

THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY: YOUTH VOTING IN THE 2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS AND THE INFLUENCES OF THE FAR-RIGHT AND EUROSCEPTICISM

SKYLA MELODY THOMAS

FACULTY SUPERVISOR: DR. AMY VERDUN

MARCH 19TH, 2025

THIS RESEARCH WAS SUPPORTED BY THE JAMIE CASSELS UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AWARDS, UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA'S EUROPEAN STUDIES PROGRAM AND THE POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION

Across the world, youth are the voice for the future of democracy. From June 6 to the 9th, 2024, the European Parliament (EP) elections took place across 27 European Union (EU) member states to determine the political direction of the EU for the next five years. With a forecasted surge of the far-right, the results reflected a far-right trend across all member states except for the Scandinavian region, while France, Germany, and Romania illustrated the victory of the far-right within the national results (Mudde 2024, 126). The European-level results indicated only 28% of eligible voters aged 15-24 turned out to vote, with the majority of 58% being the 55 and above age group (European Parliament: Directorate-General for Communication 2024, 9). This research project highlights the influence of far-right/right-wing populism and Euroscepticism on young voters in relation to the future of European democracy through the 2024 EP election results.

BROADER LITERATURE POINTS

- Ideological shift from the left to the right through four prominent EU crises since the ratification of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty
 - 2008 Euroarea crisis: Prominence of left-wing Euroscepticism and populism in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, who were hit the hardest during the economic crisis.
 - 2015 Migrant crisis: Sudden shift to right-wing Euroscepticism and populism due to internal and external border disputes influencing anti-immigrant sentiment and EU sovereignty.
 - 2016 Brexit: An anomaly of a case for hard Euroscepticism through a radical break from the EU by the United Kingdom (UK). Contributed to softening hard Euroscepticism to focus on internal change within EU institutions.
 - 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic: Heightened border restrictive disputes and a growing "us" vs "them" right-wing populist anti-elitist narrative, contributing to Euroscepticism.
- Importance of political socialisation in shaping voting behaviour during formative years for young voters
 - Influences of the far-right on youth include economic strain, social change, and the emergence of subcultures
 - Internal/intimate influences from family, peers, friends, teachers, colleagues, and external influences, such as social media.
- Case Study: Alternative Für Deutschland (AFD) and the use of TikTok to attract youth to vote for the radical right
 - Contributed to 16% of AFD's success in the 2024 EP elections (Pfeifer 2024).

REFERENCES

Human Ethics Approval under Dr. Amy Verdun's SHRC grant "The European Union and Crisis - Understanding the birth of the EU recovery fund in comparative perspective".
 SHRC Insight Grant number: 435-2021-0908
 UVic Human Ethics Approval Protocol Number: 23-0148-02

• European Commission: Directorate-General for Communication and Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. 2024. Youth and Democracy. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/672571>

• European Parliament: Directorate-General for Communication, Velasco Monasterio, G., Alpoegger, M., Büttner, M., El Koura, Y., Tsoulou Malakoudi, D., and Zühlke, O. 2024. European Parliament Eurobarometer: EU Post-Electoral Survey 2024. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2886/3850086>

• Hakhverdian, Armen, Erika van Elsas, Wouter van der Brug, and Theresa Kuhn. "Euroscepticism and Education: A Longitudinal Study of 12 EU Member States, 1973-2010." *European Union Politics* 14, no. 4 (2013): 522-41. doi:10.1177/1465116513489779.

• Leruth, Benjamin, Nicholas Startin, and Simon McDougall Usherwood, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*. 1st ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018. <https://doi-org.egproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4324/9781315464015>

• Mudde, Cas. "The 2024 EU Elections: The Far Right at the Polls." *Journal of Democracy* 35, no. 4 (2024): 121-34. doi:10.1353/jod.2024.a937738.

• Pfeifer, Hans. 2024. "AFD: How Germany's far right won over young voters" *Deutsche Welle*, June 10. <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-how-germanys-far-right-won-over-young-voters/a-69324954>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: "What were the main influences on youth voter decisions in the 2024 European Parliament election?"

Q2: "In what ways do these findings relate to the broader understanding of the rise of the right and Euroscepticism on youth within the European Union?"

METHODOLOGY

Primary Research:

With UVic human ethics (23-0148-02) approval, I conducted a survey in Brussels over the summer during my internship with the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions' (OBESSU) where I also uploaded an additional version of the survey in OBESSU's newsletter. Consisting of 5 simple questions, I asked EU citizens:

- Age
- Home country
- Personal influences on voter choices
- National influences on voter choices
- EP Political bloc affiliation

Secondary Research: Analysing three additional EU surveys from the Eurobarometer with a focus on European youth to understand the broader literature on key factors contributing to Euroscepticism and trends of the far-right influencing the voice of youth within the EU.

KEY TERMS

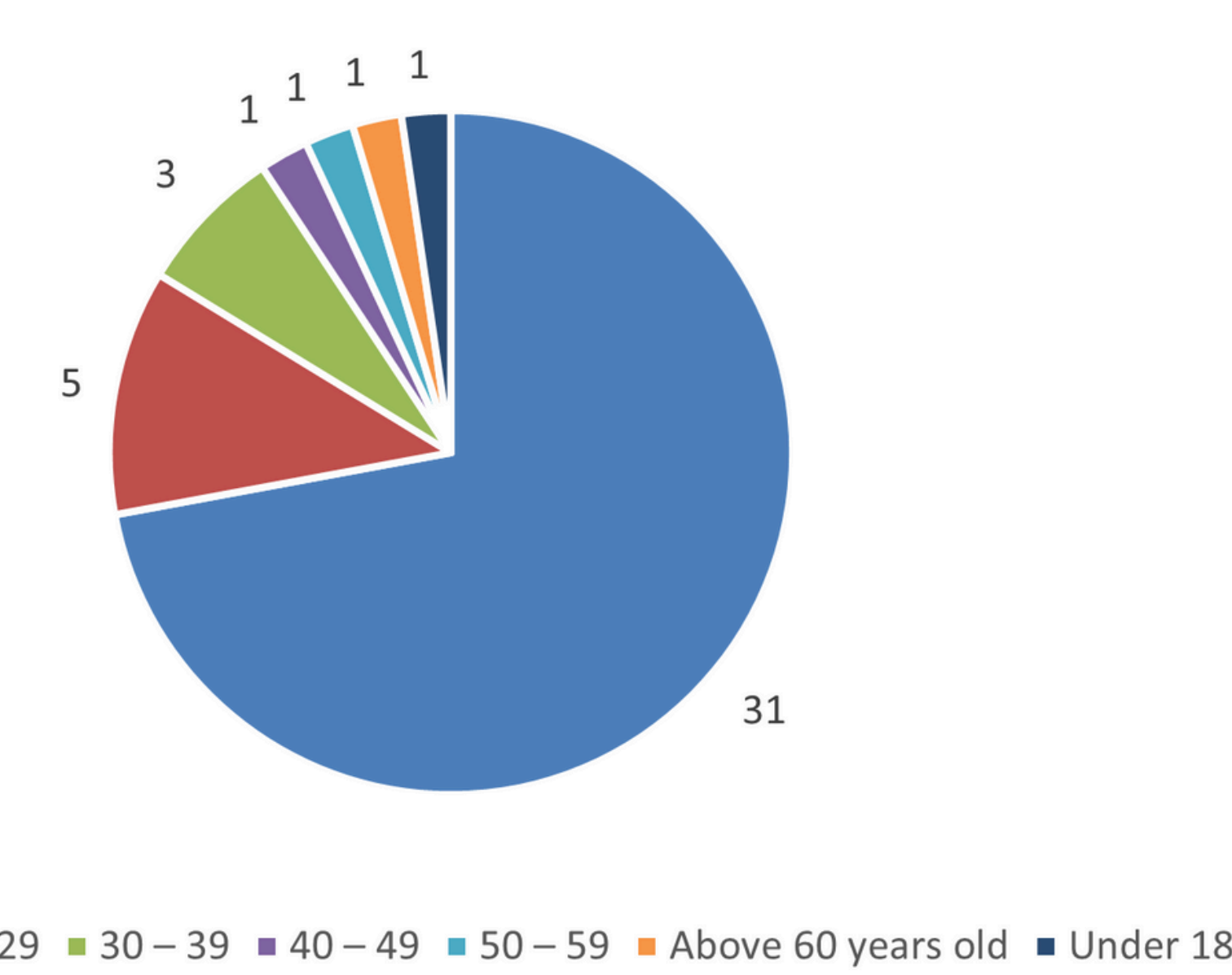
Euroscepticism is defined as a sceptical opposition to European integration, driven by other supporting factors such as ideology and socioeconomic challenges (Leruth et al. 2018, 4). Euroscepticism as a key term in relation to European political scholarship can be found in every aspect of European society from politics to economics, history, geography, and even psychology (Leruth et al. 2018, 3).

Populism is defined as the separation of society into two antagonistic homogenous groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite', with a focus on politics expressing the general will of the people (Mudde, 2016, p. 57).

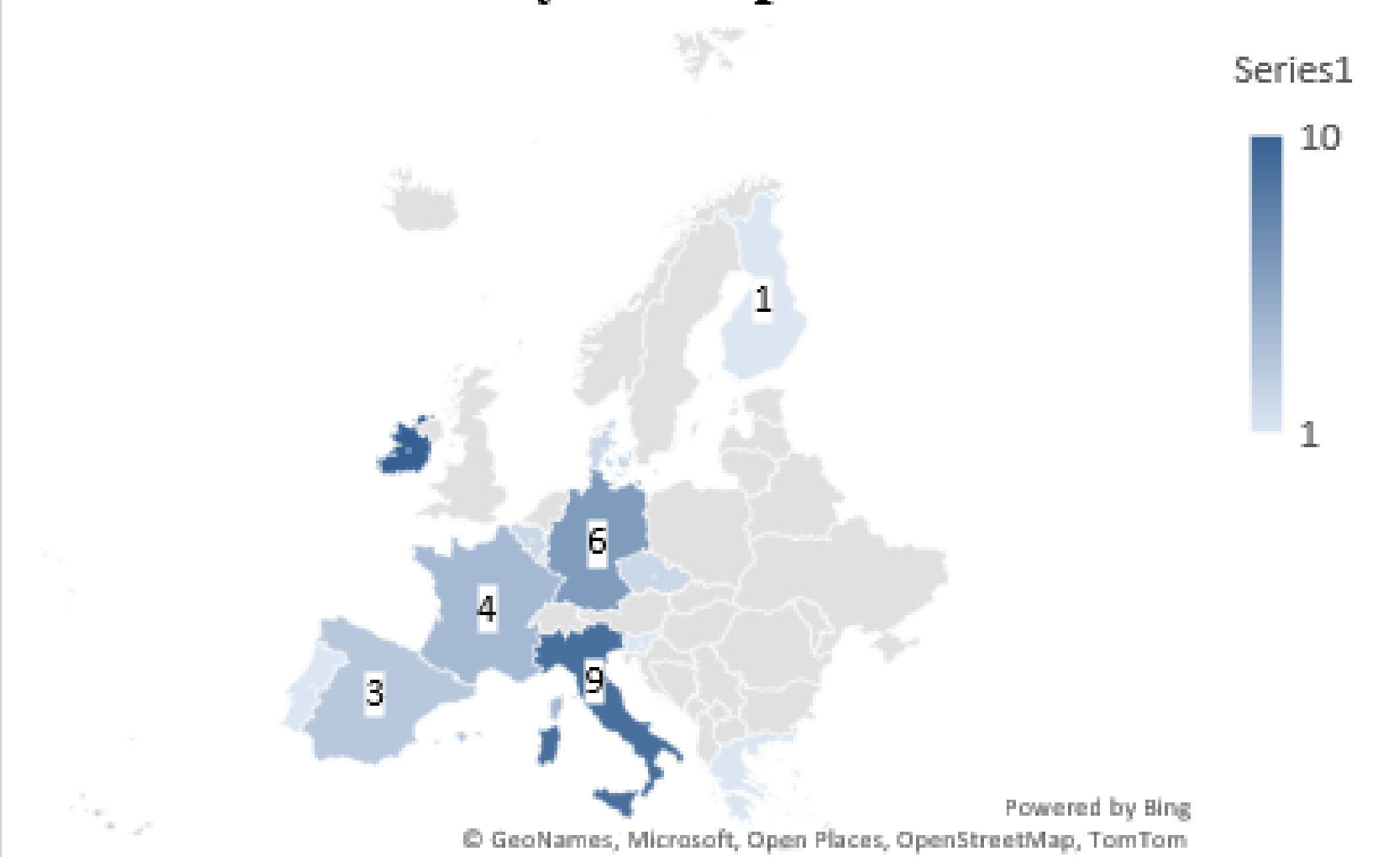
CONCLUSION

My survey contributed to the key area of interest of my research project by highlighting the top influences in my survey on a personal level, which were the rise of the right/Euroscepticism and the populist/radical right parties dominating European politics across the EU. These results highlight the importance of political socialisation in shaping voting behaviour during formative years and how education, mobility, and social background contribute to a socio-cultural divide within youth across Europe, leading to involvement in right-wing/far-right populist Eurosceptic political parties.

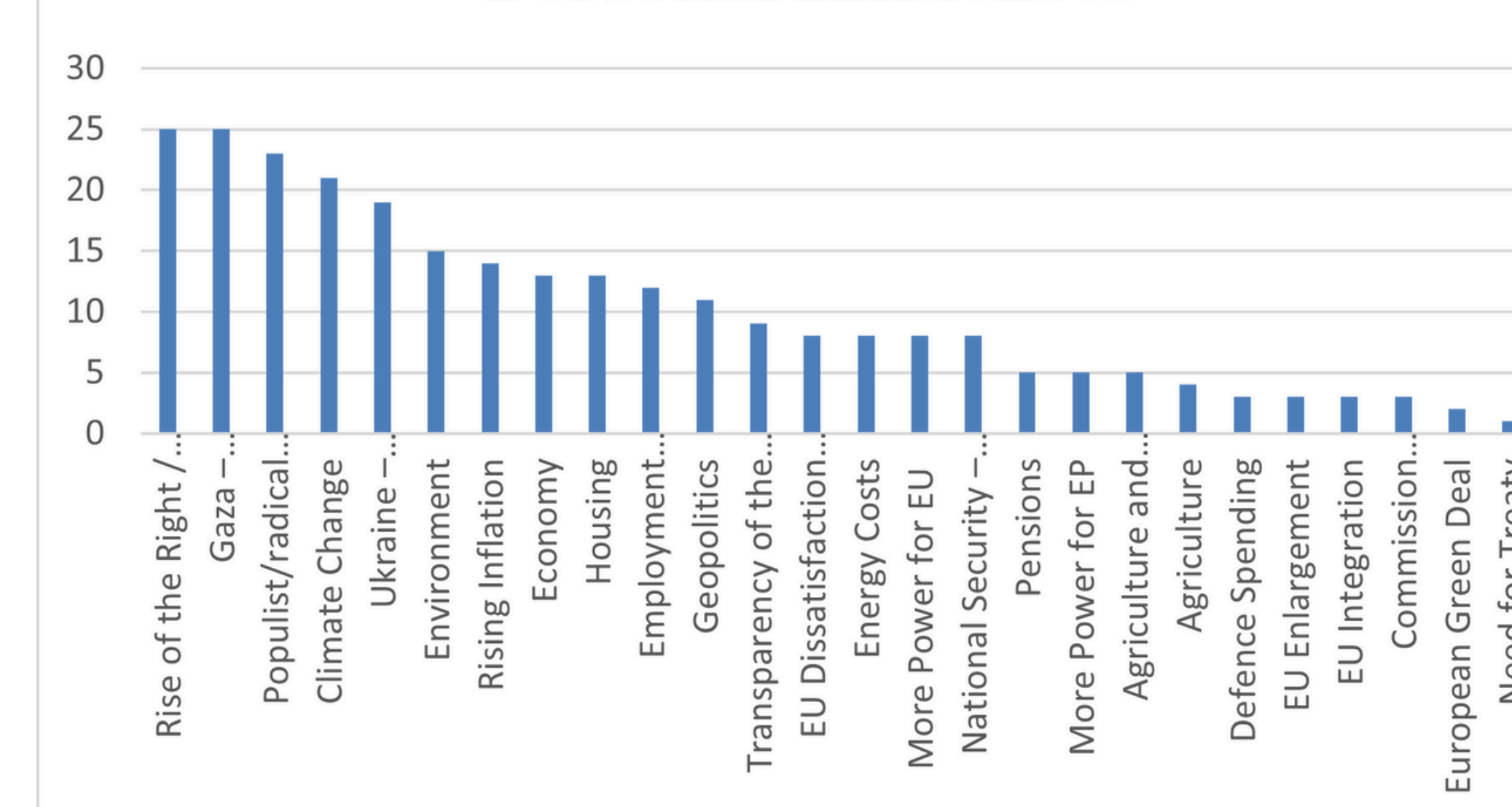
Age Group of Respondents



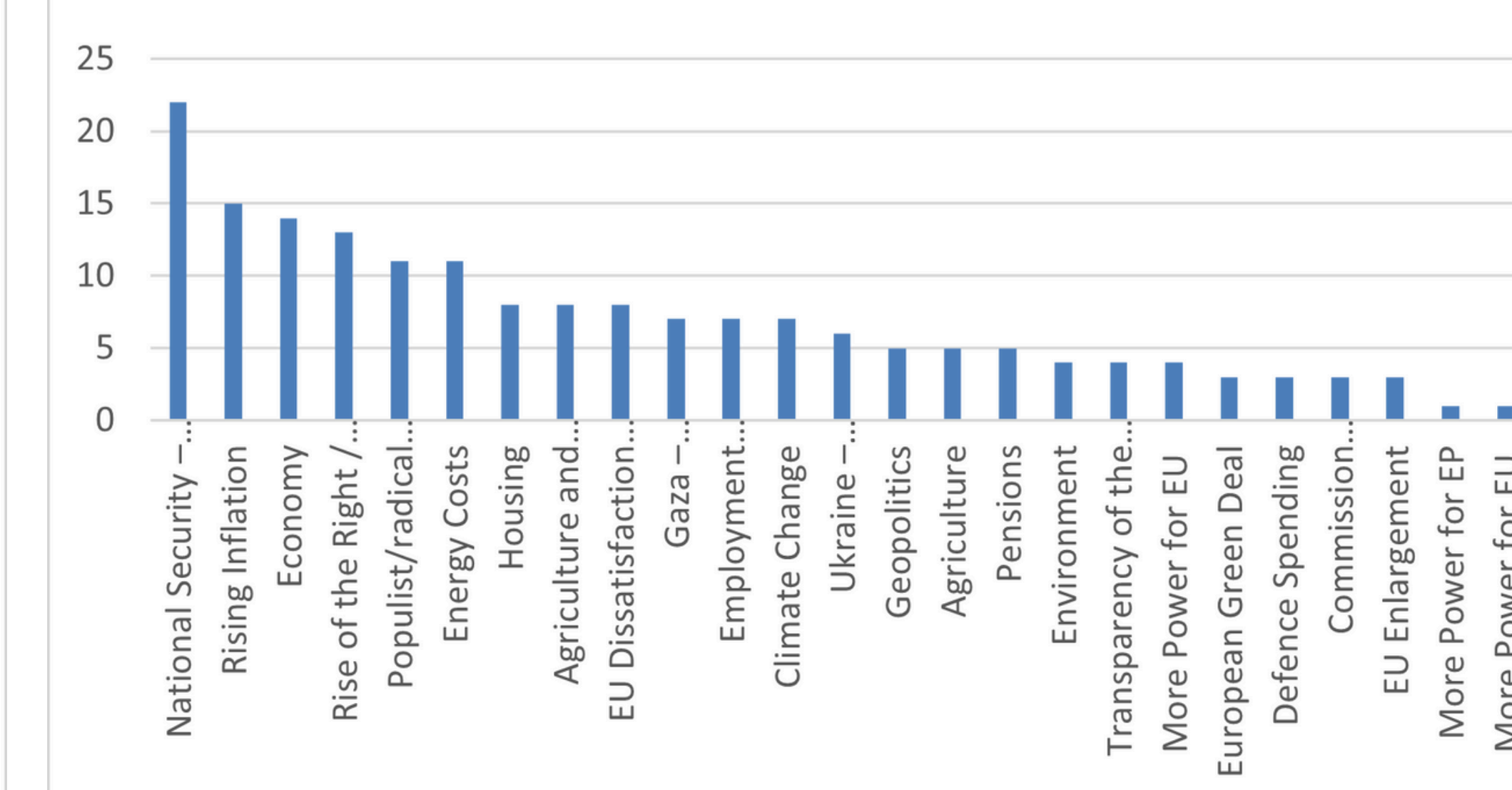
Home Country of Respondents



Personal Influences



National Influences



KEY FINDINGS

- 43 entries altogether, with the in-person survey receiving 15 responses and the OBESSU newsletter survey receiving 28 responses.
- The range of country respondents within my survey was defined by a language barrier as the survey was conducted in English. This was illustrated by Ireland having the most responses.
- The predominant age group with 31 responses was the 18-25 age range.
- The personal influences were illustrated by the current trends and events that were impacting the EU during the summer, with a focus on the far-right surge forecast within the EP electoral polls and the escalation of the situation in Gaza.
- The national influences on voter choices, with the top response being national security with a focus on immigration (22), heavily reflect the surge of the far-right and right-wing populist xenophobic sentiment across the EU. Rising inflation (15) and the economy (14) came in second as national influences on voters.
- The top EP political bloc affiliations included the Greens/EFA with 12 responses, the Left with 10 responses, and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) with 8 responses.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Amy Verdun, for her contribution in applying for UVic human ethics by including my research survey under her current SHRC-funded research project. I would also like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to intern with OBESSU over the summer in aiding my research focus on youth voters in the EU. This internship was made possible through UVic's EU Study Tour and Internship Program, where I received funding from an EU Jean Monnet Excellence grant and the Global Skills Opportunity (GSO) scholarship under UVic Co-op.