



Article

# A threat from within? Perceptions of immigration in an enlarging European Union

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## Abstract

Scholars have taken a considerable interest in how global immigration to Europe generates public concern, but we still know little about the role that migration from within the European region has in fueling apprehensions. To better understand this, I examine how public attitudes towards immigration have responded to migration following the European Union's most extensive enlargement along its eastern border in 2004. Using recent advances in multilevel modeling, this article analyzes the longitudinal, cross-sectional relationship between east–west internal European migration on public attitudes towards the economic and cultural aspects of immigration in Western Europe using individual-level data from the European Social Survey (2004–2014). The results demonstrate that growing populations of Central and Eastern European foreigners have contributed to Western Europeans' perception of immigration as an economic threat, even when taking into account simultaneous immigration from outside Europe. Moreover, the relationship between east–west immigration and an individual's perception of immigration as a threat is conditional upon their socio-economic status. These findings underscore how within-European immigration in Western Europe has become consequential to the public's attitudes about immigration more generally.

## Keywords

Immigration, European Union, public attitudes.

## Introduction

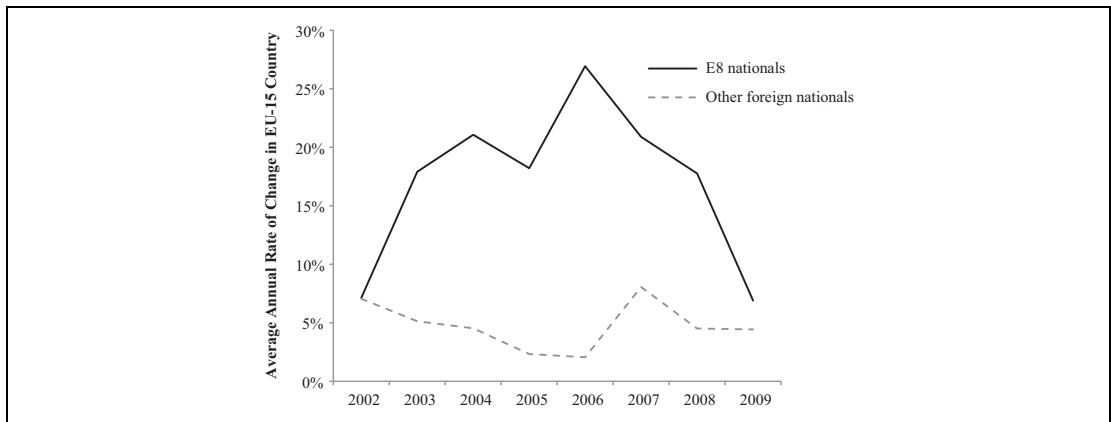
Immigration challenges Europe's well-established national identities that are rooted in cultural unity (Citrin and Sides, 2008). There is a widespread perception amongst Europeans that immigration is not only undermining economic prosperity but also a certain cultural “way of life” (German Marshall Fund, 2011) and, over the last 20 years, sociologists have documented the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe (Quillian, 1995; Semyonov et al., 2006; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2008).

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**Figure 1.** Average annual rate of change in E8 nationals in Western Europe. Source: Author's own analysis, data from Eurostat (2019) OECD (2019); Jeannet (forthcoming).

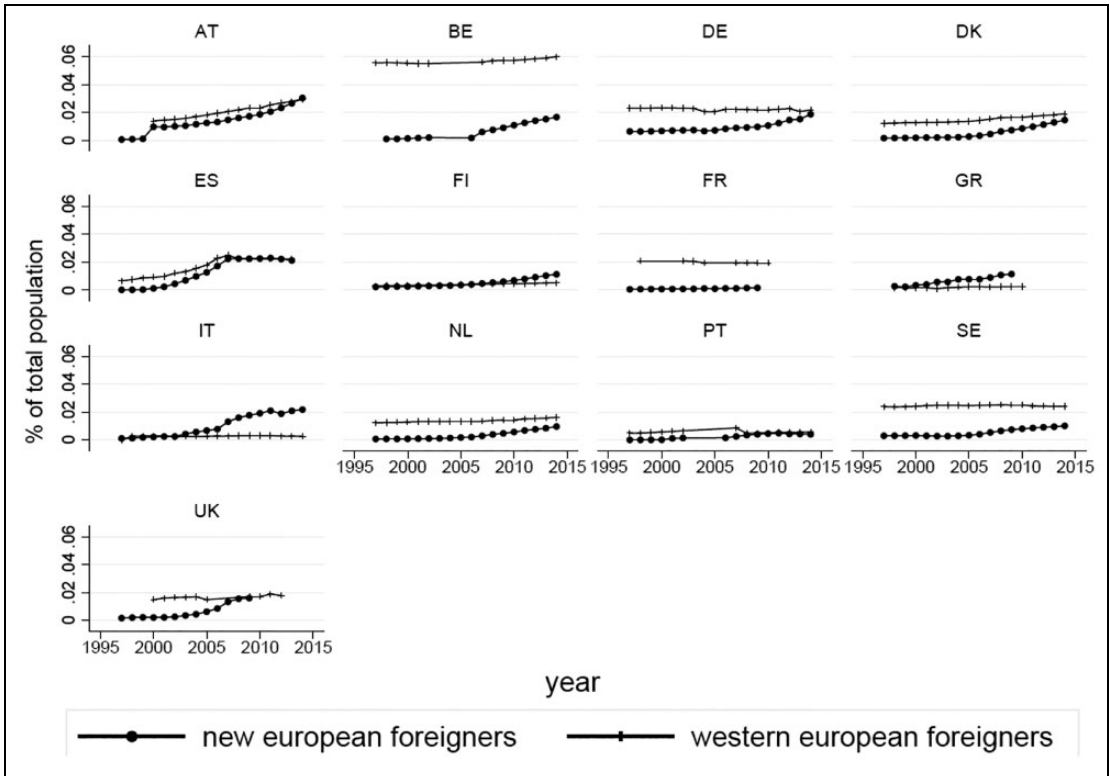
While this literature has expanded our understanding of how immigration from *outside* the European Union might cause local concern, we know relatively little about the social consequences of immigration from *within* Europe. Presumably, this has occurred because scholars have either explicitly focused on the effect non-European foreigners (Schneider, 2008; Hjerm, 2009) in some studies or because other studies indiscriminately examine the impact of all foreigners without distinguishing between extra-European foreigners and intra-European foreigners (Lancee and Pardos-Prado, 2013; Wilkes et al., 2007; Wilkes and Corrigan Brown, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

However, the recent political salience of immigration *within* European countries calls for a critical assessment of its attitudinal consequences. European governments have increasingly liberalized the movement of labor within the region while tightening migration from outside (Huysmans, 2000; Puntervold Bo, 2009; Hollifield, 2004). However, the symbolic boundaries between national languages and cultures remain strong in Western Europe (Bail, 2008) and a collective European belonging is challenged by the European Union's continuing geographic expansion into its periphery (Delhey, 2007).

To study this, this paper examines migration after the European Union's most extensive enlargement that finally united the "two Europes" as a test case. The number of countries and people introduced in the 2004 expansion was unprecedented, adding 70 million Central and Eastern Europeans from eight former communist countries (E8)—Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia—to the European Union's existing Western European member states (EU-15).<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the enlargement, Western Europeans were uneasy about extending Europe's eastern border (Dixon, 2010), especially since it coincided with the politicization of immigration. In addition to the political division between the regions, Western Europeans had long held a perception of Eastern Europeans as economically and culturally "backward" (Armour, 2012). After decades under the Iron Curtain, E8 nationals could now freely move to earn higher wages and better living standards in the West (Blanchflower et al., 2007). The number of Eastern and Central Europeans living in Western Europe grew more quickly than the overall foreign population, as shown in Figure 1.<sup>3</sup> From 2000 to 2010, the E8 national population living in Western Europe grew by about 1.5 million. Since the barriers to trade and movement of capital were eroded prior to the enlargement, the free movement of people was the accession's most remarkable aspect (Guardia and Pichelmann, 2006).

The focus of this article is also of substantive interest since post-enlargement migration has been one of the major new developments in global migration patterns (Castles and Miller, 2008) and has changed the face of European mobility: migration from the enlargement countries grew more sharply than within Western European migration in every country except France and Portugal. As we observe in Figure 2,



**Figure 2.** European foreigners as % of total population, EU-15 Countries, 1999–2014 (Jeannet, forthcoming).

with the exception of France and Portugal, Western European countries all had an increase in the proportion of new European foreigners, yet with varying degrees of sharpness. In some countries, such as Germany and the UK, the proportion of new European nationals living in the country swelled to be larger than the size of the population from “old” member countries.

Scholars of anti-immigration sentiment in Europe have not sufficiently examined the social consequences of migration within the European region, which is especially imperative since its geographic borders continue to expand. Instead, research to date has studied the attitudinal impact of non-European immigration to Europe or conflated Central and European migration to Western Europe with other types of non-Western immigration (Kessler and Freeman, 2005; Lahav, 2004a; Quillian, 1995; Scheepers et al., 2002; Schneider, 2008; Semyonov et al., 2006). I aim to resolve the open empirical question about whether immigration from new Eastern Enlargement countries contributes to the perception in Western Europe that immigration poses a threat, and if so, which socio-demographic groups are especially sensitive to perceiving this threat?

My approach answers a call in the sociological scholarship for research to disaggregate immigrants from a single out-group (Bail, 2008; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010). Examining post-enlargement migration can “reduce heterogeneity among out-group populations in terms of race, ethnicity and cultural distance from majority members of host societies, which, in turn, reduces to some extent any inter-correlation between the geo-cultural dimension and economic standing of country of origin” (Gorodzeisky, 2011a: 102).

I also refine our understanding of how an individual’s characteristics interact with their social context to exacerbate or dampen economic and cultural concerns as immigration rises. This scholarly

understanding has been flagged as an emerging frontier in the study of immigration attitudes (see Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Fussell, 2014) as it remains in a nascent phase. Although it has been established that a person's socio-economic position in society is an important determinant in their perception of economic and cultural threat, it is not clear how his or her socio-economic position interacts with the dynamics of immigration in their society.<sup>4</sup> Furthering this understanding is crucial since immigration is not a stable phenomenon and it differs across social units as well as within social units over time.

## Theoretical expectations

### *The perception of a collective threat*

An individual perceives that immigration poses a collective threat when he or she anticipates that immigration will have negative consequences for their society (Renfro and Walker, 2002, 197). A perception of threat is conceptually distinct from discriminatory attitudes such as xenophobia, prejudice, hostility toward immigrants or exclusionary immigration policy preferences (see Gorodzeisky, 2011b). According to Blumer (1958), feelings of threat emerge when the in-group feels strongly that they are superior to the out-group, who are perceived as alien. Focusing specifically on immigration, Quillian (1995) distinguishes between the threat posed at the micro-level (i.e. the threat an individual from the out-group poses to an individual from the in-group) and the threat at the macro-level (i.e. the threat a group of immigrants poses to a group of citizens). This occurs when people evaluate immigration in socio-tropic terms, meaning "in terms of general societal, rather than personal, costs and benefits" (Sears and Funk, 1990: 15).

Some describe foreign European workers living in other European countries as a "favored class" (Pettigrew, 1998), since they are extended more economic and social rights than non-European foreigners. While European foreigners may be more privileged than that of non-Europeans, it does not necessarily follow that Central and Eastern Europeans are in-group members. Rather, the division between out-group and in-group members can be drawn on the basis of national identity, since foreign nationals are perceived as "outsiders" in their host society due to their different statuses, rights and origins when compared to citizens (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2009: 402).

### *Out-group size and the perceived threat: Real or symbolic?*

*Group threat theory* emerged as an explanation of race relations between Whites and African Americans in the United States (Blalock, 1967; Bobo, 1983, 1988; Giles, 1977; Taylor, 1998). In his classic work, Blalock (1967) argued that as the size of the minority group grows, the majority group would struggle against the minority for dominance since group competition over resources provokes in-groups to perceive out-groups as a threat to their own interest. While recent global migration has made inter-group relations more complex and fragmented (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996), scholars still draw on group threat theory to explain relations between citizens and immigrants in the United States (Dixon, 2010; Hopkins, 2010; Malhotra et al., 2013; Newman and Velez, 2014) and Europe (Davidov and Meuleman, 2012; Florack et al., 2003; Quillian, 1995; Raijman et al., 2003; Schlueter, Schmidt, and Wagner, 2008; Semyonov et al., 2004).

An individual's social context shapes his or her perception of immigration but scholars debate whether this is economically or culturally motivated. Scholars that ascribe to the former interpretation take a realistic approach to group threat theory and argue that native defensive attitudes are a socio-tropic reaction to a "real" threat that is a direct function of immigration. By this logic, groups compete with ethnic newcomers for scarce economic resources and the competition is exacerbated when the group of immigrants is larger (Dancygier and Donnelly, 2013), causing individuals to be concerned about their group's economic interest (Olzak, 1992; Crepez and Damron, 2008; Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2009).

It is certainly reasonable to expect that E8 migrants would be perceived as fueling an economic threat since E8 nations were attracted by better employment opportunities and higher wages in Western Europe. Moreover, the attitudinal impact of immigration is more notable when there are sudden changes (Hopkins, 2010; Meuleman, et al., 2009; Newman and Velez, 2014). Thus, on the basis of this economic interpretation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals who live in a society with a growing proportion of E8 nationals are more likely to perceive immigration as a threat to their country's economy.

However, a second group of scholars take an identity-based interpretation and see concerns about immigration as driven by the individual's perception of cultural threats, (Sides and Citrin, 2007; Sniderman et al., 2004; McLaren and Johnson, 2007; Sears and Funk, 1990) thus drawing on the human tendency to (create) divisions between "us" and "them" (Tajfel, 1978, 1982). While the realistic interpretation focuses on tangible resources such as employment or welfare services, the symbolic focuses on the intangible resources such as culture or language (Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010: 286).

Although the geographic proximity of Central and Eastern Europe to Western Europe can indicate a shared culture, important symbolic divisions exist between the two regions. For instance, experimental evidence shows that evaluations of Eastern Europeans are not more positive than Africans (Sniderman et al., 2002), likely because even after the fall of Communism, Eastern Europeans were considered to be a "product of the soviet system" and apart from the modern West (Tiryakian, 2004). Although the dichotomy between the regions is a "social construction," it nourished Western Europeans' long lasting perceptions about the East as "backward" and "less civilized" than the West and not really "part of Europe" (Górny and Ruspini, 2004: 7).

Given the long-standing social and political divisions between the "two Europes" and the emphasis on national culture in European societies, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who live in a society with a growing proportion of E8 nationals are more likely to perceive immigration as posing a collective threat to the country's culture.

Still, the empirical link between group size and attitudes is tenuous at best (Hjerm, 2007). This point is illustrated by societies where defensive attitudes towards immigration are prevalent but there are relatively few immigrants (Schlueter and Davidov, 2013). Some find that there is positive relationship between the number of immigrants and public concerns (Kunovich, 2004; Quillian, 1995; Scheepers et al., 2002; Semyonov et al., 2006; Semyonov et al., 2008), while others have found no effect (Hjerm, 2007, 2009; Hello et al., 2002; Sides and Citrin, 2007). Such discrepancies could be based on how the public imagines immigration (Blinder, 2013; Blinder and Jeannet 2018), which is only loosely based on actual occurrences, if at all. Given this inconclusive previous empirical evidence, it is not certain that post-enlargement immigration will be associated with an amplified perception of threat.

### ***Perception of threat and self-oriented group interest***

Since individuals have differences in opinion a priori, it follows logically that these would be differently impacted by the dynamics of national immigration. Individual characteristics are not a separate micro-level phenomenon but rather intersect with the attributes of his or her social context (Rosenstein, 2008). Immigration trends can act as a kind of "situational trigger" which, when joined by certain predisposing factors of the individual, can generate divergent attitudinal outcomes (Sniderman et al., 2004).

Variations in the threat perception of individuals could be explained by a phenomenon developed in social psychology termed *self-oriented group interest*, whereby individuals' self-interests are perceived to be positively interdependent from the majority in-group (Sears and Funk, 1991). According to Sears and Kinder (1985: 1146) "group consciousness is quite self-oriented," where the person believes that his or her individual interests will be met if the group's interests are met and vice versa. Therein lies an

important distinction between self-oriented group interest and a “pure” group interest where the person is supportive of a policy regardless of his or her own well-being (Sears and Funk, 1991). According to this logic, an individual’s perception of immigration’s threat to society would be magnified if he or she personally feels more vulnerable to immigration increases.

The theoretical tenets of self-oriented group interest predict that when experiencing migration from Europe’s new member countries, Western Europeans who are economically vulnerable, such as those who are poorly educated or are in low paying work, have a disproportionate tendency to perceive immigration as a threat to their economy. Based on these proposed theoretical extensions, this paper puts forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The hypothesized positive association between change in E8 group size and the perception that immigration threatens the national economy is dependent on the individual’s economic position in society.

While a person’s education may reflect their economic position, it also has an alternative- or complimentary-cultural significance. More highly educated individuals also tend to be less culturally threatened by immigration. This is thought to be because educated individuals are more likely to establish a “cultural affinity” for immigrants, helping them view immigration in a more positive light (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007, 2010). So, it is not surprising that recent empirical evidence finds that education as a form of “cultural capital” dampens the relationship between high national immigration and the person’s perception of threat (Manevska and Achterberg, 2013).

Based on these previous empirical findings, we can expect to find that lacking education intensifies the perception of cultural threat in Western Europe amongst individuals living in places with a higher proportion of E8 nationals. In particular, the novelty of Central and Eastern Europeans,<sup>5</sup> may have exacerbated the perception of threat amongst Western Europeans who are less educated and are more wary of unfamiliar cultures. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: The hypothesized positive association between change in E8 group size and the perception that immigration threatens the national culture is dependent on the individual’s level of education.

## **Data and methods**

I analyzed micro data from six biannual rounds (2004–2014) of the European Social Survey with a sample of 100,400 respondents.<sup>6</sup> The survey population intends to cover people 15 years and older who are resident in the country. To focus solely on the attitudes of non-immigrants, I restricted the sample to include individuals without an immigrant background (born in the country to parents who were also born in the country). To handle the missing data, I employed list-wise deletion at the individual level. The micro data was pooled with macro-level country data from Eurostat. The countries included in this analysis are the EU-15 member states: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. Due to data limitations regarding attitudinal or migration data, all countries are included for all six rounds except for: Austria (2004–2006), Belgium (2004), France (2010–2014), Germany (2006–2012), Greece (2006, 2010–2004), Ireland (2004), Italy (2004–2010, 2014), and Luxembourg (2006–2014), Netherlands (2014), Portugal (2004), Spain (2014), and Sweden (2014). Together, the sample included 61 country-year contextual observations.

As an independent variable, I exploited the variation in the annual stock of E8 citizens living, as percentage of the total population, in a given Western European country.<sup>7</sup> Immigration stock measures are more convenient and reliable for cross-national comparisons than immigration flow measures. There are two ways to measure the stock of the foreign population: the size of the foreign national population or

the size of the foreign-born population. For convenience purposes, I used the former<sup>8</sup> because it is more complete and minimizes gaps in the data. The foreign national population may include individuals who were born abroad and retained the nationality of their country of origin, but it also includes second and third generation immigrants who are born in the host country. It also may not include individuals who have acquired citizenship in the host country, despite being born abroad.

The analysis sets out to estimate the relationship between post-enlargement migration and a person’s perception that immigration poses a threat to society. Because the aim is to test two different scholarly interpretations of threat perception, there are two dependent variables: the first dependent variable is the perception that immigration poses a threat to the country’s economy and the second dependent variable is the perception that immigration is a threat to the country’s culture.<sup>9</sup> Both measures are treated as continuous variables since their underlying scale can be assumed to be continuous.

A series of controls for the individual characteristics were also included. First, the following socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent were included: the person’s age (in years), gender (woman=1), and education (years in full time education). Dummy variables were included to control for individuals who live in urban areas (urban area=1), are unemployed (unemployed=1), and report having economic difficulties (economic difficulties=1). The subjective measure was based on a survey item that asks the respondents if they find living on their current income to be difficult. Those who respond that it was “difficult” or “very difficult” were coded as economic difficulties. This subjective measure, as an alternative to an objective measure of household income, deciles because the latter is plagued by a large number of missing cases (approximately 23%).

I also introduced a series of control variables at the contextual level to take into account differences across countries that could influence an individual’s threat perception. The first contextual variables were macro-economic variables: the unemployment rate and national GDP per capita. A contextual control variable for the proportion of foreign nationals (excluding EU-15 nationals and those who are nationals of the accession countries) was also added to the model. Finally, the year of the survey was included to control for any underlying time trend in attitudes.<sup>10</sup> A table of descriptive statistics for all measures included in the models can be found in Appendix A.

Central to this analysis is the notion that a person’s individual characteristics interact with the group-size of new European nationals in their society to explain patterns of threat perception. The first moderator was variable education (years in full-time education), and the second moderator variable was economic difficulties, which captures if the respondent’s household finds it difficult to live on their present income.

As an empirical strategy, I employ a multilevel modeling approach that is tailored to the structure of repeated cross-national cross-sectional data. Following Fairbrother (2014), I employed a three-level hybrid model whereby individuals are nested within time (country-years) which are then nested within countries. Macro explanatory variables were then split into two different components: the cross-time mean for each country (the cross-sectional between-country difference component, BE) and demeaned variations for each observation at country-year (the longitudinal within-country change component, WE).<sup>11</sup> The advantages of this three-level multi-model is that it distinguishes between-country effects and within-country change while controlling for compositional differences at the individual level (see Fairbrother, 2014). Using multi-level analysis also helps avoid committing an ecological fallacy which occurs when data is analyzed at a higher level but conclusions are formed at a lower level (Hox, 2010).

The mixed effect random-intercept three-level hybrid multi-level models are estimated using maximum likelihood. The model, as shown below, employs a pooled time series where *i* represents individuals, *t* represents country-years and *j* represents countries.

$$y_{jit} = \beta_0(t) + \beta_1 X_{jit} + \gamma_{WE}(Z_{jt} - \bar{Z}_j) + \gamma_{BE}(\bar{Z}_j) + \mu_{jt} + e_{jit}$$

I proceeded in a step-wise fashion, beginning with the estimation of an “empty” model (Model 0) without explanatory variables in order to partition the variance of both dependent variables across the three levels. All models with cross-country interactions also included a random slope for the lower-level

**Table 1.** Multi-level regressions showing perception of economic and cultural threat, individual-level controls only.

	Economic threat				Cultural threat			
	Model 0a		Model 1a		Model 0b		Model 1b	
	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.
Individual controls								
Female			0.27***	0.01			-0.09***	0.01
Education			-0.08***	0.00			-0.09***	0.00
Age			0.00*	0.00			0.01***	0.00
Urban			-0.28***	0.02			-0.29***	0.02
Unemployed			0.29***	0.04			0.14***	0.04
Economic difficulties			0.68***	0.02			0.56***	0.02
Explained variance								
Country variation	0.20	0.95	0.15	0.08	0.75	0.28	0.67	0.25
Country-year variation	0.13	0.03	0.10	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.01
Residual variation	5.21	0.23	4.91	0.02	5.31	0.02	4.99	0.02
Log pseudolikelihood	-224986.57		-222010.31		-226372.53		-223219.14	
Constant	5.11	0.12	5.71	0.15	4.42	0.23	5.29	0.22
N (individuals, country-years, countries)	100213,61,15		100213,61,15		100400,61,15		100400,61,15	

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

variable at the country-year (see Heisig and Schaeffer, 2019). The calculations were performed using the xtmixed command in Stata 14 software.

## Results

Table 1 reports the coefficients for the null model and introduces individual-level controls for each of the dependent variables. Model 0a displays the results of the null model for the first dependent variable, economic threat, and Model 0b for the second dependent variable, cultural threat. Both null models show variation to be mostly at the individual level but also at the country-level and, to a lesser extent, at the country-year level, justifying a multilevel approach (Snijders and Bosker, 2011). Including individual-level controls in Model 1a and 1b improves the model fit, as indicated by a higher pseudo-likelihood and by a reduction in the residual variance. Model 1a and 1b also confirm, as expected, that socio-demographic controls are strong predictors of perceived economic and cultural threat.

The results show a positive association between an increase in E8 nationals and the perception that immigration poses a threat to the economy amongst Western Europeans (Hypothesis 1a). In Table 2, Model 2 shows that the coefficient for *E8 group size (within-country)* is positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In other words, when the group size of E8 nationals increases by 1 percentage point in the national population, the increase goes hand-in-hand with a 0.39 increase in threat perception on a scale of 0 to 10. The coefficients fluctuate from 0.35 to 0.39 and maintain a statistical significance of  $p < 0.01$  when introducing macro level controls in Models 2–4. As expected, the contextual controls show that living in a society that has growing unemployment, is less wealthy, and has a growing foreign population all predict that individuals will be more likely to perceive immigration as an economic threat. When all the contextual controls are included simultaneously in Model 4, the coefficient for *E8 group size (within-country)* remains positive and highly significant ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). On the hand, the coefficient for *E8 group size (between-country)* does not achieve statistical significance in any model. From this, we can conclude that the statistical association between E8 group



**Table 2.** Multi-level regressions showing the relationship between E8 group size and Western Europeans’ perception that immigration threatens the national economy or culture.

	Economic threat			Cultural threat		
	Model 2 coef (se)	Model 3 coef (se)	Model 4 coef (se)	Model 5 coef (se)	Model 6 coef (se)	Model 7 coef (se)
E8 group size (between-country)	0.06 (0.12)	0.14 (0.09)	0.16* (0.07)	0.10 (0.20)	0.15 (0.19)	0.17 (0.16)
E8 group size (within-country)	0.39* (0.18)	0.36* (0.18)	0.35* (0.16)	0.20 (0.14)	0.11 (0.15)	0.09 (0.14)
Contextual controls						
Unemployment (between-country)	0.04 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)	0.05 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.08)
Unemployment (within-country)	0.09*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
GDP per capita (between-country)		-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)		-0.04*** (0.02)	-0.05*** (0.02)
Non-E8 foreigner group size (between-country)			0.02 (0.06)			0.20 (0.13)
Non-E8 foreigner group size (within-country)			0.24*** (0.06)			0.13* (0.06)
Explained variance						
Country variation	0.21 (0.09)	0.10 (0.05)	0.08 (0.03)	0.63 (0.24)	0.56 (0.21)	0.42 (0.16)
Country-year variation	0.05 (0.01)	0.05 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)
Residual variation	4.91 (0.02)	4.91 (0.02)	4.91 (0.02)	4.98 (0.02)	4.99 (0.02)	4.99 (0.02)
Log pseudolikelihood	-221997.79	-221991.08	-221984.50	-223216.92	-223214.70	-223210.99
Constant	5.11 (0.42)	8.08 (0.77)	7.85 (0.68)	4.70 (0.66)	7.37 (1.39)	6.94 (1.24)
N (individuals, country-years, countries)	100213, 61, 15	100213, 61, 15	100213, 61, 15	100400,61,15	100400,61,15	100400,61,15

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001.

Standard errors in parentheses. All regressions include year dummies and individual controls.

size and attitudes about immigration is due to within-country increases rather than between-country differences in group sizes.

The results do not support the hypothesis that increases in the E8 population is negatively related to the perception of cultural threat amongst Western Europeans (Hypothesis 2a). Model 5 in Table 2 shows the coefficients for *E8 group size (between-country)* and *E8 group size (within-country)* are not significantly related to an individual’s propensity to see immigration as detrimental to their country’s culture. This holds even when accounting for other confounding macro-contextual factors in Models 6 and 7.

Next, the results also partially support the hypothesized positive relationship between the increase of E8 nationals and a person’s perception that immigration poses a threat to the society’s economy depends on this person’s socio-economic status (Hypothesis 3). In Table 3, two measures of socio-economic status are introduced as moderators: education and economic difficulties. Each time, the within-country and between-country measures of E8 population size both are interacted with the lower-level interaction term. First, I estimated the model with only the within-country interaction term and in the next model I also introduced the between-country interaction term. Both Model 8 and 9 show that possessing higher education is not a significant moderator of the within-

**Table 3.** Multi-level regressions showing the relationship between E-8 group size and economic and cultural threat perception depending on socio-economic characteristics.

	Economic threat					Cultural threat				
	Model 8 coef (se)	Model 9 coef (se)	Model 10 coef (se)	Model 11 coef (se)	Model 12 coef (se)	Model 13 coef (se)	Model 14 coef (se)	Model 15 coef (se)		
E8 group size (between-country)	0.27* (0.12)	0.27* (0.12)	0.15* (0.07)	0.15* (0.07)	0.34* (0.15)	0.34* (0.15)	0.16 (0.16)	0.16 (0.16)		
E8 group size (within-country)	0.25 (0.26)	0.17 (0.26)	0.36* (0.16)	0.34* (0.16)	-0.21 (0.26)	-0.29 (0.26)	0.08 (0.14)	0.08 (0.14)		
years in education	-0.10 (0.01)	-0.11 (0.01)					-0.12 (0.01)			
years in education x E8 group size (within-country)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)			-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)				
years in education x E8 group size (between-country)		0.07** (0.02)				0.08*** (0.02)				
economic difficulties			0.62*** (0.04)	0.60*** (0.04)			0.48*** (0.04)	0.45*** (0.04)		
economic difficulties x E-8 group size (within-country)			0.06* (0.03)	0.06** (0.02)			0.09*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)		
economic difficulties x E-8 group size (between-country)				0.23* (0.11)				0.38** (0.11)		
Contextual Controls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		
Individual Controls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		
Year Fixed Effects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		
Explained Variance										
country variation	0.21 (0.09)	0.21 (0.09)	0.07 (0.03)	0.07 (0.03)	0.35 (0.15)	0.36 (0.15)	0.41 (0.16)	0.40 (0.16)		
country-year variation	0.08 (0.02)	0.08 (0.02)	0.04 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)	0.07 (0.02)	0.07 (0.02)	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)		
years in education	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)			0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)				
economic difficulties			0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)			0.04 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)		
residual variation	4.85 (0.02)	4.85 (0.02)	4.90 (0.02)	4.90 (0.02)	4.91 (0.02)	4.91 (0.02)	4.98 (0.02)	4.98 (0.02)		
Log pseudolikelihood	-221534.29	-221528.91	-221952.68	-221950.43	-222606.23	-222600.61	-223167.52	-223162		
Constant	9.06 (1.12)	9.08 (1.12)	7.84 (0.67)	7.84 (0.67)	8.87 (1.36)	8.87 (1.35)	6.94 (1.24)	6.94 (1.24)		
N (individuals, countries)	100213, 61, 15	100213, 61, 15	100213, 61, 15	100213, 61, 15	100400, 61, 15	100400, 61, 15	100400, 61, 15	100400, 61, 15		

\*p&lt;0.05, \*\*p&lt;0.01, \*\*\*p&lt;0.001. Standard errors in parentheses.

country E8 group size, but it is a positive moderator of between-country E8 group size.<sup>12</sup> This means that, with all else being equal, highly educated individuals in countries with a large E8 group size are more threatened by immigration than their highly educated counterparts in countries with small E8 group sizes. In Model 12, the results for cultural effect show the same pattern and do not provide support for Hypothesis 4.

As expected, Models 11 and 15 do provide support for Hypothesis 3 and 4. The cross-level interaction term for E8 group size and economic difficulties is highly significant in both models. In other words, individuals who face economic difficulties and live in countries with higher E8 populations tend to perceive immigration as less economically and culturally threatening than individuals who face economic difficulties and live in countries with lower E8 populations.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

In this study, I have found that immigration from within Europe should not be overlooked as a basis of threat, as perceived by Western Europeans. My findings show that Europeans' concerns are not only due to global immigration from geographically distant, lower income countries. Rather, within-European migration, and in particular migration from the region's Central and Eastern countries to Western Europe, is an important contextual factor in the perception of immigration as a threat, even when taking into account simultaneous immigration from outside Europe. A growing presence of E8 nationals in Western Europe has gone hand-in-hand with greater public skepticism about the consequences of immigration.

The findings are more compelling from an economic perspective of group threat theory than from a cultural perspective. This is likely due to the particular features of east-west migration in Europe after the enlargement. As nationals from new member countries are primarily economic migrants, we would expect them to pose a perceived economic threat to locals. This is especially since their migration is motivated by their ability to freely move and work in the more prosperous labor markets of Western European countries. Moreover, E8 nationals may not stoke native perceptions of cultural threat due to a shared European and Christian cultural heritage.

These findings speak to the debate about whether or not immigration is related to actual patterns of immigration in a society. In this article, I have found support for a link between group size and economic threat perception, implying that individuals are broadly perceptive of immigration in their society. The public's knowledge about immigration faces constraints such as elite rhetoric (McLaren, 2001; Bohman, 2011), media coverage (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Iyengar and Kinder, 2010), and opaque policy-making (Guiraudon, 1997; Freeman, 1995). Yet despite such constraints, these results support previous empirical evidence that the public is responsive to the relative magnitude of immigration in their country (Lahav, 2004b; Newman et al., 2013; Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010), although they tend to overestimate the absolute amount (Citrin and Sides, 2008).

Importantly, some Western Europeans' attitudes towards immigration have been more responsive to post-enlargement migration than others. In certain respects, the findings align with the theoretical expectations of self-oriented group interest, which conceptualizes self-interest and group-interest as interdependent rather than two separately occurring phenomena. The findings in this study show that the positive relationship between E8 group size and perceptions of threat are amplified amongst low-income individuals. Well-educated individuals in countries with small E8 group sizes are significantly less likely to be worried about the economic or cultural consequences of immigration than individuals who are well educated in countries with large E8 group sizes. It may be that a heightened link between immigration and threat perception amongst individuals with less education could be due to stronger group identification, a different information environment (such as media sources or political cues), or because they have fewer contact opportunities with foreigners.

Despite this contribution, there are still outstanding questions about how self-interest functions as a mechanism to influence the perception of socio-tropic threat. Attributing the positive moderation of a threat to heightened labor market competition between natives of low socio-economic backgrounds is merely speculation. It may also be that individuals who report facing economic difficulties are more likely to be pessimistic. Yet these results generally help to advance our theoretical understanding by considering how a person's self-interest relates to immigration occurrences and how this can produce different perceptions of threat amongst individuals within the same society. They also imply that a person's perception that immigration harms the national culture may have economic underpinnings.

This study highlights a tension between the European Union's "structural need to enlarge" in order to supplement both an aging population and labor market shortages, and European society's resistance to migration (Favell, 2008: 704). While migration between member countries should offer economic gains through the optimal allocation of labor, these features carry important social consequences. Despite opening up the borders to new European citizens, the symbolic social "circle of we" in Western European societies appears to be lagging behind its political and economic expansions.

This study raises unresolved questions about how the immigration of specific nationalities or groups of nationals can generate a sense of threat about immigration as a whole. The data at hand, for instance, does not allow us to evaluate how immigration from new European member states compares to the effects of other immigrant groups on Western European attitudes. Certainly, the group's country of origin can influence perceptions about this specific group and preferences for their admission into the country. However, investigating the process through which an influx of a specific group can generate a sense of public threat, or even public panic, about immigration would be a fruitful area for future research. This would allow for the further exploration of the theoretical complexities of group threat theory, such as visibility, power relations, and the framing of issues in the media.


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## Notes

1. A notable exception is Gorodzeisky (2011a).
2. Malta and Cyprus also joined the European Union in the same year.
3. Ireland and Luxembourg are not shown as a sufficient time series is not available for these two countries.
4. There is some literature which examines how this impacts prejudice (Quillian 1995; Scheepers et al., 2002; Schneider 2008).
5. Austria and Germany are notable exceptions.

6. The sample was selected by strict random probability methods at every stage and respondents were interviewed face-to-face when possible. In each round, the minimum effective sample sizes were at least 1500 (or 800). The minimum target response rate was 70%.
7. Eurostat 2015 (Population country of citizenship). For country-years where data is not available from Eurostat, I used data from the OECD 2015 (Stock of foreign population by nationality). I compared the ratio of Eurostat estimates to OECD estimates for four countries (Germany, Sweden, Spain and Finland) for which there is full information from both data sources and found that this ratio ranged from 1.03 to 0.91. In rare cases, I used data from the European Labor Force Survey provided by Holland et. al (2011), which is highly correlated with Eurostat data. Further details are available in the supplementary information.
8. For a discussion of the differences between foreign national and foreign-born measures, see Fas-smann (2009).
9. While it is not possible to construct multiple indicator variables due to the lack of suitable survey questions in the ESS, previous studies have found that these measures are comparable to those with multiple indicators (Davidov and Meuleman 2012).
10. I also explored whether or not these results were influenced by the transitional restrictions employed by Western European countries that were lifted at different points in time following the enlargement and they may be endogenous to the public's perception of immigration. However, when testing the models using dummy variables to indicate whether or not the country had transitional restrictions in place at the time, the results were not remarkably different and the restrictions were not significantly related to perceptions.
11. Since GDP per capita did not change significantly within a country between 2002–2014, only a between-country macro indicator is included. A similar approach has been used by McLaren (2012).
12. The results were not influenced by outliers as the analysis was replicated 14 times, with each time dropping a country from the sample.

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### Appendix A. Descriptive statistics

	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
E8 foreigners group size	0.02	5.01	0.95	1.19
Non-EU27 group size	1.35	7.32	3.96	1.58
unemployment rate	3.80	24.8	8.41	3.70
GDP per capita (thousands)	25.11	65.15	37.93	6.47
perceived economic threat of immigration	0	10	5.09	2.34
perceived cultural threat of immigration	0	10	4.25	2.45
female (1=yes)	0	1	0.52	0.50
age	15	103	49.20	18.55
years in education	0	56	12.58	5.21
urban area (1=yes)	0	1	0.31	0.46
economic difficulties (1=yes)	0	1	0.17	0.37
unemployed (1=yes)	0	1	0.04	0.20