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Attitudes toward Asylum Seekers in Small Local Communities

Aslan Zorlu*

ABSTRACT

The admission and geographic distribution of asylum seekers has a central place in public discourse in Western countries, amid mounting asylum applications and dire humanitarian crises. Receiving countries usually distribute the newly arriving asylum seekers across the entire country, in particular for small remote communities. Incidental opposition actions by local residents against the siting of Asylum Seeker Centres (ASC) has created the perception of strong and widespread resistance in the public sphere. This article aims to assess this alleged backlash by examining attitudes toward asylum seekers in small local communities. Using data from three representative surveys conducted among residents in the vicinity of four ASCs in the Netherlands, the regression analysis shows a strikingly high willingness to host an ASC, in opposition to popularly assumed public opinion.

INTRODUCTION

Many developed Western countries are facing rising numbers of asylum applicants. The influx brings additional local and national challenges for coping with this humanitarian crisis. At times the discussion can become highly politicized and contentious (Finney and Robinson, 2008; Hubbard, 2005a; O'Rourke and Sinnott, 2006). The Netherlands, one of the more popular receiving destinations, seeks to better accommodate newcomers by allocating asylum seekers to small asylum seekers centres (ASCs) scattered across the country. This dispersal policy, aimed at spreading the burden, regularly faces resistance in local communities. This resistance, however, usually disappears once an ASC is established, with social unrest persisting over a longer time period only in a few cases (Lubbers et al., 2006).

Many local residents face a social dilemma: on the one hand, they want to “create space” for newcomers in need guided by humanitarian compassion and also reap economic benefits from the ASC, in particular for firms providing goods and services and for local residents who find additional employment. On the other hand, asylum seekers are placed in their “backyard” (ASC are usually sited at the edge of rural settlements) which may cause a direct burden, especially considering the large size of the asylum seeker population relative to the village. A typical ASC hosts people from up to forty different nationalities, with high turnover. Most asylum migrants stay in an ASC while their asylum applications are processed. Thus, the inhabitants of these small communities are exposed to a continuously changing and relatively large population of asylum seekers. Most

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local residents do not have any prior experience with people from the sending countries and tend to consider them as a single group.

Local inhabitants in these villages are not used to living with a relatively large group of immigrants. Also, asylum migrants have a drastically different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as socio-economic positions and daily life habits. They are fully dependent on public means for covering living costs, and enjoy only limited privacy in an ASC. They often are not very active, i.e. “killing time” while they wait for the decision. They are not allowed to work while in asylum procedure. Considering the potentially tense context, one might anticipate regular conflicts between the receiving communities and newcomers; however, systematic analyses of these potential conflicts are scarce. The literature that explores attitudes toward asylum migrants in small local communities includes studies on objections to ASCs (Hubbard, 2005a, 2005b; Lubbers et al., 2006) and the role of local media (Finney and Robinson, 2008).

This article assesses how local communities respond to the presence of a relatively large number of asylum migrants. Since the demographic and country of origin composition of the asylum seeker population changes continuously, attitudes toward asylum seekers reflect a view of a larger collective, rather than of a specific groups. In an attempt to understand the sources of these attitudes, this study also examines the differences at local and national levels. A first of its kind, this study employs locally conducted surveys to investigate the sources of attitudes toward asylum seekers in a small local context. The article uses a representative sample of more than 1,600 residents aged 16 to 80, who live within 10 km of an ASC.

ADMISSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

The policy of dispersing asylum seekers in rural areas aims to facilitate the reception of asylum seekers upon arrival. The location of ASCs is often determined through negotiations between municipalities and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). For a municipality, hosting an ASC brings powerful incentives. ASCs are often both big employers and customers of locally produced goods and services. In the Netherlands, plans to open an ASC can trigger strong resistance in some locations, as residents express concerns about the potentially detrimental effects of newcomers on their local community. Local and national media have broadcast opposition actions by local groups, such as heated discussions during public information evenings, throwing eggs at local politicians or even setting fire to the ASC site. These reports are influential in shaping public opinion, but how small local communities really feel and react to the arrival of an ASC has not been scientifically documented or assessed. Lubbers et al. (2006) studied the drivers behind objections to ASCs, using hypothetical questions. They report that there is a stronger objection to large centres compared to small centres. In general, responders with lower education levels show stronger opposition regardless of centre size, while people with higher incomes are more likely to object to large centres. This study also finds effects of neighbourhood conditions. Neighbourhoods with higher real estate values and municipalities with a higher share of low income residents appear to object more strongly to small centres.

Strikingly, local resident resistance usually fades away over time once an ASC is established. To explore this apparent paradox, this paper zooms into the attitudes of small local communities toward ASCs and asylum seekers after the centre is established and explores how the attitudes of local communities are shaped. What are the sources of negative and positive attitudes? Local residents bear direct social burdens by sharing the available resources (services and space) and face potential nuisances due to a relatively large asylum seeker population. The forced idleness of asylum seekers, who are mostly young men, further exasperates the situation. Contrary to the costs,

which are personally felt, the benefits of an ASC are more indirect. The municipality receives more money to spend on local services, so some households will enjoy indirect benefits. Moreover, both the costs and benefits are unequally distributed across households, depending on the intensity of resources-sharing with asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers usually leave the ASC for larger cities after gaining a residence permit (Zorlu and Mulder, 2007). Thus, they are only temporary residents and do not directly compete with the local population in local housing and labour markets.

EXPLAINING ATTITUDES TOWARD IMMIGRANTS

Even though, the literature on immigration provides empirical evidence on widespread anti-immigration sentiment, attitudes toward asylum seekers appears to be less negative than it suggests (O'Rourke and Sinnott, 2006; Coenders et al., 2012). Coenders et al. (2012) report that on average about half of the population resists immigration, although with significant differences between European countries. In the Netherlands more than 40 percent of the Dutch population reports negative attitudes toward asylum migrants.

Contact theory

This strand of the literature emphasizes the role of interpersonal contacts, arguing that contacts with immigrants has traditionally been seen as the most influential factor in explaining anti-immigration attitudes (Allport, 1954). Positive intergroup contacts are expected to reduce ethnic prejudice by countering preconceptions regarding the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of the "other" (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Contact theory describes several conditions under which interethnic contacts will yield more beneficial effects and reduce intergroup prejudice. Optimally, interethnic contacts should be personal, informal, on the basis of equal status, pursuing common goals without competition (inter-group cooperation), and supported by the authorities. More superficial and casual interethnic contacts, which do not satisfy these optimal conditions, also appear to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Impersonal exposure to ethnic groups in public space may create a feeling of public familiarity. Unlike positive contacts, negative and hostile contact has received much less attention. Negative contacts possibly create the reverse effect, increasing negative attitudes by confirming and even reinforcing preconceived opinions, and are potentially more influential than positive contacts (Vrij et al., 2003).

In order to better understand the effects of contacts with asylum seekers, we consider the motivation and location of contacts. Voluntary, informal and personal contacts that often occur at home or on the street may be positive contacts, while more formal contacts on the basis of unequal status, such as contacts at work or ASC, may be negative. Our first hypothesis links the location of contacts to attitudes: *Personal contacts with asylum seekers at home or public space will be associated with positive attitudes, while contacts at work or ASC will be associated with negative attitudes (H1).*

Perceived threat and ethnic competition

Negative attitudes toward immigrants are expected when the collective economic and cultural interests of the established community are threatened. Another strand of the literature concentrates on ethnic competition theory, which considers perceived threat as intrinsic to prejudice and anticipates ethnic threat to manifest itself at the collective level (Blumer, 1958; Blalock, 1967). Hostility toward immigrants is then triggered by a threat to collective resources or status rather than

individual interests. According to the theory, inter-group conflicts are mainly caused by perceived intergroup competition for scarce resources such as housing, social services, and economic benefits.

Our second hypothesis deals with the relationship between socio-economic background and attitudes: *Negative attitudes are likely to be prevalent among resident with a lower socio-economic position (H2).*

Another strand of the literature deconstructs the perceived threat into realistic and symbolic threats (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010). Realistic threats challenge scarce resources and the economic position of the majority group, i.e. competition over jobs, housing, public goods etc. Symbolic threats challenge the morals, values, and identity of the majority community. Immigrants who hold different norms, beliefs, and symbols can be seen as threatening to the cultural identity of local residents. Negative attitudes stem, in this case, from the cultural distance between the immigrant group and the host society, which is symbolized by differences in religion, language and appearance (race, clothing). Realistic and symbolic threats enhance anxiety and hence negative attitudes toward immigrants (Turner et al., 2008). Social psychological theories suggest that attitudes toward immigrants are rooted in national identification (Louis et al., 2007) or permanent and psychological distinctions between “us” and “them” (see Verkuyten, 2004; Scheepers et al., 2002)

Negative attitudes stem from the individual’s search to establish their own distinct and positive group identity. The need to establish a positive identity is in this case a major driving force behind forming negative attitudes toward immigrants. Identity concerns are probably correlated with symbolic threats; however, the specific contributions of perceived threat and group identity are hard to distinguish. It is likely that attempts to establish a positive Dutch identity are underpinned by considering immigrants as a threat to Dutch identity. The third hypothesis considers this relationship between attitudes and differences: *Negative attitudes will be strongly associated with a perceived threat to Dutch culture (H3).*

The role of local context

Social geography literature emphasises the role of context in shaping attitudes toward immigrants. A well-known approach is the Not In My BackYard (NIMBY) hypothesis, which suggests that negative attitudes toward immigrants are rooted in local context and stem from concerns about strictly local interests. While the necessity to accommodate migrants is accepted in principle, the main worry is the potential deterioration of local services and facilities, and the “selfish” desire to safeguard community interests.

Recently, the NIMBY concept has been linked to cultural racism, i.e. preserving “white” privilege by keeping immigrants out. Hubbard (2005a and 2005b) argues that community opposition to asylum seekers centres is mobilized in defence of white privilege, and can be seen as a type of cultural NIMBYism. The validity of the NIMBY concept, however, has been extensively criticised by social scientists. The main criticism is that it fails to show the co-existence of selfish desire to resist a facility and the acceptance of the necessity at the same time (Devine-Wright, 2009; Wolsink, 2006). Hubbard’s study has focused only on community opposition to siting ASC in the neighbourhood, which is the first part of the definition. It has failed to consider the second part of the definition, i.e. lack of objections to ASCs elsewhere. This second part distinguishes NIMBY from simple opposition.

ASC offer an excellent opportunity to examine NIMBY from a new perspective in local communities. We are able to test the NIMBY hypothesis by comparing the attitudes of residents in the vicinity of an ASC and those further away. Additionally, we can assess attitudes on both local and national level, to discover more about the co-existence of self-focused desire to resist a facility while accepting the general necessity at the same time. The fourth hypothesis considers the implications of NIMBY concept: *Residents who live closer to an ASC are more likely to hold negative attitudes, while their attitudes toward asylum seekers in general will not be necessarily negative (H4).*

DATA

This article uses three surveys and qualitative data collected among a random sample of residents living within a radius of 10 km from four ASCs in various regions of the country. This survey data was collected during fieldwork weeks of human geography students from the University of Amsterdam under close supervision: the first survey was conducted around ASC Ter Apel and ASC Musselkanaal in 2012, the second survey in ASC Burgum in 2013, and the last one around ASC Baexem in 2014. ASC Ter Apel and ASC Musselkanaal are quite close to each other but the function of ASCs and the locations are significantly different. ASC Ter Apel is the main national centre with multiple functions: registration of new arrivals, performing first checks, allocating asylum seekers to other centres, temporary housing and repatriation of declined applicants. It is the first address for asylum applications, together with Schiphol airport, and also the last station for those who await repatriation. ASC Ter Apel is a big centre located outside the village. ASC Musselkanaal is a regular centre located in the middle of the village, accommodating about 400 persons. ASC Baexem is also a regular centre like ASC Musselkanaal but located just outside the village. ASC Burgum hosts about 400 declined applicants with minors who are awaiting repatriation. The applicants are “temporarily” housed because they have small children, while the other declined applicants are denied housing accommodation.

The surveys are based on a random sample of populations aged 16 to 80 years using the same questionnaire. Table 1 shows the response, sample and underlying population for each year. The samples were randomly drawn from the municipal registries for the area. Each student filled in the questionnaires during face-to-face interviews with on average 20 respondents. Students visited each address at least twice within a week. The response rate varied from 30 to almost 40 per cent across all locations. An analysis of non-responses indicates that women and older persons are slightly overrepresented in our data, irrespective of location. The female and older persons’ bias is probably due to the higher likelihood that these people were at home in the daytime and during working days. Women and older respondents have typically more positive attitudes toward asylum seekers. This results in slight overestimation of positive attitudes; when controlled for gender and age, however, the bias disappears.

MEASURES OF DEPENDENT VARIABLES

We use two dependent variables to measure attitudes toward ASC and asylum seekers in general. Both variables are measured by a set of Likert scale statements to capture a more comprehensive scope of attitudes.

TABLE 1
SURVEY CHARACTERISTICS BY ASC LOCATIONS

Place (type of ASC)	Capacity	Population (16–80 years)	Random Sample	Response rate	Number of Respondents
	ASC (# persons)	Sampling frame	Sample		Response
Ter Apel (National)	1,850	5,350	653	39.8	260
Musselkanaal (ASC)	450	5,362	675	34.5	233
Burgum (Family)	450	17,396	1,998	35.7	713
Baexem (ASC)	425	11,508	1,402	30.0	421
Total N of observations used in the analysis					1627

The first variable, attitudes toward ASC, is ranked along five statements ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. These statements have a relatively good internal validity score (Cronbach's alpha = 0.699). In order to measure the direction of attitudes, coding of statements 4 and 5 is reversed so that positive attitudes are associated with higher values.

The following original statements on the Likert scale were used to construct *attASC* for attitudes toward the location of ASC:

- (+) I would like to see the ASC located in a more central place in the village.
- (+) It was a good choice to establish the ASC here.
- (+) The presence of the ASC brings economic advantages to the municipality.
- (-) I would like to see the ASC moved to another village or city.
- (-) I dislike meeting asylum seekers during my daily activities such as shopping and work.

To construct a good response variable to measure attitudes toward ASC, the scores of these five statements are summed up and the total scores are divided into three categories. When this rule is applied strictly, scores up to 10 reflect negative attitudes, scores between 20 and 25 positive attitudes, while neutral attitude have a score of 15. This rule, however, leaves "inconsistent" answers across the statements undefined, i.e. scores 10–14 and 16–19. Therefore, this rule is slightly relaxed to construct a response variable. The scores up to 13 are classified to reflect negative attitudes, while the scores 18 and higher are considered as positive attitudes. Neutral attitude is attached to scores 14–17. This classification significantly reduces information loss while clearly distinguishing between negative and positive attitudes.

The second variable, attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, is measured with eight statements ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. These statements show a good internal validity score (reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha = 0.77). The scores of statement 5 are reversed so that positive attitudes are associated with lower values.

The following original statements on the Likert scale were used to construct *attASYLM* for attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers:

- (-) The arrival of asylum seekers in the Netherlands is a threat to our culture.
- (-) The Netherlands has limited financial capacity to support the reception of asylum seekers.
- (-) I am worried that my environment will become worse with the arrival of asylum seekers.
- (-) I fear that my financial situation will deteriorate due to the presence of asylum seekers.
- (+) Most asylum seekers come to the Netherlands because their lives are threatened.
- (-) Most asylum seekers are in fact fortune seekers.
- (-) The Netherlands should stop the reception of asylum seekers.
- (-) The Netherlands should receive only asylum seekers with a background similar to Dutch culture.

The response variable measuring attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers is similarly constructed using these eight statements. One important difference is that these statements are formulated in the opposite direction of the earlier five statements, with lower scores reflecting positive attitudes and vice versa. After summing up the scores of all the statements, the total scores are divided into three categories, considering the range of positive and negative scores at the bottom and top of score distribution. Based on the scores of the eight statements, the total scores are classified into three categories: up to 16 reflect positive attitude, 17–24 reflect neutral, and scores 25 and higher indicate negative attitudes.

This classification of attitudes into three categories captures a broad field of attitudes and is more informative about positive and negative attitudes than the two-class classification often applied in earlier studies on attitudes (see Hayes and Dowds, 2006). Positive attitudes are clearly distinguished

from negative attitudes by the middle category (indifferent), which includes the largest part of the sample. Typically, many respondents are indifferent regarding ASC and the admission of asylum seekers.

Although the two dependent variables measure attitudes at local and national levels, they partly measure a similar concept. Table 2 shows a bivariate correlation of these variables. Attitudes at the two levels are highly correlated, as indicated by a high gamma coefficient (0.65). Individuals with negative (or positive) attitudes toward ASC appear to hold a similar view toward the admission of asylum seekers in general. Considering the magnitude of the gamma coefficient, we proceed to explore how attitudes are shaped at local and national levels.

Table 3 outlines the descriptive statistics of the explanatory variables. Age, education and attitudinal variables are constructed as factor variables consisting of three categories while all other variables are dummy variables. Mean values of the variables indicate that the sample is composed of individuals who are more likely relatively older (above mid-30) and have low-medium education. More than half (56%) of respondents are women, three-fourth are married, and 41 per cent have a child. Almost 40 per cent describe themselves as Christian. One-third of respondents were not born in the place where they currently reside. Looking at the socio-economic position (SEP), more than half of respondents are employed and 28 per cent are retired. Almost two-third of respondents live in an attractive house and a very large part is satisfied with their life environment. If respondents have contact with asylum seekers, this usually happens in public spaces and often through professional activities (work and institutions). Looking at attitudes, respondents tend to be somewhat internationally oriented. They disagreed with the negative statements suggesting that asylum seekers are a threat to Dutch culture and that no more asylum seekers should be admitted. A relatively small number of respondents feels uncomfortable with asylum seekers in their vicinity. Interestingly, a relatively small part of respondents is convinced of the economic advantages of ASCs.

EXPLAINING ATTITUDES TOWARD NEARBY ASCS

We examined the driving forces behind attitudes using regression analyses. Considering the three-category nature of the response variables, a multinomial logit estimator is used, assuming that this variable is nominal and it satisfies the assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA).

We estimate the probability of having negative and positive attitudes toward the ASC and asylum seekers with respect to neutral attitudes. To better understand the role of separate variables, we start with a baseline model of only five forms of contact with asylum seekers (see Table 3). We add

TABLE 2

CORRELATION BETWEEN ATTITUDES TOWARD ASC AND ADMISSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

Attitudes toward ASC	Attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers				N
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
	%	%	%	%	
Negative	61	29	10	100	260
Neutral	20	66	14	100	746
Positive	6	51	43	100	621
Total	21	55	24	100	1,627

gamma = 0.6509 (p = 0.027)

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF VARIABLES

		Obs	Mean	S.d.	Min	Max
Demography	Age (1 = 16–35; 2 = 36–60; 3 = 61–80)	1,627	2.17	0.74	1	3
	Education (1 = low; 2 = med; 3 = high)	1,627	1.85	0.81	1	3
SEP	Woman	1,627	0.56	0.50	0	1
	Married	1,627	0.75	0.43	0	1
	Child in household	1,627	0.41	0.49	0	1
	Christian	1,627	0.39	0.49	0	1
	Newcomer	1,627	0.33	0.47	0	1
	Retired	1,627	0.28	0.45	0	1
	Employed	1,627	0.52	0.50	0	1
	Unhealthy	1,627	0.18	0.38	0	1
	Attractive house	1,627	0.63	0.48	0	1
	Satisfied with neighbourhood	1,627	0.85	0.35	0	1
Place	Groningen-TerApel	1,627	0.16	0.37	0	1
	Groningen-Mussekkan	1,627	0.14	0.35	0	1
	Friesland-Burgum	1,627	0.22	0.41	0	1
	Friesland-Hurdegaryp	1,627	0.10	0.30	0	1
	Friesland-AndersBurgum	1,627	0.12	0.32	0	1
	Limburg-Baexem	1,627	0.04	0.21	0	1
	Limburg-Heythuysen	1,627	0.11	0.32	0	1
	Limburg-HornGrathem	1,627	0.10	0.30	0	1
Contact	contact at home	1,627	0.10	0.30	0	1
	contact at work	1,627	0.22	0.41	0	1
	contact in ASC	1,627	0.09	0.29	0	1
	contact in public	1,627	0.70	0.46	0	1
	contact through institution	1,627	0.17	0.37	0	1
Attitudes	Orientation (1 = National; 2 = Neutral; 3 = International)	1,620	2.02	0.58	1	3
	Threat to Dutch culture (1 = Disagree; 2 = Neutral; 3 = Agree)	1,613	1.75	0.86	1	3
	No more asylum seekers (1 = Disagree; 2 = Neutral; 3 = Agree)	1,612	1.52	0.79	1	3
	ASC should move (1 = Disagree; 2 = Neutral; 3 = Agree)	1,614	1.37	0.66	1	3
	Uncomfortable with AS. (1 = Disagree; 2 = Neutral; 3 = Agree)	1,611	1.30	0.63	1	3
	Economic advantages of ASC (1 = Disagree; 2 = Neutral; 3 = Agree)	1,627	1.85	0.81	1	3

location, distance, demographic, household and socio-economic characteristics in Model 2. Model 3 also includes neighbourhood satisfaction and international orientation. The most extensive Model 4 includes two additional opinion variables that are used to construct the macro level *attASYLM* variable: ending admission of asylum seekers (statement 7) and perceived threat to Dutch culture (statement 1).

Table 4 presents the results. For the sake of simplicity, we present relative risk ratios (RRR) which are in fact odds ratios for multinomial logit models. The reference point for RRR is 1; for coefficients it is 0. If the RRR for a variable is higher than 1, this indicates a higher probability of being in the associated state with respect to the reference state. In case of $RRR < 1$, the probability

TABLE 4
MULTINOMIAL LOGIT ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS ASC (RRR, NEUTRAL AS BASE CATEGORY)

	Negative				Positive			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Contact								
at home	1.804**	1.796**	1.827**	1.805*	1.856***	1.796***	1.854***	1.886***
at work	1.356*	1.590**	1.533**	1.713**	1.172	1.156	1.201	1.232
at ASC	0.675	0.644	0.621	0.833	1.007	0.934	0.929	0.888
in public space	0.746*	0.852	0.829	0.959	1.388***	1.274*	1.278*	1.296*
at school or sports club	1.039	0.959	1.025	1.041	0.793	0.834	0.828	0.841
Location								
1 Ter Apel (Ref)								
2 Musselkanaal		0.831	0.789	0.753		0.448***	0.482***	0.464***
3 Burgum		0.740	0.796	0.812		0.991	0.893	0.787
4 Hurdegaryp		0.430**	0.474*	0.446*		0.827	0.710	0.622*
5 AndersBurgum		0.900	1.066	0.961		0.912	0.794	0.781
6 Baexem		0.457*	0.556	0.612		0.478**	0.405***	0.365***
7 Heythuysen		1.307	1.332	1.328		0.689	0.632*	0.575*
8 Horn/Grathem		0.428**	0.431**	0.418**		0.584**	0.532**	0.493***
Distance from ASC (km)		0.938	0.938	0.938		1.018	1.032	1.050
Demography and Household								
Woman		0.873	0.898	0.898		0.938	0.987	0.997
Married		1.051	0.963	0.963		1.032	1.042	1.088
Child in household		0.768	0.814	0.814		0.866	0.895	0.879
Christian		0.783	0.866	0.866		1.140	1.089	1.089
Unhealthy		1.446*	1.378	1.378		1.004	1.046	1.066
Newcomer		0.892	0.891	0.891		0.879	0.856	0.797*
Age 16–35 years old		2.027**	2.105**	2.105**		0.739	0.728	0.722
Age 36–60 years old		1.318	1.365	1.365		1.227	1.294	1.293
Age 61–80 years old (ref.)								

TABLE 4
(CONTINUED)

	Negative				Positive			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
SEP								
Education Low (ref.)		1.012	1.004	1.004	0.960	0.953	0.921	
Education Medium		0.498***	0.580**	0.580**	1.672***	1.420**	1.179	
Education High		0.662	0.703	0.703	1.292	1.294	1.236	
Retired		0.754	0.750	0.750	1.142	1.142	1.105	
Employed		0.626***	0.647***	0.647***	1.013	0.971	0.954	
Attractive house with neighborhood			0.837	0.837		1.774***	1.701***	
National								
Neutral			0.425***	0.651**		1.186	0.854	
International			0.144***	0.368**		3.419***	1.868***	
Disagree (ref.)								
Neutral				1.469*			0.440***	
Agree				5.222***			0.706	
Disagree (ref.)								
Neutral				1.454			0.403***	
Agree				2.512***			0.324***	
Constant	0.384***	0.923	1.965	0.215***	0.624***	0.619	0.273***	0.764
ll	-1.6e+03	-1.5e+03	-1.5e+03	-1.1e+03				
aic	3302	3188	3047	2375				
bic	3367	3479	3370	2762				
r2_p	0.011	0.066	0.108	0.307				
N	1627	1618	1611	1590				

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

of being in the associated state is lower with respect to the reference state. Considering the first model, for example, the RRR for contact at home is 1.804 for negative attitudes and 1.856 for positive ones. This means that individuals who have contact with asylum seekers at home are more likely either negative or positive with respect to the state neutral. In other words, the odds of being in the negative and positive states are 1.8 times higher than the neutral state.

Looking at the RRR's for types of personal contacts, three types of contacts are significantly correlated with attitudes toward ASCs. Individuals who have contact with asylum seekers at home are more likely to hold either negative or positive attitudes than neutral. Individuals who have contact with asylum seekers at work are more likely to hold negative attitudes than neutral attitudes; more importantly, however, they are not less likely to hold positive attitudes. Contacts at a public space are significantly positively correlated with positive attitudes. The estimated RRR's are similar across the models, and their significance levels remain stable. The contact variables are not correlated with our independent variables, i.e. the effects of contact are robust for all background variables. These results largely confirm the first hypothesis (H1), which supposes a positive correlation between informal personal contacts at home and public spaces and positive attitude toward ASC as well as a negative correlation between workplace contacts and positive attitudes. Interestingly, home contacts are also associated with negative attitudes. This suggests personal contact with asylum seekers is in itself not necessarily associated with positive attitudes.

Considering the effect of socio-economic background, two variables are statistically significant: education and the appearance of one's home (proxy indicator for affluence). The coefficient for higher education indicates that the group with highest education level (college degree or higher) is less likely to be negative and more likely to be positive toward ASC. The attractive house coefficient is significant only for negative attitudes. People with an attractive house are less likely to be negative but are not necessarily positive. These findings clearly confirm the second hypothesis (H2), which links a strong socio-economic position to positive attitudes toward asylum seekers and vice versa.

Our findings for the variables distance between the residential location and location of ASCs are not statistically significant. This suggests that there is no solid evidence to back the presumed negative correlation between location of residence and ASC. People who live closer to an ASC are not necessarily more negative or less positive toward asylum seekers because they may bear a larger share of the direct burdens of asylum seekers. This finding clearly rejects our NIMBY hypothesis (H4). To further assess this finding, we ran different versions of models considering distance variable location in non-linear forms and excluding location-fixed effects, and the outcomes confirmed this conclusion.

As the results for the variable measuring threat to Dutch culture are tested, the RRR for this variable is highly significant and confirms the third hypothesis (H3). Individuals who see the arrival of asylum seekers in the Netherlands as a threat to Dutch culture are more likely to be negative and less likely to be positive. Strikingly, the inclusion of this variable, and other opinion variables, did not significantly change the values of the other parameters. This means that the effect of perceived threat is not affected by all background variables included in our models. If it is more prevalent among the less affluent, according to popular belief, its effect should have disappeared after controlling for socio-economic background.

The assessment of location-based effects gives a mixed picture about attitudes. Residents of the villages Hurdegaryp and Horn/Grathem, located further away from ASCs, are less likely to be negative than Ter Apel, the reference case. However, these residents are not necessarily more positive than the reference group. Residents of the two other villages located near ASCs, Musselkanaal and Baexem are less likely to express positive attitudes than people from Ter Apel. The findings also hold true for residents of Horn/Grathem. As mentioned in the data section, Ter Apel hosts the largest facility, while Musselkanaal and Baexem are villages with relatively small ASCs. It is reasonable to expect that the residents of Ter Apel might be more likely to express negative and less

likely to hold positive attitudes because the risk of nuisance, sense of threat and anxiety would probably be the greatest. We also expected that residents of other villages further away from ASCs would be less positive. This assumption was not confirmed. There is not even any indication of difference in attitudes between Ter Apel and Burgum, the village with ASC hosting families with minors, perhaps the ASC location with the least “problems” among all surveyed locations. Strikingly, their responses are also less likely to be positive, which suggests support of the NIMBY hypothesis. However, residents in almost all locations, except Heythuizen, are less likely to have negative attitudes than those in Ter Apel. These results suggest that the residential distance from ASC is of minor importance in shaping attitudes toward ASCs. It is likely that some other unobserved location-specific characteristics play a more important role.

Musselkanaal and Ter Apel are two very close but quite different locations. A high concentration of residents with low social and economic profile, compounded by prevailing pessimism and desperation, are possibly the reason behind the more negative attitudes toward ASC in Musselkanaal. On the other hand, less positive attitudes in the Limburg region, Baexem, Heythuizen and Horn/Grathem are likely a regional issue, connected to recently emerging anti-immigration sentiments. The anti-immigration Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders gained significant support in this region. It is worth noting that the residents of this region are not necessarily more negative. The residents of Horn/Grathem are even less likely hold negative views. The apparently more neutral attitudes in this region could be interpreted as passive support for the reception of asylum seekers in this region.

When other control variables in the models are considered, several results stand out. Among demographic characteristics, only age is statistically significant. Strikingly, young people (16–35 years old) hold more negative attitudes toward ASC. This confirms the earlier finding of Lubbers et al. (2006), who found that young people are more likely to object to an ASC project than older respondents. This implies that young people may see asylum seekers in their neighbourhood as a threat and new actors in a competition for scarce resources. Alternatively, young residents could have more negative contacts with the asylum seekers, such as loitering and petty crime. Moreover, negative attitudes of young people might be driven by a selection effect: young people who are more positive toward ASC could have already left for large cities while those with more negative predisposition remained in these rural areas. The more negative attitudes of young people at local level cannot be generalized to other contexts. Comparing attitudes toward immigration in European countries, Facchini and Mayda (2009) find that older individuals are less likely to favour immigration flows. The focus of this study is, however, not on asylum migration but on immigration flows in general. In this case, the negative attitudes of older individuals may be driven by concerns about the potential net burden of immigration to the welfare state. High-income individuals tend to oppose immigration when immigration flows are low-skilled and therefore perceived as a net-burden on the welfare state. It is more likely that older people earn more income and pay more taxes. In our case, the negative attitudes of young people may stem from concerns about their future, driven by the perceived net burden of asylum migrants (at least in the short run) or feelings of defending their community against foreign influences and “invaders”.

Our estimates for the remaining opinion variables are in line with expectations, and are very pronounced. Residents who are satisfied with their neighbourhood are positively predisposed toward ASCs. Internationally oriented individuals are significantly less likely to be negative and more likely to be positive than those who have a clear national orientation. Neutral individuals, without a national or international orientation, are less likely negative but are not significantly positive. Respondents who are against the admission of more asylum seekers also have significantly more negative attitudes toward ASCs. The distinctive feature of our findings is that the mentioned opinion variables seem to be very important in shaping attitudes at both local and national levels, given the observed demographic and socio-economic variables.

EXPLAINING ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ADMISSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

While attitudes toward having an ASC nearby may be rooted in local context, attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers on the national level may be driven by general concepts, such as nationalistic ideologies or racial, ethnic antagonism. If indeed residents are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward asylum seekers at the local level than at the national level, the findings would support the NIMBY hypothesis. However, the descriptive statistics indicate the opposite: the likelihood of having negative attitudes toward ASCs is lower than the likelihood of having negative attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers on the national level (see table 3). These differences, however, could be eliminated by our observed variables when attitudes are correlated with demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the local residents.

We will examine now the probability of negative and positive attitudes toward the general policy, the admission of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. Again, the strength of the neutral attitudes serves as a reference. Similar to the attitudes toward ASCs, we utilize four different models, adding stepwise the groups of variables. In this analysis, the set of variables is only different for the fourth model. For the first three models the same variables are used, allowing us to compare the effects of explanatory variables on attitudes toward asylum seekers between the local and the national level. The last model (Model 4), however, includes three different variables. The first variable measures attitudes regarding location: “ASC should move to another location” (statement 4). The second variable measures the degree of feeling comfortable when meeting asylum seekers in public space (statement 5). The third variable measures whether a person perceives economic advantages of having an ASC in their community. These variables link local context to attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers on the national level.

Table 5 shows the results from a multinomial logit assessment of attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers. Compared with the measurements of attitudes on the location of ASC, these are less pronounced. Any sort of contact with asylum seekers has no significant effect on attitudes toward their admission. Only locations in Friesland seem to be less likely to hold negative attitudes. Differences in the likelihood of positive attitudes are not statistically significant. Newcomers, i.e. residents who did not grow up in the current location, are more likely to hold positive attitudes. The effects of the variables measuring socio-economic position are quite similar to the results in Table 4. Individuals with higher education, residents living in an attractive house, and residents with high neighbourhood satisfaction are less likely to hold negative attitudes. On the national level, young people do not show significantly different views from old people. This finding underlines the conclusion of perceived competition and threat by young people at the local level.

The opinion variables indicate similar effects as in the local case. Residents who feel uncomfortable encountering asylum seekers in a public area, who oppose the admission of asylum seekers and who do not see any economic advantage of the ASC in their vicinity, are more likely to report negative and less likely to report positive opinions. The attitudes of residents with an international orientation are shaped the other way around. They are more likely to have a positive and less likely to have a negative view of asylum seekers. Regarding the large size of this effect and their robustness to all observed variables, these opinion variables point to persistent anti-immigration attitudes at both levels, as suggested by social psychological theories.

LINKS BETWEEN ATTITUDES AT LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

The separate analysis of attitudes toward ASC and the admission of asylum seekers shows that attitudinal variables have a much stronger predictive power than socio-economic variables. Hence,

TABLE 5
MULTINOMIAL LOGIT ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ADMISSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE NETHERLANDS (RRR, NEUTRAL AS BASE CATEGORY)

	Negative				Positive				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	
Contact	at home	0.979	0.984	0.976	0.863	1.240	1.171	1.176	1.149
	at work	0.811	0.949	0.864	0.780	1.047	0.985	1.037	1.003
	at ASC	1.005	1.072	1.094	1.210	1.328	1.141	1.137	1.265
	in a public space	0.897	1.276	1.243	1.207	1.377**	1.204	1.181	1.239
	at school or sports club	1.077	1.187	1.289	1.237	0.983	0.972	0.975	1.014
	1 Ter Apel (Ref)								
	2 Musselkanaal	0.758	0.639*	0.639*	0.733	0.859	0.859	0.970	0.899
	3 Burgum	0.382***	0.389***	0.389***	0.524**	1.652**	1.652**	1.655**	1.420
	4 Hurdegaryp	0.413***	0.475**	0.475**	0.592	0.946	0.946	0.827	0.733
	5 AndersBurgum	0.391***	0.423***	0.423***	0.419**	1.072	1.072	0.974	0.878
6 Baexem	0.352**	0.405**	0.405**	0.515	1.407	1.407	1.313	1.279	
7 Heythuysen	0.786	0.760	0.760	0.700	0.932	0.932	0.930	0.866	
8 Horn/Grathem	0.646	0.607	0.607	0.765	1.236	1.236	1.186	1.186	
from ASC (km)	0.934	0.934	0.934	0.998	1.047	1.047	1.070	1.070	
Demography	0.972	0.963	0.963	0.979	0.883	0.883	0.918	0.901	
and	0.901	0.794	0.794	0.814	0.926	0.926	0.948	0.945	
Household	0.766*	0.787	0.787	0.787	0.945	0.945	0.975	0.928	
Child in household	0.791	0.960	0.960	0.977	0.847	0.847	0.803	0.760*	
Christian	1.320	1.227	1.227	1.150	0.973	0.973	1.043	0.931	
Unhealthy	1.106	1.073	1.073	1.167	1.566***	1.566***	1.558***	1.653***	
Newcomer	0.917	0.954	0.954	0.667	0.736	0.736	0.731	0.861	
Age 16–35 years old	0.701	0.701	0.729	0.650	0.825	0.825	0.866	0.951	
Age 36–60 years old									
Age 61–80									
years old (ref.)									
Education Low (ref.)									
Education Medium	1.235	1.249	1.249	1.344*	0.964	0.964	0.932	0.971	
Education High	0.409***	0.496***	0.496***	0.602**	1.507***	1.507***	1.198	1.206	
Retired	0.749	0.842	0.842	0.978	1.139	1.139	1.185	1.234	
Employed	0.992	1.034	1.034	1.151	1.098	1.098	1.132	1.124	
Attractive house	0.675***	0.713**	0.713**	0.807	1.048	1.048	1.022	1.021	
SEP									

TABLE 5
(CONTINUED)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Negative				Positive			
Satisfied Orientation			0.576***	0.703*			1.331	1.286
ASC should move			0.333***	0.378***			1.419	1.300
Uncomfortable with asylum seekers			0.055***	0.082***			4.625***	3.816***
Economic advantages of ASC				1.942***				0.404***
				5.523***				0.754
				2.154***				0.135***
				5.662***				0.432*
				0.864				1.221
				1.500**				0.646**
				1.091			0.332***	0.110***
Constant	0.428***	1.433	5.330***	-1.2e+03				
ll	-1.6e+03	-1.5e+03	-1.4e+03	2599				
aic	3267	3156	2933	2986				
bic	3331	3447	3256					
r2_p	0.005	0.060	0.128					
N	1627	1618	1611	1591				

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Models 1–3 in Tables 4 and 5 account for only a small part of the variation, while the most extensive model 4 with attitudinal variables captures a substantial part of variation. Model 4 in Table 4 relates national concerns to attitudes toward ASC while the Model 4 in Table 5 relates local concerns to attitudes toward admission of asylum seekers. The estimates indicate a strong correlation between concerns and attitudes at local and national levels. While this is the anticipated outcome, our estimates might be biased since our variables approximating concerns are potentially endogenous. In other words, the causality does not flow only from concerns toward attitudes but also in the opposite direction. We address the interrelatedness of attitudes at local and national levels and concerns by simultaneously estimating the probability of negative attitudes toward ASCs and the admission of asylum seekers. A standard bivariate probit model serves to estimate these two processes and account for the correlation between unobserved variations of the two models. Therefore, our categorical dependent variables should be transformed into dummy variables. We recoded our dependent variables *attASC* and *attASYLM* into dummy variables: the dummy variable, *attASC2*, measuring negative attitudes toward the location of ASC takes 1 if attitudes are negative and 0 if otherwise. Similarly, the dummy variable *attASYLM2* takes 1 if attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers are negative, 0 otherwise. We then estimate the probability of negative attitudes at local and national levels simultaneously by bivariate probit estimator:

$$\begin{aligned}\Pr(\text{attASC}_i = 1) &= \beta X_i + \delta Z_i + \varepsilon_{1i} \\ \Pr(\text{attASYLM}_i = 1) &= \beta X_i + \delta Z_i + \varepsilon_{2i} \\ \text{Cov}(\varepsilon_{1i}, \varepsilon_{2i}) &= \rho\end{aligned}$$

X_i and Z_i indicate vectors of individual (demographic and socio-economic) characteristics and attitudinal variables; ε_{1i} and ε_{2i} represent error terms that are assumed to be normally distributed, $(\varepsilon_{1i}, \varepsilon_{2i}) \sim N(0, \Sigma)$.

To uncover separate contributions of individual characteristics and attitudinal variables that are expected to shape preferences, we apply a two-step procedure. Firstly, we estimate a bivariate probit model using individual characteristics (similar to Model 3 in Tables 4 and 5) that are more likely exogenous. Subsequently, we estimate another bivariate probit model which includes the same attitudinal variables as in Model 4 in both Table 4 and Table 5.

The estimation of these two models is presented in Table 6. The Wald test of $\rho = 0$ at the bottom of Table 6 suggests that error terms of two models $(\varepsilon_{1i}, \varepsilon_{2i})$ are significantly correlated, justifying the simultaneous estimation of attitudes at both levels. The estimation results indicate that our main conclusions remain similar to the results from the separate multinomial logit models: Young individuals are more likely to have negative attitudes toward ASC at local level, while highly educated individual are less likely to be negative toward the admission of asylum seekers, but are not necessarily in favour of ASC at local level. In addition, attitudinal variables approximating local concerns are strong predictors of attitudes at national level, while national concerns seem to shape local attitudes. Some coefficients of socio-economic variables in the first model with only individual characteristics are statistically significant but they turn out to be insignificant after including attitudinal variables in Model 2. For example; the coefficients for higher education (only in the equation for attitudes toward ASC) and an attractive house (in both equations) become insignificant in Model 2 after attitudinal variables are included. This underlines the importance of this last group of variables.

To explore the impact of the attitudinal variables, we predict the probabilities for four outcomes by age and education, based on Models 1 and 2. Age and education levels are perhaps the most interesting individual variables. The four components of probability are as follows:

TABLE 6
BIVARIATE PROBIT MODELS OF ATTITUDES TOWARD ASC AND THE ADMISSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS. COEFFICIENTS.

Pr(Negative attitude toward ASC)	Pr(Negative attitude toward admission)	
	Model 1	Model 2
Age 16–35 years old	0.444***	0.541***
Age 36–60 years old	0.122	0.280*
Age 61–80 years old (ref.)		
Education Low (ref.)	0.023	0.194*
Education Medium	–0.481***	0.064
Education High		
Ter Apel (Ref)		
Mussekanaal	0.086	–0.048
Burgum	–0.192	–0.049
Hurdegaryp	–0.460**	–0.306
AndersBurgum	–0.109	–0.066
Baexem	–0.257	–0.145
Heythuysen	0.149	0.146
Horn/Grathem	–0.387**	–0.333
Distance from ASC (km)	–0.023	–0.04
Woman	–0.057	–0.072
Married	0.011	0.042
Child in household	–0.101	–0.093
Christian	–0.148*	–0.137
Newcomer	–0.031	–0.002
Unhealthy	0.204**	0.106
Retired	–0.250*	–0.276
Employed	–0.156	–0.131
Attractive house	–0.276***	–0.071
Satisfied with neighbh.		–0.101
Contact at home		0.17
Contact at work		0.2
Contact at ASC		–0.113
Contact in public space		–0.069
Contact at school/sport		0.082
Oriental. (National:ref.)		
Neutral		–0.184*
International		–0.610***
	Model 1	Model 2
Age 16–35 years old	0.022	–0.232
Age 36–60 years old	–0.154	–0.221
Age 61–80 years old (ref.)		
Education Low (ref.)	0.12	0.157
Education Medium	–0.563***	–0.270**
Education High		
Ter Apel (Ref)		
Mussekanaal	–0.144	–0.234
Burgum	–0.585***	–0.405**
Hurdegaryp	–0.463***	–0.315
AndersBurgum	–0.510***	–0.457**
Baexem	–0.589***	–0.406
Heythuysen	–0.117	–0.24
Horn/Grathem	–0.277*	–0.243
Distance from ASC (km)	–0.038	–0.007
Woman	–0.012	0.03
Married	–0.042	–0.095
Child in household	–0.137	–0.104
Christian	–0.095	0.053
Newcomer	–0.011	0.054
Unhealthy	0.185**	0.07
Retired	–0.18	–0.005
Employed	–0.033	0.05
Attractive house	–0.244***	–0.094
Satisfied with neighbh.		–0.173
Contact at home		–0.061
Contact at work		–0.147
Contact at ASC		0.1
Contact in public space		0.067
Contact at school/sport		0.134
Oriental. (National:ref.)		
Neutral		–0.529***
International		–1.445***

TABLE 6
(CONTINUED)

	Pr(Negative attitude toward ASC)		Pr(Negative attitude toward admission)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
No more AS (Disagr.:ref.)				
Neutral		0.455***	ASC should move (Disagr.ref.)	0.546***
Agree		1.196***	Neutral	1.321***
Threat Dutch (Disagr.:ref.)			Uncomfort. with AS (Disagr.ref.)	
Neutral		0.478***	Neutral	0.703***
Agree		0.915***	Agree	1.240***
Constant	-0.485**	-1.528***	Economic advan. (Disagr.ref.)	
			Neutral	-0.019
			Disagree	0.454***
			Constant	-0.365
rho	0.649***	-0.425***		
ll	1317.83	-1015.27		
N	1618	1578		
				0.063

$\Pr(attASC2 = 0 \text{ and } attASYLM2 = 0)$: attitudes toward ASC and the admission of asylum seekers are not negative;

$\Pr(attASC2 = 0 \text{ and } attASYLM2 = 1)$: attitudes toward ASC are not negative, and attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers are negative;

$\Pr(attASC2 = 1 \text{ and } attASYLM2 = 0)$: attitudes toward ASC are negative, and attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers are not negative;

$\Pr(attASC2 = 1 \text{ and } attASYLM2 = 1)$: attitudes toward ASC and the admission of asylum seekers are negative.

The distributions of the predicted probabilities by age and education are given in Figure 1. A comparison of the predictions from the first and second models indicates that the share of non-negative attitudes at local and national levels increases for the age groups, in particular for older people when attitudinal variables are included in model 2. Interestingly, there is a significant increase in the relative share of negative attitudes for young and middle age categories at local and national levels at the same time (IV), at expense of negative attitude at either local or national level (II and III). Including attitudinal variables in model 2 leads to a decrease in the probability of

FIGURE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF THE PREDICTED PROBABILITIES BY AGE AND EDUCATION LEVEL, OBTAINED FROM MODEL 1 AND 2 IN TABLE 6.

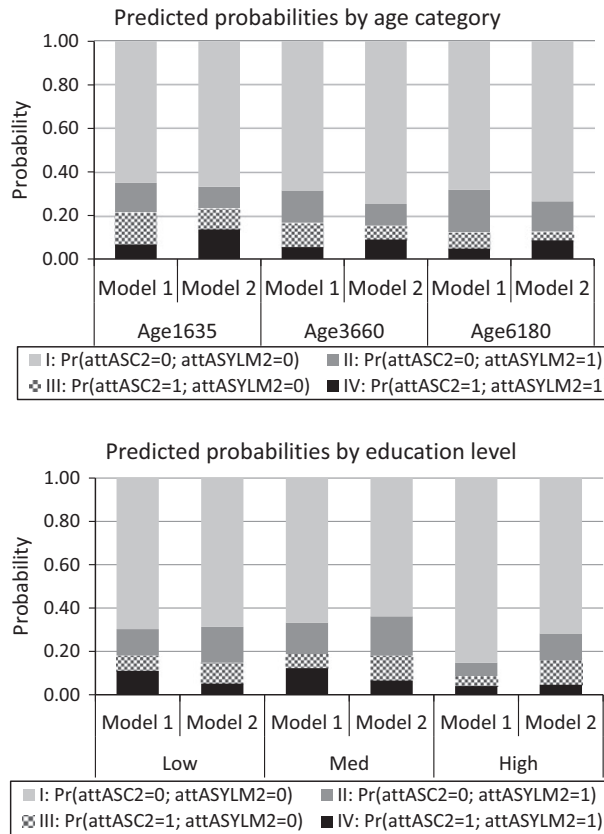
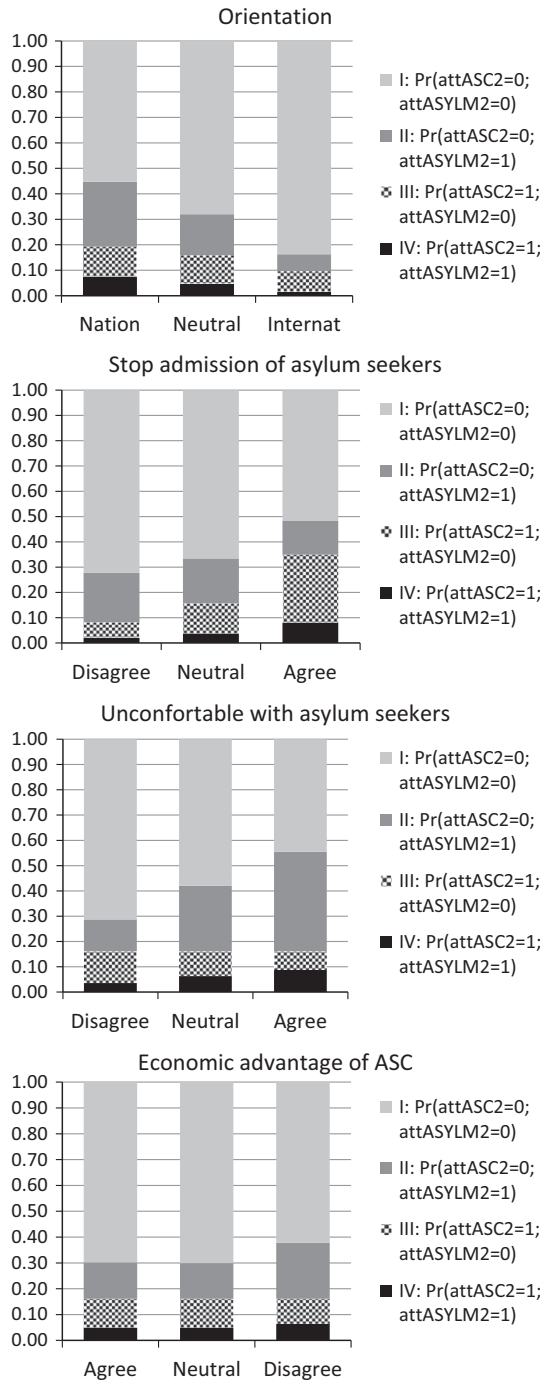


FIGURE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF THE PREDICTED PROBABILITIES BY ATTITUDINAL VARIABLES, OBTAINED FROM MODEL 2 IN TABLE 6.



positive attitudes (I) (non-negative) for individuals with secondary and especially higher-education while the probability of negative attitudes at either local or national level (II and III) increases.

Similarly, we also calculated the predicted probabilities for the attitudinal variables from Model 2 in Table 6 to see the correlations between local and national level attitudes. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the predicted probabilities for these variables. There is a strong correlation between concerns and attitudes, even after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Respondents who are more nationally oriented, i.e. attaching more importance to national interests than to international solidarity and who do not perceive the economic advantages of ASC, often have negative attitudes. Individuals who agree with negative statements such as “no more admission of asylum seekers” and “feeling uncomfortable with asylum seekers” are more likely to have negative attitudes.

CONCLUSIONS

This article examines the attitudes of residents toward asylum seekers in a small local context using four unique survey datasets, collected within a 10 km radius of four asylum seeker centres. We assess the likelihood of respondents holding having positive and negative attitudes with respect to neutral attitudes. This approach was selected as it helps to represent the likelihood of holding an extreme view with respect to neutral, without inflating the effects.

The analysis provides three major conclusions about the sources of negative and positive attitudes. First, personal contacts with asylum seekers at work strengthen negative attitudes toward ASCs, while contacts in public space are associated with a higher likelihood of having positive attitudes. This confirms our first hypothesis (H1) of a positive correlation between personal contacts and positive attitudes, which is in line with contact theory. Personal contacts with asylum seekers at home are correlated with both having negative and positive attitudes with respect to neutral. This interesting result may indicate successful or unsuccessful attempts to make close contacts with asylum seekers. These results follow the predictions of contact theory that effects of interethnic contacts critically depend on the nature and purpose of contacts. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, since the estimated correlation between contacts and attitudes is not necessarily causal.

Second, there is a clear correlation between socio-economic status and attitudes. Persons who enjoy stronger socio-economic security are significantly less likely to hold negative attitudes toward both having an ASC nearby and the admission of asylum seekers in general, as predicted by ethnic competition theory. This result confirms the second hypothesis (H2) of a positive correlation between affluent socio-economic position and positive attitudes. In particular, people with a completed college or university education are more likely to hold positive attitudes and less likely to hold negative attitudes than those with low and medium education.

Third, people who live closer to ASCs, and hence are more likely to face the social burdens of asylum seekers, are not necessarily more negatively predisposed toward ASCs than people who live further away. This finding suggests a negation of the NIMBY hypothesis (H4), at least when strictly considering a 10 km radius. However, we find indirect and weak support for this hypothesis when the estimates of attitudes toward both the location of ASCs and the admission of asylum seekers are considered and the distance limit of within 10 km is relaxed.

Finally, some opinions persist even when holding constant all the observed individual and contextual variables important for shaping attitudes. People who perceive asylum seekers as a threat to Dutch culture, and those who are national-oriented and who have a predetermined negative attitude toward asylum seekers, are more likely to be negatively and less likely positively predisposed at both local and national levels. This is a clear support for the third hypothesis of a negative

correlation between perceived threat and favourable attitudes toward asylum seekers (H3). On the other hand, internationally oriented respondents, i.e. those concerned about European and global problems, displayed much more positive attitudes toward migrants. Also people who see economic advantages in hosting ASCs are more positive and less negative. Since the impact of these opinion variables is strong and robust, we tend to interpret the effects of these variables as an ideological issue. Attitudes are possibly largely shaped by social identity considerations.

Overall, this article contributes to the literature by assessing attitudes toward asylum seekers in small local communities using a unique survey. Our findings suggest that attitudes toward asylum seekers are not more negative than the national average in small rural locations that host an ASC. Small communities with little or no experience with immigrants are not necessarily strongly opposed to the admission of asylum seekers. Attitudes toward asylum seekers at the local context are shaped by socio-economic position, international orientation, interpersonal contacts, perceived threat to Dutch culture and the perceived economic benefits of ASCs. The predominantly positive and neutral attitudes toward asylum seekers imply the presence of significant support for the reception of asylum seekers in local communities in the Netherlands. This finding suggests that the scope and impact of local resistance against the siting of ASCs is not as big as the impression created in media. If respondents responded in a socially desirable way, our measure of negative attitudes might be underestimated. However, closely monitoring of the data collection in different locations and selectivity checks of responses do not indicate systematic measurement errors. The public impression of a local resistance is probably the a success of an opposition organized by a relatively small group of opponents who are not necessarily local residents.

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