Attitudes towards immigration in Europe: myths and realities

Monday 19 June 2017, 4-6pm
A5E-1, ASP Building, European Parliament

Agenda:

4-4.55pm
Presentations: Academic experts will present key findings from their research on attitudes towards immigration.

4.55-5.35pm
Policy proposals: Speakers will present recommendations of policy changes that would help improve public opinion on immigration.

5.35-5.55pm
Q&A session: The audience will be invited to put questions to academics, moderated by the Migration Policy Group

5.55-6pm
Reaction: Jean Lambert MEP will react to presentations, proposals and Q&A session
Rory Fitzgerald
The European Social Survey

The European Social Survey (ESS) welcomes you to this special event co-organised with the Migration Policy Group and kindly hosted by the office of Jean Lambert MEP.

The ESS is an academically driven survey using the highest methodological standards. Every two years, up to 40,000 face-to-face interviews are conducted in participating countries on a wide range of subjects.

With over 100,000 registered users, over 3,000 publications using our data and clear evidence of impact ‘beyond academia’, the ESS has already established itself as a critical pillar of the European Research Area. In addition, its methods and methodological research programme ensure that the infrastructure remains ‘state of the art’ and helps to position Europe as a global leader in terms of comparative social science.

The ESS was established against a background of poor availability of academically rigorous cross-national data, in particular in regard to attitudes, beliefs and values. The founders of the ESS, Roger Jowell and Max Kaase, had the vision and determination to develop the scientific blueprint for the study and to persuade national funders, the European Science Foundation and the European Commission that a knowledge gap existed. They therefore agreed to fund and nurture a Commission that a knowledge gap existed.

As Europe faces a grand societal challenge on immigration, the ESS is continuing to provide robust attitudinal data in this area. In each round of the survey, a number of questions are asked on immigration. Additionally, in Round 1 (2002/03) of the ESS, a module specifically on immigration was included. Our Round 7 (2014/15) module on immigration was built on the design of the ESS Round 1 module meaning that this repeat set of questions allows for direct comparisons using the same measures.

The 2014/15 module also included some new concepts as well as detailed questions about specific groups of migrants. As with all of the modules we include in the ESS, we are thankful to the external questionnaire design teams who worked on the immigration modules that were included in both Round 1 and Round 7. Their endeavour through collaboration with the ESS meant that each immigration module included in the survey was designed to the highest possible standards.

Immigration continues to be one of the topics most frequently analysed by scholars and we are delighted to be able to introduce you to some of those scholars today. I thank them for taking the time to be here today. I would also like to thank Jean Lambert MEP and her staff for their assistance in organising and hosting this event.

Thomas Huddleston and Paola Mikaba
Migration Policy Group

Policymakers: Be as bold as your constituents and support a welcoming Europe!

The number of immigrants moving to and settling in Europe has increased over the past decade, and so has the openness of Europeans to migrants and especially to refugees. In turn, people with a migrant background are better integrated in inclusive countries. Perhaps surprisingly, voters have not turned against people immigrating or seeking asylum, neither after the 2008 economic crisis nor following the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015. Nevertheless, policy-makers remain reluctant to implement welcoming measures.

We wonder why politicians are less bold than their constituents.

Trends extracted from recent survey data disprove the argument that the rising support for the far-right is due to a radical change of heart among Europeans. Instead, closer analysis reveals that the recent large numbers of arrivals have only mobilised a specific subgroup of the population, namely those who already viewed socio-demographic change as a risk to social order. In other words, it has exacerbated right voters’ tendency to over-estimate immigration flows and their possible threats and politicised far-right voters. Voters on the left however tend to better see the opportunities immigrants bring and want greater integration.

Beyond this dichotomy, research shows that regardless of their country’s economic situation, Europeans (72%) of all ages, education levels and across the political spectrum support a fair allocation of refugees based on a country’s reception capacity (population size, GDP, employment rate and number of asylum applications). Furthermore, the majority (58%) remain in favour of proportional allocation even when informed that such a system would likely increase the intake of asylum seekers in their own country.

An allocation mechanism based on Member States’ reception capacity is exactly what the temporary EU relocation scheme provides. However, despite public support for such a system, only some 20,000 refugees out of the initial target of 160,000 have been relocated since 2015. This is mainly because mainstream politicians fear a backlash from vocal far-right colleagues and voters if they publicly support the entry of refugees. Hence, the Dublin System, which allocates asylum seekers based on the “first point of entry,” remains the status quo.

As this latest research shows, voters are generally inclined to continue to support an open Europe. Governments therefore need to build on this and put in place inclusive policies that will further strengthen public support for immigration. This call is made all the stronger when viewed in conjunction with other studies that underline how immigrants living in inclusive countries have a greater sense of belonging and feel as patriotic as the local population. We therefore urge politicians to listen to their voters, respect relocation quotas and reform EU asylum rules for a fairer system. In short, to be as bold as their constituents!

This article is published in the Features section of www.migrationnewsheet.eu with all relevant sources and more data.
Marie-Sophie Callens, KU Leuven (University of Leuven) and LISER (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research)

Migration to Europe changed the face of European countries, where rising levels of ethnic diversity are increasingly becoming typical. At the same time, the rise of far-right parties and anti-immigrant sentiments is becoming evident in these countries. Several studies provide theoretical arguments for the existence of a link between integration policies and public opinion on immigrants (Bourhis et al., 1997; Favell, 2001; Jakobs and Herman, 2009).

Public opinion on immigrants is an umbrella term that is used interchangeably for general or public attitudes toward immigrants (Ceobanu & Escandell 2010; Fetzer 2000), anti-immigrant feelings, prejudice toward immigrants (Stephan, Ybarra & Bachman 1999a) and attitudes toward outgroups. The term public opinion can thus have very different meanings, often depending on the items available in cross-cultural surveys. Various authors argue that the integration policies implemented in a country are - albeit in complex and intricate ways - related to public opinion that spreads among the population (Lahav, 2004; Weldon, 2006; Wright, 2011).

This link between policy and attitudes has been analysed from different theoretical perspectives that make opposing assumptions about the causality of the relationship: certain theories assume that policies are a determinant of public opinion rather than a consequence of it (Mettler and Soss, 2004), whereas others see public opinion as the main driver of policies (Brooks and Manza, 2006). Unfortunately, the empirical evidence that is currently available does not provide a straightforward answer to the question which of these mechanisms is behind the relationship between policies and threat (Morales et al., 2015). Given the mixed evidence, we think that the relationship between integration policies and public opinion on immigrants should be seen as dialectic and have therefore put forward the policy-opinion circle.

The policy-opinion circle involves both policy feedback and policy responsiveness mechanisms. The policy feedback theory claims that policies themselves reshape the political environment, and also the broader societal context and public opinion (Mettler and Soss, 2004).

Integration policies and public opinion in Europe: in conflict or in harmony?

Society’s view on immigration and integration, institutionalized through immigration laws and integration policies, influences the tolerance of ethnic minorities (Schlueter et al., 2013; Weldon, 2006).

The other mechanism, the policy responsiveness theory, explains that policymakers in democratic states take into account public preferences when designing integration policies, in order to reduce the risk of losing votes and to avoid the likelihood of public reprisals in the form of protests or public disobedience (Brooks and Manza, 2006; Howard, 2010; Lahav, 2004). Howard (2010) states that although public opinion has an impact on the restrictiveness of integration policies, this is more likely to happen when public opinion is activated by far-right parties.

We consider that policy responsiveness and policy feedback work as a policy-opinion circle, in which both continuously influence each other and change public opinion and integration policies incrementally. In the case where more-inclusive integration policies are followed by more positive public opinion, and again by even more inclusive integration policies, we describe this as a virtuous policy-opinion circle. By contrast, a cycle where negative public opinion is followed by more-restrictive integration policies and again by more negative public opinion is described as a vicious policy-opinion circle.
Empirical evidence

Research on the topic, and especially comparative research, remains scarce (Schlueter, Meuleman & Davidov 2013), mainly due to the lack of quantitative measures available on integration policies in different countries. Since its publication in 2004, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) has become the most frequently used index of integration policies for empirical comparative research.

A recent review paper (2015) looked at published articles and working papers on the statistical relationship between public opinion toward immigrants and integration policies, with a strong focus on research using MIPEX. The review included eighteen multivariate studies of which ten used the ESS data. Among the others there were the Eurobarometer (four studies), European Values Study (EVS) (two studies) and then other datasets, such as International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) (one study), the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) (one study) and the SOM database (one study).

The four studies that looked at immigrant related threat perceptions found all positive significant effects. In countries with more inclusive integration policies, people were found to have less ethnic threat perceptions. A more recent study (Callens & Meuleman, 2016) made a distinction between the different integration strands of MIPEX and found that especially inclusive labour market policies and inclusive political participation policies are related with lower economic threat perceptions.

Nevertheless, all results show evidence of a virtuous circle, in which more-inclusive integration policies relate to positive public opinion on immigrants, which in turn can lead to even more inclusive integration policies. One should be aware that the dynamic between integration policies and public opinion continuously influence each other and in the future could also become a vicious circle.

This summary is based on following articles:


James Dennison
Migration Policy Centre

• Favourability towards immigration varies considerably by country.

• However, across time, attitudes to immigration are highly stable and are in fact becoming slightly more favourable.

• What varies far more across time than attitudes to immigration is the salience of the immigration issue. This salience, or the importance of immigration, also varies considerably according to country. Though attitudes have stayed stable lately, salience has risen sharply.
Explaining variation in attitudes to immigration in Europe

• Attitudes to immigration at the individual level can be powerfully predicted by fundamental psychological traits, with individuals displaying openness and excitability more drawn towards pro-immigration positions and those displaying conscientiousness and concern over safety more drawn towards anti-immigration positions.

• Attitudes to immigration are also powerfully predicted by broader political attitudes, such as left-right self-placement, desire for egalitarianism and desire for a strong government to secure safety. Also, individuals who are more sceptical of the motives of politicians tend to be more opposed to immigration.

• With the above variables, we can explain around 40 per cent of variation in attitudes to immigration.

• Surprisingly, with the above variables taken into account, we find no direct effect of university education, parental education, nationalism, cultural supremicism, interest in politics or having lived abroad, on attitudes to immigration.

• Individuals living in more diverse regions and who have more ethnically diverse friends tend to hold more pro-immigration positions.

• Attitudes to immigration, it seems, are the result of deep-lying psychological differences within the electorate and are unlikely to be easily changed by exposure to new information or political campaigns.

James Dennison (james.dennison@eui.eu) and Teresa Talò (teresa.talo@eui.eu)
Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, Florence
Rob Ford
University of Manchester

1. Public opinion isn’t turning against immigration, but attitudes are becoming more polarised

I have found two important trends in the overall structure of public opinion about immigration in Britain (Ford, Heath and Morrell 2012; Ford and Heath, 2014) and across Europe (Ford and Lymperopoulou, 2017). Public opinion is not, in general becoming more negative about immigration, even in countries with high rates of migration inflow. But Europeans are becoming more divided about migration and its effects. These divides have opened up along multiple lines, including age, education, social class and migrant heritage. The young, the highly educated, the middle class and those with migrant heritage tend to be more positive about migration. By contrast, the old, those with few or no qualifications, the working class and those without any migrant heritage tend to be more negative. These groups are diverging further over time, with positive groups becoming more convinced about the benefits of migration while negative groups become more sceptical.

This polarisation is not symmetrical in its political effects, because migration is a far more salient issue for opponents than for supporters. Voters hostile to migration tend to blame it for a range of social problems, and will support political parties who focus on reducing immigration - opposition to migration is the strongest predictor of support for populist radical right parties. By contrast, supporters of migration tend to regard it as a non-issue, and focus on other matters. As a result, much of the political initiative on migration often rests with opponents, even though their hostility is often not shared by the majority of citizens.

Three things I have learned about immigration attitudes

2. Migrants’ characteristics matter - and skills matter most

I have carried out a series of survey experiments in my research, where I randomly vary the characteristics of migrants to test how these characteristics affect how they are perceived. Such characteristics turn out to matter a great deal - native citizens do not have fixed views about all migrants, but are very responsive to who migrants are, and what they have to offer. The largest effects come from skills - highly skilled migrants are regarded much more positively than those with fewer skills. What is more, skills seem to trump origins - while respondents in many countries have more negative views of ethnically or religiously different migrants, this “ethnic penalty” is reduced or eliminated entirely if the migrants are highly skilled.

In research focussed on Britain only, I have found that migrants’ characteristics matter for views about each form of migration - but discrimination by origins is more prevalent where the economic contribution of migrants is less clear. British respondents are more positive about labour migrants coming to fill jobs than those coming to search for work, and much more positive about skilled professional migrants than unskilled labourers. Respondents show a preference for Eastern European unskilled labourers over migrants from Pakistan, but show no ethnic preference between Eastern European and Pakistanis. In experiments asking about student migration, the ethnic origin of students makes no difference at all but the grades of students has a huge effect - very large majorities support the migration of students with good grades while similarly large majorities oppose the migration of students with bad grades. In the domain of family reunion migration, where the economic contribution is less clear than for labour or student migration, respondents show a stronger preference for European over non-European migration, though they also respond to the primary migrant’s length of residence regardless of ethnicity - longer residence encourages higher support for family reunion in all circumstances.

In more recent research I have carried out a similar experiment on labour migration across a range of European countries, comparing views of migrants from the largest European source of migration to each country with views of migrants from the largest non-European source of migration, and comparing views of professionals and unskilled labourers. The general pattern is the same as in Britain - skills have a much larger impact than ethnic origins, and ethnic origins matter more for unskilled migration. There is, though, a lot of variation between countries - both skills and ethnicity matter more in some European countries than others.

![Positive views of the cultural impact of immigration among graduates under 45 (blue) and "school leavers" with lowest level of formal qualifications over 65 (purple) (ESS 2014)](chart.png)
3. Migrants are regarded as less deserving of welfare assistance

I have also employed survey experiments to investigate how migrants are viewed in the context of welfare provision. Individual migrants are consistently perceived by respondents in both British and Dutch experiments as less deserving of help than identically described natives. However, there are also differences between reactions in the two countries. Ethnic difference has a negative impact on perceptions of claimants in Britain, but has no such effect in the Netherlands. The negative effect of migrant status on views of welfare claimants is also usually larger in Britain than in the Netherlands. Two factors play a large role in explaining the differences in support for migrant or minority welfare claimants. Firstly, prejudice against minorities depresses support for migrant and minority claimants but has no effect on views of white native claimants. Economically secure white native respondents who express no prejudice do not discriminate against migrant or minority welfare claimants.

I have also investigated the effect of targeting welfare policy at ethnic minorities. When welfare assistance is targeted at, for example, “poor Muslim families” rather than just “poor families”, public support for the policy falls sharply - even though policies targeted at “poor families” would include assistance for poor Muslim families. Both of the factors outlined previously - economic insecurity and prejudice - played a similar role here. We also found that ideological factors played a role in the very large differences in support for income targeted and ethnically targeted welfare policy. The ideological beliefs which encourage support for redistribution from rich to poor have a much weaker effect on views of ethnically targeted redistribution. British left wingers who support income targeted redistribution are much less supportive of ethnically targeted redistribution.

Since the refugee crisis hit, many have argued that the Dublin status quo is not only logistically unsound but also inherently unfair, given that most asylum seekers today will come through the southern border countries. A campaign to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) has picked up steam over the past year, with proponents calling for greater solidarity and a fairer sharing of responsibility for refugees. A high level summit will take up its proposals in June of this year.

While EU leaders hammer out reforms, however, they seldom hear the voices of ordinary Europeans debating the issue in pubs and cafes. What kind of asylum system do they want? We conducted an unprecedented survey of 18,000 Europeans in 15 countries to find out, and the answer was clear: Europeans would strongly prefer a system that allocated asylum seekers in proportion to each country’s capacity - even if that system brought larger numbers into their own country.

Given the high costs and social unrest that some countries have experienced while accommodating large numbers of refugees, one might think plenty of Europeans would want their own country’s share to be as low as possible. Most countries would see an increase if the EU moved to a proportional allocation system, which would take into account each country’s population, GDP, unemployment rate, and the number of applications already received. Yet the principle of proportional equality appears to be deeply engrained in the public’s understanding of fairness in the world.

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Dominik Hangartner
Immigration Policy Lab, ETH Zurich

Scenes from the front lines of Europe’s refugee crisis depict a border overwhelmed by the influx of desperate people on the move. The Italian Coast Guard operates at full tilt to rescue boatloads of migrants at sea; in Greece, sprawling refugee camps housing tens of thousands have stretched the country to its limits. Local institutions are buckling under a backlog of asylum applications, leaving many asylum seekers in limbo.

Europe’s asylum system wasn’t built to withstand circumstances like this - when not only the Syrian civil war but many entrenched conflicts across Africa and the Middle East will continue sending people fleeing toward Europe for the foreseeable future. Under the current Dublin Regulation, the EU member state where an asylum seeker first arrived is responsible for the application.

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Europeans would accept more refugees if the Asylum System were fair

With the two impulses in tension, are people more likely to ask whether the asylum policy benefits their own country, or whether it is designed to be fair for everyone? We randomly assigned manipulations to see which holds sway. When respondents were informed of the options presented - the status quo, proportional allocation, and an equal number of asylum seekers for each country - majority support for proportional equality remained nearly unchanged. This suggests that the norm is so widely shared, and so intuitive, that it doesn’t need to be explained. And when respondents were told how many asylum seekers each option would send to their country, allowing them to easily pick the one with the lowest number, proportional allocation saw decreased support in most countries but still won a 56% majority.

This preference was remarkably consistent across the surveyed countries, including major EU powers and new members, border and interior countries, and ones with few and many asylum seekers. It persisted, too, among respondents on the left, right, and center of the political spectrum.

In the years since the crisis hit, the world has looked on the scale of the human tragedy and called on European countries to work together to protect and provide for the refugees. Our study shows that there’s strong desire for cooperation and coordination, but that desire is thwarted by the Dublin Regulation system. Beyond the refugee crisis, this shows that voters care about how international institutions are designed, not just about the results they deliver for individual countries.

European leaders may worry that any increase in asylum seekers brings the risk of public backlash and a loss of political position. But these results point to a consensus broad and strong enough to empower them to move confidently toward reforming the system.

A Consensus for Change

0: Number of Dublin Regulation countries with a majority willing to accept more refugees under the status quo allocation

72: Percent of respondents who prefer proportional allocation of asylum seekers

18: Percentage who would stick with status quo

7/10: Countries whose respondents choose proportional allocation even though they were told it would increase their number of asylum seekers
Lindsay Richards, Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College, University of Oxford

Immigration is a divisive issue in Europe. Further, there is every reason to expect that attitudes to immigration might be becoming more divided over time. New ‘radical right’ political parties with anti-immigration agendas have been gaining ground in many countries and immigration is often rated highly on the political agenda by voters.

It has also been a period of social and economic turmoil. The Great Recession of 2008 hit most countries in Europe, with more or less dire consequences in terms of unemployment and austerity measures. This may have put additional strain on inter-group relations, with attitudes to immigrants (and to minority ethnic groups) hardening with the pressure on resources.

The European Social Survey (ESS) in 2002/03 and 2014/15 included the following questions:

To what extent do you think [country] should allow (1) people of the same race or ethnic group as most [country]’s people to come and live here? (2) How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people? (3) people from the poorer countries in Europe? (4) people from the poorer countries outside Europe?

In 2014/15, additional questions were asked about: (5) Jewish people (6) Muslims, and (7) Gypsies

In this talk, I show responses to these items (which were none, a few, some, and many) to attempt to answer the following questions:

1) Which types of migrants are preferred?

2) How have attitudes changed between 2002/3 and 2014/5?

3) Do we see different patterns of change in different countries?

4) How are attitudes divided along socio-economic lines?

Preferred type of migrant

There is a clear hierarchy of preferred type of migrant. The most preferred are people from the same race or ethnic group as the majority while Jewish people are much more welcome than Muslims, who in turn are more welcome than Gypsies.

Looking across the four items asked in both time points, we find that the hierarchy of preferred migrants was very similar on both occasions.

Polarising Attitudes

We also find that attitudes became somewhat more polarised between 2002/3 and 2014/5, particularly so in the case of attitudes towards migrants from poorer countries outside Europe. The proportion of European publics who felt that none of these migrants should be allowed to come increased from 11% to 20%. At the same time, there was an increase in the proportion who felt that many such migrants should be allowed entry (from 11% to 12%). In other words European publics are becoming more divided. We find variation between countries in their change over time:

Several of the more positive countries became even more positive between 2002/3 and 2014/15: Sweden, Norway and Germany, for example.

Attitudes to immigration in Europe: how divided are we?

However, most countries became more negative in their attitudes over this period. In some cases such as the Czech Republic, Ireland and Switzerland the changes were quite dramatic.

In nine of the nineteen countries we find that public opinion has polarized, which is to say that there are fewer people with middling views, and more choosing one of the extreme answers.

Socio-economic and demographic divides

The strongest cleavage is between the highly educated (graduates) and the less educated (those with lower secondary education or below), where the gap is 21 percentage points. Age is also divisive, where it is the younger people who are more favourable to immigration than are older people (17 points).

The gap between the top quintile and the bottom quintile of income is 15 points.

Differences between migrants and non-migrants, and between Christians and people with no religion, are relatively small in comparison.

When we compare young highly educated to older less educated, we find the degree of polarisation varies hugely across countries.
The gaps are around 50 percentage points in Britain and France, for example, compared with 20 points or less in Hungary, Lithuania and the Czech Republic.

The extent of polarisation tends to be smallest in countries like Hungary which are the most negative about immigration.

But some of the countries which are overall quite positive about immigration - such as Denmark and Finland - are also quite divided in socio-economic terms. This suggests that issues of immigration have the potential to be politically divisive in Nordic as well as in western European countries like Britain and France.

**Concluding thoughts**

Despite the evidence for polarisation, we should keep in mind that attitudes were generally stable between 2002/3 and 2014/5. We saw the largest change in attitudes to immigrants from poor countries outside Europe but for other types of immigrant, there was little change.

The enduring nature of attitudes within most countries suggests that they may have deep rooted origins and cannot be explained by short-term changes.
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Contact information:

Jean Lambert MEP (@GreenJeanMEP)
Group of the Greens/
European Free Alliance
jean.lambert@europarl.europa.eu

Rory Fitzgerald (@RoryFitzESS)
European Social Survey
r.fitzgerald@city.ac.uk

Thomas Huddleston (@migpolgroup)
Migration Policy Group
thuddleston@migpolgroup.com

Marie-Sophie Callens (@MSCallens)
KU Leuven (University of Leuven)
and LISER (Luxembourg Institute
of Socio-Economic Research)
mariesophie.callens@gmail.com

James Dennison
(@JamesRDennison)
Migration Policy Centre
james.dennison@eui.eu

Rob Ford (@robfordmancs)
University of Manchester
rob.ford@manchester.ac.uk

Dominik Hangartner
(@ImmigrationLab)
Immigration Policy Lab, ETH Zurich
d.hangartner@lse.ac.uk

Lindsay Richards (@csinuffield)
Centre for Social Investigation,
Nuffield College, University of Oxford
lindsay.richards@nuffield.ox.ac.uk

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This publication was produced by the European Social Survey ERIC, using funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 676166.