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Threat Perceptions of Migrants in Britain and Support for Policy

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Abstract

Arguments that migrants represent a threat to the Britain are often cast in terms of impact on the economy and a criminal threat to Britain's streets. We examine the impact of these attitudes on support for policies curtailing the rights of European Union (EU) and non-EU migrants in the United Kingdom separately, as well as their implications for support for punitive criminal sanctions. Using data on a nationally representative sample of Britons, results indicate that perceptions of migrants as a criminal threat have a greater effect on support for curtailing rights of EU migrants, more so than economic threat, suggesting that British citizens invoke deep rooted stereotypes about EU migrants as criminal when choosing their preferences. Criminal threat is also associated with support for more punitive criminal sanctions. Thus, threat narratives, especially narratives of immigrant crime, could be instrumental in public support for policy, but different narratives are associated with EU and non-EU migrants.

Keywords

immigration, group threat, punishment

Introduction

As revealed during Britain's contentious "Brexit" referendum campaign, tensions over migration in Britain reached historic highs, with many interconnected controversies filling newspapers, political debates, and public discourse. At the core of the debate was the idea of freedom of movement within the European Union (EU). Foundational to European integration was the idea that labor capital and individual persons could move freely between EU member states. Various directives helped develop and formalize a Union citizenship, effectively extending the rights of movement and residence to workers and service providers, as well as some noneconomically active persons (Costello and Hancox 2014). Further expansion in the number of EU member states over time created new EU citizens, and altered migration flows in and out of Britain. As an example, Britain experienced a rapid inflow of migrants from eight European countries who acceded to the EU between 2004 and 2011 (also known as A8 countries), many of whom participated in the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS). Although the WRS was temporary, the opening of the British labor market resulted in larger than expected numbers of labor migrants coming to the United Kingdom (Ruhs 2012; Vargas-Silva 2014).

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Threat narratives about job security and crime accompanied European migration to Britain, with such concerns providing rallying cries for advocates of the United Kingdom leaving the EU (Blinder 2014). Former Prime Minister, Sir John Major, accused anti-EU campaigners supporting Britain's exit from the bloc, as stoking "prejudice" on immigrants (Parfitt 2016). Claiming that emotions in the United Kingdom have been stirred up by fear, Major warned of dangerous territory that could "open up long terms divisions in our society." The link between EU immigration and crime is largely refuted by crime data in the United Kingdom, with offending rates among Polish, Romanian, and Bulgarian individuals consistent with the rates among British born. Furthermore, between 2004 and 2011, total recorded crime incidents in the United Kingdom declined by 33 percent (Office for National Statistics 2015). And a study by the London School of Economics found that crime fell greater in areas that experienced the largest immigration from Eastern Europe (Bell, Machin, and Fasani 2013). Despite the preponderance of evidence suggesting that immigration from European countries had little effect on crime in England (Bell et al. 2013; Bell and Machin 2013; Jaitman and Machin 2013; Stansfield 2016), threat narratives surrounding recent immigrants seem largely unaffected by these facts (Bell and Machin 2013), with fears of a crime accompanying new migrant groups specifically from Eastern Europe (McLaren and Johnson 2007; Stansfield 2016).

Despite Brexit campaigning often centering on migrants within the EU, the share of non-European origin in England and Wales has been larger than European origin over the past two decades. Furthermore, a study by Simon Hix, Eric Kaufmann, and Thomas J. Leeper (2017) revealed that U.K. residents preferred migration from inside the EU. Asking respondents to indicate their preferred level of net migration for each group, Hix and colleagues found that members of each social group in the United Kingdom called for a bigger cut in non-EU, than EU migration. In a second recent study, Eric Kaufmann (2017) found that an increase in non-EU origin in a U.K. resident's local area was a stronger predictor of support for the U.K. Independence Party than an increase in EU origin. These surprising findings suggest that U.K. residents give preference and perceive EU and non-EU group migrants differently. However, the reasons for, and implications of, these differing evaluations have largely been ignored by research. Hix and colleagues further suggested that politicians have been more reluctant to use threat narratives to describe non-EU migrants than EU migrants, given the racial connotations of appealing to anti-Asian or anti-African sentiment. For these reasons, the current study seeks to uncover potential reasons, and implications, of these differing evaluations. We explore support for the control of migrants from both EU and non-EU origins separately, and assess whether different threat narratives drive support for the control of EU and non-EU migrants. Specifically, while recent studies suggest that labor migration from outside the EU may be a more pressing concern for U.K. residents, threat narratives about crime have almost exclusively accompanied EU origin migration.

Using data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA), the present study examines the extent to which EU and non-EU migrants are perceived as a criminal or economic threat in the United Kingdom, and the implications of such a perception for support for policies limiting the rights of migrants, in addition to support for punitive criminal sanctions. Considering perceptions of these two groups separately is an important step as research moves away from assumptions that the public think in terms of a monolithic "immigrant." In this study, we examine whether individual deep-seated stereotypes about migrants as a criminal and economic threat are invoked when deciding policy preferences for curtailing migrant rights and enhancing criminal punishment. The importance of this topic is guided by the group threat perspective, which has argued that individuals who perceive growing minority groups as a threat also tend to support intensive social control, tough sanctions, and even capital punishment (Dambrun 2007; Johnson et al. 2011; Ousey and Unnever 2012; Parker, Stults, and Rice 2005; Pickett and Chiricos 2012; Wheelock, Semukhina, and Demidov 2011).

Group Threat

The group threat perspective (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958) is particularly relevant to contemporary developments in society as it provides a framework to account for recent surges in immigration posing a potential threat to a community, resulting in policies aimed at curtailing rights and increasing social control (Feldmeyer et al. 2015; McLaren 2003; Stupi, Chiricos, and Gertz 2016). This approach argues that objective or perceived threats to a majority group's interests or prerogatives in society will be associated with prejudice and efforts to control the out-group (Blumer 1958; Quillian 1995). The majority group's perception of threat should increase as the numerical size of the out-group increases (Williams 1947). Thus, migration of a visibly or culturally different group into a given area may also increase the risk of intergroup conflict (Williams 1947).

In addition to growth of minority group size, group threat theory also operates in tandem with one's own economic and social circumstances (Quillian 1995). The threat may take several forms depending on how individuals perceive that their job security and material interests will be affected (Mayda 2006) or how individuals evaluate the threat to their national identity and culture (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). Although scholars have often measured threat in terms of either economic *or* cultural threat, both types of evaluation are likely to be present synonymously, together driving an individual's evaluation of out-group members (Maxwell 2012, 2013).

Building on the classic work of Hubert M. Blalock (1967), who argued that discriminatory practices would increase as a result of minority group size increases, recent applications of the group threat perspective have argued that if majority groups perceive growth in minority groups as potential cultural, political, and economic threats, they will subsequently support tougher criminal sanctions and applications of social control including the restriction of rights (Chiricos et al. 2014; Feldmeyer et al. 2015; Light, Massoglia, and King 2014; Parker et al. 2005; Semyonov et al. 2004; Unnever and Cullen 2012). Explanations for the link between prejudice and crime policy attitudes suggest that individuals invoke deep rooted racial stereotypes when they evaluate preferences for criminal sanctions (Dambrun 2007; Ousey and Unnever 2012). In response to perceived threat from minority populations, members of the dominant group "support the coercive control of minorities" (Ruddell 2005:11).

Conversely, intergroup contact theory suggests that contact with members of an out-group can foster reevaluation of emotions and attitudes directed toward the out-group, reducing negative stereotypes, such as the association of crime and economic threat with immigration. A meta-analysis conducted by Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda Tropp (2008) revealed evidence that group contact reduces prejudice via three main pathways: reducing anxiety about intergroup contact, increasing empathy, and to a lesser extent, enhancing knowledge about the out-group. Via these mechanisms, not only may individuals experience more positive attitudes toward a group and lower threat perceptions but intergroup contact may also foster a change in policy preferences (McLaren 2003; Schlueter and Scheepers 2010), mediating the relationship between threat perceptions and policy attitudes directed toward an out-group (Pickett, Baker, et al., 2014).

Economic Threat

These theories, then, guided scholars in the examination of support for more punitive social and criminal justice policies (Pickett and Chiricos 2012; Pickett et al. 2014) and became relevant to study the impact of changes in immigration, and the potential threat it imposes (Coenders, Lubbers, and Scheepers 2009; Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2009). Explanations of immigrant threat in Europe often rest on economic grounds, with perceptions that growth in low-wage labor may lead to an excess labor supply, thereby depressing average wages and employment

availability in the destination society. Following the influx of migrant workers into Britain from Eastern Europe following 2004 Accession, interest in the labor market effect of migration in the United Kingdom increased. Yet, findings from reports in the United Kingdom were unremarkable regarding unemployment and average wages (Dustmann, Fabbri, and Preston 2005, 2013; Reed and Lattore 2009; Ruhs 2015).

Importantly, Martin Ruhs (2015) identified differences in short-term and long-term effects, with any declines in wages and employment in the short run offset by rises in the long run. In the short run, Ruhs (2015) found that effects are likely to be greatest for lower-wage workers, and therefore if there is a link between objective and perceptual economic threat, workers in lower-wage occupations may have stronger policy preferences for the social control of migrants. Interestingly, recent evidence in the United Kingdom revealed that resident workers who were themselves migrants are the low-wage workers who stand to lose the most in the short term as a result of greater migration (Ruhs 2015). Although this evidence suggests that objective threat may be somewhat limited for the average British-born worker, perceived threat is often unrelated to objective individual situation and context (Bobo 1983; Chiricos et al. 2014; McLaren and Johnson 2007).

Even prior to EU Accession in 2004, evidence from the BSA revealed that anti-immigrant hostility among British citizens had very little to do with self-interest, as often assumed, rather it was related to the potential for increased crime (McLaren and Johnson 2007). As demonstrated in a recent study by Ted Chiricos and colleagues (2014), perceived immigrant threats are likely to influence individual policy preferences through the very threat narratives described above, that is, that immigrants take jobs away from native born workers, increase unemployment, increase crime rates, and undermine national or cultural identity. Although research linking immigrant threat and policy preferences has often focused on the perceived economic threat, fewer studies have focused attention on the criminal threat.

Criminal Threat

Many Britons associate immigration with a criminal threat. In one recent examination of group threat and anti-immigration attitudes in Britain, Lauren M. McLaren and Mark Johnson (2007) examined data from the 2003 BSA and found that British citizens were primarily concerned with perceived threats to British customs and perceived threats to crime. This trend can be partly explained by a growing "criminalization of immigration," whereby the social control of both immigrants and criminals has become unified through the criminal justice system (Welch 2002). The criminalization of immigrants is an important social and political construction (Pickett 2016), through which crime statistics have been manipulated and used as vehicles to advance racial and ethnic stereotypes. Data from the U.K. Home Office suggested that five times the number of EU citizens were in detention centers in 2015 compared with 2009 (Forester 2017). Following Theresa May's appointment as Home Secretary in 2010, the amount of EU citizens deported also increased by 256 percent. These numbers dovetail with changes in rhetoric accompanying political campaigning in the United Kingdom over the last decade (Charteris-Black 2006). Such narratives influence, and are influenced by, the politics of migration and immigration in Europe (Geddes and Scholten 2016).

Such perceptions toward certain migrant groups are also likely reinforced by criminal threat narratives in the media. As an example, following the violent riots in several London boroughs in 2011, Eline de Rooij, Matthew Goodwin, and Mark Pickup (2015) found evidence that the publicized violence significantly increased white perceptions of a collective safety threat, and this threat had a significant effect on white Britons' social distance from Muslims and Eastern Europeans. There have also been numerous reported stories of Eastern European "crime waves" throughout the United Kingdom. Citing data from the London Metropolitan Police, the Daily

Mail reported that foreign-born nationals were accused of more than one in four crimes in London (Doyle and Wright 2012). Important variations were seen within these data too. Individuals born in Poland and Romania were significantly more likely to be arrested than all other foreign-born individuals, fueling fears of an Eastern European crime wave.

Several studies have demonstrated the negative impact the media has on public opinion regarding immigration (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Esses, Medianu, and Lawson 2013; Esses et al. 2008). A recent study by Noah Carl (2016) found that a majority of survey respondents identified a migrant's criminal history as the most important characteristic when assessing whether to allow them into the country. Respondents were asked to identify the extent to which people of 23 nationalities should be allowed into the country. Migrants from Turkey, Romania, and Nigeria had the greatest opposition while migrants from Ireland and Canada had the least. Although it has become clear that U.K. residents do give preference and evaluate groups differently (Hix et al. 2017; Kaufmann 2017), it remains unclear how Britons evaluate the criminal threat of both EU and non-EU origin, and the implications of these evaluations for policy. Existing research from the United States and Europe offers some guidelines for this study, however.

Research assessing the implications of perceptual criminal threat has expanded in both the European (McLaren and Johnson 2007; Semyenov et al. 2004; Welch and Schuster 2005; Young 2003) and American context (Chiricos et al. 2014; Pickett , Chiricos, and Gertz, 2014; Stupi et al. 2016; Wang 2012). In the United States, Xia Wang (2012) found that the perceived size of the undocumented immigrant population and unemployment rates were related to the evaluation of immigrants as a criminal threat. A recent study by Elizabeth Stupi and colleagues (2016) sought to link perceived criminal threat to support for social control and anti-immigrant policies. Using survey data collected from 1,364 non-Latino adults in the United States, Stupi and colleagues revealed that perceived criminal threat had the greatest influence on support for more punitive controls. Criminal threat perceptions also mediated the link between political ideology and education with punitive policy support.

Some related research from Europe also warrants discussion, where data from the European Social Survey suggested that negative views about the criminal involvement of immigrants tend to outweigh more sanguine views (Sides and Citrin 2007; Visser, Scholte, and Scheepers 2013). In one recent example using data from Russia, Darren Wheelock and colleagues (2011) examined whether the perception that immigrants were a threat to public safety was related to different forms of social control including punitive attitudes. Much like results in the United States, Wheelock and colleagues found that perceived threat was associated with public desire to punish criminals. No study that we are aware of has examined the link between perceived criminal threat and preferences for policies curtailing migrant rights in the British context, despite the speed and magnitude of migration over the past decade, and evidence that British citizens view immigration and a criminal threat synonymously.

Current Study

In sum, recent theoretical and empirical work has turned its attention to perceptions of specific threats posed by immigrant groups (McLaren 2003; Schneider 2008; Semyonov and Glikman 2009), and their implications for policy. In general, these studies have assessed perceived economic and cultural threats in relation to policy preferences in the United States (Chiricos et al. 2014; King and Wheelock 2007) and Europe (McLaren 2003; Ousey and Unnever 2012; Quillian 1995; Semyonov and Glikman 2009; Wheelock et al. 2011), finding that perceptions of threat are important intervening variables in the relationship between individual characteristics, anti-immigrant attitudes, and policy preferences.

In the British context, it has become clear that individuals do not evaluate migrants as a monolithic threat; rather different threats are associated with different groups (Hix et al. 2017; Kaufmann 2017). Given the magnitude and speed of migration from Eastern Europe over the past decade, in addition to countless reports about Eastern European crime waves, this study considers whether threat narratives are differentially associated with support for policies curtailing the rights of EU versus non-EU migrants. In so doing, this study aims to provide additional evidence on how evaluations of migrants as "criminal" or an economic threat affects support for curtailing rights and crime control policies in Britain.

Data and Method

The BSA provides the data for the current study (National Center for Social Research 2013). The BSA is Britain's longest running public opinion survey dating back to 1983. The BSA uses random probability sampling, which ensures that everyone has a fair chance of being picked to take part in the survey, and uses face-to-face interviewing of approximately 3,000 respondents each year to obtain a representative view of the British public. The 2013 version of the survey was used for the current study as it is the most recent version of the survey publicly available that asks respondents about the relationship between immigration and crime specifically. As opinions on migration are likely to differ greatly between individuals with varying personal experience with migration, we limit our study sample to those who were born in Britain ($N = 2{,}904$), excluding 335 respondents who were born abroad and five respondents who did not provide an answer to the question of birth location. Three versions of the 2013 BSA were administered, with individuals randomly assigned to Version A, B, or C. As only Version A of the survey asked individuals to rate the criminal threat posed by immigrants, our study is further limited to the 846 individuals who completed Version A. As displayed in Table 1, the final sample was 43 percent male, with an average age of 53, and 62 percent with a greater than secondary school education. The sample also reveals numerous sources of contact with foreign-born persons, including 16 percent of the sample with at least one parent born abroad, 6 percent of the sample with a partner who was born abroad, and 54 percent of the sample having close friends who are foreign born.

Dependent Variables

Our study uses two policy indices as dependent variables. First, data in the BSA allow us to construct a measure of *curtailing migrant rights*, including asking respondents to indicate (six responses, ranging from immediately, after one year, after three years, after five years, after 10 years, or never) how quickly migrants from (1) EU countries and (2) non-EU countries should be allowed to receive the same welfare benefits as British citizens, and when they should be allowed to vote. There could be wide variation inside these categories, for example, British threat narratives of Polish groups will likely differ from narratives of French or Irish migrants. Given the scale of coverage on Eastern European migration, in addition to the size of the growth (over one-third of the growth between 2004 and 2011 was from Eastern European countries), we assume that the average Briton would have associated "migrants from EU countries" with Eastern European migration predominantly. Similar variation exists in non-EU origin groups too, although the largest group of labor and family migrants over the past decade is nationals of Asian countries, including India and Pakistan, accounting for 9.0 percent and 5.9 percent of the United Kingdom's foreign-born population, respectively (Vargas-Silva and Rienzo 2017).

Approximately half of the sample were asked questions about migrants from EU countries ($n = 415$) and half were asked about non-EU countries ($n = 431$).[1] An indicator of *curtailing migrant rights* was created for EU and non-EU migrants separately by summing scores indicating how quickly migrants should receive welfare benefits (score of 1–6) and voting rights (score

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics for Total Sample.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent variables				
Internal control of EU migrants (*n* = 415)	6.839	2.492	2	12
Internal control of Non-EU migrants (*n* = 431)	7.200	2.527	2	12
Support for punitive criminal sanctions (*N* = 846)	7.589	1.961	2	10
Support for stiffer sentences	4.034	0.844	1	5
Support for the death penalty	3.554	1.372	1	5
Independent variables (*N* = 846)				
Criminal threat	3.321	1.112	1	5
Economic threat	3.057	0.956	1	5
Sex (*male* = 0, *female* = 1)	0.573	0.495	0	1
Age group	4.468	2.025	1	7
Foreign born parent(s)	0.159	0.367	0	1
Foreign born partner	0.066	0.249	0	1
Foreign friends	0.540	0.499	0	1
Married	0.466	0.499	0	1
Conservative	0.281	0.450	0	1
Occupation class	1.910	0.917	1	3
Higher education	0.628	0.484	0	1
Work part-time	0.250	0.433	0	1
Receives state benefits	0.613	0.487	0	1
Religiosity	2.531	2.187	1	7
Self-rated racial prejudice	1.354	0.541	1	3

Note. EU = European Union.

of 1–6), creating a maximum potential score of 12. The alpha of the two items capturing the internal control of EU migrants was .700, and the alpha of the two items capturing the same measure for non-EU migrants was .742. As suggested by Chiricos and colleagues (2014), this item directly indicates support for assimilative activities directed at migrants already present in the destination country. Our measure is reverse coded so that higher scores indicate support for curtailing these assimilative activities and thus higher internal social control. As displayed in Table 1, our sample exhibits slightly higher support for curtailing rights of non-EU migrants (M = 7.20) compared with EU migrants (M = 6.84).

Our second dependent variable, support for *punitive criminal sanctions*, does not ask respondents directly about societal responses to migrants. Instead two questions from the BSA were selected that ask all respondents in the sample (n = 846) to agree (on a five-point scale) whether for some crimes the death penalty is more suitable, and whether stiffer sentences should be handed down. Items were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated higher agreement. Responses on these items were highly correlated (Spearman's rho = .675) so items were combined into an additive scale, with a maximum possible score of 10. This scale reflects support for more punitive criminal control.

Independent Variables

Sources of immigrant threat. We offer two distinct measures of threat that capture the current public discourse around migration in Britain, and the potential threat of further European expansion. The 2013 BSA asked all respondents to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, whether immigrants are generally good for the economy. Respondents were also asked to rate their level of agreement

(on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 indicating *strongly disagree*) on the following statement: "Immigrants increase crime rates." Both measures were coded so that higher scores indicate a higher perceived threat (i.e., immigrants are bad for the economy and increase crime rates). The BSA defines an immigrant as a permanent settler in Britain (National Center for Social Research 2013). We recognize that other measures of threat could also be influential for understanding policy attitudes (e.g., political threat); however, such measures were not available. Although the use of multi-item measures of threat would be preferable, we believe these single-item measures to be appropriate in the absence of other available measures in the data, and representative of measures of economic and criminal threat used in prior research. Estimates should be considered conservative, however.

Control variables. Research on anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe has found that often a lack of familiarity and fear over conflict of values and culture may better explain the relationship between out-group size and outcomes in attitudes which may be supportive of social control (Schneider 2008). Yet, growth in immigration and contact with migrants may alleviate these fears and defuse stereotypes about recently arrived populations. A recent analysis by Gavin Jackson (2014) revealed strong support for the contact hypothesis, whereby living in a U.K. constituency with a higher proportion of migrants, and thus increasing the number of friends and colleagues who are foreign born, is associated with a greater belief that migration enriches rather than undermines British cultural life. Katharina Schmid, Ananthi Al Ramiah, and Miles Hewstone (2014) also found evidence that growing diversity in England can decrease threat perceptions and increase trust. We thus include a measure of whether the either of a respondent's parents were born outside of Britain (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), a measure of whether one's romantic partner is foreign born (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), and a measure of respondents having any friends living in Britain who were born abroad (0 = *none*, 1 = *one*, 2 = *a few or several*). Each of these contact measures is likely related to one's threat evaluation of migrants more generally, as well as one's support for policies related to the social control of migrants.

In addition to the potential for contact, we control for several respondent characteristics that may confound the relation between threat and policy attitudes. Specifically, threat is often found to be especially prominent among majority group members who are unskilled, less well educated, and/or unemployed (Mayda 2006; Sides and Citrin 2007). Accordingly, we include controls for occupation class (3 = *managerial and professional occupations*; 2 = *intermediate occupations*; 1 = *lower supervisory, technical, semi-routine, and routine occupations*), higher education (1 = *achieved any postsecondary school qualifications*; 0 = *no postsecondary school qualifications*), and employment. Only 5.28 percent of the sample was unemployed, meaning employed versus unemployed was not a meaningful control. However, we focused on part-time (=1)/full-time (=0) employment to capture a potential job strain. Furthermore, we control for whether or not a respondent receives any type of state benefits, as this may alleviate any strain felt, and thus potential economic threat from migrant workers. Models also include control variables capturing respondent sex (*male* = 0, *female* = 1), age (in seven-year age groups),[2] legal marital status (0 = *not married*; 1 = *currently married*), respondent's political party identification (*Conservative* [*conservatism*] = 1; *Labor, Liberal Democrat, Scottish National Party, other* = 0), and religiosity (measured on a seven-point scale of religious service/meeting attendance, where 7 *indicates once a week or more* attendance, and 1 indicates *never or practically never*). Finally, previous European studies established that racial prejudice exerts an independent effect on anti-immigrant attitudes, above and beyond perceived threat (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2016). We include a control for a respondent's self-reported racial prejudice, measured via responses to the question "how would you describe yourself . . . as very prejudiced against people of other races, a little prejudiced, or not prejudiced at all?" This item was measured on a scale of 1 to 3, where 3 indicated *very prejudiced against people*, and 1 indicated *not prejudiced at all*. Although only

3 percent of respondents described themselves as "very prejudiced," 27 percent said they were "a little prejudiced," and 68 percent said they were "not prejudiced at all."

Analysis

The 846 respondents are nested within 12 regional areas in Britain, large aggregations incorporating very diverse cities and towns (e.g., North East, West Midlands, Outer London, South East). A number of techniques were considered to address the intraclass correlation, including multilevel modeling and using clustered robust standard errors. Given the use of cross-sectional data with very few clusters, our models were estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Models also included clustered robust standard errors at the regional level to help correct for correlated errors. Each model also included a dummy variable for each region to control for interregional variation which may be associated with differences in preference regarding immigration and public policy (i.e., contextual threat; McLaren 2003).

In estimating the models, each measure was entered one at a time so that any changes in magnitude or direction indicating multicollinearity or partialing could be detected. Variance inflation factor (VIF) scores, often the preferred diagnostic statistic for assessing multicollinearity, were also checked using 2.50 as the recommended threshold (Allison 1999). Using these two diagnostic checks, our models offered few concerns with multicollinearity. Average model VIF scores were consistently below 2.50, and the highest individual VIF score (not including regional dummy controls) never exceeded 1.32. VIF statistics are included in the result tables. As one final diagnostic check, we also considered whether results would be affected by the inclusion of individuals who live in the London area, where a majority of migrants in the United Kingdom reside. An estimated 31 percent of London's population is foreign born; therefore, perceived threat and contact with migrants is likely to be different for individuals in London and the South East compared with other areas of Britain. Models were estimated both with (n = 846) and without individuals from London (n = 763) and the South East (n = 730), and substantive results were consistent.

Results

Table 2 displays the results of OLS regression estimates of immigrant threat on support for curtailing rights of EU and non-EU migrants separately. Standardized regression coefficients are displayed so that the relative importance of coefficients in each model can be ascertained. Model 1 shows the estimated effects of individual-level control variables, on respondent support for the internal social control of EU migrants, controlling for unobserved regional heterogeneity. Model 2 displays the estimated effects of the same explanatory variables, in addition to our measures of perceptual immigrant threat, on respondent support for the internal social control of EU migrants.

Results reveal that higher education and self-reported prejudice are both significantly associated with greater support for the control of EU migrants' rights, albeit in opposite directions. Higher education is negatively associated with support. There is also some support for the intergroup contact hypothesis, in that having a foreign-born partner, and to a lesser extent having foreign-born friends, is associated with less support for the social control of EU migrants. In Model 2, we see that perceptual criminal threat has the greatest impact on support for EU migrant control (β = .168, p = .006). Economic threat perceptions failed to achieve significance in Model 2.

Also of note in Model 2, the estimated effect of two measures of intergroup contact, foreign friends and partners, diminished after entering threat perceptions into the model. To test for mediation, we use the commonly cited solution to issues with Sobel (Hayes 2013), namely the bootstrapping method of Kristopher J. Preacher and Andrew Hayes (2004). We found that 33 percent of the relation between foreign friends and support for EU migrant rights control was mediated by perceptions of immigrants as criminal, and 42 percent of the relation was mediated

Table 2. OLS Estimates of Immigrant Threat on Support for Internal Social Control of Migrants.

	EU control				Non-EU control			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Explanatory Variables	Coefficient	*SE*	Coefficient	*SE*	Coefficient	*SE*	Coefficient	*SE*
Economic threat	—	—	0.119	0.090	—	—	0.277***	0.056
Criminal threat	—	—	0.168**	0.049	—	—	0.122	0.085
Sex	0.124†	0.058	0.129†	0.059	0.016	0.083	0.007	0.075
Age group	0.041	0.082	0.048	0.074	−0.060	0.035	−0.033	0.039
Foreign born parents	0.027	0.090	0.052	0.083	0.104	0.075	0.133	0.065
Foreign born partner	−0.088*	0.035	−0.082†	0.039	−0.055	0.032	−0.021	0.031
Foreign friends	−0.110†	0.059	−0.070	0.080	0.016	0.057	0.057	0.074
Married	0.053	0.045	0.039	0.048	0.057	0.069	0.025	0.062
Conservative	0.014	0.076	0.016	0.070	0.098†	0.046	0.095*	0.039
Occupation class: Intermediate	−0.116†	0.063	−0.057	0.071	−0.018	0.066	0.025	0.070
Occupational class: Managerial	−0.097	0.058	−0.033	0.078	−0.134*	0.046	−0.066	0.047
Higher education	−0.175**	0.046	−0.160**	0.048	−0.035	0.067	−0.020	0.056
Work part-time	0.043	0.082	0.028	0.086	−0.031	0.065	−0.020	0.060
Receives benefits	−0.044	0.049	−0.060	0.054	−0.086	0.052	−0.088†	0.048
Self-rated prejudice	0.158**	0.038	0.087*	0.032	0.189**	0.044	0.081	0.049
Religiosity	−0.007	0.064	−0.011	0.058	−0.167*	0.071	−0.136*	0.055
Observations	391		391		409		409	
R^2	.173		.211		.150		.239	
Highest VIF	3.32		3.49		3.52		3.53	
Mean VIF	1.82		1.87		1.90		1.92	

Note. Standard errors are corrected for clustering in region. All models include dummy variables for regional area, save "North East England" as reference. Standardized coefficients are presented. OLS = ordinary least squares; EU = European Union; VIF = variance inflation factor.
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. Two-tailed.

by perceptions of economic threat. In addition, we found significant mediating effects of criminal (22 percent) and economic (36 percent) threat in the relation between having a foreign-born partner and support for EU rights control.[3] Together, these results suggest that that intergroup contact reduces perceived threat, and in turn affects policy attitudes targeted toward EU migrants.

Turning to Models 3 and 4, perceived economic threat had the greatest estimated impact on support for the control of non-EU migrants (β= .277, $p = .001$). Although criminal threat was associated with support for curtailing rights of non-EU migrants when estimated individually, this relation became insignificant once economic threat was included. The introduction of immigrant criminal threat into Model 4 increased the amount of variance explained by less than 1 percent. Conversely, the introduction of economic threat into Model 4 increased the amount of variance explained by 5 percent. This finding suggests some interesting differences in the predictors of curtailing rights of EU versus non-EU migrants. By comparing the equality of coefficients across models, we cannot say that criminal threat is more important for the evaluation of EU migrants compared with non-EU migrants ($z = .47$).

Nevertheless, it does appear that an economic threat is a more important part of one's evaluation of policy when considering non-EU migrants in isolation, and criminal threat is more closely

related to one's policy preferences regarding EU migrants. By examining EU and non-EU migrants separately, results suggest that individuals who believe that immigrants represent a criminal threat are more likely to invoke this attitude when evaluating migrants from Europe. This offers anecdotal evidence that threat narratives of Eastern European crime waves and criminal gangs from new EU countries have become deep rooted in the United Kingdom.

Also of note, several other predictors were associated with support for curtailing rights of non-EU migrants. An increase in attendance at religious services or meetings, indicative of greater religiosity, was associated with reduced support for the control of non-EU migrants. Self-reported conservatives were more supportive of curtailing rights of non-EU migrants. And self-rated prejudice was associated with increased support for curtailing rights of non-EU migrants. Although self-rated prejudice was associated with support for curtailing rights of both EU and non-EU migrants in Models 1 and 3, this association is significantly mediated by threat perceptions. Although intergroup contact was found to reduce perceived threat, and in turn affect policy attitudes toward EU migrants, no such evidence of mediation was detected concerning policy attitudes toward non-EU migrants.

Next, we examine whether perceptual threat is associated with support for more punitive criminal policies more generally by turning to Table 3. Results revealed that respondents from managerial and professional occupations were less likely to support more punitive criminal sanctions compared with respondents in lower supervisory, technical, semi-routine and routine occupations. Greater religiosity, indicated by regular religious service and meeting attendance, was also associated with reduced support for stricter crime control. An increase in age group was also associated with reduced support for punitive criminal sanctions.

Regarding the key explanatory variables in this study, greater perceptions that migrants represent an economic threat and that migrants increase crime rates were both associated with greater support for more punitive crime control policies. An examination of standardized beta coefficients revealed that the perception that immigrants increase crime was the strongest predictor of support for tougher criminal sanctions. Perceived criminal threat from migrants had the greatest association with support for more punitive criminal sanctions of all indicators. These findings support the idea that individuals invoke deep rooted racial stereotypes (in this case, that immigrants increase crime rates) when they evaluate preferences for punitive criminal sanctions and crime control policy (Ousey and Unnever 2012). Interestingly, however, perceptions that migrants represent an economic threat fell below conventional levels of statistical significance after controlling for individual perceptions that immigrants increase crime.

We also find partial support for the intergroup contact hypothesis. In Model 1 of Table 3, having foreign friends is associated with reduced support for punitive criminal sanctions. Once perceptual threat measures were entered in Model 2, the effect of foreign friends was significantly diminished. Specifically, 44 percent of the relation between foreign friends and support for punitive criminal sanctions was mediated by perceptual criminal threat (bootstrap coefficient = −.092, 95 percent confidence interval [CI] = [−.124, −.059]). We also found that 37 percent of the relation between foreign friends and support for punitive criminal sanctions was mediated by economic threat perception (bootstrap coefficient = −.079, 95 percent CI = [−.106, −.052]). Consistent with some prior research (Pickett et al. 2014), we suggest that intergroup contact reduces perceived threat, and in turn affects policy attitudes.

Discussion

Studies have often linked growth in minority populations with greater social control and administration of criminal justice. These associations are often thought to be mediated by perceived economic threats among the in-group population, and subsequent changes in support of the local population for control (Kent and Jacobs 2005). Our study revealed that economic threat was an

Table 3. OLS Estimates of Immigrant Threat on Support for Punitive Criminal Sanctions.

	Punitive criminal sanctions			
	Model 1		Model 2	
Explanatory Variables	Coefficient	*SE*	Coefficient	*SE*
Economic threat	—	—	0.081†	0.038
Criminal threat	—	—	0.343***	0.033
Sex	−0.081†	0.040	−0.068†	0.034
Age group	−0.094*	0.036	−0.108**	0.028
Foreign born parents	0.017	0.050	0.059	0.047
Foreign born partner	−0.033	0.034	−0.004	0.032
Foreign friends	−0.120**	0.029	−0.081*	0.036
Married	0.026	0.039	0.002	0.036
Conservative	0.042	0.044	0.022	0.037
Occupation class: Intermediate	−0.014	0.037	0.051	0.033
Occupational class: Managerial	−0.219**	0.063	−0.135*	0.053
Higher education	−0.063	0.043	−0.036	0.034
Work part-time	−0.027	0.044	−0.025	0.039
Receives state benefits	0.017	0.037	0.022	0.038
Self-rated racial prejudice	0.169***	0.033	0.072†	0.038
Religiosity	−0.085*	0.031	−0.058*	0.023
Observations	846		846	
R^2	.191		.313	
Highest VIF	3.35		3.43	
Mean VIF	1.79		1.82	

Note. Standard errors are corrected for clustering in region. All models include dummy variables for regional area, save "North East England" as reference. Standardized coefficients are presented. OLS = ordinary least squares; VIF = variance inflation factor.
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. Two-tailed.

important predictor of support for curtailing rights of migrants in Britain. Perceived economic threat was also associated with support for more punitive crime control policy. In this regard, our study provided evidence for the immigrant threat hypothesis in Britain and our results are consistent with prior studies (Pickett and Chiricos 2012; Wang 2012; Wheelock et al. 2011). Our results also offered some partial support for the intergroup contact hypothesis. Research on anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe has found that a lack of familiarity and fear over conflict of values and culture may better explain the relationship between out-group size and outcomes in attitudes which may be supportive of social control (Schneider 2008). Yet, growth in immigration and contact with immigrants may alleviate these fears and defuse stereotypes about recently arrived populations. We found that having a partner or friends who are foreign born was modestly and negatively associated with a reduction in support for curtailing rights of migrants.

Interestingly, however, our study offers several unique findings and contributions to the literature that warrant further discussion. First, perceptual criminal threat has a greater impact on support for policies limiting the rights of migrants in the United Kingdom, when the migrants in question are from the EU. Although criminal threat seemingly trumps economic threat when individuals evaluate their preferences for curtailing rights of EU migrants, economic threat clearly predominates when evaluating preferences for curtailing rights of non-EU migrants. In addition, perceived criminal threat had the greatest impact on preferences for more punitive crime control. Combined, these findings speak to both the prevalence and impact of the

association between immigration and crime. Despite the preponderance of evidence in the United Kingdom (Bell et al. 2013; Bell and Machin 2013; Stansfield 2014) that refutes an association between recent immigration and crime, public opinion has remained committed to the idea that recently arrived immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, represent a substantial criminal threat (McLaren and Johnson 2007). Contributing to these beliefs, politicians have at times been guilty of misrepresenting evidence on the extent of crime committed by newly arrived immigrants (Morris 2013), a perception that in turn exerts considerable influence on public policy related to the entire process of immigration.

These findings also offer two important implications for group threat research. First, we echo recent studies (e.g., Stupi et al. 2016; Wang 2012) to note the importance of incorporating criminal threat into studies of public opinion and policy preferences. A recent study in the United States (Chiricos et al. 2014) focusing on the social control of undocumented immigrants found that perceived economic and cultural threats were the strongest predictors of policy preferences, more so than individual-level characteristics or contextual threat factors. The present findings suggest that the perception that immigrants commit crime has an even greater effect on policy preferences in the British context. It is also important to consider the different context of Britain, where national unemployment levels are lower than in the United States. Nevertheless, the importance of perceptual criminal threat as it relates directly to the curtailing of rights in the United Kingdom, as well as its relation to crime control policy, highlights the value of managing fears and stereotypes about immigrant criminality. Considering evidence about political discourse and media portrayals of migrants heightening the emotional responses of British citizens to immigration, politicians and the media must take seriously their role in helping to reduce ethnic antagonism resulting from threat narratives built upon false perceptions of immigrant population size, criminal threat, and resistance to assimilation.

Second, we emphasize the need for research into criminal threat that remains sensitive to different migrant groups and their history and context of reception. Regrettably, our study was unable to deconstruct opinions and policy preferences by country of origin due to data limitations. Yet, immigration from Ireland and other Western European nations may be received quite differently from Eastern European immigration and non-EU immigration. Threat narratives by Nigel Farage, whose U.K. Independence Party received 13 percent of the popular vote in the 2015 general election, admittedly gave preference to English-speaking immigrants from Australia and India over Eastern European migrants because they "understand the British legal system" ("BBC Newsnight" 2015). Although this study is not a full test of the group threat perspective, it echoes the findings of Mikael Hjerm and Kikuki Nagayoshi (2011) in suggesting group threat theory must continue to be developed by examining the effects of specific threats that are directly related to the specific composition of immigrant populations.

A limitation lies in cross-sectional data. The paper assumes (based on theory) that threat perceptions influence policy support. It remains possible that the extent to which one supports restricting the rights of migrants causes variation in attitudes about immigrants as an economic or cultural threat. In this sense, attitudes about immigration may act as an ex post facto justification for an already held policy preference about immigrant rights. This seems unlikely, however, as a policy preference will typically be developed on the grounds of an existing opinion or knowledge of a subject. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that the extent to which one supports criminal sanctions would cause variation in attitudes about immigrants.

A final important limitation of the current study is the inability to measure specific contextual threats which may increase feelings of threat and, as a result, prejudice attitudes and policy support (Quillian 1995). In recent years, for example, major rioting in England, political campaigning, terrorist incidents in Europe, and significant cuts in government spending could all increase feelings of threat. As an example, a recent study by de Rooij and colleagues (2015) found that prejudice toward Eastern European migrants, as well as black British minorities, increased after

media coverage of the riots in 2011, but no increase in prejudice toward Muslims in the United Kingdom was witnessed. This was explained by more positive media coverage of Muslims in Britain as defenders of their communities in London (de Rooij et al. 2015). Results should be considered in light of the absence of these contextual measures and how individuals internalized and reacted to such conditions.

Nevertheless, the story told by our results offer important policy implications not just in Britain, but for all countries undergoing significant population diversification. The findings emphasize the potential policy consequences that can occur if anti-immigrant political groups and policy-making officials are given the support of the public (Charteris-Black 2006). Many European countries are at a critical juncture, with anti-migrant political platforms seeking to ride a movement which has seen a majority of British voters choose to leave the EU. For example, the French presidential primaries saw a surge of support for the National Front Candidate Marine Le Pen whose campaign largely focused on security and immigration. Furthermore, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States may signal a growth in anti-immigrant platforms worldwide. With these recent successes, it bears thinking about the impact of fear mongering and feeding perceptual threats in Britain and elsewhere on policy directives. And those perceived threats, especially beliefs that immigration increases crime, could seemingly be instrumental in supporting policies limiting the rights of migrants already in Britain, as well as bolstering crime control policies for the entire population.

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Notes

1. Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to ensure that the two separate samples (individuals asked about European Union [EU] migrants and individuals asked about non-EU migrants) did not differ significantly along any variables used in this study. Results revealed that the two samples were not significantly different from each other.
2. The age of respondent was grouped into seven categories by the British Social Attitudes Survey designers. The groupings, from youngest to oldest, are ages 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 59, 60 to 64, and 65 and over.
3. To test whether perceived threat mediated the relationship between intergroup contact and support for social control in Table 2, Model 2, we first assessed whether intergroup contact was directly related to perceived threat. Having foreign friends ($p < .0001$) and having a foreign-born partner ($p = .022$) were both negatively and significantly associated with criminal threat perceptions. Having foreign friends ($p < .0001$) and having a foreign-born partner ($p = .002$) were also both negatively and significantly associated with economic threat perceptions. Mediation models were estimated in Stata via sgmediation and bootstrapping with case resampling. Confidence intervals (CIs) produced via this method correspond with Kristopher Preacher and Andrew Hayes (2004) CIs. If the interval did not contain zero, the indirect effect was considered statistically significant. As an example, criminal threat perceptions significantly mediated the relation between having foreign friends and supporting the control of EU migrants, observed coefficient = −.064, CI = [−.099, −.028]. Criminal threat perceptions also significantly mediated the relation between having a foreign-born partner and supporting the control of EU migrants, observed coefficient = −.031, CI = [−.058, −.004].

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