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## Different groups, different threats: public attitudes towards immigrants<sup>‡</sup>

Timothy Hellwig\* and Abdulkader Sinno\*

Department of Political Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA

### ABSTRACT

Research on attitudes towards immigrants devotes much attention to the relative effects of economic and social-psychological factors for understanding sentiment towards immigrants, conceived in general terms. In this article, we advance this work by arguing that the context framing immigration concerns leads publics to associate different types of immigrants with different threats. An issue context that diminishes support for one 'type' can boost it for another. Evidence from an original survey experiment in Britain supports this claim. Security fears affect attitudes towards Muslim immigrants but economic concerns bear on views towards Eastern Europeans. While concern about crime adversely affects sentiment for East Europeans but casts Muslims more positively, cultural threats have the opposite effect. By shifting the focus onto the qualities of different types of immigrants, we highlight the importance of the target immigrant group for understanding public attitudes.

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Immigration; public opinion;  
Muslims; East Europeans;  
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Immigration ranks among the most salient issues shaping politics in Western democracies today, engendering substantial negative attitudes towards those perceived as outsiders. What drives such attitudes? Researchers have asked whether opposition to immigrants is due primarily to perceived economic threat, cultural threat, or to some combination of the two. Economic arguments test predictions of models of labour market competition and immigrants' use of public services (Mayda 2006; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). Studies emphasising cultural elements focus on threats to national identity (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004), religion (McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011), values and beliefs (Fetzer 2000; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007), ethnic differences (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008), or conservative social attitudes (Ford 2011). Other studies highlight the effect of security fears (Wike and Grim 2010; Lahav and Courtemanche 2012) and concern about crime (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Fitzgerald, Curtis, and Corliss 2012). These accounts speak to the complex and multifaceted nature of sentiments towards immigrants.

**CONTACT** Abdulkader Sinno ✉ [asinno@indiana.edu](mailto:asinno@indiana.edu)

<sup>‡</sup>The underlying research materials for this article can be accessed at <http://www.sinno.com/publications>

\*The author names are in alphabetical order to reflect equal contributions.

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Despite a wide range of approaches, current explanations generally share a focus on the personal experiences or sociotropic concerns of non-immigrant publics. In this study, we take a different approach by starting instead with the identities of the target immigrant groups. We begin with the assumption that anti-immigrant sentiment is driven by threats to the social order in Western societies. However, we argue that the substance of these threats, be they real or just perceived, depends on how various minority and immigrant groups activate different *types* of threat perceptions. Immigrant types, we assert, are related in the public's mind to economic and labour market considerations, to cultural identity, or to more tangible considerations like safety and law and order. Perceiving a specific threat leads individuals to react negatively to immigrant groups associated with this particular threat.

To test whether different considerations affect sentiment towards contextually relevant categories of immigrants we perform an experiment, embedded in a survey of the British public, where subjects are randomly assigned to one of three groups. Two groups are primed to conceive of immigrants in terms of type, either as 'Muslim' or as 'East European'. The third group receives no group-specific labels and serves as a control. Subjects in each group receive a battery of questions associating the immigrant group in question with four sets of considerations, corresponding to the range of threats elicited by immigrants: economic, cultural, security, and crime.

The evidence from the experiment supports our intuition. While *levels* of support are broadly similar across immigrant groups, this similarity masks substantial differences in the *determinants* of attitudes towards each group. Immigration framed as a security threat affects negatively attitudes towards Muslim immigrants. While economic considerations affect the popular standing of migrants from Eastern Europe, they have no bearing on the other groups. Further, association with crime adversely shapes views towards East European immigrants but casts Muslims in a more positive light. And cultural threats have the opposite effect, undermining support for Muslims but benefiting East Europeans.

By showing that attitudes towards immigrants are shaped by the different identities, values, and threats individuals associate with specific groups, our research advances current scholarship in several directions. First, while a handful of studies compare publics' attitudes across different immigrant groups (Burns and Gimpel 2000; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015), ours is the first to show that a single immigration-related threat can have different effects for different immigrant groups. A particular framing of the issue may induce restrictionist attitudes towards one group of immigrants but boost support for another. Second, while a consensus in the literature has emerged pointing towards socio-psychological factors as relatively more important than economic ones, our study shows how such generalisations do not hold up once we account for heterogeneity in target groups. And third, we show that attaching specific identities to immigrant groups can have 'spillover' effects for immigrants in general: immigration is 'Islamised' in Britons' consciousness in the context of security frames and 'East-Europeanised' in the context of crime, regardless of the group in question. This may very well be because members of the public, as Blinder (2015) tells us, imagine different types of immigrants when prompted about immigration.

The next section expands on the above by demonstrating the need to examine attitudes towards immigrants in terms of different types. We also develop hypotheses on how sensitivity to economic, cultural, security and crime threats should affect attitudes towards

two important immigrant groups in the UK- Muslims and East Europeans. We then introduce our data, a survey-based experiment conducted in the United Kingdom. Data analyses examine the effects of these four factors on sentiment towards Muslim immigrants, immigrants from Eastern Europe, and a 'generic' baseline group. The final section concludes with implications for future research.

### Attitudes towards immigrants: the importance of target group

What explains anti-immigrant sentiment? Researchers have identified a wide range of sources, many of which address notions of threat. Natives' anxieties about new groups' presence in society may be shaped by real threats, affecting their well-being, or only perceived threats (Pettigrew, Wagner, and Christ 2007). Regardless, prominently featured are threats due to economic competition, cultural identity, security concerns, and crime. With respect to economic factors, theories of labour market competition predict that individuals will oppose immigration of workers with skills similar to their own but support immigration of workers with different skill levels (Mayda 2006). Studies that emphasise cultural bases of sentiment build in part on the symbolic politics literature and social identity theory (Tajfel 2010). Such analyses emphasise feelings of threat to national identity (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004), religious values (McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011), cultural values and religious beliefs (Fetzer 2000; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Poynting and Mason 2007), ethnic differences (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008), and conservative social attitudes (Ford 2011). With respect to security concerns, it has shown that terrorist perceptions associated with immigrant groups produce psychological distress that increase feelings of threat from minorities and, consequently, predicts exclusionist attitudes towards them (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Lahav and Courtemanche 2012). And while few studies have probed the effect of crime levels on attitudes towards immigrants, Fitzgerald, Curtis, and Corliss (2012) report evidence that majorities in Western countries believe immigration increases crime levels.

The literature, then, provides us with a range of potentially important factors for understanding sentiment towards immigrants. Interestingly, less attention has been paid to whether and how these factors vary with the attributes of the immigrants themselves. Politicians, publics and media outlets often articulate their views on immigration in terms of particular migrant groups' ethnic, geographic, or religious identity. Negative discourses are often directed against particular immigrant groups and there is evidence to suggest that attitudes towards different types of immigrants vary (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2010, 2016; Dancygier 2010; Ford 2011; Harell et al. 2012; Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013). And yet, research on the underpinnings of popular attitudes generally does not address sentiment towards particular types of immigrants.<sup>1</sup> More recently, a few studies have examined how the immigrants' area of origin, economic status, and religion shape popular attitudes.<sup>2</sup> This strand of work represents an important step forward; one on which we build here.

However, in not examining differences across immigrant groups owing to economic, cultural, security and crime drivers of immigrant sentiment, existing research is unable to isolate group-specific concerns that shape popular attitudes. This oversight carries important implications. General measures of sentiment towards immigrants mask substantial differences in the underpinnings of attitudes towards different culturally and

politically salient categories of immigrants. When opinion surveys gauge sentiment towards immigrants in general, and without reference to specific groups, they conflate the impact of all these complex associations in unpredictable and misleading ways.<sup>3</sup>

## Theory

The theory we test is developed in three parts. We begin by straightforwardly asserting that the determinants of immigrant support are shaped by the identity of the target group. Particular immigrant groups are associated with different sorts of threats in popular discourse, in statements made by politicians, and in the coverage of media outlets (Ivarsflaten 2008). Individuals who perceive that performance in a particular area – be it the economy, culture, security, or crime – is poor, will react negatively to immigrant groups associated with threats in that sphere.

From these general expectations, we develop specific arguments with respect to our case. To gain purchase on the influence of specific immigrant group characteristics on public sentiment in Britain, we focus on two salient types of immigrants: East Europeans and Muslims. British discourse has focused disproportionately on these two groups and the threats they represent. Eastern European immigration triggers concerns about the economy and crime. The mid-2000s expansion of the EU's Single Market to include the formerly communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe has engendered discourses against skilled labourers from the East coming to take well-paying jobs. Therefore, people who think the economy is in trouble or that crime is rising will be more opposed to East European immigration, as they've learned to associate economic competition and crime with that group. Meanwhile, Immigrants from different Muslim countries, whether from the Middle East or from South Asia, have been increasingly portrayed as 'Muslim' (Allievi 2005) and associated with terrorist threats (Morey and Yaqin 2011) after 9/11. Muslim immigration triggers concerns about security and cultural change. Those who think Britain has become more threatened by terrorism will be more likely to oppose Muslim immigration but be no more opposed to East European immigration.

While these designations, 'Muslim' and 'East European', connote different types of identity (religious and regional, respectively), media and political discourses nonetheless construct them as distinct and meaningful categories of immigrants. In keeping with the four factors identified above – labour markets, culture, security, and crime – we propose four hypotheses pertaining to sentiment towards different immigrant groups in Britain.<sup>4</sup> First, studies which model sentiment towards immigrants on the basis of economic considerations are motivated primarily by theories of self-interest, competition over resources, and the influence of educational and professional trajectories (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). Further, evidence suggests that economic crises increase the importance of economic considerations on sentiment towards immigrants (Dancygier and Donnelly 2012). In Britain, debates on natives' ability to keep or find jobs in competition with immigrants from Eastern Europe heading westward to improve their economic prospects have been particularly intense. Events, such as the EU's eastern enlargement in 2004 and the financial crisis in 2008, have only increased the salience of economic-based concerns attached to migrants from Europe. Our first hypothesis, therefore, is that economics-based threats will disproportionately affect sentiment towards East European immigrants.

Many argue, however, that cultural threats more strongly shape sentiment towards immigrants than economic ones (inter alia, Lahav 2004; McLaren and Johnson 2007; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). With respect to Britain, studies have considered cultural factors as diverse as racism, perceptions of differences in values and ways of life including religious practices and general belief systems, and fear of loss of national identity and degradation of community (Paul 1997; Lewis 2005; McLaren and Johnson 2007).<sup>5</sup> Following the end of the communist regimes, newspapers often depicted East European immigrants in a positive light, alluding to their whiteness and emphasising cultural similarity and work ethics. However, tabloids soon fell upon negative crime and economic-based frames in their reports (Cekalova 2008). The early positive attitudes often included in the same breath cultural rebukes of Muslim immigrants, such as the following extract from *The Times*: ‘They [the Poles] are people who want to work and learn English quickly, who dress like us and who are not prone to strange religious fanaticism.’<sup>6</sup> Indeed, discourses connecting cultural threat to ‘Muslim’ immigrants are a staple of British media and politics today. We therefore expect culture-based frames to adversely affect public views towards Muslim immigrants.

While much of the literature speaks to the relative importance of economics and cultural accounts, the post-9/11 environment brought an additional set of concerns. Security and terrorism concerns have increasingly been associated with immigrant groups in many Western societies (Morey and Yaqin 2011). Britain is no exception. Here we make the straightforward claim that the effect of terrorism perceptions will have a disproportionate effect on natives’ sentiment towards Muslim immigrants.

Finally, we expect crime considerations to matter for attitudes towards different types of immigrants, but more so towards East Europeans. Historically, the British public has associated crime, even specific criminal activities, with particular immigrant groups. Russians, Jews and Latvians were associated with robbery and firearms at the end of the nineteenth century; the Chinese with the opium trade in the 1920s and heroin in the 1960s; the Italians with protection rackets, robbery, and gaming in the 1930s; the Maltese with vice in the 1940s; the Pakistanis and Turks with heroin in the 1970s and 1980s; and the Colombians with cocaine in the 1990s. Today, popular discourse misleadingly associates crime with both Muslim and East European immigration, with tabloid media frequently featuring pieces on East European ‘vice gangs’ and ‘Muslim’ rape gangs that target ‘white’ adolescent girls (Kehrberg 2007).<sup>7</sup> Still, East Europeans receive the bulk of coverage in terms of crime.

### The survey experiment

While most studies of immigration attitudes test arguments using observational data, researchers have increasingly turned to survey-based experiments to better isolate competing causal factors such as culture, ethnicity, and labour markets (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). Building on this work, we employ an original experimental design embedded in the British Elections Study’s June 2011 Continuous Monitoring Survey (CMS) and administered by YouGov.<sup>8</sup> The experiment randomly assigns respondents to one of three comparably sized groups, a control group in which immigration was communicated in general terms, and two treatment groups in which immigration was associated with ‘Muslims’

or 'East Europeans'.<sup>9</sup> While this is not an exhaustive multidimensional treatment, we isolate these two types of immigrants because they are highly salient targets of political, media and cultural discourses in the U.K. And even though there are other groups that are targeted with particular stereotypes (e.g. non-Muslim Indians and Caribbean immigrants), and the categories of Muslims and East Europeans overlap on the margins (e.g. Bosnian Muslims), focusing on a pair of salient groups provides us with the necessary leverage to test claims using an experimental design.

Our analyses exploit two features of the experimental design. First, we use the treatment-based primes to assess sentiment towards the different types of immigrants by asking subjects 'To what extent do you think Britain should allow [immigrants/Muslim immigrants/immigrants from Eastern Europe] to come and live here?'<sup>10</sup> Responses are coded 'allow many to come and live here' (4), 'allow some' (3), 'allow a few' (2), and 'allow none' (1), to produce the variable PROIMIG. The second key aspect of the experiment gauges subjects' agreement with a set of issues (economic, cultural, security, and crime-based) associated with the type of immigrants that define their treatment.

Survey items are designed to elicit responses in terms of four distinct considerations: economic, cultural, security and crime.<sup>11</sup> To isolate *economic*-based considerations, respondents were asked to express their degree of agreement with four statements: [*Immigrants/Muslim immigrants/East European immigrants*] *take jobs away from other British workers; abuse the welfare system; contribute to the British economy; and are needed to do the jobs other British people won't do.* We know from Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007) that natives attribute cultural traits at different rates to different immigrant minorities. Sentiment towards Muslims, in particular, is driven by complex cultural judgments. We build on this approach to examine the effects of cultural frames on respondents' sentiment towards immigrants by asking subjects whether [*Immigrants/Muslim immigrants/East European immigrants*] *are hardworking; do not share British values; refuse to integrate; limit women's rights in Britain; enrich British culture; and are no different to anyone else.* To test the effect of framing immigrants in terms of security, we include the statement [*Immigrants/Muslim immigrants/East European immigrants*] *are a security threat.* And finally, we test the effect of framing immigration in terms of crime: [*Immigrants/Muslim immigrants/East European immigrants*] *commit too much crime.*<sup>12</sup>

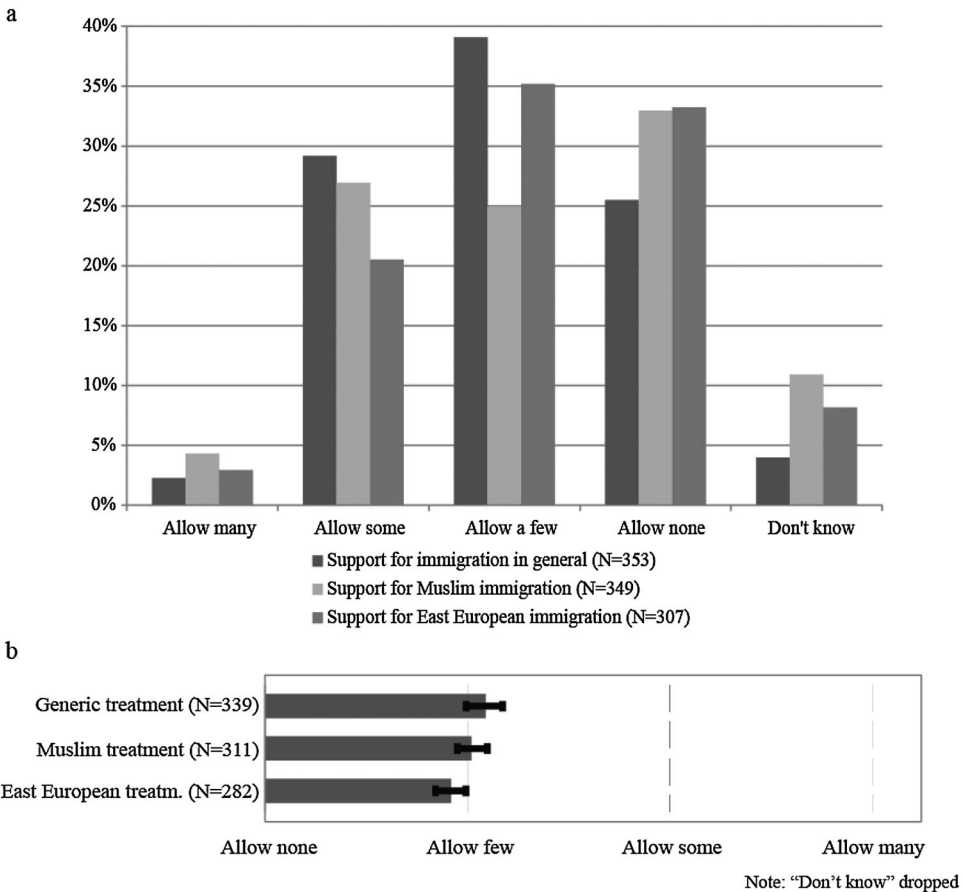
Statements were randomly ordered across respondents to reduce the possibility of order effects, including the possibility that an emotive reaction to the use of one frame might affect responses to the ones that follow. We code the five-category responses, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, such that the higher the value of the response mean, the more supportive the respondent is for the target group in the context of the question's frame.

In order to test whether perception of deterioration in one issue area affects sentiment towards the immigrant group most associated with it, we model support for different types of immigrants as a function of respondents' performance evaluations of the economy, security, and crime. Each question asks respondents whether the situation – pertaining to threats arising from the economy, terrorism, or crime – has improved or declined over the past year.<sup>13</sup> The multivariate analyses leverage answers from respondents to questions asked separately in a different part of the survey to avoid endogeneity. A further benefit of these retrospective threat items is that they are not 'coupled' by having attitudes about immigration influence responses to other items (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007).

Given variation in how different types of immigrant groups are perceived in citizens' minds, as apparent across the survey frames (Appendix B), we expect that the effects of assessments of system performance on immigration attitudes, as measured by PROIMIG, differ according to whether the target immigrant group is Muslim, East European, or neither (generic).

**Analysis: performance evaluations and sentiment towards immigrants**

Figure 1(a) provides the distribution of responses to PROIMIG, with the first bar of each cluster of three representing those answering the question about *generic* immigration, the second about *Muslim* immigration, and the third about *Eastern European* immigration. Findings, displayed in Figure 1(b), show that Britons are generally not supportive of immigration – the median response outcome is a preference for ‘allowing a few to come and live here’, across treatments.<sup>14</sup> Further, they are slightly more supportive of immigration in general than the immigration of both Muslims and, more sharply, East Europeans. The share of those who are adamantly against Muslim and East European immigration (i.e.



**Figure 1.** (a) Support for different types of immigrants (percentages). (b) Means for support for immigrants by treatment, with 95% confidence bound.

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those who would ‘not allow any’) is larger than for immigration described in generic terms. However, these differences are not large substantively or, with the exception of the difference of means between generic and East European immigrants, statistically significant.

Though the distribution of general sentiment is fairly similar regardless of immigrant type, we find considerable cross-type variation when respondents are queried through the use of economy, culture, security, and crime-based frames (see Appendix B). Reactions to these four theoretically driven groups of frames indicate that the determinants of public opinion are contingent on match of target group and concern.

We next perform a set of multivariate analyses where we examine the effects of performance evaluations on support for immigrants. Specifically, models regress PROIMIG on *Economic Evaluations*, *Terror Evaluations*, and *Crime Evaluations*, along with a set of demographic items for education, age and gender.<sup>15</sup> Given the nature of the dependent variable, we estimate ordered probit models. To find whether the effects of performance evaluations differ across immigrant groups, we use an interactive specification of the form

$$\begin{aligned} \mu_i = & \alpha + \theta_1 M_i + \theta_2 EE_i + \beta_1 \text{Economy}_i + \delta_1 (M_i * \text{Economy}_i) + \omega_1 (EE_i * \text{Economy}_i) \\ & + \beta_2 \text{Terror}_i + \delta_2 (M_i * \text{Terror}_i) + \omega_2 (EE_i * \text{Terror}_i) + \beta_3 \text{Crime}_i + \delta_3 (M_i * \text{Crime}_i) \\ & + \omega_3 (EE_i * \text{Crime}_i) + Z_i \gamma, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

Where  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  represent the effects of the  $M$  and  $EE$  treatments relative to being in the generic (control) group on individual  $i$ 's preferences for immigration. The  $\beta$  s measure the effect of retrospective performance evaluations. The  $\delta$  s and  $\omega$  s estimate the mediating influence of the Muslim ( $M$ ) and East European ( $EE$ ) treatments on the effects of performance evaluations on immigrant sentiment. These parameters provide information regarding the extent to which being cued for a particular immigrant type conditions the influence of retrospective performance evaluations. For instance,  $\beta_1 + \delta_1$  estimates the effect of economic evaluations on the subject's support for *Muslim* immigrants, while  $\beta_1 + \omega_1$  does the same for *East European* immigrants. Finally,  $\gamma$  gauges the effects of a set of socio-demographic covariates  $Z$  for gender, age, and education.

Results are reported in Table 1 in four models. The first model examines whether the effect of economic performance assessments varies across treatment. The positively signed and statistically significant coefficient on the interaction with the East European group implies that economic perceptions have a stronger influence on attitudes towards immigrants when the latter are characterised as originating from those nations. Model 2 examines security concerns and shows, consistent with our argument, that the terrorist threat is activated when immigrants are viewed as Muslims. And in Model 3 we take up the crime issue, finding a greater sensitivity here for the East European prime, as judged by coefficients on the interaction terms. Finally, Model 4, reports estimates for the full three-issue model as described in equation (1).<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, we find that the interactive parameters contribute to model fit, implying the presence of non-identical slopes across treatment groups.<sup>17</sup> In what follows, we describe the effects of economic, cultural, security, and crime factors in greater detail, drawing both on the fully specified model 4 in Table 1 and on the group-specific items described above.

*Economic frames and evaluations.* With respect to economic perceptions, recall that we expect the economy to have the largest effect on attitudes towards East European

**Table 1.** Modelling individual support for immigrants, interactive specifications.

	(1) Treatment conditioning Economy	(2) Treatment conditioning Terror	(3) Treatment conditioning Crime	(4) Treatment conditioning All
Muslim Prime	-0.04 (0.11)	0.01 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.10)	0.01 (0.11)
E. European Prime	-0.13 (0.11)	-0.26** (0.10)	-0.11 (0.11)	-0.09 (0.12)
Economic Evaluations	-0.02 (0.05)			-0.08 (0.06)
Muslim Prime × Economy	0.08 (0.08)			-0.01 (0.09)
E. European Prime × Economy	0.14* (0.08)			0.12 (0.09)
Terror Evaluations		0.25** (0.07)		0.22** (0.07)
Muslim Prime × Terror		0.16* (0.09)		0.16 (0.10)
E. European Prime × Terror		-0.06 (0.10)		-0.18* (0.11)
Crime Evaluations			0.20** (0.06)	0.14** (0.07)
Muslim Prime × Crime			0.07 (0.09)	0.04 (0.09)
E. European Prime × Crime			0.16* (0.09)	0.19* (0.10)
Education	0.25** (0.03)	0.26** (0.03)	0.23** (0.03)	0.24** (0.03)
Age	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)
Female	0.12* (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.06 (0.07)
LR test: Generic vs. Muslim	2.40	3.64	2.30	4.62
LR test: Generic vs. East European	9.80**	6.45**	8.76**	12.80**
LR test: Muslim vs. East European	2.72	7.43**	2.03	12.78**
log likelihood	-1048.46	-1021.72	-1023.32	-1003.85
N	932	932	932	932

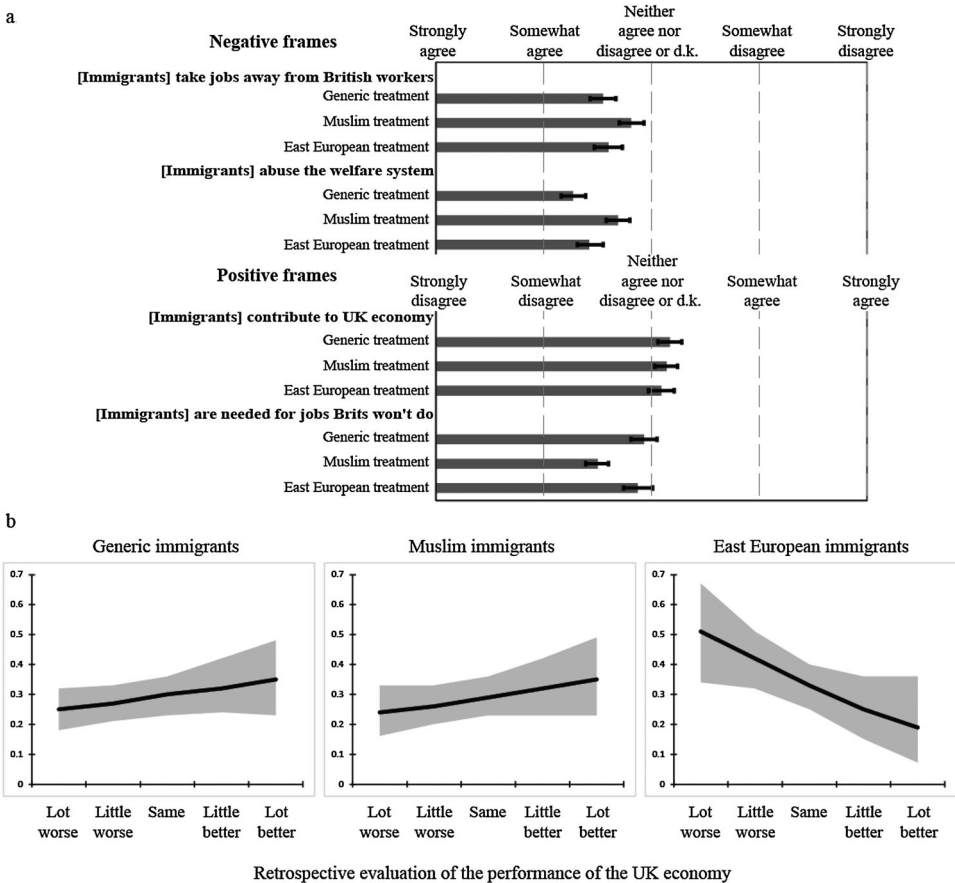
Notes: The dependent variable is PROIMIG. Cells report ordered probit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Cases weighted prior to estimation. The reference category for the treatment is generic immigrants. Threshold estimates for the model latent dependent variable not displayed to facilitate presentation.

\* $p < .10$ , two tailed test.

\*\* $p < .05$ , two tailed test.

immigrants. Figure 2(a) unpacks the survey items querying respondents on how immigrants relate to the British economy. Individuals are more likely to agree that generic immigrants abuse the welfare system (mean = 2.27) more so than they take jobs away from British workers (2.55). Respondents also adopt a more neutral attitude towards all types of immigrants (means between 3.09 and 3.17) in the context of a fiscal frame ('contribute to UK economy').<sup>18</sup> Muslim immigrants are seen to be far less likely than generic or East European immigrants to abuse the welfare system or take jobs away from British workers. At the same time, Muslims are viewed as the least needed in terms of filling a role in the labour market. All in all, comparisons of means show that sentiment towards generic immigrants with respect to economic frames is much more similar to sentiment towards East Europeans than towards Muslims. Results of the multivariate analysis are consistent with this finding (see also Ford [forthcoming](#)).

The multivariate analysis of immigrant attitudes reveals that perceptions of the economic environment shape preferences for more or less immigration. But, again, effects vary across groups. Employing estimates from Table 1 Model 4, Figure 2(b) shows that the anticipated effect of economic retrospections – whereby perceptions of an improving (deteriorating) economy leads to more (less) support for immigration – appears *only* in the



Note: Vertical axis reports the probability the respondent states that Britain "should allow no [immigrants/Muslim immigrants/immigrants from East Europe] to come and live here." Probabilities are produced from Table 1, Model 4. Horizontal axis captures how attitudes are affected by respondent's assessment of the performance of the British economy over the past 12 months.

**Figure 2.** (a) Means for each treatment group on economic issues, with 95% confidence bounds. (b) Effect of retrospective economy evaluation on the predicted probability of "allow none" response, with 95% confidence intervals.

case of the East European treatment. If the economy is perceived to be in decline, then respondents become less willing to accept East European immigrants than they are to accept Muslim migrants. In contrast, those who evaluate the economy as being 'a lot better' today than one year ago are slightly (1.3 times) *more* likely than those who think it was a lot worse to want to allow no generic or Muslim immigrants into the country but are 2.7 times *less* likely to completely oppose immigration from Eastern Europe. The upshot is that economic threat perceptions depress support for East European immigrants but not for Muslim immigrants.

Together, findings show that economic factors influence attitudes towards immigration in complex ways: perceptions of the state of the economy affect attitudes towards some categories of immigrants but not others, and these categories of immigrants are perceived differently in the context of different economic frames. By not considering differences among types of immigrant, on the one hand, and the types of economic concerns, on

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the other, previous work on the economy and attitudes towards immigrants risks making incorrect inferences.

*Culture-based frames.* We examine cultural stereotypes directed towards specific immigrant groups by posing six questions based on an equal number of positive and negative culturally based frames. Figure 3 provides a depiction of the means of attitudes towards each type of immigrant for the six culture-based frames. Britons perceive East European immigrants to have slightly more in common with British values and to be much more willing to integrate into British life than generic or Muslim immigrants in particular.<sup>19</sup> Muslim immigrants are viewed in particularly negative light with respect to women’s rights.<sup>20</sup> East Europeans are also perceived to be harder working than Muslims. Respondents react almost similarly, and relatively positively, to all types of immigrants in the context of the equity-evoking statement that they are ‘no different to anyone else’. On the other hand, both East Europeans and Muslims are considered to enrich British culture less than generic immigrants. Unsurprisingly, positively worded culture-based frames tend to elicit more favourable reactions than negative ones, with means 0.43

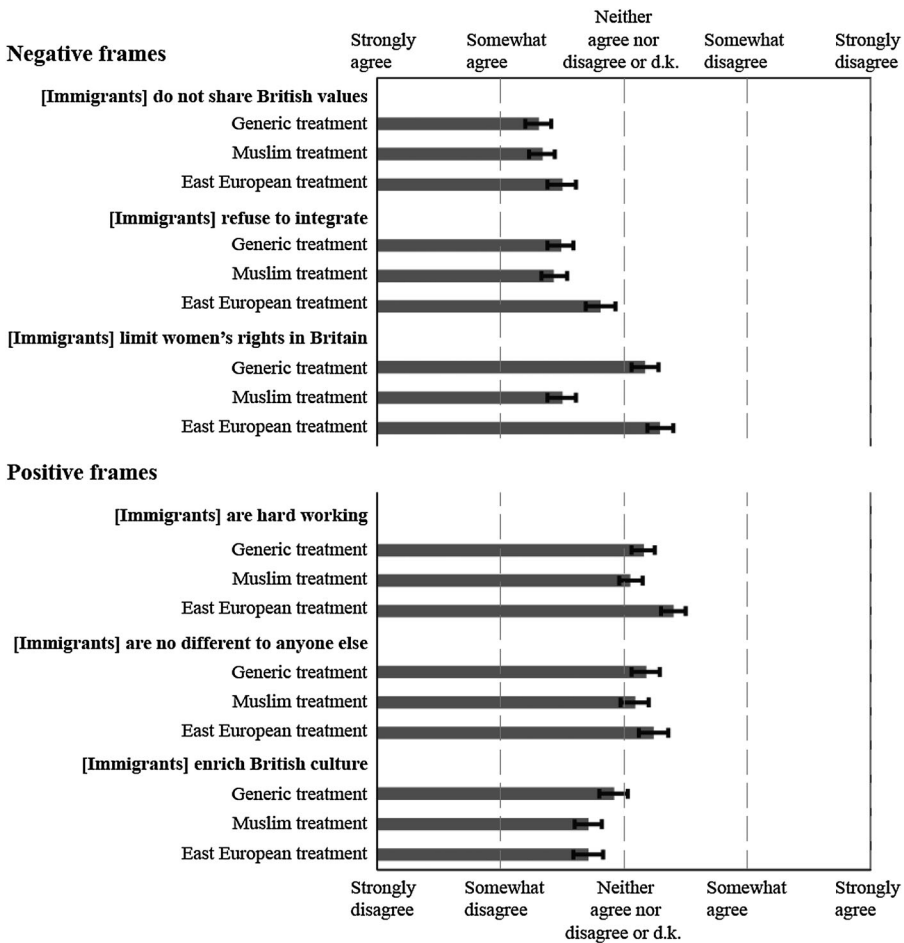


Figure 3. Means for each treatment group on cultural issues, with 95% confidence bounds.

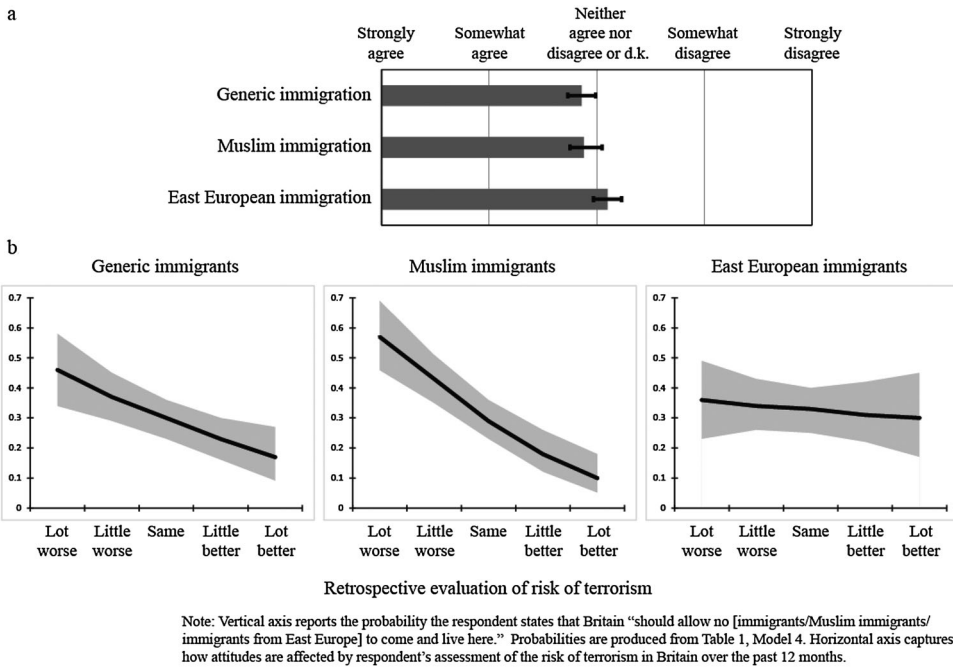
points higher for generic immigrants, 0.52 higher for Muslims, and 0.25 higher for East Europeans. We might conclude that while attitudes towards Muslims tend to be negative vis-à-vis generic and East European immigrants in the context of cultural frames, the former are particularly unfavourable in the context of *negative* cultural frames and therefore recover disproportionately when *positive* frames are used. This finding suggests that elites have some capacity to address or reshape cultural biases against unpopular minorities through their choice of discourse.

*Security frames and evaluations.* To gauge the intensity of sentiment towards the three immigrant groups with respect to security concerns, subjects were provided with the statement ‘immigrants are a security threat’. The wording seems to lead respondents to think about the Muslims/terrorism link when prompted, even when asked about generic immigrants (Figure 4(a)). Means are substantively and statistically indistinguishable for subjects undergoing the generic and Muslim treatments, and East Europeans receive much more favourable answers than both ( $p < 0.01$ ). It may be that when prompted on highly emotional and salient issues associated with a subset of immigrants, individuals transfer their attitudes to immigrants in general. If this is true, what matters is not whether the mean for perceiving Muslims as a security threat is distinguishable from that for generic immigrants, but that *both* are considerably lower than the mean for a group of immigrants – East Europeans – having no connection to Islam or terrorism in the public’s mind.

Figure 4(b) displays the influence of security assessments, as gauged in terms of terrorist threat, on predicted probabilities for ‘allow none’, as produced from estimates from Model 4 of Table 1. While security assessments have no perceptible effect on sentiment towards East European immigrants, they bear a large effect on sentiment towards Muslim and generic immigrants. Respondents who feel that the terror threat is a ‘lot better’ than it was a year ago are 5.7 times less likely to answer ‘allow none’ regarding Muslim immigrants and 2.7 times less likely to do the same for generic immigrants than respondents who feel that the terror threat is ‘a lot worse’ than it used to be. The change in odds of giving this negative answer for the same degree of change is statistically and substantively negligible for East European immigrants.

These results support the claim that the use of security frames and perceptions of a deteriorating security situation produce more negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants than towards other immigrant types. Further, negative sentiments towards Muslims in the context of security considerations spill over to immigrants generally, but not to specific non-Muslim groups. Immigration is ‘Islamised’ to a considerable degree in Britons’ consciousness in the context of terrorism frames.

*Crime frames and evaluations.* Finally, we examine ties between crime perceptions and attitudes towards immigrants. We ask respondents whether they agree with the statement that ‘[immigrants/Muslim immigrants/East European immigrants] commit too much crime’. From Figure 5(a) we see that the ratio of those who agree over those who disagree with the crime frame is 0.5 for Muslims, 1.7 for generic immigrants and 2.1 for East Europeans. These numbers, and the substantial difference in the averages of means among treatment groups, indicate that sentiment towards East Europeans is more likely to be shaped by crime considerations compared to attitudes towards Muslims. It also suggests that Britons ‘East-Europeanise’ immigration *in general* within the context of a crime frame.<sup>21</sup>

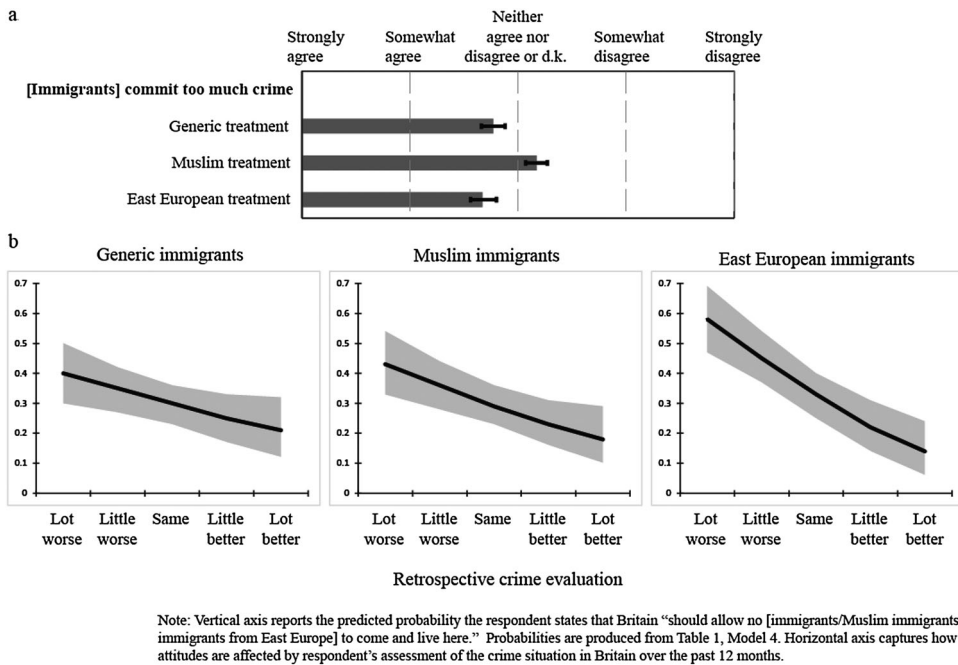


**Figure 4.** (a) Means for each treatment group when subjects primed on security with 95% confidence bounds. (b) Effect of retrospective security evaluation on the predicted probability of "allow none" response, with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 5(b) suggests that evaluations of the crime levels bears on preferences for accepting more immigrants across all treatments – individuals are more likely to oppose immigration if they perceive an improved crime situation. The slope, however, is steeper for East European immigrants than for the other two groups. Respondents who feel that the crime situation is a 'lot better' than it was a year ago are 4.2 times less likely to refuse allowing any East European immigrants and 2.4 times less likely to do the same for Muslim immigrants than respondents who feel that the crime situation is 'a lot worse' than it used to be. The odds ratio for generic immigrants is smaller than for the two specific immigrant types. The steeper slope for those receiving the East European treatment may indicate that crime perceptions affect attitudes towards this group more so than towards immigrants in general or, for that matter, Muslim immigrants.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

Faced with the task of summarising a vast and evolving literature, a recent review concludes that 'immigration attitudes show little evidence of being strongly correlated with personal economic circumstances (but) are shaped by sociotropic concerns about national-level impacts, whether those impacts are cultural or economic' (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 225). While concurring with this view, we submit that current research is limited in its capacity to identify the basis of immigration attitudes in two important ways. First, by limiting comparisons to 'culture' versus 'economics' arguments, current research is unable to discern the full range of complex determinants of sentiment



**Figure 5.** (a) Means for each treatment group on crime, with 95% confidence bounds. (b) Effect of retrospective crime evaluation on the predicted probability of "allow none" response, with 95% confidence intervals.

towards immigrants (cf: Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). Second, by conflating immigrant groups, researchers run the risk of glossing over variations in the bases of support for specific immigrant communities (cf: Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008). The result has been a situation of sustained disagreement on the underpinnings of sentiment in spite of growing scholarly interest in the topic.

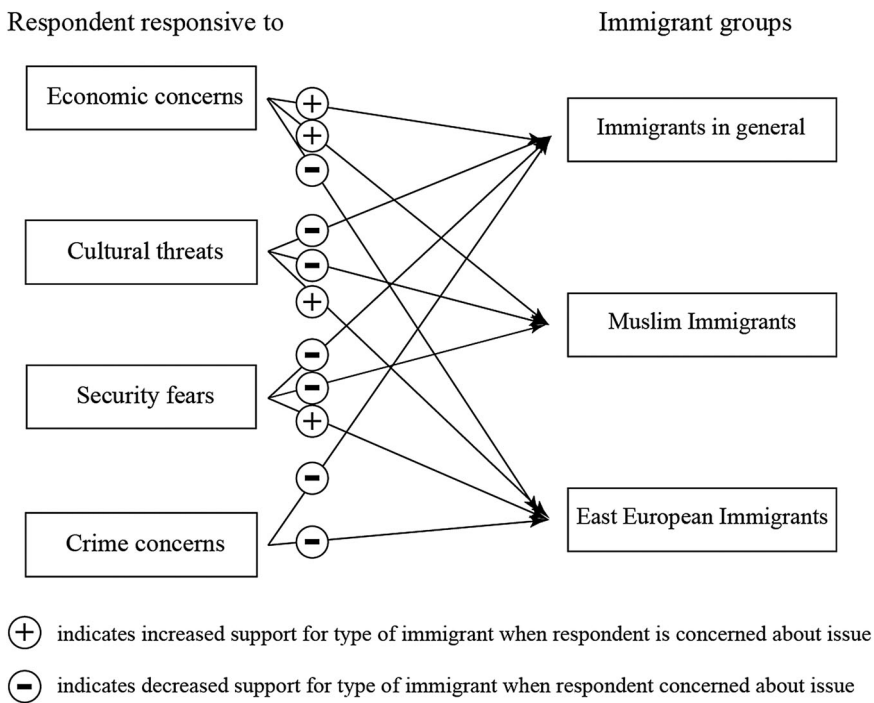
This study provides one way to address conflicting accounts. When individuals evaluate system performance poorly in specific issue areas, they are more likely to respond negatively towards the type of immigrant that is associated with the given domain. While levels of support are comparable across immigrant groups (Figure 1), this similarity masks substantial differences in the determinants of attitudes. Security concerns make attitudes towards Muslim immigrants more negative, while the popular standing of migrants from Eastern Europe is shaped by economic considerations. Further, worry about crime adversely affects views towards East Europeans but casts Muslims more positively. Cultural sensitivity has the opposite effect – it undermines support for Muslims but benefits East Europeans. And some concerns spill over to generic immigrants: immigration is 'Islamised' in the context of security and 'East-Europeanised' in the context of crime. These summary conclusions are displayed in Figure 6.

Publics in other countries of emigration associate particular threats with different types of immigrants as well. These publics are often exposed to anti-immigrant political and media discourses that target specific immigrant groups. Of course, targeted groups may differ from country to country and finer-grained distinctions are sometimes made within broader categories of immigrants, such as the different Muslim ethnic groups

(Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007) or Roma and Poles among East Europeans. We expect to find variation in the underpinnings of attitudes towards all categories of immigrants that are broadly accepted as relevant wherever there are dominant type-specific anti-immigration discourses.

Study results have many implications. For one, we show that it may be more fruitful to conceptualise attitudes towards minorities in terms of multidimensional sets of preferences than in terms of indiscriminate prejudice (Wike and Grim 2010), systems of hierarchies of acceptance by natives (Levin and Sidanius 1999), or ‘bands of others’ (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009). Publics, we show, do not rank different types of immigrants consistently in comparison to others on economic, cultural, security, and crime dimensions. They don't even rank them similarly within these broad categories in the case of economic and cultural concerns. Though further work is needed on this point, our results imply that hierarchies among immigrant types, if they exist, are attributable in great part to specific threats rather than general forms of prejudice.

Study results also shed light on policy choices and political and media strategies vis-à-vis immigrants. Multiculturalism as an organising principle of a *de facto* diverse society is under threat in European countries now more than ever (Kundnani 2007). Yet it would be costly for these societies to succumb to nativist impulses when around one-eighth of their populations are foreign born, with higher proportions in cities.<sup>23</sup> These countries’ future economic performance and their ability to meet fiscal responsibilities in the context of



**Figure 6.** How concerns about different areas affect sentiment towards different types of immigrants in the British economic, political, and cultural contexts.



rising debt and aging populations require the absorption and integration of young and productive cohorts of immigrants.

Threats to multiculturalism rise along with discourses that use anti-immigrant and anti-minority frames. Such discourses, in combination with other factors, undermine support for diversity and immigration (Hopkins 2010). Of course, politicians, bureaucrats and news producers make strategic choices about whether to cast particular immigrants in a positive or negative light based on their own assessments of sentiment among voters and news consumers. Future work should be directed at exploring linkages between media portrayals, media consumption, and group-specific attitudes. Quantifying the effects of these choices is an important next step in the study of public opinion and immigration. Political elites may not, however, be aware of the cumulative long-term effect of their negative discourses on public opinion and the cohesiveness of their multi-ethnic societies. They may also not be aware of their ability to influence attitudes through their choices.

Lastly, our approach also has the potential to explain differences in the ability of populist parties to the right to draw voters away from leftist parties by emphasising immigration fears – that is to explain where and when the issue has ‘flash potential’ (Messina 1989; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Leftist voters’ concerns may or may not be associated with groups of immigrants in a specific cultural, media and political environment, thus affecting the odds of such a strategy to succeed. Of course, populist parties themselves can slowly shape the political culture and create stereotypes of immigrants, but snapshot surveys can assess their mobilisation potential at critical junctures of an electoral cycle.

## Notes

1. Lack of attention may be due to limited data – few public opinion surveys allow analysts to discern individuals’ attitudes towards different types of immigrants *relative* to their views of immigrants with other attributes. The 2002 New Zealand Election Study asks respondents about support for immigrants from ‘Muslim countries’. The 1998 and 2001 Australian Election Studies include an item pertaining to ‘migrants who are from the Middle East’. The 2006 Pew Global Attitudes Survey asks respondents from four Western democracies whether it is ‘a good thing or a bad thing that people from the Middle East and North Africa come to live and work in this country’. The 2003 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey asks for attitudes that relate to individuals from three immigration areas: South Asia, the European Union, and Australia/New Zealand. The Transatlantic Trends Survey (2011) includes an embedded experiment to gauge sentiment towards Muslims and generic immigrants in five European countries and Hispanic versus generic immigrants in the US. The survey also gauges differences of attitudes towards the integration of each dyad of immigrants but does not address threats that are not cultural in the experiment. It does however address them in non-experimental survey questions about generic immigrants.
2. Examples include McLaren and Johnson 2007; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Strabac and Listhaug 2008; Ford 2011; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; and Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2016.
3. A case in point is the emerging consensus pointing to socio-psychological factors as driving immigrant sentiment among European and North American publics (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). This finding may stem from a particular identity respondents attach to ‘immigrants’. In the US, for instance, biases in media coverage imply that individuals are far more likely to view immigrants as Hispanic than as East Asian (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008).

4. These expectations should apply to publics in many immigrant-receiving European countries. Applying the analyses on the British case to other contexts is grounds for future research.
5. Ford (2011) addresses the complex cultural factors that affect Britons' attitudes towards immigrants from different regions in a longitudinal study of BSA survey data. Ford's study is limited, however, in that the BSA data do not allow him to provide precise mechanisms linking wide cultural proxies with sentiment.
6. Hames (2004), reported in Cekalova (2008)
7. On Muslims, see Bolognani (2009). On East Europeans, see Campbell (2012). Another group, Nigerians, is also often associated with fraud. One complication is that some East European immigrants (e.g. Albanians or Kosovars) who are frequently covered in media outlets could be of 'Muslim' background, but they are generally considered East Europeans rather than Muslims. See also Endley (2014).
8. The questionnaire and data are available at <http://bes2009-10.org/cms-data.php>.
9. Of the 1,009 respondents who took the online survey, 353 received the generic control treatment, 349 the 'Muslim' treatment, and 307 the 'East European' treatment. We report the distributions of key demographic variables for participants in these three randomly assigned groups in Appendix A in the supplementary information file.
10. Item construction follows that used in waves of the European Social Survey (e.g., Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007). 'Don't know' and no answer responses, comprising 7.6 percent of the sample, are omitted from the analysis.
11. In all cases, subjects were asked to respond to items with respect to the same immigrant group, such that each frame contained separate randomisations. We considered an alternative design with subjects randomized according both to type of immigrant and one of four issue frames (economic, culture, security, crime). However, this would require dividing subjects into twelve groups and would not provide a sufficient number of cases per treatment on which to gauge statistical inference. The substantive differences we find suggest that our design is capable of isolating the effect of both the type of immigrant and type of issue.
12. We also included a set of items that are not theoretically driven to maintain parity between negative and positive frames (see Appendix B).
13. Question wording appears in the supplementary file. We did not have a suitable retrospective question for culture because of the complexity of cultural considerations. Note that items were put to respondents earlier in the omnibus CMS questionnaire, thereby posing little risk of affecting responses to the experimental items questions.
14. See Appendix B. The distribution across response categories is similar to that for similarly worded items from the European Social Survey modules.
15. *Education* is coded as 1=14 or fewer years of formal education, 2 = 15 years, 3 = 16, 4 = 17–18, 5 = 19–20, and 6 = 21 or more; *Age* is coded 1 = 18–24 years old, 2 = 25–39, 3 = 40–54, and 4 = 55 and over. Demographic items are included for bases of comparability with other studies (e.g., Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010) and have no effect on the results of the main coefficients of interest. Analyses use demographic weights.
16. As a robustness test, we ran Model 4 with indicators of issue salience instead of retrospective performance assessments. Results were generally similar but with wider confidence intervals because responses clustered at the higher ('more important problem') end of the scales.
17. The likelihood ratio test of the null hypothesis that all interactive parameters in Model 4 are zero is rejected at  $\chi^2(6) = 14.49, p = 0.02$ .
18. Comparing this positive frame with the previous two must be done with care, however, because positive frames generally elicit a more positive reaction.
19. This finding agrees with McLaren and Johnson (2007) and Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004).
20. This is not surprising considering that the social threat of Muslim gender inequality is one of four dominant themes in the British tabloids' coverage of Muslims (Richardson 2004).

21. There is no statistical significance to the difference between the means for generic immigrants and for East European immigrants but a statistically meaningful one between the mean for the Muslim treatment and the means for the two other treatments.
22. Our findings indicate a difference between the Britain of 2011 and the Netherlands of 1997–8. The analysis by Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004, 38) of the latter case find that ‘threats to safety are the *least* important in accounting for hostility to ethnic minorities’ (emphasis added). It is consistent, however, with McLaren and Johnson’s (2007) findings based on a 2003 British survey on the importance of crime.
23. Eurostat, ‘Foreign citizens and foreign-born population’, Reference: STAT/12/105, 11/07/2012.

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