

## **Opposition to Immigration: Self-interest or Public Interest?**

**Gallya Lahav**  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Political Science  
State University of New York, Stony Brook  
SBS S749  
Stony Brook, NY 11794-4392  
Email: [gallya.lahav@sunysb.edu](mailto:gallya.lahav@sunysb.edu)

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## **Opposition to Immigration: Self-interest or Public Interest?**

**Abstract:** Why do some Europeans feel threatened by immigrants more than others? Some studies have suggested that there is a pattern of negative attitudes toward immigrant which rises according to the size of immigrant population (Eurobarometer, 1989, Quillian, 1995; Lahav, 2003). This follows accounts of electoral behavior; extreme-right parties such as the French FN tend to do best in areas of high immigrant concentration (Mayer and Perrineau, 1989; Schain 1988; Mayer, 1999; Perrineau, 1985; 1996; Schain 1998; Schain, Zolberg and Hossay 2002). Others have suggested that the feeling that there were too many immigrants might be strong even in countries with small immigrant populations, while expressed tolerance was found in some countries where the proportion of immigrant is relatively high (Baldwin-Edwards and Schain 1994). Although much has been written about 'immigration thresholds', how immigrant size translates into immigrant rejection remains unclear and ambiguous. This paper attempts to uncover these contradictions by disentangling the effects of personal concerns from societal consideration and by looking at the different motivations underlying peoples' assessments. It argues that people tend to separate their personal concerns from broader judgments about societal threat when thinking about immigration. It suggests that while immigrant numbers matter, it may only be in context of other threats (i.e., security, European integration) that they fully make sense.

### **Introduction**

The emergence of immigration as a political issue appears to have become a permanent feature of the post-War period, as immigration has been negatively associated with industrialization and globalization. While immigration to Europe is not new, it had only entered public debates when it became clear that immigration was no longer a springboard for economic growth. Economic recession and growing unemployment coincided with the realization in the 1980s that migrant workers had become permanent residents. What was once a bureaucratic and post-World War II phenomenon tied largely to reconstruction needs, the presence and impact of culturally, religiously, and ethnically diverse groups in European society was introduced into the public and political arenas. This has been marked by electoral campaigns and party contestation, the emergence and consolidation of extreme-right parties, and increasing public support for xenophobic political forces.

The coincidence of this politicization with growing unemployment and economic downturn suggests that public opposition to immigration is a function of economic threat. More generally, individuals who feel that their economic well-being is endangered by an influx of cheap labor will be more likely than those individuals who feel secure in their job and income position to feel an anti-immigrant effect. Certainly, the rise of the extreme right has been attributed to such dislocation as modernization, globalization, unemployment, and other socioeconomic factors (see Messina, 2002; Givens, 2002; Jackman and Volpert, 1994; Lewis-Beck and Mitchehl, 1993), though the increasing diversity of support for extreme-right groups and anti-immigration opposition has made it difficult to isolate cultural from economic arguments about losers of modernization (see Minkenberg, 1992; Ignazzi, 1992). A nagging question has been what explains immigrant rejection and hostility – economics or culture? And is it general conditions or more personal ones that provoke immigrant opposition?

Although much has been written about ‘immigration thresholds,’ how immigrant group size translates into immigrant rejection remains unclear and ambiguous (for a rigorous comparative attempt to empirically sort through this puzzle, see Money, 1999; Fetzer, 2000). The relationship between size of immigrant group and rejection of foreigners is complex. On the one hand, as the *Eurobarometer* studies have suggested, there is a pattern of negative attitudes toward immigrants, which rises according to the size of immigrant population. This also follows accounts of electoral behavior; extreme-right parties such as the French *Front National* tend to do best in areas of high immigrant concentration (Mayer and Perrineau, 1989; Schain, 1988, 1998; Mayer, 1999; Perrineau, 1985; 1996).

On the other hand, as *Eurobarometer* 30 report revealed, relationships between the number of immigrants and attitudes only appear on national averages (correlation rate = .82) not

in individual answers (1988: 64).<sup>1</sup> The relationship between immigrant numbers and rejection of foreigners does not indicate that people with more exposure to, and familiarity with immigrants are less favorable to them. In fact, at an individual level, the *Eurobarometer* study found that people who live in neighborhoods or work within contexts where there is a wider range of different people are neither more nor less inclined than the rest of the population to have a hostile attitude to other people. The report suggested that attitudes may be more symbolic and subjective than concrete and objective.

In this paper, I attempt to reconcile these conclusions by considering the multiple bases of immigration opposition. In considering the impact of demographic contexts, I differentiate between *sociotropic* -- public concerns (general national conditions or aggregate factors) and *self-interest* (personal or individual level) motives that inform immigration preferences and immigrant opposition. These distinctions allow us to reconcile competing findings by suggesting that public considerations may be more pertinent to immigration attitudes than personal motives.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Attitudinal research has consistently yielded contradictory results over ecological and contextual factors, and theoretical advancements have remained inconclusive. According to policy-makers and scholars in France (in the 1980s) and Germany (in the 1990s) for example, the ‘threshold thesis’ posited that the concentration of immigrants produce certain levels of xenophobia and immigrant backlash. It implied that there was a certain bar, by which public opinion would become hostile. The *Eurobarometer* data on public opinion across European nations provided a robust standpoint by which to generate some generalizable findings. They

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on the correlation between “percent of answers stating ‘too many’ others” (in terms of nationality, race, religion, culture, and social class) and “percent of non-EEC nationals in relation to population of country” (n = 12), *Eurobarometer* 30, p. 45.

reinforced the threshold thesis with a twist. In 1989, the survey on “Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance” concluded that on national aggregate, public opinion increased with the numbers of immigrants residing in each country. Strikingly, the findings were not replicated at the individual level, where familiarity appeared to breed amity more than contempt for foreigners. This left agape an enormous puzzle. Does exposure to immigrants in fact generate more hostility or does immigrant contact mitigate it?

The literature on inter-group conflict and tolerance has made a significant contribution to our understanding of immigrant rejection, but it has been divided regarding the impact of demographic contexts. The contact thesis developed by Gordon Allport (1954; 1979) has generated a genre of studies devoted to the question of whether contact between members of different ethnic or racial groups increase tolerance or simply reinforce existing prejudices.<sup>2</sup> Allport identified two main types of contact: ‘causal contact’, which predisposes individuals to increasing prejudice to minority groups and ‘true acquaintance’ in which individuals actually get to know each other, and become more tolerant (1979). While a plethora of studies have attempted to test these measures against a variety of sample subsets (including racial minorities, ethnic groups, immigrants, etc.), up to date, they have borne contradictory results, and the measures used to distinguish between the two forms of contact and to test the presence of contact assumptions have been problematic, begging questions about its theoretical utility (see Fetzer, 2000).

The power threat thesis originating in the work of V.O.Key (1949) has also posited that racial animosity increases with the percent of blacks in an environment, as the political or economic power of whites is threatened (see Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000; Giles and Hertz

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<sup>2</sup> The contact thesis is similar to the threshold notion, and largely stems from the work of Gordon Allport (1954; 1979). It focuses on the distribution of immigrants in one’s neighborhood or region and on how many and what kind of personal contacts one has with newcomers. While there has been some evidence that casual contact with immigrants promotes xenophobia and direct contact generates tolerance, there is much controversy on how to measure the two.

1994; Glaser, 1994; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld, 1989; Taylor, 1998). These classical theories have inspired many valuable empirical studies, but are noteworthy for their contradictory findings.

The conclusions of these studies have recently been called into question for several reasons. First, they have failed to distinguish socio-economic context from racial or demographic environments more generally, and from considering for example that most white Americans live in homogenous racial environments (see Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000). Indeed, the contextual sources of racial hostility may work less through realistic conflict over resources than through psychological states that produce out-group animosity (Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000: 587). Thus, socio-economic contexts as well as education (Blake, 2001; Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000; Fetzer, 2000: 148-149; Hoskin, 1991: 147; Zaller, 1992: 11; 98; Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Hernes and Knudsen, 1992; Stouffer, 1955) have been found to be more important influences on negative stereotypes towards blacks and out-groups than the mere presence of them. Increased education may be seen to decrease opposition to immigration, as higher education may instill greater confidence in one's ability to "compete", less threat, and more tolerance.

Furthermore, many of these studies tend to focus on the relation between individuals in the dominant and sub-ordinate groups, but they omit an important source of dominant-group opposition – the role of collective threat that lead to racial prejudice (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1983; 1988; Bobo and Kluegel, 1993; Quillian, 1995). A large out-group is perceived a great threat to the group advantages of the dominant in-group when the economic situation of a host country is precarious (Blalock, 1967; Money, 1999). Moreover, a conjunctural argument such as forwarded by Money is helpful in understanding the interactive effects of economics and culture (1999).

While many of these findings are useful in gaining leverage over hostility towards foreigners, the explanatory power of these theories is somewhat compromised by the failure to

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account for interaction effects. One might overcome these competing paradigms, by thinking about the interactive effects of economics and culture as Jeannette Money has done in her analysis of anti-immigrant sentiment at the local level (1999). Her study revealed that the interactive part of job competition for example, comes not from the mere presence of migrants, but the presence of migrants when unemployment rises (which is what creates labor market competition). This perspective underscores the need to more systematically identify and delineate these contextual variables so as to predict conditions under which rejection explodes.

In this paper, I do not try to resolve the debate between economic and cultural threat nor the macro-micro discrepancies of public opinion research, though I hope to contribute to the discussion on personal versus public constraints. Following Quillian's (1995) logic on the use of national variables, I use the country unit of analysis to examine national variations of immigration attitudes. It makes theoretical sense to consider countries as important cultural, political and economic units, as people develop their sense of threat as they develop their notions of 'us' and them'. Indeed, as Anderson aptly described, the "imagined community" of the nation or the racial group are the primary social identities through which prejudices against outsiders are formed (1981).

Empirically as well, despite important intra-state local variations in demographic concentrations, cross-national differences with immigrant size are readily visible, and do not require any conceptual interpretations.

**Table 1: Numbers and Percents of EU and non-EU Foreign Populations, 1996**

Country	Number of Foreign Population (thousands)	Percent of Foreigners/ Total Pop	# of EU foreigners	% of EU Foreigners/ pop	# of non-EU foreigners	% of non-EU Foreigners/ pop
Austria	728.2	9.0				
Belgium	910	9.0	555	61%	355	39%

Denmark	223	4.3	47	21%	176	79%
Finland	69	1.4	18	26%	55	74%
France <sup>b</sup>	3597	6.4	1322	37%	2275	63%
Germany	7173	8.8	1811	25%	5362	75%
Greece	155	1.5	44	28%	111	72%
Ireland	117	3.2	73 <sup>d</sup>	63% <sup>d</sup>	44 <sup>d</sup>	37% <sup>d</sup>
Italy <sup>a</sup>	1095.6 <sup>c</sup>	2.0 <sup>c</sup>	111 <sup>d</sup>	10% <sup>d</sup>	984 <sup>d</sup>	90% <sup>d</sup>
Luxembourg <sup>a</sup>	142.8	34.1	115 <sup>d</sup>	80% <sup>d</sup>	28 <sup>d</sup>	20% <sup>d</sup>
Netherlands	726	4.7	192	26%	534	74%
Portugal	169	1.7	42	25%	127	75%
Spain	499	1.3	235	47%	264	53%
Sweden	531	6.0	179	34%	352	66%
UK	1992	3.4	818	41%	1174	59%

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Source: EUROSTAT; SOPEMI, OECD, 1998.

aEurostat 1996 figures

bOECD 1990 figures

cOECD 1998 (reporting 1996 figures)

<sup>d</sup>Eurostat 1994 (reporting 1992 figures)

Table 1 shows the significant national differences that exist among EU countries with regard to foreign populations.

This paper departs from the other studies however in that it accepts that there are both individual and aggregate approaches to the data. Rather than gauge competing levels of analysis, I seek to distinguish the public versus self-interest components or sources of immigration attitudes in informing opposition by focusing on one unit of analysis. The country level allows us to tap into nation-state differences, and both general and specific conditions simultaneously. I use data from *Eurobarometer* Survey 30, which focused on immigrants and out-groups (1989), as well as demographic figures from OECD to operationalize country differences with regards to immigrant numbers.

I propose that immigration preferences may be informed by models (used in different contexts) of attitude constraints. They include *symbolic politics* (long-standing abstract predispositions such as ideology, political beliefs, racial prejudice), *self-interest* (the 'pocket-book' hypothesis), and *sociotropic* (conditions of the nation at large) motivations (see Sears *et*



*al.*, 1980; Sears and Citrin, 1982; Kinder and Kiewit, 1981; Kinder, Adams and Gronke, 1989; Kinder and Sears, 1981; Kinder and Sanders, 1996). Each of these models may explain the tractability and nature of immigration concerns by distinguishing the bases of these attitudes – external realities (both personal and public) or internal values. Thus, for example, people who place a high priority on immigration because their fundamental cultural values are at stake may not find incremental actions by European governments as satisfying as those who are disturbed by large societal changes in their environment. Self-interest and sociotropic origins of attitudes emphasize external attitudinal processes, suggesting that citizens react to concrete problems in their environments, whereas symbolic models focus on mechanisms or values that exist within people.<sup>3</sup> In general, the value of these different models lies in their power to reconcile the anomalies of immigration attitudes. More powerfully, these distinctions allow us to re-situate our discussion of immigration attitudes by overcoming the tendency to label all oppositional attitudes as racist or xenophobic. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on self versus public interests in immigration attitudes in order to assess the extent to which immigration concerns are susceptible to more general country conditions or idiosyncratic personal preferences.

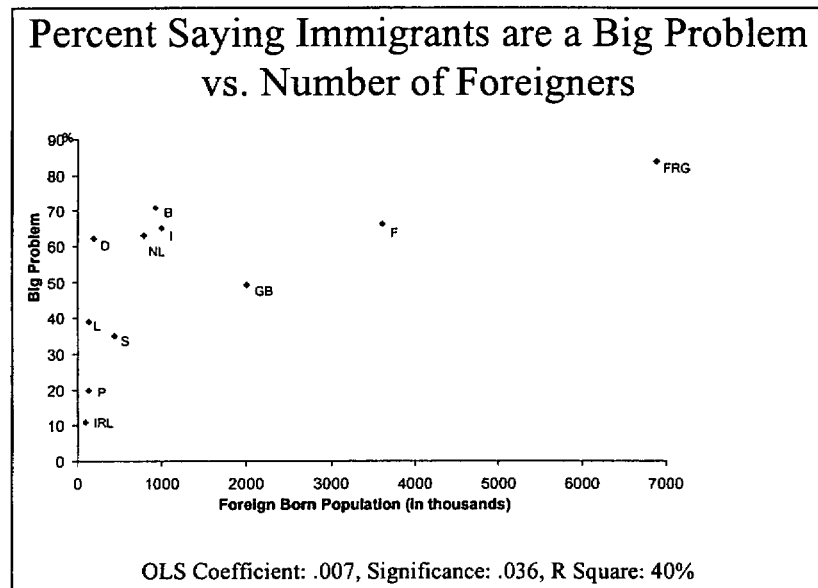
### **Empirical Findings**

There is no doubt that having knowledge about immigration numbers in any given country or locality can tell us something about people's attitudes and orientations towards immigration (Lahav, 2001, 2003; 2003 *forthcoming*). To a large degree, national patterns are suggestive of immigrant numbers in differentiating attitudes. Figure 1 below reveals that the degree by which Europeans reported immigrants to be a problem seemed to be largely explained by the numbers of resident immigrants.

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<sup>3</sup> For a cogent application to environmental issues, see Rohrschneider, 1988).

Figure 1



Forty percent of the variability in the notion that immigrants are a big problem is explained by the foreign born population. Nonetheless, the ordinary least squares coefficient (OLS) shows a weak substantive significance, and a scan of the scatterplot reveals that this relationship may be largely driven by three outliers (Great Britain, France and Germany).<sup>4</sup> A similar regression between those saying that immigrants are a big problem and the *percent* of total foreigners yielded statistically insignificant values ( $p=.91$ ).<sup>5</sup>

A more nuanced understanding of demographic figures is necessary to understand why the immigration problem is perceived greater in some countries than in others. That is, as figure 3 below illustrates, it is not the immigrant numbers that affect attitudes as much as the concentrations of certain *types* of immigrants. The relationship between those who would reject certain immigrants

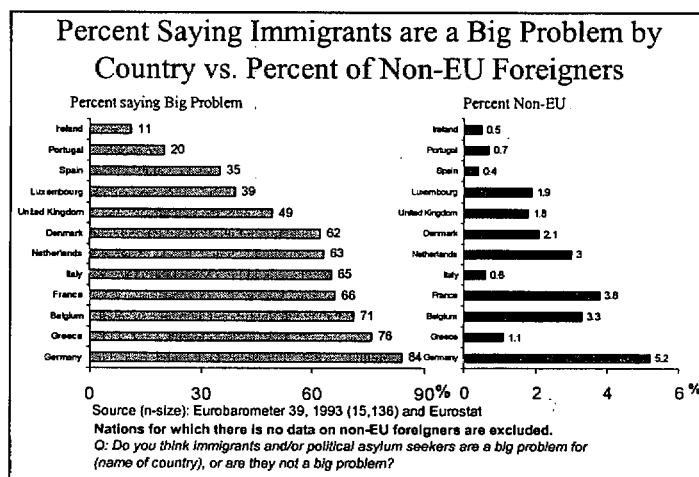
<sup>4</sup>The OLS coefficient relates the direction and strength of the variability in the dependent variable described by the independent variable.

<sup>5</sup> OLS=.111,  $r^2=.00$

and the numbers of *non-EU foreigners* in their nation is statistically significant while such a correlation does not exist for rejection of immigrants and the numbers of *EU* or *total foreigners*.

The use of abstract numbers (whether in absolute figures or relative percents) to explain measures of attitude formation, though common, inhibits a deeper understanding. The ambiguous relationship between numbers and attitudes is further illuminated by the findings on numbers of various immigrant-specific groups. Thus, while a regression between the percent of the European public who believe immigrants are a big problem (across nation) by percent of EU foreigners was statistically insignificant ( $p=.65$ ),<sup>6</sup> a regression between this same dependent variable against the number of non-EU immigrants per nation revealed a statistically significant relationship (see figures 2 and 3).

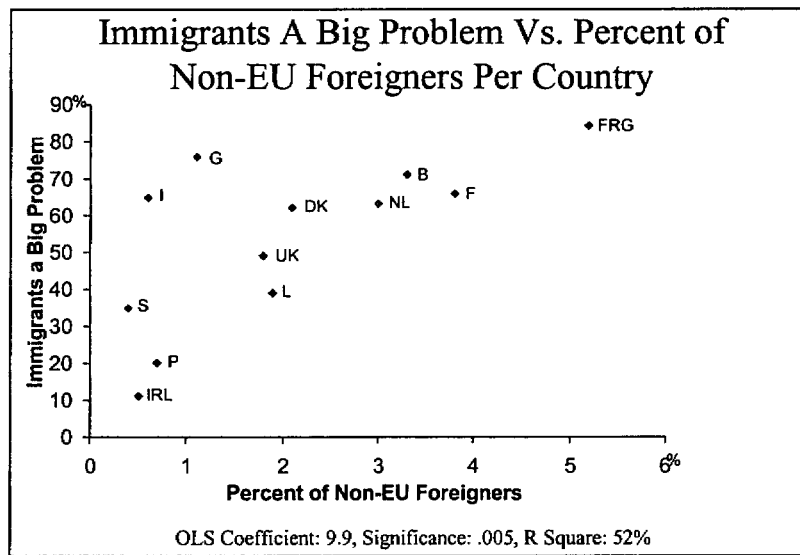
Figure 2



A notable nation-based variation in the assessment that ‘immigration is a big problem’ (illustrated in figures 2 and 3) demands deeper analysis. Despite an overall consensus about the problematic nature of the immigration issue, the public opinion findings reveal that the sentiment that immigrants were a big problem was most pronounced in Germany, Belgium and France -- countries with substantial immigrant populations. In contrast, significantly fewer than 50% of

respondents in Luxembourg, Spain, Finland, Portugal and Ireland felt this way. The latter were countries with significantly less non-EU populations. The scatterplot below captures this relationship graphically.

**Figure 3**



In fact, 52% of the variability in the European public’s perception that immigrants are a big problem by nation is explained by the percent of non-EU foreigners per nation. As the percent of non-EU foreigners increases by one percent, those saying immigration is a big problem increases, on average by 9.9%. This is significant at the .005 level. The fact that such a relationship does not exist for a regression where the independent variable is EU foreigners rather than non-EU foreigners points to the greater resistance Europeans have toward accepting immigrants least like themselves.

The importance of non-EU immigrants in driving attitudes about immigration is reinforced by further analysis. A statistically significant relationship emerged for example between those saying there are “too many immigrants” and the concentration of non-EU

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<sup>6</sup> OLS=.511, r<sup>2</sup>=.02

foreigners, as well as between those nations that Europeans label as most hostile to foreigners and the level of non-EU migrants in those countries (see table 2). In both cases, the percent of EU immigrants did not yield statistically significant results in predicting these two perceptions. This corroborates McLaren's (2001) findings that EU migrants generate consensus, and are therefore not good indicators of attitudinal variability. Indeed, the percent of non-EU foreigners is considerably more important in determining attitudes toward immigration than levels of EU foreigners.

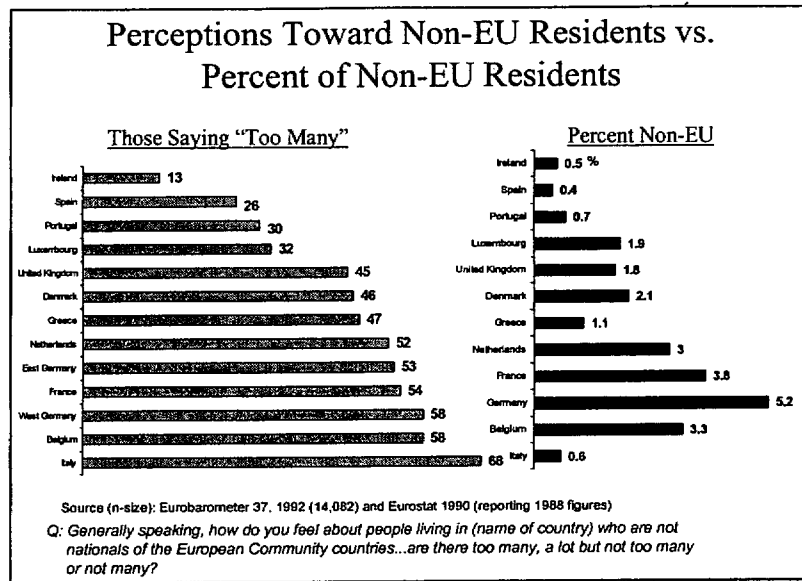
**TABLE 2: Immigrant Thresholds by Foreign Concentrations, 1992-93**

	Percent non-EU	Percent EU	Percent Total Foreigners
Immigrants are a	9.9 <sup>1</sup>	-.511	.111
Big Problem	(.005) <sup>2</sup>	(.65)	(.91)
	.52 <sup>3</sup>	.02	.00
Too Many	4.99	-.455	-.078
Foreigners	(.051)	(.540)	(.911)
	.30	.035	.001
Nation most	5.44	-.151	.140
Hostile to	(.011)	(.792)	(.785)
Immigrants	.49	.007	.008

1. OLS Coefficient
2. Significance
3. R<sup>2</sup> value

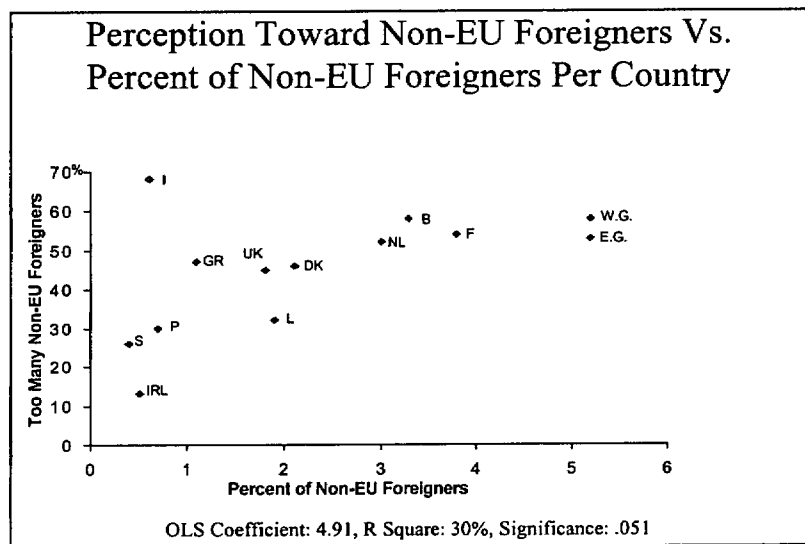
These relationships can be further studied with the help of the figures 4 and 5 below.

Figure 4



In 1992, the perception that there were too many foreigners was greatest in Germany, France, and Belgium, countries with high concentrations of non-EU.

Figure 5



Immigrant rejection seems to be associated with proportions of non-EU immigrants found in each country. These various measures of immigrant thresholds suggest that the numbers of non-EU

migrants figure largely in public perception.

With the exception of Belgium and Luxembourg, the relative size of non-EU foreigners per foreign population is significantly larger than the proportion of EU foreigners (see table 1 above). In most EU countries, non-EU populations account for two-thirds of the foreign populations. It is thus plausible that numbers speak of more concrete distinctions between non-EU and non-EU foreigners than of xenophobia itself.<sup>7</sup> On thing is clear, preferences of immigrant groups are based on some concrete conditions. Whether this is based on economic or cultural threat is difficult to ascertain since they often cross-cut.

Although several factors determine attitudes towards immigration, we may get some purchase on the nature of these sources by cross-sectional analysis of different education or cognitive levels. By using cultural proxies, such as religiosity or attitudes towards European integration, which tap into national identity, we may compare cultural sources to other more economic considerations, such as family income across different segments of cognitively mobilized and education. Table 3 below provides a breakdown of immigration attitudes according to cognitive mobilization, and relates them to concerns about European integration, family income, and religion, and demographic/ideological control variables. The cognitive mobilization index is constructed from responses to questions about education levels and reporting of tendencies to discuss political matters in one's daily life.<sup>8</sup> Each column represents a regression equation,

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<sup>7</sup> I refer here to Bernd Baumgartl and Adrian Favell's definition of xenophobia as "...the dread of 'foreigners' as a group, whether defined legally as 'immigrants', or by their strangeness as a visible group, it is taken as a classic device of self-definition as part of an 'in-group' in opposition to an 'out-group' (1995: 379).

<sup>8</sup> The literature on cognitive mobilization tends to interchangeably refer to this as opinion leadership. The opinion leadership index constructed by Inglehart for analyzing cognitive mobilization in the *Eurobarometer* public opinion studies is derived from combining responses to two questions: 'When you get together with friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally or never?' and 'When you , yourself, hold a strong opinion, do you ever find yourself persuading your friends, relatives or fellow workers? If so, does this happen often, from time to time, or rarely.' The assumption is that opinion leaders pay more attention to the mass media and all forms of political information, and communicate more frequently with each other (see Wessels 1995: 142). In the *Eurobarometer 30*, the index for this was referred to as "cognitive mobilization" (v723) and includes question 1 (q122) and Q536, which refers to age finished school.

according to cognitive mobilization groupings, from least (1) to most (5) cognitively mobilized.

**Table 3: Cultural versus Economic Motivations for Attitudes towards Immigration, by Cognitive Mobilization**

Relationship with Attitudes Toward Immigration by Cognitive Mobilization <sup>a</sup>						
Regression of Cognitive Mobilization and Immigration Attitudes	(1) Low	(2) Medium-Low	(3) Medium	(4) Medium-High	(5) High	Total
% of Cognitive mobilization	19%	28%	29%	19%	6%	100%
Integration Attitude <sup>b</sup>	*	*	*	*	ns	*
Family Income	ns	*	ns	ns	*	*
Religiosity <sup>c</sup>	ns	*	*	*	ns	*

\* Statistically significant at below the .05 level. NS: Not significant

a Ordered Probit regression includes the following control variables: nation specific dummies, materialism, sex, age, ideology, and ideological intensity. The question on immigration (q169-172) is derived from *Eurobarometer 30*, "Generally-speaking how do you feel about the number of people of another nationality living in our country: too many, a lot but not too many or not many?"

b Factor score for integration attitudes is derived from principal components analysis of 3 affective variables (v520, v523, v524) in *Eurobarometer 30* (1988) n=11791. See Appendix A for question wording.

c Religiosity variable refers to *Eurobarometer30* question v561, "Would you say that you are religious, not religious, or an atheist?"

The table above reveals that the majority of respondents are not motivated by family income, but rather by attitudes towards European integration, religion, or other cultural values. Among the 6 percent of the most cognitively mobilized Europeans, attitudes towards immigration are significantly related to income but not to other factors. With the exception of the second least cognitive mobilized (regression 2), all the others were influenced by one or the other cultural factors. The most cognitive mobilized may be said to behave as rational self-interested or utilitarian thinkers in the sense that income may be a proxy for education, and that they would be most



enlightened with regard to immigration, and least likely to bear the direct costs of immigration. Assuming that highly educated are correlated with high cognitive mobilization and high income levels, it can also be argued that the most cognitively mobilized have the highest incomes, and therefore have most to lose. More broadly, this table gives credence to the ability of European integration or religion to distinguish patterns of opposition on questions of immigration over traditional socio-economic factors. If we stop here, we may argue that immigrant rejection is a function of cultural, religious and racial divide and is proportionate to the relative size of population.

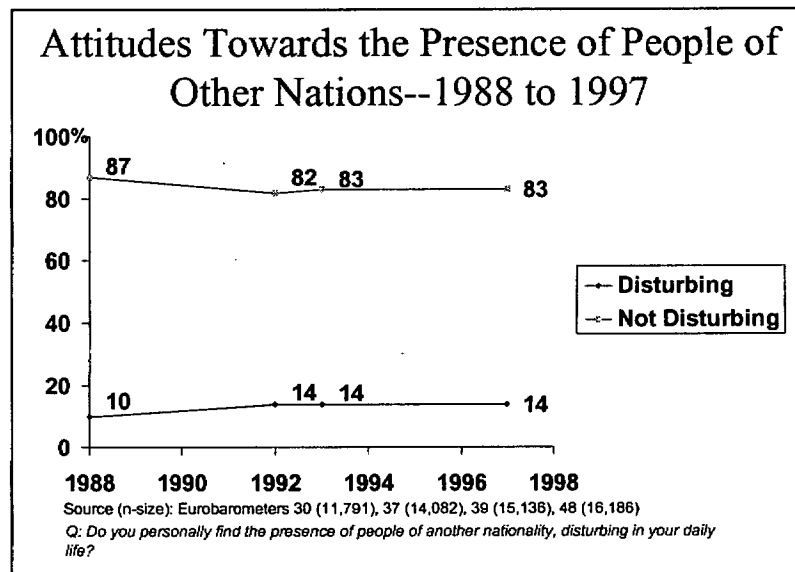
However, there are certain anomalies that still need to be explained (i.e., the convergence of the most informed and least informed with regard to religion). More surprising is the lack of effect of family income on the least cognitively mobilized, potentially most economically vulnerable. There are important discrepancies that remain and merit explanation. Although various measures of immigrant thresholds suggest that country contexts (i.e., numbers of non-EU migrants) figure largely in public perception, national patterns also expose the nuances.

Moreover, the exceptions of countries such as Greece, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and to some degree, Italy (see figures 2 and 3) underscore another trend noted by Baldwin-Edwards and Schain. That is, the feeling that there are too many immigrants may be strong even in many countries with small immigrant populations; while expressed tolerance may be found in some countries where the proportion of immigrants is relatively high (Baldwin-Edwards and Schain, 1994: 6). In explaining these inconsistencies, it is useful to consider the conclusion of the 1997 *Eurobarometer* report (no. 47.1). The anxieties expressed by a number of respondents seem to result not so much from the actual presence of minority groups but from the perception as to the ability of the host country to accommodate them. These discrepancies suggest that an analysis of sources of mass attitudes may benefit more from an examination of perceptions of national

conditions or political processes (i.e., insecurity, European integration, community-building) than from an examination of demographic trends alone.

Indeed, there are considerable anomalies in how people feel about immigration generally and how they translate these sentiments more personally. Thus, the lines between public and private preoccupations with immigration may help reconcile what would otherwise be anomalous findings. Consider for example that in surveys conducted from 1988 to 1997, fewer than 20% of Europeans ever said that the presence of people of other nations was disturbing *on a personal basis* (figure 6).

**Figure 6**



Consistently, over 80% of Europeans said that the presence of people of other nations was not personally disturbing.

Yet, we know that there is some unease with immigrants. In 1993, over a majority of Europeans (54%) said immigrants were, in some way that is left open to each respondent's interpretation, a big problem. Only 36% said they were not a big problem. Feelings of tolerance seem to coexist with the belief that immigrants are a big problem for host countries.

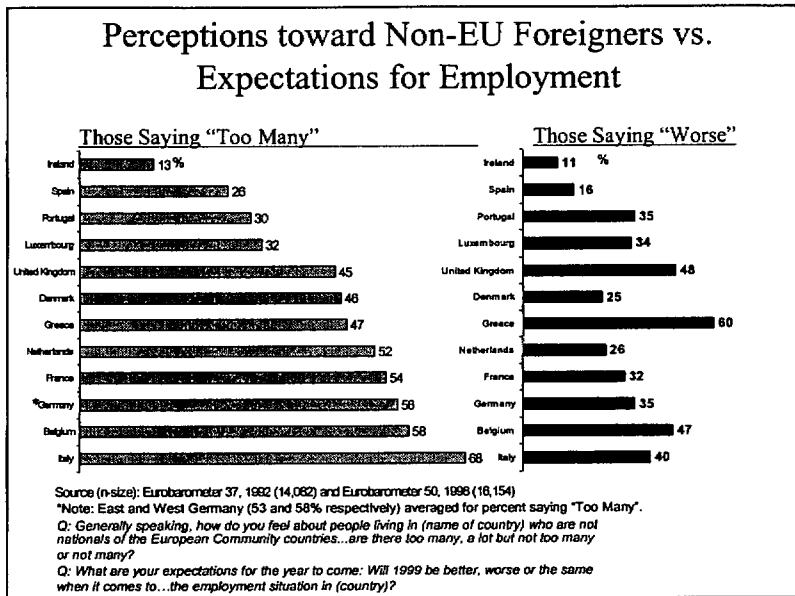
These discrepancies may be understood by disentangling the different motivations

underlying peoples' assessments. People tend to separate their personal concerns from broader judgments about social issues and politics. That is, while attitudinal motivations may be informed by personal self-interest – the classic pocket-book voting (Kinder, Adams and Gronke, 1989), sociotropic motivations – societal or national concerns – often dominate policy preferences. These are conditions that extend beyond people's immediate situation (Kinder and Kiewit, 1981, Sears and Citrin, 1982).

The longitudinal analysis of general attitudes towards people of other nations suggests that the salience of the immigration issue in the daily lives of Europeans may be small relative to its politicization, or its public nature. Taken together with national variations regarding country problems, they are suggestive of public sensitivity to domestic environments (sociotropic concerns) even when they are not personally disturbed. Publics are sensitive to immigrant numbers, but their concerns are more driven by abstract conditions than personal threat. Self-interest does not seem to be a factor in their responses. Evaluations of the data would be incomplete without an understanding of Europeans' sociotropic motivations – concerns about general conditions. Alternatively, their abstract beliefs or symbolic racism – more long-standing predispositions such as ideology, political beliefs, racial prejudice may influence these attitudes.

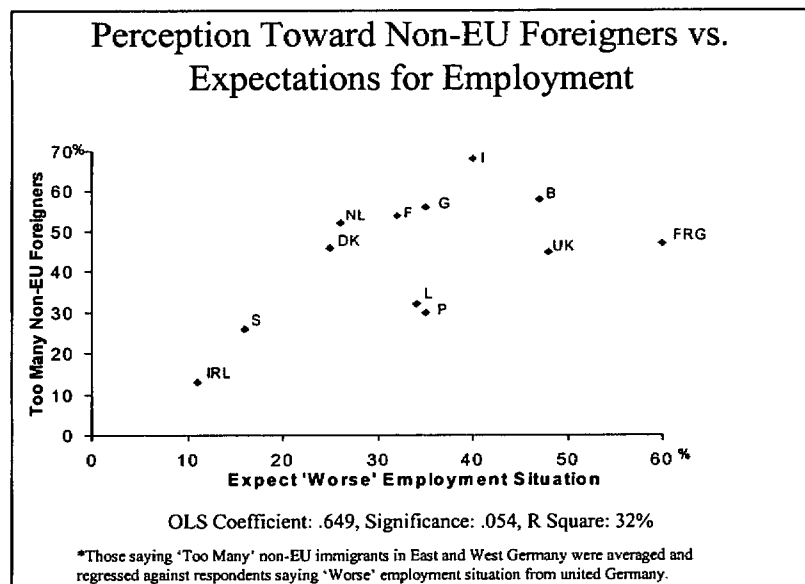
The discrepancy between personal and public considerations is further replicated in other areas of immigration attitudes. Thus, while people's assessments of immigration are tied to economic considerations, their attitudes are based on more national (sociotropic) conditions than personal ones. Generally, as people in EU countries grow increasingly pessimistic about their nation's future employment prospects, they also become more likely to believe there are too many non-EU foreigners residing among them (figure 7).

### **Figure 7**



Regression analysis confirms the existence of a relationship between these variables (figure 8). The scatterplot below helps to illuminate the links between measures of national economic insecurity and immigrant rejection.

**Figure 8**

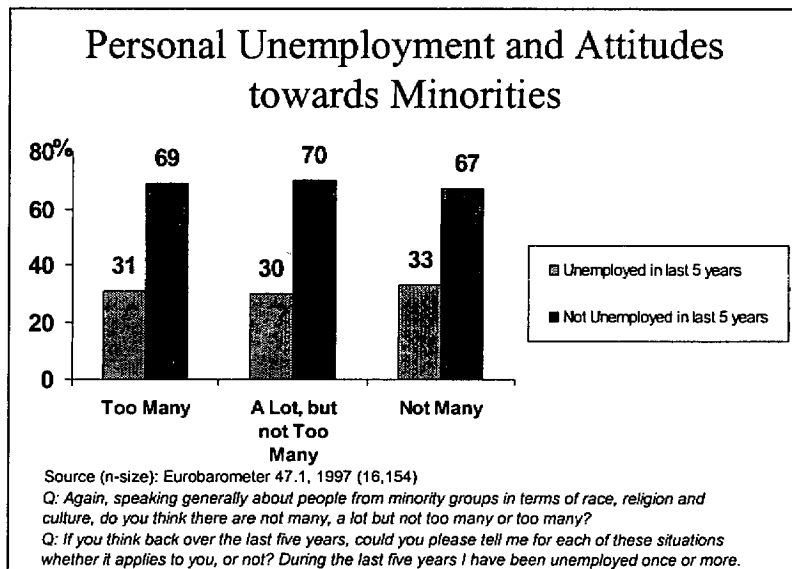


As expectations for a worsened employment situation increase by one percent, respondents are .65 percent more likely to believe that there are too many non-EU foreigners in their nation. This is statistically significant at the .05 level. One-third of the variability in those responding that there are too many non-EU nationals is accounted for by the underlying insecurities (measured here by future employment expectations).

However, the 1997 *Eurobarometer* finding that there was no significant correlation between *being* unemployed and degree of racist or xenophobic feelings expressed is worthy of mention (47.1, Spring 1997). Hence, while nearly one third of respondents had themselves been unemployed at one stage during the last five years, nearly half of those interviewed worked in a company that had been affected by unemployment at one stage during that period. A regression of the unemployment rate across those saying 'too many' non-EU foreigners (by country) yields a statistically insignificant result (.84).

As figure 9 illustrates, knowing the unemployment status of respondents does not yield any information about his/her predisposition towards immigrants.

**Figure 9**



From these data, we may surmise that the fear of losing one's job (societal conditions) appears to be a much more important factor than personal unemployment itself. This is not surprising, given the historical Weimar German experience and the failures of the SPD over the NSDAP to attract the middle classes in their genocidal undertaking.

These findings are also consonant with the argument that immigrant fears may be more related to larger societal trends than personal factors. They support studies of authoritarianism, which have shown that in contrast to the perception of a deteriorating national economy, threats to *personal* economic conditions (i.e., unemployment or more general personal economic decline) have no on aggravating effect on authoritarianism or intolerance (Feldman and Stenner, 1997). Rich empirical data have shown that intolerance is aggravated by threats to the political and social order but not by threats to personal well-being (Feldman and Stenner, 1997: 765). This also reinforces studies that have shown no relationship between extreme right voting and unemployment either over time or space (see Perrineau, 1996; Mayer, 1999). For attitudinal analysis, the problem is that unemployment is a priority issue for all voters, and slightly less for those who vote FN (see Perrineau, 1996). There also appears to be no relationship over space (Mayer, 1999).

Again, these findings not only point to ecological fallacies of attitudinal research, but to the relevant distinctions between symbolic and sociotropic attitudes as opposed to those motivated by self-interest competition, *per se*. More specific to the European case, it also supports Dominique Schnapper's argument that, "it is less the objective difficulties of integrating migrants—even if they do exist" which explain the passion of the European debates on immigrants than the crisis of the nation-state itself (Schnapper, 1994: 138). The subtle but underlying sentiment toward protecting the historical essence of one's homeland becomes more apparent when one looks at how much sovereignty the European public is willing to release to a

supranational governing agency. While immigrant numbers matter, it may only be in context of other threats (i.e., community integration, terrorism, identity) that they fully make sense (Lahav, 2001; 2003). On the whole, we can say that people's ideas towards immigrants are guided by more general conditions and more long-standing perceptions of public threat.

That attitudes towards immigrants may derive from more symbolic and general factors than concrete and personal ones seems to be echoed in the EU literature. If this is true, then Allport's earlier distinction between casual and true-acquaintance contact may be relevant. Perrineau's study of support for the anti-immigrant FN party found a correlation between immigrant numbers existed less in *communes* (city precincts) than in much larger *départements*. His explanation that xenophobia forms "more from fantasy than from the actual perception of objective" or around "the stranger with whom one doesn't live but whom one senses at the city limits..." follows the casual contact thesis (1985).

In the absence of multi-level contexts, my study attempts to explain these differences by focusing on the distinction between public and self-interest in motivating these different responses. It is plausible that more general societal considerations rather than specific personal motivations of demographic contexts are what matter.

## **Conclusions**

From the analysis above, we may conclude that attitudes towards immigrants are systematically related to size of immigrant numbers, and therefore have some demographic context. There is sufficient evidence in the aggregate to suggest that knowing the number of immigrants in a country may tell us something about peoples' attitudes and orientations towards immigration, since perceptions have some reality base. Publics are more informed about immigrant numbers than migration scholars have traditionally assumed (see Freeman, 1995; McLaren, 2001), but there are multiple aspects to their immigration concerns (i.e., racist, self-

interest, or sociotropic assessments), which vary from economic to cultural evaluations. In assessing attitudinal patterns, it is important to extricate ourselves from reductionist explanations of immigration rejection. Certainly, unfettered xenophobia or symbolic racism is one version of exclusionism, which may defy 'rationality',<sup>9</sup> and distinguish attitudinal patterns. But, other more 'rational' motivations, such as self-interest and sociotropic considerations must also be entertained to explain immigration norms.

The primacy of sociotropic concerns – societal or national conditions – over self-interest motivations, as the findings in this paper strikingly capture, is a testament to the more robust effects of societal – non-personal dimensions of immigration attitudes that exist. While these findings may legitimate immigrant opposition, they overcome the tendency to label all skepticism about immigration as racism. These observations also concur with research in the United States, which suggest the peoples' attitudes about immigration may be crystallized along both non-economic and non-racial factors (Gimpel and Edwards, 1999: 314). Evaluations of immigration opposition would be incomplete without an understanding of Europeans' general public concerns rather than fleetingly selfish or immovable racist convictions.

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<sup>9</sup> This term follows Page and Shapiro's definition (1982) , and is used here to mean a stable public opinion which is seen to fluctuate predictably with policy changes. It deviates from its more common instrumental usage, which implies a means-ends relationship based on available data to the individual.



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