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Who Believes the Country Belongs to Their Ethnic Ingroup? The Background Characteristics of 'Owners' and Their Support for Stricter Immigration Policies Across Three Western Societies

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Abstract

We examined if ethnic majority members with different background characteristics (national identification, political orientation, gender, education, and age) differ in the perception that their ethnic group owns the country they live in, and whether this can explain their opinions about stricter immigration policies. Using nationally diverse samples of Anglo-Australian (N = 475), Dutch (N = 599), and British participants (N = 1005), we found that ownership beliefs were consistently positively associated with support for stricter immigration policies. Further, we showed that ownership beliefs were stronger among higher national identifiers, men, right-wing, lower educated (United Kingdom only), and older people (Australia only), and ownership partially accounted for these groups' stronger endorsement of stricter immigration policies. Our study underscores the relevance of ownership beliefs as a novel construct that can explain the relation between personal background characteristics and anti-immigration stance among ethnic majority populations in Western countries.

Keywords

Non-Technical Summary

Background

People can believe that the country they live in belongs to their ethnic group. The sense that something is owned by a group is called 'collective psychological ownership' and it can have implications for societal coexistence. For example, people who more strongly believe that their ethnic group owns the country tend to be more willing to exclude those who belong to a different group. This study focused on ethnic majorities in three immigrant-receiving countries and examined their attitudes towards immigration policies.

Why was this study done?

People differ in their sense of collective ownership and their opinions about stricter immigration policies. However, little is known about the background characteristics of ethnic majority members who strongly believe that the country is 'theirs'.

Further, it is unclear whether a sense of country ownership is an important reason why particular segments of the majority population tend to support anti-immigration policies. Uncovering these relations could help understand the polarization in the debate on immigration policies.

What did the researchers do and find?
Using data from the Netherlands (599 participants), the United Kingdom (1005 participants), and Australia (475 participants), we found that country ownership beliefs were more prominent among people who identified strongly with their ethnic group, men, right-wing, lower educated (only in the UK), and older people (only in Australia). Country ownership beliefs partially explained why people with these background characteristics showed support for anti-immigration policies.

What do these findings mean?
Our findings provide a picture of the people who believe that the country is 'theirs'. We also show that strong ownership beliefs go hand in hand with more support for stricter immigration policies. If the aim is to foster a more accepting climate with regards to immigration, especially among some segments of the ethnic majority, the feeling that their country belongs (only) to their group needs to be addressed. Although we now know more about who these people are, we need more research to find out how this could be achieved.

Back in 1996, Pauline Hanson, an Australian politician with a strong anti-immigration rhetoric said in her maiden speech 'If I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country' (The Sydney Morning Herald, 2016). In 2016, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) successfully campaigned for Brexit with the slogan 'Take back control of our country'. Two years later, Dutch radical right party leader Geert Wilders marched through Rotterdam with a banner stating, 'The Netherlands ours again' (PVV, 2018). All these politicians refer to the notion that the country belongs to its people and that they should have control over it. While this idea is clearly perceived by some politicians as having a singular potency in mobilizing people to oppose immigration, ownership beliefs have only recently been considered in social psychology as a novel angle for understanding intergroup relations (Verkuyten & Martinović, 2017), and much about country ownership beliefs remains unknown.

In this paper we contribute to this emerging literature by identifying background characteristics of 'owners'. We focus on national identification, political orientation, age, gender, and education, all of which have repeatedly been shown to relate to attitudes towards immigrants and immigration (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; McAllister, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018; van der Heijden & Verkuyten, 2020). Importantly, we consider a sense of country ownership as a novel yet relevant mediating mechanism in the relationships between these background characteristics and support for stricter immigration policies.

Altogether, we aim to answer the following question: To what extent are national identification, political orientation, age, gender, and education related to country ownership beliefs, and via these ownership beliefs, to the endorsement of stricter immigration policies? We examine this in the context of three Western societies, namely the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia. These countries are home to a dominant ethnic majority and have been facing large immigrant inflows in the last decades (CBS, 2019; Office for National Statistics, 2019; Parliament of Australia, 2018). Moreover, as illustrated by the quotes above, politicians in all three countries try to stress ethnic majority's exclusive claim to the country and use this ownership rhetoric to argue for limiting immigration. At the same time, whereas in the Netherlands and the UK the natives are in majority, in Australia the dominant majority is not native but comprises the descendants of European settlers. Our comparative design enables us to assess whether collective psychological ownership is a robust explanation of support for stricter immigration policies across these diverse contexts, and whether the same segments of the population in these countries tend to see their ingroup as owning the country.

Ownership Beliefs

Even in the absence of legal ownership, people tend to experience objects, places, and ideas as belonging to them ('mine', Pierce et al., 2001). This state of mind is called psychological ownership, and children as young as two reason about ownership of objects (Rossano et al., 2011), by distinguishing between 'mine' and 'yours'. Research has shown that a personal sense of ownership is important to individuals because it can improve their self-esteem, yet, ownership can at the same time impede sharing and cooperation, thereby damaging interpersonal relationships (Pierce et al., 2001).

Importantly, ownership can also be experienced on a group level. We as people are not only concerned about our individual characteristics and property, but we also see ourselves as group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). By extension, what we think we own as a group becomes relevant to us, and this sense that something is *'ours'* has been labeled *collective psychological ownership* (CPO, Pierce & Jussila, 2010). Organizational scholars have argued that team members in an organization can perceive their team to collectively own their work outcomes and working space and this can have positive outcomes such as increased stewardship behavior that serves the interest of the team or company (Henssen et al., 2014; Pierce & Jussila, 2010; Pierce, Jussila, & Li, 2018). However, collective psychological ownership can also have negative consequences, including resistance to organizational changes, protective behaviors, and losing a sense of self while making personal sacrifices on behalf of the object of ownership (Pierce & Jussila, 2010). More recently, social psychologists have examined the role of ingroup and outgroup ownership beliefs in explaining relations between ethnic groups. Ingroup ownership beliefs have been found to stand in the way of harmonious intergroup relations, whereas outgroup ownership beliefs have the potential to improve intergroup relations (for a review, see Martinović & Verkuyten, 2023).

Ownership Beliefs and Support for Stricter Immigration Policies

A defining characteristic of (perceived) ownership, be it individual or collective, is the right to control the object by prohibiting others from using it (Snare, 1972), also referred to as the gatekeeper right (Merrill, 1998). Based on this right, people can deny outsiders access to their territory and its resources. Research in the context of organizations has shown that a sense of personal ownership increases territorial behavior at workplaces (Brown et al., 2014), and Brown and colleagues (2005) have identified two types of territorial defenses: anticipatory and reactionary. Anticipatory defenses are measures taken by owners to prevent others from infringing on one's property (e.g., placing a lock on one's door), whereas reactionary defenses are taken in response to infringement that has already taken place (e.g., complaining to one's superior).

Collective ownership beliefs can extend to other contexts and places, such as neighborhoods and even whole countries (Verkuyten & Martinović, 2017). In line with the idea of owners being allowed to exclude others from using the owned object or place (Snare, 1972), there is recent evidence that collective ownership of a country goes hand in hand with negative attitudes and territorial behavior toward the 'intruding' outgroup. In a study from Finland, ethnic majority members with a stronger sense of ownership of Finland had less positive feelings toward Russian and other minorities living in Finland (Brylka et al., 2015). And among native Dutch and native Brits it has been shown that their ownership beliefs of the Netherlands and the UK, respectively, were related to more negative attitudes toward established immigrant-origin ethnic minorities (Nijs, Martinović, et al., 2021). Furthermore, two recent studies from the Netherlands and New Zealand show that country ownership beliefs held by ethnic majorities are also associated with a related yet different dimension of outgroup exclusion (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010), namely, support for stricter immigration policies that would reduce inflows of new immigrants (Nijs, Martinović, & Verkuyten, 2022; Nooitgedagt et al., 2023). Similarly, it was found in the UK that neighborhood ownership was related to exclusion of newcomers to one's neighborhood (Toruńczyk-Ruiz & Martinović, 2020).

Having national policies in place that control the inflow of immigrants is a meaningful strategy to have a say in who enters the country. Such policies can be seen primarily as an anticipatory defense, which, similar to the lock on the door, keep out potential intruders by denying them entry. At the same time, support for stricter immigration policies could be seen as a form of reactionary defense. Due to an increase in immigration over the last decades, majority members from Western countries might experience a loss of control, as they feel they are slowly losing to immigrants their right to

decide about what happens in 'their' country (Nijs, Verkuyten, & Martinović, 2022; Verkuyten & Martinović, 2017). One way to regain control is by advocating even stricter immigration policies that would keep additional immigrants from coming into 'their' country. Taken together, we hypothesize that *stronger country ownership beliefs will be associated with a greater endorsement of stricter immigration policies (H1)*.

Who Thinks Their Ethnic Ingroup 'Owns' the Country?

Given the importance of a sense of collective ownership for people personally and for intergroup relations, the question remains who is more likely to have such ownership beliefs. Based on the drivers of collective psychological ownership (Pierce & Jussila, 2010), findings from a study on individual psychological ownership (Ozler et al., 2008), and literature on populism with a specific focus on the 'cultural backlash' thesis (e.g., Inglehart & Norris, 2017), we consider five background characteristics: national identification, political orientation, educational level, age, and gender.

It is well established that these characteristics matter for attitudes towards immigrants and immigration (e.g., McAllister, 2018; van der Heijden & Verkuyten, 2020). In the literature on populism, the thesis on 'cultural backlash' states that in Western societies, mostly older and lower educated men are the ones that feel as if they became estranged from the predominant values in their own country, making them more susceptible to anti-immigration rhetoric (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018). Since they are the ones who (used to be) the privileged societal group, they might react to their loss of privilege and status by, amongst others, developing a stronger feeling that this country is theirs, and that therefore they are the ones with certain rights.

The potential relevance of these characteristics for ownership beliefs will be discussed in light of three basic psychological needs that have been argued to contribute to the emergence of psychological ownership: the need for efficacy (i.e., control), self-identity, and a sense of place (Pierce & Jussila, 2010). First, concerning the need for efficacy, people have the need to be in control of their lives, and (collective) ownership can offer a way to alter and control one's surroundings. Second, (collective) ownership can fulfil the need for self-identity, as property can serve as a way to define and symbolically express one's identity. Third, the need for a sense of place is driven by the territorial nature of humans, and fulfilled by (collective) ownership as it encourages one to claim a certain place and make it one's home.

National Identification

In the organizational literature, Pierce and Jussila (2010) have argued that when group members feel a bond and are willing to work together to reach a mutual goal, a sense of collective ownership is likely to emerge. Reasoning from the group engagement model, one must first identify with the ingroup before one becomes motivated to engage in group matters and cooperate with ingroup members (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Similarly, national identification might be an important prerequisite for country ownership beliefs. To feel that the country is 'ours' one needs a sense of 'us' (Pierce & Jussila, 2010). There is indeed some evidence of a positive link between ingroup identification and country ownership beliefs among ethnic majority members in Finland (Brylka et al., 2015) but also in (post)conflict contexts of Kosovo, Cyprus, and Israel (Storz et al., 2020). We expect to replicate this finding in our three research contexts (the Netherlands, the UK, and Australia) and we hypothesize that *higher national identification will be associated with stronger country ownership beliefs, and indirectly, with more support for stricter immigration policies (H2)*.

Political Orientation

Previous research has shown that right-wing oriented people are more conservative, a characteristic that goes along with a stronger need for control (Aichholzer & Zandonella, 2016; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2002). A need for control over one's environment has been argued to make people turn to their ingroup to indirectly derive back a sense of control (Fritsche et al., 2013). Moreover, following the reasoning that collective psychological ownership can make one feel efficacious (Pierce & Jussila, 2010), collectively claiming country ownership could be a way to alter and control one's environment. Conservatives also have a stronger desire for a stable societal position, and the maintenance of traditional norms and values (Jost et al., 2008), which respectively resonate with the need for a sense of place and the need to maintain one's identity. In present times characterized by complex demographic and cultural changes, caused not in the least by large inflows of immigrants, reclaiming ownership of the country could help right-wing people fulfil their need

for efficacy, a sense of place, and a sense of identity. We hypothesize that *people oriented more toward the political right will have stronger country ownership beliefs, and indirectly, show more support for stricter immigration policies (H3).*

Educational Level

The needs for efficacy and self-identity could be argued to underlie the association between education and country ownership beliefs. First, higher educated individuals might feel more efficacious because they are more often active in well-paid jobs and in management positions, which allows them to keep control over their financial situation and to exercise control over the work process and subordinates (Mirowsky & Ross, 1998). In contrast, the lower educated are less likely to be employed in autonomous and well-paid jobs (Ross & Reskin, 1992), and thus enjoy less financial security. Eventually, this could go along with feelings of stress and powerlessness (Wheaton, 1980), making lower educated people feel less in control of their lives. Claims of country ownership may for this group represent an easily accessible way to fulfil the need for efficacy. Second, people want to express their self-identity to others and therefore engage in ways to differentiate themselves from others. This might be more challenging for lower educated people, as they are more often active in standardized jobs, where similarity among employees is regularly enhanced (Brown et al., 2005). People can develop a sense of ownership to differentiate themselves from others. Altogether, we expect *lower educated to have stronger country ownership beliefs, and indirectly, show more support for stricter immigration policies (H4).*

Age

We argue that older people might be more likely to feel country ownership, as they could have a stronger need for a sense of home and also feel less in control of their lives. Older people may experience more than younger people that their national home, which was once ethnically more homogenous, has changed as a result of immigration, and they might be afraid that it will change even more if immigration continues. At the same time, older people may experience a loss of control over their personal lives, by becoming physically or mentally less vital. To regain both a sense of home and a sense of efficacy, older people might claim country ownership. A study in the context of organizations has shown that there is a positive bivariate correlation between older age and psychological ownership of the organization (Ozler et al., 2008). In the same vein, we expect *older people to have stronger country ownership beliefs than younger people, and indirectly, show more support for stricter immigration policies (H5).*

Gender

Related to the need for efficacy, in general, men tend to be more dominant than women (see for example, Pakzadian & Tootkaboni, 2018), and therefore more willing to exercise control over subordinate groups in society. For instance, men were found to be more in favor of policies promoting group-based hierarchies than women (Pratto et al., 1997). Due to increasing immigration, men belonging to the ethnic majority may find it hard to maintain a sense of control over subordinate groups and their social position, as they might feel their dominant position in society is threatened. The idea of collectively owning the country with their ethnic ingroup members could help these men regain a sense of efficacy, as country ownership provides a clear idea of one's position in the societal hierarchy, and social categorization has been found to provide a sense of order and control (Hogg, 2007). Men, compared to women, were, for instance, found to express higher levels of organizational ownership (Ozler et al., 2008). Altogether, we hypothesize that *men have stronger country ownership beliefs than women, and indirectly, show more support for stricter immigration policies (H6).*

Altogether, we argue that ethnic majority members with stronger national identification, who are more right-wing oriented, lower educated, older, and male, endorse stricter immigration policies more, and that this is partly explained by their stronger country ownership beliefs.

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Method

Data and Participants

We used pooled data from three online questionnaires administered in 2018 in the Netherlands (N = 608) and Australia (N = 555), and in 2019 in the UK (N = 1,005).[1] Participants were recruited via panels provided by research agencies Thesistools (Netherlands), Qualtrics (Australia), and Kantar (UK). The samples were diverse in terms of age, gender, and educational level. Additionally, Kantar in the UK applied weights and Qualtrics in Australia used quota to come close to national representativity.[2] Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained.

The research agencies were instructed to target participants with ethnic Dutch background in the Netherlands, White Anglo-Celtic background in Australia, and English, Welsh, and Scottish background in the UK (Northern Ireland was not covered by the survey).[3] We excluded nine participants in the Netherlands and 20 in Australia who did not meet this criterion. Our final analytical sample consisted of 2079 participants, with subsamples of 599 participants from the Netherlands, 475 from Australia, and 1005 from the UK[4]. Within the pooled sample, age ranged from 18 to 87 (M = 49.74, SD = 16.97) and 53% of the participants were male.

Measures

Data from each country were collected independently and therefore measures differed in wording and number of items per construct (see Supplementary Materials A). For some countries, several items measuring ownership beliefs and endorsement of stricter immigration policies were missing, and in order to be able to estimate the multigroup model based on the same number of items across the three countries, so-called 'pseudo items' were created. This was done by first creating the missing items, then duplicating all values, and in the duplicated part of the data filling the pseudo items with random values which were uncorrelated with the other variables in the model. See Supplementary Materials B for a detailed explanation on the creation of pseudo items. To make meaningful comparisons between the countries, we harmonized the scales in the pooled dataset (see Supplementary Materials B). All responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*), unless stated otherwise. Scale reliabilities for multiple-item measures were obtained after Confirmatory Factor Analyses and can be found in the section on Measurement Invariance below.

Endorsement of Stricter Immigration Policies

This latent measure was inspired by previous studies on the public's opinion on border control (see e.g., Verkuyten, 2004). Sample items are "British border control should be stricter than that it is now," and "The Australian government must continue to make it difficult for migrants to enter Australia". Altogether, there was one item available in the Dutch, three in the British, and four in the Australian survey (see Supplementary Materials A).

Country Ownership Beliefs

Based on previous research on collective psychological ownership (Nijs, Martinović, et al., 2021), we measured the extent to which participants had a sense of ownership over their country and we treated it as a latent factor. Four items

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1) The data and syntax are available online on Open Science Framework, see https://osf.io/emwuf/

2) Kantar made use of MOA's golden standard, a calibration tool to retrieve diverse national samples. See https://www.moa.nl/gouden-standaard-expertise-center.html

3) In the Australian sample, we kept participants with both parents of Anglo-Celtic ancestry (i.e., English, Welsh, Scottish, or Irish), or when one was of Anglo-Celtic ancestry and the other had a different White background. In the Dutch case, we kept the participants who indicated that they themselves and their parents were born in the Netherlands.

4) Since secondary data was used, we could not conduct a-priori power analyses. However, as a rule of thumb at least 10 cases per parameter are required, and with 11 factor loadings, 11 intercepts and 11 residual variances for the factor items, 3 latent factor (residual) variances, and 11 structural paths, a minimum sample of 470 participants per country was needed. Our samples were thus all large enough to test the proposed model.

were used in the British and Dutch surveys, e.g., "I feel as though we Brits own this country together," and "I think this country belongs to us Dutch". In the Australian sample, three items were used (somewhat differently phrased), e.g., "In your opinion, how much does Australia belong to Anglo-Celtic Australians?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*).

National Identification

In all three countries, national identification was a latent variable captured with three items used in previous research (e.g., Martinović & Verkuyten, 2013): 'I strongly feel Dutch/British/Australian', 'Being Dutch/British/Australian is important to me', and 'I identify strongly with other Dutch/British/Australians'.

Political Orientation

To measure political orientation, participants were asked to place themselves on a political self-placement scale ranging from 1 (*left*) to 5 (*right*). The Australian data included a "don't know" option which we treated as missing (17.7%).

Educational Level

Since education systems differ across countries, the highest level of education completed was measured with a different set of categories in each country. We harmonized these by creating seven categories based on the ISCED classification 2011 (see Supplementary Materials A; UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020): 1 (*primary education*), 2 (*lower secondary*), 3 (*upper secondary*), 4 (*post-secondary non-tertiary*), 5 (*bachelor's or equivalent*), 6 (*master's or equivalent*), 7 (*doctoral level*). Answers to the open question in the 'other' category were assigned to existing categories whenever possible, and otherwise coded as missing (0.1% in the Netherlands, 0.4% in Australia). No 'other' option was available for the British sample. We reversed the scale so that a higher score stands for lower education, to match the direction of the hypothesis and facilitate the interpretation.

Age and Gender

Participants were asked to indicate their age (in years), and gender (male, female, or other). Only one Australian participant chose 'other' and we had to treat this as a missing value in the analysis, for statistical reasons only. The final dummy contrasted males (1) with females (0).

Results

Measurement Invariance

We first performed a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis in Mplus (version 7.3) to test whether the items measuring *country ownership beliefs*, *endorsement of stricter immigration policies*, and *national identification* formed three empirically distinct latent factors across the three countries, and to test whether they were interpreted in a conceptually similar way across the three countries. First, to see if the same three-factor structure could be identified in all three countries, a model with configural invariance was fitted, allowing factor loadings, intercepts, and residual variances to vary across the three countries. This model had a suboptimal fit. However, the fit improved significantly and became acceptable when additionally freeing the covariance between the first and fourth item of the endorsement of strict immigration policies in Australia, and the third and fourth item of country ownership beliefs in the Netherlands and the UK, $\chi^2(120)$ = 406.26, $p < .001$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.986, Tucker−Lewis coefficient (TLI) = 0.981, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.041 (low = 0.037, high = 0.046; see Supplementary Materials C). These adjustments were theoretically justifiable: the two items in Australia were both positively formulated and referred to a more lenient stance of the Australian government towards immigrants, and the two items in the Netherlands and the UK explicitly mentioned ownership (see Supplementary Materials A). Across the three factors, standardized loadings were at least .60 for the Netherlands, .83 for the UK, and .59 for Australia. With composite reliability scores ranging from .830 to .936 in the Netherlands, .843 to .945 in the UK, and .651 to .883 in Australia, the reliability of the three latent scales was good.

Next, a model with metric invariance was fitted, constraining the factor loadings to be the same across countries. This model had a worse fit than the configural model, as shown by a significant Satorra Bentler test, $\Delta SB\chi^2(17) =$ 1342.40, $p < .001$. Thus, only configural invariance could be established for the three-factor model, and we used this as a basis for estimating the structural paths. Even though configural invariance does not allow us to quantitatively compare the structural coefficients across the countries, it does provide a basis for qualitative multigroup comparisons (i.e., hypotheses testing for each country separately, and comparing the direction of effects across countries). Finally, multicollinearity was not a concern, with the highest VIF (1.459 for CPO in the Netherlands) being well below the commonly suggested cut-off value of 2.5 (Johnston et al., 2018).

Descriptive Findings

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the latent and manifest variables are presented in Table 1. Means of latent variables are by default set to zero, and in order to view each latent variable on a meaningful metric (i.e., on the same scale as the average of its underlying manifest variables), effect coding was applied (Little et al., 2006).

Table 1

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Correlations, per Country

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	*M/%*	*SD*
The Netherlands (*N* = 599)								
1. Stricter immigration policies[a]	–						4.40	1.90
2. Country ownership beliefs	.53***	–					4.79	1.66
3. National identification	.51***	.58***	–				5.06	1.35
4. Political orientation *(left – right)*	.55***	.35***	.30***	–			2.75	1.18
5. Lower education[b]	.38***	.13***	.17***	.11***	–		3.39	1.49
6. Age	.11**	.06*	.06**	-.01	.07*	–	60.39	12.91
7. Gender *(1 = men)*	-.16***	.09*	-.03	.03	-.06*	.27***	59%	–
UK (*N* = 1,005)								
1. Stricter immigration policies[a]	–						5.66	1.39
2. Country ownership beliefs	.51***	–					4.96	1.61
3. National identification	.38***	.52***	–				5.42	1.39
4. Political orientation *(left – right)*	.35***	.30***	.26***	–			2.96	1.08
5. Lower education[b]	.16***	.15***	.12***	.07**	–		4.19	1.43
6. Age	.30***	.15***	.23***	.16***	.11***	–	47.38	16.36
7. Gender *(1 = men)*	.07**	.16***	.05	.06**	-.06**	.03	50%	–
Australia (*N* = 475)								
1. Stricter immigration policies	–						4.64	1.63
2. Country ownership beliefs[a]	.35***	–					4.54	1.42
3. National identification	.45***	.29***	–				5.60	1.39
4. Political orientation *(left – right)*	.43***	.24***	.19***	–			3.02	1.23
5. Lower education[b]	.15***	.08	.08*	-.07*	–		3.79	1.33
6. Age	.27***	.15***	.28***	.02	.13***	–	41.30	16.06
7. Gender *(1 = men)*	.12***	.07**	.01	.13*	-.12***	.04	50%	–

[a]Latent scales with one or more items missing by design: three out of four policy items missing in the Netherlands, one out of four policy items missing in the UK, and one out of four ownership items missing in Australia. [b]Lower education was treated as a continuous variable ranging from 1 (doctoral level) to 7 (primary education).

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

On average, ownership beliefs, support for strict immigration policies, and national identification were relatively strong among participants in all three countries. One sample *t*-tests show that on average, respondents in all three countries scored significantly higher than the mid-points of the 7-point Likert scales of the three variables, with *p*-values smaller than .001 in all *t*-tests. Especially national identification was skewed to the left in the British and Australian samples. Dutch and Australian participants were somewhat higher educated than the British participants. In the UK and

Australia, the gender distribution was approximately equal, while men were the majority in the Netherlands. With an average age of 60, the Dutch sample was relatively old, in contrast to an average age of 47 in the British and 41 in the Australian sample.

Looking at the correlations, the endorsement of stricter immigration policies was positively associated with ownership beliefs, right-wing political orientation, lower education, age, and national identification in all three countries. In addition, correlations with gender showed that women compared to men in the Netherlands, and men compared to women in the UK and Australia endorsed stricter immigration policies more strongly. Furthermore, in all three countries, stronger beliefs of country ownership correlated with a more right-wing political orientation, stronger identification with the national ingroup, older age, and being male. Lastly, in the UK and the Netherlands, lower education correlated significantly with stronger beliefs of ownership.

The Mediating Role of Ownership Beliefs

We fitted a multiple group mediation model with national identification, political orientation, education, age, and gender as independent variables, ownership as the mediator, and the endorsement of stricter immigration policies as the dependent variable. To correct for the skewed distribution of the items measuring national identification (see Table 1 for high means), models were fitted using the Robust Maximum Likelihood estimator. Missing values were handled by means of full information maximum likelihood, which assumes missingness at random (Muthén & Muthén, 2012)[5]. The results of the multigroup mediation model are presented in Table 2. In all three countries, and in line with *H1*, a higher sense of country ownership was related to greater endorsement of stricter immigration policies.

Concerning the predictors, higher national identifiers experienced stronger ownership beliefs in all three countries. Higher identifiers were also more supportive of stricter immigration policies, and this association was significantly positively mediated by ownership beliefs in all three countries, which is in line with *H2*[6].

Right-wing political orientation was positively related to ownership beliefs in all three countries. The total effects show that people oriented more to the political right were also more supportive of stricter immigration policies, and the indirect effects confirm that this association was significantly positively mediated by ownership beliefs in all three countries, which is in line with *H3*.

Lower educated people had a stronger sense of country ownership in the UK, but not in the Netherlands and Australia. The total effects show that lower educated people were more supportive of stricter immigration policies in all three countries, but this association was significantly positively mediated by ownership beliefs in the UK only, as shown by a significant indirect effect. Therefore, *H4* was only supported in the UK.

Regarding age, we found that older Australians (but not the Dutch and the Brits) had a stronger sense of country ownership than their younger counterparts. In all three countries, total effects showed that older people were more supportive of stricter immigration policies. However, the indirect effect via ownership beliefs was positive and significant only in Australia. *H5* was thus only supported in Australia.

Men had stronger ownership beliefs than women in all three countries. Unexpectedly, the total effects showed that while men were more supportive of stricter immigration policies than women in the UK and Australia, they were less supportive of stricter immigration policies than women in the Netherlands. Interestingly, in all countries, we found a significant indirect effect of being male on support for stricter immigration policies via stronger country ownership beliefs, which is in line with *H6*. This indicates that for the association between gender and support for stricter immigration policies, ownership beliefs functioned as a mediator in the UK and Australia, and as a suppressor in the Netherlands.

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5) To use FIML it is necessary to endogenize variables with missing values. Endogenizing the dichotomous gender variable produced a warning that the standard errors may not be trustworthy. However, the model results were not substantively different when gender was not endogenized.

6) In an additional analysis, we tested whether national identification moderates the relationship between the background characteristics and collective psychological ownership. See Online Supplement D for the motivation, explanation, and results of this test.

Table 2

A Multi-Group Model of Support for Stricter Immigration Policies, With Ownership Beliefs as the Mediator: Decomposition Into Direct, Total and Indirect Effects

Effects	The Netherlands B (SE)	UK B (SE)	Australia B (SE)
Direct effects on endorsement of stricter immigration policies			
Ownership beliefs	.25 (.04)***	.30 (.02)***	.13 (.03)***
Political orientation	.50 (.04)***	.20 (.03)***	.37 (.05)***
Lower education	.24 (.03)***	.06 (.02)***	.16 (.03)***
Age	.01 (.003)***	.02 (.002)***	.01 (.002)***
Gender (1 = *men*)	-.67 (.09)***	.05 (.05)	.10 (0.07)
National identification	.21 (.05)***	.09 (.03)**	.25 (.04)***
Direct effects on ownership beliefs			
Political orientation	.28 (.04)***	.24 (.03)***	.23 (.05)***
Lower education	.02 (.03)	.10 (.02)***	-.02 (.04)
Age	-.001 (.003)	.001 (.002)	.01 (.003)***
Gender (1 = *men*)	.28 (.08)**	.47 (.06)***	.39 (.10)***
National identification	.66 (.04)***	.56 (.04)***	.25 (.04)***
Total effects on endorsement of stricter immigration policies			
Political orientation	.57 (.04)***	.27 (.03)***	.40 (.04)***
Lower education	.24 (.03)***	.09 (.02)***	.16 (.03)***
Age	.01 (.004)**	.02 (.002)***	.01 (.002)***
Gender (1 = *men*)	-.60 (.09)***	.19 (.05)***	.15 (.07)*
National identification	.38 (.05)***	.26 (.03)***	.29 (.04)***
Indirect effects on policies via ownership beliefs			
Political orientation	.07 (.02)***	.07 (.01)***	.03 (.01)**
Lower education	.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)***	-.003 (.01)
Age	.00 (.001)	.000 (.001)	.001 (.001)**
Gender (1 = *men*)	.07 (.02)**	.14 (.02)***	.05 (.02)**
National identification	.17 (.03)***	.17 (.02)***	.03 (.01)**
Explained variance (R^2)			
Endorsement of stricter immigration policies	.57	.36	.40
Ownership beliefs	.38	.32	.15

Note. Country functioned as a grouping variable. Unstandardized coefficients, with standard errors presented within parentheses.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Discussion

People can have a sense that the country they live in belongs to their ingroup, and this sense of collective psychological ownership (Pierce & Jussila, 2010) can have consequences for the exclusion of relevant outgroups. Feelings of country ownership are a rather present, yet only recently studied, sentiment that can form a barrier to harmonious intergroup relations, as ownership gives a self-evident and solid justification for the exclusion of out-group members (Verkuyten & Martinović, 2017). The ownership rhetoric is being used by radical right politicians in Western societies to generate electoral support. Several studies have shown that stronger ownership beliefs go hand in hand with more negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities (Brylka et al., 2015; Nijs, Martinović, et al., 2021), and stricter immigration policies (Nijs, Martinović, & Verkuyten, 2022; Nooitgedagt et al., 2023). The present study relied on nationally diverse samples from the Netherlands, Australia, and the UK, and we contributed to this emergent literature in two ways. First, we

identified background characteristics of people who are more likely to have a sense that the country belongs to their ethnic ingroup, focusing on national identification, political orientation, education, gender, and age. Second, as these background characteristics are known to be relevant predictors of anti-immigrant sentiments (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; McAllister, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018; van der Heijden & Verkuyten, 2020), we considered the mediating role of ownership beliefs in the association between the background characteristics and support for stricter immigration policies.

As anticipated, in all three countries we found that a stronger sense of country ownership was related to greater endorsement of stricter immigration policies. This resonates with the findings of other studies that ownership beliefs among natives were related to more negative attitudes toward immigrant-origin ethnic minorities (Brylka et al., 2015; Nijs, Martinović, et al., 2021). Since ownership comes with the right to regulate outsider's access to the property (Merrill, 1998), people who perceive themselves to be country owners might see stricter immigration policies as means to defend 'their' country from these outsiders (Brown et al., 2005; Nijs, Martinović, & Verkuyten, 2022).

The sense that the country belongs to their ethnic ingroup differed for people with different background characteristics. The stronger people identified with the national ingroup, the more they felt the country belonged to their ingroup, and in turn the more they supported stricter immigration policies. This was found in all three countries and resonates with the finding of Brylka and colleagues (2015), who demonstrated national identification to be indirectly related to more negative toward resident immigrant minorities through stronger ownership beliefs among majority Finns.

In line with the theory of group-based control (Fritsche et al., 2013), people with a more right-wing political orientation showed stronger ownership beliefs in all three countries, as people with a heightened need for efficacy are likely to turn to their ingroup to indirectly regain control over their environment. Following the literature on conservatism, those oriented more to the political right typically have a strong need for efficacy due to their conservative mindset (Aichholzer & Zandonella, 2016; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2002), which could be reinforced in societies characterized by large-scale immigration, where newcomers threaten the secure societal position of the native majority. Right-wing people were also more supportive of strict immigration policies and that association was partly explained by a higher sense of country ownership.

Furthermore, in each country, men reported stronger ownership beliefs than women. According to earlier research, men, compared to women, are more likely to express higher levels of organizational ownership and to take a dominant position in society to maintain a sense of efficacy (Ozler et al., 2008; Pakzadian & Tootkaboni, 2018). Similarly, country ownership beliefs could help men to regain a sense of efficacy, as they provide a clear view on one's societal position (Hogg, 2007), especially when one's dominant position is threatened due to the presence of immigrants. In the UK and Australia, a higher sense of country ownership helped explain why men endorsed stricter immigration policies more than women. Unexpectedly, in the Netherlands, men were less supportive of stricter immigration policies than women. We can speculate on possible explanations unrelated to ownership beliefs (e.g., Dutch women might be more negative toward immigrant groups because they might see them as undermining gender equality). Interestingly, ownership beliefs seem to suppress these differences. Even though Dutch men are less supportive of strict immigration policies than Dutch women, they at the same time have a stronger belief that the country belongs to their ethnic ingroup, which indirectly makes them more supportive of such policies.

Next, we argued that lower educated people would have fewer opportunities to fulfil their need for efficacy in a changing environment (e.g., due to large-scale immigration, see also Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018), because of their more vulnerable financial position (e.g., lacking a financial buffer in times of emergency), and therefore might become receptive to claims of country ownership to regain control. We found that lower educated people experienced more country ownership in the UK, but not in the Netherlands and Australia, and ownership beliefs partially accounted for the positive association between lower education and support for stricter immigration policies in the UK. A better representation of lower educated people in the British sample might be responsible for the effect of lower education coming out stronger in the UK. Moreover, the data from the UK were collected in the heat of the Brexit debate, where ownership rhetoric was extensively used. Participants' interpretation of the items measuring country ownership beliefs might have been implicitly influenced by their stance on Brexit, and 'leave' voters were found to be lower educated (Goodwin & Heath, 2016).

Only in Australia, older people had a stronger sense of country ownership than younger people and were thus indirectly more in favor of stricter immigration policies. This might be due to the changes in the influx of immigrants. Whereas Australian immigrants in the past mainly descended from European countries (e.g., Italy, Germany), the last 20 years migrants were increasingly descending from China, India, and the Philippines (see Parliament of Australia, 2018). At the same time, the composition of migrant groups in the Netherlands and the UK remained largely the same (CBS, 2019; Office for National Statistics, 2019). These demographic developments might explain why older white Australians might perceive their national home, which was once largely dominated by their settler ingroup, to be changing, and experience more difficulties in fulfilling their need for a sense of home and efficacy than younger Australians. A sense of country ownership might compensate for this (Pierce & Jussila, 2010).

Limitations and Future Directions

A few limitations need to be mentioned and could inspire future research. First, even though the samples are diverse in terms of education, gender, and age, they are not representative as they were not randomly drawn from the ethnic majority population in each country. As such, there were some differences between the samples, e.g., compared to the UK and Australia, older people were overrepresented in the Netherlands, and non-binary people were underrepresented in all three countries. Furthermore, the data for each country were collected separately and with different sampling methods. Although we do not expect this to have substantially influenced the relationships found, samples that are representative of the ethnic majority population can offer more insights into (cross-country comparisons of) descriptive statistics.

Related to this, as the measures used were found to be differently interpreted by participants across countries, we were unable to quantitatively compare the latent means or associations between constructs across the countries. This is probably partly due to differences in the number and wording of items across the countries but also due to historical differences. The Netherlands and the UK have historically been nation states with a clear ethnic majority and have become immigration destinations only in the second half of the 20th century. Australia, in contrast, is a settler society with a long history of immigration, with members of the dominant White group mostly being aware of their immigrant origins, and with the indigenous groups serving as a reminder of the fact that White Europeans were not the first inhabitants. As such, concepts of collective ownership and immigration policies might have a somewhat different meaning in settler societies compared to European nation states. In spite of this, we mostly found similar associations between these constructs. Future research could compare more countries with different historical backgrounds, but also use more harmonized measures to be able to compare the strengths of the associations.

Moreover, the current study made use of cross-sectional data, and therefore no firm conclusions can be drawn about causal relationships. Although we argue that a sense of country ownership is a general underlying belief that influences attitudes towards immigration policies, bi-directional relations are plausible as country ownership can be used as a justification of pre-existing support for strict immigration policies. Experimental studies could try to manipulate collective ownership of the country and examine the effects on support for stricter immigration policies but also on other relevant intergroup outcomes, such as attitudes towards immigrants and behavioral intentions toward this group. We are less concerned about the causal direction in the relationships to background characteristics such as education level, age, or gender, because these can hardly be influenced by ownership beliefs or the endorsement of strict immigration policies.

Lastly, our expectations on the association between background characteristics and ownership beliefs were based on the psychological needs underlying collective psychological ownership (Pierce & Jussila, 2010). However, we were unable to take these needs into account in our model. To broaden the knowledge on collective psychological ownership, future research could investigate whether these psychological needs are indeed responsible for the associations between the five background factors and ownership beliefs, or whether other underlying mechanisms are at play. Furthermore, future scholars could investigate the role of perceived immigrant threat as a moderator in the links between the background characteristics and ownership beliefs, as well as the link between ownership beliefs and the endorsement of anti-immigrant policies. For example, Martinović and Verkuyten (2013) found that, in line with the group position model

(Blumer, 1958), country ownership based on first occupancy was only related to outgroup prejudice among people who felt their dominant societal position to be threatened by minorities.

Conclusion

The current study adds to the emergent literature on collective psychological ownership and intergroup relations by examining country ownership beliefs among ethnic majority members in three Western nations: the Netherlands, the UK, and Australia. Across these three contexts, we have provided first empirical evidence for the importance of ownership beliefs as a mediator between people's background characteristics and their endorsement of strict immigration policies in these Western countries.

Supplementary Materials

The Supplementary Materials include the following items (for access see Straver et al., 2023a; Straver et al., 2023b):

- The data and syntax for the study
- Additional analyses:
  - *Online Supplement A, Table A*: Original items used in Dutch, British and Australian samples
  - *Online Supplement B*: Pseudo items to deal with items including completely missing cases
  - *Online Supplement C, Table C*: Measurement models for comparing the latent constructs of ownership beliefs, endorsement of stricter immigration policies, and national identification between the Netherlands (N = 599), the UK (N = 1005), and Australia (N = 475)
  - *Online Supplement D*: Moderating role of national identification (additional analysis)
  - *Online Supplement D, Table D*: Interaction effects between national identification and the four background characteristics on country ownership beliefs

Index of Supplementary Materials

Straver, L., Martinović, B., Nijs, T., Nooitgedagt, W., & Storz, N. (2023a). *Supplementary materials to "Who believes the country belongs to their ethnic ingroup? The background characteristics of 'owners' and their support for stricter immigration policies across three Western societies"* [Research data and code]. OSF. https://osf.io/emwuf/

Straver, L., Martinović, B., Nijs, T., Nooitgedagt, W., & Storz, N. (2023b). *Supplementary materials to "Who believes the country belongs to their ethnic ingroup? The background characteristics of 'owners' and their support for stricter immigration policies across three Western societies"* [Additional analyses]. PsychOpen GOLD. https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.13178

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