

SELF Project Line 7: Collective Identities in Transition

Dissertation projects in this project line will investigate the consequences of migration for **collective identities**. Growing economic, socio-cultural and political globalization pressures on European countries and their citizens have been leading to the polarization of citizens into groups of winners and losers who support antagonistic positions towards the opening up of national borders and on a variety of globalization issues (Kriesi et al., 2008). Not only self-interest, but also identities stand at the core of this societal conflict in Europe (Teney et al., 2014). **Growing denationalization** is indeed leading to a shift in the salience of collective identities, which, in turn, further polarize citizens. On the one hand, identification with existing constitutive communities, such as national identities, becomes more salient among the segment of the population that sees the opening of national borders as a threat to their life chances, as they consider their social status and security protected by the nation state and are attached to the exclusionary norms and political institutions of their national community. On the other hand, denationalization has led to the emergence of **supranational identities** endorsed by some social groups. As compared to supranational identities, identification with one's existing communities and national identities can be considered to be more interdependent in nature, in that social ties are at least subjectively closer and more exclusive. What is the impact of this societal polarization along a national-supranational identification dimension on **social cohesion**?

Potential dissertation projects would investigate the effects of this shift in collective identification and its resulting societal polarization on social cohesion. One possible operationalization of social cohesion has been offered by the **Bertelsmann Social Cohesion Radar** (PI Klaus Boehnke), which assesses three main domains: social relations; connectedness, and focus on the common good (Dragolov et al., 2015). The empirical part of these projects would be based on secondary international survey data such as, e.g., Eurobarometer data to assess the polarization of the European population along this national-supranational identification dimension and its impact on social cohesion. Since Wave 8, the core module of the ESS also encompasses one item each on national vs. supra-national attachment (How emotionally attached to [country] are you? How emotionally attached to Europe are you?), included after a multi-year initiative of Boehnke et al. (2016). The dissertation projects will also benefit from the first results of DFG funded Open Research Area (ORA) project "Towards realistic computational models of social influence" which Klaus Boehnke and Jan Lorenz which started in 2019 together with partners in the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom. Their part is to analyse polarization on many dimensions based on data from the European Social Survey and use it to refine agent-based models of social influence. Furthermore, survey experiments would be conducted to provide a more nuanced assessment of the link between this polarization and the various dimensions of social cohesion.

Changing degrees of denationalization and rising societal polarization have furthermore given rise to alienation from the democratic political system and loss of trust accordingly. The gap between formal democratic institutions and people's personal experience seems to widen; populist movements and political parties have been gaining momentum and are mobilizing significant parts of the electorate along the identity divide (Goodhart, 2017). Dissertation projects addressing this **democratic disconnect** might link political culture research with concepts from political psychology, aiming to better understand how growing societal polarization affects the subjective dimension of politics – the

psychological manifestation of a political system – and its interplay with society and the political system. One goal of this RTG is to study how processes on the individual level construct, shape and change social structure on the macro level. To do so, agent-based models could be derived by taking psychological mechanisms of self-construal and by implementing them in a multi-agent simulation. The macroscopic social structure which these models bring about could then be compared to real-world data from social surveys.

Possible dissertation projects on collective identities in transition:

- What impact do national vs. supranational identifications have on social relations (intactness of social networks, general trust, acceptance of diversity) in Europe?
- How does supranational identification affect connectedness with social entities (place identification, trust in institutions, perceived social justice) in Europe?
- National-supranational identification and its impact on people's focus on the common good (solidarity and helpfulness, acceptance of basic rules, political and civil society participation) in Europe

Potential supervisors:

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References:

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- Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschie, S., & Frey, T. (2008). *West European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge University Press.
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