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The Rational Public? Internal Migration and Collective Opinion about the European Union

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Abstract

Although the European Union allows citizens from member countries to migrate freely within its confines to facilitate integration, it may be alienating public support for Europe. This paper investigates this by extending group threat theory to explain how internal migration influences mass public support using annual data from 1998 to 2014 across 15 Western European countries. We find that increases in the presence of foreigners from new member countries in Central and Eastern Europe have raised collective concerns about EU membership and there is some evidence that it may have eroded trust in European institutions as well. The results also show that this effect is exacerbated during an economic downturn. Our findings imply that collective opinion has responded ‘rationally’ to contextual changes in Europe’s internal migration patterns. The study concludes by discussing how group threat theory is relevant for understanding collective sentiment about the European Union.

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Key words: Public Opinion; European Union; EU attitudes, immigration

INTRODUCTION

Lately, Europe's internal migration, a central principle of the *community acquis*, has come under political scrutiny. There is a strong imperative for the nation state to manage migration (Castles and Miller, 2008; Huysmans, 2000; Freeman, 1986) which is at odds with Europe's borderless mobility in the Single Market. These public sentiments have had momentous political consequences. Internal migration from European countries was the main reason that voters cast their ballot to leave the European Union in Britain's 2016 referendum, which has now resulted in the so-called "Brexit" (Ipsos MORI, 2016). Recent events suggest this phenomenon goes beyond Britain: elections in Europe show growing support for right-wing parties with both anti-EU and anti-immigration platforms (Golder, 2016; McGann and Kitschelt, 2005; Zaslove, 2008; Treib, 2014).

The existing literature has considerably advanced our understanding of the antecedents of individual-level attitudes towards Europe. This body of work has pushed scholars to view EU attitudes beyond the prism of material self-interest, instead increasingly emphasizing the importance of socio-tropic or group interest (Garry and Tilley, 2009; Lauren M. McLaren, 2007; Kuhn et al., 2014) and non-material factors such as cultural threat (McLaren, 2002; Lubbers, 2008) and identity (Carey, 2002; Christin and Trechsel, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Hooghe and Marks, 2004; Fligstein et al., 2012; Deflem and Pampel, 1996; Fligstein, 2009; Citrin and Sides, 2004; Lauren McLaren, 2007).

Yet unlike the growing literature exploring individual-level opinions about Europe, existing work on collective support¹ has remained in the realm of macro-economic factors (Anderson and Kaltenthaler, 1996; Armingeon et al., 2016; Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Garry and Tilley, 2015; Inglehart and Rabier, 1978). Without disputing this body of knowledge, we contend that, unlike work on individual-level opinion, research on collective opinion has largely ignored the consequences of internal migration for European attitudes. Collective opinion influences political representation and decision-making (Stimson, 1999; Taber, 2003) and support is crucial to maintaining democratic legitimacy (Almond and Verba, 1965). Aggregate opinion can act as a constraint for further European integration (Bølstad, 2015; Hobolt and Vries, 2016; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Citrin and Sides, 2004). Collective opinion, however, is not merely the statistical aggregate of some individuals 'but rather a social process' (Mutz, 1989, p. 21). Mass public opinion is known to behave highly rationally, to be stable and respond in predictable ways to contextual changes, even if individual citizens do not (Page and Shapiro, 1992). While the literature on individual-level opinion is informative and highly relevant, since individual opinions are the "building blocks" of collective opinion (Crespi, 1997, p. 47), it is not a substitute for understanding aggregate opinion.

The "New" Internal Migration in Europe

The rising political salience of Europe's internal migration has coincided with two accessions along its expansive and populous eastern periphery. The first of these enlargements, in 2004, was the EU's largest accession ever, both in terms of the number of countries and the size of the population. The expansion granted European citizenship to approximately 75 million Central and Eastern European (CEE) nationals from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia,

¹ We use the terms collective opinion, mass opinion, and aggregate opinion interchangeably.

Hungary, and Slovenia.² Another accession quickly followed in 2007 when Bulgaria and Romania became member states, adding approximately 30 million people.

[Figure A here]

Economic disparity between the two regions and decades of suppressed migration potential under communist regimes caused a large-scale migration from Western to Eastern Europe after the accession. Some Western European countries enacted temporary restrictions on the labour market participation of new European citizens but while these restrictions did divert flows to a certain extent (Boeri and Brücker, 2005) they were not a safeguard against inflows (Steinhardt, 2009). As shown in Figure A, from 1997 to 2009, the number of Europeans from new Central and Eastern member countries living in Western Europe grew by about 4 million, coinciding with Europe's economic crisis.

The Central and Eastern Europeans who moved to Western Europe have not been warmly welcomed. While Europeans have rights to the labour market, family reunification and welfare state resources, the public does not 'treat EU citizens with any degree of privilege compared to migrants from outside the EU' (McLaren, 2001, p. 102; Sniderman et al., 2002). Solidarity between Europe's core and periphery has developed more slowly than economic integration (Scheuer and Schmitt, 2009) and East-West internal migration highlighted tensions about mobility. Across Western Europe, many oppose immigration from poorer European countries (Gorodzeisky, 2011). For instance, Ford (2011) finds that Eastern Europeans are the most opposed of all 'white' immigrant groups in the United Kingdom.

Although the European Union allows citizens from new member countries to migrate within the region to facilitate integration, it has been suggested that this may be, paradoxically, alienating public support for Europe (Toshkov and Kortenska, 2015). The paradox lies in the fact that the further European institutions become integrated, the more public support for the European Union dwindles. If this the case, it is an undesired and inadvertent consequence: political elites have aimed to use institutional integration as a vehicle for fostering the 'European identification of we-feelings' (Scheuer, 1999, p. 30).

This article sets out to answer the open empirical question of whether recent public hostility towards Europe is, in part, explained by a rise of internal migration from new member countries that joined in the 2004/7 enlargements. This paper employs the notion of group threat as a theory to explain mass public opinion about the European Union. We argue that by provoking competition between natives and EU foreigners, internal migration brings about a defensive reaction in the collective citizenry of the host country against the European Union. To investigate this in a comparative setting, we exploit the variation in migration after the Eastern enlargements to observe its impact in 15 Western European publics over time.

THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

The Nature of Mass Attitudes towards Europe

² Malta and Cyprus also joined in 2004.

There has been a resurging interest in studying aggregate opinion (Levy et al., 2016; Oliver and Wood, 2014; Owen and Quinn, 2016) as a way of examining how ‘shared feelings’ move over time and circumstance (Stimson, 1999, pp. 17–18). Collective opinion has distinct properties from individual opinion and thus behaves differently (Page and Shapiro, 1992). Citizens are often poorly informed or lack concrete opinions, and tend to possess simultaneously multiple and conflicting points of view, making their opinions unstable (Feldman, 1989; Feldman and Zaller, 1992). Yet ‘the inadequacies of individual citizens, when combined, are more likely to cancel than to multiply’ in the statistical process of aggregation (Kinder 1998, 797).

Page and Shapiro (1992) argue that these distinct properties make collective opinion highly rational. Rational is defined as being meaningful, coherent, logical and stable; and that changes in the collective opinion occur in an understandable and predictable manner that constitutes a “sensible adjustment to the new conditions.” The term is used differently from everyday usage which usually refers to employing ‘rules of evidence and inference’ (Lahav, 2004a, p. 1159). Nor does this definition imply a normative judgement about whether the public makes “good” decisions or has “right” opinions.

In this study we are interested in two different mass attitudes towards the European Union. First is a socio-tropic utilitarian attitude towards European Union membership. Attitudes towards Europe have been noted for their socio-tropical basis (Carrubba, 2001; Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Kaltenthaler and Anderson, 2001) and parallels may be drawn with the self-interest utilitarian attitudes (Anderson and Reichert, 1995; Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998; Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Scharpf, 1999) because it shares the notion of support for Europe as an instrumental calculation of costs and benefits. The distinction is that a utilitarian socio-tropic attitude refers the way in which the citizenry, as a whole, weighs the benefits on the basis of the perceived interests for their country rather than themselves.

However, a socio-tropic orientation is not only economically motivated and this brings us to the second form of mass attitude that is of interest in this study: the public’s political distrust in the European Union. Mass political distrust in the European Union can be defined as a shared perception that the European Union is producing outcomes inconsistent with collective expectations (Hetherington, 2004, p. 9) and that a country’s interests would not be attended to ‘if the authorities were exposed to little supervision or scrutiny’ (Easton, 1957, p. 447). This attitude conceives of the public’s connection with the “idea of Europe” as based on ideals rather than an economic calculus. More recently, scholars of individual-level opinion have tended to emphasize the importance of identity and affective support (Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Klingeren et al., 2013; McLaren, 2002) by building on earlier works (Haas, 1958; Inglehart, 1970; Inglehart, 1977).

How Internal Migration Influences Mass Attitudes towards Europe

Group threat theory³ postulates that group competition over resources provokes in-groups to perceive out-groups as a threat to their own interest (Blalock, 1967). The presence of foreigners in a host country provokes a collective socio-tropic threat, whereby an in-group is threatened by the presence of the out-group (Quillian, 1995; Blumer, 1958), which is understood ‘in terms of general

³ Some refer to this as group conflict theory.

societal, rather than personal costs and benefits' (Sears and Funk, 1990, p. 15; Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Lahav, 2004b). In other words, in-groups compete with newcomers for economic resources because they are motivated to preserve their own group's material interest. Thus, foreigners who settle in a host country are seen as threatening the jobs of natives (Hollifield et al., 2014) and usurping the country's welfare resources (Bobo, 1988; Citrin et al., 1997; LeVine and Campbell, 1972; Quillian, 1995) of which they are perceived to be 'undeserving' (Oorschot, 2000).

The definition for in-groups and out-groups is based on social identity (Mols and Weber, 2013). Individuals derive their social identity from self-defined group membership and inherently differentiate and protect themselves from out-groups (Tajfel, 1970; Turner, 1975; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel et al., 1971).⁴ In modern democracies, national identity is central to a sense of belonging (Anderson, 1983; Breuilly, 1982; Brubaker, 1996; Calhoun, 1993; Deutsch, 1966; Gellner, 1983) and, in Europe, linguistic and cultural traditions often form an affective political identification with the nation (Duchesne and Frogner, 1994). European identity is built on the basis of existing national identities (Duchesne and Frogner, 1994, p. 194) and while Europeans are capable of holding both national and supranational identities simultaneously (Marks, 1999; Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001; Risse, 2003; Risse, 2014) national identities still remain more salient (Carey, 2002; Christin and Trechsel, 2002; Fligstein et al., 2012; McLaren, 2006; Hooghe and Marks, 2005).

Recently, scholars have turned to group threat theory for answers about why support for European Union varies across individuals. The work of Lauren McLaren has been instrumental in extending the explanatory power of group threat theory to explain why certain individuals have anti-European sentiments (McLaren, 2006). McLaren argues that fear of "the degradation of the resources of the nation" and hostility to other cultures are crucial, finding that citizens who hold anti-immigration attitudes tend also to have negative attitudes towards the European Union (McLaren, 2002; McLaren, 2006, p. 55), which has been confirmed by others (Beaudonnet and Barbulescu, 2014; Boomgaarden et al., 2011; de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005).⁵

So can the explanatory power of group threat theory be extended to claim that the size of the foreign population explains the variation collective opinion about the European Union across time and space? Thus far, this remains understudied and not well understood.⁶ Studies of individual-level attitudes suggest a link between perceived immigration and the likelihood that a person has negative sentiments towards European integration (Luedtke, 2005). This might seem counter-intuitive given that the EU policies aim to restrict extra-European immigration but according to some this occurs because national political elites cue citizens to blame extra-European immigration on the European Union (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Kumlin, 2009; Kumlin, 2011). Yet other studies do not find a relationship between the actual size of the foreign population and individual attitudes towards the EU (Beaudonnet and Barbulescu, 2014; Klingeren et al., 2013).

⁴ For a review of social identity theory and how it is related to European Union attitudes, see Mols and Weber (2013).

⁵ Concerns about immigration also explain why individuals oppose Turkish membership (Azrout et al., 2011; Canan-Sokullu, 2011; Erisen and Erisen, 2014; Hobolt et al., 2011; Lauren M. McLaren, 2007).

⁶ This has been more extensively studied regarding anti-immigrant attitudes (Davidov and Meuleman, 2012; Florack et al., 2003; Quillian, 1995; Rajman et al., 2003; Schlueter et al., 2008; Semyonov et al., 2006; Semyonov et al., 2004) and the evidence is inconsistent (see Hjerm, 2007; Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2015).

We contend that while group threat theory may not necessarily predict patterns of individual opinions about the European Union, it may hold explanatory power for collective opinion. This is because individuals tend to be misinformed about the volume and composition of national immigration (Blinder, 2015; Herda, 2010; Herda, 2015; Wong, 2007) but as a collective, mass opinion may be more knowledgeable. While information available to a single individual may be limited, cumulating the information all citizens have means that the collective ability to identify, judge, perceive, or estimate phenomena is notably better than that of a single individual (Surowiecki, 2005).

Moreover, if behaving “rationally,” as Page and Shapiro define it, aggregate opinion towards the European Union should have distinct responses to European and non-European immigration. The removal of borders between European countries has brought about further internal migration and, by provoking a sense of socio-tropic group threat, may be reflected in negative attitudes towards the European Union. Our argument hinges on the fact that aggregate public opinion is capable of differentiating grievances regarding internal migration from those regarding external-EU migration (which is ostensibly still under control of national governments). Initial evidence provides support for this line of reasoning and indicates that this public reaction is largely provoked by migration from new European member countries. A recent study finds evidence of the negative relationship between the presence of Central and Eastern Europeans and region-level support for European integration in three of four countries studied (Toshkov and Kortenska, 2015). We take this idea further and hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: A greater presence of Central and Eastern European foreigners living in a Western European country raises collective concerns about whether their country benefits from European membership.

There is also reason to suspect that internal migration within Europe may sow seeds of distrust in the European Union by raising fundamental doubts about the European project. Sentiments of political distrust can arise when there is a perception that governing institutions are not adequately protecting a community ‘from the potentially major changes to cultural composition and economic competition that they perceive are likely to result from large scale immigration’ (McLaren, 2012, p. 207). Internal migration is a dual representation of two salient political symbols: immigration and the European Union (Bruter, 2004; Cram, 2012; McLaren, 2002; McLaren, 2004). McLaren (2002) points out that the shift in the role of the nation and the nation-state prompts many Europeans to cast a critical eye on the European Union, as a contributing force behind this change (McLaren, 2002, p. 554).

Hypothesis 2: A greater presence of Central and Eastern European foreigners living in a Western European country raises collective distrust in European political institutions.

The Conditional Impact of Economic Scarcity

Group threat theory postulates that economic conditions have a crucial influence on inter-group relations; economic scarcity is a mechanism which exacerbates conflict between natives and foreigners (Dancygier, 2010; Olzak, 1992). According to group threat theory, in-groups compete with out-groups over resources; implying that the extent of competition between these groups is

driven by two forces: the size of the foreign population (the number of competitors), but also the extent of economic resources in the society. Even if immigration can bring economic benefits to the host country, the public tends to believe that immigration occurs in zero-sum competitive situations whereby a gain for the out-group is perceived to automatically imply a loss for the in-group (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996).

In addition to group-oriented materialistic reactions, the economic context also conditions the symbolic and affective aspects of inter-group relations since economic scarcity can give rise to in-group favouritism and reinforce out-group hostility (Chang et al., 2016) by propagating a rivalry between the groups. In fact, evidence shows that publics in immigrant-receiving countries tend to adopt more defensive attitudes about immigrants and immigration during times of economic difficulty (Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Dancygier and Donnelly, 2013; Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Filindra and Pearson-Merkowitz, 2013; Polavieja, 2016; Quillian, 1995; Strabac and Listhaug, 2008).

So, how might economic scarcity condition the impact of internal migration on collective opinion about the EU? We argue that economic scarcity, by fuelling group rivalry between natives and foreigners, would then be expected to heighten the public's defensive reaction to internal migration and this would have consequences for attitudes towards Europe. It has been established that macro-economic factors condition collective opinion about European integration (Anderson, 1998; Gabel, 1998) and that should not be surprising since elites have framed European Union membership around an economic calculus (Hooghe and Marks, 2005). Moreover, during times of economic difficulty, political trust is eroded (Bovens and Wille, 2008) and national elites also tend to shield themselves by deflecting blame to the supranational level (Schlippak and Treib, 2016; Vasilopoulou et al., 2014). Based on this evidence and the tenets of group threat theory we put forward two additional hypotheses for testing:

Hypothesis 3: The positive effect of immigration from new European countries on collective concerns about the country's benefit from EU membership is more acute when macro-economic conditions worsen.

Hypothesis 4: The positive effect of immigration from new European countries on collective distrust in European institutions is more acute when macro-economic conditions worsen.

DATA, MEASURES AND METHODS

Data

We test our claims with time-series cross sectional (TSCS) data from 15 Western European countries from 1998 to 2014.⁷ To assess the changes in mass attitudes towards the European Union over time, we use pooled annual Eurobarometer data,⁸ which has the advantage of allowing for the

⁷ These countries are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

⁸ The data has been pooled by the author using EB waves 53.0, 55.1, 59.1, 61.0, 63.4, 65.2, 67.2, 69.2, 71.1, 73.4, 75.3, 77.3, 79.5. 82.4.

observation of temporal and cross-national dynamics. Each annual survey interviews approximately between 1000 to 1500 respondents per member country (with the exception of Luxembourg) with a total of 372,941 respondents over the entire period. The descriptive statistics and information about data sources are in the appendix.

The time period has been selected for both substantive motivations and practical constraints. It spans from before the first eastern accession in 2004 through the lifting of the last restrictions in Western Europe on the freedom of movement of workers from Bulgaria and Romania in 2014. The Eurobarometer survey goes back to 1974 but the longevity of the survey cannot be fully exploited in this study since migration data is not available for the full period.

Measures

We consider two measures to gauge mass opinion towards Europe.⁹ The first operationalizes the socio-tropic utilitarian dimension of public opinion. This item, *membership disadvantageous* captures the public's opinion about whether or not membership in the European Union is beneficial to their country.¹⁰ The values have been aggregated by calculating the mean response for that country in that given year. In other words, the value represents the percentage of the national public who do feel that European Union membership is not beneficial to their country.

Next, we measure aggregate distrust in the European Union, *EU distrust*, as an index of five survey items. These are distrust of: the European Commission, the parliament, the Council of Ministers, the ECB, and the ECJ (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.914$).¹¹ Higher values on this index indicate higher distrust in European institutions and lower values indicate lower distrust. The mean index value is then computed for each country in each year. We opt not to add *membership disadvantageous* to the index also as this would lower to the Cronbach's α to 0.7. Moreover there is little theoretical justifications since the two attitudes which are conceptually distinct. While one addresses the output oriented utilitarian dimension, the other addresses the in-input oriented affective dimension of European support (Boomgaarden et al., 2011).¹²

For our independent variable we rely on a measure of the stock of nationals¹³ of new European member countries which is provided by Eurostat¹⁴ in the form of a proportion of the total population

⁹ We are restricted to survey items which are featured annually and where questions and responses have remained unchanged.

¹⁰ "Generally speaking do you think that (our country's) membership of the European Union is...?" The survey item has three answer categories: 1) a good thing 2) a bad thing or 3) neither good nor bad. We recoded the third answer category with the "don't know" responses (16%) which are omitted through listwise deletion.

¹¹ "And now for each of the following European institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?" The survey item has three response categories: 1) tend to trust it, 2) do not tend to trust it, and 3) don't know. We recoded the "don't know" responses as missing and they are omitted through listwise deletion.

¹² As a check, we ran the results when combining the two measures into a single generalized measure of European support and the results are consistent with those presented here.

¹³ The size of the foreign-born population is not possible as it is available only for some countries.

¹⁴ For country-years where data is not available from Eurostat, we use data from the OECD. As a check, we compare the ratio of Eurostat estimates to OECD estimates for four countries (Germany, Sweden, Spain and Finland) of which we have full information from both data sources and find that this ratio ranges from 1.03 to 0.91. In the remaining rare cases, we use data from the European Labor Force Survey provided by Holland et. al (2010) which is highly correlated with Eurostat data. Further details are available in the appendix.

in that country in that year.¹⁵ As we observe in Figure B, with the exception of France and Portugal, all Western European countries experienced an increase in the proportion of new European foreigners, with varying degrees of sharpness.

[Figure B here]

To assess the moderating influence of macro-economic conditions, we use two measures of economic performance which are each interacted with the stock of foreigners from new member countries. These are: the country's GDP per capita (EUR) and the national unemployment rate, both at time t .

We also take into consideration mitigating factors which influence public attitudes towards the European Union across countries over time by introducing a series of control variables. A series of variables are introduced to control for other migration trends occur contemporaneously. The first is the percentage of non-European foreign nationals residing in the country as a percentage of the country's total population. The second is the number of Western European foreign nationals as a proportion of the country's total population. Finally, intra-European trade (exports + imports) as a proportion of total trade (exports + imports) is included as a control variable.

Estimation Strategy

Our data are an unbalanced time-series cross sectional (TSCS) including 15 countries over 17 years. Table 1 presents the countries included in the sample along with their longitudinal coverage. Gaps in longitudinal coverage are due either to the fact that the country did not participate in the Eurobarometer survey or that estimates of the foreign populations were not available for that year. Since the measures for *membership disadvantageous* are not available in 2012, these have been interpolated.¹⁶

[Table 1 here]

We report the results for two different estimations. First, we first report the results of a fixed effects model specified without adjustments for autocorrelation or panel-specific heteroscedasticity. Since Wald tests showed a significant amount of panel-specific heteroscedasticity, we then report the results of a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis which are estimated with panel corrected standard errors (PSCE). PSCEs are used to adjust for group-wise heteroskedastic error terms which are common in cross-sectional time series data where error terms have different variances between different units and are correlated across units (Beck and Katz, 1995; Beck and Katz, 1996).¹⁷ Following convention, we lag all independent variables and control variables by one year. We use country dummies to account for any unobserved time invariant characteristics of countries not included in the model such as historical experiences with migration, cultural orientations, citizenship policies, and tenure in the European Union. It also ensures that the models

¹⁵ We use stock measures rather than flow measures since these are better harmonized across countries. For a discussion see Fassmann (2009). Amongst the countries where both measures are available, we find that measures of the stock of foreign born and foreign nationals are strongly correlated (0.91).

¹⁶ As a check, we ran the models omitting the year 2012 for which values of the dependent variable have been interpolated and the results are consistent with those presented here

¹⁷ Due to the small N and T, tests of stationarity are not conducted (Hadri, 2000).

explain variation public attitudes towards the EU over time within countries but not differences in levels between countries. Year dummies are also included to control for any unobserved time shocks.

Woolridge tests reveal that there is no serial correlation when predicting *membership disadvantageous* but that there is first order serial correlation when predicting *EU distrust*. In other words, any distrust that the public held about the European Union in the past matters to the extent that it trusts its institutions today. Therefore, in those models that predict *EU distrust* we also specify a model with a lagged dependent variable.

RESULTS

Internal Migration and Mass Support for the Country's EU Membership

We begin by examining the impact of internal migration from new member countries on collective support for the country's membership in the EU. Table 2 displays a series of regressions which examine the impact of internal migration from new member countries on the extent to which the public perceives European membership as disadvantageous to their country (*membership disadvantageous*). Regressions are estimated with both fixed effects models and OLS models with panel corrected standard errors (PCSE), producing similar results. The results confirm Hypothesis 1: surges in the share of foreigners from new member countries increase the proportion of the public who feel that EU membership is not benefiting their country. In the fixed effects estimation in Model 1 and the OLS-PSCE estimations in Models 2 and 3, the coefficients for *new European foreigners* are positive and significant.¹⁸ It is also noteworthy that the significance of the presence of new European foreigners stands in contrast to the coefficients for Western Europeans and Non-Europeans foreigners which do not have a significant impact.

[Table 2 here]

We further examine the nature of the relationship by specifying two additional models (Model 4, Model 5) which introduce an interaction term between macro-economic conditions and the presence of foreigners from new European countries. These interaction terms allow us to directly examine the effects of internal migration on support for the country's European Union membership as economic resources become scarce. Table 2 makes clear that, as expected in Hypothesis 3, conditions of economic scarcity exacerbate the negative effect of internal migration from new member countries on membership support. In Model 4, when the proportion of new Europeans is interacted with the level of unemployment, the coefficient is positive and significant. Using these, we illustrate the relationship between these two variables for different levels of unemployment. Figure C shows the coefficients and the upper and lower bounds of 95 confidence intervals for the effects of new Europeans conditional on these different levels of unemployment. The results are significant for all levels of unemployment observed in the sample (zero to twenty-five per cent

¹⁸ These results have been subject to a series of robustness checks. The results were re-estimated omitting one country at a time from the pooled dataset, providing assurance that the results are not driven by factors specific to a single country. The results are also similar even when controlling for wages and inflation.

unemployment rates). Consistent with our expectations, higher levels of new Europeans living in the country is associated with higher proportions of the public believing that EU membership is not advantageous to their country, especially when domestic unemployment rates are high.

[Figure C here]

The results in Model 5, when the proportion of new Europeans is interacted with level of GDP per capita, also confirm the conditional effect of economic scarcity. The coefficient for the interaction term is negative and significant, meaning that the association between internal migration and the public's support for membership in the European Union is dampened when levels of GDP per capita are higher. As is illustrated in Figure D, this is significant for all levels of GDP per capita which are observed in the sample. In other words, the effect of new Europeans on membership support is more acute in national contexts where GDP per capita is lower (*ceteris paribus*).

[Figure D here]

Turning now to a substantive interpretation of these results, we can say that, all else being equal, an increase of a percentage point in the proportion of new European foreigners in the population is predicted to bring about an increase of 6.6 points in the percentage of the population who feel that EU membership is not beneficial to their country. The size of this effect increases as economic resources become more scarce: when the unemployment rate is greater than 10%, this effect is more than 8 percentage points (which is equivalent to more than half of a standard deviation) and is more than a ten point increase when GDP per capita is less than 40,000 Euros. In other words, the negative influence of internal migration from Central and Eastern member countries on Western Europe's support for EU membership is larger when the domestic economy fares poorly. In substantive terms, this is an important finding considering that an increase of one percentage point in the proportion of new European foreigners in the total population is not an unreasonable scenario: about two-thirds of the Western European countries experienced increases of one percentage point or more during the period examined.

Internal Migration and Mass Distrust in the European Union

We now turn our attention to political trust in the European Union. In Table 3, we examine the role of internal migration from new member countries in explaining public distrust in European institutions. In line with our expectations, the coefficient for new European foreigners is positive and significant when estimated using fixed effects regression in Model 1 as well when using OLS with panel corrected standard errors and country dummies in Model 2. The coefficient continues to be highly significant in Model 3 when introducing year dummies, albeit the size of the coefficient is diminished. The size is further diminished and the standard errors are larger in Model 4 when introducing a lagged dependent variable to adjust for the serial correlation in public distrust yet it remains statistically significant. The results in the first four models in Table 3 indicates that a higher level of internal migration from new member countries goes hand and hand with an increase the public's distrust in European institutions.¹⁹

¹⁹ This result is robust when re-estimating a model that controls for average wages. However when re-estimating the model controlling for inflation rates, the coefficient for new European foreigners remains positive but is no longer statistically significant. The results of these estimates are available in the appendix.

[Table 3 here]

There is strong evidence that this relationship is conditional on the level of unemployment in the host country. In Model 5, the proportion of new European foreigners is interacted with the unemployment rate in the host country, and we see that the coefficient is highly significant and positive. Figure E provides an illustration of the coefficients and how this varies depending on the level of unemployment. We observe that below 7 percent unemployment, the level of unemployment does not have a significant effect on the relationship. Yet when the domestic unemployment rate is higher than 7.5%, the positive influence of new European foreigners living in the country on distrust becomes more acute as unemployment increases. Still, this is only partial support for Hypothesis 4 since there is no evidence that the relationship is conditional on GDP per capita. Model 6 shows that the interaction between new Europeans and GDP per capita is not significant and including it into the model also erodes the statistical significance of the coefficient for *new European foreigners* below the 0.05 threshold.

[Figure E here]

In substantive terms, Model 4 tells us that an increase of new Europeans in the population by one percentage point would result in an increase of 0.019 points on a scale of political distrust from 0 to 1. While this effect size is quite small (considering also that the $SD=0.13$), it is nevertheless meaningful. Diffuse support is widely acknowledged to be stable and slow to change, unlike utilitarian support and it is not expected to be as sensitive to institutional outputs. Moreover, the size of this effect is dependent on the level of unemployment in a country, and as Figure E illustrates, if the unemployment rate is 10%, the effect size doubles. This tells us that internal migration from new member countries may have contributed to a small rise in public distrust in the European Union as predicted by Hypothesis 2, although we have some reservations regarding the robustness of this finding to certain sensitivity checks. Yet we do find solid evidence of this effect when national unemployment rates are high. In times of scarce labour market opportunities, the increasing presence of new European citizens can foster distrust in European institutions.

We fully recognize that, being an observational study, there are important limitations to be considered; namely that the distribution of foreigners from new member countries in Western Europe is not random. We have tried to address this by controlling for confounding factors as well as unobservable time invariant differences between countries. Importantly, our results take into account any changes in the non-European foreign population over time, since most Western European countries also experienced immigration from outside Europe. Given the time period of the study which is from 1997 until 2014, we are not concerned about the interference of the refugee political “crisis” in Europe which peaked in 2015 (BBC, 2016). Still, we acknowledge that we cannot rule out that the presence of other unobservable time variant characteristics, which could bias our results. We cannot exclude, for instance, that the compositional mix, in skill or nationality amongst the stock of new member Europeans may have shifted within countries over time.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The “Brexit” and its aftermath has brought political discontent about Europe’s internal migration, particularly from new Eastern European member countries, to the forefront of scholarly attention. Our findings do not indicate that it is internal migration per se that is detrimental to public support for Europe but rather that it is specific to internal migration from new member countries. We find that increases in the presence of foreigners from new member countries makes aggregate public opinion more concerned about the benefits of EU membership and there is some evidence that it may have eroded trust in European institutions as well. While we cannot rule out the cultural explanations for this, there is reason to suppose the timing of Europe’s economic crisis during the years following the Eastern accessions is crucial. Domestic economic conditions have a moderating role since internal migration from new member states has had a more detrimental effect when the economy is less prosperous.

The findings speak to the fundamental question about whether mass opinion towards Europe is connected to ‘real’ contextual changes. While individuals may lump EU and non-EU immigration together (McLaren, 2001) into a pot of grievances directed at the European Union on the basis of uniformed perceptions of immigration, we find that the collective opinion is much more ‘rational.’ In this sense we find that collective opinion has responded coherently and is able to make reasonable distinctions: namely that the European foreigners from new member states causes publics to be less supportive of EU membership, while immigration from outside the European does not have an impact on EU attitudes. This response can be determined as reasonable, in the way that Page and Shapiro (1992) conceive of the term, since it can be explained as a sensible adjustment to changes to Europe’s internal migration patterns, given our understanding of inter-group relations as put forward by group threat theory.

These findings underscore the fact that collective opinion internalizes internal migration as a threat to their group interest, which they perceive in terms of the nation state. As such, group threat theory holds an important explanatory power and offers theoretical insights into the possible mechanism for this relationship. Socio-tropic utilitarian orientations towards the nation state remain strong and thus an increase in foreigners, who represent members of an out-group, can be seen as a threat to the finite economic resources of the in-group. As resources become more finite, the effect of this competition on eroding support for the country’s membership and trust in European institutions becomes starker. In our view, this is because the free mobility paradigm is at odds with the national sovereignty paradigm: internal migration is seen as a threat to national sovereignty over borders, a function which Europeans have been socialized to believe belongs to the nation state. New European citizens who moved to live and work pose a particular economic threat compared to non-European foreigners as they have full rights of labour market participation and settlement.

Still, our findings do not necessarily mean a gloomy future for Europe’s political support, namely we do not claim that this will inevitably result in a long term effect. It remains to be seen if the abrupt impact of internal migration from new member countries will be temporary or will give way to a continued gradual decline in mass support for Europe. It seems that domestic populations adapt to various waves of newcomers (Alba, 1985; Ford, 2011; Simon, 1997). It is possible that once Western European countries become accustomed to having sizeable numbers of new EU migrants, who will eventually be not new anymore, this issue will no longer prompt hostility from the domestic population. This notion that the host society becomes accustomed to, over time, certain foreign populations also might explain why we find that Western European foreigners don’t have

any effect on support for the European Union since this form of internal migration has a longer tradition. Moreover, our findings underscore the importance of the economic context in moderating the effect of internal migration on support for Europe. Therefore, if economic conditions improve, the impact of internal immigration could then lessen.

Our findings raise some important questions about whether the public has accepted the reallocation of authority of some forms of immigration to the European Union. Further research is needed to expand our understanding about the way in which internal migration has been politically mobilized, particularly by domestic political elites, to undermine public support for the European Union. We know that when it comes to attitudes towards Europe, the public is guided by elite cues (Gabel and Scheve, 2007) and considering their role in framing the utilitarian understanding of internal migration would yield greater insights into the political sustainability of Europe's free internal movement of people.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure A. E8 and E2 Nationals living in Western European Member States (EU-15), 1997 vs. 2009

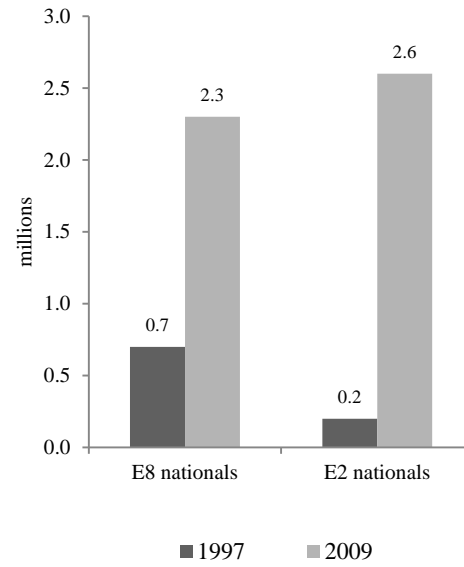


Figure B. European Foreigners as a proportion of Total Population, EU-15 Countries, 1999-2014

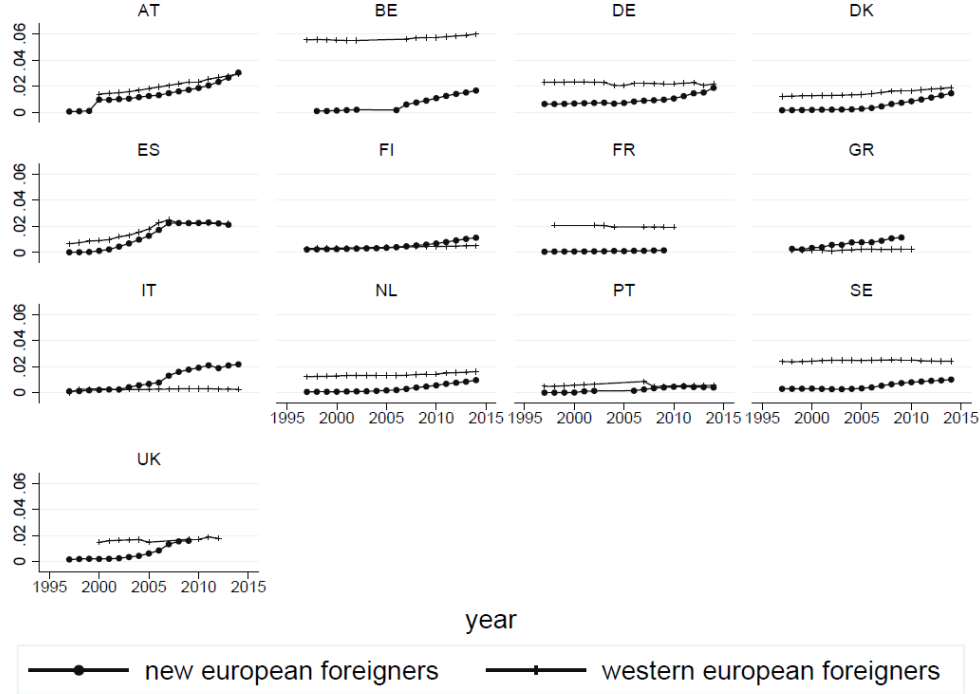


Table 1. Time Series Coverage by Country

Country	Years*
Austria	2003,2005-2014
Belgium	1999-2002, 2007-2014
Denmark	1998-2014
Finland	1998-2014
France	2002, 2004, 2007-2009
Germany	1998-2014
Greece	1999-2009
Ireland	2006-2014
Italy	1998-2014
Luxembourg	2000-2013
Netherlands	1998-2014
Portugal	1998-2002, 2007-2014
Spain	1998-2013
Sweden	1998-2014
United Kingdom	2001-5, 2009

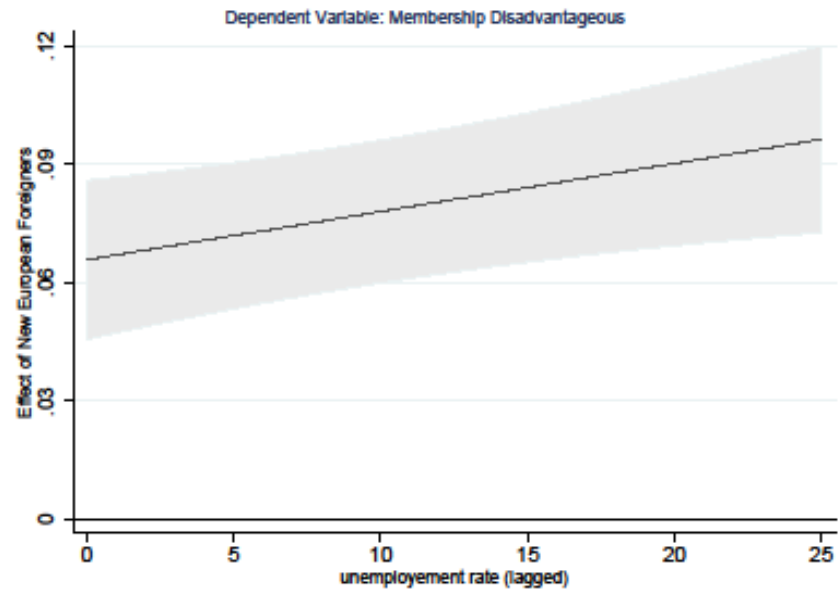
* Survey items for mistrust are not available in 1998 or 1999.

Table 2. The Impact of Internal Migration from New Member Countries on Attitudes Towards the European Union Membership

<i>Membership Disadvantageous</i> = dependent variable	FE (1)	PCSE (2)	PCSE (3)	PCSE (4)	PCSE (5)
L. New European foreigners	0.078** (0.025)	0.078*** (0.007)	0.074*** (0.009)	0.066*** (0.010)	0.166** (0.056)
L. Western European foreigners	0.006 (0.009)	0.006 (0.006)	0.009 (0.006)	0.008 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.010)
L. Non-European foreigners	0.005 (0.009)	0.005 (0.005)	0.005 (0.007)	0.004 (0.007)	-0.005 (0.010)
L. GDP per capita	-0.008*** (0.002)	-0.008*** (0.001)	-0.010*** (0.001)	-0.009*** (0.001)	-0.004 (0.003)
L. unemployment	0.006* (0.003)	0.006* (0.003)	0.006* (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)	0.007* (0.003)
L. trade dependence	-0.372 (0.425)	-0.372 (0.230)	-0.205 (0.267)	-0.141 (0.253)	-0.043 (0.281)
L. New Europeans x L. unemployment				0.001* (0.000)	
L. New Europeans x L. GDP per capita					-0.001* (0.001)
constant	0.740* (0.351)	0.909*** (0.218)	0.843** (0.259)	0.799** (0.245)	0.570* (0.288)
R^2	0.20	0.71	0.74	0.74	0.75
N	170	170	170	170	170
country dummies	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
time dummies	no	no	yes	yes	yes

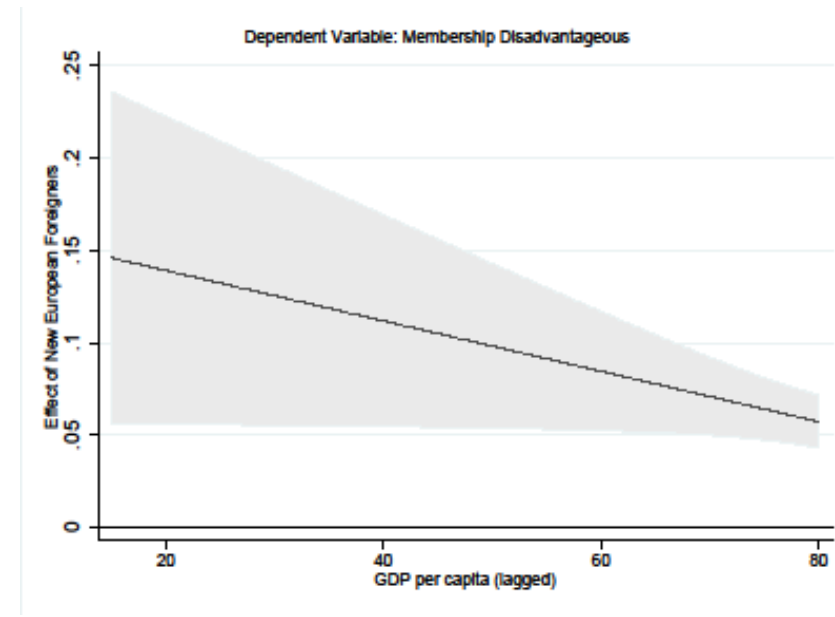
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ Note: Standard Errors in Parentheses. FE=Fixed Effects; PCSE=panel corrected standard errors; Table entries are unstandardized coefficients from a time series cross-sectional analysis performed in STATA 14.

Figure C. Effect of New European Foreigners conditioned on levels of unemployment



Note: 95% Confidence Intervals. OLS-PCSE estimation.

Figure D. Effect of New European Foreigners conditioned on levels of GDP



Note: 95% Confidence Intervals. OLS-PCSE estimation with AR(1) Correction.

Table 3. The Impact of Internal Migration from New Member Countries on Distrust in the European Union

<i>EU distrust</i> = dependent variable	FE (1)	PCSE (2)	PCSE (3)	PCSE (4)	PCSE (5)	PCSE (6)
L. New European foreigners	0.053** (0.017)	0.053*** (0.014)	0.033*** (0.006)	0.019* (0.008)	0.006 (0.009)	-0.003 (0.041)
L. Western European foreigners	-0.002 (0.008)	-0.002 (0.007)	0.012* (0.005)	0.008 (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)	0.011 (0.008)
L. Non-European foreigners	0.004 (0.008)	0.004 (0.006)	0.011 (0.006)	0.006 (0.004)	0.004 (0.004)	0.009 (0.007)
L. GDP per capita	-0.004* (0.002)	-0.004** (0.001)	-0.008*** (0.001)	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.007* (0.003)
L. unemployment	0.015*** (0.003)	0.015*** (0.004)	0.011*** (0.003)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.005*** (0.002)
L. trade dependence	-1.870*** (0.373)	-1.870*** (0.329)	-1.396** (0.431)	-0.325 (0.292)	-0.279 (0.273)	-0.378 (0.296)
L. New Europeans x L. unemployment			(0.036)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.056)
L. New Europeans x L. GDP per capita					0.002*** (0.000)	
						0.000 (0.001)
constant	1.620*** (0.313)	1.870*** (0.329)	1.639*** (0.399)	0.531* (0.262)	0.517* (0.242)	0.604* (0.281)
R^2	0.58	0.68	0.76	0.84	0.84	0.84
N	180	180	180	180	180	180
country dummies	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
time dummies	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
lagged DV	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ Note: Standard Errors in Parentheses. FE=Fixed Effects; PCSE=panel corrected standard errors; Table entries are unstandardized coefficients from a time series cross-sectional analysis performed in STATA 14.

Figure E. Effect of New European Foreigners conditioned on levels of unemployment

