

# Abstract

This thesis investigates the EU's legitimacy changes preceding Brexit from 2004 to 2016. Scholars have identified legitimacy deficits and crises within the EU since the 1990s. Against this backdrop, Brexit can be interpreted as a symptom of a deeper EU legitimacy crisis. The thesis investigates the changes in EU legitimacy during the period from 2004 to 2016. During this period, the EU has undergone two crises that have impacted its central arrangements: the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the Schengen area of unrestricted movement. By concentrating on the specified timeframe, the thesis documents the legitimization changes that occurred during each crisis and have fundamentally altered the EU's material context. The study examines shifts in legitimation and critique within the UK public sphere using computer-assisted quantitative text analysis (supervised machine-learning) and qualitative discourse analysis. The findings suggest that the EU's institutional design has led to recurrent legitimation problems and a legitimation crisis. However, it is unlikely that the EU has experienced a severe legitimacy crisis in the period. The key implication of these findings is that unless an empirical connection between legitimacy changes and institutional changes is established, the role legitimacy plays in (de)stabilizing the institution should be considered uncertain.