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Immigration absorption and anti-immigrant attitudes in European welfare states

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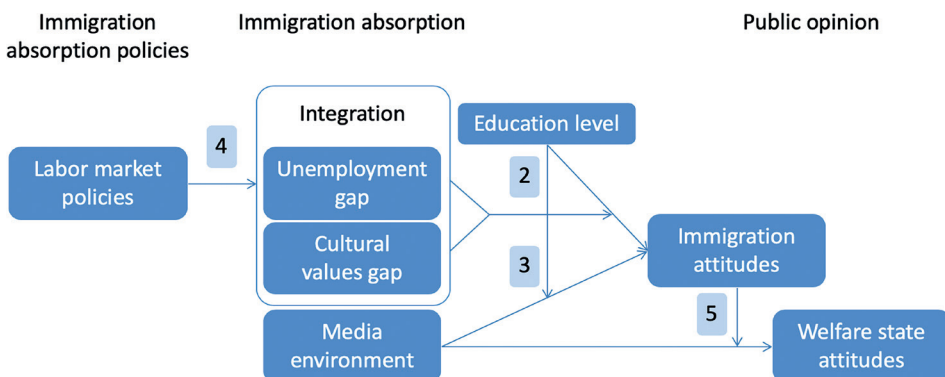
CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSION

I conclude this dissertation by returning to the puzzles set out at its outset. Key is that the importance of immigration has gained traction in Western Europe over the past two decades (Duffy and Frere-Smith 2014). Equally key, however, are misperceptions surrounding that importance. Recent studies show that people tend to overestimate the number of migrants in the country and how those overestimations are related to anti-immigrant sentiment (Duffy and Frere-Smith 2014; Semyonov et al. 2008; Strabac 2011). Indeed, this comports with the main discrepancy reported at the outset of this study: that the immigration size and anti-immigrant sentiment do not correlate as one might expect (Strabac 2011). Although this may seem puzzling at first, it is understandable that most people in society do not notice the mere rise or size of immigration firsthand. As this dissertation has tried to show, the extent to which people experience and problematize immigration is dependent on aspects that have to do with the embedding or connectedness between migration groups and society, or as I call it, immigration absorption. As previous chapters have sought to clarify, immigration absorption describes both the institutional and societal adaptation of immigration. Immigration absorption is a two-way process. Both migrants themselves and the host society and institutions are part of immigration absorption. Immigration absorption thus comprises the environment which determines the visibility and potential problematization of immigration, which influences anti-immigrant sentiment, apart from immigration flows themselves.

The dissertation has explored the fundamental implications and possible policy-political underpinnings of immigration absorption, as outlined in Figure 6.1. In the first part of the dissertation, I studied how different conceptualizations of immigration absorption relate to immigration attitudes. I analyzed the economic and cultural integration of migrants in the host country's society and the extent to and ways in which immigration is portrayed in the news media environment. I also analyzed how these relationships are moderated by the level of education of the respondents. In the second part of the dissertation, I embedded the findings in the broader academic debate on immigration and the welfare state; a policy area that has the potential to positively impact immigration absorption. I explored if LMP increases or decreases the employment of immigrants relative to that of natives. Finally, I investigated if natives' support for welfare policies is increased or decreased by immigration absorption.

Figure 6.1: Conceptual framework of the different chapters



In this concluding chapter, I outline the project’s main conclusions about the effects of immigration absorption on immigration attitudes and its relationship with the welfare state in Europe. Equally important, however, I discuss the implications and potential areas of future research to which the dissertation’s chapters and sub-studies point. After that, I identify one specific and additional policy area that I argue needs development to potentially increase tolerance in society and to stimulate equal opportunities between natives and migrants – all practical and scholarly wisdom that I hope can be drawn from this dissertation.

Immigration absorption and anti-immigrant sentiment

Immigration absorption can take many forms, but for this dissertation I focused on two different and important elements. First, I studied the role of immigrant integration. Migrants actively participate in the host country’s economy and get accustomed to the cultural habits. The extent to and ways in which migrants are different from natives influences natives’ experience with immigrants and ultimately their attitudes towards them. My second expression of immigration absorption is reporting in the media environment on immigration. One of the ways in which a host society absorbs immigration is related to the way people view and talk about the issue in the public and media debate. Because most people do not experience abstract social changes like immigration firsthand, they rely on the media to inform them about such issues. The extent to and ways in which the host country’s news media describe the immigration issue is therefore important to study when explaining anti-immigrant sentiment. These two expressions of immigration absorption differ in whether they are social or institutional, focused on the side of the migrants or the side of the host country, and whether they reflect how immigration is experienced by natives or how it is viewed by them. This makes these expressions interesting to compare in relation to immigration attitudes.

One might expect that the higher the level of immigration absorption is, the less negative citizens are towards immigration. And yet, recent literature on immigration attitudes shows that different types of motivations can be distinguished and their effects can be dependent on personal characteristics of citizens (Dustmann and Preston 2002; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007). In the academic debate on anti-immigrant sentiment, one of the questions scholars explore is whether these attitudes are economically or culturally motivated. Most studies from the 1990s and early to mid-2000s argued that personal economic interests lie at the heart of differences in immigration opinion between natives with a low and high education level (Mayda 2006; Scheve and Schlaugter 2001). More recent studies, however, argue that differences in cultural worries are the reasons why some people are more anti-immigration than others (McLaren and Johnson 2007; Sides and Citrin 2007). The same distinction can be made when it comes to immigration absorption. In this dissertation I study both economic and cultural integration of migrants and economically and culturally framed immigration news in the media environment. By comparing the effect of the two areas of focus of immigration absorption on anti-immigration attitudes, this study connects and adds to the motivations of immigration attitudes debate.

Another lesson from the literature is that immigration attitudes are dependent on someone's level of education (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2005). Important in the discussion of the effects of immigration absorption on immigration attitudes is if they apply differently to people with different education levels. Studies consistently find that lower educated natives are more anti-immigration than higher educated natives (Citrin et al. 1997; Dustmann and Preston 2007; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). Given this fact, it would be surprising if on average people with a low and high education level respond in the same ways to integration or changes in the media environment. It is far more likely that the way people perceive the absorption of immigration is partly dependent on this personal trait.

The empirical analyses in previous chapters have shown that the different elements of immigration absorption (immigrant integration and the media environment), the distinction between economic and cultural aspects of immigration absorption, and the moderation of education level are all relevant to the way people view immigration. All these factors, and different configurations of these factors, yield different but theoretically interesting effects on anti-immigrant sentiment. Below, I briefly recap these findings.

Chapter Two discussed the effect of economic and cultural integration on anti-immigrant sentiment. Economic integration was operationalized as the yearly average difference of unemployment between natives and migrants. The smaller the difference, the better the economic integration. Cultural integration is a much more difficult concept to measure, because it potentially involves many different aspects that are not necessarily related to

each other and that are often not part of large international and repeated survey projects. The way I operationalized cultural integration was to take the average differences in opinion between natives and migrants on three different culture-related issues: gay rights, religiousness, and personal freedom.

The effects of both employment integration and cultural values integration on anti-immigrant attitudes were remarkably different and varied depending on the respondents' education level. Higher educated natives' opinions about immigration were more strongly and positively affected by the unemployment gap between natives and migrants. Further analysis showed that this pattern is mainly due to higher educated natives being more anti-immigration in their stances where and when the unemployment of natives is higher – something that also closes the employment gap. Lower educated natives respond more strongly to differences in cultural values between migrants and natives. The greater the average differences of opinion between natives and migrants when it comes to LGBT rights, religiousness, and individual freedom, the higher the anti-immigrant sentiment of lower educated natives. These findings indicate not only differences in how lower and higher educated natives respond to diversity, but also that low versus high-educated natives respond differently to different kinds of diversity and potentially have different priorities when it comes to their immigration opinion. Higher educated natives seem to be more concerned with natives' labor market condition than with differences in cultural values when it comes to their consideration of immigration. For lower educated natives, it is the other way around: their perceptions of immigration are more strongly linked to concern with how different migrants and natives are in their cultural values and less to labor market considerations.

Chapter Three dealt with the effect of reports on immigration in the media environment on anti-immigrant sentiment. In order to study the extent to which the immigration debate in the media environment was described in economic or cultural terms, I chose three associative media frames within those debates: welfare, terrorism and Islam. These frames were relevant across Europe during the research period and are related to economic and cultural motivations of the public.

In relation to anti-immigrant sentiment, a different, but complementary picture emerges from the chapter on immigrant integration. I did not find a statistical relationship between welfare related immigration news and anti-immigrant sentiment, not even for higher educated natives. Yet both the Islam and the terrorism frames did seem to spur anti-immigrant sentiment. This indicates that more cultural and security-related immigration news has a stronger and more negative impact than economic-related immigration news. Next, I analyzed whether there is a difference in how lower educated citizens respond to Islam and terrorism frames compared to their higher educated counterparts. This appears

to be the case. Similar to my findings regarding cultural values immigrant integration, Islam and terrorism related immigration news has a stronger positive effect on the anti-immigrant sentiment of lower educated citizens than that of higher educated citizens.

In sum, the main conclusion that can be drawn from Chapter Two and Three is that absorption of immigration matters for the immigration opinion of mainly lower educated people when such absorption relates to the cultural, more than the economic, aspects of immigration. Lower educated citizens seem to fear for their national culture or identity and the more culturally different immigrants are from the host society, or the more those cultural aspects are highlighted in the news media, the more anti-immigration lower educated natives are.

Immigration absorption and the welfare state

To promote immigration absorption, governments have a range of policies at their disposal. In the realm of the welfare state, crucial policies that are relevant to, and may seek to promote, such absorption are social policies intended to stimulate social equality among and between natives and migrants. Later chapters of this dissertation focused on the effects of labor market policies for the relative employment opportunities of immigrants. Employment is a key issue when it comes to participation in society. Unemployment is related to a range of other personal and social issues, from poverty to health- and crime-related problems (Caliendo and Schmidl 2016), so when immigrants are lagging behind in employment it is of concern to society as a whole and the acceptance of migrants in particular. In the researched period, there was a gap between the unemployment rate of natives and migrants in most European countries. Especially since the economic crisis of 2008-2010 this gap has increased substantially. As I have argued, the integration of migrants is related to immigration attitudes of natives. Employment is therefore a potential area of focus to decrease differences and increase tolerance between societal groups.

As Chapter Four laid out, LMPs such as UBs or training programs, subsidized labor, or job rotation programs (ALMPs), are in place to combat unemployment in general. However, the difference in the effectiveness of these programs between natives and migrants is understudied, especially on aggregate level. In the chapter, then, I explored the effects of LMPs on the unemployment gap between natives and different migrant groups. A reason to be concerned about the effects of LMPs on the unemployment gap is that they are not specifically targeting migrants, whereas there are several well-studied reasons to believe the problems of migrants on the labor market are highly specific and not always solvable to the same extent as natives' unemployment by a government hand-out or activation policies (Brücker et al. 2002). Immigrants may have limited access to welfare programs, face labor market discrimination, or they might have a disadvantage on the labor market because their

language or skills are not yet adjusted to the new labor market. These problems could be amplified if LMPs do not work for migrants to the extent that they work for natives and they might require a more tailored approach.

The results revealed that LMPs actually tend to increase the unemployment gap between natives and migrants. In the case of UBs, the effect on the employment of natives is positive. There was however no statistically significant effect on the employment of third country migrants (TCMs). In the case of ALMPs, furthermore, there was no effect on the employment chances of natives, but for TCMs the effects of ALMPs were negative. In other words, both UB and ALMPs are contributing to a larger employment gap between natives and migrants. As the chapter discussed, this pattern likely reflects the period of adjustment that immigrants need in order to reap the benefits of the government programs that are in place. For instance, Chapter Four found that if a migrant is in the host country for nine years or longer, the effects of UBs and ALMPs for migrants are not significantly different than the policies are for natives. None of the other measured explanations (access, discrimination), found support in statistically significant correlational relationships. Indeed, the portrait painted in the chapter is that the first nine years in a foreign country can be formative. It is a period of adjustment in which most migrants learn the language, acquire skills suited for the new environment, and learn how to navigate the labor market, among other learning dynamics. Which of those skills or combination of skills is responsible for the change in effectiveness of LMPs remains an unanswered question that should be addressed in future projects on this topic. But the combination of skills and capacities that can be garnered in the first years after immigration are plausibly important and their beneficial role in leveraging social policy interventions is corroborated by the correlational exploration in this chapter.

Whatever the particular implications welfare states have for immigration absorption, in the media debate immigration is often framed as a welfare state issue. In communication science and political science literature – and in Chapter Three of this dissertation – much attention is given to different ways reporting about immigration in the news affects immigration attitudes (Eberl et al. 2018). Yet it remains unclear whether the extent to which media framing of immigration as a welfare state issue also affects individuals' attitudes about welfare redistribution. As the welfare state has the potential of being an important area for policy makers to stimulate immigration absorption, it is relevant to know whether and how forms of immigration absorption are related to welfare state support among natives. On the one hand, increasing welfare framing of immigration in the media debate and the insecurities this might bring could stimulate natives to demand more social protection and spur welfare state support (Finseraas 2008). On the other hand, as immigration becomes politicized and problematized, the welfare state in the context of immigration could be seen as something under threat by immigration. Natives

may feel that their money is not redistributed from high- to low-income people within the in-group, but, instead, view the welfare state as a vehicle of redistributing money from the in-group to the out-group (Eger and Breznau 2017).

Chapter Five concludes that welfare framing of immigration in the media environment can sway support for government redistribution, but the direction of this effect is dependent on respondents' immigration opinions. The empirics of the chapter support the inference that people who are against immigration are more critical of the welfare state if they live in a media environment where there is more emphasis on immigration news related to the welfare state. This result implies that for such people, news that links welfare to immigration activates worries about general social policy. This might entail worries about the sustainability of welfare programs or questions about welfare state deservedness: welfare chauvinism. In contrast, respondents who are already in favor of immigration appear to be more supportive of the welfare state when welfare framing of immigration is more prominent in the news environment. As Chapter Five argued, this pattern likely reflects that pro-immigration respondents' reason that more protection is needed for vulnerable groups when immigration becomes a bigger media issue.

Limitations and further research

After conducting the research and reflecting on the results and implications, I consider a number of avenues for further research to extend the theoretical and empirical scope and to strengthen the internal validity. Throughout the chapters, I have cautiously tried to make claims of causal inference, which are based on observational statistical analyses only. It is crucial that readers of the dissertation's findings take seriously the problems and limitations that constrain causal inference based on the kind of data and analyses on which this dissertation has relied.

The dissertation argues that immigration absorption is a relevant concept for studying the dynamics between migrants and the host society and institutions. Economic and cultural immigrant integration and news media framing of immigration appear to be important predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment and also show relevance for the politics of the welfare state. Due to limitations in terms of time, resources and data, I was unable to study other aspects of immigration absorption. Future research should include the social and political integration of immigrants. When it comes to media reporting on immigration it would be interesting to take into account the political debate about immigration and the role of political parties with anti-immigration platforms, more immigration-related media frames, and the tone of such reporting. Also, the scope of immigration absorption-related policies can be widened, for instance by including other welfare state policies, but also immigrant entry policy, something on which I worked together with the IMPALA database consortium (Beine et al. 2016), and integration and citizenship policy.

When it comes to Chapter Three and Five on the effects of immigration framing in the media environment, there are opportunities in the measurement and data collection to improve both the internal and external validity. Especially including a longer time period, more countries, more media outlets per country, and other types of media, such as television news and social media, would greatly strengthen the empirical analyses. Considering the current field of research into immigration salience and framing in the media environment, this study already extended the scope in terms of time period and countries included, broadened the external validity of associative framing research, and questioned the persuasive effect of mere media salience of the immigration issue.

One of the challenges of statistical research is fleshing out the mechanisms that drive the effects found between the dependent and the independent variables. Without explicitly measuring the intervening variables in between, as a researcher one must rely on theory more than observation to argue how A leads to B. For instance, in Chapter Two, and to lesser extent in Chapter Three, I argue that the education level of natives is an important factor in how they respond to levels of immigration absorption. Although substantial scholarship explores how education level affects anti-immigrant sentiment, the question of why such effects exist remains open. Perhaps there is a socialization or liberalization effect of attending education (Coenders and Scheepers 2003; Igarashi and Saito 2014). Or perhaps a more cosmopolitan worldview is stimulated by learning about the world and sitting in class with a diverse group of people, in which case one would expect people to become more cosmopolitan throughout their education. Some recent examinations question precisely these links (Lancee and Sarrasin 2015). They suggest that correlation between education and immigration attitudes may more likely reflect selection effects, like growing up with liberal and highly educated parents shaping both a person's education level and political opinions (De Graaf et al. 2000; Jennings et al. 2009; Dinas 2013). If so, education level could well be picking up differences in social class, but there is no scientific consensus or conclusive evidence on the root causes of the education gap of anti-immigrant sentiment. While this dissertation has lacked the data to explore these nuances in causal mechanisms, its identification of new and important education gaps in immigration politics adds yet another voice calling for further research into such causal mechanisms.

A similar criticism could be made for the dissertation's claim that LMPs increase the employment chances of natives more than of migrants from non-European countries. While the chapter did address different causal mechanisms and found stronger support for the time migrants had spent in the country than for access to social benefits and anti-immigrant sentiment, I was not able to pinpoint how, exactly, or with respect to what aspects of immigrant integration LMPs could be more effective for the employment chances of third country migrants. This is, thus, a further area for extension and clarification of intervening causal mechanisms in the politics explored here.

Finally, the dissertation's empirics face, like most observational work, endogeneity as a principal obstacle to causal inference. It is not cliché, but a serious problem of social science in the positivist tradition to state that everything in society is connected to everything and that reverse relationships should be taken into account in interpreting correlations. The way that the chapters are related to one another has already signaled my attempt to take such endogeneity issues seriously. The project and its component parts were set up to study how welfare state policies are related to immigration absorption (Chapter Four) and how immigration absorption is related to natives' welfare state attitudes (Chapter Five). Some of the relationships found within the different chapters could also be an artifact of the same relationship working in opposite direction. This could be argued to criticize, for instance, the direct effects of media attention and framing on anti-immigrant sentiment or welfare state attitudes of natives. Journalists try to publish stories the public is interested in and for some issues it is hard to determine where the importance of a certain issue originated and why that issue is important at a certain time.²⁹ However, most of my conclusions are based on conditional relationships instead of direct effects: for instance, do natives respond differently to immigration absorption in terms of their immigration opinion, based on their level of education? For reverse causality to be a threat to this type of claim, the reverse relationship should also be conditional on education level, which is theoretically highly unlikely.

In short, this dissertation is not meant as the final word in the academic debate about immigration absorption, anti-immigrant sentiment and the welfare state. Considering the limitations and explorative nature theoretically, methodologically and empirically, this dissertation rather opens such debates and humbly attempts to make contributions to the field. However, despite these limitations, the conclusions are based on thorough research and should be taken seriously. The measures that comprise my statistical models are based on substantive argumentation and my findings result from interpretations of state-of-the-art statistical analyses. The implications of different choices of measurement and modeling are provided as robustness checks. These principles contribute to making the claims as substantiated, transparent, replicable, and convincing as possible.

Implications

Beyond insights into academic debates and avenues for future research in political science, sociology, communication science and economics, this dissertation showcases promising opportunities for policy makers concerned with immigration, integration and social cohesion. For such policy makers, and for anyone who is in favor of equality, this dissertation tells a sobering story. It tells the story of how differences in social class between in-groups

²⁹ Studies into news values try to address this issue and indeed point to the role of the (perceived) interest of the public (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O'neill 2001).

and out-groups increases anti-immigrant sentiment and increases polarization between low- and high-educated natives. This dynamic does not appear to be mitigated by LMPs. However, the analyses also suggest paths to escape the cycle of immigrant marginalization, poor integration, anti-immigrant attitudes and polarization among natives.

First, there is the difference in the type of immigration absorption that has the biggest impact on immigration attitudes, namely the cultural side of the issue. This message emerges most clearly in Chapter Three, where Islam and terrorism framing of immigration in the media environment come out of the analysis as the stronger predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment than immigration-welfare frames. If this pattern captures a truth of immigration politics, that anti-immigrant sentiment is more strongly related to cultural than economic concerns, the absorption politics of immigration poses a distinct challenge for policy makers. Political debates about cultural immigration issues are deeply rooted, prove to be very complex and lead to strong reactions among the public. For instance, debates about the integration of Islam have torn political parties between the ideal of freedom of religion and the preservation of national identity in several Western European countries.

To navigate this type of policy dilemma, the reasons why people are afraid or angry when it comes to what they perceive as cultural threats should be identified. Are such threats related to language? To habits? To religion? Or are they more abstract and come closer to bigotry or racism? Of course, there might still be material interests behind those sentiments that are translated to cultural anxieties. But if so, how? Understanding the cultural threat is a vital next step for this literature given both its explanatory power regarding immigration attitudes and its ambiguous nature.

Second and finally, the LMPs in place are helping natives more than migrants and thereby hamper immigration absorption. But the extent to which this is so depends on whether the migrant is coming from an EU country, whether he or she is a citizen, and how long the migrant has spent in the host country. In other words, immigrant integration has a positive effect on the effectiveness of LMPs for immigrants, as Chapter Four shows. Immigrant integration, especially cultural integration, also has the potential to increase tolerance towards immigrants among lower educated natives, as Chapter Two argues. This implies that programs fostering the integration of migrants have the potential to serve as a double-edged sword by increasing the chances of getting paid work sooner after arrival and simultaneously decreasing anti-immigrant sentiment among lower educated natives. Despite this high potential of immigrant integration, this is still an underdeveloped area of research. Research on the effects of immigrant integration on racism or anti-immigrant sentiment is scarce (Givens 2007). Studies on the effect of immigrant integration on economic success are more common (e.g. Chiswick et al. 2005; Clark and Drinkwater 2008). It is important to

study what aspects of integration are most vital for labor market integration and for natives' perception of diversity, which may not necessarily be the same. All these matters may well be crucial to the extent and quality of absorption of immigration. And given the salience and sustained presence of immigration in contemporary polities, the academic agenda of this dissertation remains urgent for our political lives.