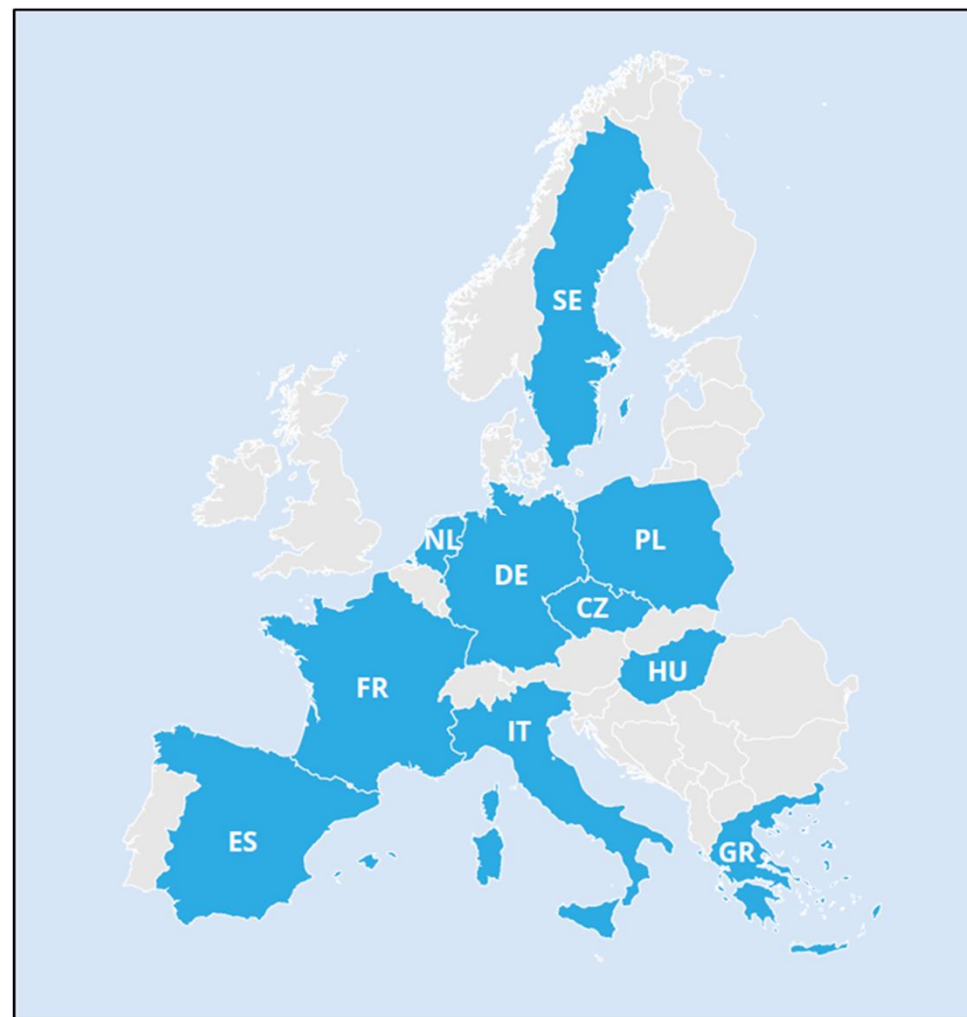
Data

Survey

- 20,449 people in 10 European Union countries
- Data collected in fall 2022
- In cooperation with YouGov

Methodology

- (Regional) online access panels
- Population-representative quotas (age, gender, region and education)
- Standardized questionnaire with country-specific adaptations



Analysed Issues

Issue areas

Immigration

War in Ukraine

**Pandemics such
as COVID-19**

Climate change

**Social benefits
and their
financing**

**Gender
equality**

**Policy toward
sexual
minorities**

CONTENT

1. Conceptualization

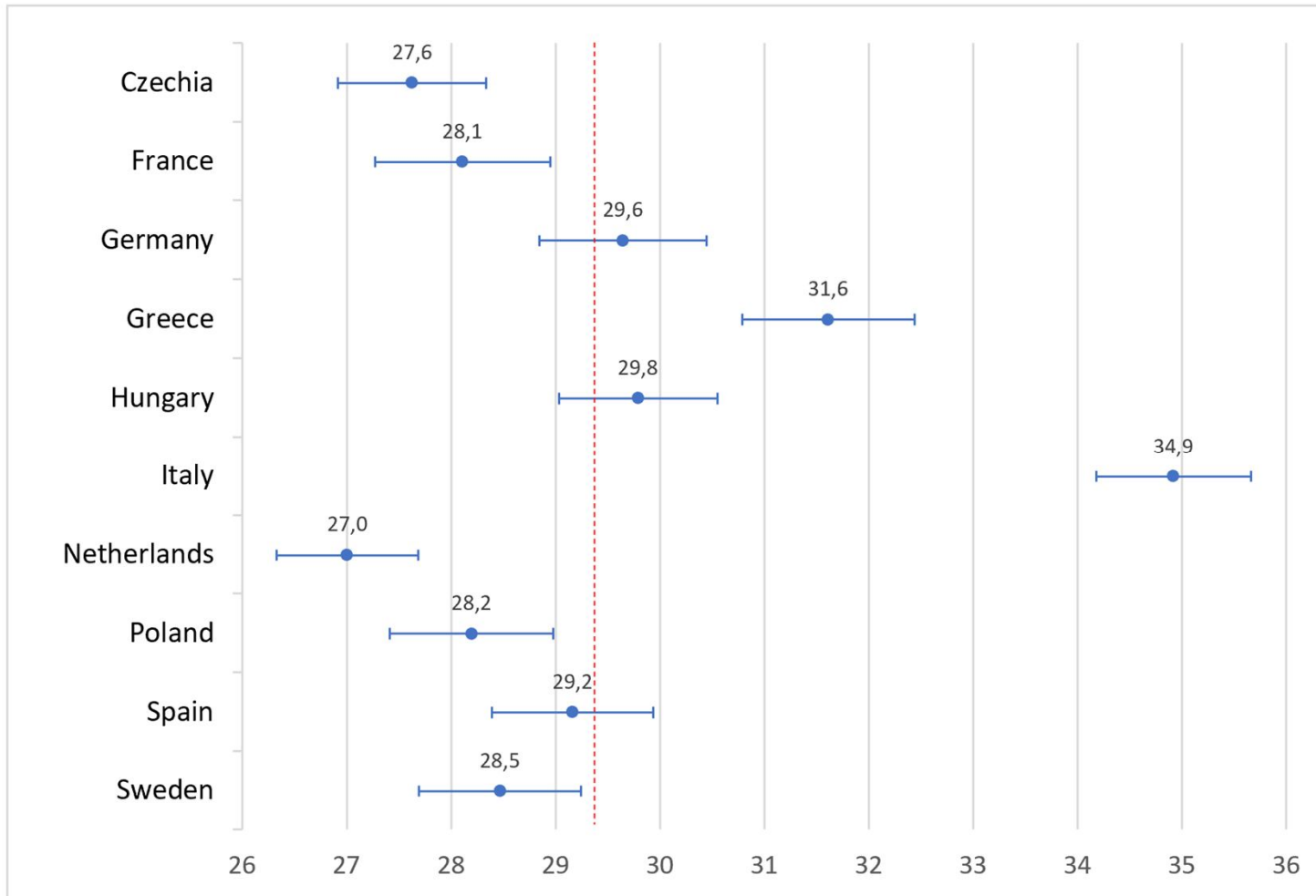
- What is polarization? What is affective polarization?
- How to measure affective polarization?
- Our study: methodology



2. Results

- What degree of affective polarization can be observed in different countries?
- Which social groups show the highest amount of affective polarization?
- What do high rates of affective polarization actually mean?
- How does affective polarization influence a democracy?
- Which issues have the highest potential to cause (political/societal) divisions?

All Issues: Polarization by Country

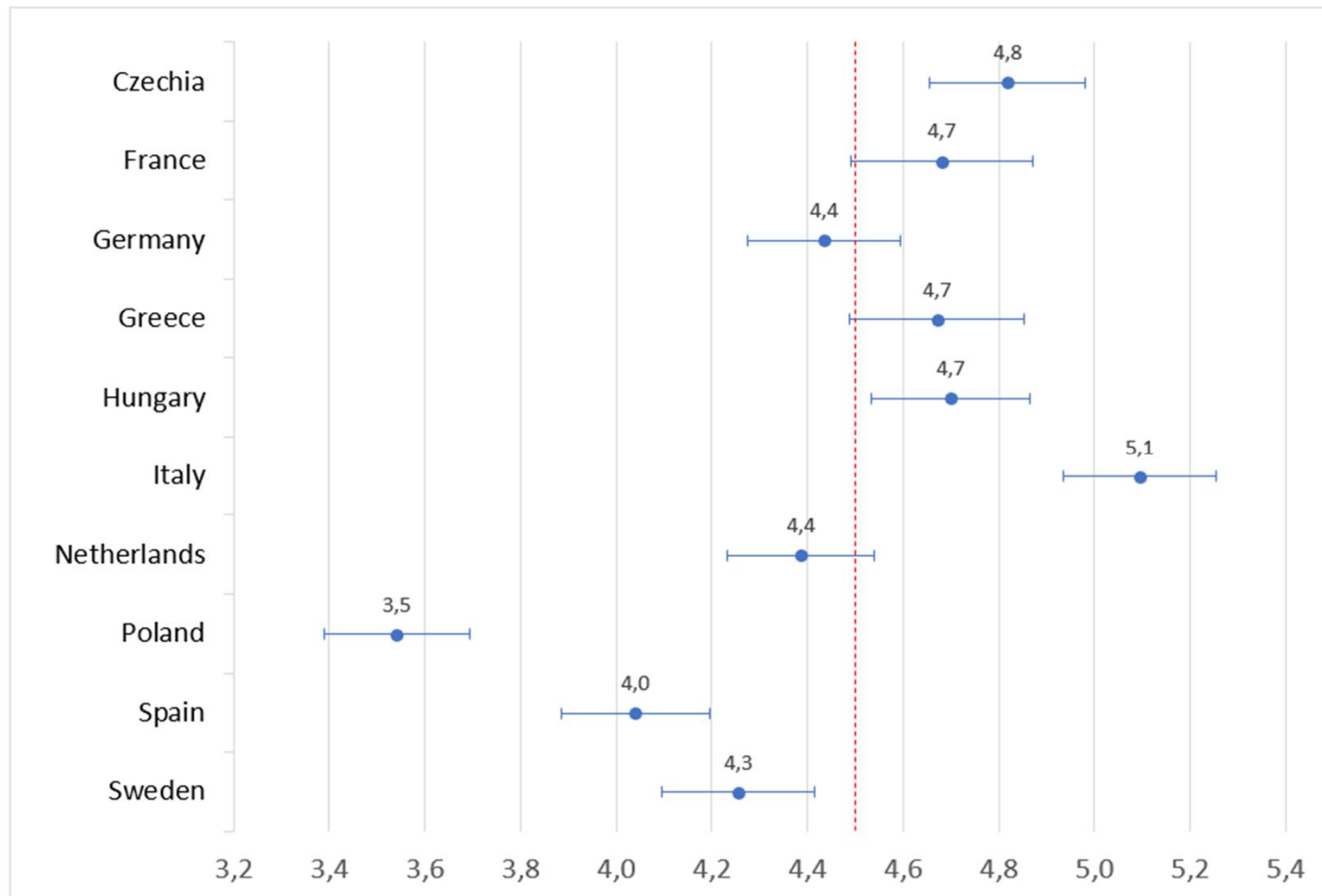


Which countries show the greatest amount of polarization?

- Italy and Greece exhibit Europe's highest level of affective polarization
- Respondents in the Netherlands and Czechia are the least polarized

Note: Dots indicate the average group values of the polarization index with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region, n = 20,449 (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

Immigration: Polarization by Country

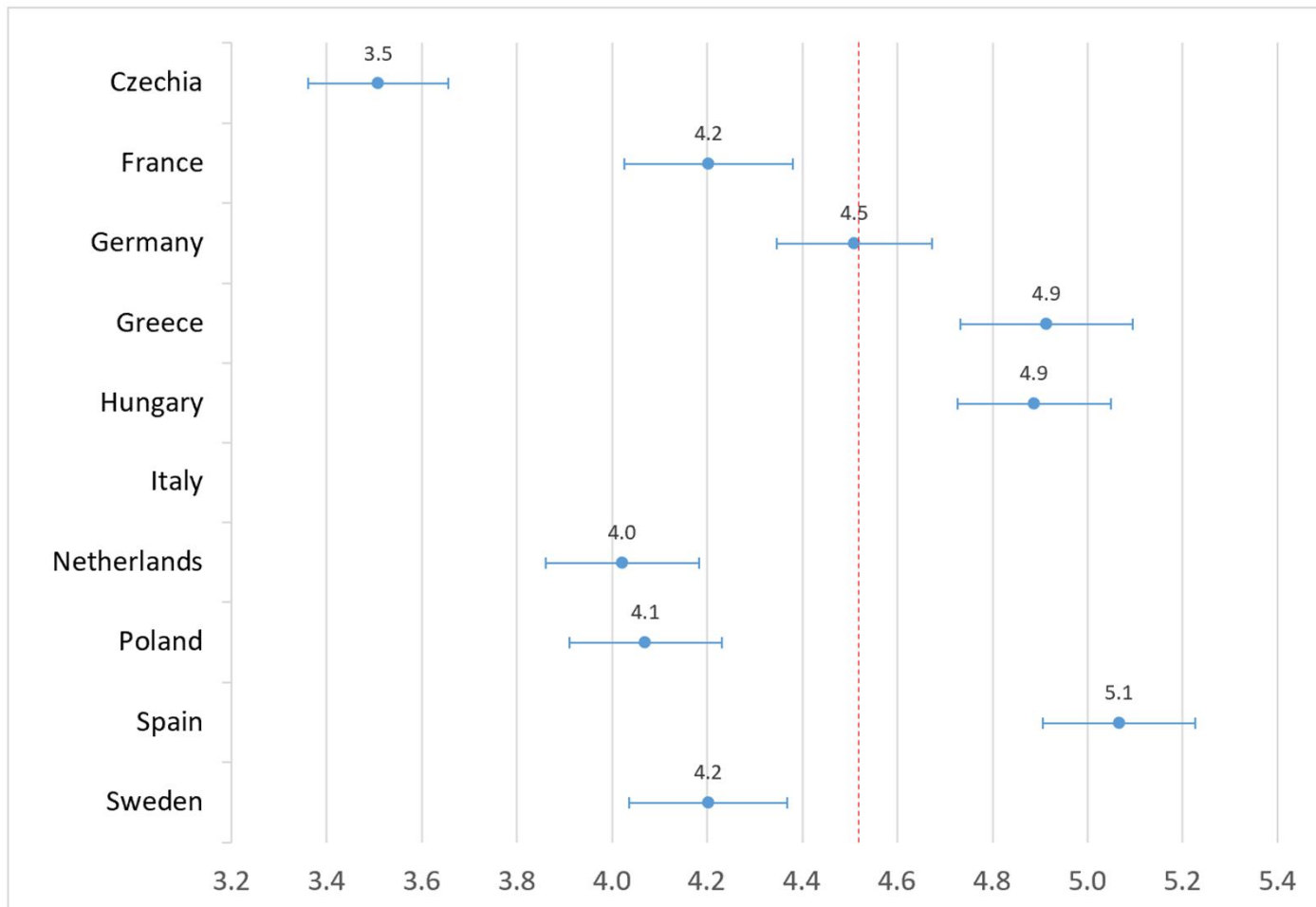


IMMIGRATION: Which countries show the greatest amount of polarization?

- In Italy and Czechia: Europe's highest level of affective polarization
- Respondents in Poland and Spain are the least polarized

Affective polarization on the issue of immigration. Dots indicate the average group values on the polarization score with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region, n = 20,449 (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

Climate Change: Polarization by Country

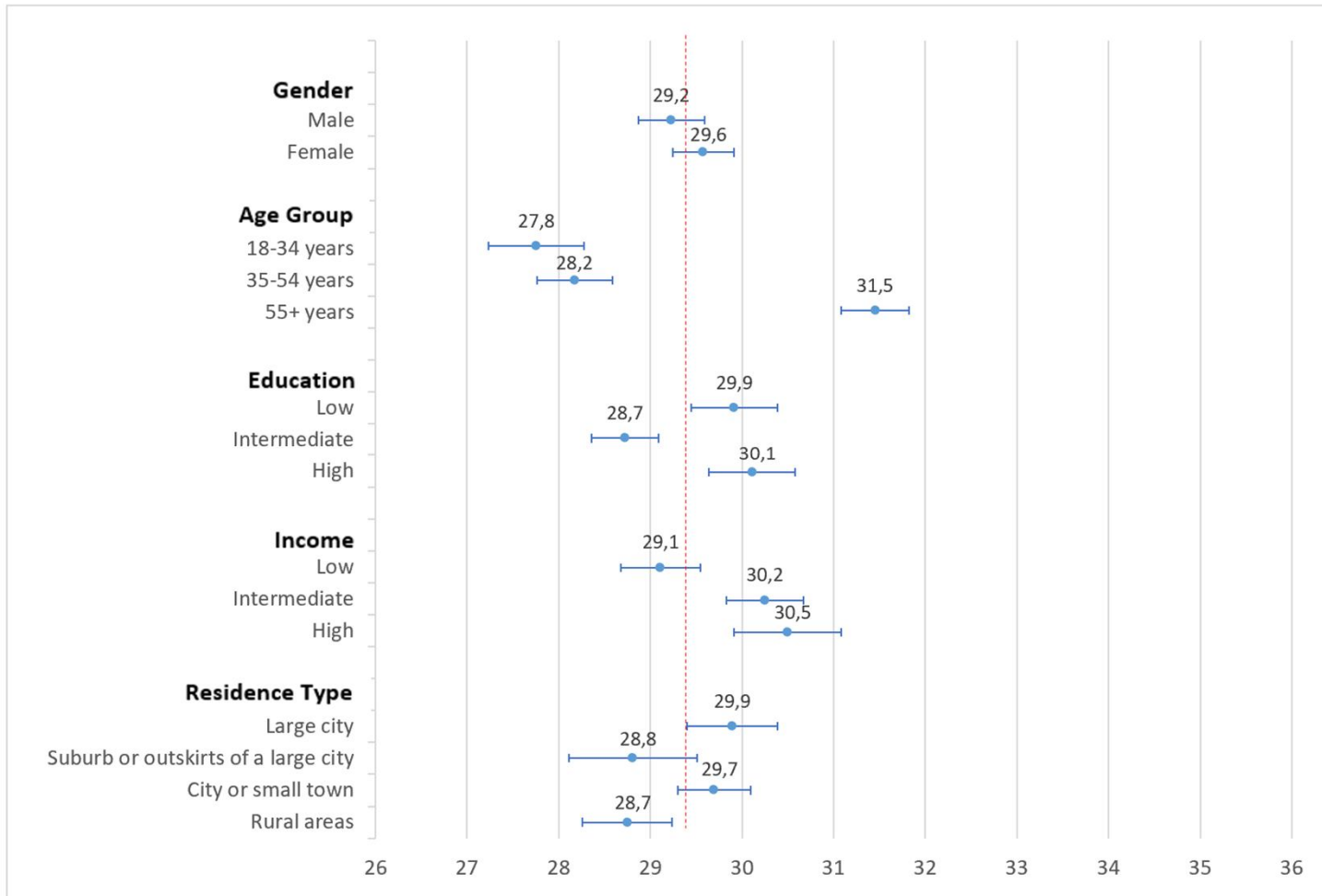


CLIMATE CHANGE: Which countries show the most affective polarization?

- In Greece, Spain and Hungary: Highest affective polarization in Europe
- Respondents in Czech Republic least polarized

Affective polarization on the issue of climate change. Dots indicate the average group values on the polarization score with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region, n = 20,449 (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

All Issues: Polarization by Sociodemographic Group

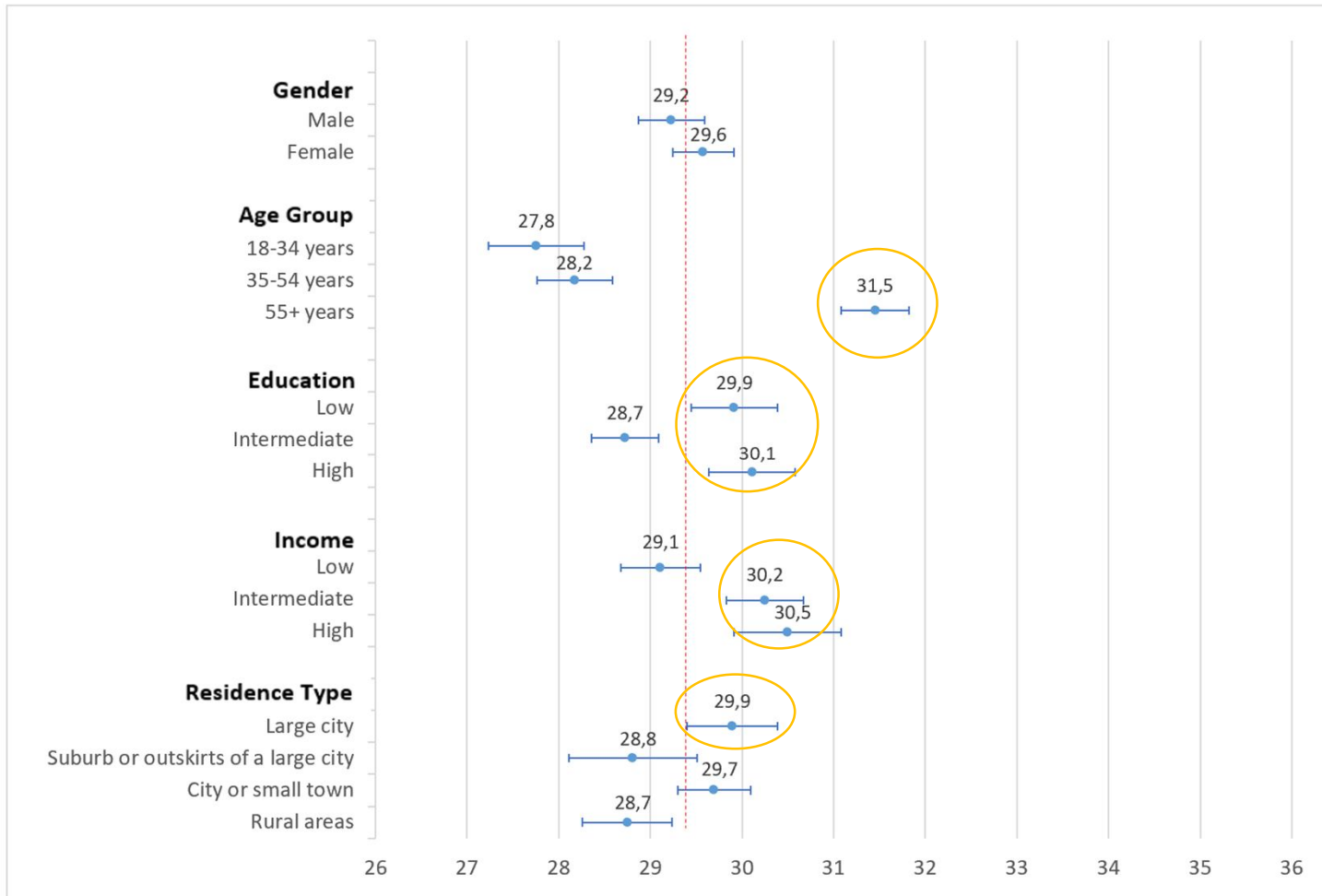


Which groups of people are particularly strongly polarized?

- People in the oldest age group are significantly more affectively polarized than younger people
- Well-educated people and people with high incomes show the greatest amount of polarization
- Residents of large cities are significantly more polarized than people who live in rural areas

Note: Dots indicate the average group values of the polarization index with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449, except for gross household, where n = at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

All Issues: Polarization by Sociodemographic Group

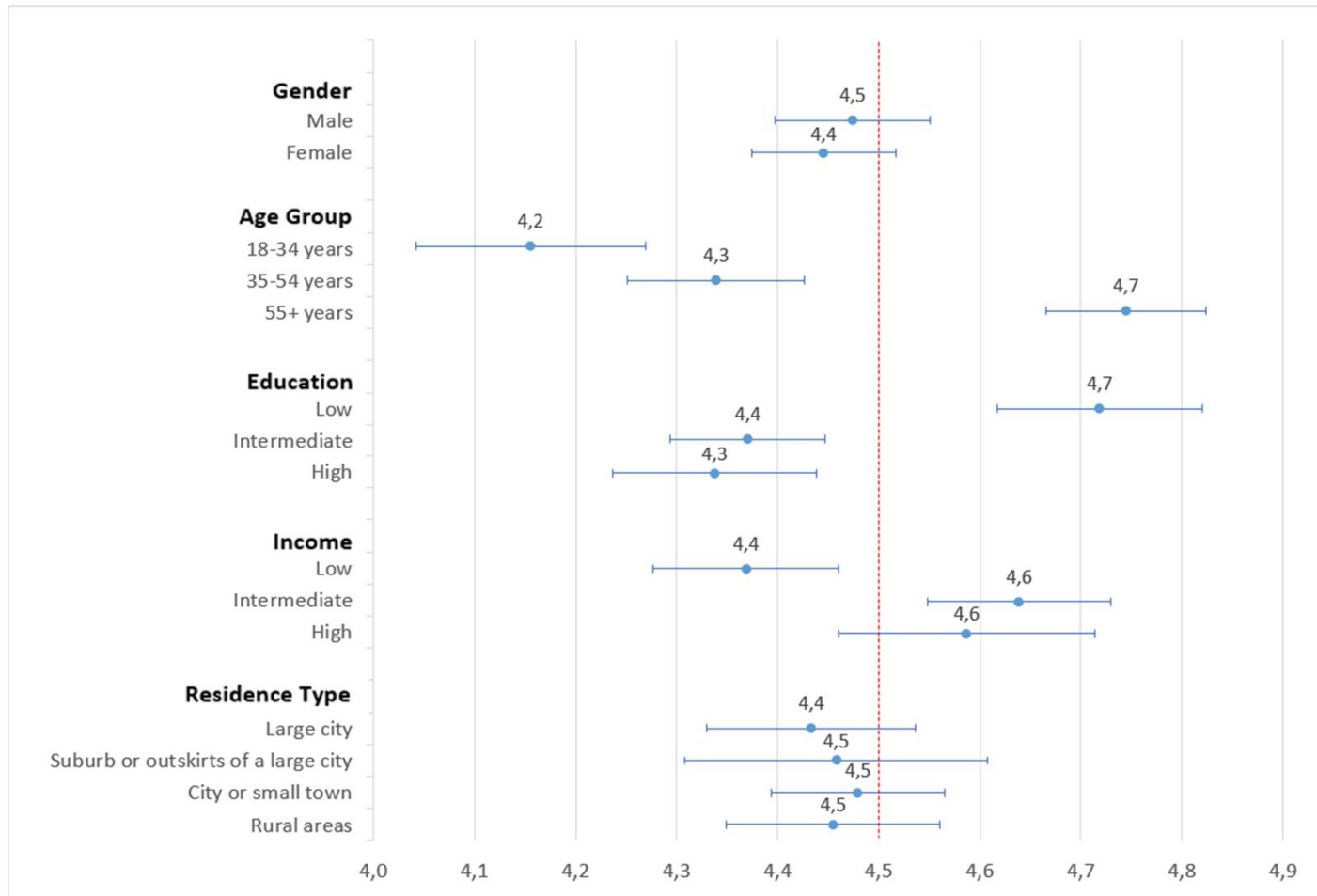


Which groups of people are particularly strongly polarized?

- People in the oldest age group are significantly more affectively polarized than younger people
- Well-educated people and people with high incomes show the greatest amount of polarization
- Residents of large cities are significantly more polarized than people who live in rural areas

Note: Dots indicate the average group values of the polarization index with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449, except for gross household, where n = at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

Immigration: Polarization by Sociodemographic Group

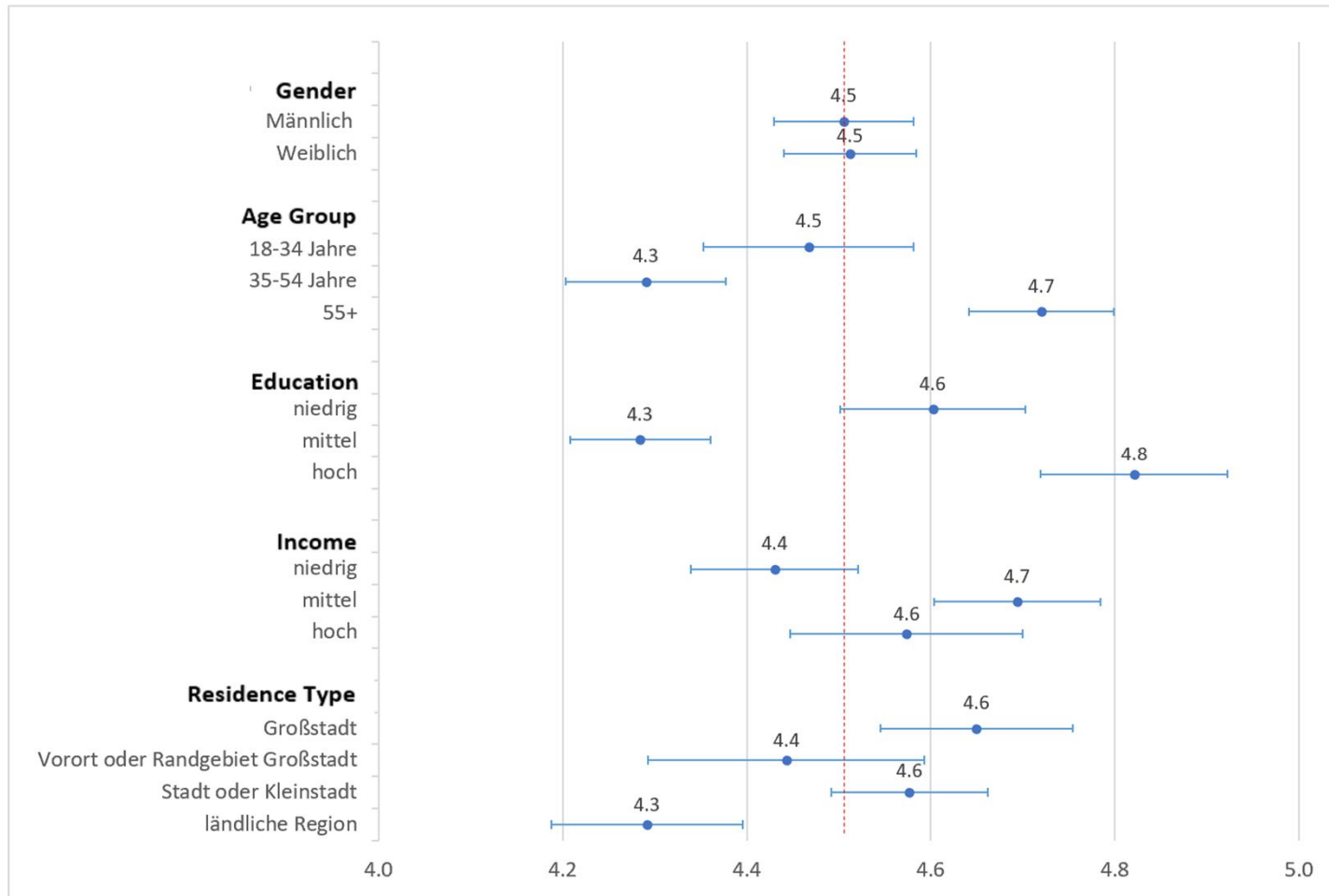


IMMIGRATION: Which groups of people show the greatest amount of polarization?

- People in the oldest age group are significantly more polarized than younger people
- People with low levels of formal education show the highest amount of polarization

Affective polarization on the issue of immigration. Dots indicate the average group values on the polarization score with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449, except for gross household, where n = at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

Climate Change: Polarization by Sociodemographic Group

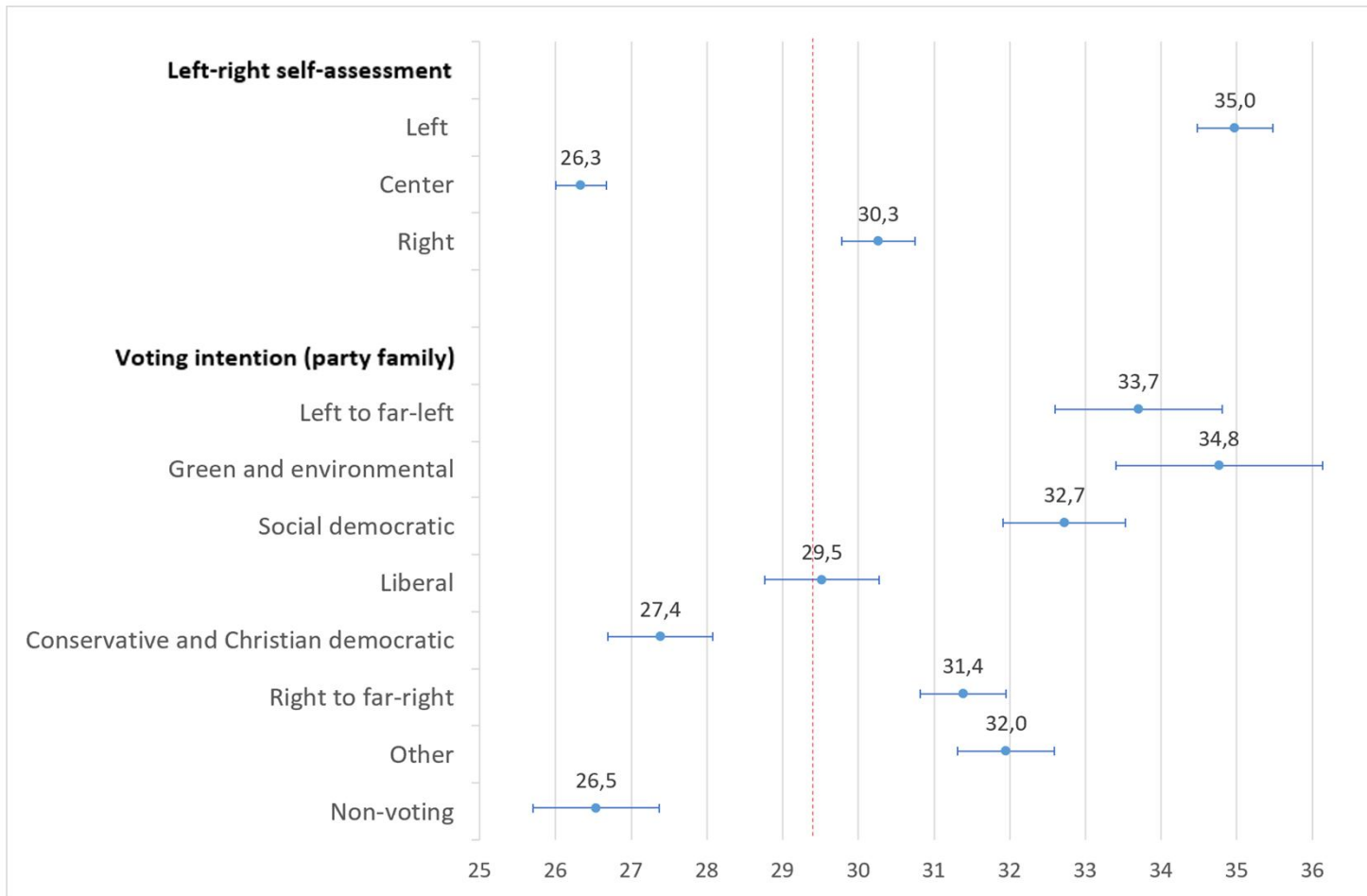


CLIMATE CHANGE: Which groups of people are most polarized?

- Older people are significantly more polarized than middle-aged people
- People with high levels of formal education exhibit the highest levels of polarization

Affective polarization on the issue of climate change. Dots indicate the average group values on the polarization score with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region ($n = 20,449$, except for gross household, where $n =$ at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

All Issues: Polarization by Political Characteristics

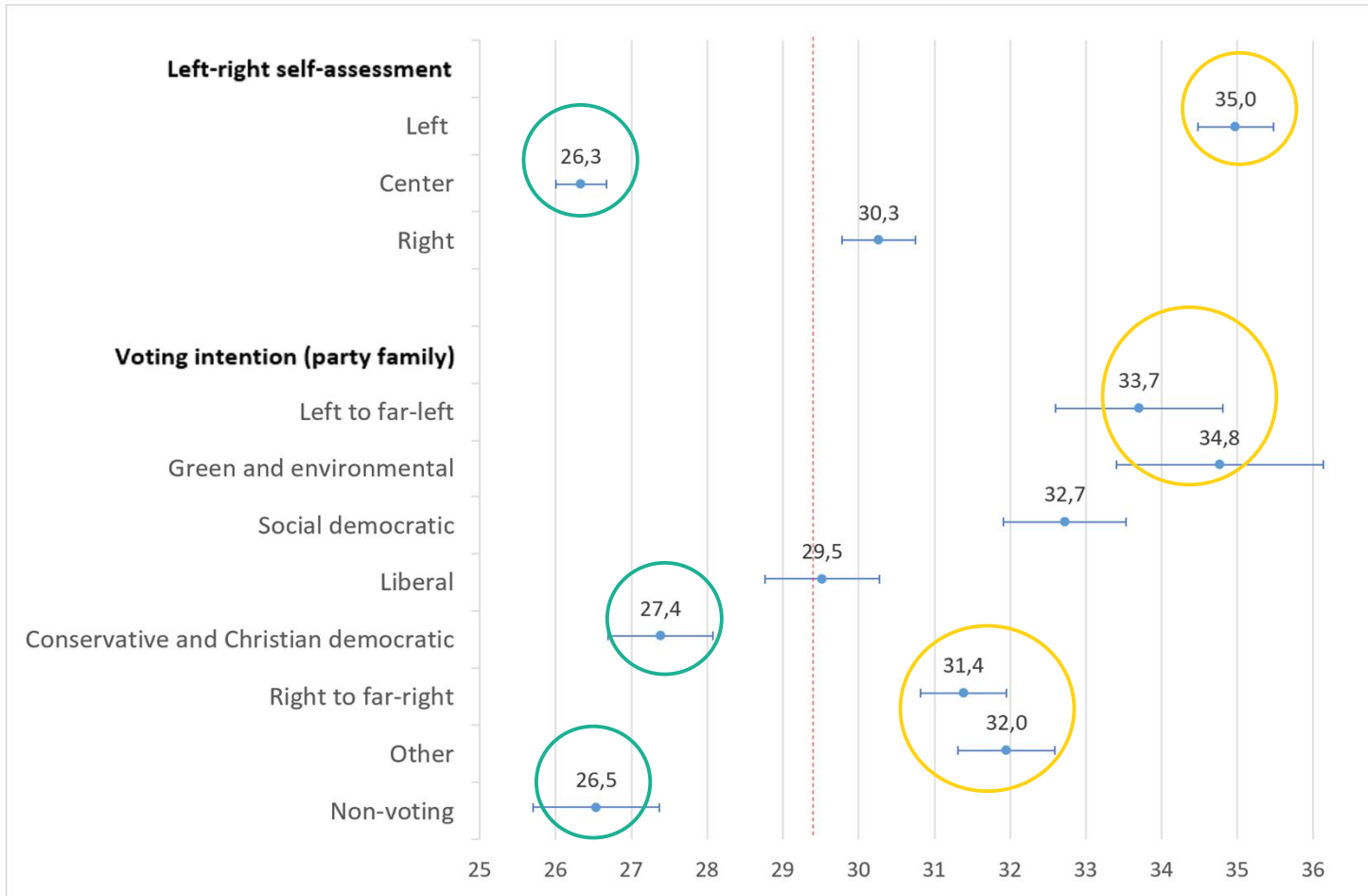


Which groups of people are particularly strongly polarized?

- In general, people on the political left are more polarized than those on the right
- Polarization is strongest among supporters of left, far-left, and environmental parties
- People with progressive positions are more polarized than conservatives

Note: Dots indicate the average group values of the polarization index with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449, except for party groupings, where n = at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

All Issues: Polarization by Political Characteristics

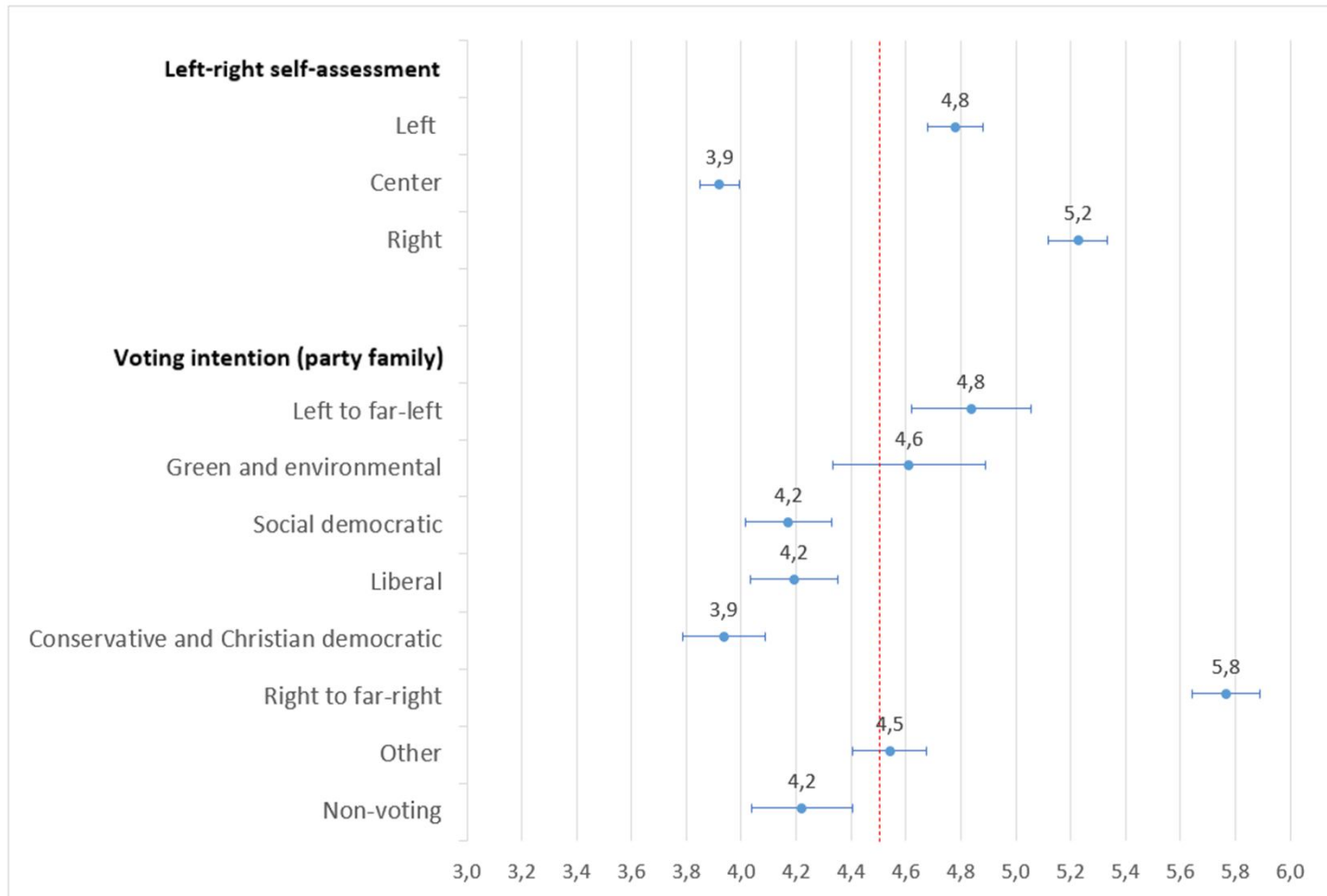


Which groups of people are particularly strongly polarized?

- In general, people on the political left are more polarized than those on the right
- Polarization is strongest among supporters of left, far-left, and environmental parties
- People with progressive positions are more polarized than conservatives

Note: Dots indicate the average group values of the polarization index with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449, except for party groupings, where n = at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

Immigration: Polarization by Political Characteristics



IMMIGRATION: Which groups of people show the greatest amount of polarization?

- In general, people on the political right show the highest polarization, followed by those on the left
- Polarization is strongest among supporters of right and far-right
- Supporters of conservative and Christian democratic parties exhibit the lowest level of polarization

Affective polarization on the issue of immigration. Dots indicate the average group values on the polarization score with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449, except for party groupings, where n = at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

CONTENT

1. Conceptualization

- What is polarization? What is affective polarization?
- How to measure affective polarization?
- Our study: methodology

2. Results

- What degree of affective polarization can be observed in different countries?
- Which social groups show the highest amount of affective polarization?
- What do high rates of affective polarization actually mean?
- How does affective polarization influence a democracy?
- Which issues have the highest potential to cause (political/societal) divisions?



What do high rates of affective polarization actually mean?



- negative evaluation of persons whose opinion differs from one's own
- Interpretation: high affective polarization scores could indicate (spectrum):
 - high political interest
 - strong will to shape policy
 - strength of opinion, self-confidence, conviction
 - confidence in the correctness of one's own world view
 - linkage of one's own opinion with emotions and processes of identity formation (also hinting at associated processes of exclusion and demarcation)
 - lack of tolerance, ideological rigidity

CONTENT

1. Conceptualization

- What is polarization? What is affective polarization?
- How to measure affective polarization?
- Our study: methodology

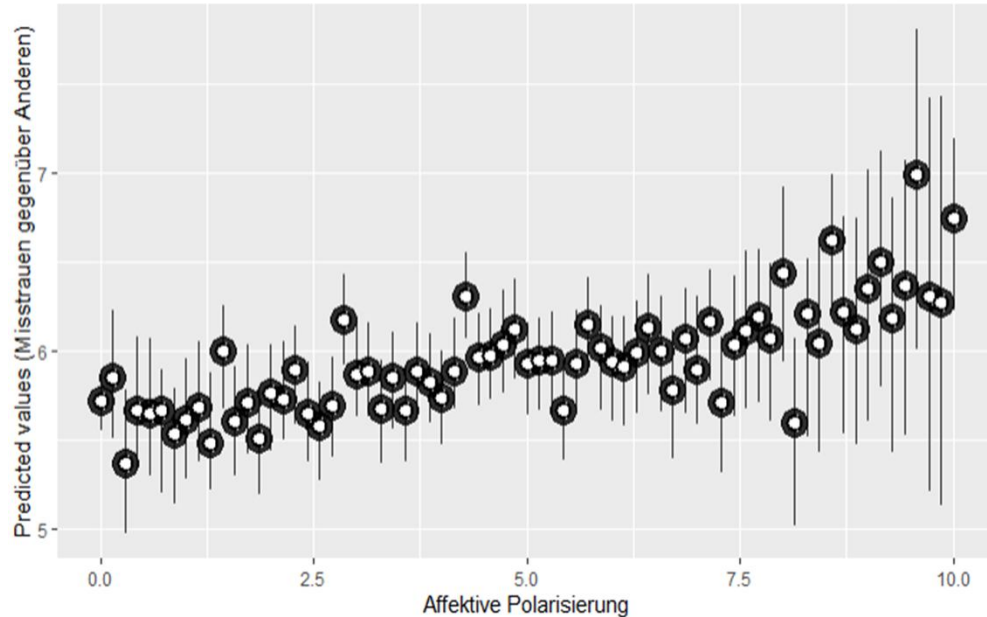
2. Results

- What degree of affective polarization can be observed in different countries?
- Which social groups show the highest amount of affective polarization?
- What do high rates of affective polarization actually mean?
- How does affective polarization influence a democracy?
- Which issues have the highest potential to cause (political/societal) divisions?



How does affective Polarization influence Democracy?

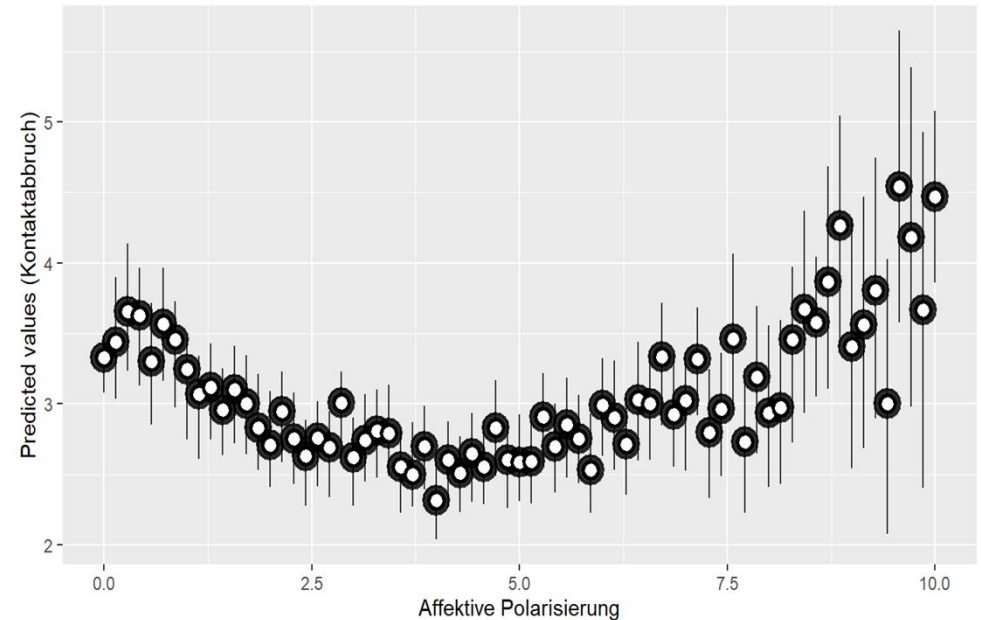
Affective Polarization and Social Trust



Distrust of others: "Speaking generally: Do you think most people can be trusted, or that you can't be careful enough when dealing with other people?" (0 = "Most people can be trusted," 10 = "You can't be careful enough.")

Note: The figure shows the average answer to the respective question according to the degree of affective polarization of the respondents (x-axis). Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449). Own survey / YouGov.

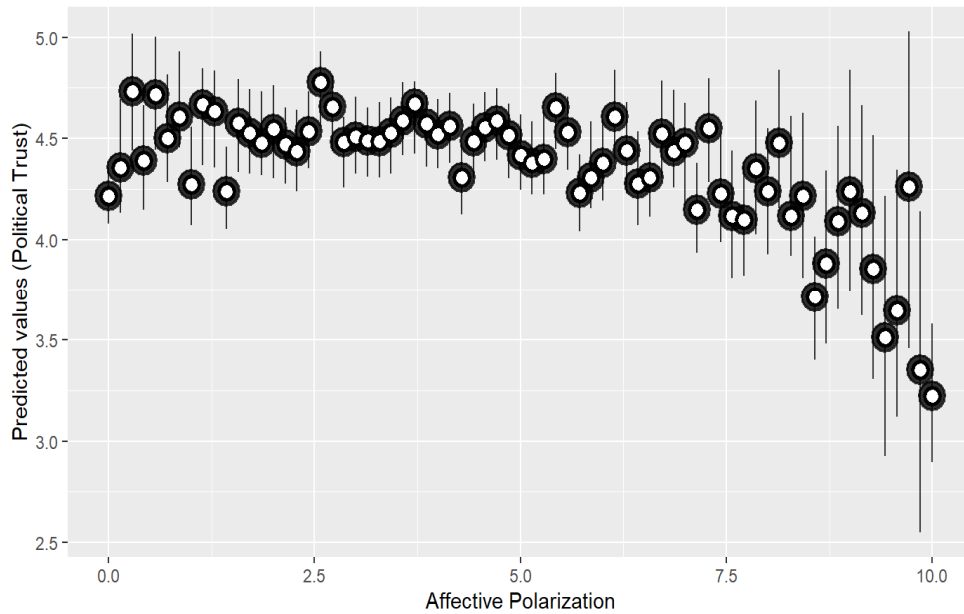
Affective Polarization and Breaking contact



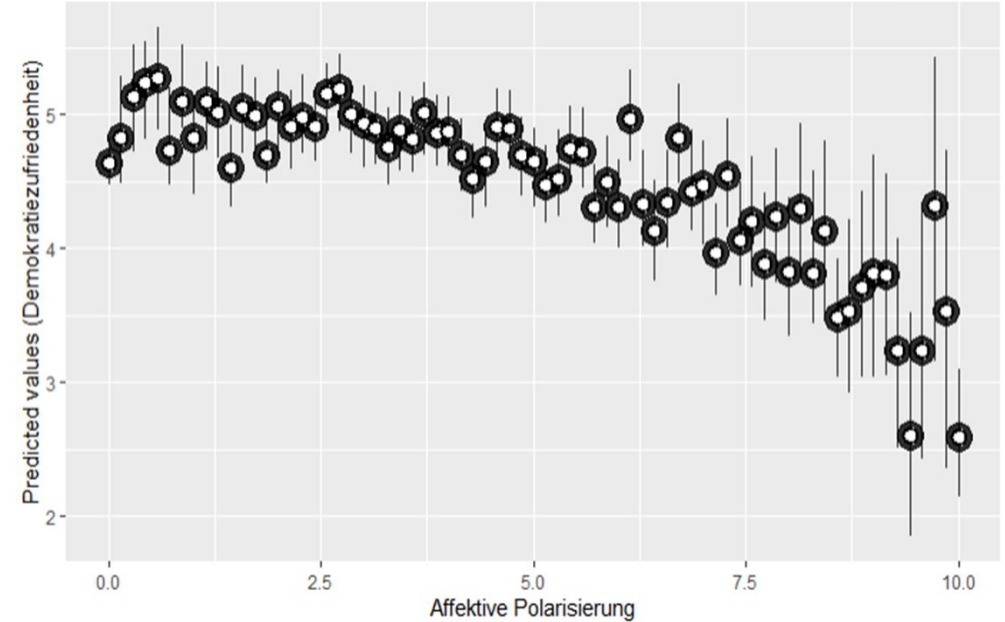
Breaking off contact: "I have broken off contact with certain people because of their political views." (high values = agreement)

How does affective Polarization influence Democracy?

Affective Polarization and Political Trust



Affective Polarization and Satisfaction with Democracy

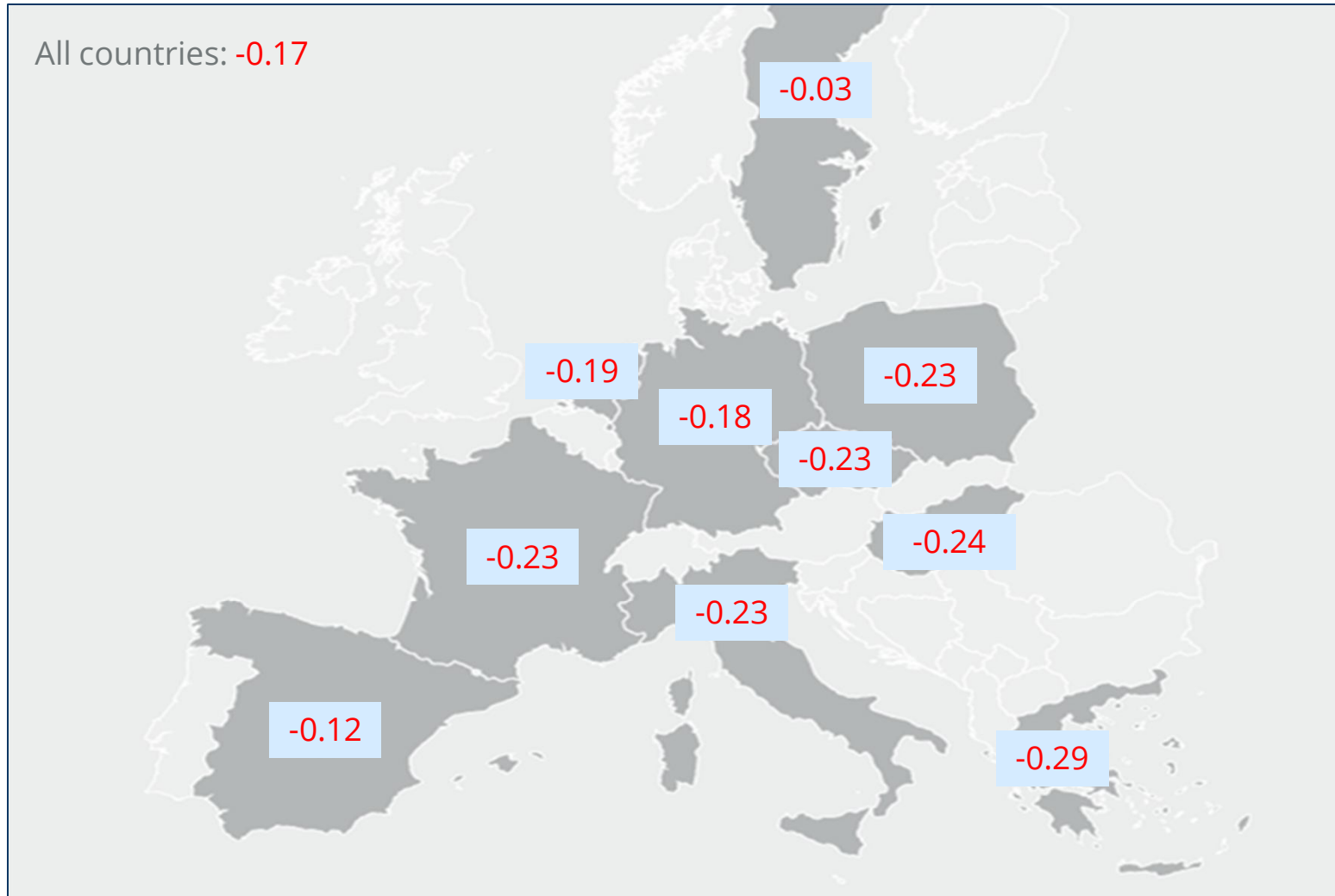


Political trust: "Please indicate how much, if at all, you personally trust the following institutions." Here: mean index of "the parliament," "the political parties," "the judiciary," "the police," "science," "the media," "the European Parliament" (high values = high trust)

Satisfaction with democracy: "How satisfied are you - all in all - with the way democracy works in [country]?" (0 = "extremely dissatisfied," 10 = "extremely satisfied")

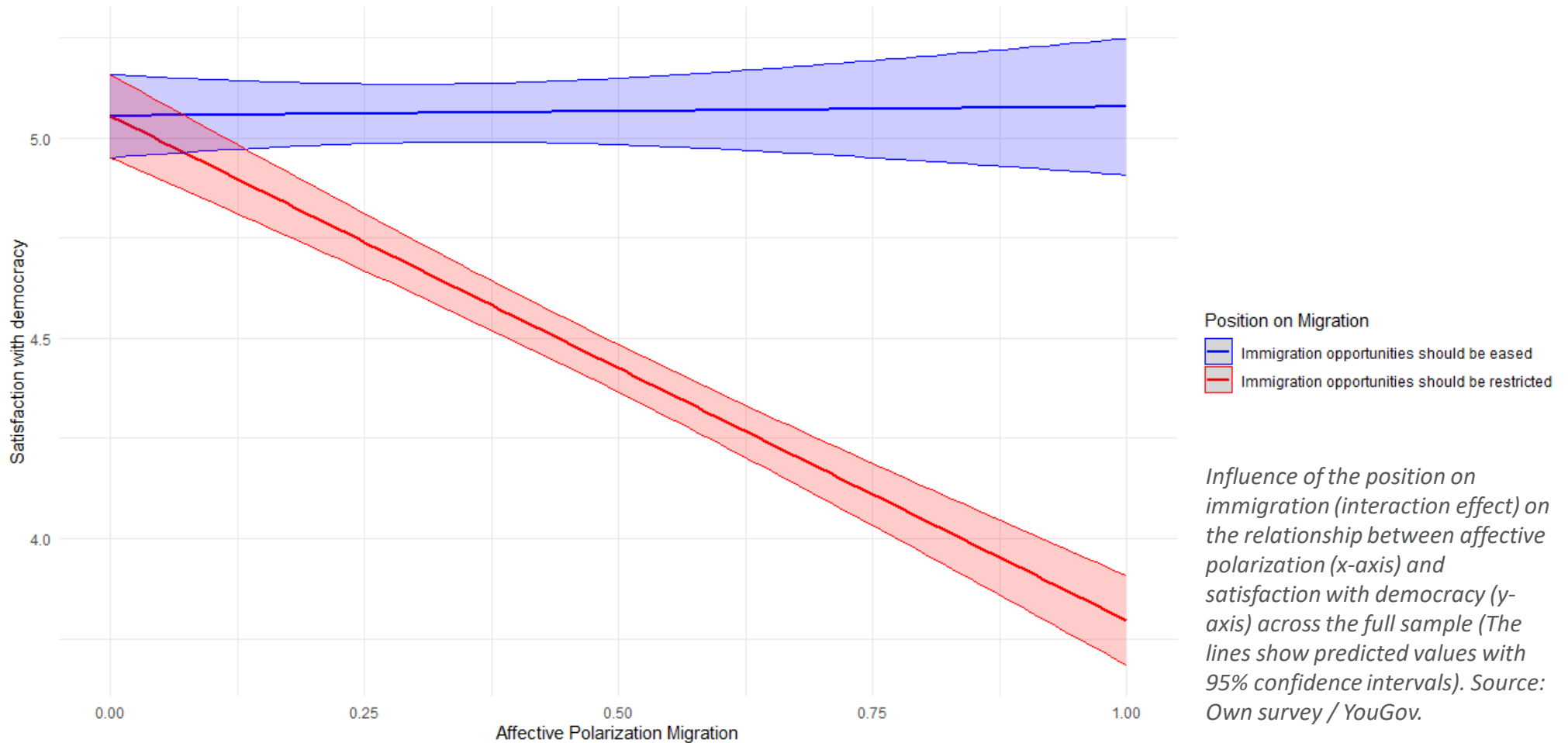
Note: The figure shows the average answer to the respective question according to the degree of affective polarization of the respondents (x-axis). Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449). Own survey / YouGov.

Affective Polarization and Satisfaction with Democracy

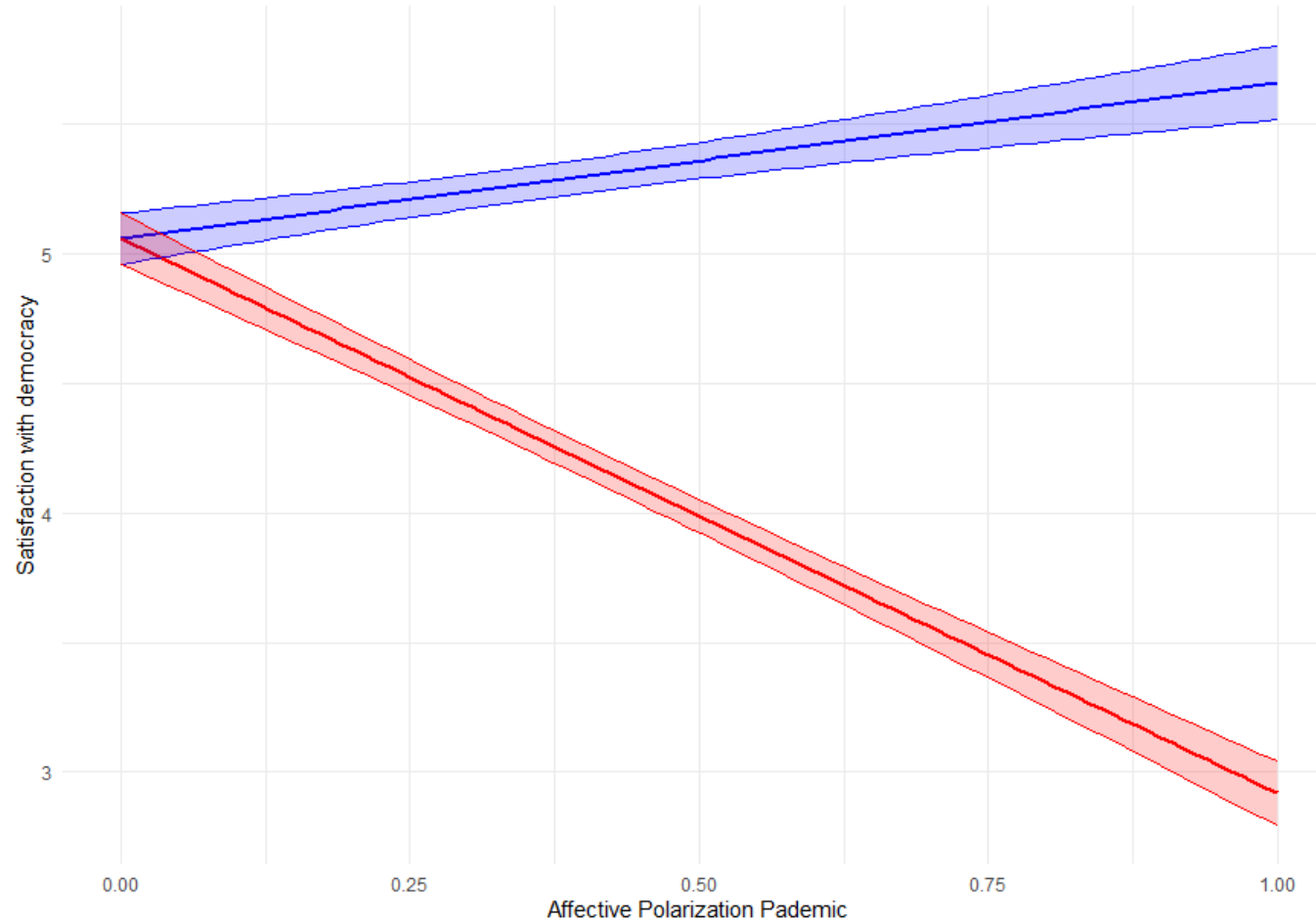


Average marginal effects (AME) of affective polarization (index) on satisfaction with democracy. Basis: robust linear regression models that include control variables and country fixed-effects. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region.

Migration: Affective Polarization and Satisfaction with Democracy



Covid-19: Affective Polarization and Satisfaction with Democracy

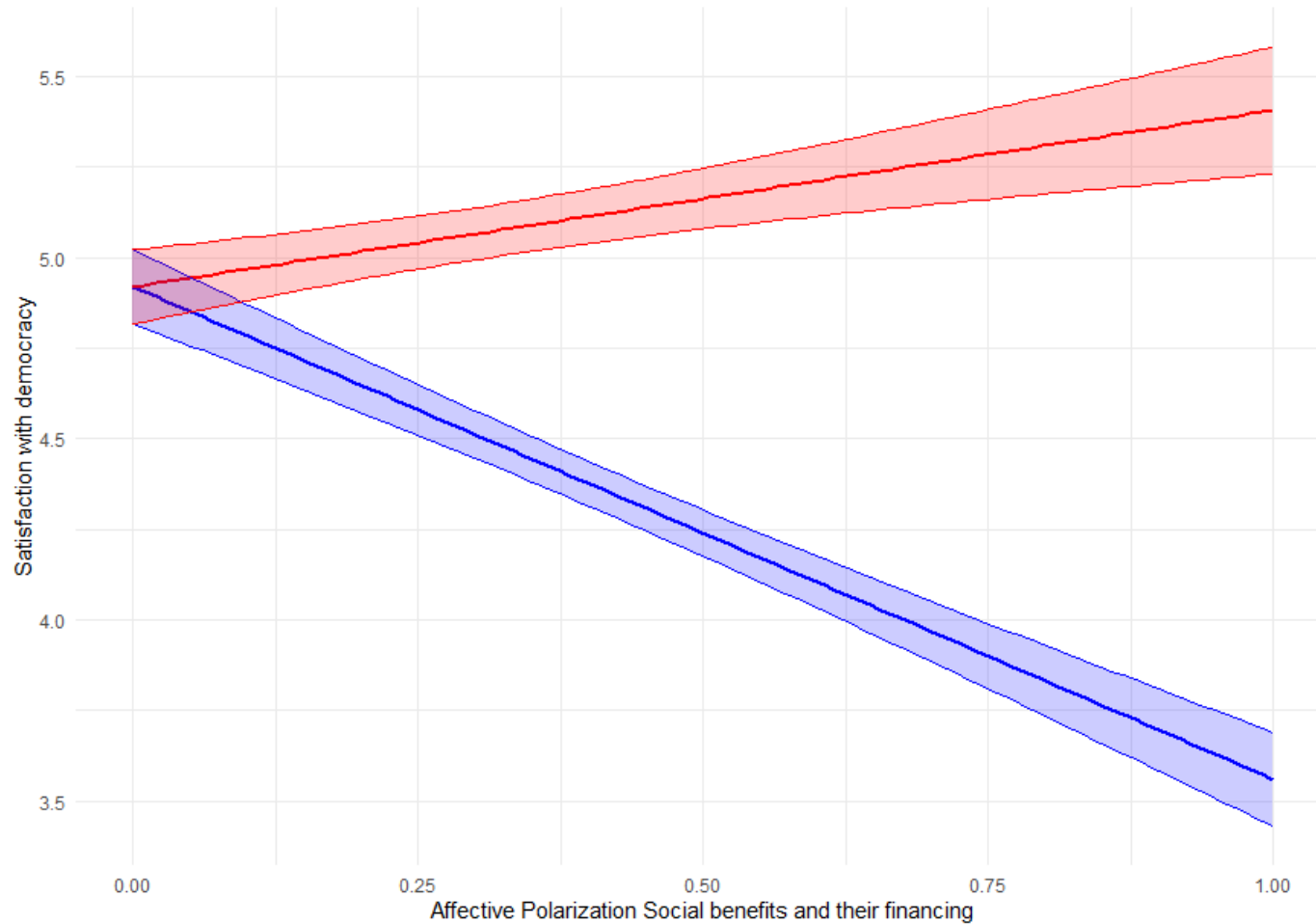


Position on Pandemic Control

- Far-reaching encroachments on individual freedom necessary
- Opposed to encroachments on freedom

Influence of the position on pandemic control (interaction effect) on the relationship between affective polarization (x-axis) and satisfaction with democracy (y-axis) across the full sample (The lines show predicted values with 95% confidence intervals). Source: Own survey / YouGov.

Social Benefits: Affective Polarization and Satisfaction with Democracy



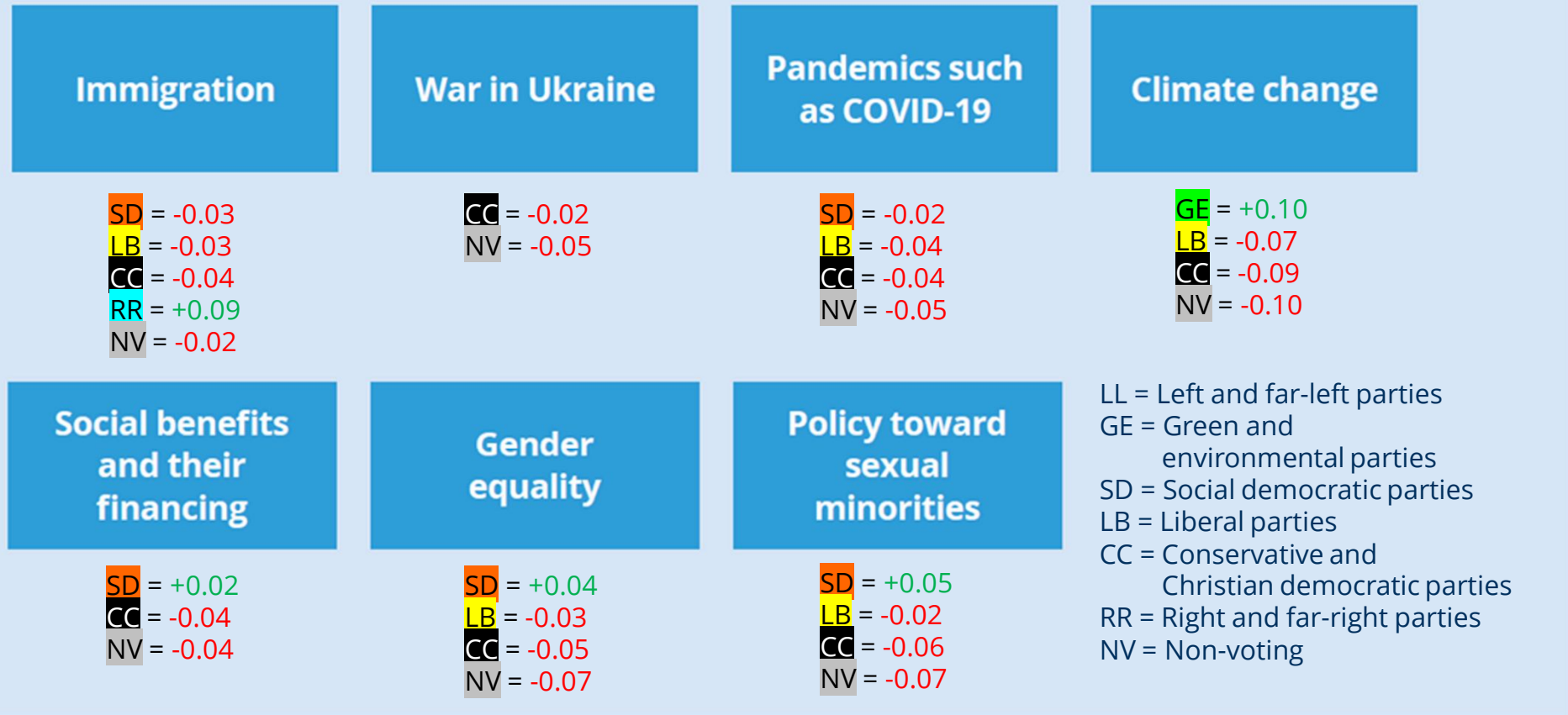
Position on Social benefits and their financing

- Less taxes and contributions, resulting in fewer social benefits
- More social benefits, increase in taxes and contributions

Influence of the position on social benefits (interaction effect) on the relationship between affective polarization (x-axis) and satisfaction with democracy (y-axis) across the full sample (The lines show predicted values with 95% confidence intervals). Source: Own survey / YouGov.

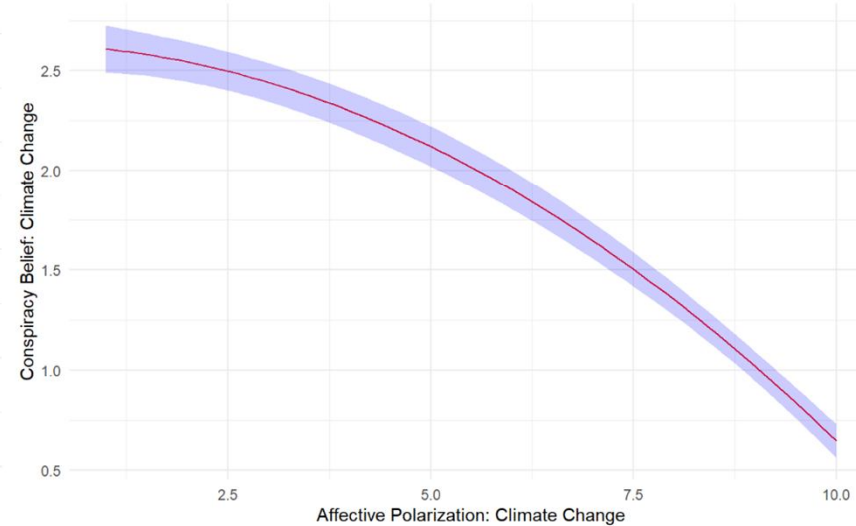
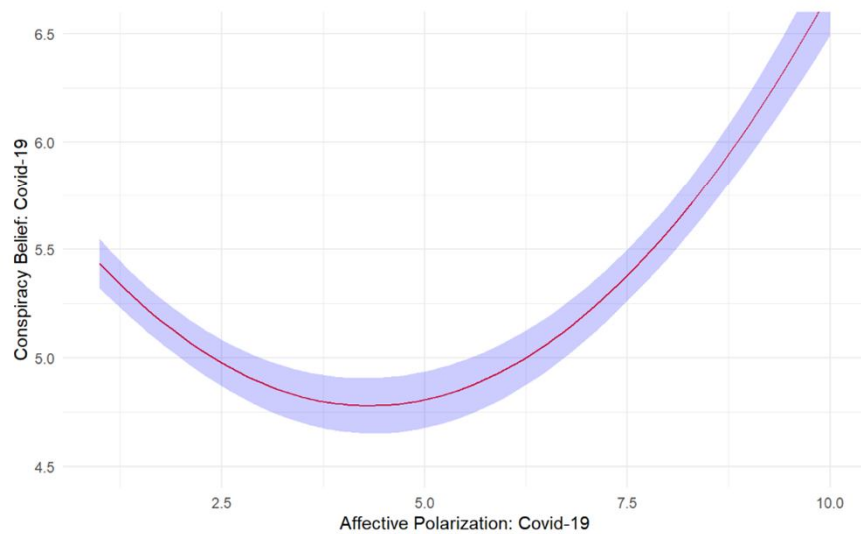
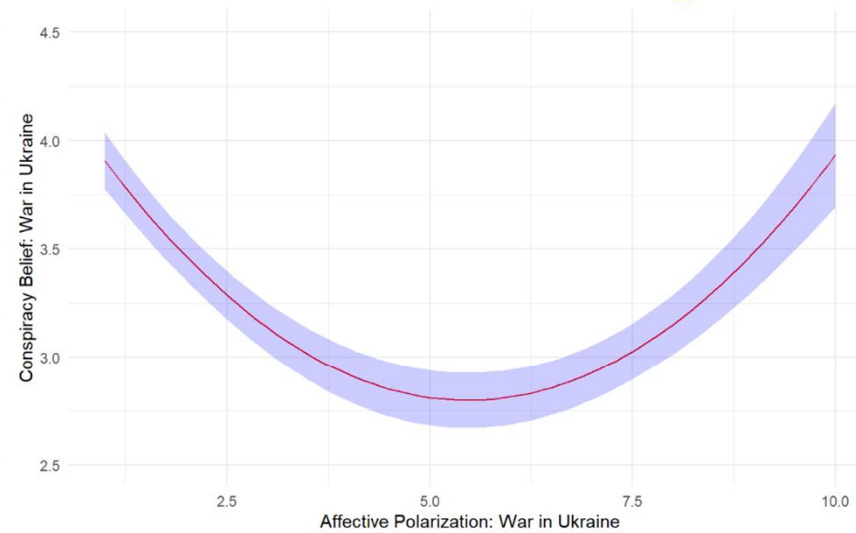
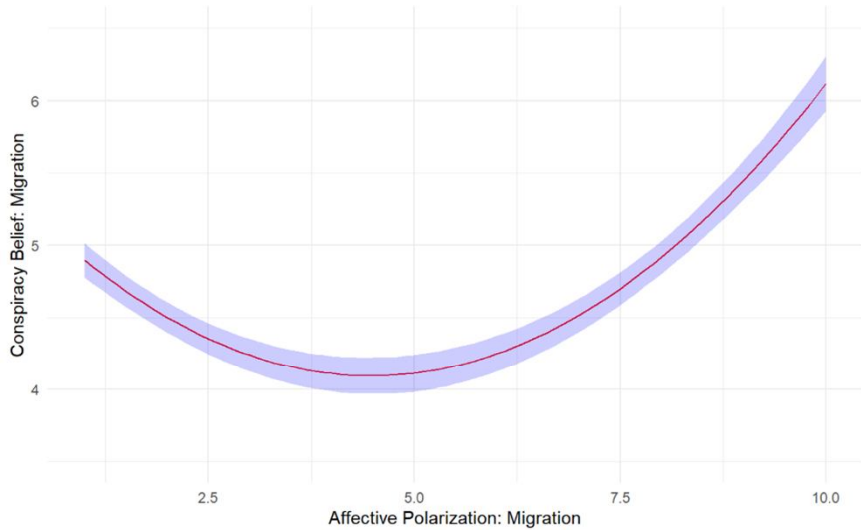
Affective Polarization and Voting Intention

Increasing affective polarization by 1 Point on the following issue areas:



Average marginal effect of affective polarization on voting intentions (Basis: multinomial logistic regression models; Question: "Which party would you vote for, if there were a general election next Sunday?"). Only significant effects are included.) Example: If affective polarization on migration is increased by one point on the scale, the likelihood of voting for a right or far-right party is increases by 0.09 points.

Affective Polarization and Conspiracy Belief



Relationship between affective polarization (x-axis) and conspiracy belief (y-axis) across the full sample for four different issue areas. Predicted Values with 95% confidence intervals on the basis of robust non-linear regression models (Source: Own survey / YouGov).

1. Conceptualization

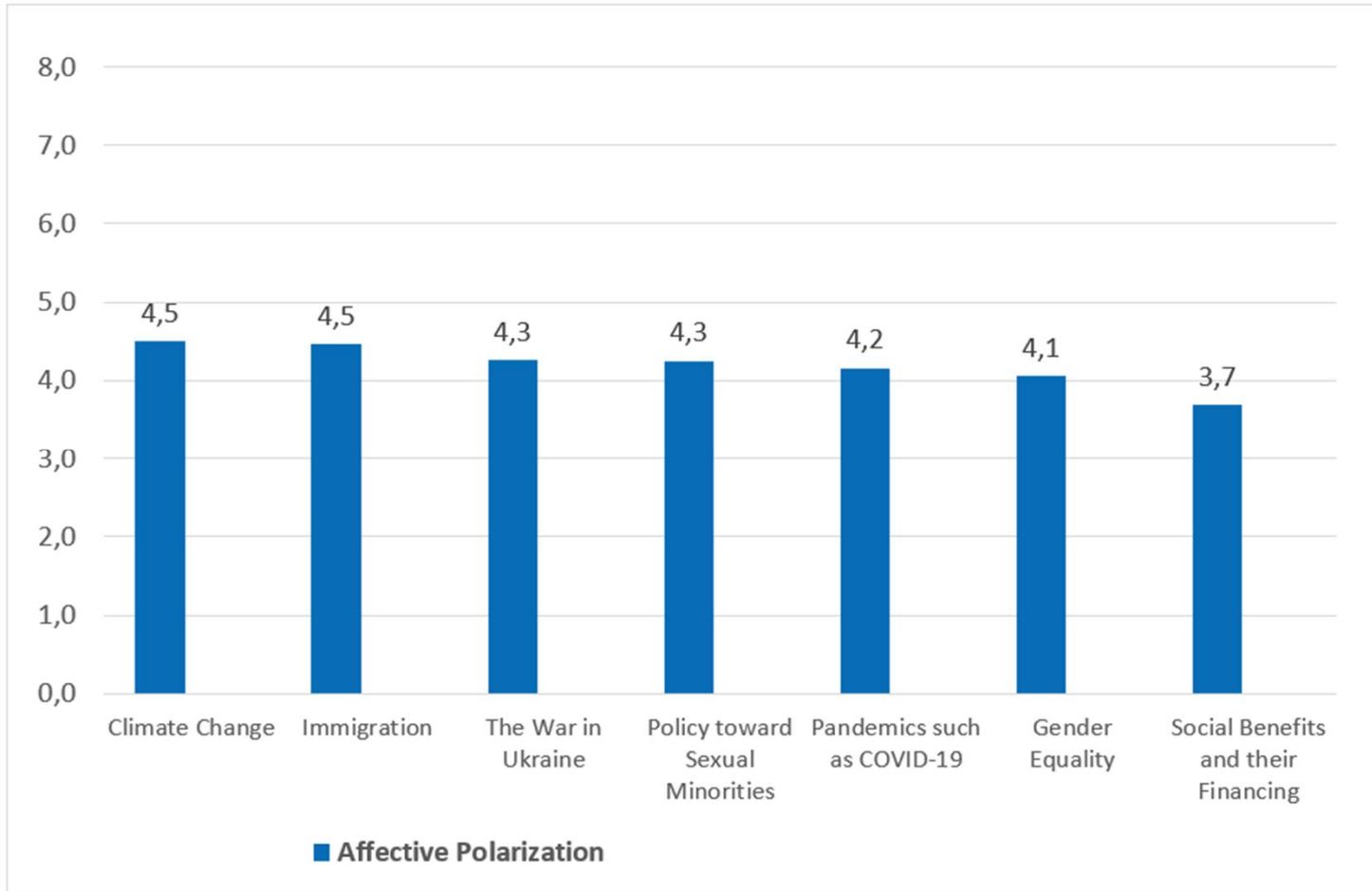
- What is polarization?
- Why asking for affective polarization?
- How to measure affective polarization?
- Our study: methodology

2. Results

- What degree of affective polarization can be observed in different countries?
- Which social groups show the highest amount of affective polarization?
- What do high rates of affective polarization actually mean?
- Which issues have the highest potential to cause (political) divisions of society?



Affective Polarization by Issue



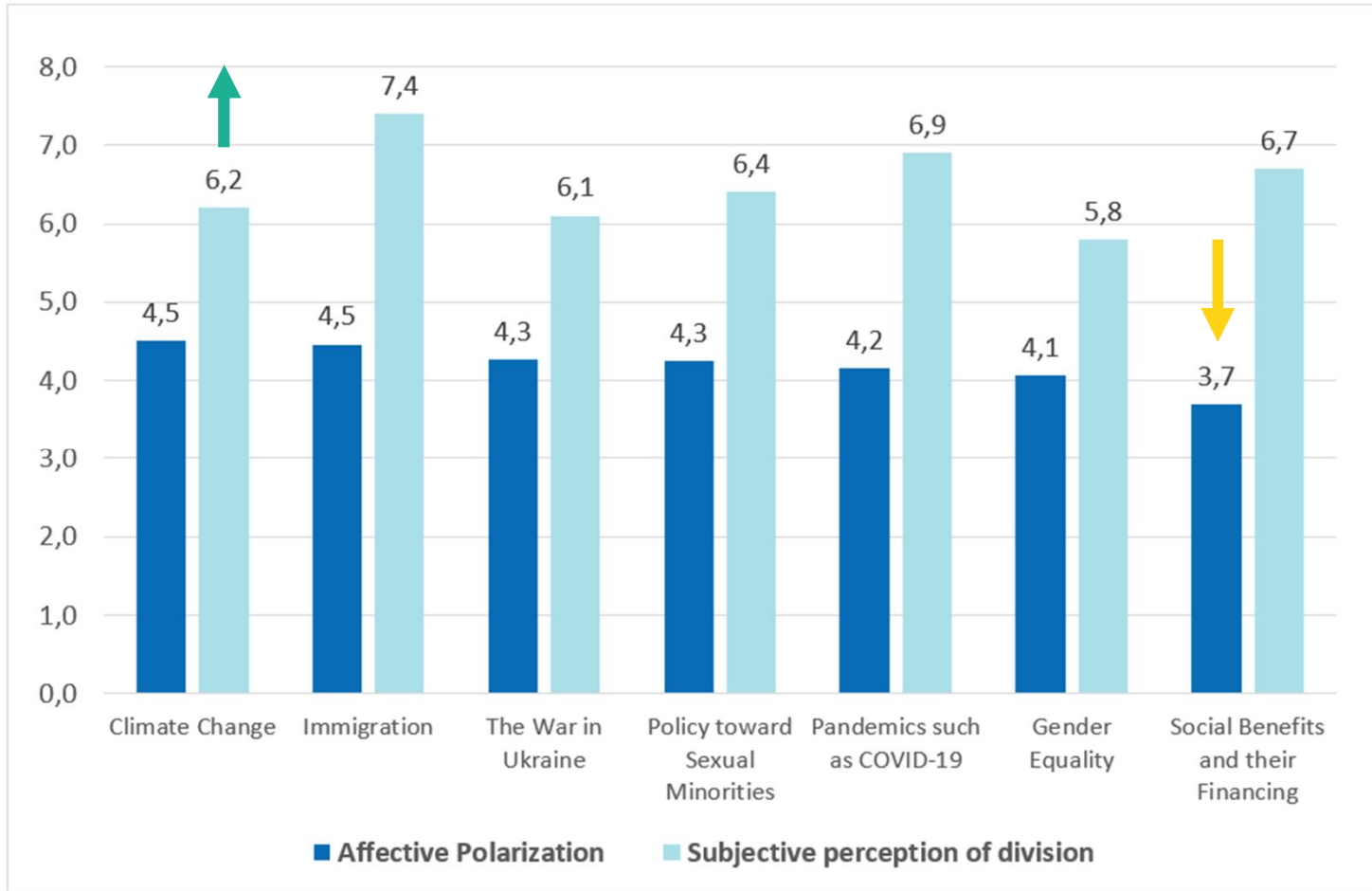
Which issues are most polarizing?

- "Immigration" and "Climate Change" show the highest levels of affective polarization
- levels of affective polarization are lowest for the issues of "Gender Equality in Society" and "Social Benefits and their Financing."

Note: Figure depicts average scores of affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449).

Source: Own survey / YouGov

Affective Polarization and Subjective Perception of Division

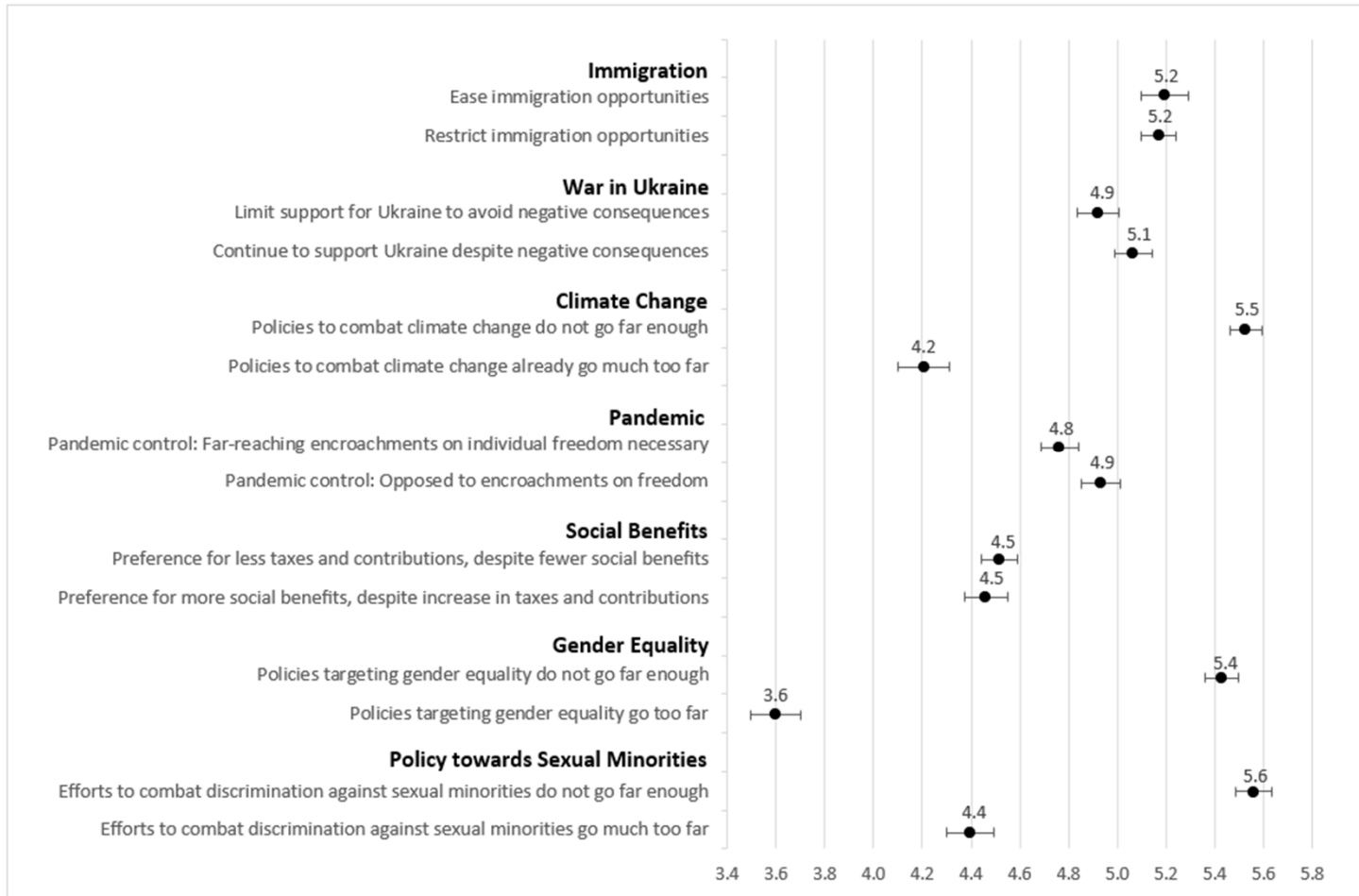


What issue do respondents expect to be the most societally divisive?

- *“Immigration,” “Pandemics such as COVID-19” and “Social Benefits”* are seen as the most divisive issues
- The greatest differences between the perceived potential for divisiveness and the actual extent of polarization is seen at *“Social Benefits”* and *“Climate Change”*

Average answers to the question *“For which of the political issues addressed do you see a division in society? Please rate your answer on a scale from 0 (no division at all) to 10 (very strong division)”* and Affective Polarization on the respective issue. *n = at least 18,279 per item.* (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

Affective Polarization and Self-Positioning

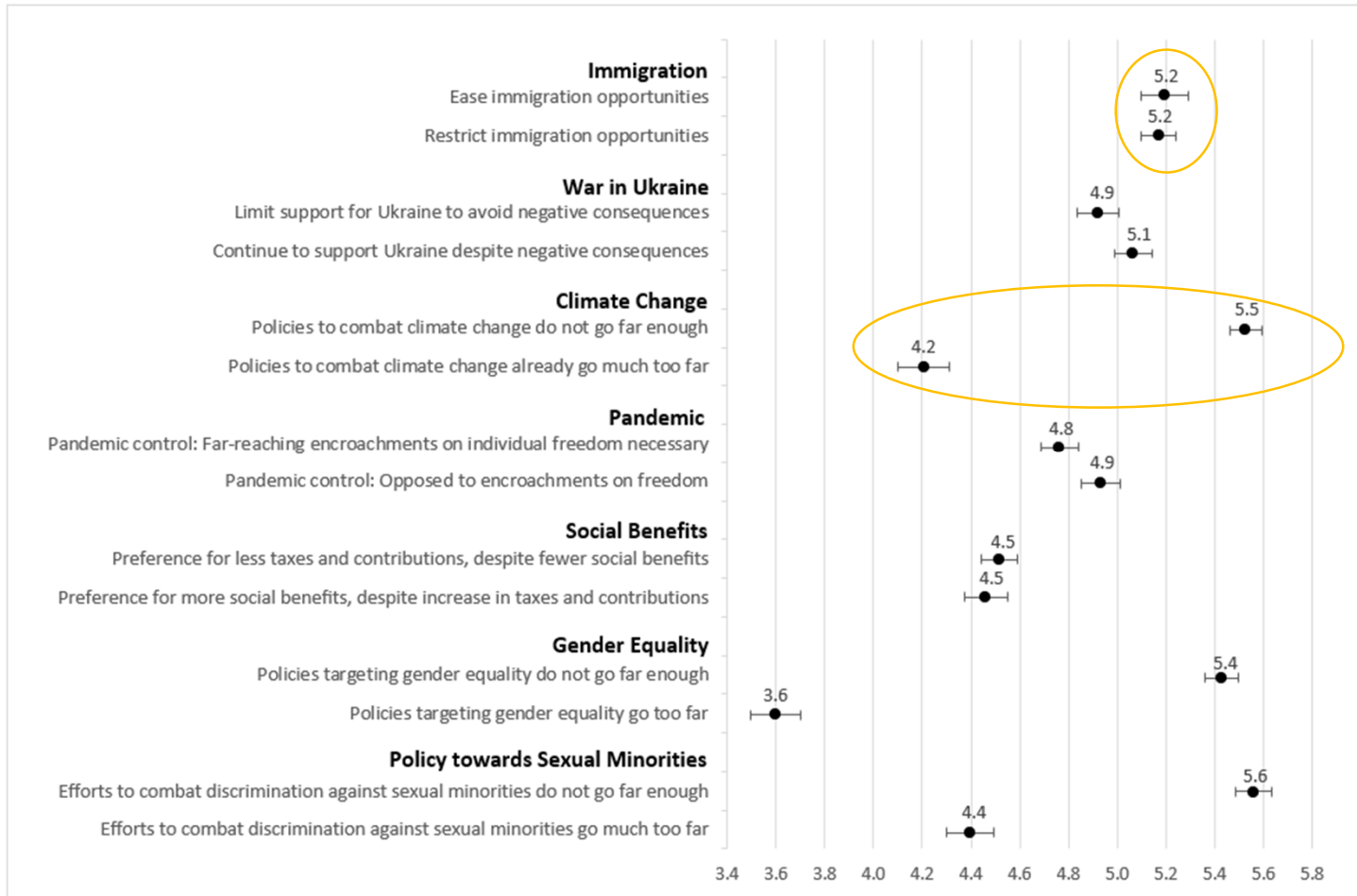


Which groups of people are particularly polarized?

- 'climate change', 'gender equality', 'policy towards sexual minorities': people who hold rather progressive positions show more affective polarization than those with conservative views
- 'immigration', 'war in Ukraine', 'pandemics', 'social benefits': both opinion groups show the same amount of affective polarization

Note: Dots indicate the average group values of the polarization index with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449, except for party groupings, where n = at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

Affective Polarization and Self-Positioning

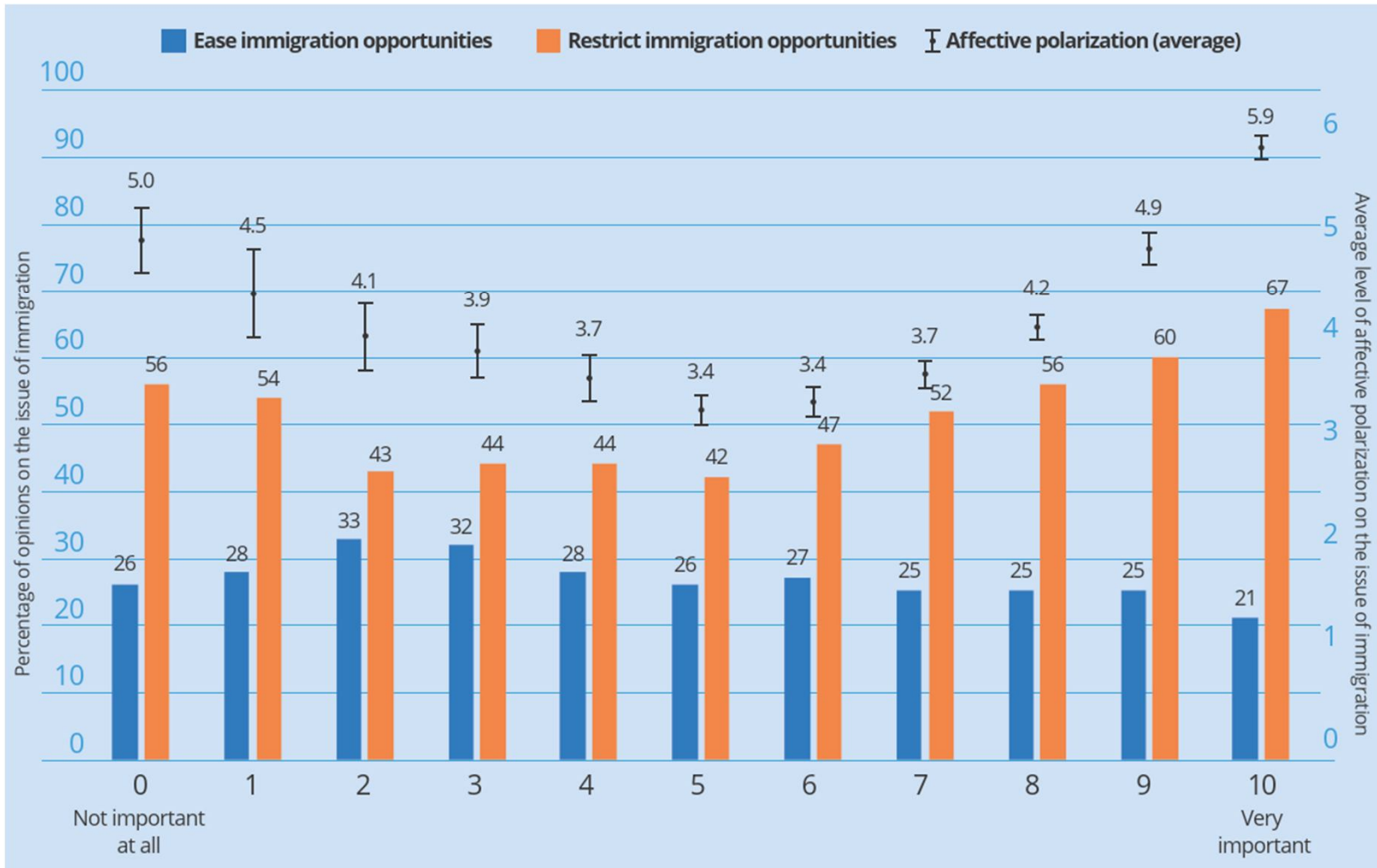


Which groups of people are particularly polarized?

- 'climate change', 'gender equality', 'policy towards sexual minorities': people who hold rather progressive positions show more affective polarization than those with conservative views
- 'immigration', 'war in Ukraine', 'pandemics', 'social benefits': both opinion groups show the same amount of affective polarization

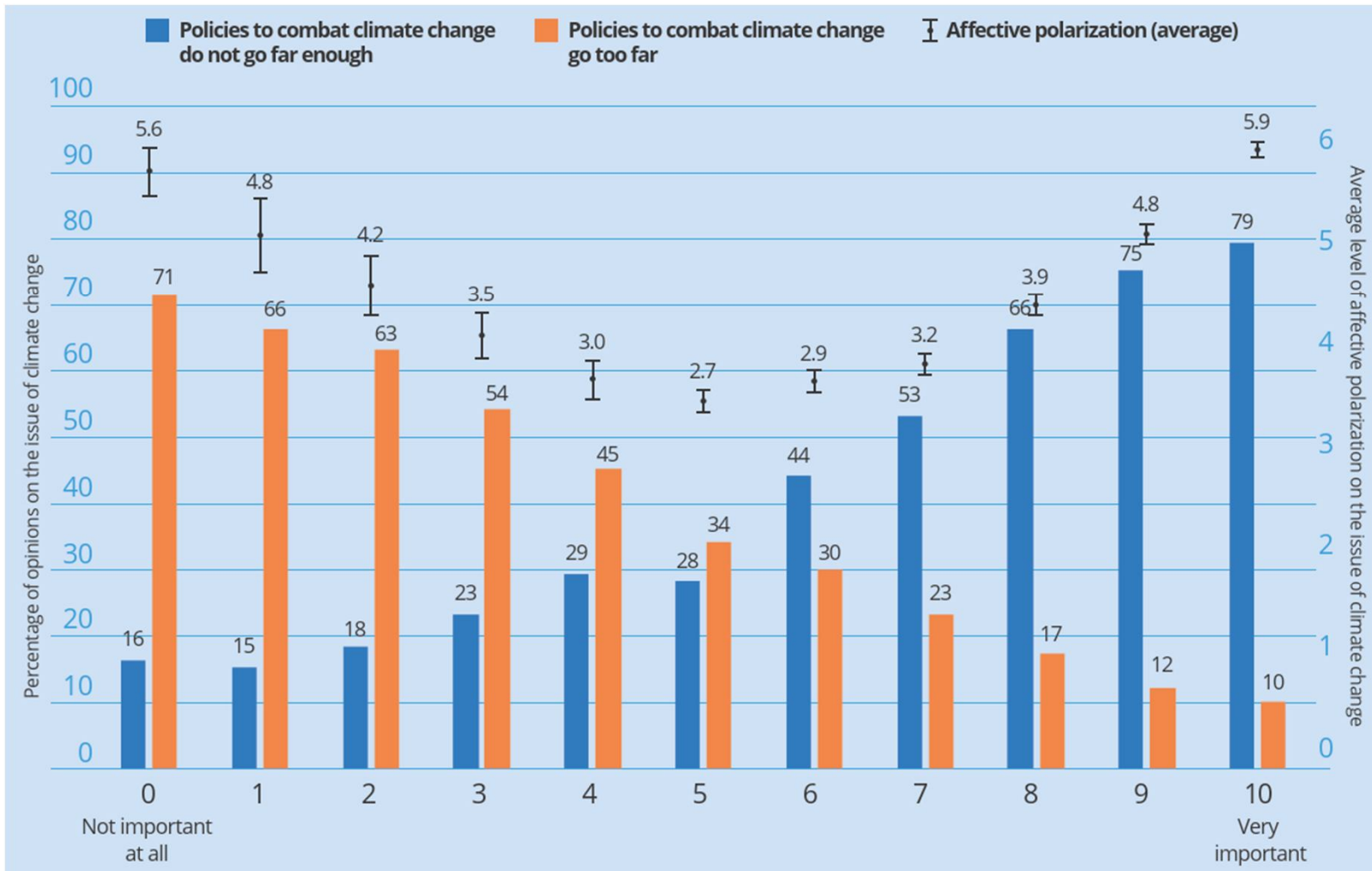
Note: Dots indicate the average group values of the polarization index with associated 95% confidence intervals. The higher the value, the stronger the affective polarization. Results are weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449, except for party groupings, where n = at least 16,569. Missing values = "don't know"/no answer). (Source: Own survey / YouGov)

Affective Polarization, Self-Positioning and Salience



Affective polarization on the issue of immigration by salience (average scores and confidence intervals), with associated shares of opinion groups (%). The results were weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449). Source: Own survey / YouGov.

Affective Polarization, Self-Positioning and Salience



Affective polarization on the issue of immigration by salience (average scores and confidence intervals), with associated shares of opinion groups (%). The results were weighted by age, gender, education and region (n = 20,449). Source: Own survey / YouGov.

Summary: Key Findings

- Respondents in **Italy and Greece** are the most polarized, while those in Netherlands and Czechia are the least polarized
- **Older** people, people with **high levels of education** as well as those with high incomes and residents of **large cities** show the greatest amount of affective polarization
- **People on the left and on the right** show more affective polarization than supporter of liberal parties in the political center; people with rather **progressive views** who aim at political change are more polarized than supporters of conservative parties
- The **issues of “climate change” and “immigration”** show the highest levels of affective polarization. From the people’s perspective, however, “immigration,” “COVID-19” and “social benefits” are regarded as most divisive.
- There is no linear relationship between salience and affective polarization.
- In general, affective polarization **contributes to democratic discontent**, institutional distrust, populist resentments, and the success of certain parties. However, its effect is **highly dependent from the specific issue and people’s position** on that issue.
- In some contexts, the impact of affective polarization is **not linear**: Too little affective polarization can have similar negative effects as too much.

References (selection)

- Castanho Silva, Bruno; Andreadis, Ioannis; Anduiza, Eva; Blanuša, Nebojša; Morlet Corti; Yazmin et al. (2018): Public Opinion surveys. A new scale. In Kirk Hawkins, Ryan Carlin, Levente Littvay, Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (Eds.): *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Theory, Method & Analysis*. London: Routledge, pp. 150–178.
- Harteveld, Eelco; Berntzen, Lars Erik; Kokkonen, Andrej; Kelsall, Haylee; Linde, Jonas; Dahlberg, Stefan (2022): *The (Alleged) Consequences of Affective Polarization: A Survey Experiment in 9 Countries*: Center for Open Science.
- Herold; Maik, Joachim, Janine; Otteni, Cyrill; Vorländer, Hans (2023): *Polarization in Europe. An Analysis of Ten European Countries*. Dresden: Mercator Forum Migration and Democracy (MIDEM).
- Hobolt, Sara B.; Leeper, Thomas J.; Tilley, James (2021): *Divided by the Vote: Affective Polarization in the Wake of the Brexit Referendum*. In *Brit. J. Polit. Sci.* 51 (4), pp. 1476–1493. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123420000125.
- Iyengar, Shanto; Lelkes, Yphtach; Levendusky, Matthew; Malhotra, Neil; Westwood, Sean J. (2019): *The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States*. In: *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 22 (1), S. 129–146. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034.
- Iyengar, Shanto / Sood, Gaurav / Lelkes, Yphtach 2012: *Affect, Not Ideology. A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization*. In: *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(3). Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41684577> (retrieved: 04/12/2023).
- Kingzette, Jon; Druckman, James N.; Klar, Samara; Krupnikov, Yanna; Levendusky, Matthew; Ryan, John Barry (2021): *How Affective Polarization Undermines Support for Democratic Norms*. In *Public Opinion Quarterly* 85 (2), pp. 663–677. DOI: 10.1093/poq/nfab029.
- Mason, L. (2015). “I Disrespectfully Agree”: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(1), 128–145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12089>
- Mason, L. (2018). Ideologues without Issues: The Polarizing Consequences of Ideological Identities. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 82(S1), 866–887. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfy005>
- Reiljan, Andres 2020: ‘Fear and Loathing across Party Lines’ (also) in Europe: Affective Polarisation in European Party Systems. In: *European Journal of Political Research*, 59(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12351> (retrieved: 04/12/2023).
- Wagner, Markus (2021): *Affective polarization in multiparty systems*. In: *Electoral Studies* 69, S. 102199. DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102199.



Thank you !

gesundheitsamt-infektionsschutz@dresden.de

maik.herold@tu-dresden.de





Affective Polarization in Europe

Maik Herold

10th October 2023, Villa Vigoni



