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**The impact of public discourse  
on the securitization of the  
asylum law (LAsi) and policies in  
Switzerland**

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## **Abstract**

In recent decades, in the majority of Western societies (including Switzerland) asylum has been socially constructed, through public discourse, as a threat to national identity and welfare, and therefore as a security issue. During the same period, Switzerland has followed the majority of Western societies in progressively tightening its asylum policies. These restricted asylum policies are clearly marked by a securitizing trend. This thesis argues that the Swiss social construction of asylum as a security issue has influenced the asylum policies. Moreover, I demonstrate that a Swiss radical right wing populist party *Unione Democratica di Centro (UDC)* played an essential role in linking public debate to policies.

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## Introduction

In recent decades, in the majority of Western societies (including Switzerland) migration has been perceived as a threat to national identity and welfare, and therefore as a security issue. In fact, on the one hand, people in Western societies have defined themselves in contrast to the other – usually the migrant - who is seen as a threat to their cultural identity. On the other hand, citizens of Western societies constantly attribute the effects of economical instability and the market labour distress to migrants who are seen as “job stealers”. Furthermore, migrants are perceived as “receiving privileged treatment at the expense of the tax-paying citizens” (Betz, 1999, p.314). Moreover, since the 80s Western European societies have experienced an important rise of radical right-wing populist parties that, despite being substantially different, promote an anti-migrant message (Fennema, 2005). The *Unione Democratica di Centro* (hereafter *UDC*), a Swiss radical right-wing populist party has become in 1999 the first Swiss party in terms of electoral suffrages (Mazzoleni, 2008). After 9/11/01, the link between migration and security has even been reinforced (Faist, 2002). Migrants of Muslim origin have started to be conceived in the majority of Western societies as potential terrorists, and therefore as a potential threat to national security and public order.

The discourse that associates migration to security reflects in laws and policies that Western countries have adopted toward migrants. Since long, but especially in the last two decades, migration policies in Western European countries have been tightened. One can clearly see this trend in the Schengen agreements (1985), in the Dublin Convention (1990), and in the EU’s adoption of the Third Pillar on Justice and Home Affairs (1993).

Though not an EU member, Switzerland undergoes a similar restrictive turn in migration laws and policies. It has signed the bilateral agreements with the EU and adopted the above-mentioned Conventions. It has also significantly tightened its national migration laws without an EU incentive (initially, *Legge Federale sul soggiorno e lo stabilimento degli stranieri (LSEE)* and since 2008, *Legge Federale sugli Stranieri (LStr)*).

In this thesis, I focus on asylum-seekers and refugees and I verify whether Swiss citizens

conceive these migrants as threats to their national security. Because asylum-seekers and refugees come from politically and economically unstable countries, and since they often display visible religious markers (such as clothing) that provoke fear among Western societies' members, in the collective imagery they are gradually seen as a source of threat.

Once again, the radicalization of citizens' perception on asylum seekers and refugees reflects in laws and policies that Western countries have adopted toward these migrants. The EU countries have implemented more severe policies towards asylum-seekers that make more difficult for a person to get the refugee status in the EU. The Swiss case reflects this trend as it has become part of the Schengen agreements and of the Dublin Convention, and since it has independently tightened the *LAsi* in recent years.

My thesis aims to answer the research question: did the radicalization of publicized discourse about refugees and asylum seekers led to more restrictive asylum legislation in Switzerland between 1993 and 2006? If yes, which mechanisms led to this outcome?

To properly answer this question I have formulated a hypothesis that I will test in my thesis. This hypothesis stems from the constructivist theoretical approach proposed by the Copenhagen school of thought. It predicts that asylum seekers and refugees have been increasingly socially constructed as a threat to Swiss national welfare and identity. Therefore, Swiss public debate has progressively radicalized over the years, by linking asylum to security. Consequently, this securitizing trend has had an impact on Swiss restricted policies on asylum.

Another hypothesis that I evaluate in my thesis predicts that *UDC* influence the radicalization of the Swiss citizens' claims-making activity and in this way exert an impact on the restrictive shape of policies. In fact, the Swiss political system allows for the use of popular initiatives and referenda that permit Swiss citizens to directly access the political process. Therefore by being especially active in the promotion of an anti-asylum message, and in the launching of several popular initiatives aiming at restricting the *LAsi*, *UDC* is luckily to have importantly contributed to the securitization of asylum in Switzerland.

In order to test this hypothesis I analyse whether public discourse, that is, claims-making activity in the public sphere (independent variable), exerted an impact on the securitization of asylum

policies in Switzerland (dependent variable). I study the Swiss claim-making activity by periodically analysing the articles presented in the *Corriere del Ticino*, a national politically centred newspaper, that due to this characteristic, tends to report the opinions and actions of the majority of actors that express themselves on asylum in Switzerland (NGOs, political parties, interest groups, civil society, etc... (Koopmans, 2002). Although I focus principally on the Swiss case, I situate it in the analysis of the wider European context in which Switzerland is embedded.

## **Justification**

It is important to study how and why asylum is commonly perceived as a security issue in Switzerland for several reasons.

First, because the restrictive turn in asylum policies and the rise of negative perceptions of these migrants in Switzerland is not an isolated case. In contrast, the same trend is visible in Europe and in other various Western states. Therefore, exploring how asylum is framed in the Swiss public discourse can help explain the wider securitization trend in Western countries.

Additionally, Switzerland is historically, economically, politically, geographically and culturally an interesting case. First of all, Switzerland has a long migration history, linked to its geographical location and demographic composition. Second, it is a multicultural society where four linguistically and culturally different regions peacefully coexist. Third, Switzerland, that is the oldest democracy in Europe, has been characterized along its history by a humanitarian tradition of welcoming refugees. Fourth, Switzerland, by not being exposed to any particular danger or threat, is widely recognized as one of the safest countries in the world.

One would expect that these four factors and the importance of the migrant labour force for the national economy would lead to an open multicultural society, willing and able to accept asylum-seekers. However, this is not the case. Contrary to what one would anticipate, asylum-seekers in Switzerland are often unwelcomed and increasingly perceived as a potential threat to the national security. Moreover, several popularly accepted votes have negatively affected asylum-seekers, and have turned the *LAsi* into one of the most restrictive European asylum laws. Therefore, this puzzle calls for academic attention.

Furthermore, as Leonard notices (2007), it is only recently that scholars have applied the securitization theory to some concrete cases. Therefore, an empirical application of the



securitization theory to the Swiss case is especially pertinent, as it will permit to enrich the existing studies on the securitization of migration. My research on Switzerland will thus contribute to the literature on the securitization of migration by adding new insights to the study of the link between discourse and policy. In fact, up to now there has been a clear gap in literature as far as Switzerland is concerned. Additionally, the Swiss case is of particular interest in the study of this link, since the country benefits from a particular political system that permits Swiss citizens to take directly part to the decision process through popular initiatives.

Finally, analysing how discourse practices impact upon the construction of asylum-seekers as a security issue can help us counteract this trend. De-securitization of asylum is a first step to construct a democratic pluralistic society. In fact, a positive social construction of the asylum-seekers and refugees, not as a security issue but as a cultural and economic benefit, would contribute to a more open and plural society and to the emergence of some policies and laws that permit and sustain a better integration of these migrants in the hosting country.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In this thesis, I share the constructivist approach of the Copenhagen School in the international relations body of literature, which highlights that security issues do not exist *per se*. In contrast, they are socially constructed by the citizens' perceptions of what constitutes a threat in a particular moment (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998; Waever, 2004). In fact, "security is a self-referential practice, because it is in this that the issue becomes a security issue, not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat" (Buzan, Waever and, De Wilde, 1998, p.24). Therefore, this approach stresses that security agenda does not include only traditional political and military sectors (Buzan, 1997).

Despite adopting a wide perspective, the Copenhagen school states that in order to be considered as a security issue, the different threats and vulnerabilities that can arise in military and non-military areas have to meet specific criteria (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998). "They have to be staged as existential threats to a referent object by a securitizing actor who thereby generates endorsement of emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise bind" (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998, p.5). Generally, this situation occurs when states, considering their survival undermined by a major threat or vulnerability, opt for a particular rhetorical structure (Buzan,

Wæver and De Wilde, 1998, p.26). This permits them to justify their use of emergency actions (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, 1998, p.26).

By being socially constructed, security issues take forms through speech acts made by “securitizing actors” (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, 1998, p.5), such as political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists, and pressure groups (Wæver, 2004, p.13). Therefore, in order to study security issues, we need to analyze discourse and political constellations (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, 1998). However, the securitization process is not a subjective one, but an inter-subjective one (Wæver, 2004, p.13). In fact, in order to effectively securitize an issue, the discourse that presents something as an existential threat must be accepted as such by the audience (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, 1998; Wæver, 2004; Buzan, 1997). The securitization of an issue by nations will have political consequences by leading them to act differently (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, 1998; Buzan, 1997).

Since my thesis investigates the possible causal relation that exists between Swiss public discourse -which enables the social construction of asylum as a security issue- and Swiss asylum policies, it is important to focus on the studies that reflect upon the relation between discourse and policies. As sustained by Schmidt and Ravelli (2004, p.189) “discourse [...] is one among several factors involved in policy change”. In fact, continue Schmidt and Ravelli (2004, p.188), public discourse influences policies by modifying actors’ interests, which in turn enhance “their political institutional capacity to change”.

A large number of scholars focused on the existence and the direction of a linear causality between public opinion - which is strongly influenced by public discourse in the mass media - and policies. No academic consensus on this subject emerged. In fact, as Page and Shapiro points out (1983, p. 175), although some authors have shown that public opinion influence policies, others authors have demonstrated the contrary; namely that the adoption of certain policies affects public opinion.

However, since my thesis aims at testing the impact of public discourse on policies, I concisely report only the arguments of authors that have studied the linear causality between public opinion and policies. As Page and Shapiro observe (1983, p. 181) “policy tends to move in the same direction as public opinion most often when the opinion change is large and when is stable -that is not reversed by fluctuations. Similarly, policy congruence is higher on salient than non-salient

issues”.

Aside these general remarks, and following Finney’s suggestion (2005, p.6) it is important to consider the factors that by shaping the public opinion “intervene in the opinion-policy relationship”. In general, the factors negatively influencing the popular sentiment toward asylum seekers and refugees are: social, economic, demographic and historical factors, mass media, and radical right wing populist parties (Page and Shapiro, 2005; Wimmer, 1997; Finney, 2005).

Since this thesis focus on the public discourse in the *Corriere del Ticino*, a reputable Swiss national newspaper, it is important to highlight the impact of mass media in general on citizens’ opinion and perceptions, which thus influence public opinion (Van Dijk, 1995).

Although different factors influence public opinion and more in general public debate, in this thesis I mainly focus on *UDC* action due to its prominent role in the securitization of asylum in Switzerland. In order to follow this purpose it is important to previously theoretically define radical right-wing populist parties, and which are the principle theoretical explanations of the large success that these parties have had in Europe during the past three decades.

In Betz’s words (1993, p.413), “radical right-wing populist parties are radical in their rejection of the established sociocultural and socio-political system and their advocacy of individual achievement, a free marketplace, and a drastic reduction of the role of the state”. Following Betz’s definition (1993, p.413), radical right-wing populist parties “are right wing in their rejection of individual and social equality, in their opposition to the social integration of marginalized groups, and in their appeal to xenophobia, if not overt racism”. This political positioning, in Betz’s words (1999, p.309), can be resumed in the concept of “ethno pluralism” which is at the core of what he defines “new racism”. This sentiment does not acknowledge the fact that racial superiority exists; on the contrary, it accepts that different types of ethnic groups subsist (Betz, 1999). However, in order to preserve this variety of cultural identities “new racism” negatively perceives the mixing of cultures that migration produces. Therefore, radical right populist parties, aiming at preserving the welfare and cultural identity of their countries, are clearly against the worldwide product of globalization, namely the tendency to go towards deeper multiculturalism.

Succeeding Betz’s definition (1993,p.413), these parties “are populist in their instrumentalization of sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment and their appeal to the common man and his

allegedly superior common sense.”

The appearance of these parties in Europe and the political success that some of them have achieved have multiple reasons. These, following the theoretical explanation proposed by Mazzoleni (2008, pp. 41-61), can be resumed into two main groups. The first one contains the structural transformations that have interested Western European societies since the 90s, which in particular refer to the changes reported in the economical, social and cultural circumstances (Mazzoleni, 2008, p.41). The second group of reasons contains the non-structural reasons, such as a particularly winning ideology, important organizational resources, a particular electoral or institutional context, a charismatic leadership, etc...(Mazzoleni, 2008, p.41).

## **Methodology**

I use a discourse analysis method, namely the claim-making one, because it allows to explore the social construction of asylum as a security issue. In fact, by being at the core of any democratic systems, public debate reflects the social construction of the security issues since it enable citizens and political actors to exchange their opinions on the subject (Buzan, 1997). This method also helps reveal the mechanisms through which the securitization of the discourse in the public sphere has contributed to the tightening of migration laws and policies in Switzerland. In fact, by looking at the chronological patterns, it is possible to see if first there was a more radicalized discourse and then the creation of strict laws and policies.

As Koopmans says (2002, p.2), “an instance of claim making (claim) is a unit of strategic action in the public sphere. It consists of the expression of a political opinion by some form of physical or verbal action; regardless of the form this expression takes (statements, violence, repression, decision, demonstration, court ruling, etc. etc.) and regardless of the nature of the actor (governments, social movements, NGO’s, individuals, anonymous actors, etc.)”.

As previously anticipated, I analyse the claims-making activity on the topic of asylum in the principal newspaper of the Swiss Italian region, named *Corriere del Ticino*. I focus on public discourse pronounced in print media because broadsheets of public record exhaustively report public debates and, on the other hand, they play an essential role during political campaigns.

I focus on the 1993-2006 period given that at that time the *LSi* changed significantly. I limit my analysis to the newspaper’s editions of Tuesdays and Thursdays because claims-making method

is labour- and time- intensive. Likewise, I concentrate only on editions in the selected time frame that appeared in the periods of major legislative changes. Therefore, on one side I compare the results of the claim-making analysis of April 1993 to the one of 1999, which is the year when the Swiss citizens accepted by popular referenda the total revision of the *LAsi* (13 June). On the other side I compare the claim-making activity of September 2000 to the one of 2006, that is the year when the Swiss citizens accepted by popular referenda the partial revision of the *LAsi* (24 September). I choose to compare these two periods because in April 1999 and September 2006 the public debate was probably heated due to the proximity with the popular vote.

For each selected month I divide in two categories the claims made on asylum. On the one hand I assemble claims that by positively depicting or neutrally addressing the asylum issue can be considered as pro-asylum or neutral claims. On the other hand I regroup the claims that by negatively referring to asylum can be designed as anti-asylum claims. By comparing the percentages of pro/neutral claims with the anti-asylum ones in each of the two selected periods I can empirically verify if public discourse had effectively radicalized. Moreover this methodological strategy helps me to evaluate my initial hypothesis by permitting me to examine if the radicalization of the public discourse about asylum preceded the implementation of harsh legislation. If this it is going to be realized it could be reasonably inferred that the change in public discourse was a cause or an intervening factor in the tightening of policies.

As Koopmans and Statham (1999) underline, claims-making analysis poses two potential problems that are important to take into account when analyzing the content of publicized discourse. One possible risk is the description bias (1999, p.6) that means that the articles could report the events in a biased manner. On the other hand, not all the significant facts might be reported in the newspaper that I have selected and this could provoke a selection bias (1999, p.6). In order to tackle these problems, I take a newspaper that is in the political centre. In addition to that, I take into account two weekly editions -the Thursday and the Tuesday editions - thus diminishing the possibility to bias my information.

Aside claim-making analysis, I analyse public opinion surveys to identify the evolution of common citizens' views on asylum seekers and refugees in Switzerland. The citizens' public perceptions are part of public discourse and complement my findings from the claims-making analysis.

Finally, I look as well at the numerous popular initiatives concerning asylum that have been launched or strongly supported by the *UDC* between 1981 and 2006, and the scores that they have reached. This in fact permits me to perceive if there was effectively a radicalization of the publicized discourse before the entrance into force of the two main revisions on which I focus.

## **Historical Overview of the Securitization of Migration in Western European Societies**

By following the previously exposed constructivist theoretical framework, it can be argued that during the past decades in Western European countries, migration has been progressively securitized by being politically and socially constructed as an effective or potential threat. This securitizing trend has been reflected in the tightening of Western European states' migration laws and policies.

Between the late 60s and the beginning of the 70s migration was conceived as a subject of public concern because of the difficulties in the labour markets of host countries (Huysmans, 2000). The tightening of national laws and policies followed the growing desire to protect the social and economic rights of the domestic workforce, and therefore principally wanted to limit labour immigration. Consequently, many people from underdeveloped or developing countries entered Europe by family reunification, illegal immigration and asylum (Boswell, 2000). Because of this migrant population did not diminish but continued to grow instead (Huysmans, 2000).

During the 80s, Western European radical right-wing populist parties have been especially skilled in using the dramatic augmentation of asylum seekers and refugees; the change of refugees typology and immigrant population; and the economical difficulties that the majority of Western European countries were facing at that moment, for gaining votes. In fact, by presenting themselves as the protector of the national citizens against the threatening outsiders, they have appealed citizens with a xenophobic discourse, which clearly reflects the concept of ethno-pluralism previously explained (Steiner, 2009). Therefore, radical right wing populist parties by forcefully entering the European scene by multiplying both votes and parliamentary representation have importantly contributed to a negative social construction of the migrants as a security issue (Art, 2011) and so to the radicalization of the public discourse. More in detail,

especially since the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s these parties have decisively contributed to the politicization of the asylum issue as connected to illegal immigration. This link was reinforced by the EU countries mass media, which contributed to the strengthening of the securitization process (Huysman, 2000, p.763).

The radicalization of the public debate about migration once again reflects in the restriction of immigration and asylum policies. In fact, on the one hand in the past two decades, Western European states have individually introduced different laws in order to make it difficult for migrants to legally enter and to remain in their countries (Leonard, 2007). These laws were coupled with progressively tightened policies of border control, which clearly showed the growing link between security and migration. On the other hand, in the past two decades the cooperation between the European Union (*EU*) member states in the field of immigration and asylum increased. In 1975 was created the TREVI group, and during the 80s an Ad Hoc Group on Asylum and Immigration was formed. These two groups “are the exemplification of migration policies that are often even institutionally linked to crime” (Faist, 2002, p. 10). Moreover, the Schengen Agreement, originally signed in 1985, “locates the regulation of migration in an institutional framework that deals with the protection of internal security” (Huysmans, 2000, p.757). More in detail, the Schengen Application Convention, that coupled the original agreement and that was established in 1990 “connects immigration and asylum with terrorism, transnational crime and border control” (Huysman, 2000, p.756). Besides, in 1990 the Dublin Convention was adopted; this created an important European system to impede asylum seekers to demand the recognition of their asylum status in different countries (Zetter, 2009). By using the term “asylum shopping”, the Dublin Convention clearly sustains the idea that migration and asylum represent a threat for EU member states (Zetter, 2009). Finally, immigration and asylum became a subject of inter-governmental regulation within the EU with the introduction of the Third Pillar on Justice and Home Affairs that was created with the institution of the Treaty on European Union at Maastricht in 1993 (Huysmans, 2000). This treaty clearly associates asylum and migration to a security issue. It is with the Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force in 1999, that member States identified justice and home affairs as one of the Union’s priority policies, by incorporating into the EU framework the inter-governmental cooperation in the migration, asylum and security field (Huysmann, 2000). This clearly shows the perception of migration and asylum as linked to security.

Migration and security nexus has been reinforced in Western European states after the 9/11/01 events, and especially after the Madrid attacks of 2004 and the London ones in 2005. In fact, by being increasingly linked to terrorism, international migration has been gradually constructed as strictly connected to security (Bigo, 2009). Western European countries have progressively both individually and cooperatively tightened their border controls and established internal controls for non-EU citizens (Faist, 2002).

## **The Swiss Case**

Despite not being part of the EU, but still being a Western European country that entertains important relations with the EU, Switzerland undergoes a similar experience.

Immigrants came to Switzerland already in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century so as to face the country's labour needs. As a consequence of the dramatic augmentation of the foreigner population in Switzerland between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> one, the latent racism that since long has characterized the country forcefully spread. In fact, as Wimmer notices (2002), Swiss national identity has been constructed on the exclusion of the other in order to intensify the links between citizens that live in four diverse regions with particular linguistic and cultural traditions. The spread of the latent racism can be seen in the fact that in public debate was progressively used the *Überfremdung*'s concept that refers to "a foreign overpopulation threatening the Swiss identity" (Riaño and Wastl-Walter, 2006, p.1).

Although, the numbers of foreigners decreased during and after the First World War, the Swiss anti-foreigners sentiment has been intensified during the 20s and 30s due to the metaphorically invasion of a wave of racism in Western European countries. This contributed to the popular support for the introduction in 1931 of the *LSEE*, which included the concept of "overforeignization" (Mahning and Wimmer, 2003). This law aimed at limiting the number of foreigners on the Swiss soil in order to protect the Swiss national identity. However, due to the economical need of the moment the concept of "seasonal worker", through which immigrants could still enter the country, was introduced (Mahning and Wimmer, 2003).

After the end of the Second World War, the number of foreigners established in Switzerland increased, due to the economical progression of the country. As a reaction to foreigners' augmentation some xenophobic parties appeared in the 50s. Despite being limited both in their



success and in their zone of influence, these parties have contributed, through their messages, to the radicalization of the public opinion and public discourse on immigration (Mazzoleni, 2008). In 1969 the Schwarzenbach initiative that proposed to limit the proportion of foreign workers in order to preserve the national economical welfare was for example launched (Art, 2011, p. 168). This initiative generated an important public debate, and, once voted in the popular referenda, it was approved by 46% of Swiss citizens (admin.ch, 2012b). This suggests that a wide number of Swiss citizens shared the anti-migrant sentiment that characterized the Swiss radical right-wing populist parties (Art, 2008, p.168). Moreover, through their use of direct democratic tools, namely popular initiatives and referenda, these parties have been able to include migration in the national political agenda. For example, right after the Schwarzenbach's initiative result, the Swiss authorities adopted the "stabilization policies" which consisted in an overall cap policy that introduced some annual admission quotas, and further restrictions to immigrants rights (Riaño and Wastl-Walter, 2006).

The migrant flux toward Switzerland was temporarily slowed down after the oil shock of 1973 that affected the Swiss economy and therefore reduced its need for an extra workforce (D'Amato, 2008). However, despite the "stabilization policies", the flux of migrants started once again after the pick up of the Swiss economy during the 80s, and took mostly the form of family's reunification. Moreover, due to the structural changes that happened in this decade, the origin of the new migrants has progressively changed, passing from being European to non-European one. This change affected the political agenda of the existent Swiss radical right wing populist parties, and led to the creation of new ones (Mazzoleni, 2008). In fact, these parties started to use the cultural and physical differences of the "new migrants" to launch a message aiming at differentiating migrants from the Swiss citizens. Therefore, once again, they contributed to the radicalization of the public opinion. Moreover, despite Swiss radical right wing populist parties benefit from a marginal consensus, they also managed to use referenda for turning migration into a constant political issue (Art, 2011, p.168). This is for example the case of the popular initiative aiming at "limiting migration" which was launched by *Action Nationale* in 1988, and which received the 32.7% of positives votes (Mazzoleni, 2008, p. 21).

Since the 90s and thanks to the growing success that they have gained, two radical right populist parties have importantly contributed to the radicalization of the debate. In fact, despite being in the national political sphere from a long time, radical right wing populist parties reached for the

first time a significant and stable success only in this period, namely through the political action of the *UDC* (at the national level) and the one of the *Lega dei Ticinesi* (at the regional one). Since 1929 *UDC* has been part of the Swiss government, and since 1999 it has become the first political party of the country (Art, 2011). As a result *UDC* managed to augment its representation in the national Parliament, and in cantonal Parliaments, and to pressure the consociational formula that since long characterized the country (Betz, 2001, p.3). Since the 90s *UDC* successfully became the principle promoter of the anti-foreigner message. Due to its impressive political ascendance, that is a clear indicator of the progressive radicalization of voters and the public discourse on migration, it is imperative to look in a deeper way at its political trajectory.

Following Betz's definition previously exposed (1993, p.413), *UDC* can be classified as a radical right wing populist party. In fact, it is radical in the sense that it constantly attacks the political class (although being part of it), it prompts for an important responsiveness of the individual citizens and therefore for limiting the state's role. *UDC* is right wing because it spurs an anti-migrant message. Finally, *UDC* can be depicted as populist because it constantly exalts the "national people" by regularly using the instruments of direct democracy, for protecting them from the abuses of the political elite (Mazzoleni, 1999, pp.32-39).

The theoretical explanation furnished by Mazzoleni and previously presented (2008, pp. 42-61) is pertinent to discover the principal reasons behind the political success of *UDC* since the 90s. Firstly, it is important to remember, that since long in Switzerland there has been a widespread negative image of the migrant and therefore *UDC* has found a fertile ground. Secondly, Switzerland has been affected by some important structural changes at the end of the 80s and during the 90s. In fact, during the 90s Switzerland had to face an important economic crisis, which put into question its national welfare, caused an important unemployment's rate, and created a climate of incertitude (Mazzoleni, 2008). As a consequence, certain uneasiness has grown within the Swiss population, which has even been intensified by the anti-crisis measures that the government has taken (Mazzoleni, 2008). Therefore Swiss citizens have lost their faith in Swiss political institutions (Skenderovic, 2011). Within this context, the securitizing message proposed by the *UDC*, which promised to prevent the Swiss citizens from a further deterioration of their social and economical situation -mainly through the limitation of immigration - became highly appealing and gained a large success. Thirdly, globalization triggers fear in the Swiss citizens because they perceive it as negatively affecting their national culture and identity.

Traditional parties, however, have openly declared in favour of further globalization, and thus have progressively lost the citizens' support. In contrast, *UDC* presented itself as the protector of the Swiss identity, by promising to safeguard it through the limitation of migration. Therefore *UDC* has been particularly skilled in using the citizens' fears, prejudices or latent racism, and resentment against the political elite and the government to gain political support (Betz, 2001). Fourthly, the Swiss political system also contributed to the political success of the *UDC*. In fact, as Mazzoleni highlights (2008, p. 63-65), from one side direct democracy offers a direct access to the political process to citizens. From the other side, the electoral proportional system permits to a minority party to gain a better representation than what would be the case in a majoritarian system (Mazzoleni, 2008, pp. 65-69). Finally, the national consociational principle, which describes the traditional consensus that exists within the different governmental parties, has some perverse aspects. This in fact can be negatively perceived by the citizens, that by losing their faith in the political campaign of the traditional parties could be attracted by a party that, despite being part of the government, presents itself as an outsider, by giving a discordant opinion (Mazzoleni, 2008, pp. 65-69). Fifthly, *UDC* disposes of some impressive organizational methods both in material capital and in the human one (Mazzoleni, 2008). Besides, in the 80s Christoph Blocher, became the charismatic leader of the party and has been able to gain a wide popularity since then (Mazzoleni, 2008). Due to these characteristics *UDC* has proved to be highly skilled in using mass media and political campaigns in order to enlarge its zone of influence, which is a very important feature in the era of technological communication (Skenderovic, 2011). In fact, by informing citizens, mass media shape their opinion and perception (Van Dijk, 1995).

The anti-foreigners message that primordially characterize *UDC*, and that was shared by a large part of the Swiss population, reflects in the different modifications that have marked the *LSEE* (then the *Lstr*). In fact, influenced by the popularity of the *UDC* message and popular initiatives, and confronted to the deepening of the European integration, Switzerland has progressively modified its *LSEE*, by making it increasingly tightened. On one side, during this period it became easier for people coming from the European Union and from the US and Canada to establish themselves on the Swiss soil (Riaño and Wastl-Walter, 2006). On the other side, since the 90s it has gradually become difficult for people of non-EU or Western countries to enter Switzerland (Riaño and Wastl-Walter, 2006). The progressive tightening of the Swiss foreigners law clearly reflects the securitizing trend experienced by other Western countries. In fact, foreigners are

increasingly perceived as possible abusers, and therefore as a possible threat to Swiss welfare and identity.

The public debate on asylum followed the same radicalizing routes as the one of immigration. This reflects in the tightening of the *LAsi*, which since its introduction in 1981, has been object of a polarized discourse mainly because of the diversification of the origin of asylum seekers and the reason of their arrival on the Swiss soil. Therefore the *LAsi* has been repeatedly modified, making it increasingly difficult for the asylum seeker to gain the refugee status. On one side, the *LAsi* has progressively been aligned to the European standard. In fact, since 2008 the Schengen Agreements and Dublin Convention entered into force on the Swiss soil. On the other side, Switzerland has progressively strengthened its asylum legislation. At this purpose two main revisions were introduced, namely the total revision of the *LAsi* (1999), and the partial revision of the *LAsi* (2006). These two revisions have importantly restricted both the terms under which the refugee status is alleged and the procedure through which the person has to demand this recognition. For example, the partial revision of 2006 restricted in its article 32.1.2 let. a and 1.3, the possibility for people that do not have any travel or identity documents to open the procedure (admin.ch, 2012c). In fact, if in the 48 hours that follow its requests for asylum he or she does not present such documents, then the starting of the ordinary asylum process would generally be impeded. By restricting the definition of asylum seeker, these measures put into danger the persons in need of protection, by risking to expel them from the country.

The progressive tightening of the *LAsi* has taken a securitizing connotation by primordially depicting asylum seekers as possible abusers and not as persons who escape from an unsustainable situation in their countries. Moreover, the policies that couples this law are clearly showing this securitizing route. For example, at the moment of registration the use of a tool to detect fingerprints has been introduced. Due to this, multiple parts -namely Amnesty International, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, etc- have criticized the tightening of the *LAsi* (Corriere del Ticino, 2006).

Against this background I empirically analyse in the following part to what extent the securitization of discourse exerted an impact on the adoption of more restrictive policies.

## Empirical Analysis

As presented in the methodological part, I have decided to use a claim-making method in order to test if the publicized discourse on asylum has radicalized between the 90s and the beginning of 2000, and if this preceded the entrance into force of the two principle *LAsi*'s revisions (1999, 2006). The results of this action can be summarized in the following table:

Month and Year	Numbers and types of claims on asylum-seekers		
	PRO OR NEUTRAL	ANTI	Total
apr.93	5	2	7
	71,4%	28,6%	100%
apr.99	22	21	43
	51,2%	48,8%	100%
sept. 2000	5	8	13
	38,5%	61,5%	100%
sept. 2006	17	21	38
	44,7%	55,3%	100%
Total	49	52	101
	48,5%	51,5%	100%

Source: Author's own elaboration on the basis of data gathered by "claims-making".

This table shows the percentages of pro-neutral and contra-asylum seekers claims in the two months of 1993, 1999, 2000 and 2006. Through the results of the analysis exposed in this table some important observations can be done.

First, it is easily perceivable that the intuitive observation previously done on the status of the public debate right before the popular vote is empirically confirmed. In fact, both in April 1999 and in September 2006, claim-making activity crucially augmented in relation to 1993 and 2000 thus proving that the public debate had heated. Second, in both compared periods a radicalization of the publicized debate can be detected. On one hand, in 1993 only 28,6% of the total claims were anti-asylum, which significantly differs from the percentage of the anti-asylum claims in 1999 - that is 48,8%. On the other hand, in 2000, 61,5% of the total claims were still anti-asylum. The fact that in 2006 this proportion was of 51,5 %, confirms that in that year the majority of

claims were anti-asylum as well. Furthermore, this result is attributable to the fact that the claims in the two editions that followed the popular vote of the 24 September 2006 were mainly criticizing the tightening of the introduced legislative revision. In fact, the majority of claims expressed the preoccupation for the destiny of a certain part of the asylum-seekers as well as the *NEM (Non Entrata in Materia)*, who have received the answer of non-entry into merit from the Swiss Federal authorities, and who were consequently obliged to leave the country.

I now move to the description of the characteristics of an “anti-asylum” claim. It allows me to highlight a securitizing trend in the claims on asylum. The large majority of the anti-asylum claims contain terms related to security. In fact, asylum-seekers and refugees are often associated to “crime”, “violence”, “prison”, “problem”, “threat”, “abuse”, “cost”, “illegality”... Moreover, by emphasizing the ethnicity of asylum-seekers and refugees, and by referring to them using the term “other”, they are often presented as different from the Swiss citizens and therefore as threatening them. Through this rhetoric, asylum-seekers and refugees are socially constructed as a threat to the national identity, economic welfare and public security. This social construction met an increasing approval of claim-makers and led to the adoption of emergency laws and policies as well as to the adoption of important revision of the current law (*LAsi*). This was meant to counteract the supposed “abuses” that were perceived in the asylum field. Thanks to this analysis, and basing my explanation on the theoretical explanation given by the Copenhagen school of thought, I argue that asylum is not a security issue *per se*, but it is socially constructed as such.

Additionally to my *Corriere del Ticino*'s analysis, other indicators show the presence of a negative opinion within the Swiss citizens on asylum seekers, which is a central indicator of the radicalization of the public debate that has been produced during the studied period. For the first time in 1995 the Swiss Electoral Study named “Selects” was launched. This contained the question: “In your opinion, which is the problem that is most pressuring the Swiss future?” (Selects, 1995). Respondents had to choose their answer among 15 categories that reflected some possible problems. 7.6% of the 7441 interviewees answered that the most bothering problem were foreigners, asylum-seekers, and, in general, immigration (Selects, 1995). Four other categories caused more problems in the Swiss citizens' eyes. In 1999, when confronted to the

same question, the majority of the 3121 interviewees, namely the 25.4%, answering the question “Which is nowadays the most pressing unresolved problem that Switzerland is facing?” said: asylum-seekers and refugees (Selects, 1999). On the basis of these data, I argue that during the 90s the Swiss citizens’ opinion on asylum-seekers and refugees had deteriorated.

During the second analysed period (2000-2006), I also detect a shared negative sentiment within the Swiss population toward asylum seekers and refugees thanks to the analysis of data generated by the “Eurobarometer” survey in Switzerland. In 2000, when confronted to the question “Would you be in favour of Switzerland accepting people fleeing from countries where there is a serious internal conflict?” 54.7% of the 17069 people interviewed answered “Yes, but with some restrictions” (Eurobarometer, 2000). Within the same study, when asked to opine on the statement “The right to asylum in (our country) should be easier to obtain”, 59.4% of 17068 interviewees said they “tended to disagree” (Eurobarometer, 2000). In the same study, when people were asked “Would you be in favour of accepting people suffering from human rights violations in their country, who are seeking political asylum?”, 55.7% of the 17070 interviewees answered “Yes, but with restrictions” (Eurobarometer, 2000). One can clearly see this negative sentiment toward asylum seekers and refugees as well in the results of the “Selects” study of 2003. In fact, 21.4%, of the 5140 interviewees (the majority) confronted to the question “Which is the most pressing problem that Switzerland is facing nowadays” replied that was immigration and integration (Selects, 2003).

Moreover, the growing rejection of asylum seekers in the 90s and during the first part of the 2000-decade is also perceivable through the increasing success of several initiatives aiming at hindering asylum seekers’ access to the refugees’ status. First of all, it is important to underline that between 1987 and 2006 five initiatives aiming at restricting the asylum legislation have been launched. Two of them, namely the one launched in 1987 (*For the limitation of the acceptance of persons seeking asylum*) and the one launched in 1990 (*Against the massive immigration of foreigners and asylum seekers*) have not been successful because of the insufficient number of signatures that they have collected. Another popular initiative launched in 1991 (*For a rational policy of asylum*) has been declared null by the Swiss Federal Assembly. The other two initiatives launched respectively in 1992 (*Against the illegal immigration*) and 1999 (*Against the abuses in*

*the asylum field*) have been rejected by popular vote, respectively the one of 1 December 1996 with a 53.7 % score and the one of 24 November 2002 with a 50.1% score (admin.ch, 2012b). Therefore, as the results of the two last initiatives show, the number of people that share a negative sentiment toward asylum-seekers and refugees has been consistent since the second half of the 90s and grew bigger at the beginning of 2000.

In the light of this information that shows a clear radicalization of the public debate on asylum both between 1993 and 1999 and between 2000 and 2006, and by taking into consideration the moments when the two main revisions of the *LAsi* entered into force, it is possible to positively answer the initial research question: Did the radicalization of publicized discourse about refugees and asylum seekers led to more restrictive migration legislation in Switzerland between 1993 and 2006?

In fact, I have empirically proved that the radicalization of the public debate preceded the tightening of the *LAsi* in both analysed periods. On one hand, the total revision of the *LAsi* entered into force on 1 October 1999, after having been accepted by popular referenda on 13 June 1999. On the other hand, the partial revision of the *LAsi* entered into force gradually since 1 January 2007, after having been popularly accepted by referenda on 24 September 2006. Moreover, the opinion surveys previously cited confirm that an anti-asylum sentiment was shared by a large part of the Swiss population even before the entrance into force of the two revisions. Besides, the radicalization of the public opinion on asylum, which one may observe in the results of the initiatives previously cited, confirm that the restriction of the asylum law followed this trend. Finally, the results of the two popular referenda accepting the revision of the *LAsi* also confirm the radicalization of the public opinion on asylum. On one hand, 70.8% of popular voters accepted the total revision of the *LAsi* on 13 June 1999. On the other hand, 67.8 % of popular voters accepted the partial revision of the *LAsi* on 24 September 2006 (admin.ch, 2012a).

## **Mechanisms Through which the Radicalization of the Public Debate Impacted on the Tightening of the Swiss Asylum Policies**

Having demonstrated that the radicalization of discourse preceded the tightening of the Swiss asylum policies, it is now crucial to understand in what ways the radicalization of the public debate has contributed to the tightening of the Swiss asylum law (*LAsi*).



For this purpose I look more deeply at the role *UDC* has had in the radicalization of the public debate. Since the 90s *UDC* has especially contributed to the radicalization of the public opinion on asylum, by focusing its political message on the counteraction of the “asylum abuses”. This can be clearly seen through the fact that the successful political ascendance of the *UDC* since the 90s has moved as fast as the progressive radicalization of the public opinion on the asylum issue. In fact, *UDC* political success has increasingly grown since the federal election of 1993 when it received 14.9% of popular votes, to 1999 when it became the first Swiss political party gaining 22.5% of popular votes, and by gaining, in 2003, 26.7% of popular votes, and in 2007, 28.9% (Cochrane, n.d).

Moreover, *UDC* launched a number of initiatives aiming at restricting the asylum law. They were certain that these initiatives would have a direct impact on the tightening of *LAsi* by including some propositions, that were later integrated into the national law despite these initiatives had been rejected. This is, for example, the case of the initiative rejected in 1996, which proposed that the fact of being a “criminal asylum-seeker” should lead to the non-opening of the asylum procedure, and was afterwards integrated in the revisited *LAsi* in 1999, namely in its articles 32 and 33 (Brutsch, n.d). In this initiative, the suspension of the asylum procedure for a person coming from a country that is in war, by making its status into a temporary one for five years, was also suggested. This proposal was included in the totally revised *LAsi* of 1999 in its article 69 al 3.

In addition, it appears that the spectacular political success of the *UDC*, mainly through its anti-migrant message, favoured the alignment of some moderate right parties on certain issues concerning asylum. In fact, following Betz’s idea (1999, p. 316) based on the work of Altermatt and Kriesi (1995), one can argue that the tightening of Swiss asylum law strongly relates to the fact that “the established parties (and here especially the moderate right) make 'substantial concessions' to the radical right by adopting some of their priorities while at the same time decisively distancing themselves from their organisations and leading personalities”. This thesis seems confirmed by Stünzi (2012) who maintains that asylum has become salient in the parliamentary debates especially since the 90s. In fact, as Stünzi reports (2012), a wider number of parliamentary representatives, not only coming from the *UDC*, exalt the need of emergency measures for tackling asylum’s requests. Therefore, by incorporating a part of the *UDC* message, other representatives made claims on the asylum issue that have contributed to the radicalization

of the public debate, which in turn has led to the tightening of the Swiss asylum law and policies.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis I have argued that public discourse on asylum-seekers and refugees have influenced the tightening of the Swiss asylum law and policies.

By empirically applying the securitizing theory proposed by the Copenhagen school of thought to the Swiss case, I demonstrated that asylum-seekers and refugees have been socially constructed, through public debate, as a threat to the Swiss national welfare and identity, and therefore as a security issue. Basing my empirical analysis on the studies of the link between discourse and policies, I have shown that in the Swiss case the radicalization of the public opinion, part of the public debate, has importantly contributed to the tightening of the Swiss asylum law and policies. This is due to the particularity of the Swiss political system that through the direct democracy's tools permits Swiss citizens to have an impact on the national policies. Moreover, using the theoretical definition of the right wing populist parties proposed by Betz (1993), and the theoretical explanation of these parties' political success offered by Mazzoleni, I have revealed the important role played by the *UDC* in the radicalization of the public opinion and debate, and thus in the securitization of asylum in Switzerland. Therefore, my thesis contributed to the development of the theories on political parties and discourse impact on policies. My findings suggest that the role of populist political parties in shaping the public discourse and consequently policies cannot be ignored.

However, in order to better sustain my deduction, further research should be done. First, the number of national newspapers analysed and the total number of editions studied should be augmented to give a wider insight into the topic. Second, following Bigo's suggestion (2000, p. 194) scholars could explore non-discursive practices as well. Namely, it would be essential to examine the bureaucratic structures and networks linked to security practices since they play an active role in the creation of asylum policies. Aside the important role played by the *UDC*, other actors have importantly contributed to the radicalization of the public debate and therefore to the

tightening of asylum law. This is for example the case of mass media that by often negatively portraying asylum seekers and refugees contribute to the radicalization of the public opinion and therefore of the public debate (Wimmer, 1997). Unfortunately, due to the limited time for the elaboration of the Master thesis, I could not delve into these topics any further. I hope to widen my investigation in near future.

In conclusion, the securitizing trend in which Switzerland as well as other Western countries are nowadays embedded is alarming. In fact, the social construction of asylum-seekers as abusers, as deviants and as possible or real threats is especially pernicious for the large majority of migrants, that by fleeing a desperate and dangerous situation in their country - often synonymous of a high degree of insecurity - are ironically increasingly perceived as a security threat once entering a Western country. Due to this misinterpretation, the social construction of the asylum issue as intrinsically related to security slows the mechanism of integration in the majority of Western European countries, Switzerland included. In order to counteract this dramatic trend, it is important to disseminate a social construction of the asylum-seeker as a person who, compelled by the unsustainable situation in his/her country, decide to leave everything behind and start a trip that is most often deplorable and risky, with the only hope to begin a better and dignified life. Only through a positive social construction of the asylum-seekers, laws and policies could be revised following humanitarian and solidarity values. However, in order to do this, deeper media attention and academic scholarship should be dedicated to debunk the widespread beliefs on asylum-seekers and refugees.

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