



# Euroscepticism: a meta-analysis

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## Abstract

The rise of Euroscepticism has prompted extensive academic investigation, with researchers exploring a wide variety of areas and uncovering substantial information in recent decades. Despite these achievements, the overall self-knowledge of the literature—its overarching themes, the countries scrutinised, the methodologies employed, and their evolution over time—remains relatively underexplored. To bridge this gap, this study utilises *wizdom.ai* to delineate the borders of Euroscepticism by conducting a meta-analysis of over 400 journal articles between 1995 and 2020. The findings reveal two distinct macro-periods. The first—1995 to 2010—primarily comprises party-based, single-country qualitative studies. Conversely, the latter period—2011 to 2020—witnessed a proliferation of research, marked by an expansion into previously under-investigated topics, countries, and methodologies. This is exemplified by a notable increase in quantitative and comparative publications across many EU Member States. These findings constitute a preliminary basis for assessing the existing breadth and depth of the study of Euroscepticism and may stimulate further research on the topic.

**Keywords** Euroscepticism · Meta-analysis · Systematic review

## Introduction

The study of Euroscepticism has undergone a fascinating evolution. Initially, the European project advanced unabated, buoyed by widespread support from political elites and low public interest. During this time, researchers saw little need to investigate a phenomenon characterised by marginal, temporary, or sectoral forms of opposition (Brack and Startin 2015; Leconte 2010). This state of affairs began to change with the progressive shift from ‘permissive consensus’ to ‘constraining dis-sensus’ from the 1990s onwards (Eichenberg and Dalton 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hutter and Grande 2014). As certain actors began to exploit growing public

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criticism towards the EU (Franklin and van der Eijk 2007; Hobolt and de Vries 2016), Euroscepticism gradually moved to the core of the political debate (Leconte 2015). Given these premises, it is unsurprising that said transformation ended up captivating the attention of the academic community. As noted by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2018), the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism resulted in a substantial volume of publications on parties, public opinion, media, and other less-explored areas (Boomgaarden et al. 2011; de Wilde and Trenz 2012; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a, 2008b).

However, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that such proliferation does not imply a similar degree of self-knowledge, for scholars have only recently begun to provide a critical evaluation of the literature (Stockemer et al. 2018; Vasilopoulou 2018). Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to existing efforts by conducting a meta-analysis of a substantial collection of journal articles published between 1995 and 2020. After compiling a dataset from a list of publications acquired through the *wisdom.ai* service, each article undergoes a qualitative assessment to determine its unit of analysis, methodology, approach, country selection process, and other relevant factors. The data is then subject to a longitudinal descriptive analysis to comprehensively assess the main characteristics and progression of Euroscepticism's academic research.

The article is structured as follows. Firstly, it provides an overview of systematic reviews on the topic and establishes a theoretical framework to address the need for further investigation. Secondly, it defines the methodological criteria for publication selection and dataset construction, as well as operationalising key indicators. While the third section presents the analysis of over 400 publications roughly spanning a quarter-century, the conclusion summarises the study's findings and suggests potential pathways for advancing our understanding of Euroscepticism.

## **Problem formulation: meta-analysis and Euroscepticism**

Systematic reviews are an integral part of academic research, as they seek to prevent information overload from hampering exploration prospects (Card 2012). By adhering to precise standards for evidence collection, they organise publications into familiar patterns and emphasise the key elements that define a specific field of study (Lipsey and Wilson 2001). Employing various methodologies, meta-analytic approaches have proven successful in investigating different topics, including job insecurity (Sverke et al. 2002), the media (D'Alessio and Allen 2000), and mass-elite congruence (Pareschi et al. 2023), among others (Matthes et al. 2018).

Within the domain of Euroscepticism, systematic reviews are relatively recent. Stockemer et al. (2018) employed this approach to examine the relationship between Euroscepticism and immigration. By reviewing 21 peer-reviewed articles published before the 2015 European migrant crisis, the authors showed that individuals with critical attitudes towards immigration tend to hold negative views on European integration. Furthermore, they found no correlation between actual immigrant numbers in specific locations and higher levels of Euroscepticism, thus indicating perceived immigration as the main driver behind these trends. In contrast, Vasilopoulou (2018)



adopted a more holistic approach by comparing 28 top-cited papers and 26 articles from 2014. The author identified a shift towards Europe-wide party-based studies in recent articles, compared to a previous emphasis on public opinion. Additionally, the two clusters of papers predominantly employ quantitative comparative methods, positioning Euro-scepticism as the dependent variable.

The intrinsic value provided by these studies aligns with Dacombe's (2018) assertions regarding the benefits of systematic reviews despite their relatively limited presence in political science. This reluctance may stem from precise flaws within the approach, such as the role of evidence hierarchies, the operationalisation of qualitative articles, and the diverse theoretical frameworks utilised in specific articles. These challenges are also evident in the study of Euro-scepticism, as proven by diverse party-based and public-based categorisations, the absence of clear-cut selection parameters for papers, and the employment of specific statistical tools (see Cleophas and Zwinderman 2017). Indeed, although the addition of different conceptualisations can potentially yield conflicting results, excluding significant portions of the literature may reduce the investigation's validity. Similarly, setting overly inclusive parameters for a systematic review's selection process risks diluting its findings, while too strict criteria may hinder its scope. The same rationale applies to specific methodological tools (i.e., meta-regressions), which could lead to the exclusion of publications that rely on qualitative research.

While not questioning the legitimacy of these arguments, the current level of meta-analytic exploration of Euro-scepticism warrants a comprehensive assessment of existing research. As explained by Dacombe (2018), the *problem formulation* for a meta-analysis can be methodologically challenging in research areas whose overall breadth and depth are yet to be established. In those cases, attempting to define the field's borders could serve as a platform for future studies to explore more fine-grained issues. Given the considerable extent of the literature, a complete synthesis of the entire research on Euro-scepticism might be challenging. Conversely, expanding Vasilopoulou's (2018) work through the examination of a wide array of publications might offer valuable insights into the overall spread and strength of the field, as well as confirm or refute the author's findings.

## **Methodology: data collection and evaluation**

### **Data collection**

Having laid the theoretical basis for *problem formulation*, this study aims to choose an appropriate tool to identify all publications openly discussing Euro-scepticism. Additionally, specific guidelines must be established to exclude articles that may not align with the research objectives.

With this in mind, the study has chosen to employ *wisdom.ai*, a service launched in 2016 by *Informa*, as the primary source for constructing its dataset. The decision to rely on this tool is twofold. Firstly, there is currently no consensus regarding the most appropriate course of action for *data collection*. Previous systematic reviews either relied on multiple sources or did not specify the rationale behind



their choice (Costa 2017; Doucouliagos and Ulubaşoğlu 2008; Imbeau et al. 2001). This variability is also evident in the study of Euroscepticism, as data was retrieved from the Social Science Citation Index (Vasilopoulou 2018) and Google Scholar (Stockemer et al. 2018). Furthermore, each service comes with advantages and disadvantages. While the above ones are regarded as suitable options due to their stable growth rates (Harzing and Alakangas 2016), they are not exempt from criticism. For instance, Web of Science (WoS) has a relatively low growth rate compared to Google Scholar (Bar-Ilan 2008; Larsen and von Ins 2010), while the latter exhibits inconsistencies concerning publication years and study attribution (Jacsó 2005, 2008). In other words, the decision to utilise a bibliographic database, which one to select, and the conditions under which it should be used remain unclear.

Secondly, the decision to rely on *wizdom.ai* was motivated by the emergence of the brand-new field of altmetric services (for more, see Haustein et al. 2014). The progressive shift from traditional to online platforms (Priem and Hemminger 2010) has paved the way for a more comprehensive approach to assessing scholarly publications (Galligan and Dias-Correia 2013). In this regard, *wizdom.ai* offers a fast, reliable, and easily accessible means of measuring published studies (Mohammadi and Thelwall 2014). Leveraging a blend of “big data, machine learning and artificial intelligence” (Pool 2017), *wizdom.ai* provides an intelligent research assistant that deep-searches articles to furnish users with data from journal databases (Johnson et al. 2018; Razack et al. 2021). This information includes statistics on journals, publishers, articles, authors, and more. Constantly monitoring over 90 million publications from 73,000 journals,<sup>1</sup> *wizdom.ai* provides a set of publications comparable with other providers (see Johnson et al. 2018), thereby supplying this study with ample data to achieve its objectives.

While altmetric services have garnered mixed reactions from the academic community (Cronin 2013) due to their relative novelty and limited utilisation, they could present a viable alternative to traditional tools like citations and impact factors (Haustein and Larivière 2015). In this sense, it is essential to clarify that the study’s preference for *data collection* is not intended as a rejection or criticism of previous publications. On the contrary, it does constitute an opportunity to integrate the meta-analytic approach with a new and potentially innovative source. Consequently, the systematic review’s findings should be considered preliminary and would require additional validation through future studies.

## Data evaluation

The initial search on *wizdom.ai* (search word: Euroscepticism: Topic) yielded a total of 484 publications (*wizdom.ai* 2020). Subsequently, the study excluded publications that did not align with the research goals, such as books, book reviews, and research notes. This *data evaluation* process resulted in an original dataset of 444 papers from 1995 to 2020 (see Appendix A). Among the others, the dataset not only

<sup>1</sup> For a complete list of data sources: <https://www.wizdom.ai/acknowledgements>. Accessed January 2023.



includes papers' titles and authors but also a series of details about their journal of publication, such as their H-Index, their publisher, and their impact factor's quartile (Q).

Notably, the dataset also includes articles published in journals currently ranking in the third and fourth quartiles (Scimago 2020). The rationale behind this decision primarily stems from the necessity to broaden the study's scope of inquiry. While previous research has focused either on specific topics (Stockemer et al. 2018) or sets of publications (Vasilopoulou 2018), this analysis seeks to provide a more general understanding of Euro-scepticism by expanding the criteria of investigation to the discipline of political science and beyond. The study also incorporated 25 working papers from the Sussex European Institute (SEI 2020) for the same reasons. Although these publications were not present in the original search, they still constitute a cornerstone in the analysis of Euro-scepticism. As Mudde (2012) highlighted, the crucial insights brought by the *Opposing Europe* network (OERN/EPERN) guided the literature at a time when research on the topic was still in its early stages. Scholars from the OERN/EPERN network provided a highly valued party-based conceptualisation of Euro-scepticism, investigated Euro-sceptic actors throughout Europe, debated its ideologic or strategic determinants, and so on. Despite specific issues pertaining to data sources, excluding these publications would potentially deprive this study of a significant source of knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of operationalisation, several indicators were developed based on the framework outlined by Vasilopoulou (2018), although modifications were made to better suit the study's objectives (see Appendix B). The *country* indicator was restructured into *macro* and *micro* sections for a more thorough understanding of Euro-scepticism's *thematic focus*. Aside from separately and collectively observing the EU-15 and Central and Eastern European country (CEEC) blocs, the *macro* indicator presents a category covering countries outside the EU and other unrelated topics. Conversely, the *micro* indicator covers each EU Member State (MS) examined in the dataset ( $N=2768$ ). A similar process was also applied to the *unit of analysis*, with articles investigating *parties/elites* being divided based on their focus, such as a single party, a group of political formations, or EU-related studies. The *public and parties/elites* category was split into *voting behaviour* and articles that dealt with public and partisan topics. Similarly, the *public* category was separated into *public opinion* and *media*. Additionally, all categories include a *Brexit* subsection for all publications related to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, given the topic's rising prominence in recent years. Finally, articles that could not be categorised were placed in the *other* category, with their pertinent research field specified. As for the *research design*, Vasilopoulou's (2018) *approach* indicator was refined into two distinct categories: *approach* focused on whether the article selected one or more countries for its inquiry, while *methodology* assessed whether it relied on qualitative or quantitative tools (in both cases, *other* otherwise).

<sup>2</sup> To offer a more thorough analysis, this study conducted a systematic review without the 25 working papers on Euro-scepticism from the Sussex European Institute. Appendix C shows that their exclusion does not substantially change the study's conclusions.



The meta-analysis also operationalised several other indicators. Notably, examining the publication year of each article (*time*) is crucial for analysing the evolution of Euroscepticism. Furthermore, the study extracted *keywords* from each publication to observe how authors characterised their papers. It is worth noting that this approach poses certain issues, as the use of keywords is both relatively recent and optional in some cases. Of the dataset's 444 papers, only 305 effectively display at least one keyword ( $N=1364$ ). Despite these limitations, incorporating this component into the systematic review enriches our understanding of the literature. Specifically, the keywords were categorised into various macro-categories to avoid overdispersion during the information-gathering process.

Finally, the study introduced the *school* indicator to analyse two prominent approaches within the literature: the Sussex (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a, 2008b, 2018; Taggart 1998) and North Carolina (Hooghe et al. 2002; Marks et al. 2002; Ray 1999) schools. The former primarily consists of single-country qualitative studies investigating Eurosceptic parties through electoral manifestos, statements, and votes. In contrast, the latter consists of quantitative expert surveys covering most EU countries from 1999 onwards. The two schools represent distinct—if not antithetical—approaches concerning the conceptualisation, operationalisation, and measurement of Euroscepticism (Mudde 2012). This ended up hampering research, as there is still no agreement among scholars on the most suitable approach to understanding Euroscepticism (for more, see Szczerbiak and Taggart 2018). To this end, the *school* indicator allows for the observation of the actual scope of the two schools within the literature. Each paper was categorised as *Sussex* if it utilised the soft/hard approach to categorise and analyse political parties and their positions/attitudes.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, articles relying on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al. 2020) were categorised as *North Carolina*.<sup>4</sup> Papers that utilised both methodologies were classified as *both* (*none* otherwise).

## Data interpretation: a systematic review of Euroscepticism

### Time

Having established the meta-analysis' methodological framework, the study undertook a preliminary assessment of the dataset's 444 entries, employing a longitudinal descriptive approach to visualise the Eurosceptic literature from 1995 to 2020. The data portrayed in Fig. 1 corroborate Szczerbiak and Taggart's (2018) notions on the evolution of research trends while expanding their analysis by encompassing a more extensive time frame. The authors' findings align closely

<sup>3</sup> For example, Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2018) paper was classified as *Sussex* because the authors used the soft/hard approach to categorise Eurosceptic parties in their analysis.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Meijers' (2017) paper was classified as *North Carolina* because the author used the CHES dataset for his empirical analysis.



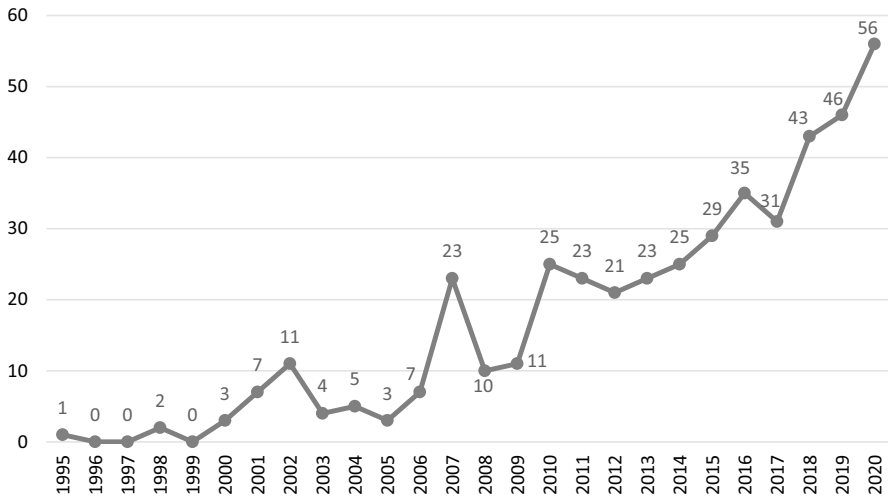


Fig. 1 Articles published on Euro-scepticism (1995–2020)

with the evidence shown in the meta-analysis, further validating its methodology and the reliability of *wizdom.ai* (Barnes 2015).

Data shows relatively limited attention concerning Euro-scepticism during the initial fifteen-year period under examination, with the annual publication rate consistently reaching double digits only after the release of the *Acta Politica* special issue (Hooghe and Marks 2007). Interestingly, the initial upsurge during the 2000s coincided with crucial signs of “popular disquiet with the EU” (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a, p. 1). This not only encompasses the rise and/or entry into government of Euro-sceptic forces within various European political systems (e.g., Austria, the Netherlands) but also the rejection of several proposals through referendums. Aside from the Nice Treaty in Ireland, adverse outcomes were also reported in Denmark and Sweden concerning the adoption of the Euro, as well as the French and Dutch rejection of the Constitution for Europe. Thus, scholarly attention to Euro-scepticism appears to be triggered by notable manifestations of opposition to European integration.

In this regard, the 2010s marked a positive shift in publication rates. Initially hovering around the levels observed in 2007, the latter half of the decade witnessed a substantial flow of articles. For context, the total number of papers published in 2019–2020 equals the entire pre-2009 literature on the topic. This trend is further underscored when comparing separate decades, with an average of 33 papers per year from 2011 to 2020 vis-à-vis 7 articles from 1995 to 2010 (1995–2020 average = 17). This heightened awareness may be attributed to the advent of the polycrisis, which triggered a substantive manifestation of discontent towards European integration with decade-long socio-political ripple effects (Brack and Startin 2015; Usherwood and Startin 2013).



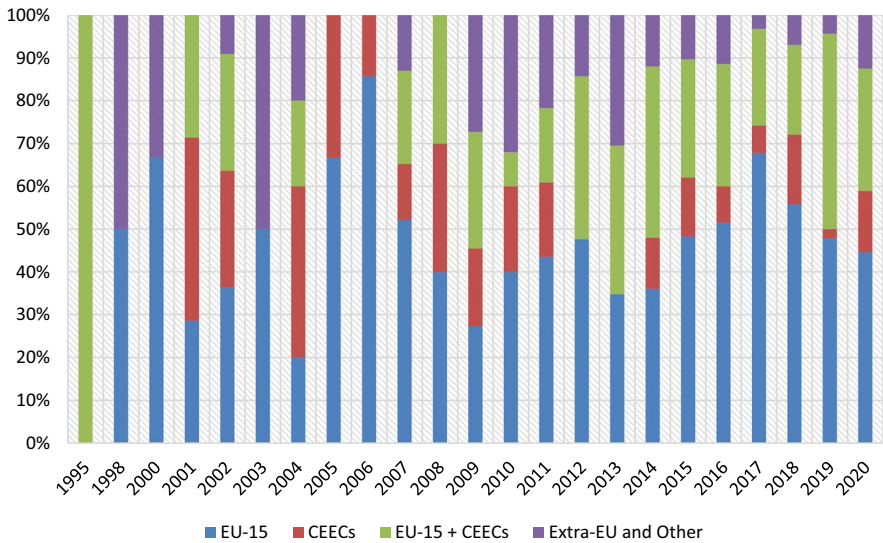


Fig. 2 Articles published on Euroscepticism per macro-bloc (1995–2020)

### Thematic focus: countries, units of analysis, and keywords

The *country* indicator (Fig. 2) reinforces existing evidence, highlighting the literature's emphasis on both EU-15 countries (47.30%) and the EU at large (27.25%). Research dedicated to CEECs gained traction only a few years before the first Eastern enlargement. Despite the notable uptick in the volume of publications experienced by the literature during the 2010s, the proportion of these studies remained relatively limited (12.39%) compared to the sustained scholarly interest in the other country blocs.

This change can be ascribed to two main factors. Firstly, the literature (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a, 2008b) signals that the early 2000s represented a critical moment for European integration. As several CEECs sought EU membership, European integration became highly contested among certain sections of the candidate countries' public spheres. This open manifestation of opposition to the EU constitutes precisely the kind of event that would capture the academic community's interest and lead to an increased research effort.

Secondly, the dominance of qualitative research methods and the influence of the Sussex school during this period encouraged a wealth of single-country and comparative studies to better understand this growth in Eurosceptic tendencies. However, the 2010s attested a sizable change towards quantitative research methodologies and a broader range of analytical units, enabling a more rounded examination of the EU and its 28 (now 27) MSs. As more Eastern European states were selected alongside Western countries, this development caused a relative decrease in the articles explicitly focusing on CEECs, while the EU-15 remained relatively unaffected.

A closer look at the indicator's *micro* sub-section solidifies the above findings. It should come as no surprise that the birthplace of the study of Euroscepticism, the





**Table 1** Articles published on Euro-scepticism per country (1995–2020)

UK	249	Austria	99	Luxembourg	57
Italy	162	Sweden	97	Latvia	56
France	150	Portugal	96	Lithuania	52
Germany	149	Belgium	94	Bulgaria	46
Netherlands	130	Czechia	90	Cyprus	44
Poland	124	Ireland	87	Malta	38
Spain	119	Finland	85	Romania	34
Greece	117	Estonia	72	Croatia	15
Hungary	109	Slovakia	69	Extra-EU	57
Denmark	104	Slovenia	68	EU	57
				None	42

Source: Own Source;  $N = 2768$ ;

*OERN/EPERN* network, and the Sussex school—the United Kingdom—is the country most frequently investigated in the dataset. However, the analysis of individual EU MSs brings new evidence into the underlying rationale for country selection. According to Table 1, there appears to be a heightened interest in larger MSs such as France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain. These countries are not only frequently chosen for comparative and quantitative research but are also notable subjects of qualitative and single-country studies. Furthermore, highly investigated states feature prominent Euro-sceptic parties within their political landscapes, which sheds light on the scholarly interest towards MSs like Greece and Hungary. Despite their size, these countries attract attention due to their specific political dynamics. These patterns indicate that the presence of Euro-sceptic parties and the political context of a country significantly affect the selection process, as shown by the considerable number of single-country publications focusing on MSs like Czechia, Sweden, and Austria.

In summary, selection criteria are influenced by a combination of three primary factors: seniority, size, and level of Euro-scepticism. On the one hand, Italy is often a subject of academic inquiry due to its longstanding EU membership, its considerable population, and its pronounced public and partisan Euro-scepticism. On the other hand, the relatively low emphasis on Malta can be ascribed to its public sphere's lower levels of Euro-scepticism, smaller population, and more recent EU accession. In some instances, one or two factors may suffice as a rationale for either including or excluding a particular country, as can be seen with respect to Luxembourg. Regardless, the decision to focus on a specific MS is likely influenced by a blend of these elements, which can have different degrees of salience, may not be mutually exclusive, and may significantly change over time.

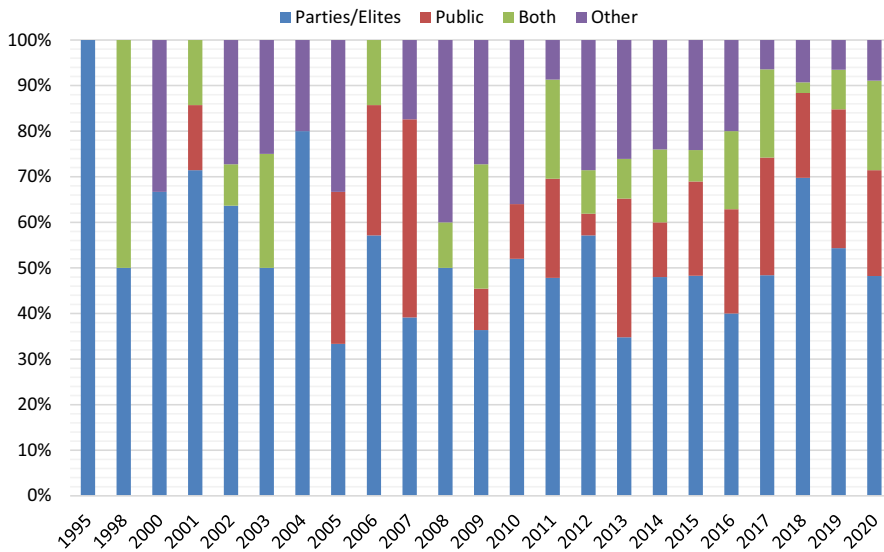
The observed pattern of reinforcing established concepts while presenting new information is also evident when looking at the *unit of analysis*. The data partially corroborate Vasilopoulou's (2018) findings concerning the prominence of party-centric and elite-centric studies (Table 2), as these articles comprise the bulk of the systematic review (50.90%). Within this macro-category, comparative and single-case analyses account for a significant portion of the dataset, respectively, with 19.59%



**Table 2** Articles published on Euroscepticism per unit of analysis (1995–2020)

Unit of analysis (macro)	Unit of analysis (micro)	N = 444
Parties/elites	Comparative Parties/elites (Comparative Study)	87
	Comparative Parties/elites (Case Study)	49
	European Politics	32
	Single-case study	41
	Brexit (Parties/elites)	17
Public	Public Opinion (Comparative Study)	40
	Public Opinion (Case Study)	26
	Media (Comparative Study)	10
	Media (Case Study)	8
	Brexit (Public)	7
Public and Parties/elites	Public Opinion and Comparative Parties/elites (Comparative Study)	13
	Public Opinion and Comparative Parties/elites (Case Study)	19
	Voting Behaviour (Comparative Study)	8
	Voting Behaviour (Case Study)	8
	Brexit (Public and Parties/elites)	4
Other	Political Science	49
	History	13
	Law	7
	Economy	4
	Education	2

Source: Own source



**Fig. 3** Articles published on Euroscepticism per unit of analysis (1995–2020)



and 11.03%. This trend may result from the foundational influences of the Sussex School and their pioneering party-based framework. Furthermore, the rise of Euro-scepticism in the late 1990s and early 2000s likely steered scholarly efforts towards investigating the determinants, reasons, and impacts of the electoral support these political formations garnered across Europe.

The importance of the above topics remained generally unaltered over time (Fig. 3) due to the growing popularity of the CHES dataset and the adoption of more quantitative methodologies. More significantly, the 2010s were characterised by a notable decline in support for European integration and a significant reshuffling of European partisan systems (Hernández and Kriesi 2016). As Euro-sceptic forces gained prominence in the political discourse—and Euro-sceptic governments began to emerge in several EU countries (Taggart and Szczepiński 2013)—researchers renewed their motivation to address the socio-political ramifications of the polycrisis. In this sense, a quick review of the dataset's titles and keywords reveals a vested interest in (supra)national parties at the extremes of the political spectrum, which are more prone to Euro-sceptic attitudes (Kopecký and Mudde 2002), as well as in (supra)national elections and EU politics. Regarding the latter, the approval and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and the EU's increasing role during and after the polycrisis led scholars to investigate the influence of supranational actors and institutions from the late 2000s onwards (7.21%).

While research on parties and/or elites has consistently represented more than 30% of the publications each year, this emphasis has inadvertently sidelined other important research areas. Among these, public-related studies on Euro-scepticism account for roughly one-fifth of the total (20.49%), with a notable portion focusing on public opinion. Indeed, research on this specific macro-topic lacked a proper conceptualisation of Euro-scepticism until relatively recently (for more, see Boomgard et al. 2011; de Wilde and Trenz 2012) and was often analysed in conjunction with parties and elites (11.71%). As a result, the period 1995–2010 only saw sporadic and mostly UK-focused publications, thus partially challenging Vasilopoulou's (2018) findings.

From this perspective, the special issue of *Acta Politica* constitutes a critical juncture, providing scholars with a pathway for operationalising and analysing Euro-scepticism in both the media and the general population through a series of quantitative comparative studies.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the outbreak of the polycrisis prompted a heated debate on the actual benefits of the EU among the European public and in (social) media during the 2010s. These two elements caused a major academic U-turn concerning the observation of public attitudes towards European integration, both per se and in combination with parties and elites, at a time when the very notion of EU membership was under heavy scrutiny across Europe.

The second macro-period also saw the emergence and growing visibility of studies investigating Euro-scepticism beyond the traditional boundaries of political science. Evidence from the systematic review points to four main clusters of publications. The first—historical articles—primarily examines the influence of

<sup>5</sup> The special issue also featured a single-country study on British public opinion (Raunio 2007).



**Table 3** Articles published on Euroscepticism per keyword (1995–2020)

Political parties	149	EP	17	Education	4
EU (Geographic and Member States)	132	Attitudes	16	Legitimacy	4
EU	95	Behaviour	15	Social democracy	4
EU integration	83	Europeanisation	14	Anti-establishment	4
Political science approaches	76	PMs	13	Disintegration	4
Public Opinion & Public Sphere	55	Policy	13	Groups	4
Elections & EP Elections	44	Crisis	12	Cleavages	3
Brexit	33	Referendum	11	Deliberation	3
Populism	32	Democracy	11	History	3
RRPs and RLPs	31	EU enlargement	10	Culture	3
Domestic politics	30	Ideology	9	Federalism	3
EU politics & polity	26	Communication	9	Multidimensionality	2
Identity	22	Regions	8	Saliency	2
Politicization & Depoliticization	21	Elites	8	Security	2
Media & Social Media	21	Responsiveness & Responsibility	8	Strategy	2
EU policies	20	Left & Right	7	Terrorism	2
Euro-crisis	19	Religion	7	Theory	2
Economy	19	Government	7	Transnationalism	2
Voting	18	Manifesto	6	Institutions	2
Party-based Euroscepticism	18	Trust	6	Rhetoric	2
Nationalism	18	Sovereignty	5	Socio-political Movements	2
Migration	17	Representation	5	Other	109

Source: Own Source;  $N = 1364$

nationalism, ideology, and identity on Eurosceptic attitudes. The second one—juridical articles—delves into the complexities that emerge from the interaction between national laws and supranational regulations. These publications highlight issues related to supranational treaties, key institutions, and the challenges presented by cultural diversity within national legal contexts. The third cluster focuses on economy-related research, investigating how the Great Recession affected Euroscepticism and vice versa, as well as exploring the economic drivers behind Eurosceptic sentiments and their impact on the political economy. Lastly, the education cluster explores the correlation between school attainment and Eurosceptic tendencies.

Finally, the analysis of *keywords* (Table 3) enhances our comprehension of the diverse array of sub-topics within Euroscepticism, underscoring the inherent complexity of the field and shedding light on its extensive scope of inquiry. In particular, the meta-analysis shows how a substantial proportion of authors position their work within the realm of *political parties* (10.92%). This encompasses a set of related terms, ranging from (non-)partisan actors and attitudes to extreme political formations. Researchers have also dedicated substantial



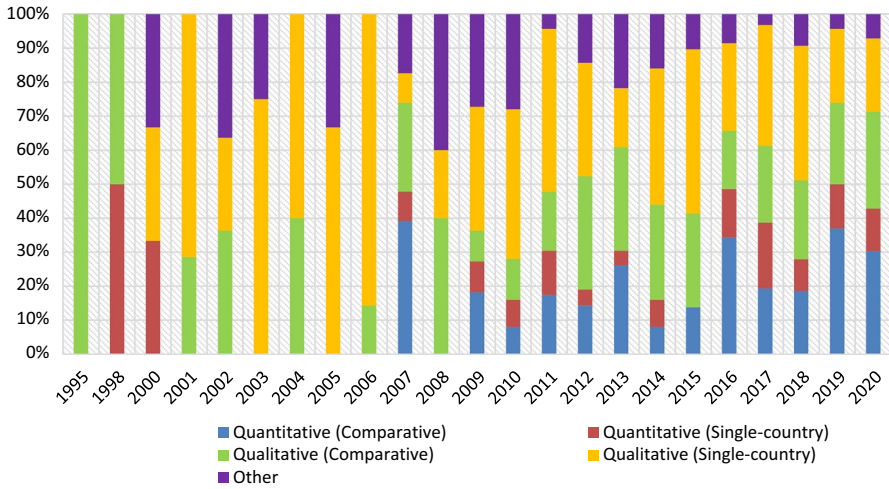


Fig. 4 Articles published on Eurosepticism per approach and methodology (1995–2020)

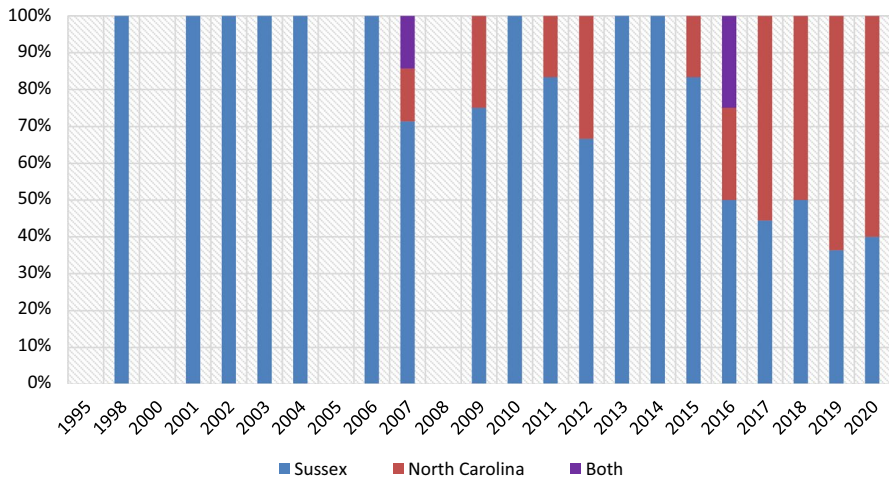


Fig. 5 Articles published on Eurosepticism per school (1995–2020)

scholarly attention to the supranational domain, with major focuses on EU polity, policies, and politics collectively representing over a quarter of the dataset’s keywords. Political ideologies such as *nationalism* and *populism* are also prominently featured. Interestingly, the representation of public-related publications is notably lower than anticipated. This aligns with prior findings regarding the *unit of analysis* indicator, with the combined keyword macro-clusters of *public opinion & public sphere* and *media & social media* constituting 5.57% of the total. Nonetheless, this finding does not inherently challenge de Wilde and Trenz’s (2012) assertion regarding the critical role these domains play in the study of



Euroscepticism. Additional research is needed to clarify this discrepancy. It's also crucial to recognise topics that have been comparatively overlooked in the scholarly discourse, such as *terrorism*, *security*, and *representation*.

## Research design: approach, methodology, and schools

To complete the systematic review, this study moves to analyse the dataset's *approach* and *methodology* indicators, as well as the overall impact of the Sussex and North Carolina schools. In this sense, Figs. 4 and 5 paint a clear picture of the discipline's development. The period 1995–2010 is characterised by a pronounced preference for qualitative research, including both comparative and single-country studies. These articles constitute 57.66% of the literature and 59.82% of the total publications of the first macro-period. This trend can be partly ascribed to the early development of the Sussex school and the OERN/EPERN network. However, it is also important to note that only 27 out of 112 papers explicitly adopted their framework for analysing Eurosceptic parties or observing Eurosceptic attitudes and stances. While certain studies implemented their unique classification (e.g., Kopecký and Mudde 2002), others decided to eschew any specific methodological allegiance altogether. Thus, while the soft/hard approach has been instrumental in shaping the study of Euroscepticism, it is equally important to acknowledge the extensive number of scholars who decided to investigate the phenomenon of their own accord.

In contrast with the earlier research phase, the 2010s marked the advent of a more varied scholarly environment, with the 2007 special issue of *Acta Politica* propelling a diverse array of studies and methodologies to the forefront of the field. Although the patterns established during the initial macro-period maintained their significance, their dominance was incrementally contested. This is evidenced by an upsurge in quantitative research, with their share rising from 17.86% during the period 1995–2010 to 34.34% between 2011 and 2020. Considering the current trajectories, one could assume that comparative and quantitative research may soon form the majority of new scholarly contributions published each year. Similarly, while the Sussex school's influence persisted, the North Carolina approach gained substantial traction over the last decade. Of the 332 papers published during the 2010s, 42 utilised the soft/hard methodology, while 33 relied on CHES. This marks a significant rise in the adoption of the latter approach, which was utilised in only 3 out of 112 publications from 1995 to 2010. Given the significance of this methodological shift, one could speculate that the soft/hard methodology may further decline in favour of North Carolina's dataset moving forward.

Despite the evidence presented so far, questions regarding the overall influence of the two schools persist. Based on the current data, methodologies associated with Sussex and North Carolina were identified in 103 articles out of 444. Narrowing the scope of the study to exclude papers focusing on non-party-based *units of analysis* does not significantly change the systematic review's findings. In essence, a substantial section of the literature employed alternative frameworks for their analyses. While this observation does not diminish either approach's validity or significance, it underscores the need to better understand the dynamics behind these patterns. In



the same vein, while the increase in quantitative and comparative publications can partially be attributed to the greater availability of data sources, this explanation alone may not sufficiently account for the patterns observed before and after the late 2000s.

In conclusion, the emergence of quantitative comparative research has disrupted the early predominance of single-country qualitative studies, resulting in a more balanced environment. Nevertheless, additional research is required to gain a deeper understanding of how the interaction between methodological innovation and scholarly development has influenced the evolution of the literature over time.

## Discussion

This study aimed to thoroughly evaluate the literature on Euro-scepticism through a systematic review of over 400 research articles published from 1995 to 2020. By integrating methodologies from prior research with an original dataset based on altmetrics, this article offers an overview of the scholarly development within this research field.

From a longitudinal perspective, the results show that the expansion of Euro-scepticism research closely aligns with the progression of the European project. Expanding the EU's powers and responsibilities intensifies political perceptions of European integration—both positively and negatively—thus warranting further scholarly inquiry. The evolution of this cyclical trend can be roughly divided into two macro-periods. The initial phase—1995 to 2010—was predominantly marked by qualitative single-country studies on Euro-sceptic parties and elites, with a relatively high degree of attention on the EU-15 and CEEC macro-blocs. This evidence partially contrasts with Vasilopoulou's (2018) analysis of top-cited papers, which prominently feature public-related analyses. Similarly, the author's evidence concerning the overall utilisation of quantitative methodologies does not entirely align with the results of the systematic review. With respect to the former, the outcome of this study could be seen as counterintuitive. Since party-based Euro-scepticism was considered peripheral during the 1990s (Taggart 1998), researchers would have had little reason not to focus on public opinion.

Although the data do not permit definitive conclusions, this gap in early research may stem from two distinct phenomena. Firstly, the potential for public contestation of European integration may remain latent among the general populace with-out 'appropriate' conditions (van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). European integration may either be a non-salient issue for voters or remain unexpressed without the influence of dedicated partisan entrepreneurs (de Vries 2007). Secondly, the magnitude of Taggart's publication—and the creation of the OERN/EPERN network—likely shifted academic momentum towards a qualitative "attempt to map [party-based] Euro-scepticism" (Taggart 1998, p. 363) at the expense of other sub-topics. More importantly, this last passage may be instrumental in explaining the conflicting results between Vasilopoulou's (2018) work and the present study, thus signalling a discrepancy between top-cited publications and the broader literature in terms of both methodological approaches and overarching themes. In other words, the study's



findings show that the top layer does not necessarily provide an accurate representation of the greater whole.

Many of the literature's shortcomings regarding public opinion and comparative and quantitative approaches were addressed by the notable increase in publications during the period 2011–2020. Over time, European integration reached a level of salience that enabled political parties to mobilise voter preferences more effectively (Hooghe and Marks 2009). The combination of this progressive politicisation with other major events—the rejection of the Constitution for Europe, the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and the outbreak of the polycrisis—may have provided favourable conditions that encouraged researchers to venture beyond the more well-trodden paths of the discipline.

The transition from a predominantly party-based, single-country qualitative literature to a more diversified array of research is poised to invigorate future academic endeavours. While the study's findings offer encouraging prospects, it's also worth noting that notable sections of the discipline remain relatively less investigated. The literature has not yet achieved a complete balance, as areas such as media-related topics and mass-elite issues could profit from more in-depth inquiries. The same can be said with respect to the country selection process. Notwithstanding the rise in EU-wide publications over the last decade, country-specific studies on 'newer', less populous, and more pro-European MSs would undoubtedly enrich the literature.

Furthermore, additional information is paramount to support or challenge the meta-analysis' findings regarding the overall spread of the Sussex and North Carolina schools, which may depend on the rationale and selection criteria adopted by the systematic review. Finally, despite the notable presence of studies outside of the realm of political science, these studies represent only a relatively minor portion of the literature. Integrating our present knowledge with additional insights from other research areas would be valuable for understanding the complex dynamics related to Euroscepticism.

Overall, this study serves as a first assessment of the literature's self-knowledge, offering a working contribution for scholars to build upon. Breadth-wise, researchers may rely on different bibliographic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, WoS) and selection criteria to confirm or refute the systematic review's findings. Alternatively, they might improve the meta-analysis by including abstracts, books, chapters, and clusters of authors to accurately depict the literature's current state.

Depth-wise, future studies may push beyond the general overview provided by this systematic review. In particular, authors may attempt to investigate specific segments of the literature to reinforce existing evidence and/or provide a stepping stone for subsequent scholarly endeavours (for more, see Stockemer et al. 2018). For example, future meta-analyses may delve into the different conceptualisations of Euroscepticism that have been proposed over the decades. This might aid in tackling one of the current gaps in the literature, namely the lack of a proper theorisation for the “phenomenon as a whole” (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2018, p. 5). Alternatively, systematic reviews could examine other well-explored topics, such as the primary drivers of Euroscepticism and the *vexata quaestio* of ideology versus strategy.

Finally, gathering information on particular facets of Euroscepticism might prompt authors to explore relatively uncharted areas. This wide array of topics may





include the impact of Euro-scepticism on policy outputs and vice versa, its patterns of radicalisation and moderation in combination with government participation, and more (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2018). Of course, these suggestions are just the tip of the iceberg, as many more currently available opportunities within the boundaries of the existing literature are likely to be explored in the future. Given Euro-scepticism's persistent role in European public discourse and political systems (Treib 2021), academic research will continue evolving alongside the very phenomenon it seeks to understand.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author declares no conflict of interest associated with this publication.

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