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The “Refugee Crisis,” Immigration Attitudes, and Euroscepticism

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Abstract

Between 2015 and 2017, the European Union (EU) was confronted with a major crisis in its history, the so-called “European refugee crisis.” Since the multifaceted crisis has provoked many different responses, it is also likely to have influenced individuals’ assessments of immigrants and European integration. Using data from three waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) — the wave before the crisis in 2012, the wave at the beginning of the crisis in 2014, and the wave right after the (perceived) height of the crisis in 2016 — we test the degree to which the European refugee crisis increased Europeans’ anti-immigrant sentiment and Euroscepticism, as well as the influence of Europeans’ anti-immigrant attitudes on their level of Euroscepticism. As suggested by prior research, our results indicate that there is indeed a consistent and solid relationship between more critical attitudes toward immigrants and increased Euroscepticism. Surprisingly, however, we find that the crisis increased neither anti-immigrant sentiments nor critical attitudes toward the EU and did not reinforce the link between rejection of immigrants and rejection of the EU. These findings imply that even under a strong external shock, fundamental political attitudes remain constant.

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Keywords

Euroscepticism, attitudes towards migrants, refugee crisis

Introduction

Pictures of migrants from the Middle East and Africa trying to reach the Italian, Greek, and Spanish shores have been a constant in news across Europe in recent times (European Commission 2014, 2016, 2018; Goodman, Sirriyeh, and McMahon 2017; Niemann and Zaun 2018). Escaping war, violence, and poverty, hundreds of people have tried to reach the European Union (EU) daily for several years now (Pew Research Center 2016; UNHCR 2019). In 2015, at the peak of the so-called “European refugee crisis,” 2.4 million non-EU migrants arrived on European soil (Eurostat 2016). In addition to the humanitarian crisis, the refugee crisis has triggered a problem of governance: by the beginning of 2019, more than three years after the peak of the crisis, there was still no coherent common policy on how to distribute refugees/asylum-seekers throughout EU member countries. Trying to capitalize on fears stemming from large streams of incoming refugees, as well as (uncontrolled and) sustained immigration, Eurosceptic forces such as radical right-wing parties have employed an anti-immigration, anti-Islam, and anti-Europe rhetoric (Akkermann, de Lange, and Rooduijn 2016, 5).

This article investigates the effect of the “European refugee crisis” on European residents’ attitudes toward the EU. Prior research indicates that “attitudes towards immigrants” are among the most important predictors of Euroscepticism¹ (McLaren 2002; de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007). We build on this research and examine the effect of the “European refugee crisis” on anti-immigrant attitudes, Euroscepticism, and the link between anti-immigrant attitudes and Euroscepticism among Europeans. We expect that the refugee crisis strengthened the two variables, as well as the link between them, because the events between 2015 until 2017 triggered a multifaceted “crisis” in the areas of governance, border control, and unregulated migration to EU member states (Trauner 2016, 1). This shock has likely provoked fears toward immigrants and rejection of the EU in Europe. Our research questions are, thus, the following: Has the refugee crisis made European residents warier of immigration? How has the refugee crisis influenced Euroscepticism? Has the refugee crisis strengthened the link between the rejection of immigration and the rejection of the EU?

We investigate these three research questions by using data from three rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS) for the years 2012 (before the refugee crisis), 2014 (at the onset of the crisis), and 2016 (right after the peak of the crisis). The data

¹The term “Euroscepticism” broadly encapsulates “a range of critical positions on European integration, as well as outright opposition” (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004, 3).

cover the duration of the crisis and, therefore, should depict its potential effects on residents' sentiments. In line with our expectations, we find that before, at the onset, and at the perceived peak of the refugee crisis, European residents who rejected immigration also rejected the EU. Yet, and this is surprising, we also find that these feelings did not change; that is, negative sentiments toward both immigrants and the EU did not increase in the period between 2012 and 2016. The same applies to the strength of the link between anti-immigrant sentiments and Euroscepticism, which also remained constant from 2012 to 2016.

To explore these findings, the article proceeds as follows. First, we offer some description of the refugee crisis. Second, we review the literature on anti-immigrant attitudes and Euroscepticism and develop our three hypotheses. Third, we discuss our research design and methods, paying particular attention to the operationalization of our key variables. Fourth, we present and discuss the results of our quantitative study. Finally, we conclude and suggest some avenues for future research.

The “European Refugee Crisis”

In his seminal book, *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas (1975) defines a crisis as a rarely occurring event that can destabilize both the existing order and citizens' long-standing beliefs. The European refugee crisis was such a milestone event. We use the term “(European) refugee crisis” throughout the article to refer to two dimensions of the crisis: first, a humanitarian crisis of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing or migrating from war, oppression, or disastrous economic circumstances² to EU member states from 2015 to 2017 and, second, a crisis of European governance which was exacerbated by dealing with the humanitarian crisis.

The European refugee crisis, of course, did not happen in a vacuum, and signs were visible prior to 2015 (Menéndez 2016, 388). The Arab Spring and the start of armed conflict in Libya and Syria created a security vacuum and humanitarian crisis in important parts of the Middle East and North Africa. Linked to these geopolitical developments, the number of refugees to Europe sharply increased in 2015, after having reached a low point in 2009 (Pew Research Center 2016). In 2011, the number of asylum-seekers in Europe topped 250,000 for the first time since 2004 (Pew Center 2016). In the following years, that number continued to increase, reaching over 1.3 million filed asylum applications in 2015 (Pew Research Center 2016). Along with gradually increasing numbers of refugees and migrants in this

²The reason a person leaves his/her home (country) is important for determining that person's legal status: “Refugees” are persons who flee their home for predominantly political persecution, war, or violence and are, therefore, entitled to specific legal protection (Nicholson and Kumin 2017, 17). In contrast, persons leaving their home (country) because of economic or other reasons are not legally recognized as “refugees” (Nicholson and Kumin 2017, 258) and, therefore, called “migrants” throughout this article.

period, there was a dramatic rise in the number of shipwrecks and deaths in crossing the Mediterranean (Pastore and Henry 2016, 52–53). By the second quarter of 2015, the number of asylum-seekers arriving in Italy and Greece reached several tens of thousands per month (UNHCR 2019), and the issue took center stage when several boats sank in the Mediterranean (El-Enany 2016).

Yet, the refugee crisis was more than a humanitarian crisis. It also led to a European crisis of governance (Niemann and Zaun 2018). As Goodman et al. (2017) state, the crisis challenged existing governing structures, in particular, the EU's cohesion. Italy and Greece, the two countries where most refugees landed, were soon overstrained by the refugee flow, leading to a policy of waving asylum-seekers through, which resulted in enormous "secondary movements" toward Northern Europe (Niemann and Zaun 2018, 4). In the end, the Dublin system, which rules that countries where asylum-seekers first enter the EU (i.e., the so-called frontline states) are responsible for administering asylum claims, collapsed entirely (Menéndez 2016, 397).

Although the European Commission (2015a) launched its "Agenda on Migration" in March 2015 to push for European-level management of the crisis, the Dublin system's breakdown precipitated a chain of uncoordinated unilateral actions (Niemann and Zaun 2018, 4; Zaun 2018, 56). In August 2015, Germany disregarded the Dublin regulations for Syrian citizens, admitting them directly into the national asylum system (Euractiv 2015). However, as other EU member states refused to follow suit, Germany, constrained by an enormous number of arrivals at its southern border, reversed course by (temporarily) reinstating controls at its Schengen border with Austria, preventing refugees from getting "stranded" in their country (Pastore and Henry 2016, 54). France, Denmark, and Sweden imitated this measure in 2015 (Niemann and Zaun 2018, 4). Hungary went so far as to build a fence along its border with Croatia and Serbia, which moved refugee flows to neighboring Slovenia (Trauner 2016, 320) and eventually led to the complete closure of the "Balkan route" (Weber 2016, 38).

Since Autumn 2015, the European Commission and EU member states have been working on a multitude of measures to manage the crisis (Zaun 2017; Niemann and Speyer 2018; Niemann and Zaun 2018). These measures include the handling of asylum-seekers' arrival at the EU's external borders (e.g., through the introduction of hotspots³), approaches to responsibility-sharing (through relocation and

³With the so-called hotspot approach, the EU strives to support frontline member states "by deploying Migration Management Support Teams that operate in five key areas: establishing functional hotspots, implementing the relocation decisions, ensuring the effective return of migrants not entitled to international protection, improving border management and creating sufficient and adequate reception capacity" (Niemann and Zaun 2018, 5–6). To this end, several EU agencies provide on-the-ground support to local authorities. The approach relies, however, on sufficient infrastructure in the member states.

resettlement), policies of externalization (especially the EU-Turkey Statement⁴), the redefinition of who is in need and has a right to asylum (e.g., through the introduction of new safe origin countries), and the prevention of irregular migration (e.g., through border measures against trafficking and smuggling) and refugee departure from their home and transit countries (e.g., through the introduction of trust funds) (Niemann and Zaun 2018). Despite these measures, disagreements between EU member states have remained. Most notably, some countries such as Poland and Hungary have not accepted any temporary distribution of refugees to their countries, even after the Council of the EU formally adopted this policy (European Commission 2017). In 2019, more than three years after its peak, the refugee crisis remains an important topic on the EU agenda, as well as on those of many member states such as Germany, Italy, Greece, and the Nordic countries. It also remains important for many citizens across the EU (European Commission 2018, 12).

European Identity, Attitudes toward Immigrants, and Euroscepticism

Social identity, the “knowledge of their membership in their social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership,” helps individuals define who they are (Tajfel 1978, 63). For many Europeans, their nationality and nation-state have been important sources of identification for hundreds of years (Smith 1992, 55; Kroskirty 1999, 111; Hooghe and Marks 2004, 416). More recently, the EU has become an additional source of self-identification (Risse 2003; European Commission 2018, 35), increasingly affecting people’s lives and adopting its own symbols (e.g., the European Flag and anthem). Although for most citizens on the continent, the nation retains primacy (European Commission 2018, 35), the growing sense of “Europeanness” implies that more people are integrating a sense of belonging to two overlapping polities (Citrin and Sides 2004, 170): a national identity and a European identity (McLaren, 2010). However, not only has this feeling of belonging to the EU developed relatively recently, it is also not shared by everybody, especially not by those who are critical or sceptical of the EU and/or the process of European integration (Verhaegen, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2014, 296).

Prior research has established that sentiments toward immigrants are an important predictor of attitudes toward the EU (McLaren 2002; de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007). “Ethnic threat theory” explains this link by building on “social identity theory,” which assumes that individuals categorize themselves and others into groups and favor their own group over others (Tajfel

⁴The EU–Turkey Statement was concluded in March 2016 at the initiative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The statement illegalizes the asylum applications of refugees who cross irregularly from Turkey to Greece (Zaun 2018, 56).

and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1981; Brown 1995). However, people's dispositions vary in this respect: Sniderman et al. (2002) show that people who reject immigrants are especially prone to categorization. *Vis-à-vis* immigrants, they hold a strong negative out-group bias (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005, 64) or rather a strong positive in-group bias (McLaren 2002). As a result, people holding anti-immigrant attitudes often perceive immigrants as members of an out-group posing a threat to the in-group in which they locate themselves (Azrout, van Spanje, and de Vreese 2011, 7).

Ethnic threat theory identifies different kinds of threats (McLaren 2002, 557): first, in a situation where a specific good such as employment, social assistance, or housing is scarce, natives may fear immigrants as competitors ("economic" or "realistic threats"). A larger group of researchers (e.g., de Vreese, Boomgaarden, and Semetko 2008; Azrout, van Spanje, and de Vreese 2013), however, focuses on the perception of "cultural" (or "symbolic") threats posed by immigrants: natives might fear that immigrants dilute the national culture and lifestyle. Foreigners might have a different faith (i.e., Islam) and different customs, all of which might be in opposition to natives' ideas of their traditional culture (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007; de Vreese et al. 2008). Additionally, faced with immigration from mostly Muslim countries, European citizens might also fear a growing danger of (Islamic) terrorism (Azrout et al. 2013).

Since the EU stands for free movement and diversity, perceived threats posed by immigrants might also trigger Euroscepticism. For many Eurosceptics, Schengen and the open-border framework are synonymous with a failed immigration and citizenship policy (Orbán 2017). In addition, some national governments in Europe frame migration-related issues as European problems, even if only to divert public attention from their own historical or contemporary failures in the fields of migration and domestic integration policy (Barbulescu and Beaudonnet 2014). This strong interlinkage of the two topics makes it reasonable to expect an attitudinal link between sentiments toward immigrants and sentiments toward the EU.

The literature on EU attitudes confirms a positive link between the rejection of immigrants and Euroscepticism: for example, Lubbers and Scheepers (2007, 663) show that people "who fear immigrants and who perceive a threat from immigrants" are especially prone to "political Euroscepticism." Focusing more on the cultural dimension of Euroscepticism, McLaren (2002, 554) writes that "[t]he uniqueness of national cultures and the exclusive control over the resources of the nation-state are . . . seen under threat by the EU." Similarly, Luedtke (2005, 8) argues that citizens who fear immigration's negative economic and social consequences will most likely prefer that the nation-state retains control over its own historically based borders and immigration policies. Finally, de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005, 64) state that the European project is defined by bringing together people from different countries, regions, and cultures and different religions and ethnicities, with the implication that anybody who is wary of these newcomers should also be wary of the EU (McLaren 2012; Hatton 2016).

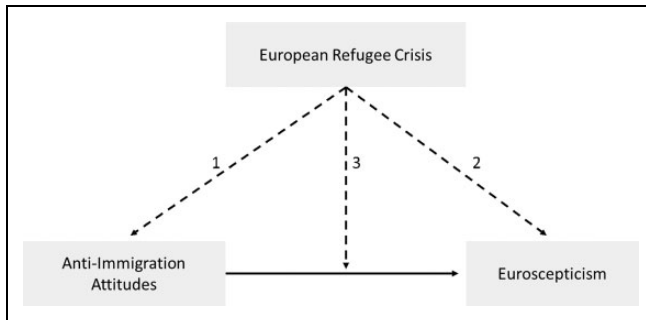


Figure 1. Anticipated Effects of the European Refugee Crisis on Anti-immigrant Attitudes, Euroscepticism and the Link between Anti-immigrant Attitudes and Euroscepticism.

We follow this line of argument and hypothesize that European residents’ support for the European project and identification with the EU should wane in the face of the refugee crisis. In other words, we expect the crisis to strengthen not just Euroscepticism but also anti-immigration attitudes and the link between both variables (see Figure 1).

Contrary to the literal meaning of a “refugee” crisis, we expect the crisis to have affected not only sentiments toward refugees but also attitudes toward immigrants more generally for two reasons. First, the media did not make a clear-cut distinction between refugees and immigrants, often conflating these terms (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, 16; Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017, 4; Goodman et al. 2017, 111–12), which resulted in a great uncertainty about who was migrating to Europe. This conflation likely influenced Europeans’ perception of not only refugees but also immigrants.

Second, while the term “refugee” is defined in accordance with the reasons a person must leave her/his home country (Nicholson and Kumin 2017, 17), an “immigrant” is a person who moves to another country to stay for a considerable period of time. Hence, a person can come as a refugee and become an immigrant, creating more connections and overlap between the two terms and groups of people (Nicholson and Kumin 2017, 258). Moreover, since the circumstances that caused people to leave their home countries and to flee to EU member states are very unlikely to change quickly, we expect European residents to frequently consider refugees as immigrants who are consequently posing the same perceived threats as other immigrants. For these reasons, we investigate how the European refugee crisis affected attitudes toward immigrants generally and not just attitudes toward refugees. Our three hypotheses are, thus, the following: the refugee crisis has (1) increased anti-immigration attitudes, (2) led to a higher level of Euroscepticism, and (3) strengthened the link between the two variables.

HI: The Refugee Crisis Increased Anti-immigrant Sentiments

According to our first hypothesis, the refugee crisis has likely caused an increase in anti-immigration attitudes. Ethnic threat theory explains changes in sentiments toward a specific group by the perception of this group as an out-group that poses multiple threats to the in-group.⁵ As shown by Eurobarometer data, since Spring 2015, EU citizens have viewed immigration as the top challenge facing the EU (European Commission 2015c, 13; 2016, 4–5; 2018, 12–13). In addition, the refugee crisis in both its humanitarian and governance aspect was the dominant media topic in 2015 and 2016 (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017), which, according to “agenda-setting theory” (Dearing and Rogers 1996), entails the issue’s high popular importance (Sirriyeh 2013; McMahon 2015). While the constant description of the events as a “(European) crisis” may already entail a negative connotation and foster an in- and out-group dichotomy (Goodman et al. 2017, 112), migrants were repeatedly referred to as a “flood” overrunning European societies (Watson 2015; Reynolds 2016; Timur and Nordland 2016). In addition, some media reports focused on tax money spent on refugee relief, portraying immigrants as additional competitors on the job market and thus framing the issue as a potential economic threat (The Economist 2016).

Moreover, the migrant influx has stirred cultural fears: since 2014, the majority of refugees have come from countries with Muslim-majority populations (Pew Research Center 2017). Right-wing populist parties have seized on this fact to position these newcomers’ (religious) beliefs as alien to “Western” values of secularism, gender equality, and individual liberty (Akkermann et al. 2016, 5). In addition, during the crisis, European politicians and the media repeatedly linked migration to Islamic terrorism (Duncan 2017; Scarborough 2017): multiple terrorist acts, such as those in Paris in November 2015, and reports of sexual violence perpetrated by refugees in Germany might have increased security threats felt by European residents and, thus, aggravated negative attitudes toward immigrants.⁶ As

⁵Ethnic threat theory provides a better fit for explaining the effects of the refugee crisis than the alternative “contact” or “negative contact theory” (Allport 1954; Putnam 2007). Proponents of contact theory argue that increased intergroup contact will, under specific circumstances (equal status between groups; common goals; intergroup cooperation; support of authorities), lead to fewer prejudices. Although the refugee crisis has entailed increased intergroup contact in some places, the demanding conditions spelled out by the theory have not been met (especially in the short period investigated here).

⁶Through an analysis of British media in 2015, Goodman et al. (2017) show that external events triggered a constant recategorization of newcomers in the media. While the emblematic picture of the drowned Aylan Kurdi led to a brief sympathetic stance toward refugees (Vis and Goriunova 2015; Goodman et al. 2017, 105), the majority of frames were clearly negative: “[R]efugees arriving in Europe are often presented negatively as threatening the

a result, the significant attention devoted to the crisis and the specific representation of refugees and migrants in public discourse are likely to have strengthened already-existing anti-immigrant attitudes and provoked new ones.

H2: The Refugee Crisis has Increased Euroscepticism

Second, we hypothesize that the crisis has directly increased Eurosceptic attitudes among Europeans, mainly due to the EU institutions' perceived lack of effectiveness in handling the crisis. Most importantly, the crisis revealed several defects in the current EU refugee and asylum system, including the Dublin system (failing to ensure equal redistribution of refugees across EU countries), the Schengen system (lacking adequate protection of external borders), and asylum legislation (lacking harmonization from member state to member state). Together, these shortcomings prompted differing/diverging migratory pressures across the EU (Niemann and Zaun 2018). In addition, the management of the refugee crisis was suboptimal in several respects: hotspots in countries such as Greece or Italy were created rather slowly, while conditions in refugee centers there were chaotic (Human Rights Watch 2016). The (emergency) redistribution of refugees from Greece and Italy was accompanied by much political controversy among EU member states, especially several Eastern European countries, and suffered from severe implementation deficits (European Commission 2017). Moreover, there has been little progress concerning a permanent redistribution mechanism (Zaun 2018, 1–2). Taken together, the crisis has revealed both severe conflicts between member states and a lack of problem-solving capacity among EU institutions, which, in turn, may have increased Eurosceptic attitudes among EU residents.

H3: The Refugee Crisis has Strengthened the Link between the Rejection of Immigration and the Rejection of the EU

As noted above, the EU is often associated with free movement and diversity, both of which are likely to be rejected by those who hold anti-immigrant attitudes. Eurosceptics have repeatedly attacked Schengen for promoting a failed immigration policy (Orbán 2017). In addition, national governments of EU member states have found it convenient to shift the blame regarding migration-related problems toward the European level (Barbulescu and Beaudonnet 2014). Following these observations, we hypothesize that the refugee crisis strengthened the link between anti-immigrant attitudes and Euroscepticism.

European way of life and as serious economic burdens" (Goodman et al. 2017, 106). Given that the collection period of the ESS data for each wave investigated here spans about four months, we assume that it is largely free from short-time fluctuations, as reported by Goodman et al. (2017).

This reasoning is even more convincing, given that the refugee crisis was essentially a conflict between member states over EU external borders, free movement within the EU, and the fair division of refugees between EU member states (Zaun 2017; Thielemann 2018). Hence, the refugee crisis has been a genuinely *European* crisis. People who hold anti-immigrant attitudes might, therefore, associate the EU even more strongly with issues of unwanted immigration and diversity, which would presumably strengthen their opposition to the European project itself. Consequently, the link between anti-immigration sentiments and Euroscepticism could become stronger in the wake of the crisis, even in the case that the number of people holding anti-immigrant attitudes/sentiments did not rise (and Hypotheses 1 and 2 prove wrong).

Research Design and Methods

To test our hypotheses, we looked at data on immigration and Euroscepticism before the refugee crisis (2012), at the onset of the refugee crisis (2014), and at (or right after) the peak of the refugee crisis (2016). The European Social Survey (ESS), an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted every two years across Europe since 2001, captures attitudes toward migration and Europe, as well as all other relevant covariates to explain attitudes toward the EU.⁷ We define the dependent variable, “Euroscepticism,” as a “generic, catch-all term, encapsulating a disparate bundle of attitudes opposed to European integration, in general, and opposition to the EU in particular” (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2017, 12). The 11-point scale is based on the question, *should European integration go further, or has it gone too far?*, measuring the degree to which residents expressed “doubt or disbelief in Europe and European integration in general” (Hooghe and Marks

⁷The following EU countries participated in the 2012 round: Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The following EU countries participated in the 2014 round: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The following EU countries participated in the 2016 round: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Thus, the ESS data do not include Italy and Greece, countries severely hit by the crisis. Nevertheless, we rely on the ESS data (1) as it is the only cross-European survey with continuous measures of anti-immigration attitudes and EU attitudes throughout the crisis and (2) as it includes those (core) EU member states that witnessed electoral successes for right-wing populist actors who capitalized on increased anti-EU and anti-immigrant sentiment.

2007, 120). Values range from 0 (“European integration has gone too far”) to 10 (“European integration should go further”).⁸

For the independent variable, “anti-immigration attitudes,” we also use a generic operationalization of the concept — namely, the answer to the question: *do immigrants make the country a better or worse place to live in?* Such a general measurement of attitudes toward immigration is frequently used in the academic literature dealing with anti-immigrant sentiment (Kuhn 2011; Tillman 2013; Yavcan 2013). It should also cover the different dimensions (economic and cultural) from which anti-immigrant attitudes can arise. The scale of our immigration proxy ranges from 0 (“a worse place to live in”) to 10 (“a better place to live in”). Given that such a generic operationalization has the disadvantage that it cannot investigate attitudes toward different categories (refugees and immigrants, different ethnic groups, etc.), we consider three more questions which asked respondents whether the host country should allow many/few immigrants of the same ethnic group as the majority, whether the host country should allow many/few immigrants of a different ethnic group from the majority, and whether the host country should allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe.

Since Euroscepticism stems not only from negative perceptions toward immigration but also from a host of other covariates, we control for relevant demographic factors and attitudinal variables in the regression models: education, unemployment, perceived economic situation, political interest, satisfaction with democracy, political ideology, urban or rural residency, gender, and age. For the first variable education, we assume that European labor mobility increases labor competition for the lower strata and has led to above-average rises in the paychecks of better-educated residents (Anderson and Reichert 1995; Hooghe and Marks 2005), who additionally profit from open borders for both labor and leisure (Gabel 1998). Therefore, those individuals that benefit from *higher education* — measured by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as ranging from early-childhood education (coded 1) to a doctoral degree or equivalent (coded 7) — should, on average, be more Europhilic (Gabel and Palmer 1995; Hakhverdian et al., 2013; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007). The same positive relationship should exist between material affluence and higher support for the EU (gauged by a person’s satisfaction with her/his household income coded on a scale from 1 to 4 (lower values imply less

⁸The ESS target population are all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private households in several EU member states (see footnote 7 for the full list), regardless of their nationality, citizenship, or language. This means that not all respondents are European citizens. However, in the ESS three waves we use, more than 95 percent of polled respondents are citizens of the country in which they took the survey. We can assume that of the 5 percent non-citizens, a large percentage are EU citizens, which leaves a tiny percentage of non-EU citizens. This tiny percentage is highly unlikely to influence the survey results in a meaningful way.

satisfaction)). In contrast, unemployment (measured by a dummy variable for prolonged unemployment over 12 months in a person's life) should increase Euroscepticism.

As the EU is a highly complex political entity, individuals with higher *cognitive mobilization* — measured by political interest coded from 1 (very interested) to 4 (not interested at all) — should be more sympathetic to the integration project (Inglehart 1970; Janssen 1991; Gabel 1998; Boomgaarden et al. 2011). Likewise, if citizens are very supportive of democracy in their respective countries (operationalized by a 12-point scale ranging from 0 (not satisfied at all) to 11 (very satisfied)), this support will likely spill over to the integration process (Gabel 1998; Boomgaarden et al. 2011).

While the empirical literature has largely confirmed the above-mentioned relationships, results have been inconclusive as to the effect of political ideology, residence, gender, and age on Euroscepticism and anti-immigration attitudes (Ray 2003; de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007; Kuhn 2011; Tillman 2013; van Klingeren, Boomgaarden, and de Vreese 2013). Nevertheless, we follow prior research in assuming that a right-wing *political ideology* — measured by a person's self-placement on a left–right scale from 0 (very left) to 10 (very right) — as well as a *rural residence*, measured by an ordinal variable measuring residence by degree of urbanization from 1 (large urban centers) to 5 (the countryside), should be associated with traditional, nationalist, and exclusionary values and therefore increase Euroscepticism (Coenders, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2005, 423).

For gender (men are coded 1 and women 2), the relationship's direction could go either way. Earlier research found that women are more Eurosceptic than men (Laatikainen 1996; Nelsen and Guth 2000). According to Laatikainen (1996), this increased Euroscepticism comes from women's higher economic vulnerability to free-market policies. For Nelsen and Guth (2000), the main reasons for women's moderately more negative opinions are their lower knowledge of the EU and higher distrust of Brussels. More recent research, however, provides a more nuanced picture. In fact, recent studies (e.g., Lubbers and Scheepers 2010, Nielson 2016) mainly include gender as a control variable in models discussing the constituents of Euroscepticism, without theorizing why one gender should oppose the EU more than the other. These studies come up with mixed results. For instance, Lubbers and Scheepers (2010) confirm that women are more Eurosceptical than men, whereas Nielsen (2016) finds that gender does not influence Euroscepticism. In another study, Stokes (2016) reports that in some countries, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, men report stronger opposition to more European integration than do women. Stokes (2016), however, only reports bivariate results, rendering her findings suggestive. Finally, *younger* individuals should be less Eurosceptic than the elderly, as they are generally better educated and better paid and subscribe more firmly to postmaterialistic, pluralistic, and cosmopolitan values (Inglehart 1977; Coenders et al. 2004; Goerres 2008). This last variable is measured by survey respondents' actual age.

Table 1. Distribution of the Variable: European Integration Has Gone Too Far (Should Go Further).

	2012	2014	2016
European integration has gone too far (0)/ should go further (10)	5.08	4.88	4.93

Table 2. Anti-immigrant Attitudes in 2012, 2014, and 2016.

	2012	2014	2016
Immigrants make country a worse place (coded 0) a better place (coded 10)	5.03	5.04	5.07
Allow many immigrants (coded 1), few immigrants (coded 4) of the same ethnic group as the majority	2.19	2.12	2.10
Allow many immigrants (coded 1), few immigrants (coded 4) of different ethnic group from the majority	2.50	2.46	2.47
Allow many immigrants (coded 1), few immigrants (coded 4) from poorer countries outside Europe	2.61	2.65	2.52

Statistical Procedures

To measure the influence of anti-immigration sentiment on Euroscepticism, we combine the 2012, 2014, and 2016 waves of the cross-sectional ESS survey. With these data, we engage in a three-step analysis. First, we present some univariate statistics and graphs of our two indicators of interest, (a) “attitudes toward immigrants” and (b) “attitudes toward the European Union,” for 2012, 2014, and 2016, respectively (see Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 2 and 3). These statistics/graphs highlight whether there has been change in either of our two variables. We also add descriptive statistics on our three additional operationalizations of immigration attitudes to test for the robustness of the general immigration attitudes scale (see Table 2). Second, we test in the bivariate realm whether there is a change in the magnitude of the relationship between immigration attitudes and Euroscepticism (see Figure 4). Finally, and most importantly, we present the results of four multivariate regression models, measuring the influence of immigration attitudes on attitudes toward European integration.

On the left-hand side of our regression equation is our 11-value European integration variable. On the right-hand side is our independent variable measuring whether respondents think that immigrants make their country a better or worse place to live. We also add all the control variables on the right-hand side of the equation (see Table 3). Since the dependent variable is normally distributed (see Figure 2), we can run our models (see Model 1) as an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model. To account for unequal variances between observations, we run our models with Huber White Standard Errors (Long and Ervin 2000).

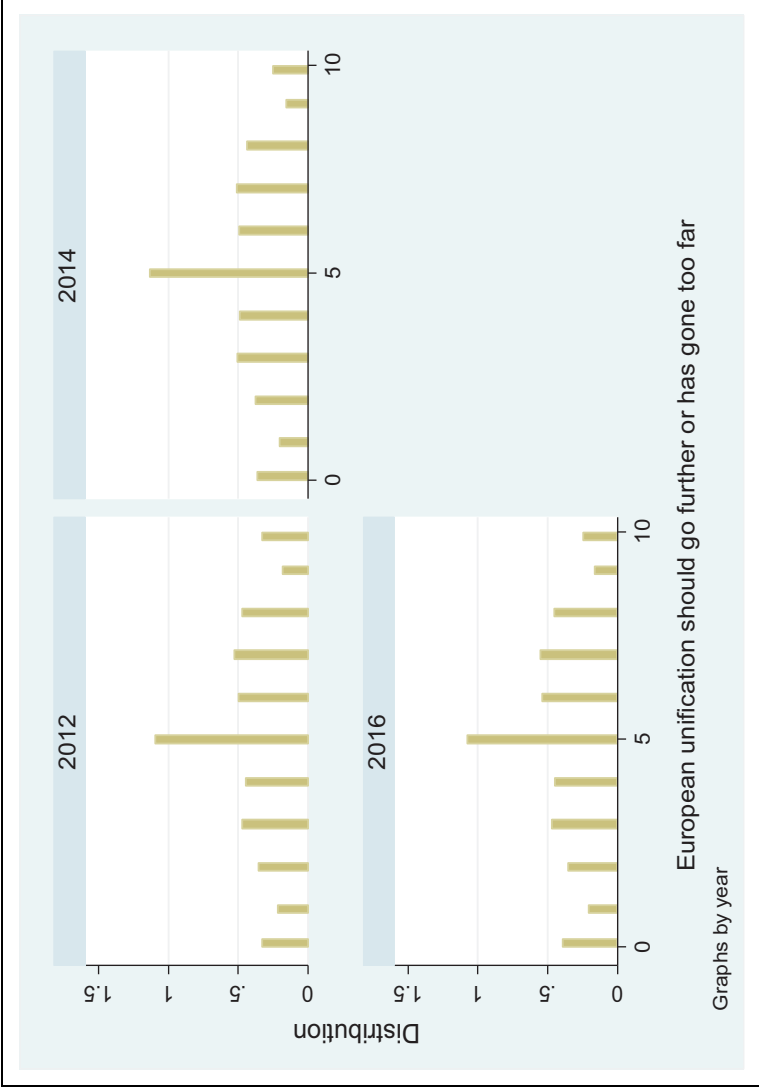


Figure 2. Distribution of the Dependent Variable: European Integration Has Gone Too Far, Should Go Further for 2012, 2014, and 2016.

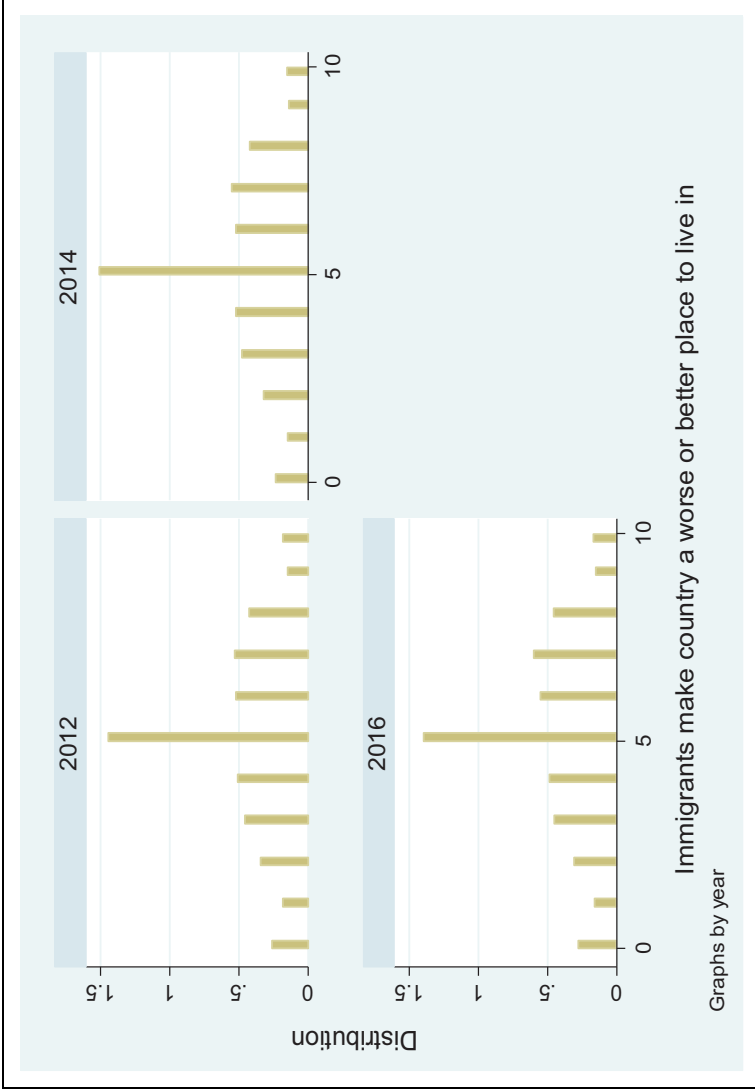


Figure 3. Distribution of the Independent Variable: Immigrants Make Country a Worse or Better Place to Live in for 2012, 2014, and 2016.

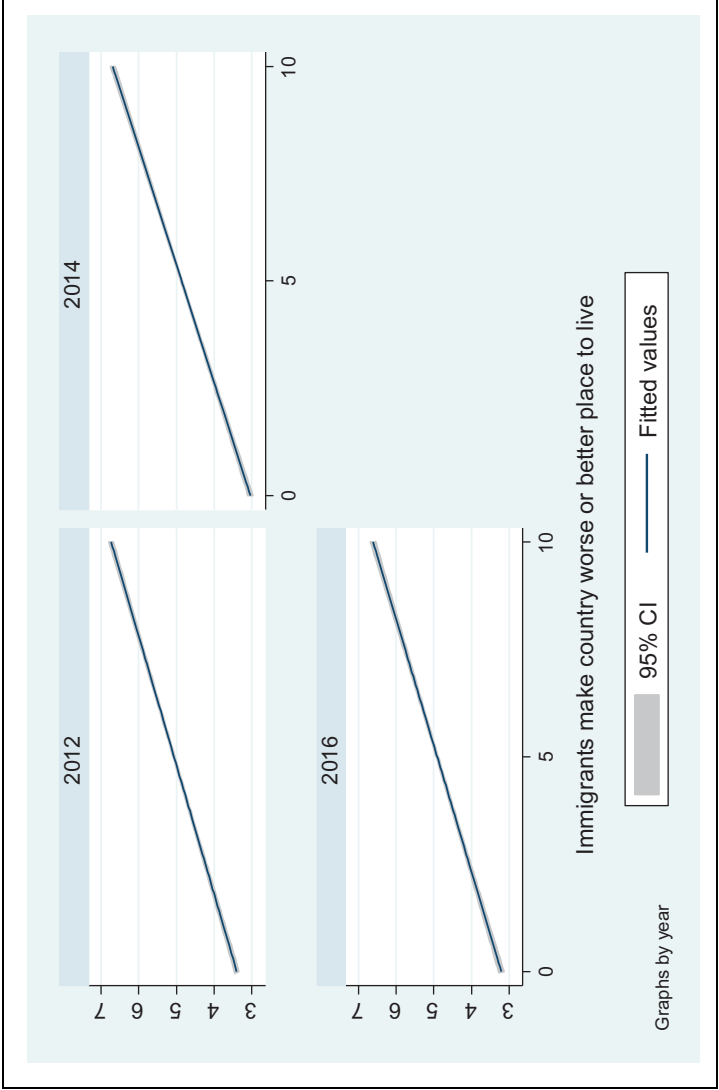


Figure 4. Bivariate Relationship between Attitudes toward Immigration and Attitudes toward European Integration for 2012, 2014, and 2016.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Models Measuring the Influence of Attitudes toward Migration on Attitudes toward European Integration (2012 to 2016).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Immigration attitudes	.291*** (.004)	.291*** (.004)	.277*** (.007)	.281** (.007)
Gender	-.052*** (.017)	-.034** (.017)	-.054** (.017)	-.034** (.017)
Age	-.001*** (.0002)	-.001*** (.0002)	-.001*** (.0002)	-.001** (.0002)
Education	.052*** (.005)	.055*** (.005)	.054*** (.005)	.055*** (.005)
Perceived household income	-.003 (.002)	-.003* (.002)	.015*** (.002)	.009*** (.003)
Level of urbanization	-.071*** (.007)	-.040*** (.007)	-.069*** (.007)	-.041*** (.007)
Political interest	-.017* (.010)	-.036** (.010)	-.022** (.010)	-.035*** (.011)
Satisfaction with democracy	.112*** (.004)	.166*** (.004)	.113*** (.004)	-.167*** (.004)
Unemployment	.010 (.026)	-.090*** (.024)	-.002 (.026)	-.092*** (.026)
Political ideology (unidimensional left-right scale)	-.027*** (.004)	-.022*** (.004)	-.028 (.004)	-.022*** (.004)
2014			-.459*** (.056)	-.205** (.100)
2016			-.210*** (.057)	.075 (.057)
Interaction term 2014 and immigration attitudes			.027*** (.009)	.021** (.010)
Interaction term 2016 and immigration attitudes			.011 (.010)	.012 (.010)
Constant	3.25*** (.063)	2.01*** (.069)	3.38*** (.069)	2.02*** (.081)
R ²	.10	.16	.11	.16
Number of observations	86405	86405	86405	86405

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Significance: * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

This first model serves as a baseline model. Its purpose is to confirm the negative link between anti-immigrant attitudes and Euroscepticism. In Model 2, we add country dummies or fixed effects to the equation. These country dummies account for uncontrolled between-country variation in Euroscepticism. In the third and fourth model, we add time dummies for 2014 and 2016, with the year 2012 serving as a reference category. We also add an interaction term between the two time dummies and our variable gauging immigration attitudes. These interaction terms measure whether there is a statistically significant and possibly substantively relevant difference in the effect of immigration attitudes on attitudes toward European integration between 2012, 2014, and 2016. For our two interactive models, Model 3 does not include country dummies, whereas Model 4 does. Finally, to test whether our findings also apply to key countries, we present the results from two countries (see Table 4): Germany, a country that has had a high refugee influx during the

Table 4. Multiple Regression Models Measuring the Influence of Attitudes toward Migration on Attitudes toward European Integration for a Country with High Immigration during the Refugee Crisis (i.e., Germany, models 5 and 6) and Low Immigration during the Refugee Crisis (i.e., Poland, models 7 and 8).

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Immigration attitudes	.402*** (.015)	.366*** (.026)	.258*** (.024)	.211** (.038)
Gender	.065 (.055)	.066 (.054)	.004 (.083)	-.001 (.084)
Age	-.001* (.0006)	-.001 (.0006)	-.002 (.002)	-.002 (.002)
Education	.073*** (.017)	.065*** (.017)	-.004 (.023)	.007 (.023)
Perceived household income	-.088*** (.026)	-.099** (.046)	-.005 (.006)	-.065 (.079)
Level of urbanization	-.058** (.026)	-.062*** (.025)	.012 (.035)	.013 (.035)
Political interest	-.171*** (.038)	-.161*** (.038)	.013** (.056)	.014 (.056)
Satisfaction with democracy	.250*** (.014)	.252*** (.014)	.137*** (.019)	.136*** (.019)
Unemployment	.0002 (.082)	.011 (.082)	.148 (.116)	.166 (.117)
Political ideology (unidimensional left–right scale)	-.044*** (.0156)	-.041*** (.016)	-.107*** (.020)	-.106*** (.020)
2014		-.136 (.225)		.469 1.29
2016		.229 (.196)		-.362 (.335)
Interaction term 2014 and immigration attitudes		.075** (.033)		.089 (.056)
Interaction term 2016 and immigration attitudes		.037 (.033)		.071 (.056)
Constant	2.58*** (.217)	2.56*** (.267)		4.60*** (.415)
R ²	.24	.24	.08	.08
Number of observations	8184	8184	3701	3701

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Significance: * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

refugee crisis, and Poland, a country that has had little migration during the refugee crisis but whose leaders have strongly opposed any relocation mechanism. For both countries, we first present our baseline model (see Model 5 for Germany and Model 7 for Poland) and then add the time dummies and interaction terms (see Models 6 for Germany and Model 8 for Poland).

Results

Rather surprisingly, we find that the refugee crisis has changed neither anti-immigration attitudes nor attitudes toward European integration (see Tables 1 and 2). Contrary to what we expected, we even find that attitudes toward immigrants

have become slightly more positive. In 2012, the average EU resident gave a 5.03 rating on the 0 to 10 scale measuring whether immigrants make the country a worse or better place. In 2014 and 2016, these averages slightly increased to 5.04 and 5.07 (see Table 2). If we look at the three immigration variables — (a) allow many/fewer immigrants of the same ethnic group in one’s country, (b) allow many/fewer immigrants from a different ethnic group, and (c) allow many/fewer immigrants from poorer countries — we again see very little change in respondents’ assessments between 2012, 2014, and 2016 (see Table 2). In more detail, neither question shows a difference in the average response greater than .1 on a 1–4 scale between years.

When it comes to attitudes toward European integration, we see the same stability: while there is a slight dip in average support from 5.08 in 2012 to 4.88 in 2014, in 2016, shortly after the peak of the refugee crisis, support for EU integration rose slightly to 4.93.⁹ Thus, not only did immigration attitudes and support for European integration remain stable, but so did the distribution of responses (see Figures 2 and 3). For both indicators (attitudes toward immigrants and attitudes toward EU integration), the histograms for 2012, 2014, and 2016 basically mimic one another. To be sure, many respondents (i.e., 28% in 2012 and 30% in 2014 and 2016) situated themselves in the middle, at the value 5 for the immigration proxy. For Euroscepticism the answers were very similar throughout the years as well (between 22% and 23% of the polled chose the middle category, which means that they were neutral/unsure about, whether European integration should go further or whether it has gone too far for the three surveys). While this observation implies that European residents are still neutral/unsure about the positive and negative aspects of immigration and European integration, the refugee crisis did not change these assessments.

The refugee crisis also did not trigger a move toward extreme positions (i.e., outright rejection or support) on anti-immigration attitudes and Euroscepticism. In 2012, 2014, and 2016, approximately 9 percent of respondents answered the question whether immigrants make the country a worse or better place with 0 or 1 (“immigrants make the country a worse place to live in”). On the positive side, roughly 6 percent of respondents gave the answers 9 and 10 (“immigrants make the country a better place to live in”). For Euroscepticism, respondents chose the two most positive values with a likelihood between 11 and 12 percent and the most negative ones with a probability of 8 to 10 percent. Hence, the first conclusion we can draw from these univariate statistics is that the refugee crisis has not

⁹Eurobarometer data broadly substantiate that support for European integration has basically remained stable across these years. On the question that comes closest to support for European integration and has been consistently asked during these years (“Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: [Our country] could face a better future outside of the EU”), 58 percent disagreed during all three year’s autumn survey (European Commission 2012, 2014, 2016).

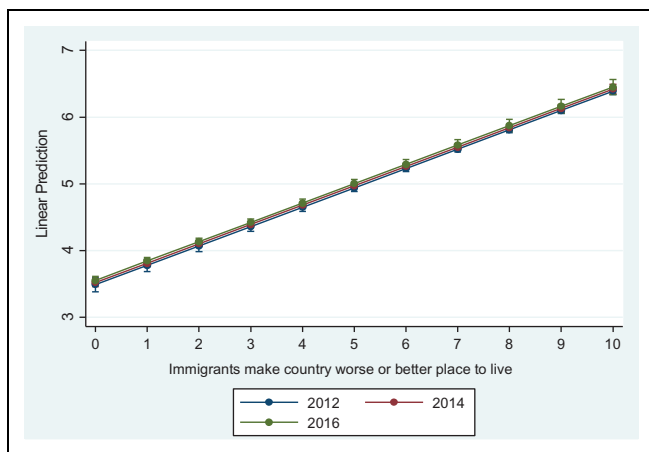


Figure 5. Predictive Values Derived from Model 4 of the Relationship between Immigration Attitudes and Support for European Integration.

dramatically changed the distribution of individual opinions on immigration and European integration.

Figure 4 confirms the expected relationship between increased anti-immigrant sentiment and critical attitudes toward the EU. The three line graphs, which display the OLS lines between the two concepts, demonstrate that the more respondents thought that immigrants were good for the country, the more likely they were to support further European integration. However, if we compare the steepness of these three lines in the years of observation, our results again indicate no or only slight and nonperceptible differences between 2012, 2014, and 2016. For all three years, we have a solid linkage between immigration-friendly attitudes and EU-friendly attitudes.

Our four regression models confirm the bivariate result (see Table 3). There is a substantively strong and statistically significant relationship between immigration attitudes and EU attitudes. In fact, all models predict that for every point an individual saw immigration more positively, his/her support for European integration increased by nearly .3 points. Holding all other variables constant, this finding implies that somebody who gave a rating of 10 to the question whether immigrants make the country a better or worse place to live is expected to have an approximately 3 percentage points higher rating on the 11-point scale on support for European integration than somebody who gave a 0 or 1. However, the differences in this relationship between the years are at best minimal. Figure 5, which displays the predicted level of EU support based on Model 4, shows that the differences between 2012, 2014, and 2016 are so small that they are hardly perceptible in the graph. In statistical terms, the interaction term between immigration attitudes and Euroscepticism in 2014 indicates a significant difference, but, in real terms, this difference is less than .1 points and, thus, negligibly small. This non-effect is confirmed if we use

the other immigration proxies (presented in Table 2) in the regression models. Hence, it is safe to conclude that the refugee crisis had little to no effect on European residents' attitudes toward immigration, European residents' attitudes toward the EU, or the link between the two variables. This finding is confirmed for our exemplary cases Germany and Poland (see Table 4).

The control variables mainly behave as expected: support for the EU increases with education, satisfaction with national democracy, and political interest and decreases with age. On average, (some of) the models also predict that women are more Eurosceptic than men and that people who experienced unemployment might be less likely to support European integration. The same may apply to individuals who were not satisfied with their income. However, the influence of the latter three variables is tiny at best.

Discussion

To explain the rather surprising finding that Euroscepticism did not increase in the wake of the refugee crisis, we offer two complementary explanations. Our first explanation is based on the insights that EU attitudes and Euroscepticism are multi-dimensional phenomena and that identities tend to be rather robust. On the one hand, the literature distinguishes between different *modes* of EU support (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970; Easton 1975; Niedermayer and Westle 1995): utilitarian/specific support, which relates to concrete policy outcomes and a polity's performance, and affective/diffuse support, which relates to (European) ideals and identity. On the other hand, it differentiates between different *objects* of support: (a) attitudes toward the regime (i.e., its institutions, processes, and principles) and (b) attitudes toward the community (i.e., its political collectivity, including its members and people) (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970; Easton 1975; Niedermayer and Westle 1995).

Taking these conceptual distinctions into consideration, we can differentiate different dimensions of Euroscepticism, especially when it comes to the EU's current functioning and to support for further EU integration (Kopecky and Mudde 2002). These dimensions further imply that people who are dissatisfied with the EU's current functioning may still support the EU or further integration because they may agree with it at a level of affection and/or when focusing on it as a community (Boomgaarden et al. 2011). For example, egalitarians may be skeptical concerning the workings of a rather liberal EU, but their culturally more cosmopolitan and universalist attitudes could lead to a positive evaluation of European integration as an ideal (van Elsas, Hakhverdian, and van der Brug 2016). More generally, (soft) 'Eurosceptics' (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004; Kopecky and Mudde 2002) who support the idea of integration but not its realization through the current EU are unlikely to fundamentally question European integration due to the refugee crisis. In addition, identities tend to be rather resilient (Swann 1999) and less likely than utilitarian aspects to be influenced by new developments or single events (Lubbers and Scheepers 2010). These findings provide a plausible rationale for unchanged

attitudes toward European integration among residents, despite the European refugee crisis. This explanation is further strengthened by the fact that we find that the generation who should be most malleable to what is commonly labelled as “formative events” (i.e., young adults aged 18 to 24 years) showed both the highest support ratings for the EU between 2012 and 2016 (i.e., an average of 5.5 on the 0–10 scale) and a slight increase in EU support between 2012 and 2016.

A second (complementary) explanation for an unchanged rating of the EU in terms of public attitudes is that the EU did not, in fact, perform so badly as sometimes suggested. The European Commission (2015a) proposed a comprehensive and timely blueprint of how to manage a European refugee and migration crisis with its European Agenda on Migration of May 2015. Once the crisis became immanent, the European Commission (2015b) put forward priority actions to implement the Agenda in September of that year. Therefore, Pauly et al. (2016, 24) claim “that the EU’s overall response to the so-called refugee crisis has been more substantial and comprehensive than commonly perceived.” Possibly, the refugee crisis has been an eye-opener for some, highlighting that transnational challenges such as migration can only effectively be dealt with transnationally at the EU, rather than at the national level (Politico 2016).

The possibility that the EU did not receive all the blame becomes more plausible when we consider that the pre-crisis EU asylum and migration system was deficient not so much due to lacking (appropriate) Commission proposals but rather due to member governments’ inability to agree on (ambitious) legislation, for example, in terms of asylum procedures, qualification, reception conditions, and redistribution (Zaun 2017; Niemann and Zaun 2018). Once the crisis hit, member states, not the EU itself, failed to reach agreement on more permanent and comprehensive redistribution mechanisms (Zaun 2018). Moreover, some suggest that certain member governments further aggravated the crisis either by encouraging additional migration or by lacking appropriate reception and management capacities (Morvai and Djokovic 2018; Thielemann 2018). Thus, in conclusion, though our findings are surprising at first sight, both research into EU support and the European Refugee Crisis offer promising avenues for rationalizing them.

Conclusion

This article provides a timely addition to the growing literature measuring the interplay between attitudes toward immigrants and attitudes toward European integration (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2007; Boomgarden et al. 2011; Hobolt et al. 2011). We confirm prior research (Luedke 2005; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007) that finds that anti-immigration attitudes are a strong predictor of Euroscepticism. In fact, in our regression models, anti-immigration attitudes are, by a rather large margin, the strongest predictor of critical attitudes toward the EU. We also find that the attitudes toward both immigration and European integration are very stable. The average is a 5 on a 0–10 scale for both indicators. The stability in immigration attitudes applies, regardless of whether we use the generic or a more restricted operationalization that

only considered immigration from poor countries or from countries with different (i.e., “non-European”) ethnic backgrounds.

At first sight, this stability in results is surprising, as it would only be logical to blame the EU for the chaos the refugee crisis has created at the European level. Yet, at second glance, we can explain why EU dissatisfaction did not increase in the wake of the crisis. Our complementary explanations highlight, on the one hand, the multi-dimensionality of Euroscepticism and stickiness of identities and, on the other, the European Commission’s solid performance, the issue’s transnationality (requiring European solutions), and member governments’ failure in crisis management.

Given that we have used four different operationalizations of immigration and given that all four operationalizations provide robust results, we are confident in our finding that immigration attitudes have not changed during the refugee crisis. Our various measures of immigration attitudes, including attitudes toward immigrants from poor countries or countries with a non-European ethnicity, capture some aspects of the distinction between “deserving” refugees and “undeserving” immigrants or “fake” asylum-seekers. They also cover the ethnic aspect to a certain degree. Nevertheless, future research should try to capture negative sentiments toward Muslim minorities or people coming from countries with Muslim-majority populations (Azrout et al. 2013; Hobolt et al. 2011), given that negative broadcasting has mainly been directed at this group of refugees (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017). Though future research could dissect the category of “immigrant” even more, our results nicely tie into some earlier literature. For example, Hobolt and Wraidl (2015) and Risse (2014) find that the Euro crisis¹⁰ did not (significantly) affect public attitudes about European integration either.

Yet, two puzzling findings remain. Immigration is the signature theme of radical right-wing parties in Europe (and elsewhere), and if negative attitudes toward immigrants have not increased, how can we understand the increasing success of radical right-wing parties? To approach this question, we tested how many radical right-wing voters actually expose anti-immigrant sentiment.¹¹ Using the ESS, we find that more than 40 percent of such voters do not think that immigrants make their country

¹⁰Following Arghyrou and Kotonikas (2012, 658), the term “Euro crisis” refers to the “transformation of the global financial crisis into a sovereign debt crisis in the euro area. Starting from Greece in autumn 2009, the crisis has since prompted European policymakers to take extraordinary measures aiming to limit the crisis’ fall-out on the affected countries and prevent its further spreading.”

¹¹We code a radical right-wing voter as anybody who voted for the following parties: FPO (Austria), BZO (Austria), Vlams Belang (Belgium), Workers’ Party of Socialist Justice (Czech Republic), DF (Denmark), EIP (Estonia), PS (Finland), FN (France), Mouvement pour La France (France), AFD (Germany), NPD (Germany), REP (Germany), PVV (Netherlands), LPF (Netherlands), PiS (Poland), Congress of the New Right KPN (Poland), League of Polish Families LPR (Poland), SNS (Slovenia), SD (Sweden), BNP (UK), or UKIP (UK).

a worse place (i.e., do not harbor pronounced anti-immigrant attitudes). Despite the fact that their signature theme is immigration, this preliminary finding lends itself to the hypothesis that radical right-wing parties could have recently broadened their scope beyond their (immigration-hostile) core voters. Nevertheless, future research is necessary to tackle the puzzle as to if, and how, radical right-wing parties have broadened their support base.

Finally, this article raises (at least) one more interesting question for the wider study of international migration. While Europe has certainly been substantially affected by the Mediterranean refugee crisis, comparatively less well-off countries in the Middle East and North Africa have been hit by it much more severely, with states like Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey hosting proportionately greater numbers of refugees compared to Sweden and Germany (UNHCR 2016). More research is, therefore, warranted on the impact of the Mediterranean refugee crisis on attitudes toward immigrants in countries of the Middle East and North Africa (Taşdemir 2018). Moreover, such research could fruitfully be extended to examine the impact of the refugee crisis on attitudes toward regional and international organizations that deal, to some extent, with both issues of migration and the war in Syria, most notably the Arab League and United Nations.


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