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Immigration, Integration, and Public Opinion in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

The politics of immigration and integration pose significant and interrelated challenges for the continued growth and success of the European Union. This paper explores that connection by means of a literature review and a regression analysis. While the literature explores in depth each issue separately, I conclude that public opinion moves in the same direction; that is, a person that views the EU favorably is most likely going to view immigration positively. This is for a number of reasons, the most important of which relates to how citizens perceive their national identity, as both integration and immigration are threats upon national sovereignty. I find that variables such as a nation's 'foreign policy' tradition, education, and left/right positioning are also important factors, while most other socioeconomic data are not significant.

KEYWORDS

immigration, integration, public opinion, national identity, European Union

As the European Union has expanded and brought prosperity to the continent, both member states and the EU have to contend with immigration to the community from the East and South. But because of the structure of the EU, it has to negotiate the internal politics of deeper integration to solve these problems. As EU integration has evolved, elites, whose priorities have differed from those of citizens, have to a great extent controlled integration and immigration (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005; Lahav, 2004; Philip, 1994). Nevertheless, the way in which public opinion shapes national and European level politics is very important because of the interplay between national and supranational policy making institutions. Furthermore, there are important connections between public opinion on immigration and integration. Both issues can be seen as encroachments on national sovereignty and identity. Immigration (people coming from the outside) is ideologically inextricably related to European integration (people from outside ruling over the nation). Immigration, therefore, highlights the challenge faced by European Union integration in terms of the extent to which the EU can become truly one unit (Lahav, 2004; Hooghe & Marks, 2004). Using both literature and public opinion data, this paper will demonstrate that the factors (economic, cultural, historical, and political) that determine citizen's attitudes towards integration are similar to those that guide their decision on immigration.

INSTITUTIONAL INTERPLAY AND INTEGRATION

Because of the way the European Union is structured, there is a 'democracy deficit' that is endemic of its supranational structure. Only one branch, the European Parliament, with relatively little power, is an elected body. DeVreese and Boomgaarden (2005) and Lahav (2004) argue that elites, who have controlled European Union integration under the Monet method, and the public disagree significantly on immigration issues. European citizens, by and large, did not have a say in or a role in the creation of an integrated Europe. Elites in the EU have had significant control on immigration policy and have liberalized it. These 'Eurocrats' are able to take a much more liberal stance on immigration because they do not face electoral pressure in the way national legislatures and administrations are held accountable to decisions made (Luedtke, 2008). The European Parliament can vote on many decisions, but because of the consensus-seeking nature of the Union, policy makers are often not held accountable to public opinion. In addition, the democracy deficit in the EU does not confer legitimacy upon the EU's institutions in the eyes of the people, and thus they may feel threatened by its encroachment. Overall, the EU has been the liberalizing force in European politics, fighting over time, for example, for free movement of labor and integration among other political objectives, while national governments are keen on blocking unwanted immigration and preserving some core elements of their power, such as foreign policy. According to Philip (1994), the EU seems to be winning this battle and will continue to win, as successive waves of integration have prompted national governments to cede power to the EU. The most recent example of this is in the Eurozone crisis, where the rhetoric surrounding the crisis has called for deeper fiscal integration.

The connector between attitudes towards immigration and integration is the power struggle and dynamics of the relationship between individual nations and the EU. No common immigration policy exists among European Union states, although many suggest that this is necessary to secure borders (Zimmerman, 1995; Huntoon, 1998). Most nations have given the EU control over issues such as the environment, and at first wanted to give the EU control over immigration, but most nations feel their identity being threatened if they do

not have control over issues such as VAT (Value Added Tax) and immigration (Lahav, 2004).

Another important issue relevant to immigration and integration debates concerns the granting of citizenship, which remains firmly in the hands of individual member states. While member states can grant citizenship, the free movement policy of the EU dictates that these newly minted citizens can move to another EU nation where they are granted social rights (Philip 1994). This fact further politicizes immigration because member states, as a result of the Schengen agreement, rely upon one another to safeguard their external borders. This first became a problem with the entry of Greece, Spain, and Portugal in 1981 and 1986 respectively, with EU citizens worrying about an influx of Spaniards and other immigrants into their countries with more generous welfare states (Philip, 1994). This lends itself to be compared to the eastern expansion of the EU in 2004 and similar concerns about immigration from the newly annexed East. Finally, related to citizenship is the concept of a national and European identity. Public perception of European identity is still very weak compared to national identity. The fact remains that the relationship between “citizenship” and “nation-state” remains much stronger than the relationship between “EU” and “citizenship” (Odmalm, 2007). This encapsulates the great debates over citizenship, immigration, and integration.

DETERMINANTS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

There are two main areas in the literature that researchers refer to when discussing attitudes towards the EU and immigration. They are cultural and national identity (and the associated problems of racism and prejudice), and economics. These are interrelated and are summarized in Quillian (1995; 1996) in Kessler and Freeman (2005) who finds that, “perceived threat, understood as a function of economic conditions and of the size of the subordinate group relative to the dominant group, is an important determinant of variations in prejudice” (p. 828). Therefore, we would expect cultures that are isolationist, such as the United Kingdom, combined with a poor perception of the economic situation would engender unfavorable opinion of the EU and immigrants.

A poor or deteriorating economic situation is a cause typically understood to lead toward protectionist measures and anti-immigrant sentiment. According to Kessler and Freeman (2005), generally, in poorer economic conditions the public tends to be more protectionist and display more anti-immigrant tendencies. In addition, concerns about national unemployment or pressure on the host country’s social tension and welfare system may drive public opinion against immigrants (Lahav, 2004; Philip, 1994; Kessler & Freeman, 2005). For example, Mayda (2004) finds that low skilled workers in high GDP nations are more apt to be more anti-immigration, as there is a perception of competition. However, there is a crucial difference between appearance and reality, as most research points to the fact that perception of increasing unemployment rather than actual changes in unemployment is more important in swaying public opinion (Kessler and Freedman, 2005, Lahav, 2004; Zimmermann, 1995). In fact, some studies, such as Kessler and Freeman (2005) and Lahav (2004) failed to show any connection between immigration and a decrease in employment. Huntoon (1998) rightfully argues that EU nations need immigrants to fill shortages in lower paying jobs. On the other hand, more trade within the European community, according to Masso (2009), tends to be a trigger that promotes more favorable attitudes towards European integration. This is one of the best tools the European Union has at its disposal to foster favorable views of the EU, as trade and improved economic performance is one of the true

benefits of European integration.

Much of the literature on feelings towards immigrants and deeper integration also points to a couple of intangible factors that matter in constructing public opinion (Mayda, 2004; McLaren, 2002). This intangible is a perceived threat to a nation's identity and culture. The research here is divided in two areas: the first discusses the creation within a nation of in- and out-groups of society, where the out-groups are treated with hostility (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005; Kessler & Freeman, 2005). This could be attributed to high concentrations of immigrants in a neighborhood or city, especially in societies where immigration levels have outpaced national growth, a common predicament of many EU member states (Lahav, 2004; Gang et al., 2002; Kessler & Freeman, 2005; Zimmerman, 1995). The second group of research focuses on the perceived cultural threat to a nation not stemming from threats to individuals lives, but to the nation as a whole, and is a result of attachment to groups, identities, and nationalism (McLaren, 2002; Lahav, 2004). Hooghe and Marks (2004) raise interesting questions in terms of identity creation and how it affects attitudes towards both integration and immigration. They propose that how individuals construct their identity is the determining factor. For example, their perceptions of national identity as exclusive or inclusive along with attitudes towards multiculturalism are most important. These feelings and the need to create strong sense of national or regional identity that shield them from the outside might stem from Europeans' eurocentrism and long held sense of inferiority that Peter O'Brien discusses (2009). The relationship between public opinion on immigration and integration is clear – people who feel threatened by the outside by either immigrants or an encroaching power will naturally tend to be more aggressively supportive of their national government, which is closer to home.

Additionally, research on integration and immigration has also dealt with national-level issues, such as politics and history as factors. Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) create a measure they call a foreign policy tradition that will help determine whether or not countries will be supportive of the EU. They prove that Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Denmark have traditionally been insular and will therefore not support the EU or be very favorable towards an influx of immigration. This is noteworthy especially for the United Kingdom, as their wariness of immigration is contradictory to the economic necessity of letting in new immigrants (Haynes, 2011). On the other hand, France, the Netherlands, and Italy will look to the EU for a voice, security, and prosperity because they have a tradition of openness. The Dutch in particular have been accepting of supranational institutions and therefore tend to be more europositive.

Previous research on European integration and immigration issues deals with the role national politics play in shaping decisions and opinion. The effects of these sentiments are exhibited mainly in the right/left divide of the political spectrum and the resurgence and growing popularity of right wing parties (Kessler & Freeman, 2005; Lubbers et al., 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2002). This attests that immigration is a major issue that has been overlooked by the main parties and thus is being carried to the center stage by right wing parties, usually identified as fringe parties, who are usually both anti-immigrant and anti-EU (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005). Furthermore, their rising power suggests that immigration and integration are huge issues within the EU. For example, Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) point out the case of Denmark in 1989, where Euroskeptic parties made significant electoral gains, and therefore the Maastricht Treaty, the founding treaty of the EU, was voted down in a referendum. A more recent reflection of euroskepticism and anti-integration sentiment is

in the European Parliamentary (EP) elections of 2009, in which a new group of euroskeptical Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) came into parliament and formed the fourth largest grouping in the EP, the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. In short, parties in power do make a difference in constructing (or mirroring) public sentiment on EU integration. This group is both conservative (and thus also relatively anti-immigration) and anti-EU, which shows that on the right side of the spectrum, there is a cohesive ideology that opposes threats to national sovereignty and identity from the outside.

Hooghe and Marks (2002) see these politics of integration through a new left/right split in politics. The authors write that parties have been challenged as European politics have become a major issue in the domestic political sphere. They first look at the traditional Left/Right split in domestic parties, and propose an inverted U model in which centrist parties tend to be pro-integration, while parties towards either extreme have been Euroskeptical. However, the authors also look beyond the traditional left/right split and examine what they call the “green/alternative/libertarian” and “traditional/authoritarian/nationalist” poles, in which issues such as lifestyle, the environment, nationalism, and immigration are important. Again trying to predict support for integration by measuring a party’s proximity to either pole, they found that the strongest correlation was found between Traditionalist/Authoritarian/Nationalist (or TAN) parties, who are anti-immigration, were also most against EU integration, while Green/Alternative/ Libertarian (or GAL) parties tend to be more pro-integrationist, though much less strongly so. They explain that these parties are more issue-driven and they are more reserved in their support because of the democracy deficit in the EU. Finally, they argue that domestic parties are constrained by the same issues on the national and EU level and that European politics have, in a way, become domestic.

CASE STUDY: IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

As is evident, the public opinion on immigration and integration is closely related. However, the arguments made for this are on a rather abstract level, and a close examination of a European Union member state, such as Spain, can help to underscore some of these points. Spain is an interesting case study because it is europositive and a large receiver of immigrants. Since its accession to the European Union in 1986, it has benefitted massively from the huge amount of EU structural funding that has flowed into Spain. This investment, according to Oscar Martinez Tapia (2011), has led Spain to being one of the more europositive nations. Europositivism does not necessarily translate to support for deeper integration, but it signals openness to European institutions. This, however, seems to be strongly related to money; and Oscar Tapia (2011) worried that in the next few years, as Spain becomes a net contributor to the EU, support for the EU would erode. At the same time, Spain is also enduring one of the worst economic crises in history; it has problems with its debt but also has underlying structural problems such as youth unemployment at over 40%. Another speaker on immigration, Joaquin Arango (2011), argued that Spanish culture has also historically been open to immigration. This is reflected in their legal system where immigrants, once they are registered, have access to social benefits and welfare. In addition, Spanish immigration policy is far more liberal than overall EU immigration legislation as it provides welfare benefits to undocumented immigrants. Interestingly, although one would expect public opinion in a crisis to turn against immigrants and the outside world (i.e., the EU), Spanish opinion has remained relatively unchanged on immigration. Finally, public opinion on the right-wing, where euroskepticism and anti-immigration sentiment tend to be found, does

not have a true outlet in Spanish politics, as there is only one (mainstream) conservative party. This is what Koopmans et al. (2005) refers to as an opportunity structure, where the political embodiment of anti-immigrant sentiment, for example, is constrained (but also given a launchpad) by extant political and social structures.

Spanish public opinion seems to be fairly contradictory – poor economic situations do not usually coincide with openness to foreigners and the European Union. While this would seem to indicate that factors of immigration and integration attitudes do not always align, it shows that national tradition (which encompasses Europositivism and tolerance for immigration), in this case, is a stronger explanatory variable than economic performance in guiding citizens' opinions. Their national tradition was born out of a particular context; Spain for a long time was a net receiver of European Union funding. However, their tradition of tolerance, not only of immigrants, comes from a long history of changes in ethnic groups, religions, and political control, and therefore national tradition can be said to have a strong influence on Spain's overall views on integration and immigration.

Spain is in many ways special and in contrast with Italy (and possibly most of Europe), where the economic downturn has created mistrust in the national government and European institutions for their inability to solve the crisis. Furthermore, Italy has had a very conservative government and has many right-wing parties, giving voice to those who oppose European integration and immigration. In addition, Italy hardly can be said to have an 'immigration policy,' despite its position on the Mediterranean. Roughly every four years it grants amnesty to immigrants already living in the country, thus providing no incentive for legal entry. According to Flavia Piperno (2011), a student at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy extends no social rights for immigrants, does not have an integration plan for them, and has problems with anti-immigrant violence. In addition, they have over time become more and more euroskeptic, as their confidence in European institutions has gradually decreased. Italy, today, exemplifies the expected outcome of an economic crisis: anti-immigrant sentiment and a more protectionist outlook.

PUBLIC OPINION DATA AND IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

In the next part of the paper, I use Eurobarometer public opinion data from 2008 in an attempt to demonstrate how interrelated attitudes towards integration and immigration are. The dependent variable in this model is a question from the Eurobarometer survey which asks, "*For each of the following areas, do you think that decisions should be made by (NATIONALITY) Government, or made jointly with the EU?*" Immigration is one of these subcategories of the question. This question is useful as it connects the issues of immigration and integration. The independent variables in the study include country level variables such as immigrant populations within member states, socio-economic variables, and questions on the perception citizens have of the EU that are typical of integration studies. This model will primarily show how related the issues are by showing how integration and immigration variables guide citizen's opinions in the same direction.

PROCEDURE

The study is based on the Eurobarometer survey, which surveys Europeans on a biannual basis on a range of issues. This study uses a Eurobarometer that focuses on globalization, the European Parliament, and further EU integration. This and all Eurobarometer surveys were also administered in Croatia, Macedonia, Turkey and Turkish Cyprus among the other

EU member states. In order to produce results that accurately reflect attitudes towards EU integration and immigration from within the community records from non-EU nations were removed from the analysis.

Because many of these variables in the model seem similar, I took steps to ensure that they are not misread or misleading. I addressed the issue of multicollinearity by running a series of bivariate correlations among the independent variables to ensure that none of the correlations was above .7, which could have indicated such a relationship and produced skewed results.

Finally, the dependent variable in the study is bivariate; it asks people if they prefer national (coded 1) or EU level (coded 0) decisions making on immigration issues. Because the variable is bivariate, I ran a logistic model rather than a linear regression model. All of the variables helped provide an explanation of what factors drive people to their beliefs about immigration decision making.

RESULTS

Table 1. Variables in the Equation

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Exp(B)
Dummy_DK	0.464	0.076	36.962	1.591
Dummy_UK	0.443	0.089	24.546	1.557
EU_image4	0.369	0.023	253.13	1.446
EU_mem_benefit2	0.288	0.043	45.83	1.334
EU_inefficient	0.265	0.036	55.345	1.303
EU_Protect	0.197	0.027	53.078	1.218
Educ_3	0.085	0.018	21.752	1.088
conservative_govt*	0.073	0.044	2.681	1.076
Unemp_financial*	0.055	0.098	0.315	1.056
LR_placement	0.036	0.008	22.3	1.037
important_immig*	0.033	0.064	0.264	1.033
perc_nonEU_immig	0.018	0.004	19.877	1.018
situation_financial	-0.16	0.026	39.29	0.852
unemp_2*	-0.308	0.283	1.185	0.735
dummy_NL	-0.284	0.08	12.719	0.752
dummy_France	-0.74	0.092	64.906	0.477

* Sig (p-value) >.05

The author's calculations of data from Papacostas, A. Eurobarometer 70.1: October–November 2008.

The dependent variable in this study was bivariate and consequently run through a logistic model. The model yielded statistics that helped determine whether or not the regression model was valid. The Omnibus Chi-Square for this model was 1332.214, and was statistically significant ($p = .000$). The model also returned two R-squared figures. The Cox & Snell R Squared produced a value of .078, while the Nagelkerke R Squared returned a higher value at .106. This means the model explains 7.8% or 10.6% of the variation. The very

high, statistically significant Chi-Square for this model (as well as its significance) indicates the model is relatively strong in explaining why people choose national or EU decision making on immigration issues.

For each of the variables in the model the findings are interpreted in terms of the likelihood that a change in the dependent variable will occur as a result of any given independent variable. For example, I used the $\exp(B)$ in the model (for *educ_3*, a scale of education, with higher education levels coded in descending order, 1.088), subtracted 1 from it (.088), and multiplied it by 100 to obtain a percentage, 8.8%. Therefore, with increasing levels of education, people will, with each level of education (high school, some college, college), be 8.8% more likely to support EU legislation.

FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

The stronger predictors of a policy-making level preference in this study were the national level variables (*dummy_DK/NL/UK/France*). People living in Denmark and the United Kingdom, for example, were 59.1 and 55.7 percent more likely to support national-level legislation on immigration than the EU 'average,' while citizens of the Netherlands and France were 24.8 and 52.3 percent less likely to support national legislation. These results point to the fact that 'national traditions' are very important in determining people's preferences on policy making. This is also revealing of a nation's attitudes towards immigration. The United Kingdom and Denmark have been slightly less accepting of immigration and thus would want to control it with national legislation, while more 'liberal' immigrant receiving states prefer more liberal EU legislation.

Socioeconomic variables (*unemp_2*, *unemp_financial*, *financial_situation*) in this model did not factor significantly into people's decision-making processes. This is not surprising because they relate to a person's actual situation, and not to their or their nation's perceived economic situation, which, according to the literature, would explain their preferences more clearly. The only significant variable was education, whereby a lower education level led to increasing inclination to support national legislation. This was very significant, as it shows that, by and large, more education, which presumably means more exposure to the EU and knowledge of its institution, will lead people to be more accepting of integration and immigration.

Finally, the variables relating to support for the European Union were all significant. The variables measuring support for the Union were: *EU_image4* (a four point scale of a positive or negative view of the EU), *EU_mem_ben_2* (a yes/no question asking if they think EU accession has benefitted their country), *EU_protect* (asking if citizens felt the EU protected them), and *EU_inefficient* (asking if they felt the EU was efficient). In all cases, responses that related to a sense of confidence in the European Union translated to greater support for European Union level legislation on immigration, while a lack of confidence consistently characterized a preference for national legislation.

Another major factor in a person's decision making was their placement on the left to right spectrum. This measure was on a 1 to 9 scale, and with each increase in unit of conservatism (as the scale moves to 9), the likelihood of a person supporting national legislation increased by 3.7%. While this may seem small, the overall increase in likelihood that they support national decisions was 33.3% from position one to position nine. This is relevant because it not only points towards conservative or liberal opinions on integration, but it also is an important explanatory variable for attitudes on immigration issues.

Two variables were created with data entered from outside sources. The first one, *conservative_govt*, was meant to determine whether or not having a conservative government in power nationally affected citizen's preferences, but it seemed not to have an effect, as its explanatory power was statistically insignificant. The other, *perc_nonEU_immig*, recorded the percentage of non EU citizens in each EU member state, was statistically significant in the model. This variable shows that with every one percentage unit increase in immigrants from outside the EU, we can expect a 1.8% increase in citizen's favoring national legislation. This largely agrees with the literature that large immigrant populations tend to turn national public opinion against immigration as a whole.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, immigration and integration can be seen as threats on a nation's culture and sovereignty from the outside, and in some way change the nature of the traditional European nation-state. The European Union has been trying to forge a "European" rather than a national identity and its growth has led to the weakening of the nation's government. Similarly, immigration from outside the European Union is seen as a threat economically and culturally. Citizens are worried about the strain immigrants put on the social system and the jobs they could be taking from nationals. Additionally, immigrants change the face of the nation and they can be perceived to threaten the traditional social fabric and culture.

Although this model cannot predict people's attitudes on intangible factors such as how a person views his or her national identity, it attempts to shed some light on the relationship between people's personal characteristics and their views on integration and immigration. This statistical model and the literature done on public opinion on immigration and integration exemplify how the many factors that play into people's attitudes towards immigration and integration are, by and large, the same and point in the same direction on both issues. For example, higher levels of education relate to higher levels of tolerance for immigrants (because they are no longer a threat at a high skill level) and more knowledge (or support) of the EU. Other factors include national traditions, socioeconomic variables (though, as the model and research agree, this has more to do with a perception rather than reality), and a person's political standpoint and identity. This connection between the two topics is highly relevant as the European Union faces unprecedented challenges as a result of the Eurozone financial crisis and external factors, such as the Arab Spring. The European Union, as a result of its structure, will forever have to contend with the politics of immigration and integration, and public opinion (and thereby democracy) is likely to play a larger role in determining the future of the Union.

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