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## How Blurred is European Public Opinion between Legal versus Illegal Immigrants?

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## Abstract

Although European public opinion on immigrants has been monitored closely in recent years, there is little work that differentiates attitudes towards legal versus illegal immigrants. This study explores variations in public attitudes in Europe between legal and illegal immigration through multivariate hierarchical modelling. It shows that Europeans' anti-immigrant attitudes are rooted in their concerns more about illegal immigrants. The results also indicate that public opinion in countries with larger immigrant populations is concerned significantly about the illegal immigrants.

## Keywords

European public opinion, immigration, legal immigrants, illegal immigrants, hierarchical modelling

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The relative economic prosperity and political stability of Europe has a considerable pull effect on immigrants. Legal and documented immigrants who arrived in Europe during the 1960s were mostly recruited to remedy labour shortages in Western Europe during an era of extraordinary economic growth. However, when Europe experienced recession in the 1970s, immigrants were blamed for their host societies' economic and social problems. With the increased pace of European integration during the 1980s, Europe became attractive to refugees from developing countries, either for seeking refuge from persecution or for simply wanting a better life (Bade 2004: 346). The end of the Cold War opened a new way for immigration to Europe, particularly refugee migrants, who moved out of fear or fled persecution in their homelands.

Immigration has recently developed a bi-dimensional momentum. Besides any increase in the actual number of migrants, the topic of migration has started to raise concerns about legal and illegal migration. Illegal stays detected in Europe between 2009 and 2017 dropped to the lowest level in 2012 (around 72,440) compared with previous years (Statista 2018a). However, this rose by 48 per cent in 2013, with illegal entries between border crossing points increasing to around 107, 370 (Statista 2018b). The detected flow of illegal immigrants in 2014 increased by 170 percent in comparison with 2013, while this figure increased by over 200 percent from 2014 to 2015. According to the European Commission (2017), almost 300,000 illegal entrants were observed in 2014. Public response to this trend has been a greater concern about illegal immigrants than legal immigrants (68 per cent and 28 per cent respectively) (German Marshall Fund 2013).

There are subtle nuances in conceptual definitions of legal and illegal immigrants. Admissions of the former are carried out on various bases, such as family unifications, being nationals of post-colonial territories, labour immigration (Sassen 1988), or as catastrophe or civil war-related asylum seekers and refugees (Bade 2004). Whereas, illegal immigrants enter either secretly aided by human traffickers, crossing borders with forged documents or without any official registration (Miller 1995), or enter legally but overstay using false documents and join the informal sector. Some may seek asylum or refuge, but not through using their legal right to ask for asylum (Goodwin-Gill 1996).

This study argues that the Europeans develop distinct attitudes towards legal and illegal immigrants. 'European public opinion' here comprises the popular views in 11 European countries where immigrant populations show variations in terms of country of origin, legal status of residency and history of integration with the host society. While some European states welcome new immigrants and express their commitment to continue receiving them, others declare their limited capacity. Besides the state-level variations, at the mass public level there have also been variations in pro- and anti-immigrant attitudes.

European public opinion on immigrants has been monitored closely in recent years, yet there is little work that examines why or how attitudes toward legal and illegal immigrants differ. This study fills this gap by testing three major bodies of research into public opinion on immigrants to differentiate between attitudes towards legal and illegal immigrants. Bratsberg (1995) and Lapinski et al. (1997) suggest that it is illegal immigration which makes people more concerned. Borjas (1990) and Chiswick (1988) devote much attention to estimating the size of the illegal immigrant population and to assessing the impact of both legal and illegal immigration on the welfare of the native-born population. Jasso and Rosenzweig (1982) also address the impacts of the volume of immigration on perceived differences in legal and illegal immigrants.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of patterns in public opinion regarding legal versus illegal immigrants in Europe by testing these predominant theories of public opinion on immigration. The structure of this article is as follows. First, a multivariate theoretical background is introduced. This is followed by an outline of methodology and a presentation of findings. Methodologically, anti-immigrant attitudes are examined through hierarchical analysis of individual- and country-level data. In the conclusion, substantive insights into anti-legal and anti-illegal immigrant attitudes are explored.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There are three major bodies of research into public opinion regarding immigrants. Studies concentrating on the individual-level determinants of public opinion on immigration examine the role of socio-economic utility (Sides and Citrin 2007; Pettigrew 1998), symbolic interests (Turner, Brown and Tajfel 1979; McLaren 2003), social contact (Wilkes, Guppy and Farris 2008; McLaren 2003), policy approval (Facchini et al. 2008) and political attentiveness (Sigelman and Niemi 2001; Nadeau, Niemi and Levine 1993; Lahav 2004). The second group of studies investigates the impact of personal attributes (micro-level non-attitudinal predictors) on attitudes towards immigrants, including education (Hello, Scheepers and Slegers 2006; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010), occupation (Semyonov, Raijman and Gorodzeisky 2006; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Quillian 1995) and income (Jackson et al. 2001; Coenders and Scheepers 2008). Thirdly, a number of studies examine micro-level attitudinal predictors such as perceptions about the size of immigrant population (Hjerm 2007; Green 2009), consequences and perceived threats (realistic and symbolic) of immigration (McLaren 2003), and ideological motivations behind attitudes.

### *Individual-level determinants of public opinion on immigrants: Utility, symbols, and contact*

Micro-level theories that analyse individual level predictors concentrate on self-interest and socio-economic explanatory factors, such as economic utility or the cost of immigrants. National economic factors and/or personal economic discontent may modify how people view immigrants (Canan-Sokullu 2011). Assuming 'self-interest maximizing behaviour' (Facchini et al. 2008:668), attitudes are determined by the utility of immigration and immigrants for each individual. McLaren (2002: 557) defines threat of competing with foreigners for jobs available in the home country as 'realistic

threats'. The central contention of her approach is that 'members of the dominant group may come to feel that certain resources belong to them, and when those resources are threatened by a minority group, members of the dominant group are likely to react with hostility' (McLaren 2003: 915). By offering cheap and unskilled labour, immigrants are perceived to be taking jobs away from the host country's citizens (Lutz, O'Neil and Scherbov 2003; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). To explore whether realistic threats make any changes in attitudes towards legal and illegal immigrants, it is hypothesised that:

- (H1a) Perceiving that immigrants are competitors in the job market increases concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.
- (H1b) Perceiving that immigrants are a burden on public and social services increases concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.
- (H2a) Perceiving that immigrants positively contribute to the labour market decreases concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.
- (H2b) Perceiving that immigrants positively contribute to the national economy by creating jobs and setting up businesses decreases concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.

The second group of micro-level theories examines the role of culture and identity. A shared 'we-feeling' triggers positive opinions about the out-group, which offers a symbolic added value for the host communities. An absence of fear of losing one's own values and identity to new-comers prevents estrangement. Carey (2002) expects individuals who favour in-group protection to be less supportive of immigration into Europe. For Buzan (1991: 447), immigration threatens 'communal identity and culture' by changing the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics of the population. Matonyte and Morkevicius (2009) conceptualise 'identitarian' threat as a 'symbolic threat' that is associated with the fear that others will change the domestic culture (McLaren 2003: 917; Carey 2002). Others (Kinder and Sears 1981; Citrin, Reingold and Green 1990) also expect individuals who favour in-group protection to be less supportive of immigration into their country because immigrants who have different morals, values, beliefs and attitudes than those of the host majority group pose a significant perceived symbolic threat to the collective (national) identity. A symbolic threat represents a form of resistance to change based on moral feelings, principles and values that the minority group is perceived to violate (Citrin, Reingold and Green 1990). Drawing on these symbolic conceptualisations, this study expects:

- (H3) Perceived symbolic fears that out-group immigrants pose a cultural threat to in-group members increase concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.
- (H4) Perceived symbolic positive contribution of immigrants to national culture decreases concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.

Thirdly, contact theory looks into the impacts of social or personal contact with immigrants on public opinion. Sherif and Sherif (1953) argued that the type of contact changed concerns about the out-group. Social identity scholars (Turner 1975; Turner, Brown and Tajfel 1979; McLaren 2006; Levine et al. 2005; Hooghe and Marks 2005) have studied the impact of individual self-identification with social identity and national identity on attitudes towards accommodating immigrants within host societies. Scholars of 'primary contact' argue that primary intimate contact with acquaintances, friends or family belonging to the out-group strongly predicts opinion about immigrants, and generally reduces hostility, prejudice or exclusionary behaviour towards the out-group. 'Acquaintance potential' (Cook 1978, 1962) and 'friendship potential' (Pettigrew 1998) thus have a positive impact on attitudes towards immigrants. Having friends or family members who are immigrants, being an immigrant

oneself, frequent interaction with immigrants and sharing the same goals are among various indicators of personal or social contact that changes attitudes towards the out-group. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

- (H5) Having primary contact with immigrants through family or friends, or being an immigrant oneself, decreases concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.

### *Micro-level attitudinal predictors: Awareness and policy approval*

The first group of micro-level attitudinal predictors is concerned with being informed about immigrants. One group of scholars (Sigelman and Niemi 2001; Nadeau, Niemi and Levine 1993; Lahav 2004) concentrate on perception about the number of immigrants in the host country. They argue that individuals tend to overestimate the size immigrant of populations due to the visibility of immigrants in the public sphere or false information (for example, the frequency of news about crimes by immigrants or media coverage of the arrival of new waves of immigrants) (Verbon and Meijdam 2008). This study proposes:

- (H6a) Believing that the number of immigrants in the host-country is high increases concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.
- (H6b) Individuals who are politically more attentive are more concerned about legal and illegal immigrants.

Public approval of policies on immigration also exerts different levels of impacts on attitudes towards immigrants (Facchini et al. 2008). Individuals who often criticise immigration policies as irresponsible may tend to demonise new-comers for triggering economic and societal security challenges for host societies. Studies of the approval of immigration policies often explore correlations between attitudes towards immigrants and approval of government policies towards immigrants (Verbon and Meijdam 2008; Segovia and Defever 2010). Others study the role of policy changes on policy approval (Esses, Jackson and Armstrong 1998; Bauer, Lofstrom and Zimmermann 2001). In the specific context of illegal immigration, Berg (2009) argues that when governments take stronger measures to curb illegal immigration, approval of governments' policies increases. The status of immigrants and emergency situations which cause an increase in new-comers change perceptions about the out-group. In extraordinary times, policy decisions trigger controversies within host societies due to the humanitarian dimension of a crisis, which in return may constrain policies related to immigrants' accommodation. Drawing on existing scholarship, this study tests the argument:

- (H7) Approval of policies about immigration reduces concerns about legal and illegal immigrants.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Data for this study came from the Transatlantic Trends Survey (TTS2013) and the Eurostat (2013).<sup>1</sup> The main rationale for data selection was the availability of comparable data concerning both individual-level determinants and national statistics about immigration. The TTS2013 data comprised a battery of 14 questions to measure dependent, independent and control variables. It included representative data for 11 European countries and over 11,000 respondents.<sup>2</sup> Though there have been various studies that collect data about public opinion on immigration,<sup>3</sup> TTS2013 has been the only one that holds two separate questions that tap the dependent variables studied here. Eurostat provided data about proportional size of population of immigrants (in percentages).

There were two dependent variables, namely 'public opinion on legal immigration' (DVI) and 'public opinion on illegal immigration' (DVII). To operationalise them, two TTS2013 questions were used: 'Can you tell me if you are worried or not worried about (a) legal immigration and (b) illegal immigration?' Both questions were operationalised to measure the binary nominal dependent variables whose categories were (0) not worried and (1) worried. 'Don't know' and 'Refusals' were excluded throughout the analysis.

The first group of independent variables, namely the socio-economic factors and self-interests, include realistic perceptions of threat and opportunity due to immigrants. Threat addresses the possibility of immigrants taking jobs from local citizens (egocentric perception of threat) or the burden of immigrants on services that citizens contribute to through taxes (sociotropic perception of threat). Opportunity is comprised two indicators of perceived realistic opportunities: immigrants as a source of labour in sectors that citizens do not prefer and immigrants' contribution to the economy by setting up new businesses. The second set of indicators to test symbolic interests focused on shared cultural values between immigrants and members of the in-group. Being politically informed was measured by political attentiveness and perceived innumeracy about the size of immigrant population. While there may be other forms of political awareness (e.g. Facchini et al. 2017), it is assumed that individuals who participate in political discussions with their friends are more attentive to all aspects of immigration. The contact hypothesis was tested through three different indicators, namely whether an individual has any immigrant friends, whether at least one of the individual's parents is an immigrant or whether the individual was born in a different country than their country of residence. Measurement of all individual-level independent variables is explained in the appendix.

Since the dependent variables are binary nominal variables, two binary logistic regression models (Model 1 and Model 2) were run for the individual-level analysis of public opinion (Level 1).<sup>4</sup> The two models, one for perceptions about legal immigration and the other for perceptions about illegal immigration, were run with the same set of independent and control variables. Models included age, gender, ideological self-placement, occupation as control variables.<sup>5</sup> All independent and control variables were coded as dummies. A one-unit change in the independent and control variables results in a one-unit change (from 0 to 1) in the dependent variables. A positive *B* coefficient for the independent and control variables indicated an increase in the likelihood of concern about immigrants. Standard errors provided the parameter estimates (log-odds) requested for 95 per cent confidence intervals for the odds-ratios.<sup>6</sup>

This study also tested the impact of one country-level variable (Level 2), to test whether the size of immigrant populations in host countries accounts for cross-national variance in opinion. To the TTS2013 dataset I appended one country-level measure that was derived from the Eurostat data. Hence the data were hierarchically structured with 11,047 individuals at Level 1 nested within 11 countries at Level 2. The estimate about the proportional size of population of immigrants in each country (represented as a percentage) was the country-level independent variable.

Table 1 displays the average estimated percentage of immigrants according to national samples in the 11 European countries studied. Across these countries, there were statistically significant country-specific variations in attitudes towards legal (Pearson ( $\chi^2$ ) = 215.75,  $p < .05$ ) and illegal immigration (Pearson ( $\chi^2$ ) = 677.74,  $p < .05$ ). This suggests that a significant proportion of the variation in attitudes towards immigration may be explained by national level factors.

**Table 1. Proportional size of immigrants in 11 European countries (%)**

	<i>% of immigrants in total population<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>% of non-national EU immigrants</i>	<i>% of non-EU immigrants<sup>2</sup></i>
<b>Sweden</b>	15.9	22.8	55.4
<b>Spain</b>	13.8	32.2	56.2
<b>United Kingdom</b>	12.4	38.3	47.2
<b>Germany</b>	11.9	51.1	36.4
<b>Netherlands</b>	11.7	40.3	31.6
<b>France</b>	11.6	27.2	38.1
<b>Italy</b>	9.4	25.2	65.5
<b>Portugal</b>	8.4	9.5	21.3
<b>Slovakia</b>	4.7	38.2	9.8
<b>Poland</b>	1.7	13.4	26.8
<b>Romania</b>	0.9	0.7	8.9

Source: Eurostat (2013). For reasons of compatibility, only the EU member states from which the TTS collected data are reported here.

<sup>1</sup> Total number of immigrants includes the national and non-national immigrants. National immigrants can be calculated by subtracting non-national EU immigrants from the total numbers of immigrants.

<sup>2</sup> The proportion of the non-EU immigrants to the total number of immigrants

In this analysis, hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) at individual and country levels was employed.<sup>7</sup> HLM estimated the effects of independent and control variables on concerns about legal and illegal immigration at the individual level within countries (Maas and Hox 2005).<sup>8</sup> Controlling for individual-level effects, HLM analysed the effects of variations at the level of respondents' country of origin.<sup>9</sup>

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The results addressed the Level 1 and Level 2 analysis step-by-step. The binary logistic regression results for European public opinion on immigrants are summarised in Table 2, including the coefficients and standard errors for two models (Model 1 and Model 2).<sup>10</sup> To predict the value associated with the negative and positive opinion categories, opinions on legal and illegal immigrants were reconceptualised as an attempt to predict the probability that an individual is either concerned or not concerned. The parameter estimates in Table 2 can be interpreted as representing the variation in the impacts of independent variables on the likelihood that an individual is concerned about legal or illegal immigrants, all else being equal. Thus, negative coefficients are associated with absence of concern, while positive coefficients are associated with presence of concern about immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

Table 2 shows that perceived realistic and symbolic threats and opportunities contributed significantly to public concern on legal immigration. An increase in the perceived threat of immigrants taking jobs away from nationals of a country (H1a) and being a burden on social services (H1b) increased concerns about immigrants. In direct contrast to threat perceptions, the expected opportunity of immigrants offering extra labour in the job market made people less concerned, though this only applied to legal immigrants (H2a). The perceived positive contribution of immigrants to the national economy via creating jobs and setting up businesses decreased concerns about both groups of immigrants (H2b). Regarding the symbolic threat and opportunity perceptions, considering immigrants as a threat to national culture increased the likelihood of individuals being more anti-immigrant (H3). In contrast, if immigrants were perceived to be a factor that enriched the culture then the likelihood of becoming more immigrant-friendly increased for legal immigrants only (H4).

The coefficients of the realistic and symbolic correlates of perceived opportunity appeared to be significant only for legal immigrants.

**Table 2. Individual level models: binary logistic regression analysis of public opinion on legal versus illegal immigrants**

			<i>Model 1</i> B (SE)	<i>Model 2</i> B (SE)
<b>Intercept</b>			-1.708*** (.170)	-.436*** (.152)
<b>Predictors</b>				
<b>Socio-economic correlates</b>	Threat	...take jobs away from us	.801*** (.059)	.400*** (.063)
		...are a burden on social services	.637*** (.062)	.532*** (.055)
	Opportunity	...fill a shortage of workers	-.235*** (.058)	.089 (.058)
		...create jobs and sets up businesses	-.360*** (.059)	-.381*** (.055)
<b>Symbolic correlates</b>	Threat	...threaten our national culture	.762*** (.060)	.562*** (.072)
	Opportunity	...enrich our culture	-.311*** (.060)	.006 (.062)
<b>Primary contact</b>		Immigrant friend	-.062 (.058)	.054 (.055)
		Immigrant parent	.104 (.109)	-.002 (.095)
		Self-immigrant	.033 (.142)	.001 (.123)
<b>Micro-level Attitudinal Predictors</b>	Perceived size of immigrants	Innumeracy: Too many immigrants	.843*** (.058)	1.238*** (.076)
	Government Approval	Approval of immigration policy	-.323*** (.060)	-.122** (.051)
	Political Attentiveness	Political attentiveness	-.061 (.065)	.055 (.058)
<b>N</b>			9235	9216
<b>Model <math>\chi^2</math><sup>a</sup></b>			2356.80	1490.21
<b>-2LL</b>			8606.73	9857.94
<b>Degrees of freedom</b>			25	25
<b>Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup></b>			.324	.211

*Note 1:* The dependent variable in Model 1 is 'opinion on legal immigration' and 'opinion on illegal immigration' in Model 2. Binary categories of both dependent variables are (0) not concerned (1) concerned.

*Note 2:* Estimates of cut points available from the author upon request.

*Note 3:* Control variables were included in the estimation but not reported in the table. Available upon request.

<sup>a</sup> Both model chi-squares are statistically significant at  $p < .001$

\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .05$

The results for Models 1 and 2 estimated that Europeans who thought that there were 'too many immigrants' in their countries were significantly concerned about immigrants (H6a), where the likelihood of anti-illegal immigrant attitudes was higher. Holding all other independent variables constant, a one-unit increase in perceived number of immigrants from 'not many' to 'too many' resulted in the highest increase in the log-odds of being against both legal and illegal immigrants ( $B = .843$  and  $B = 1.238$ , respectively). An increase in approval for government immigration policies decreased the likelihood of evaluating legal and illegal immigrants negatively (H7). All else being equal, individuals' approval of immigration policies decreased their concerns about legal immigrants more.

The control variables produced several additional interesting findings. First, individuals who ideologically self-identified as centrist were significantly concerned about illegal immigrants compared to right-wing respondents. Second, people working in clerical positions were significantly more concerned about legal immigrants. Third, those with only primary education were significantly more concerned about illegal immigrants. Finally, age had a significant impact on the log-odds of concern about illegal immigrants, indicating that older people are more likely to become anti-illegal immigrants ( $B = .012$ ).

Table 3 contains HLM results examining the level of concern for legal and illegal immigration where individual opinions (Level 1) were nested within host-countries (Level 2). A country-level variable, 'proportional size of immigrants in host country', was added to the baseline models (Model 1 and Model 2) to gauge its effect on individuals' concern for legal and illegal immigration together with all other explanatory variables (Table 3). The first group of a two-level HLM analysis was Model 3 and Model 4 (intercept-only models). They excluded all individual level variables and tested whether being from different countries of origin made any significant impact on concern for legal and illegal immigration at country-level only. In both models, proportional size of immigrants had strong positive impacts on anti-immigrant concerns. Model 5 and Model 6 were fully specified models that included all independent variables, at both individual and country levels. The fixed part of the models provided estimated coefficients and the random effects part presented the variance component for the intercepts at the country level.<sup>12</sup>

Models 5 and 6 showed that socio-economic and symbolic correlates had significant impacts in the expected directions on attitudes towards legal and illegal immigrants. Primary acquaintance with either of the immigrant groups made no significant contribution to anti-immigrant attitudes. However, the results contradicted with the micro-level attitudinal predictions. Perceiving there to be 'too many' immigrants decreased individuals' concerns about legal and illegal immigrants (standard estimates were  $-.165$  and  $-.098$ , respectively) when the country-level variable 'proportional size of immigrants in host country' was included (Table 3). The estimated size of the immigrant population had significantly positive impacts on concern for illegal immigrants ( $B = .020$ ) (Model 6). The volume of immigrants within the host society population increased the likelihood of concern for the illegal immigrants, yet remained insignificant to explain the level and direction of concern about legal immigrants. Moreover, being more politically aware caused an increase only in anti-illegal immigrant attitudes.

**Table 3. Hierarchical linear modelling of public opinion on legal versus illegal immigrants**

			<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>
<b>Fixed Effects</b>						
<b>Intercept</b>			.276*** (.019)	.684*** (.035)	.578*** (.076)	.617*** (.083)
<b>Level 1 (Individual Level Factors)</b>						
<b>Socio-economic correlates</b>	Threat	...take jobs away from us			-.147*** (.010)	-.096*** (.011)
		...are a burden on social services			-.085*** (.010)	-.123*** (.010)
	Opportunity	...fill a shortage of workers			.039*** (.009)	.001 (.010)
		...create jobs and sets up businesses			.057*** (.009)	.054*** (.010)
<b>Symbolic correlates</b>	Threat	...threaten our national culture			-.153*** (.011)	-.096*** (.011)
	Opportunity	...enrich our culture			.058*** (.010)	.026** (.011)
<b>Primary contact</b>		Immigrant friend			.009 (.009)	.014 (.010)
		Immigrant parent			-.010 (.016)	-.013 (.017)
		Self-immigrant			-.008 (.021)	-.027 (.022)
<b>Micro-level Attitudinal Predictors</b>	Perceived size of immigrants	Innumeracy: Too many immigrants			-.165*** (.011)	-.098*** (.012)
	Government Approval	Approval of immigration policy			-.053*** (.009)	.009 (.010)
	Political Attentiveness	Political attentiveness			.005 (.010)	.022** (.010)
<b>Level 2 (Country-level factor)</b>						
<b>Proportional size of immigrants in host country</b>					.003 (.002)	.020** (.006)
<b>Random Effects</b>						
<b>Intercept</b>			.196*** (.003)	.202*** (.002)	.151 (.002)	.172 (.002)
<b>Variance component</b>			.003** (.002)	.013** (.006)	.008 (.004)	.013 (.006)
<b>Model Fit Statistics</b>						
<b>-2LL</b>			13137.41	13421.09	8804.59	9979.33
<b>AIC</b>			13143.41	13427.09	8862.59	10037.33
<b>BIC</b>			13165.28	13448.96	9069.39	10244.07

Note 1: The dependent variable in Model 3 and Model 5 is 'opinion on legal immigration' and 'opinion on illegal immigration' in Model 4 and Model 6.

Note 2: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors of estimates.

Note 3. Control variables were included in the estimation but not reported in the table. Available upon request.

\* p< .001. \*\* p< .01. \*\*\* p< .05

## CONCLUSION

This study focused on modelling the combined impacts of socio-demographic, economic and socio-psychological attributes of members of the in-group society on their attitudes towards legal and illegal immigrants in 11 European countries. The results show that: (i) in line with McLaren's arguments (2003), socio-culturally and economically vulnerable individuals are more likely to express negative attitudes toward both legal and illegal immigrants; (ii) perceiving that there are economic and cultural benefits to immigration decreased the likelihood of concerns about legal immigrants; (iii) concerns about the number of immigrants increased concerns about immigration in general; (iv) approval of governments' performance related with immigration decreased popular concerns about legal immigrants more; (v) there were significant concerns about illegal immigrants in countries with higher immigrant populations; and (vi) the results of primary acquaintance showed no support for the contact thesis.

Thus, this study is important for two main reasons. First, it contributes to recent debates in Europe regarding whether immigrants' legal status is a source of polarisation within immigrant-receiving societies. The central argument in this paper has demonstrated that there are differences between attitudes towards legal and illegal immigration. Perceptions outweigh the realities when it comes to the size of immigrant populations, but mostly for illegal immigrants. What makes individuals most strongly concerned is related with how they perceive the density of immigrants in the society, regardless of the source of information, exposure to accurate information or contact with immigrants. The other interesting contribution of this study is that the *actual* size of immigrant populations affects attitudes towards illegal but not legal immigrants, whereas the *perceived* size of immigrant populations has parallel effects irrespective of their status.

Secondly, this study offers policy prescriptions to decision-makers to design a new immigration regime. Europe will continue to struggle to deliver sustainable and acceptable policy responses to the arrivals of new immigrants both at the national and EU level. Immigration has been one of the key issues for voters and for political competition between parties on the right and left in contemporary European politics (Pardos-Prado 2015; Mudde 2014; Downes and Loveless 2018). Eurobarometer polls show that European public opinion has become markedly more critical of immigration since 2013. Since the 2015 migrant crisis, a majority of Europeans do not agree that immigrants contribute a lot to their countries. Only one-third view immigration positively, compared with six out of ten who say they have a negative view of immigrants from non-European countries.

This means that implementing an effective immigration policy which distinguishes between legal and illegal immigration should be a priority, not only for national politicians, but also for the European Union (EU). Since 2013 there has been almost a 20 per cent increase in those who express that developing an immigration policy that covers legal and illegal immigrants separately is a priority. As noted by the European Parliament (2017), for legal immigration 'the EU is competent to lay down the conditions governing entry into and legal residence in a Member State'. However, for illegal immigration, it argues that EU-level capacity should be built to prevent or reduce illegal immigration through an effective return policy. Any policy lacking public consent raises the question of a democratic deficit. Given that this study suggests that public support of policies on immigration alters level of concern over immigrants, European governments could significantly alter perceptions about immigrants with the policies they adopt. This points to the need for further research, which should consider additional variables, such as value congruence and immigrants' level of integration with host societies, influencing public opinion on immigration, together with data from a wider range of European countries to comparatively understand attitudes towards legal and illegal immigration across Europe.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The TTS2013 data was retrieved from <http://t/www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR>, and the Eurostat data was retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/f/f5/Immigration\\_by\\_citizenship\\_2013\\_YB15.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/f/f5/Immigration_by_citizenship_2013_YB15.png).

<sup>2</sup> The 11 European countries included are France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. To compare the data from different countries, the results were weighted by socio-demographic weights constructed by the RIM weighting for each country. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the sponsor of the study bears any responsibility for the analysis or interpretations presented here.

<sup>3</sup> There is a large variation in poll or survey questions that measure public opinion on migration. These surveys measure attitudes towards a variety of migration-related issues. A number of data sources also cover multiple countries, allowing for comparative analysis. The European Social Survey (ESS) consists of two modules with collection of questions asked on immigration in a large number of European countries. The first module was fielded in 2002 (ESS1) and the second one in 2014 (ESS7). Questions included measuring attitudes of immigration and perceptions of social realities as well as opinions on public policy and knowledge about immigration were included. Neither rounds had a direct question tapping attitudes towards illegal versus legal immigrants. There were some measures which an index could have been constructed. ESS8 (2016) and recent Eurobarometer (EB) surveys developed measures and questions tapping independent variables such as immigrants (even though it is not worded as immigrants) taking jobs away, unskilled labour, and the like. Since 2011 EB data has not collected trend questions on immigration and directly asked separate question on legal and illegal immigration. In 'Transatlantic Trends: Immigration' (TTI), a special topic public opinion survey conducted yearly between 2008 and 2011, though immigration and integration issues were extensively addressed including the effect of the economic crisis on attitudes towards immigration, immigrants' labour market impacts and effects on wages, and preferences for temporary versus permanent labour migration programmes, illegal immigration was asked only in the USA.

<sup>4</sup> *Model 1:* Logit (Opinion on legal immigrants) = f (socio-economic correlates and self-interests, symbolic correlates, primary contact, innumeracy about the size of immigrant population, political attentiveness, approval of immigration policies, gender, age, ideology, occupation, education); *Model 2:* Logit (Opinion on illegal immigrants) = f (socio-economic correlates and self-interests, symbolic correlates, primary contact, innumeracy about the size of immigrant population, political attentiveness, approval of immigration policies, gender, age, ideology, occupation, education).

<sup>5</sup> Age was a continuous variable for the exact age of the respondent. For incorporating continuous variables into binary logistic regression analysis, see Wooldridge 2009.

<sup>6</sup> This, along with wider descriptive statistics for the study, are available on request to the author.

<sup>7</sup> There are four hierarchical models specified for individual (Level 1) and country (Level 2) levels of analysis. *Model 3:* (Opinion on legal immigrants) = f (estimates about the size of population of immigrants); *Model 4:* (Opinion on illegal immigrants) = f (estimates about the size of population of immigrants); *Model 5:* (Opinion on legal immigrants) = f (socio-economic correlates and self-interests, symbolic correlates, primary contact, innumeracy about the size of immigrant population, political attentiveness, approval of immigration policies, gender, age, ideology, occupation, education, estimates about the size of population of immigrants); *Model 6:* (Opinion on illegal immigrants) = f (socio-economic correlates and self-interests, symbolic correlates, primary contact, innumeracy about the size of immigrant population, political attentiveness, approval of immigration policies, gender, age, ideology, occupation, education, estimates about the size of population of immigrants).

<sup>8</sup> The average intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) measure was .74 with a 95 per cent confidence interval from .70 to .76, which indicated moderate to good reliability (Shrout and Fleiss 1979; Feldt 1965).

<sup>9</sup> Here, the terms ‘multilevel’ and ‘hierarchical’ are used interchangeably.

<sup>10</sup> In estimating the models’ collinearity between the independent variables was not a problem as the VIF values in Model 1 and Model 2 were below the critical level ( $VIF < 3$ ) (Menard 1995; Myers 1990). As there was no multicollinearity problem, the between-variables entry method was incorporated into the logit analysis (Chen and Dey 1998: 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Since it is a logit analysis, I interpreted the *B* coefficients instead of the odds ratio in the results.

<sup>12</sup> The model fit statistics for Models 5 and 6 gave the information for comparing maximum likelihood models. The fit for Model 5 and 6 results ( $AIC_{Model\ 5} = 8862.59$ ,  $BIC_{Model\ 5} = 9069.39$ ;  $AIC_{Model\ 6} = 10037.33$ ,  $BIC_{Model\ 6} = 10244.07$ ) were smaller than those of the Model 3 and Model 4, which displayed a better fit for Models 5 and 6 than intercept-only country-level models (Table 3).

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**APPENDIX: OPERATIONALISATION OF LEVEL 1 INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

Variable			Question	Values / notes
<b>Socio-economic correlates</b>	Threat	(a) ...take jobs away from us	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (a) Immigrants take jobs away from native born (nationality)	1 = agree (1&2 collapsed) 0 = disagree (3&4 collapsed)
	Opportunity	(b) ...are a burden on social services (c) ...fill a shortage of workers (d) ...create jobs and sets up businesses	(b) Immigrants are a burden on social services (c) Immigrants generally help to fill jobs where there are shortages of workers (d) Immigrants help create jobs as they set up new businesses 1=Agree strongly; 2=Agree somewhat; 3= Disagree somewhat; 4= Disagree strongly.	
<b>Symbolic correlates</b>	Threat	(a) ...threaten our national culture	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (a) Immigrants are a threat to our national culture	1 = agree (1&2 collapsed) 0 = disagree (3&4 collapsed)
	Opportunity	(b) ...enrich our culture	(b) Immigrants enrich our culture 1=Agree strongly; 2=Agree somewhat; 3= Disagree somewhat; 4= Disagree strongly.	
<b>Primary Contact</b>		Immigrant friends	Do you have any friends who were born in another country who now live in [country]? 1= Yes, many; 2 = Yes, a few; 3 = No, none	1 = yes (1&2 collapsed) 0 = no (3 recoded)
		Self-immigrant	Were you born in [country] or in another country?	1= in another country 0 = in [country]
		Immigrant parents	Which of these corresponds to where your parents were born? (1) Your mother and father were born in [country] (2) One of your parents was born in [country] and the other was born in another country (3) Your mother and your father were born in a country other than [country]	1 = immigrant parents (2&3 collapsed) 0 = non-immigrant parents (1 recoded)
<b>Micro-level Attitudinal Predictors</b>	Perceived size of immigrants	Innumeracy: Too many immigrants	Generally speaking, how do you feel about the number of people living in (country) who were not born in country? Are there (1) too many, (2) a lot but not too many, (3) not many?	1= too many 0 = not (too) many (2&3 collapsed)
	Government Approval	Approval of immigration policy	Thinking about the steps that have been taken to manage immigration, would you say that the government has been doing ... 1 = a very good job, 2= a good job, 3= a poor job, 4= a very poor job?	1 = a good job (1&2 collapsed) 0 = not a good job (3&4 collapsed)
	Political Attentiveness	Political attentiveness	When you get together with friends, would you say you discuss political matters...? (1) Frequently (2) Occasionally (3) Never	1 = attentive (1&2 collapsed) 0 = not attentive (3 recoded)