Attitudes toward Refugees in Contemporary Europe: A Longitudinal Perspective on Cross-National Differences

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In 2015, the number of people seeking asylum in Europe skyrocketed. However, asylum applications were mainly concentrated in a few destination countries such as Germany, Austria, or Sweden. After the so-called EU-Turkey deal, asylum rates quickly dropped in subsequent years. I examine how these developments affected public opinion from both a static and a dynamic comparative perspective. The rapid and largely unpredicted rise in refugee numbers and their prominence in public debates make demographic changes potent drivers of out-group hostility. The analysis of data from over 50,000 individuals in 22 countries contained in the seventh and eighth waves of the European Social Survey shows that attitudes toward refugees do not simply follow trends in asylum applications. Significantly lowering refugee numbers, hence, did not counter anti-refugee sentiments in the European public. Based on intra-country variation over time, the model rather predicts an increase in negative attitudes during times of considerable demographic shifts. Deeper analyses reveal that this effect is stronger for conservative Europeans as well as for those who distrust EU-politics. Moreover, while a general willingness to help is associated with more openness toward refugees, actually experiencing foreigner inflow diminishes this link, suggesting limitations of humanitarian concerns. Results are stable across various modelling and sample choices and not driven by individual countries. In sum, these findings demonstrate the importance of temporal dynamics for the formation of attitudes toward refugees in contemporary Europe and point to potentially polarizing effects of immigration along ideological lines.

I presented earlier versions of this paper at the 2019 conferences of the European Consortium for Political Research, the European Survey Research Association, the European Social Survey, the International Sociological Association RC 28 Spring Meeting 2019, and the Global Refugee and Migration conference 2018 at Georgetown University. I thank all discussants as well as Alexander Schmidt-Catran, Stephan Dochow and six anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments and feedback and Sylvia Jones for proofreading. *Contact information: Goethe University Frankfurt, Theodor-W.-Adorno-Platz 6, 60323 Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Phone: + 49 798 36708; Email: christian@czymara.com*

Social Forces 99(3) 1306–1333, March 2021
doi:10.1093/sf/soaa055
Advance Access publication on 24 June 2020

Introduction

Few issues have divided Europe as much as the inflow of refugees in recent years (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016). The number of asylum applications in the European Union (EU)-member states reached a record high of about 1.3 million in both 2015 and 2016. However, the number of asylum applications almost halved in 2017 (Eurostat 2019), mainly due to an agreement between the EU and Turkey in 2016, dealing with refugee resettlement and relocation at Europe's border (BBC 2016). These developments continue to have social and political consequences for many European countries, including the economically deprived Greece (Dinas et al. 2019) as well as relatively prosperous Germany (Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017; Jäckle and König 2018). While the non-European origin of refugees as well as their rapid increase may boost threat perceptions among natives (Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet 2009; Newman and Velez 2014), refugees are also characterized by forced displacement and a direct need for help, aspects that are typically associated with more welcoming attitudes (Newman et al. 2013; Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016). Moreover, Europe's migrant policy is embedded in an institutional context on different levels of politics (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2017; Heizmann and Ziller 2020). The public' trust in political institutions on these levels is, thus, crucial for their view on the handling of the refugee intake. This article intends to shed light on the impact of demographic conditions on anti-refugee attitudes in Europe and asks who reacts most to such demographic developments. Data come from the seventh and eighth wave of the European Social Survey combined with census material from Eurostat. I employ three-level random effect models that allow the estimation of effects based on (i) intra-country variation over time and (ii) stable differences between countries (Fairbrother 2014; Bell, Fairbrother, and Jones 2019) as well as (iii) intra-country interactions with individual-level moderators (Giesselmann and Schmidt-Catran 2019). Results show that public opinion is more hostile during times of strong change in a country's ethnic composition, whereas cross-sectional differences play only a negligible role. Europeans are less open toward refugees when the national proportion of foreigners rises, and those on the political right and those who distrust EU politics react stronger to foreigner inflow. In contrast to theoretical expectations, this is also true for people that have a stronger need to help, suggesting that humanitarian concerns might quickly erode in times of real or perceived social conflict.

The Refugee Situation in Europe: National and Supra-National Policies

The inflow of people seeking asylum in Europe involves the national as well as the supra-national level of politics. The EU employs its Common European Asylum System (CEAS) for the allocation of refugees across its member states (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2017). The CEAS are EU laws regulating

that member states grant the right of asylum, with the aim of establishing a minimum standard for the asylum process (European Commission 2019). While the EU regulates who qualifies for asylum in its Qualification Directive (European Parliament 2011), there are remarkable differences in refugee and asylum seeker numbers and acceptance rates across EU countries. One reason for this is the fact that the country of first entrance is responsible for registering the asylum claim, according to the legally binding Dublin Regulation (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2017; Heizmann and Ziller 2019). With more than five times as many asylum seekers than any other EU country, Germany received most applications in total in 2015 and 2016, followed by Italy, Hungary, Sweden, and France (Burmann and Valeyatheepillay 2017; also see below).

Within countries, national governments provide short-term accommodation and social benefits and may foster social integration. However, benefits offered to asylum seekers vary considerably across EU member states. Germany, for example, offered new refugees in accommodation centers free meals and monthly allowances of 143 Euros in 2015 (Trevelyan and Jones 2015). Allowances tend to be significantly lower in Eastern European countries, with less than 15 Euro per month in the case of Poland, Czech Republic, or Lithuania (ibid.). Thus, there are remarkable differences across EU countries in the actual implementation and handling of asylum regulations. While successful allocation of refugees concerns the supra-national level, accommodation and integration of refugee are issues regarding individual countries.

Before turning to how the special political situation may shape how Europeans react to refugee inflow, I first discuss the general impact the inflow of refugees can have on natives' attitudes.

Immigration as a Driver of Exclusionary Attitudes

One of the most prominent explanations of exclusionary attitudes argues that the perception that immigrants threaten the status quo in a society shapes natives' opinions (Blalock 1967; Quillian 1995). From this perspective, newcomers pose a threat either to individual or collective economic well-being (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Dancygier and Donnelly 2013) or to the national way of life or a country's norms and values (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Sides and Citrin 2007). Ethnic Competition Theory states that psychological mechanisms of social (contra-)identification are reinforced by real or perceived competition between ethnic groups, which are influenced by macro-social conditions (Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders 2002; Savelkoul et al. 2011). Comparative research considers the size of the ethnic out-group in a country or bad state of the national economy as triggers of threat perceptions. In this reasoning, out-groups that natives consider culturally different from their own society are most likely to trigger threat perceptions, especially when the size of such an out-group is increasing (Quillian 1995; Schneider 2008; Hjerm and Nagayoshi 2011; Stephan and Stephan 2017). Cultural distance can explain why, for example, Germans were more exclusionary regarding migrants from Africa or the Middle-East independent of their skills during the times of high refugee inflow

(Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017). Asylum applicants in the EU by definition originate from areas outside of Europe (Connor 2016) and may thus significantly change the national way of life if they engage in political or cultural activities in the host country (Steele and Abdelaaty 2019). The perception that many claims for asylum are bogus can further boost resentments (Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher 2017). Moreover, many of refugees' countries of origin are predominantly Muslim (Connor 2016). Some Europeans view Muslims as a threat to liberal and secular values (Helbling and Traunmüller 2018). Various jihadist terror attacks in different European countries in recent years also affected public safety concerns (Brouard, Vasilopoulos, and Foucault 2018; Jungkunz, Helbling, and Schwemmer 2018). Some attacks were directly connected to the inflow of refugees such as the sexual assaults in Germany on New Year's Eve 2015/16 (Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017) or the truck attack on a Christmas market in Berlin in 2016 (Fischer-Preßler, Schwemmer, and Fischbach 2019; Schmidt-Catran and Czymara 2020). Kustov (2019) provides another explanation for anti-immigrant sentiments related to international status hierarchies. According to Kustov (2019), immigrants from less developed countries face more hostility independent of their economic and cultural characteristics. Since refugees mainly flee from poorer and less developed countries, their lower status may also boost negative evaluations among natives. Thus, I hypothesize that natives' views on refugees are more exclusionary in contexts of high in-migration (*threat-hypothesis*).

However, people often tend to misperceive the actual share of immigrants in their country (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2019; Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin 2019). Based on the seventh wave of the European Social Survey, Gorodzeisky and Semyonov (2019) show that such misperceptions are indeed a better predictor of attitudes than actual numbers, although perceptions and actual size are related. In the case of the so-called refugee crisis, there are two reasons to assume that actual demographic circumstances matter. First, fear of threat is especially acute when the out-group gains relative advantage, which is why people tend to react more to *changes* in the foreigner size (Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet 2009; Newman and Velez 2014; Entorf and Lange 2019). People often hold rather crude estimates of immigration numbers (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2019; Hopkins et al. 2019) but are more sensible to changes in these numbers (Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet 2009; Newman and Velez 2014; Entorf and Lange 2019). Hence, I hypothesize that changing demographics have a stronger impact on attitudes than time-stable differences in national diversity (*change-hypothesis*). The second reason I assume that national demographics are important for public opinion on refugees is the prominence of immigration in many national debates during the period of investigation. Issue salience makes natives especially attentive to the influx of newcomers (Hopkins 2010, 2011).[1] The combination of rapid change and issue salience makes an effect of changing demographics on anti-refugee attitudes especially likely.[2]

Finally, political elite rhetoric can have a considerable impact on public opinion toward immigrants, especially when immigration of a certain group is highly politicized (Flores 2018; Czymara 2019). Political elites in the opposition

are more likely to frame immigration as a problem during times of election to boost their vote share. Due to potentially higher salience of negative discourses about immigration during elections, natives should be most likely to oppose the intake of refugees during such times (*election-hypothesis*).

Who Reacts Most to Demographic Change?

The intake of refugees is likely to concern some natives more than others. In the following, I introduce potential moderators of the effect of demographic changes on the attitude toward refugees.

Political Orientation

Research on non-European countries has demonstrated that people on the political right are more negative toward asylum seekers and view them as especially threatening (Canetti et al. 2016). The political right is associated with traditionalist values across different cultural contexts also within Europe (Thorisdottir et al. 2007). Thus, demographic shifts which imply social and cultural diversification should primarily concern attitudes of natives adhering to the political right, who have an interest in preserving the social status quo (*conservatism-hypothesis*).

Humanitarianism

A characteristic that makes refugees a rather unique out-group is the fact that refugees, by definition, exhibit a high level of vulnerability. On the one hand, this means that refugees must be provided with affordable housing, healthcare, language training, and settlement services (Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher 2017). On the other hand, humans are generally helpful toward people who are fleeing persecution, war or other tragedies that exceed their personal responsibility (Newman et al. 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Bansak Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016; Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017). Among individuals with a high motivation to help others, newcomers' vulnerability and need may elicit feelings of empathy rather than threat. Hence, I hypothesize that natives who report a low desire to help should primarily react to an increasing inflow of refugees, whereas attitudes of those with a strong motivation to help should be more stable (*humanitarian concerns-hypothesis*).

Trust in Political Institutions

As discussed above, political institutions on the national as well as the EU-level play an important role in implementing refugee policies. Hence, actual inflow should affect natives more when they exhibit lower levels of trust in these institutions. Europeans who distrust national politics may be in doubt that governments are able to solve issues of migrant integration (Mclaren 2012). Similarly, those who generally distrust European politics may not believe that

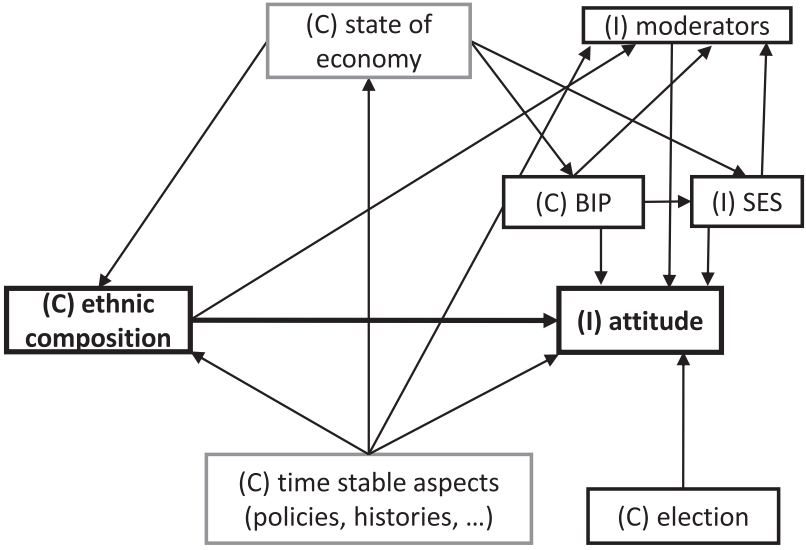
the EU is able to tackle the issue of fair refugee allocation among countries (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2017; Stockemer et al. 2018; Heizmann and Ziller 2020; Koos and Seibel 2019). Both should be most relevant in contexts of high actual inflow. Larger demographic changes should, thus, lead to exclusionary attitudes especially among those who distrust political institutions on the national as well as the EU level (*institutional trust-hypotheses*). Comparing both kinds of institutional trust, distrust in the EU may play a more important role than distrust in national governments because the relocation of refugees among countries precedes their integration on the national level. Moreover, research has shown that Europeans know less about EU affairs compared with national politics (Clark 2014), which might result in faulty attributions of allocation problems.

Causal Model

Figure 1 displays my theoretical model as a directed acyclic graph (DAG) (Elwert 2013).[3] I hypothesize that a country's ethnic composition affects the individual attitude toward refugees. However, migrants are likely to self-select into economically more prosperous countries, where more people of higher social status live. Economic conditions as well as social status determine immigration attitudes (e.g., Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Dancygier and Donnelly 2013). Hence, the state of the economy is a confounding variable. I assume that the impact of economic wealth on attitudes operates through two channels: a context effect and an individual effect. I block both paths by controlling national wealth measured by GDP (context level) as well as one's socio-economic status (individual level). Furthermore, my modelling strategy using within and between transformations of country predictor variables (see below) automatically controls all potential time constant confounders on the country level, such as stable policies and laws or idiosyncratic histories. Assuming that national elections are exogenous, the elections variable is not part of the causal process connecting ethnic composition and attitudes and, thus, should neither induce nor remove bias. Since the election effect should be independently estimable, I include this variable in a "full" and in an empty model to test the *election-hypothesis*.

I have substantive interest in examining interaction effects. In DAGs, such effect modification can relate to any variable that points toward the outcome (Elwert 2013: 254 ff.). In the present case, modeling interactions has implications for the total effect of ethnic composition on attitudes. This is because, while political orientation and basic human values are typically viewed as rather stable traits (Rokeach 1973, also see Eisentraut 2019), at least trust in political institutions is probably affected by immigration, especially when immigration is framed as a political crisis as in the present case. Figure 1 implies that part of the effect of ethnic composition in this case runs through the moderators (such as institutional trust). Hence, removing this share of the effect would result only in the *direct* effect of ethnic composition on attitudes, which is often considered overcontrolling (Elwert 2013). To tackle this dilemma, I do not include any of

Figure 1. Causal graph of theoretical model. Note: Bolt lines indicate main interest; grey squares are unobserved aspects. C: country variable, I: individual variable



the moderators in my main model and only add one moderator at a time in the interaction models.

Data and Method

I take information on the individual level from the seventh and the eighth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), editions 7.21 and 8.2, respectively. The fieldwork on both waves in combination covers the time before the inflow of refugees, its peak, and subsequent decline (see below).

Outcome: Attitude Toward the National Refugee Policy

The item I employ to measure Europeans' stance on the national refugee policy is: "*Some people come to this country and apply for refugee status on the grounds that they fear persecution in their own country. Using this card, please say how much you agree or disagree that: 'the government should be generous in judging people's applications for refugee status'*." Respondents answered on a five-point scale, where larger values imply a negative attitude. I treat the outcome as quasi-metric (results are similar for an ordered logistic model, see robustness checks).

Macro-Level Explanatory Variables

I use data from Eurostat to investigate national conditions from 2014 to 2017. My core interest lies in the impact of national demographics, which I model

based on yearly changes. This broader perspective should ensure that conditions are actually salient, a point I will return to in the concluding section.

There are two ways to operationalize national demographics, and for each I employ a longitudinal as well as a cross-sectional perspective (see methods section). First, I use the ratio of asylum applications from Eurostat (table migr_asyappctza) to total population (demo_gind) multiplied by 1,000. Longitudinally, this measure captures how Europeans react to asylum numbers that are above or below the national average of the period of investigation. In cross-section, it tests whether the public is more negative in countries that generally received more asylum seekers over the four years. While it is reasonable to assume that actual asylum rates were prominent in public debates, this operationalization has the drawback that it captures only newcomers and those who apply for asylum. Natives might not distinguish refugees from other immigrants with similar ethnic appearance in many everyday situations. Moreover, a rapid drop in the number of *new* applicants might not satisfy refugee sceptics.

To measure *cumulative* conditions and ethnic exposure, I employ the percentage of non-EU28 citizens (taken from migr_pop1ctz). This variable does not capture refugees only but measures a country's actual ethnic composition. The longitudinal version of this variable tests how natives react to ethnic diversity that differs from the mean value of the investigated period. The cross-sectional version tests whether people in countries that are historically more diverse are more open toward refugees.

In order to test my *election-hypothesis*, I generate a dummy variable with value 1 for the year in which a country had an election and 0 otherwise. I count only parliamentary elections or equivalents because they are the most important national elections and campaigning should, thus, be particularly visible.

Moderators

I measure political orientation using the self-placement on the left right-scale (0: "Left", 10: "Right", see Kroh 2007). As an alternative test of conservatism, I draw upon the conservation value of Schwatz' basic human values (Davidov et al. 2008). For institutional trust, I employ two of the ESS items that are introduced with the following statement: "*Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust.*" I use the item referring to "... *[country]'s parliament?*" for trust in national political institutions and the "... *the European Parliament?*" for trust in EU politics. While the wording of these items refers to general trust in each institution, they also capture attitudes toward the particular European or national government at that time (McLaren 2012). However, this distinction is of minor importance for the current study. I re-scaled the two trust variables so that positive values indicate less trust. To measure the motivation to help others, I include an item of Schwartz's Benevolence value (Davidov et al. 2008), namely "*It's very important to [her/him] to help the people around him. [S/he] wants to care for their well-being.*" Respondents should rate whether this applies to them on a 6-point scale, where higher values imply less drive to help. I treat this variable as continuous

for simplicity. Figure A2 in the online appendix shows aggregate trends of the four moderators for each country.

Controls

To account for a country's economic state in a given year, I control GDP per head (comparative price level indices measured in 1,000 dollars) and the individual social status characteristics education, being unemployed, income satisfaction, and age. I employ year dummies to model a general time trend.

Statistical Model

I employ random effects modelling to decompose the variance of the outcome on the country level into a within- and a between-country part (Fairbrother 2014; Bell, Fairbrother, and Jones 2019). These models are three-level hierarchical linear models, with individuals nested in country-years nested in countries (Schmidt-Catran and Fairbrother 2016).[4] For each time-varying country variable, I include its demeaned version and its mean. Adding the demeaned variables yields within effects (WE), which are based solely on variance within countries over time. WE thereby offer the huge benefit of automatically controlling for all national characteristics that are time-invariant or slow. In other words, WE are not plagued by omitted variable bias due to any time-constant aspects on the country level such as stable differences in political or legal factors (e.g., historical legacies or national policies). Adding the mean variables results in between effects (BE), which are based only on time-stable differences between countries (Fairbrother 2014; Bell, Fairbrother, and Jones 2019). All WE and BE are orthogonal (see table A1 in the online appendix).

I hypothesized that demographic changes affect different segments of a society in different ways, which calls for cross-level interactions. To this end, I employ the modelling technique recently developed by Giesselmann and Schmidt-Catran (2019). This approach provides a genuine within estimator for the cross-level interaction term. In this way, the interaction effect uses only variation within countries over time that, again, is unaffected by unobserved heterogeneity on the country-level. In addition to the interaction term of interest, which is the interaction of demeaned variables, these models include two ancillary interaction terms: one for each demeaned variable with the mean of the respective other variable.[5] The idea behind this approach is that the interaction of both WE can still be driven by variance between countries as Giesselmann and Schmidt-Catran (2019) demonstrate. This is not what one typically aims for when estimating WE. Giesselmann and Schmidt-Catran (2019) show that this can be solved by adding interactions between each WE and the respective other BE. These additional interaction terms absorb all potential between country variance that could plague the WE interaction.

I standardize all continuous individual-level variables to range from 0 to 1 so that their effect sizes are directly comparable. Each estimated effect thereby contrasts a variable's empirical minimum with its maximum.[6]

Table 1 Number of observations per country and year

	2014	2015	2016	2017
AT	189	1,032	1,396	0
BE	1,236	0	1,198	0
CH	745	0	752	0
CZ	447	969	1,782	0
DE	1,811	427	1,864	227
DK	1,163	0	0	0
EE	919	0	1,009	0
ES	0	1,266	0	1,302
FI	1,652	141	1,381	330
FR	1,064	209	998	422
GB	1,071	400	1,174	109
HU	0	1,133	0	1,044
IE	1,116	324	107	1,490
IS	0	0	170	427
IT	0	0	0	1,426
LT	0	1,161	0	1,224
NL	1,301	0	1,119	149
NO	1,035	0	1,092	0
PL	0	1,089	997	233
PT	0	903	171	791
SE	1,231	0	1,002	0
SI	688	0	825	0

Final Sample

My analysis draws upon data from all 22 European countries included in the seventh or eighth wave of the ESS: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Switzerland (CH), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), France (FR), Great Britain (GB), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Iceland (IS), Italy (IT), Lithuania (LT), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Sweden (SE), and Slovenia (SI). All of these countries but United Kingdom and Ireland are part of the Schengen area, where most people, but not refugees or asylum seekers, can circulate without being subjected to border checks. Moreover, they are (or, in the case of UK, were) all members of the EU, with the exception of Switzerland, Norway, and Iceland, which all closely cooperate with the EU.

For the final analyses, I remove country-years that exhibit fewer than 100 interviews to lower the impact of idiosyncratic observations on the individual level (see robustness checks for other solutions). Excluding respondents with

Table 2 Global descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Outcome					
Refugee attitude	50,933	2.97	1.15	1	5
Country variables					
Asylum applications	50,933	2.24	2.61	0.13	9.52
Foreigner share	50,933	3.96	2.74	0.28	14.03
GDP/c	50,933	33.91	15.94	11.37	69.17
Election	50,933	1.14	0.34	0	1
Individual variables					
LR-scale	50,933	0.51	0.22	0	1
Need to help	50,933	0.24	0.2	0	1
Trust EP	50,933	0.57	0.24	0	1
Trust Nat. Parl.	50,933	0.53	0.25	0	1
Income satisfaction					
Living comfortably	50,933	0.36	0.48	0	1
Coping	50,933	0.47	0.5	0	1
Difficult	50,933	0.13	0.34	0	1
Very difficult	50,933	0.03	0.18	0	1
Being unemployed	50,933	0.04	0.19	0	1
Education					
High (> = ISCED 5)	50,933	0.38	0.49	0	1
Medium (ISCED 4)	50,933	0.19	0.39	0	1
Medium (ISCED 3)	50,933	0.34	0.47	0	1
Low (<= ISCED 2)	50,933	0.09	0.28	0	1
Age	50,933	0.45	0.23	0	1

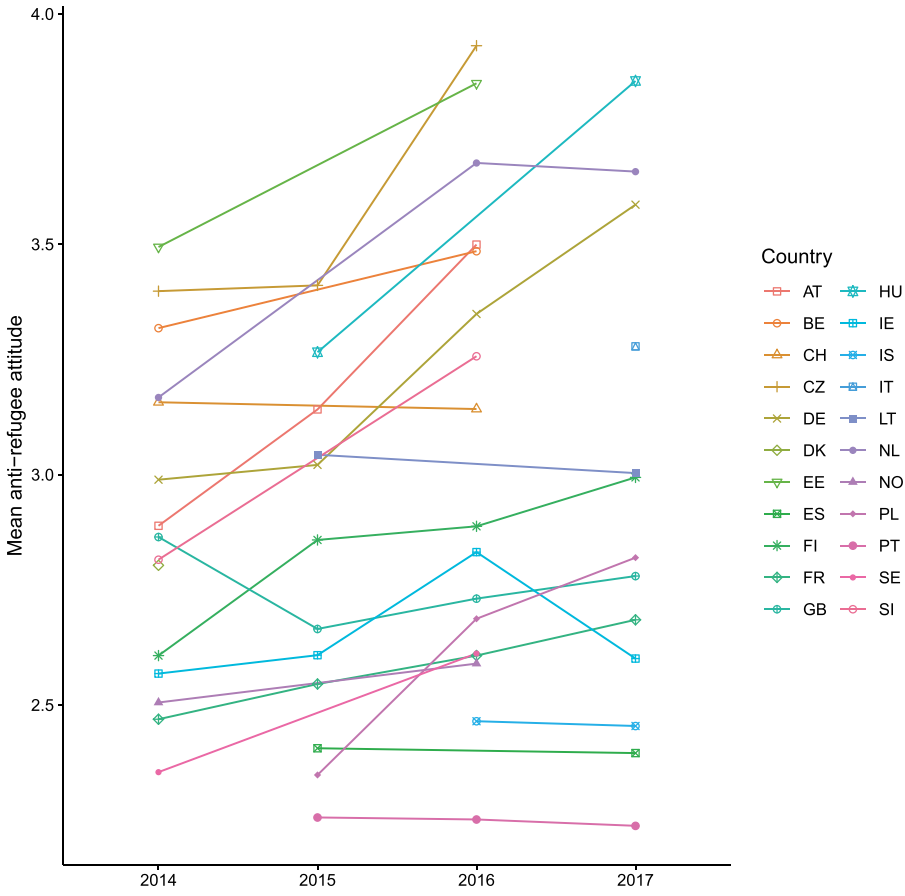
migration background and with missing values[7] and removing country-years with less than 100 observations results in 50,933 individuals interviewed in 22 countries over four years, with 57 country-years. Table 1 gives an overview of the final sample and the number of individuals in countries at each year. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics averaged over countries and years. Table A1 in the online appendix presents the correlations of all variables.

Results

Descriptive Overview

Europeans' openness toward refugees shifted over time. Averaged over all countries for which data are available in a certain year, attitudes were similar

Figure 2. Trends of anti-refugee attitudes in Europe



in 2014 and 2015, with a value of around 2.8 on the five-point scale. Natives became more exclusionary in 2016, but the value drops back to the initial value in 2017. The aggregated proportion of those with the most positive attitude (strongly agree) is rather stable at about 9–10 percent, with a slight drop in 2016. On the other hand, the relative proportion of Europeans who strongly oppose a liberal refugee policy more than doubled in two years, rising from 7.6 percent in 2014 to 14.9 percent in 2016.[8]

Examining the trends in attitudes by country offers additional insights. Figure 2 indicates that public opinion in many countries has changed in the course of time. In most cases, attitudes became more negative (indicated by higher values). For example, negative sentiments increased from below three to almost 3.6 in four years in Germany. Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Estonia show similar trends. The latter three exhibit the most exclusionary attitudes in the data. Hungary, Austria, and Germany are part of the route

many refugees took and thereby directly affected by the recent refugee flows (International Organization for Migration 2017). However, this explanation does not hold for Estonia or the Czech Republic, which were hardly exposed to refugees at any time. In contrast, natives were most welcoming in Spain, Portugal, and Iceland—a tendency that even became slightly, but not statistically significantly, more pronounced over time.

Turning to asylum rates, most fluctuation occurred in Hungary and Sweden. In 2015, Hungary had almost 18 applications per 1,000 inhabitants, the highest value across all observations (see first panel of figure A1 in the online appendix). By 2017, however, the rate dramatically dropped to just 0.3. Sweden and Austria exhibit a similar pattern, although less pronounced. In Germany, the number of applications more than doubled in 2015 and peaked in 2016 at a value of 9.1 per 1,000 inhabitants. In 2017, the rates declined to a value of 2.7, which is close to the initial level. Asylum rates were rather low throughout the whole period of investigation for many other European countries. This includes, for example, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Ireland, Poland, and Portugal. All these countries had below one asylum application per 1,000 inhabitants in all years.

The share of non-EU foreigners is less volatile. Their relative proportion steadily increased for most countries, including, among others, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Netherlands, and Sweden. Germany exhibits the largest increase, with a rise from 4.7 percent in 2014 to 6.3 percent in 2017. This is to a large degree driven by the fact that Germany was the most popular country of destination for refugees in Europe (Connor 2016). For Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania, the increase in non-EU foreigners is below 1 percent throughout the whole investigated period, although for the first two with a slightly increasing tendency (see second panel of figure A1 in the online appendix).[9] Methodologically, the fact that asylum rates dropped significantly for all countries at one point leads to a rather low correlation between these rates and the percentage of non-EU foreigners (the original version of both variables correlates with 0.05; WE with 0.08; BE with 0.05, see table A1 in online appendix).

The descriptive evidence suggests that national circumstances seem to matter especially for countries like Germany or Austria, which were directly affected by the inflow of migrants and where the topic, as a result, was highly politicized. However, as public opinion was most negative in the Czech Republic and Poland, where the inflow of asylum seekers was negligible, or in Hungary, where the intake of refugees dramatically dropped over time. To examine these associations more thoroughly, I turn to the longitudinal regression models.

Longitudinal Random Effect Models

Table 3 shows the results of the random effect models. There is no consensus on the question of how to deal with newly arriving refugees among Europeans. The decomposition of the attitude's variance in the null model (M0) in Table 3 shows that about 12.8 percent of this variance is among countries, 3 percent within countries over time and the remaining 84.2 percent is between individuals. Hence, while most variance occurs at the individual level, there is considerable

Table 3 Random effects models

	M0	M1	M2
Country variables			
Asylum appl. (WE)		−0.02	−0.02
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Asylum appl. (BE)		0.05	0.05
		(0.03)	(0.03)
Foreigner share (WE)		0.29**	0.29**
		(0.10)	(0.09)
Foreigner share (BE)		0.05	0.05
		(0.03)	(0.03)
GDP/c (WE)		−0.00	−0.00
		(0.01)	(0.01)
GDP/c (BE)		−0.01	−0.01
		(0.01)	(0.01)
National election		0.00	−0.00
		(0.06)	(0.06)
Individual variables			
Income satisfaction (ref.: living comfortably)			
Coping			0.06***
			(0.01)
Difficult			0.11***
			(0.02)
Very difficult			0.24***
			(0.03)
Unemployed			−0.09***
			(0.03)
Education (ref.: high (> = ISCED 5)			
Medium (ISCED 4)			0.06***
			(0.01)
Medium (ISCED 3)			0.12***
			(0.02)
Low (<= ISCED 2)			0.25***
			(0.03)
Age			−0.01
			(0.02)
Time trend (ref.: 2014)			
2015		0.04	0.04

(Continued)

Table 3 Continued

	M0	M1	M2
	(0.07)	(0.07)	
2016		0.19**	0.19**
		(0.06)	(0.06)
2017		0.15	0.15
		(0.08)	(0.08)
Intercept	2.95***	2.83***	2.64***
	(0.09)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Random effects			
σ^2	1.12	1.12	1.10
τ_{00}	$0.04_{year:Country}$	$0.02_{year:Country}$	$0.01_{year:Country}$
	$0.17_{Country}$	$0.15_{Country}$	$0.15_{Country}$
N (countries)	22	22	22
N (country-years)	57	57	57
N (respondents)	50933	50933	50933
AIC	150350.301	150379.733	149876.853

$^{*}p < 0.05$ $^{**}p < 0.01$ $^{***}p < 0.001$. All continuous individual-level variables standardized to range from 0 to 1.

variation at the country level and some over time. On first impressions, 3 percent might seem small but keep in mind that, while the cross-sectional variance cover all historical differences, the longitudinal variance is based on only four years. More importantly, the longitudinal variance is smaller because it excludes all variation that is due to time-invariant idiosyncrasies between countries. The lower share of within country variation is, thus, an important benefit for the resulting within effects compared to usual cross-sectional estimates as it excludes the impact of all-time stable confounding aspects.

To test the *threat-hypothesis*, model M1 in Table 3 adds the country-level predictors[10] and the time trend. First, there is no statistically significant relationship between the number of asylum applications and attitudes, either between or within countries. Hence, natives in countries that, on average, took in more refugees are not per se more negative. Moreover, it is not the case that public opinion was particularly dismissive during years that were above the respective national mean in terms of asylum applications. Remember, however, that these asylum applications cover only each year's *newcomers* to a country. Things look different for the national proportion of non-EU foreigners. Both the WE and BE effect of this variable point to a positive relationship.[11] Natives became more negative toward refugees when the proportion of foreigners in a country rose in a given year, as the WE shows ($p = 0.002$). Natives become 0.29 points more exclusionary on the five-point scale with a one percentage point increase in the foreigner share (95 percent confidence interval (CI): 0.11–0.48). This

is somewhat corroborated by the positive BE of foreigner share ($p = 0.07$). However, the WE clearly outperform the BE: it is about five times larger. This means that the historically grown differences in the ethnic composition of a country matter only a little for people's current opinion on the national refugee policy. *Current changes* relative to the country's baseline are what really had an impact. This is in line with previous research indicating that changing demographics are more important drivers of attitudes than stable group sizes (Newman and Velez 2014) and with the *change-hypothesis*. However, public opinion toward refugees did not significantly differ during times of national elections, refuting the *election-hypothesis*. The latter also holds in a model only including the election dummy as a predictor.

Model M2 adds individual-level control variables. The relationship between the refugee attitude and actual asylum applications remains statistically insignificant, while both BE and WE of the proportion of foreigners remains stable (WE 95 percent CI: 0.11–0.48). Differences in the composition of peoples' social status among countries, thus, do not cause this association.

Who Reacts to Demographic Change?

In a next step, I examine which Europeans react most strongly to the observed demographic shifts. The analysis so far has shown that the cumulative proportion of non-EU foreigners performs better in explaining attitudes than the more fluctuating asylum rates. Since only the share of non-EU foreigners variable is statistically significant, I will use changes in the relative size of the non-EU population as the measure for demographic changes, not controlling asylum applications or elections. Both are irrelevant for the share of foreigner effect and, hence, do not have an impact on the results reported below. The estimated models underlying figures 3–5 are in table A2 in the online appendix and the theoretical model in figure 1.

The *conservatism-hypothesis* concerns politically left and right natives. Figure 3 shows the effect of the proportion of foreigners within countries over time conditional on individual placement on the left right-scale (see second column in table A2 in the online appendix for the full model). One can clearly see that the attitude of those adhering to the political left depends little on national conditions. The model predicts a value of about 2.2 for those on the left, almost independent of share of non-EU foreigners (black line). Those adhering to the political right (grey line), on the other hand, have a more negative attitude up to a value of 3.7 in times of maximum foreigner inflow. Empirically, this corresponds to Germany in 2017, where the foreigner proportion was about one percentage point above the national average value of 5.3 percent—a deviation of almost 20 percent. The differences between the ideological poles are statistically significant and become more pronounced as the number of foreigners increases ($p < 0.001$ for WE interaction). Put differently, ideological polarization, understood as differences in attitudes between the political left and right, is more pronounced when a country's share of non-EU foreigners is relatively large.[12]

Figure 3. Effect of foreigner share on anti-refugee attitude conditional on political orientation (based on Model 1 in table A2 in the online appendix)

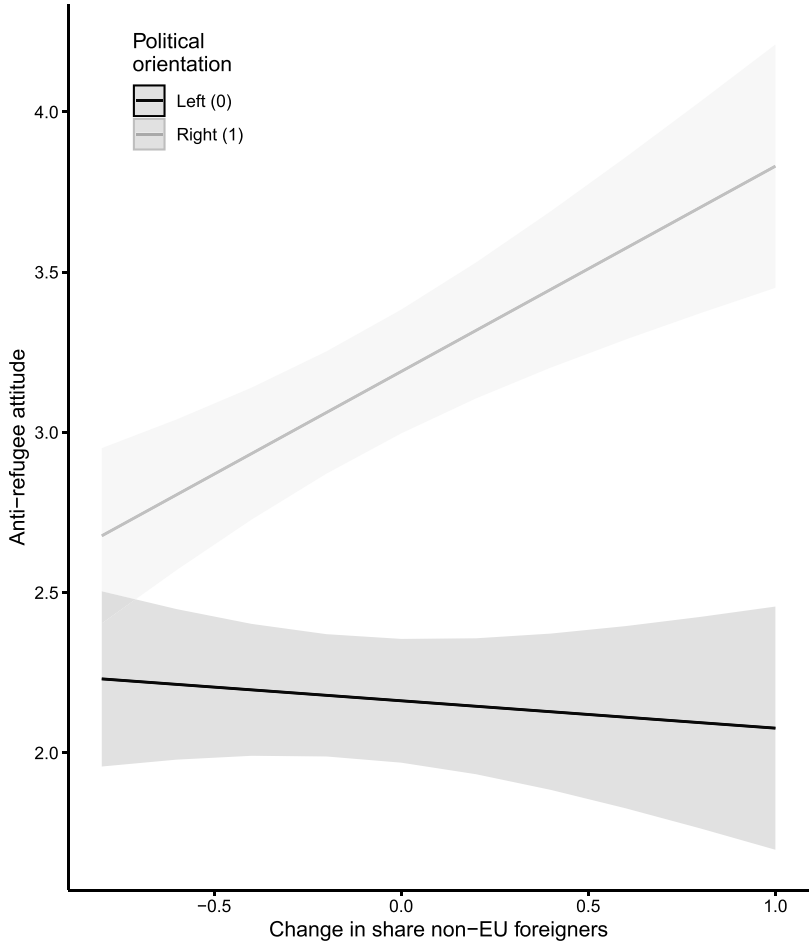
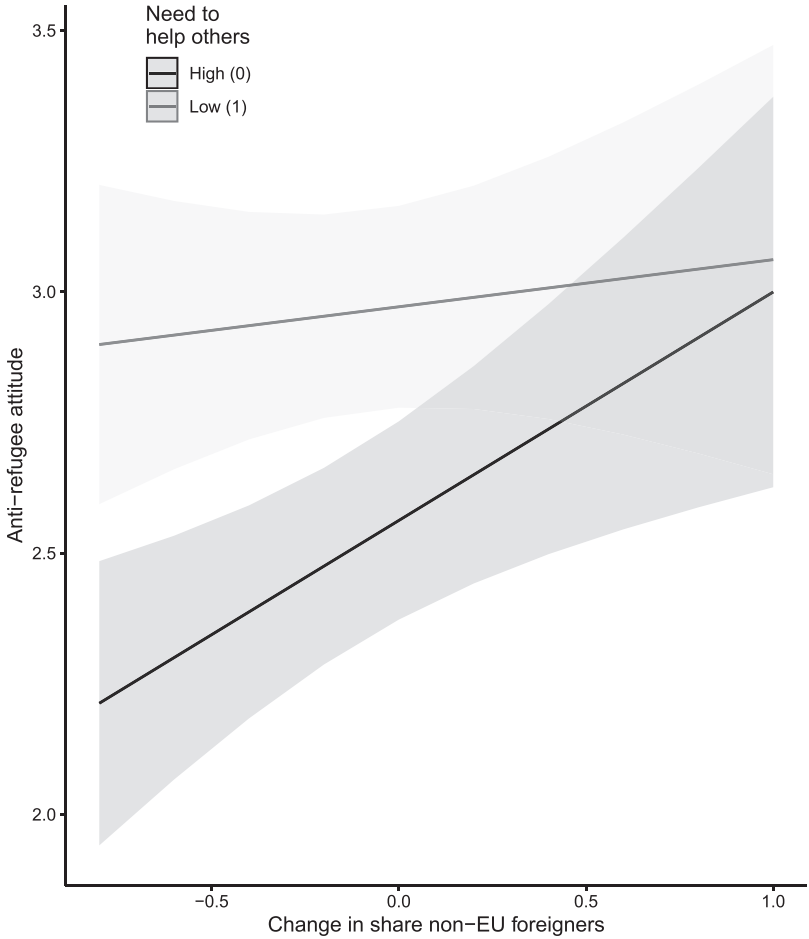


Figure 4 tests the *humanitarian concerns-hypothesis*, which states that those with a low need to help others should react more negatively to refugees (third column in table A2). Contrary to theoretical expectations, the data show that in fact the opposite is true. The model predicts that those having a high need to help others are indeed less negative toward refugees (black line), but primarily during times when the share of non-EU foreigners is below the national average, and become more negative when the share of foreigners is larger. The predicted attitude of those with a low need to help depends little on the foreigner share (grey line). Hence, the difference between those with high or low motivation to help converge with a rise in the share of non-EU foreigners. In national contexts where the foreigner share is strongly above the national average, predicted attitudes of those with a low and with a high need to help are almost identical.

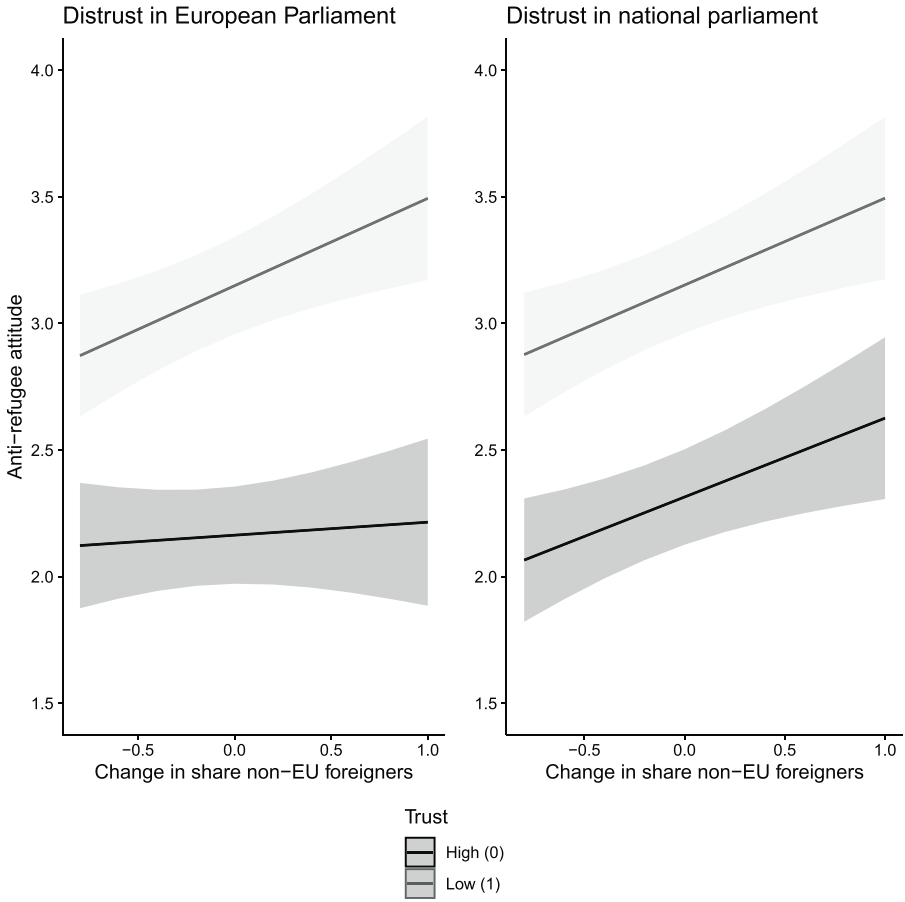
Figure 4. Effect of foreigner share on anti-refugee attitude conditional on need to help (based on Model 2 in table A2 in the online appendix)



The model, thus, predicts no statistically significant differences depending on individual willingness to help for almost half of all observations (those in contexts with an above-average value of foreigners). While the WE interaction is statistically significant ($p = 0.015$), it is not in the theoretically expected direction. The finding that the national proportion of non-EU foreigners affects those with a strong motivation to help *more* contradicts the *humanitarian concerns-hypothesis*.

Finally, figure 5 shows how the WE of share of non-EU foreigners on an anti-refugee attitude differs for the two forms of political trust to test the *institutional trust-hypotheses* (columns four and five in table A2). The left panel of figure 5 indicates that those who distrust the European Parliament (EP) hold a more negative attitude toward refugees (grey line). The positive slope of the grey line

Figure 5. Effect of foreigner share on anti-refugee attitudes conditional on institutional distrust (based on Models 3 and 4 in table A2 in the online appendix)



indicates that larger the share of foreigners, the more negative this attitude. The black line shows that those who highly trust the EP harbor a less negative attitude toward refugees, which does not depend on the share of foreigners. The differences in the WE of share of foreigners on the anti-refugee attitude is statistically significant ($p = 0.006$). Again, it seems that experiencing foreigner inflow on the national level leads to an attitude polarization between those that trust European politics and those who do not.

Turning to the right panel of figure 5, one can see that those who distrust the national parliament (grey line) also harbor a more negative view regarding the intake of refugees compared to those who trust the national parliament (black line). However, as the grey and the black lines are almost parallel, the correlation between the share of non-EU foreigners and individual attitudes toward refugees does not differ between those with high and low trust in the

national parliament. This is confirmed by the statistical insignificance of the WE interaction ($p = 0.791$).

Hence, distrust in political institutions generally correlates with more negative attitude toward refugees. But change in national demographics affects those who distrust in the EP more than those who trust the EP. On the other hand, changes in the national share of non-EU foreigners have an impact on attitudes independent of trust in national politics. The data thereby only partly confirm the *Institutional Trust-Hypotheses*. I will return to these findings in the discussion.

Robustness Checks

I took several steps to examine how stable the present findings are. The following results are in table A4 in the online appendix.

First, I treated the outcome as quasi-metric and opted for linear models for reasons of simplicity and comparability. However, the outcome could be considered ordinal. Thus, I estimated three-level ordered logit regression models.[13] Conclusions do not depend on the link function (model 1).

Secondly, I deleted country-years with fewer than 100 interviews to minimize the impact of possible idiosyncratic individual observations. This comes at the cost of a less balanced panel. Keeping all country-years (69 in total) leads to a slightly smaller but still positive and statistically significant WE of the share of foreigners (model 2). Note that including country-years with fewer than 100 interviews gives much weight to a few respondents in certain cases. For example, a single interview drives the individual-level values for Norway in 2017 (see table A3 in the online appendix). It seems rather unlikely that a single or very few persons adequately represent public opinion in a country just by chance. In my view, one should thus treat the estimates of model 3 in table A4 with caution. Moreover, I ran a model that excludes all country-years that have less than 200 interviews, which does not have an impact on the results (model 3).

Thirdly, I checked how individual countries drive the results. Changes in the size of the allochthonous population differed substantively across Europe. Germany underwent the largest increase, followed by Austria and Sweden. The WE of the proportion of non-EU foreigners is robust to removing Germany (model 4), Austria (model 5) or Sweden (model 6) from the analysis. Additional analysis shows that excluding any other country also does not drive the results. However, dropping Germany, Austria, and Sweden *simultaneously* renders the WE of the foreigner share statistically insignificant, although the point estimate remains similar (model 7). While the stability of the effect size throughout the models suggests that the correlation exists universally, only a few countries actually experienced demographic changes to a relevant extent. Thus, the effect becomes statistically insignificant when I remove those countries that mostly received the treatment, that is, that had strong changes in the proportion of foreigners.

Fourthly, splitting the data by years might be regarded arbitrary. I estimated the same models using only the two waves (2014/15 and 2016/17). This reduces temporal variation. Moreover, I view this procedure as less capable to capture

actual dynamics over the four years. For example, many interviews of the seventh wave in Hungary actually did not take place in 2014 but in 2015. The effects are very similar (model 8). The inflow of refugees to Europe started to erupt mostly in 2015, making it an outstanding year. As an additional check, I ran a model that excludes respondents interviewed in 2015. The results are, again, stable (model 9).

Fifthly, for causal inference, it is necessary that the compared countries would have followed similar trends if exposed to similar levels of non-EU foreigners in order to draw valid conclusions from the WE (Brüderl and Ludwig 2014). Put differently, in the counterfactual case that a country with strong demographic change would not have experienced this change, natives should hold similar views compared to those who were not exposed to such a change in the first place. To test this *parallel trends assumption*, I interact country dummy variables with year dummy variables. Because scholars recently argued that differences in trends between East and West Germany should be modelled separately (Auspurg, Brüderl, and Wöhler 2019), I split the two parts of Germany (excluding Berlin). For each German *Bundesland*, I take data on asylum applications from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, and on population and GDP per head as well as the proportion of non-EU foreigners from Destatis. The WE of share of non-EU foreigners remains positive and statistically significant and even quadruples if country-specific trends are modelled (model 10). The effect also remains when parallel trends are tested without splitting Germany or when Germany is split but not interactions are modelled.

Further tests show that the WE of non-EU foreigners also remain when no individual-level variables are included and without listwise deletion and when individuals with an immigration background are kept.

Conclusion

The flow of refugees into Europe has led to a crisis of solidarity among EU-member states. While Europeans generally seem to support a proportional allocation of asylum seekers (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2017), the results of the present study suggest that natives' openness toward refugees differs among individuals, among countries, and over time. The number of new asylum applications strongly decreased in all countries after 2016, mainly due to the deal between the EU and Turkey (BBC 2016). But this decrease did not halt the rise in negative attitudes toward refugees in key countries such as Germany, Austria, or Hungary. It rather seemed to be that significant accumulation of foreigners, which was most visible for the refugee designations Germany, Austria, and Sweden, was associated with a considerable drop in natives' openness toward refugees. The findings demonstrate the importance to take a dynamic perspective when examining recent hostility toward refugees. While time-stable differences between countries helped little to explain such attitudes, changes within countries over the four years of investigation had a significant impact. Static perspectives on foreigner shares ignore the importance

of change relative to a certain baseline (Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet 2009; Newman and Velez 2014). This could be one reason why a substantive body of cross-sectional comparative research does not find a connection between national share of foreigners and attitudes (e.g.,: Sides and Citrin 2007; Stockemer 2016).

Further analyses reveal that conservatives and those who distrust supra-national European politics are especially likely to react to strong demographic shifts. In contrast, the association between distrust in national politics and attitudes toward refugees does not seem to depend on actual immigration. This may at least partly be due to the anti-EU framing of the migration issue by many right-wing populist parties in Europe. For example, the former leader of the UK Independence Party, Nigel Farage, stated that the "*demand for the rapid implementation of a common EU migration and asylum policy [. . .] would be wholly unacceptable to a United Kingdom that already has levels of immigration that are too high*." (cited in Stockemer et al. 2018, 328) Similarly, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared "*there is no need for a common European migration policy: whoever needs migrants can take them, but don't force them on us*." (ibid.) Part of natives' attitudes seem to reflect this reasoning. Experiencing foreigner inflow seems to have most impact for attitudes of those skeptical of the EU. Those who do not trust European politics might blame Brussel's political elites for letting refugee inflow happen in the first place (also see McLaren 2012). Further research could help shedding more light on this interpretation of the present findings.

However, one should keep in mind what the outcome measures. Opposing a "generous" handling of refugee status does not necessarily imply a preference to keep out refugees. It might still favor proportional (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2017) or "better" (Heizmann and Ziller 2020) allocation across EU countries. Natives may also differ in their definition of a "refugee" altogether, which can have severe consequences for their political and humanitarian support. Previous research has pointed to a paradox: People *in abstracto* seem to support migrants in need, which refugees are usually considered to be (Newman et al. 2013; Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016). At the same time, however, they may oppose those originating in areas from which most refugees actually come (Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017). Similarly, the present study has shown that a general motivation for helping others predicts higher support for refugees. Yet this effect shrinks once a country undergoes a real inflow of foreigners. Solving this paradox would be a huge step to facilitating the integration of allochthonous newcomers. Future research may help by examining this mechanism further.

A second limitation of the present study might be seen in the somewhat crude measurement of temporal and geographical variations of refugee inflows. A more fine-grained differentiation, for example between months or sub-national districts, would lead to additional insights. Unfortunately, there are not enough respondents within either each district or each month for most countries. Further differentiation would hence come at the severe cost of very few to no observations in many cells, rendering any analysis infeasible. Moreover,

I consider the country-year perspective reasonable for the present study because this study's perspective concerns macro-developments. National debates, for example through mass media (Czymara and Dochow 2018), are a core transmitter of macro-developments. Such debates hardly stop at district borders. Furthermore, there should be sufficient time for developments to take effect in the course of a year. Measures based on country-years should, hence, be useful because they capture larger trends.

Even though asylum rates in Europe recently diminished considerably, the social and political consequences for host countries already include a rise in xenophobic hate crimes (Jäckle and König 2018; Entorf and Lange 2019; Ziller and Goodman 2019), electoral success of populist and far-right parties (Dinas et al. 2019), and the erosion of social cohesion (Ziller 2015). Hence, balancing the allocation of refugees and the public mood remains an important task for many EU member states.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material can be found at *SOCFOR* online.

About the Author

Christian Czymara is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Social Sciences, Goethe University Frankfurt. His research interests include immigration and migrant integration, ethnic conflict, political communication, and discourse effects on political attitudes. He published his work in the International Migration Review, European Sociological Review and the Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie.

Notes

1. Note that Hopkins (2010) argues primarily about demographic changes at the local level. However, since public speakers and mass media often referred to the inflow of refugees as a national concern, I assume that national immigration is important in this context as well.
2. In contrast, contact theory predicts that increased out-group presence decreases ethnic prejudice and, ultimately, leads to more positive attitudes (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). However, contact is more likely to happen on local levels and in everyday situations than on the national level (Weber 2015). Since my perspective is a cross-national one, I assume that inter-group contact is not the core mechanism at play.
3. I assume that effects can only be top-down in a comparative setting, that is, individual-level variables do not directly affect country characteristics.
4. I use the lmer command of the R package from Bates et al. (2015) to calculate the hierarchical linear models and the very helpful packages of

Lüdecke (2019) for plots and tables. All code is available at https://dx.doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/RPN92.

5. The models of Giesselmann and Schmidt-Catran (2019) include the original variables and their means. Using the variable's means and demeaned versions yields identical estimates for the WE (see Bell, Fairbrother, and Jones 2019 or Andreß et al. 2013: 164 ff.). As a robustness check, I re-estimated the interaction models using the original variables and their means, as expected leading to the same results for the interactions.
6. I refrain from standardizing the country-level predictors in a similar manner because the mean and the demeaned versions of each variable have a different range, and range underlies the standardization. Comparing minimum and maximum would thus imply something different for the two versions of the same variable, which can be misleading. Hence I keep the more intuitive identical scale for the WE and BE of each country variable.
7. I use listwise deletion and thereby assume that missing data are not systematically related to the effects of interest (missing at random). I remove about 23.3 percent of the original data due to item nonresponse. Results are similar for models that only include the macro-variables and all respondents with missing values on relevant individual-level variables. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that unit nonresponse in the seventh and eight wave of the ESS ranges from 30 (Spain) to 70 (Germany) percent (European Social Survey 2019).
8. However, one should be cautious with these comparisons because the averages of each year are not all based on the same set of countries.
9. In cross-section, Estonia has the largest population of foreigners at about 14 percent, with a slightly decreasing tendency over the four years. While this historically large share of non-EU foreigners in the case of Estonia is mostly due to Russians, bear in mind that the main interest of the analysis is the change over time.
10. Strictly speaking, the demeaned variables (WE) are not on the country- (i. e. third) but on the country-year-level (i. e. second). On the country level are the time-stable mean variables (BE). The WE on level 2 automatically account for all possible level 3 variables, whether they are observed or unobserved.
11. These conclusions also hold for the same models when including either the asylum application variables or the foreigners share variables, leaving the respective others out as suggested by figure 1 (WE foreigner share: 0.25; $p = 0.01$; WE asylum rates: -0.02; $p = 0.13$). Similarly, conclusions hold when not controlling for anything (WE foreigner share: 0.44; $p < 0.001$; WE asylum rates: -0.02; $p = 0.07$). I include both in the same model merely for reasons of space since the conclusion is identical to separate models.
12. The results in Table A5 in the online appendix lead to a very similar conclusion: Those who score higher on the conservation value are more likely to hold a negative attitude (model 1) and react stronger to an increase in the share of foreigners (model 2).
13. I use the clmm command of the R package provided by Christensen (2018) to estimate multilevel ordered logit regression.

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