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Explaining Attitudes Toward Refugees and Immigrants in Europe

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Abstract

While there is a large literature on attitudes toward immigrants, scholars have not systematically examined the determinants of attitudes toward refugees. Often, refugees are simply treated as a subset of immigrants, under the assumption that attitudes toward both sets of foreigners are similar. In this article, we examine whether there are distinctions between attitudes toward refugees and immigrants, as well as variation in their determinants. We address these questions using individual-level data from 16 countries in the 2002 and 2014 waves of the European Social Survey. We demonstrate that these two groups of foreigners are, indeed, viewed as distinct and that differences emerge because attitudes toward refugees are more often related to macro-level factors while immigrants are more frequently associated with micro-level economic concerns. By distinguishing between refugees and immigrants, this article addresses an important gap in the academic literature on attitudes toward foreigners in Europe.

Keywords

refugees, migration, attitudes, Europe

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Introduction

In recent years, the varied fates of refugees arriving in Western countries have captured headlines. For example, the government in Denmark has prolonged the wait time for family reunifications, cut refugee benefits, and passed a bill that would confiscate would-be refugees' valuables (Witte, 2016). In contrast, under Chancellor Angela Merkel, Germany committed to accept nearly all asylum seekers found to be legitimate refugees and welcomed more than 1 million into the country in 2015 (Dewan and Hanna, 2016).

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As demonstrations supporting and opposing refugees were taking place across Europe, commentators emphasized the role of public opinion in shaping these and other countries' policies (e.g. Hasselbach, 2016). While a clear majority of Germans supported admitting refugees and those facing political persecution, at least temporarily (Gerhards et al., 2016), the percentage of Danish voters who opposed granting more residence permits to migrants rose by 17 points in just a few months (Delman, 2016).

Despite the potentially unique implications of public opinion on refugees, research on the topic remains sparse. Exceptions such as Bansak et al. (2016) and Von Hermanni and Neumann (2018) focus on which asylum-seeker attributes affect natives' assessments of them. Only one study to date has compared individual attitudes on immigrants and refugees (Coenders et al., 2004); the authors conclude that there were more similarities than differences in attitudes toward the two groups. Several studies on attitudes toward non-citizens have not distinguished between immigrants and refugees; some scholars have examined attitudes toward all "foreigners" (Gang et al., 2013; Kessler and Freeman, 2005; Semyonov et al., 2006) while others have analyzed minorities and foreigners as a single undifferentiated group. Justifying the construction of a single additive index, Ivarsflaten (2005) even argues that underlying preferences on immigration and asylum range along a single dimension, from liberal to restrictive policies. The claim is that "western Europeans do not generally support liberal immigration policies while insisting on restrictive refugee policies, or vice versa" (Ivarsflaten, 2005: 27).

Thus, we know little about whether attitudes toward refugees and immigrants differ, and we cannot distinguish how macro-level national circumstances and micro-level demographic characteristics are related to such support. Although data on attitudes toward refugees are extremely limited, the 2002 and 2014 waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) include relevant measures. In this article, we begin to address the determinants of attitudes toward refugees by examining ESS data from 16 European countries. We show that individuals hold different views of refugees and immigrants and are, at times, more receptive to one group than the other. By and large, attitudes toward refugees are more often related to macro-level factors while immigrants are more frequently associated with micro-level economic concerns.

Attitudes Toward Migrants

Since we do not know whether survey respondents' attitudes differ in their assessments of immigrants versus refugees, we begin by drawing from legal and policy explanations of distinctions between immigrants and refugees, as well as distinctions in the rhetoric employed in the public sphere to refer to these two groups of foreigners. We then examine major findings from the literature on attitudes toward immigrants, which emphasize the role of micro-level variables like occupation and income as well as macro-economic conditions in shaping public receptivity to immigrants. We also consider other macro-level factors drawn from theories of social psychology.

Often, refugees are simply treated as a subset of immigrants, under the assumption that attitudes toward both sets of foreigners are similar. Both immigrants and refugees are foreign newcomers, but there is a distinction in law and policy between the two groups.

There is a well-established international regime for refugees, based on the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as the activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The principle of non-refoulement, which has become a principle of customary international law, prohibits returning an individual to a country

where their life would be at risk. In contrast, there is no comparable international regime for labor migration and no similar protections for migrants, whom countries are free to deport at will.

Of course, movements of human beings are mixed, and an individual will often have mixed motives for moving. Still, immigrants are frequently portrayed as having migrated voluntarily, in response to economic pull factors that attract them to particular destinations. On the contrary, refugees are often portrayed as having been forced to flee, in response to political push factors like persecution or war that threaten their lives.

Despite the considerable nuance that exists in reality, the rhetoric surrounding the surge in Mediterranean arrivals to Europe that began in 2015 demonstrates that the semantic and perceived distinction between immigrants and refugees persists. One of the most explicit examples of how lines are drawn between the two groups comes from Slovenia, where media use the term "fake refugees" to refer to economic migrants (Zavratnik and Cukut Krilić, 2018). Moreover, the distinction carries moral connotations since policies to prevent migration may be seen as more ethical than those deterring refugee arrivals (FitzGerald and Arar, 2018).

Many studies of public attitudes toward immigrants have emphasized economic factors. In a well-known article, Scheve and Slaughter (2001) use the factor proportion model, along with data from the American National Election Study, to argue that the distributional effects of an influx of low-skilled immigrants trigger opposition by low-skilled natives. Mayda (2006) offers cross-national evidence that high-skilled natives are most likely to support immigration as the skill gap between natives and immigrants grows larger. Further support for the factor proportion model is provided by O'Rourke and Sinnott (2006) and, with a more qualified argument, Malhotra et al. (2013). The idea that fears over labor market competition drive immigration preferences has come under sustained criticism (Hainmueller et al., 2015; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007, 2010), with Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014: 241) declaring it "a zombie theory." Still, Esses et al. (2001) and others have found evidence that perceived resource competition, more broadly conceived, shapes individual attitudes.

In accordance with this competitive logic, labor force status and occupational classification feature in many studies on immigration attitudes, including Scheepers et al. (2002a) and Semyonov et al. (2008). Income can also shape the extent to which natives perceive immigrants as an economic threat, with higher incomes offering more economic security, and scholars such as Kehrberg (2007) have found that greater economic security is associated with more positive attitudes toward immigrants. Similarly, Coenders et al. (2004) find that resistance to both immigrants and refugees was widespread among respondents of lower socioeconomic status. Kunovich (2004), meanwhile, has argued that the effect of individual socioeconomic characteristics may be mediated by macro-level economic conditions.

Based on findings about attitudes toward immigrants, we begin by hypothesizing that economic factors will have similar effects for refugees.

Hypothesis 1. Individuals with higher occupational status will express increased support for immigrants and refugees.

Hypothesis 2. Higher income is associated with increased support for immigrants and refugees.

In contrast to the focus on egocentric or pocketbook reasoning in the studies described above, other scholars have emphasized sociotropic concerns related to national-level economic performance. During macro-economic downturns and periods of increasing unemployment, opposition to immigration has been shown to increase. Citrin et al. (1997), for instance, emphasize the role of beliefs about the economy. Lapinski et al. (1997) and Wilkes et al. (2008) note a rise in restrictive attitudes toward immigration during economic downturns in the United States and Canada, respectively. These results indicate that real or perceived competition, which becomes more intense during economic decline, shapes attitudes toward immigrants (Money, 1999).

Hypothesis 3. Stronger macro-economic performance at the country level (i.e. higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and lower unemployment) is related to pro-immigrant and pro-refugee attitudes at the individual level.

Another factor to consider is the role of ethnic diversity in the host country. According to the social psychological theory of group threat (Blumer, 1998; Coser, 1956), an in-group develops hostile attitudes when its members perceive an out-group as challenging their sense of collective status or boundaries (see, for example, Bobo, 1999; LeVine and Campbell, 1972; Scheepers et al., 2002b). In more diverse societies, individuals must frequently interact with "others" who do not share their physical attributes, cultural practices, or value systems. As a result, these others are more likely to be seen as threatening national identity or the dominant way of life. The perception of potential loss, whether or not there is any actual danger, results in animosity. Empirically, Coenders et al. (2004) show that greater ethnic heterogeneity is associated with resistance to refugees.

Hypothesis 4. Greater ethnic diversity is associated with decreased support for immigrants and refugees.

The contact hypothesis, in contrast, argues that interacting more frequently with an out-group can help in-group members overcome prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). In fact, there is empirical evidence that interacting with ethnic or racial others can diminish stereotypes and intolerance (Ellison et al., 2011; Fox, 2004; Massey et al., 1999). Some studies in the related area of how ethnic diversity or immigration affects support for the welfare state cross-nationally have found a positive relationship (Brady and Finnigan, 2014; Steele, 2016). Other studies have yielded mixed results (Abascal and Baldassarri, 2015; Hercowitz-Amir et al., 2017). For example, Mckay et al. (2012) cite examples where personal contact resulted in positive as well as negative opinions of refugees. Another line of scholarship blends these two theories, suggesting that there is a curvilinear relationship between racial threat, inter-group contact, and discriminatory attitudes. Studies of the United States have found that negative attitudes of the majority group toward the minority group increase when the minority population is larger; in contrast, when the minority population is larger, inter-group contact rises, and negative attitudes fall in many instances (Chamberlain, 2011; Fullerton and Dixon, 2009; Steele and Perkins, 2018; Stein et al., 2000).

Another factor that is particularly relevant in the European context is anti-Muslim prejudice, which empirical evidence demonstrates to be more pronounced than hostility toward other out-groups in Europe (e.g. Spruyt and Elchardus, 2012; Strabac and

Listhaug, 2008), and there is widespread public opposition to group rights for Muslims (Statham, 2016). Media coverage and political discourse associate Muslims with violence and extremism, gender inequality, and threats to democracy (see Richardson, 2004). Country-specific studies, such as Savelkoul et al. (2010) in the Netherlands, show that larger Muslim populations are correlated with higher levels of perceived threat and more anti-Muslim attitudes. In a conjoint experiment, Bansak et al. (2016) find that Muslim asylum seekers were less likely to receive support compared to non-Muslim asylum seekers with similar attributes. In contrast, von Hermanni and Neumann (2018) show that German respondents did not have lower approval rates for Muslim refugees.

Hypothesis 5. Higher proportions of Muslims in a population are related to anti-immigrant and anti-refugee attitudes.

Finally, the portrayal of foreigners as security, and particularly terrorist, threats predates the 2015 population movements into Europe and the terrorist attacks that took place in Paris and elsewhere that year. As Brouwer (2002) and Guild and Garlick (2010) show, European law and policy linked refugees with terrorism starting in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Seen as political agents who are fleeing political events and seeking political asylum, refugees might be perceived as a transmission mechanism that will import conflict and violence from home to host country. Even genuine refugees—the argument goes—may unwittingly facilitate terrorist attacks if perpetrators hide among them (see McKay et al., 2011) or if the aid and volunteers assisting them are targeted by terrorists (see Choi and Salehyan, 2013). Accordingly, individuals whose countries have experienced terrorist attacks may be more likely to be wary of immigrants and refugees.

Hypothesis 6. A higher number of terrorist incidents in a country is associated with lower support for immigrants and refugees.

Below, we examine whether attitudes toward refugees, about which we know little, are predicted by the same factors that determine attitudes toward immigrants. We compare determinants of these attitudes using data from 16 European countries.

Data and Methods

This study uses a unique dataset that combines individual-level data from the ESS with country-level data from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2016); Ethnic Fractionalization Data (Alesina et al., 2003); the World Religion Dataset (WRD; Maoz and Henderson, 2013); the Global Terrorism Database (GTD; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2016); and the Manifesto Project Dataset (MPD; Volkens et al., 2016).

The ESS (2014) is a cross-sectional face-to-face survey that has been conducted every 2 years across Europe since 2002. While seven waves of data are currently available, measures of attitudes toward refugees were included in only two—the 2002 and 2014—waves. Because the ESS itself (Meuleman, n.d.) and other research teams (e.g. Davidov et al., 2015) have used items from the immigration module (Heath et al., 2015) to establish approximate cross-national and cross-wave measurement equivalence, we are confident that these data are appropriate for our analysis.

Outcome Measures

To our knowledge, no existing surveys contain identically worded questions that gauge attitudes toward refugees and immigrants. Therefore, we must rely on two questions from the ESS that are worded differently. Although the differences in question wording are not ideal, we believe that the meaning of the questions is similar enough to merit comparison.

The 2002 and 2014 waves of the ESS have only one refugee-related question in common. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: "the government should be generous in judging people's applications for refugee status" where [1] represented "agree strongly" and [5] represented "disagree strongly" (*Support for Refugees*).

To measure *Support for Immigrants*, we use a question in which respondents were asked: "To what extent do you think [country] should allow immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe to come and live here?" where [1] represented "allow many to come and live here" and [4] represented "allow none." For ease of interpretation, we reverse the coding of both variables.

For the purposes of some of our initial descriptive analysis, we also construct dichotomous outcome variables. We created a dichotomous variable that equals 1 (*Pro-immigrant*) if the answer to the immigrant question was "allow many" or "allow some" and 0 (*Anti-immigrant*) if the answer was "allow a few" or "allow none." Similarly, we created a dichotomous variable for descriptive purposes that equals 1 (*Pro-refugee*) if the answer to the refugee question was "agree strongly" or "agree" and 0 (*Anti-refugee*) if the answer was "disagree" or "disagree strongly" (respondents who replied "Neither" were dropped in the limited descriptive analyses in which the dichotomous variable is used, but are included in all subsequent analyses).

Explanatory Measures

Our first two hypotheses relate to micro-level or individual economic circumstances. The first hypothesis expects higher occupational status to be associated with higher support for immigrants and refugees (H1). We measure *Occupational Status* using the International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI), a continuous measure of occupational status intended to represent the cultural and economic resources that are typical of incumbents of certain occupations (Ganzeboom et al., 1992).

The second hypothesis posits that higher-income individuals will express increased support for immigrants and refugees (H2). The ESS measures household income differently in the 2002 wave (a 12-point scale applied to all countries) and the 2014 wave (deciles that vary by country). Fortunately, ESS documentation reports upper and lower bounds for the 12-point scale in 2002, upper and lower bounds for each decile in 2014, and 2014 exchange rates. Using this information, we converted the 2014 deciles into a 12-point scale similar to that used in 2002. To ensure income comparability between different countries, *Household Income* measures standardized z-scores by country for each wave and ranges from −3.8 to 5.5.

Hypotheses 3–6 concern the relationship between country-level conditions and individual attitudes. Our third hypothesis is that stronger macro-economic performance will be correlated with pro-immigrant and pro-refugee attitudes (H3). We include two measures from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI). We take the natural log of per capita GDP (purchasing power parity, in constant 2011 dollars), which ranges

from $15,041 to $64,004. *Unemployment* (the percentage of the total labor force that is unemployed) ranges from 2.6% to 24.7%.

Our fourth hypothesis is that ethnic diversity decreases support for immigrants and refugees (H4). In recent studies analyzing the effects of ethnic heterogeneity, the most commonly used measure has been the index of fractionalization, which measures the probability of two randomly selected individuals in society belonging to different ethno-linguistic groups (Alesina et al., 2003; Fearon, 2003). Existing studies have shown that among varied approaches to measuring diversity, ethno-linguistic fractionalization (ELF) is the best measure (Neumann and Graeff, 2013; Schaeffer, 2013). We use the Alesina et al. (2003) measure, which ranges from 0.05 to 0.56 (*Ethnic Fractionalization*).

We also hypothesize that a higher proportion of Muslims in a country will be associated with anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment (H5). To measure the percentage of Muslim adherents in each country (*Percent Muslim*), we rely on the WRD. This dataset provides the proportion of each state's population that practices the Muslim religion, which we convert to a percentage ranging from 0 to 100. This measure is coded only every half-decade, but dramatic changes are not likely from year to year. We match WRD's 2000 coding with the 2002 ESS wave, and WRD's 2010 coding with the 2014 ESS wave.

Finally, we hypothesize that the number of terrorist incidents would affect attitudes toward immigrants and refugees (H6). To examine this, we use data from the GTD. This database provides detailed event information on terrorist attacks around the world. We computed a count variable that measures the number of terrorist incidents occurring in each country during the year of the survey, whether these attacks were coded as international or domestic on logistical, ideological, or "miscellaneous" grounds; the variable ranges from 0 to 293.[1]

In addition, to control for how attitudes toward refugees might differ in countries with large foreign-born populations, we include a measure from the WDI of international migrant stock (percent of population), which is the number of people born in a country other than that in which they live, and includes refugees. These data are provided in 5-year intervals (for all years ending in "0" or "5"), so we interpolate values for intervening years. Percent foreign born ranges from 1.6% to 29.9%.

Country-level left-right ideology could also affect individual attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. For instance, left-wing national policies and left-wing rhetoric deployed by political elites could influence individuals to adopt pro-immigrant and pro-refugee attitudes, or they may spark a backlash leading to anti-immigrant and anti-refugee attitudes. To control for this, we use the left-right politics measure from the MPD, which weights parties' vote share in parliament to calculate the national mean left-right position.

At the individual level, we control for gender (1 = female; 0 = male), age (14–114), years of education (0–50), and political orientation (0 = left; 10 = right). We also control for whether the respondent was born outside of the country (1 = foreign born), and whether either parent was born outside of the country (1 = either mother or father is foreign born).

In Table 1, we present descriptive statistics for all variables used in our analyses. In addition, the Online Supplement contains descriptive statistics by country and wave.

Analytic Strategy

Both of our outcome variables, *Support for Refugees* and *Support for Immigrants*, take on ordered values. Hence, ordered response models are most suitable (Wooldridge, 2010).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	Min	Max	Mean (SD)		
			2002 Wave	2014 Wave	Pooled
Support for refugees	1	5	2.776	3.163	2.974
			(1.050)	(1.116)	(1.101)
Support for immigrants	1	4	2.598	2.504	2.550
			(0.805)	(0.906)	(0.860)
Country-level measures					
ln per capita GDP	9.619	11.067	10.468	10.576	10.523
			(0.323)	(0.239)	(0.288)
Unemployment	2.6	24.7	6.869	7.793	7.341
			(4.103)	(4.489)	(4.330)
Ethnic fractionalization	0.047	0.555	0.195	0.208	0.202
			(0.157)	(0.160)	(0.159)
Percent Muslim	0	20	3.411	4.611	4.024
			(3.140)	(4.649)	(4.029)
Terrorist incidents	0	293	8.223	30.842	19.780
			(19.390)	(76.758)	(57.637)
Percent foreign born	1.616	29.916	10.506	13.111	11.837
			(7.014)	(6.540)	(6.900)
Left-right politics	−17.069	12.344	1.522	−4.076	−1.338
			(7.968)	(9.223)	(9.075)
Individual-level measures					
Occupational status	16	90	43.994	45.834	44.935
			(16.498)	(17.471)	(17.027)
Household income	−3.846	5.512	0.064	0.056	0.060
			(0.993)	(0.984)	(0.989)
Female	0	1	0.489	0.496	0.493
			(0.499)	(0.500)	(0.500)
Age	14	114	46.939	50.399	48.707
			(16.607)	(17.345)	(17.076)
Years of education	0	50	12.507	13.319	12.922
			(3.777)	(4.034)	(3.932)
Political orientation	0	10	5.052	5.065	5.059
			(2.160)	(2.232)	(2.197)
Foreign born	0	1	0.086	0.111	0.099
			(0.281)	(0.314)	(0.299)
Parent foreign born	0	1	0.155	0.193	0.175
			(0.362)	(0.395)	(0.380)

DV: Dependent Variable; GDP: gross domestic product; ESS: European Social Survey.
This table includes 20,274 observations in the 2002 ESS wave and 21,181 in the 2014 ESS wave, for a total of 41,455 observations pooled across both waves.

We estimate ordered logit regression models with robust, clustered standard errors (Chen, 2005; Wooldridge, 2003) to adjust for the fact that observations within countries are not independent. This allows us to account for the presence of unobserved, country-level dependence in the error terms (Chen et al., 2003; Wooldridge, 2003).

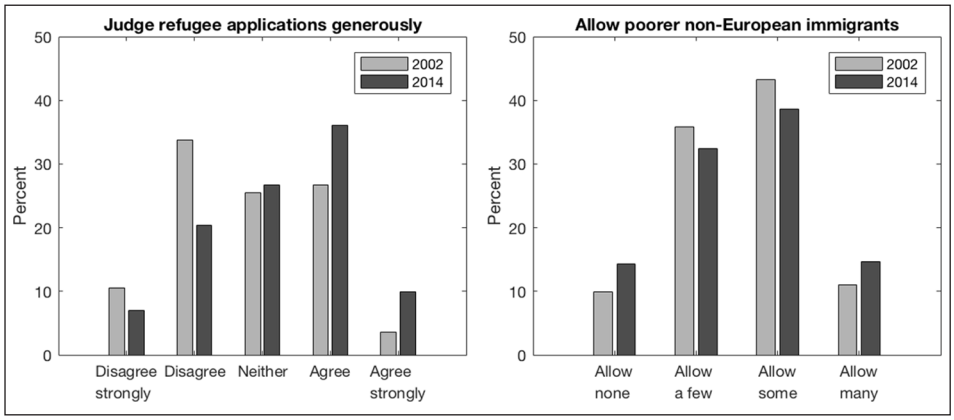

Figure 1. Distribution of Responses to Refugee and Immigrant Questions, 2002 and 2014.
Data weighted by post-stratification weight (pspweight) and population size weight (pweight). Pairwise deletion was used to exclude respondents who responded to only one of the questions.

Pursuant to the ESS guidelines on weighting, we apply a combination of population size and post-stratification weights throughout the analyses to adjust for sampling error, non-response bias, and different selection probabilities (European Social Survey, 2014).

Nineteen countries were included in both waves of the ESS that included the question about attitudes toward refugees (see the Online Supplement, Table S1, for the list of countries and number of observations). However, because data for household income are unavailable for three countries, they are removed from the analytic sample, although we present models including the omitted countries as a test of robustness in the Online Supplement. After these observations are removed, the remaining ESS sample with all complete observations has 41,455 observations.

Comparing Attitudes Toward Refugees and Immigrants

We begin by examining descriptive statistics from the ESS. This descriptive analysis indicates that individuals do, indeed, hold different attitudes toward immigrants and refugees.

The correlation between attitudes toward immigrants and refugees is low (Spearman's rho = 0.36). Moreover, average responses to these questions followed different patterns between 2002 and 2014. Two-sample t-tests with unequal variances (one-tailed) show that there was a statistically significant increase in mean support for refugees (from 2.791 to 3.215) and a statistically significant but very small decrease in the mean support for immigrants (from 2.555 to 2.536), evaluated at the 0.95 confidence level. In other words, attitudes became more pro-refugee and slightly more anti-immigrant on average. Figure 1 summarizes all available individual responses to these two questions across 16 countries in both rounds, a total of 57,572 observations.

In Figure 2, we plot the average response across all countries for each question in each round, using the dichotomous outcome variables. This approach allows us to compare responses to the two questions, despite the fact that the number of response categories differs (a 5-point scale for refugees and a 4-point scale for immigrants). While support for immigrants was greater than support for refugees in 2002, the inverse was true in 2014.

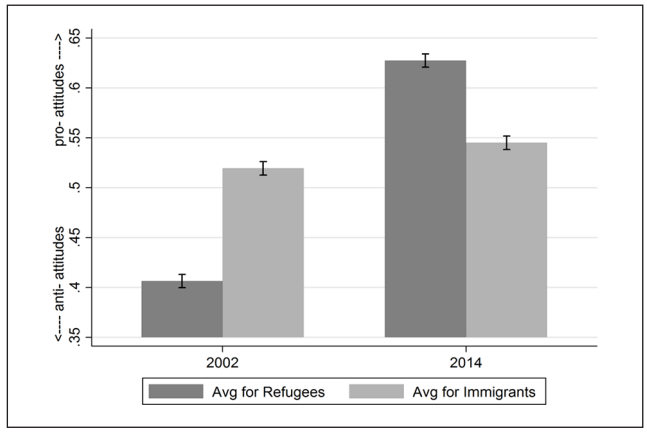

Figure 2. Average Response to Dichotomized Refugee and Immigrant Questions, 2002 and 2014.

Data weighted by post-stratification weight (pspweight) and population size weight (pweight). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Pairwise deletion was used to exclude respondents who responded to only one of the questions.

In Figure S1 in the Online Supplement, we show the mean response by country for each question in each round. Notably, support for refugees appears to have increased across all countries except one, Israel, where the term "refugee" tends to apply to non-Jewish asylum seekers while "immigrant" generally refers to Jewish migrants (Yaron et al., 2013).

These descriptive findings indicate that public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees are not identical and are in fact weakly correlated. Far from refugees simply being considered a subset of immigrants, individual attitudes toward each group show distinct patterns of temporal and cross-country variation. In the following section, we examine whether these observed differences in attitudes toward immigrants and refugees stem from distinctions in their determinants.

Results

In Table 2, we present estimates of regression coefficients with robust, clustered standard errors by wave for support for refugees (Models 1 and 2) and support for immigrants (Models 3 and 4). To assess the robustness of our findings, we examine 70 alternative models; the results from all tests of robustness can be found in the Online Supplement.[2]

For easier interpretation, Figure 3 reports average marginal effects for each model. In this figure, we present estimates of the effect of a one unit increase in each explanatory variable included in Models 1 and 2 on the probability of reporting the highest support for refugees (5 = Agree strongly). For Models 3 and 4, the estimates in Figure 3 relate to the probability of reporting the highest support for immigrants (4 = Allow many). The effects of all explanatory variables are reported in their original units.

The coefficient for occupational status is positive and statistically significant in models of support for immigrants in both the 2002 (Model 3) and 2014 (Model 4) waves. In both 2002 and 2014, a one-point increase in the ISEI raises the probability of being highly supportive of immigration by 0.1 percentage points on average, as shown in Figure 3.

Table 2. Ordinal Logit Regression for Refugee and Immigrant Attitudes by Wave.

	DV: Support for refugees		DV: Support for immigrants	
	2002 Wave (1)	2014 Wave (2)	2002 Wave (3)	2014 Wave (4)
Country-level variables				
ln per capita GDP	−1.551*	−1.199	0.121	−0.846
	(0.661)	(0.776)	(0.378)	(0.665)
Unemployment	0.016	0.053**	0.033	0.009
	(0.041)	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.017)
Ethnic fractionalization	−2.594**	−2.410***	−0.154	−1.969*
	(0.885)	(0.703)	(0.755)	(0.909)
Percent Muslim	−0.341***	−0.121**	−0.061	0.037
	(0.082)	(0.041)	(0.035)	(0.036)
Terrorist incidents	0.025***	0.000	−0.005	−0.009***
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Percent foreign born	0.137**	0.056	0.066	0.060
	(0.048)	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.031)
Left-right politics	−0.069***	0.004	−0.029	−0.010
	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.026)	(0.015)
Individual-level variables				
Occupational status	0.004	0.006***	0.008**	0.011***
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Household income	0.006	0.044	0.088***	0.087**
	(0.057)	(0.036)	(0.016)	(0.030)
Female	0.130***	0.080	0.099	0.026
	(0.036)	(0.049)	(0.068)	(0.043)
Age	0.000	0.005**	−0.006***	−0.007***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Years of education	0.033	0.030***	0.102***	0.070***
	(0.017)	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.007)
Political orientation	−0.136***	−0.132***	−0.121**	−0.148***
	(0.029)	(0.023)	(0.039)	(0.029)
Foreign born	0.424***	0.245**	0.001	0.054
	(0.100)	(0.082)	(0.095)	(0.122)
Parent foreign born	0.099	0.248***	0.300***	0.048
	(0.065)	(0.054)	(0.067)	(0.043)
Cutpoint 1	−18.618**	−14.933	0.156	−10.247
	(7.062)	(8.046)	(4.045)	(6.933)
Cutpoint 2	−16.397*	−13.127	2.339	−8.392
	(7.084)	(8.033)	(4.044)	(6.915)
Cutpoint 3	−15.170*	−11.944	4.873	−6.289
	(7.058)	(8.021)	(4.008)	(6.917)
Cutpoint 4	−12.357	−9.789		
	(7.026)	(7.982)		
N	20,274	21,181	20,274	21,181
Log-likelihood	−26,485.680	−29,764.366	−22,955.826	−25,739.940
Pseudo-R^2	0.069	0.035	0.045	0.052

GDP: gross domestic product.
Robust standard errors, clustered on the country, are in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

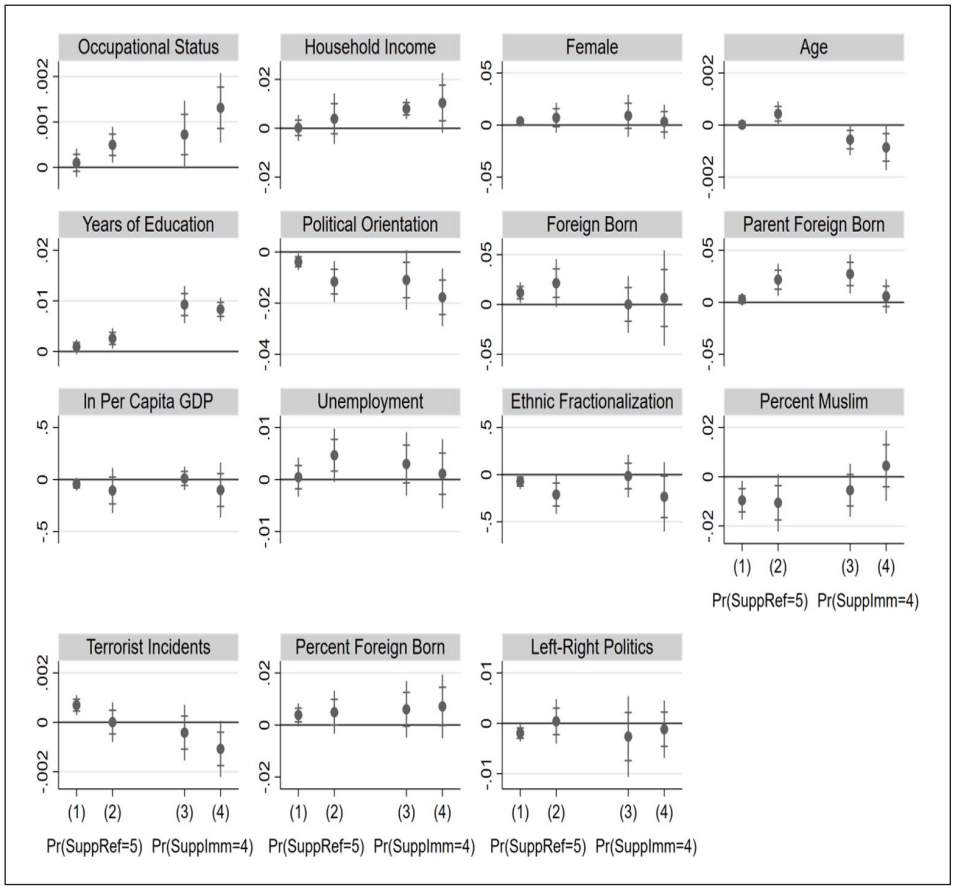

Figure 3. Average Marginal Effects from Ordinal Logit Regression.
We estimate the average marginal effect on the probability of reporting the highest support for refugees (5 = Agree strongly) in Models 1 and 2, and the probability of reporting the highest support for immigrants (4 = Allow many) in Models 3 and 4. Error bars represent 99.9% confidence intervals. Capped spikes represent 95% confidence intervals.

Higher occupational status was also associated with greater support for refugees in 2014 (Model 2): a one-point increase in the ISEI raises the probability of being highly supportive of refugees by 0.05 percentage points on average. However, the coefficient for occupational status was not statistically significant in the 2002 model of support for refugees (Model 1).

The coefficient for income is also positive and statistically significant in both the 2002 (Model 3) and 2014 (Model 4) models of support for immigrants, but non-significant in the models of support for refugees. A one-point improvement in the standardized household income z-score increases the probability of agreeing to "allow many" immigrants by 0.8 percentage points in 2002 and 1 percentage point in 2014 on average.

The coefficient of the unemployment rate is positive and statistically significant at the 99% level in the 2014 model of support for refugees (Model 2), but the coefficient of per capita GDP is negative and statistically significant in the 2002 model at the 95% level.[3] This suggests that support for refugees is inversely related to economic prosperity. In

contrast, contrary to what the economic competition theory would predict, coefficients for per capita GDP and the unemployment rate were not statistically significant in models of support for immigrants.[4] A Wald test comparing the coefficient for per capita GDP across Models 1 and 3 is significant, as is a test comparing the coefficients for unemployment across Models 2 and 4, suggesting that the differences observed across models and waves are meaningful.[5]

We find that the coefficients of ethnic fractionalization are negative and statistically significant in both waves of the models of support for refugees. The average marginal effect on the probability of strong support for refugees is −7.3 percentage points in 2002 and −21.1 points in 2014. In the models of support for immigrants, the coefficient of ethnic diversity is negative and statistically significant in the 2014 model (Model 4).[6]

The coefficient of percent Muslim is negative and statistically significant in both the support for refugees model of the 2002 wave (Model 1) and the 2014 wave (Model 2), with a −1 percentage point average marginal effect on the likelihood of reporting the highest support for refugees in the 2002 model and a −1.1 percentage point average marginal effect in the 2014 model. A Wald test shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the two coefficients at the 99% level, suggesting that this effect may have changed over time. The coefficient of percent Muslim was non-significant in both models of support for immigrants (Models 3 and 4).

The coefficient of number of terrorist incidents is positive and statistically significant in the model of support for refugees in the 2002 wave (Model 1) and non-significant in the model of the 2014 wave (Model 2). Indeed, a single additional terrorist attack in 2002 raises by 0.1 percentage points on average the probability of agreeing strongly that the government should be generous in judging refugee applications. In the models of support for immigrants, the coefficient of the number of terrorist incidents is negative and statistically significant in the 2014 model (Model 4)—which is in contrast with the effect in the 2002 model of support for refugees (Model 1). A Wald test indicates that the difference between the coefficients for terrorist incidents in Models 1 and 4 is statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level.[7]

Thus, we find that there are some key differences in how individual- and country-level factors influence support for refugees compared to immigrants. Overall, macro-level factors were more consistently associated with support for refugees while micro-level variables were more consistently associated with support for immigrants, suggesting that these factors influence the two attitudes differentially.

Differences also emerge regarding how other explanatory variables are related to support for immigrants versus refugees. Country-level left-right ideology is non-significant in the immigrant models and the 2014 model of support for refugees, but negative and statistically significant in the 2002 model of support for refugees (Model 1), suggesting that greater right-wing ideology was related to decreased pro-refugee sentiment during that period. Wald tests confirm that differences between the ideology coefficient in Model 1 and the corresponding coefficients in Models 3 and 4 are significant at the 95% level. However, the percent of the population that was foreign born, also non-significant in the immigrant models, has a positive and statistically significant effect in Model 1, which could suggest that there was more pro-refugee sentiment in countries with larger existing immigrant populations, consistent with the contact hypothesis. Still, since a Wald test indicates that the differences between the foreign-born population coefficient in Model 1 and the corresponding coefficients in Models 3 and 4 are not statistically significant, we hesitate to draw strong conclusions from this finding.

At the individual level, right-wing political orientation also yields consistent effects across models; the coefficient of political orientation is negative and statistically significant in all four models, suggesting that right-wing individuals are less supportive of both immigrants and refugees. Finally, being foreign born oneself, or having a foreign-born parent, is associated with greater support for refugees. The coefficients of foreign born are positive and statistically significant in both the 2002 and 2014 models of support for refugees. The coefficients of foreign-born parent are positive and statistically significant in the 2002 model of support for immigrants (Model 3) and the 2014 model of support for refugees (Model 2).

Discussion

Our descriptive analysis indicated that attitudes toward immigrants and refugees are only weakly correlated. Moreover, these attitudes have not followed the same pattern over time: Public attitudes were more pro-immigrant than pro-refugee in 2002, but they became more pro-refugee than pro-immigrant in 2014. In fact, the size of the increase in support for refugees between 2002 and 2014 was fairly substantial, and support for refugees increased in every country examined except Israel.

The regression analyses presented above systematically examine the variation in attitudes toward immigrants and refugees in 2002 and 2014. Overall, we find that different factors influence attitudes toward immigrants compared to refugees and that these factors vary in their relevance for each set of attitudes depending on the historical moment in time.

Our findings suggest that support for immigrants is closely associated with micro-level factors like occupational status and income. Previous research suggests that immigrants are viewed as economic competitors, and therefore, support would hinge on individual aspects of economic well-being like occupational status (H1) and income (H2), as well as features of the national economic climate like GDP per capita and employment rate (H3). Our analysis demonstrates that individual-level factors such as greater income and occupational status are associated with greater support for immigrants in both waves, consistent with scholarship that demonstrates that greater economic security may reduce the perception of immigrants as economic threats (Kehrberg, 2007; Scheepers et al., 2002a; Semyonov et al., 2008). While these factors had no effect on attitudes about refugees in 2002, higher occupational status was a robust predictor of greater support for refugees in 2014.

While we did not find country-level economic factors to be associated with support for immigrants, there was some evidence of an unexpected association with support for refugees. In 2014, higher unemployment rates were associated with greater support for refugees. Greater per capita GDP was associated with lower support for refugees in 2002.

Our findings indicate that support for refugees is associated more consistently with macro-level factors like ethnic diversity, the proportion of Muslims, and terrorist incidents. In line with group threat theory, we find support for the hypothesis that associates greater ethnic diversity with decreased support for refugees in both 2002 and 2014 (H4). Ethnic fractionalization is also associated with lower support for immigrants in the 2014 models, but this finding is not robust across alternative model specifications. To further understand the apparent volatility of the relationship between ethnic diversity and support for refugees observed in this study, our follow-up study has demonstrated that the relationship is highly sensitive to how diversity is measured (Steele and Abdelaaty, 2019).

However, other researchers who have compared varied approaches to measuring diversity maintain that ELF remains the best measure (Neumann and Graeff, 2013; Schaeffer, 2013). Increasingly, there are findings suggesting that the negative attitudes of majority-group members toward minority-group members are attenuated once the minority group is integrated enough into society for contact to increase (Chamberlain, 2011; Fullerton and Dixon, 2009; Steele and Perkins, 2018; Stein et al., 2000). Finally, research on immigration in urban West Africa suggests that cultural similarities between immigrants and native populations may actually disrupt immigrant integration (Adida, 2016). Thus, we hesitate to draw strong conclusions about the effects of ethnic diversity on attitudes toward refugees.

Consistent with existing research about anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe (Savelkoul et al., 2010; Spruyt and Elchardus, 2012; Statham, 2016; Strabac and Listhaug, 2008), we find that higher proportions of Muslims in a population are related to anti-refugee attitudes in both 2002 and 2014 (H5). However, there was not a statistically significant relationship between the percentage of Muslims and attitudes toward immigrants in either wave in our main models.[8]

Our findings offer only mixed support for our sixth hypothesis (H6) that higher numbers of terrorist incidents would be associated with lower support for immigrants and refugees. In fact, we find that higher numbers of terrorist incidents are associated with *greater* support for refugees, but only in 2002. This result may indicate that experience with terrorist attacks (perhaps especially in the aftermath of 9/11) led to greater empathy with their victims, along with a recognition that refugees may themselves be fleeing terrorism. On the contrary, there appears to be an association between higher numbers of terrorist incidents and lower support for immigrants in the 2014 wave.

Our results demonstrate that attitudes toward refugees and immigrants are distinct, contrary to scholarship that suggests that survey respondents cannot distinguish between them.

Conclusion

Alongside policy and diplomatic disputes, the 2015 surge in Mediterranean arrivals to Europe also generated a fierce debate over terminology. Many media outlets covering these events struggled with whether these individuals were best described, in the words of an Associated Press editor, as "Migrants, refugees or both?" (Kent, 2015). UNHCR even released a video with celebrities defining each term, under the social media hashtag #WordsMatter (UNHCR, 2015). European leaders paid attention to these labels, too. For example, Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, claimed that the "overwhelming majority" arriving in Europe were not refugees (Zavis, 2015). And Robert Fico, Slovakia's Prime Minister, alleged that up to 95% were economic migrants (The Economist, 2015).

However, this debate goes beyond semantics. Indeed, it relies on the assumption that choosing the label "migrant" or "refugee" has real consequences. From a purely legal standpoint, of course, refugees are entitled to certain rights and protections that set them apart from other categories of people on the move. More importantly for this article, however, public receptivity may vary toward those seen as economic migrants as opposed to refugees.

Although attitudes toward immigrants in Europe have been researched extensively, there has been little research on attitudes toward refugees. Yet, we find notable differences in attitudes toward immigrants compared to refugees. Individual-level support for

immigrants is more consistently related to the financial well-being of households while support for refugees is more robustly associated with country-level political circumstances. It is possible that such differences stem from the perception that refugees are considered as political actors, more so than economically motivated immigrants.

As mentioned above, measures of attitudes toward refugees were included in only two ESS waves, with over a decade between them (2002 and 2014). As a result, it is difficult to rigorously examine temporal variation. Future research may be able to further explore temporal changes in the effect of our explanatory variables on attitudes toward immigrants and refugees as additional waves of ESS data become available. For example, the origin countries of refugees headed to Europe have shifted over time, with potential implications for public attitudes. In the early 2000s, public opinion may have been shaped by the recent presence of sizable populations of Bosnian and Kosovar refugees. By 2014, Syrians and Afghans represented a large proportion of asylum seekers in Europe. However, again, the ESS included only one very general question about support for refugees; there were no questions about refugees of different national or ethnic origins. A study of immigrant origins in Germany and other research on a range of related topics suggests that nationality and ethnicity could affect such attitudes (Czymara and Schmidt-Catran, 2017; Fox, 2004; Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2016; Hjorth, 2015; Scheepers et al., 2002a). Future surveys should ask a wider range of questions about attitudes toward refugees to address these issues.

In addition, a key limitation of this study is that the wording of the ESS question regarding refugees is not identical to the question gauging attitudes toward immigrants. We attempted to circumvent this issue as much as possible by focusing on attitudes toward poorer non-European immigrants, which would have origins most comparable to those of refugees. A future survey that asks similarly worded questions for both groups would provide further confidence in our results and ensure that our findings are not partly driven by the differences in phrasing between the two questions.

Moreover, it will be particularly interesting for future research to analyze how the recent influx of refugees into Europe, which was only just beginning in 2014, and high profile terrorist incidents, particularly in France, Belgium, and Germany, are related to attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. An analysis of future waves of ESS data that include the refugee attitudes question would allow us to further test the findings we present in this article. Future research might also fruitfully compare attitudes toward immigrants and refugees outside the European context, whether in traditional immigrant societies or in developing countries.

As the influx of foreigners into Europe continues to capture headlines, the issue of whether these newcomers should be defined as "refugees" has become increasingly salient. As we demonstrated above, refugee status not only confers certain rights and privileges to its bearers, but it may also have an impact on how those seeking a new place to live are greeted by nationals of their host countries. Given the current global political context, we are likely to continue to see increasing flows of those identifying themselves as refugees; understanding the unique facets of public opinion toward refugees, as a group distinct from other migrants, can offer an important tool for policy makers who may seek to offer aid to these newcomers.

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Supplementary Information

Additional supplementary information may be found with the online version of this article.

Contents

Notes

1. Israel, also a notable outlier in other respects in this study, is the country with 293 terrorist attacks. In the Online Supplement, we present models excluding it as a test of robustness.
2. We estimated models without individual-level political orientation and without country-level left-right politics; without household income; with three different approaches to adjusting household income; excluding the potential outlier country, Israel; including both European Social Survey (ESS) waves along with a wave dummy; with alternative measures of terrorist incidents; with quadratic age; substituting

alternative measures from the ESS of support for immigrants, including an index of those measures; and using alternative functional forms—ordinary least squares (OLS) and multi-level regression models.
3. However, this finding was not robust to alternative model specifications.
4. However, an unconstrained generalized ordinal logit regression model indicates that per capita GDP may have a positive effect at the lowest levels of support for immigrants in the 2002 wave (i.e. comparing "Allow none" to all other responses on the *Support for Immigrants* variable).
5. Cross-model Wald tests were implemented via seemingly unrelated estimation ("suest" command in STATA). See Clogg et al. (1995).
6. However, this finding is not robust in some alternative model specifications (see Online Supplement).
7. In addition, an unconstrained generalized ordinal logit regression model indicates that Terrorist Incidents may have a negative effect at the lowest levels of support for immigrants in the 2002 wave (i.e. comparing "Allow none" to all other responses on the *Support for Immigrants* variable).
8. Some effects are observed in alternative model specifications.

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