Lewis Davis and Sumit S. Deole

Immigration and the Rise of Far-Right Parties in Europe

Lewis Davis
Union College.

Sumit S. Deole
Martin-Luther-University
Halle-Wittenberg.

INTRODUCTION

The immigrant share of the population has risen substantially in most European countries since the beginning of the century. Figure 1 shows this rise for selected countries between 2002 and 2014. Not only is the immigrant share of the population high in absolute terms, exceeding 10% in a majority of the countries in the Figure, but in many cases it has increased quite rapidly, with growth exceeding 50% for several countries during this period. While the rapid increase in the immigrant share of the population has posed major policy challenges for European countries, involving assimilation, education, and employment, inter alia; for many observers the more fundamental challenge has been the coincident rise of far-right wing political parties.

Table 1 presents vote shares for far-right political parties in national parliamentary elections for the period 2002-2017. Many parties secured substantial vote shares (>15%), e.g. FPÖ in Austria, DF in Denmark, Finns Party in Finland, FRP in Norway, Jobbik in Hungary, etc. (see Table 2). Not only does the rise of far-right parties challenge the center-left consensus on which European institutions have come to rely, brought to the fore by Britain's decision to exit the EU; it also raises fundamental questions related to the role of ethnic identity in European societies and the potential for ethnic conflict in Europe.

Given the stridently anti-immigrant rhetoric of far-right political parties, it is natural to ask to what degree these phenomena are linked and, indeed, a significant body of scholarship has emerged that investigates the impact of immigration on the success of far-right par-

ties.[1] These studies largely find that increases in immigration play an important role in the success of contemporary far-right parties in a number of European countries, i.e. Halla et al. (2017) for Austria; Dustmann et al. (2016) and Harmon (2017) for Denmark; Otto and Steinhardt (2014) for the city of Hamburg (Germany); Sekeris and Vasilakis (2016) for Greece; Barone et al. (2016) for Italy; Brunner and Kuhn (2014) for Switzerland; Becker and Fetzer (2016) for the UK.

By contrast, Steinmayr (2016) finds evidence consistent with the *contact hypothesis* suggesting that accommodations that hosted refugees showed a decrease in support of FPÖ in Austria. Vertier and Viskanic (2017) investigate the impact of the relocation of refugees from "Calais jungle" in France to temporary refugee-centers (CAO) on votes in favour of the far-right party "Front National" in the 2017 French presidential elections, and provide further evidence of *contact hypothesis*. They find that presence of a CAO reduces the vote share increase of the Front National by around 13.3% compared to other municipalities.

Interestingly, however, these studies also underline a number of characteristics that mediate the association between immigration and the electoral success of far-right parties. For example, using Swiss voting results, Brunner and Kuhn (2014) find that the effect of immigration on the electoral success of far-right parties transmits through cultural differences between immigrants and natives, whereas Harmon (2017) finds that the increases in local ethnic diversity due to immigration explain right-ward shifts in election outcomes in Denmark. Dustmann et al. (2016) exploit the quasi-random refugee allocation in Denmark and underline the heterogeneity effect associated with the impact of immigration on rightwing voting by focusing on municipality level characteristics such as urbani-

[1] Becker and Fetzer (2016), Halla et al. (2017), Barone et al. (2016), Brunner and Kuhn (2014), Otto and Steinhardt (2014), and Harmon (2017) investigate the impact of immigration on electoral outcomes of rightwing parties, whereas, Sekeris and Vasilakis (2016), Vertier and Viskanic (2017), Dustmann et al. (2016) and Steinmayr (2016) consider the effect of refugee inflows. This distinction is important to note because as suggested by O'Rourke and Sinnott (2006), the native response to refugees is broadly less hostile from that to other immigrants.

Figure 1

Immigrant Share in European Countries
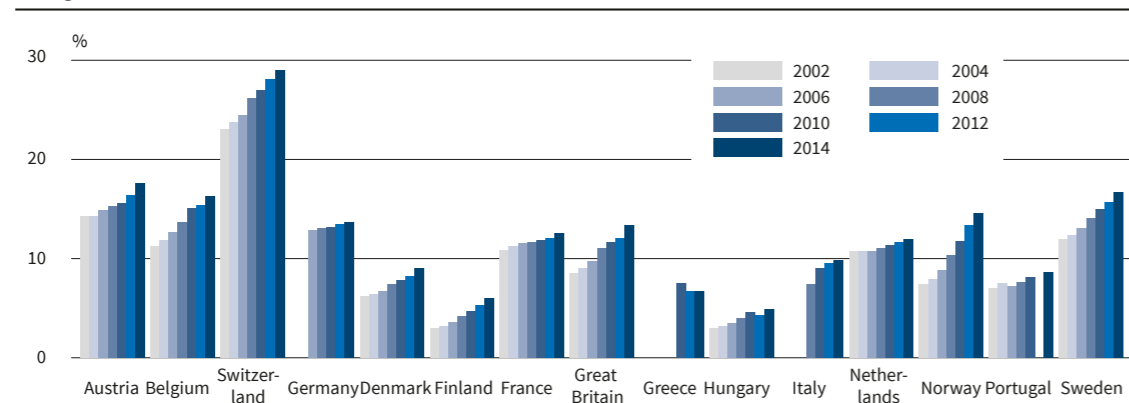
Source: OECD (2016).

© ifo Institute

Table 1

Vote Share of Far-Right Parties in National Parliamentary Elections, 2002-2017

Country	Election 1	Election 2	Election 3	Election 4	Election 5	Election 6
Austria	10.01	15.15	28.24	24.04	-	-
Belgium	13.57	13.96	8.27	3.67	-	-
Switzerland	27.71	29.46	26.8	29.5	-	-
Germany	0.3	1.9	1.9	3.5	-	-
Denmark	13.3	13.9	12.32	21.1	-	-
Finland	1.8	4.2	19.04	17.65	-	-
France	13.23	5.88	13.6	13.2	-	-
United Kingdom	2.9	5	12.6	1.9	-	-
Hungary	4.6	1.7	16.7	20.22	-	-
Italy	5.18	10.73	4.21	-	-	-
Netherlands	17	5.7	6.1	15.45	10.08	13.1
Norway	22.06	22.91	16.35	-	-	-
Portugal	0.09	0.16	0.2	0.31	0.5	-
Sweden	1.4	2.93	5.7	12.86	-	-

Source: European Election Database.

Table 2

List of Far-Right Parties

Country	References	Far-right parties
Austria	Mudde (2013)	Austrian Freedom Party (FPO)and Bundnis Zukunft Osterreich (BZO)
Belgium	Mudde (2013)	Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang (VB)and Front National (FN)
Switzerland	Ivarsflaten (2006) and Mudde (2013)	Swiss People's Party (SVP), Swiss Nationalist Party (PNOS) and Swiss Democrats (SD)
Denmark	Ivarsflaten (2006)	Danish People's Party (DF) and Danish Progress Party (FP)
Germany	Ivarsflaten (2006)	National Democratic Party of Germany(NPD)and The Republicans (REP)
Finland	Ivarsflaten (2006)	Finns Party (PS) and Finnish People's Blue-whites (SKS)
France	Rydgren (2008)	Front National(FN), National Republican Movement (MNR)and Movement for France(MPF)
Hungary	Mudde (2012)	Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP)and Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)
Italy	Ivarsflaten (2006)	Social Movement - Tricolour Flame (MS-FT)and Lega Nord (LN)
Netherlands	Rydgren (2008) and Mudde (2013)	Pim Fortuyn List (LPF and Party for Freedom (PVV)
Norway	Rydgren (2008)	Progress Party (FRP)
Portugal	Mudde(2012)	National Renovator Party (PNR)
Sweden	Ivarsflaten (2006)	Swedish Democrats (SD)
United Kingdom	Ivarsflaten (2006)	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)and British National Party (BNP)

Source: Ivarsflaten (2006); Mudde (2012); Mudde (2013); Rydgren (2008).

zation, pre-policy immigrant shares, unemployment rates and crime rates. For example, in the largest and most urban municipalities, they find that refugee allocation has the opposite effect on far-right voting. In less urban municipalities with high pre-policy immigrant shares and in urban municipalities with high unemployment, they find a pronounced response to refugee allocation. Finally, they find a homogenous effect of higher pre-policy crime rates in strengthening the association between refugee flows and support for anti-immigration parties.

While highly informative, the tendency in this literature to focus on specific countries obscures the degree to which the rise of the right is a pan-European phenomenon with a common set of underlying relationships. It also fails to address systematic differences across countries in the degree to which immigration has fostered support for far-right parties. The remainder of this article addresses these issues.

DATA

The data for this study comes from the first seven waves of the European Social Survey (ESS), a biennial survey launched in 2002. Our dependent variable is a dummy variable for whether an individual voted for a far-right party in the most recent national election. We construct this variable by matching responses to a question regarding the party an individual voted for in the last election to a list of far-right parties based on work by Ivarsflaten (2006), Rydgren (2008), and Mudde (2012, 2013).[2] Given our interest in immigration and far-right voting behaviour, we restrict the sample to individuals who report voting in the last national election and reside in one of the 14 countries with at least one significant far-right party, and for which the OECD database (2017) reports data on immigrant popula-

[2] See Davis and Deole (2016) for details.

tion share. These countries are Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden.[3]

Individual level variables are obtained from the ESS survey responses and include variables indicating information on a variety of demographic, economic and cultural characteristics that may influence their voting decision. Demographic variables include an individual's age, gender, marital status, household size, residential location, and a dummy variable for whether there are children living at home. Economic variables include measures of education attainment and employment status. Cultural variables include an individual's religious affiliation, the immigration status of the individual and their parents, and a measure of religiosity.

Our primary independent variable is the natural log of the immigrant population share, which is taken from OECD (2017). Our focus on the immigrant population share (IPS) is motivated by the salience hypothesis (Blumer 1958; Blalock 1967), which holds that an increase in the presence of another racial or ethnic group tends to increase an individual's awareness of their own ethnic identity, a process that would potentially give rise to native political support for parties with an ethno-nationalist ideology. Given that our dependent variable measures an individual's decision to vote for a far-right party in the last national elections, we match IPS to individual respondents using the year of last national election rather than the survey year.

Given the binary nature of the outcome variable (i.e. decision to vote for far-right parties), we estimate a *probit* regression. Our hypothesis in this respect is that the immigrant share of total population of a country increases the probability of voting for a far-right political party, which is given by

$$\text{Prob}(rightvote_i = 1) = \Phi(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \log(IPS_{ct}) + \alpha' X_i + \gamma_c + \gamma_t),$$
(1)

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	sd	Min	Max	Obs.
Dependent Variable					
Vote to far-right	0.056	0.229	0	1	109477
Demographic characteristics					
Age	51.379	16.592	18	102	109326
Female	0.502	0.500	0	1	109461
Married	0.577	0.494	0	1	109477
Live with children	0.371	0.483	0	1	109404
HH Size	2.514	1.276	1	22	109463
Urban	0.320	0.467	0	1	109374
Economic characteristics					
Education in years	12.869	4.217	0	56	109115
Unemployed	0.029	0.168	0	1	109477
Retired	0.279	0.448	0	1	109477
Self-employed	0.130	0.336	0	1	109477
Owner	0.015	0.122	0	1	109477
Cultural characteristics					
Roman Catholic	0.231	0.421	0	1	105517
Protestant	0.264	0.441	0	1	105517
Eastern Orthodox	0.047	0.211	0	1	105517
Other Christians	0.010	0.101	0	1	105517
Jewish	0.001	0.034	0	1	105517
Islamic	0.008	0.087	0	1	105517
Eastern religions	0.004	0.060	0	1	105517
Other non-chri.	0.002	0.049	0	1	105517
Born in the country	0.953	0.211	0	1	109451
Foreign-born father	0.075	0.263	0	1	109158
Foreign-born mother	0.075	0.264	0	1	109378
Religiosity	4.597	2.915	0	10	109477
Macro indicators					
Immigrant share (IPS)	11.158	5.490685	2.924	28.7	99235
Unemployment rate	7.507	3.620547	2.55	26.49027	99235
GDP per capita	37686.520	10525.8	14885.2	65658.42	99235
Religious diversity	0.674	0.223	0.324	0.949	99235
Individualism index	66.667	16.552	27	89	99235

Source: Authors' calculations.

where $rightvote_i$ is a binary dependent variable recording individual i's decision to vote for a far-right party; *IPS* is the immigrant share of total population in country c at time t; X_i is a vector of individual level characteristics as presented in table 3; γ_i and γ_i are country and year dummies, which are included to account for unobserved country and period characteristics; and ϕ is the standard normal distribution's *cdf*. For ease of interpretation, we report the adjusted predictions at means (APMs) of far-right voting for different values of immigrant share (IPS).

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS, IMMIGRANT POPULATION SHARE AND FAR-RIGHT VOTING

Figure 2 presents the adjusted predictions at means (APMs) for the relationship between immigrant population share (IPS) and far-right voting (FRV) from our baseline specification. We find a strong positive rela-

tionship between the immigrant population share and the propensity of individuals to vote for a far-right party. While Figure 2 presents the average relationship between immigrant share and far-right voting, it's quite possible that this relationship differs systematically across individuals with different characteristics. To explore this possibility, we augment our baseline regression with terms by interacting the IPS with a variety of individual characteristics including educational attainment, employment status, urban location and religiosity.

Our choice of characteristics to examine is motivated by prominent theories of racial and ethnic hostility (see Quilian 1995). Our interest in respondents' education and employment derive from group threat theory, which suggests the response to immigration will be more hostile among individuals who perceive themselves as competing with immigrants for jobs or public resources. More educated respondents tend to exhibit lower levels of ethnocentrism, place greater value on cultural diversity and tend to be more optimistic about the economic impact of immigration (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). Similarly, unemployed individuals may find competition from immigrants in the labour market as the reason for their unemployment (O'Rourke and Sinnott 2006). Allport's (1954) contact theory suggests that increased contact with immigrants should reduce anti-immigration or xenophobic sentiments. A broad reading of this theory suggests that individuals living in urban areas, with greater exposure to cultural and ethnic diversity, may be less threatened by rising immigration than their rural counterparts. Finally, our investigation of religiosity is motivated by cultural theories of ethnic conflict.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between the immigrant share of the population and far-right voting for various population subgroups. Figure 3a, for example, shows that less educated and highly educated respondents show distinct relationships between IPS and far-right voting. The less educated

are defined as individuals with 12 or less years of education. Not only are the poorly educated more likely to vote for a far-right party for any level of immigration, but their voting behaviour is also more sensitive to a rise in immigration, as seen by the steeper slope of the curve.

Similarly, as seen in Figures 3b and 3c, we find far-right voting is also more sensitive to changes in the immigrant population share among the unemployed and the rural population than among their employed and urban counterparts. These results are broadly in line with the predictions of group threat and contact theories. Interestingly, in Figure 3d, we find that far-right voting is higher among non-religious individuals, but it is more sensitive to changes in IPS among the
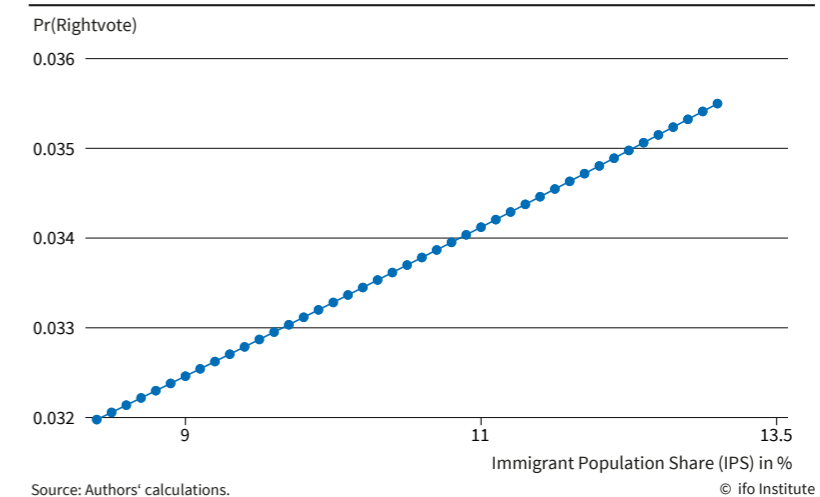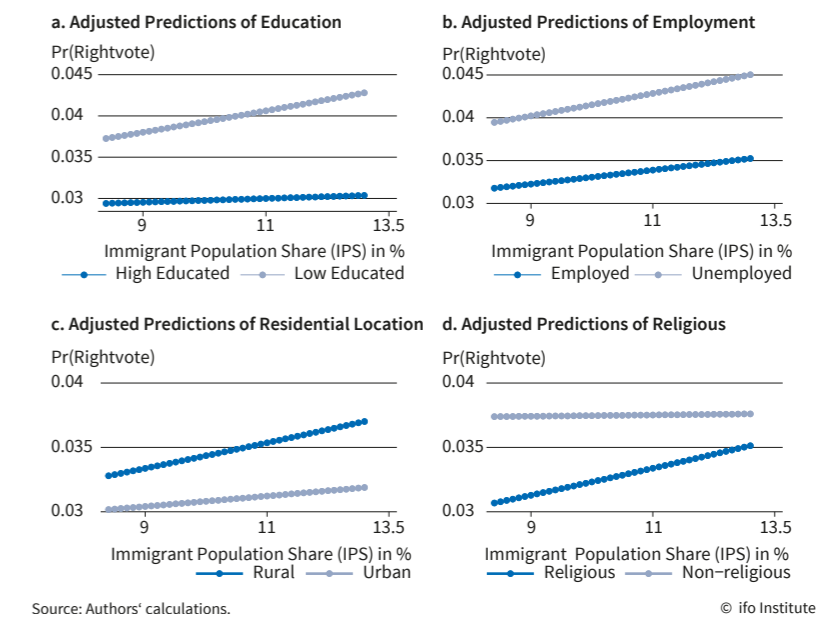
Figure 2

Immigrant Share (IPS) and Far-Right Voting

Pr(Rightvote)

Immigrant Population Share (IPS) in %

Source: Authors' calculations.

© ifo Institute

Figure 3

Individual Variables

a. Adjusted Predictions of Education
Pr(Rightvote)
Immigrant Population Share (IPS) in %
High Educated   Low Educated

b. Adjusted Predictions of Employment
Pr(Rightvote)
Immigrant Population Share (IPS) in %
Employed   Unemployed

c. Adjusted Predictions of Residential Location
Pr(Rightvote)
Immigrant Population Share (IPS) in %
Rural   Urban

d. Adjusted Predictions of Religious
Pr(Rightvote)
Immigrant Population Share (IPS) in %
Religious   Non-religious

Source: Authors' calculations.

© ifo Institute

religious. This suggests that religiosity may involve separate and competing effects. For example, a commitment to the humane treatment of others may be coupled with a greater awareness of cultural and religious difference between native and immigrant groups.

These results indicate that the economic, demographic, educational and cultural make-up of a country's population is likely to play a significant role in the degree to which an increase in the immigrant population share generates support for far-right political parties. Next, we consider two country-level variables that also play a role in mediating this relationship.

DOES THE IPS-FRV RELATIONSHIP DIFFER ACROSS COUNTRIES?

Informal observation of the patterns of immigration and far-right voting across countries, shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, suggests that the political response to immigration differs across time and countries. Here, we consider two plausible hypotheses to explain these patterns, both of which are motivated by group threat theory. The first is that the political response to immigration may depend on macroeconomic conditions in a country. More specifically, difficult economic times may be associated with a greater concern among natives over competition with immigrants for scarce jobs or public resources. To measure the macroeconomic conditions of a country, we consider its national unemployment rate, obtained from OECD Database (2017). As with the immigrant population share, we match these data to individual respondents based on the year of their country's last national election.

Figure 4 shows that national unemployment mediates the positive association between immigrant population share and support for far-right parties. We find that a higher national unemployment rate strengthens citizens' responses to increases in immigrant population shares, as depicted by increasing slopes. This probably reflects a channel of influence related to perceived competition with immigrants over access to scarce employment opportunities.

Figure 4

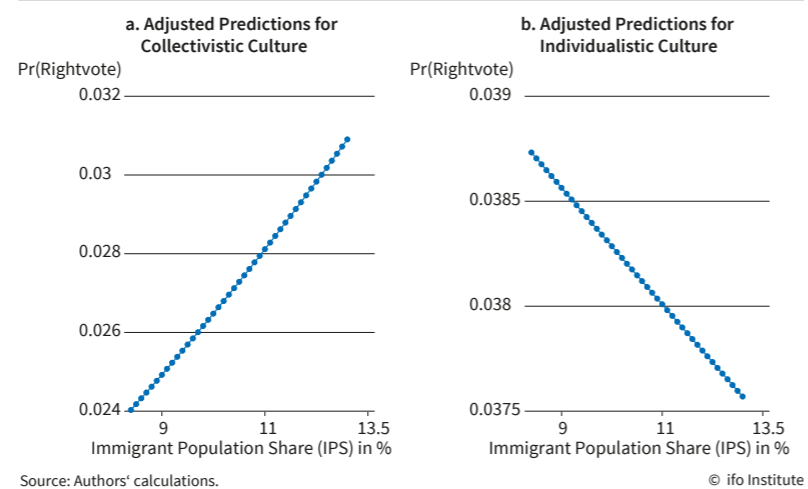**Macroeconomic Channels of IPS-Far-Right Relationship**

a. Adjusted Predictions for Unemployment Rate

Pr(Rightvote)

Unemployment rate (in %)
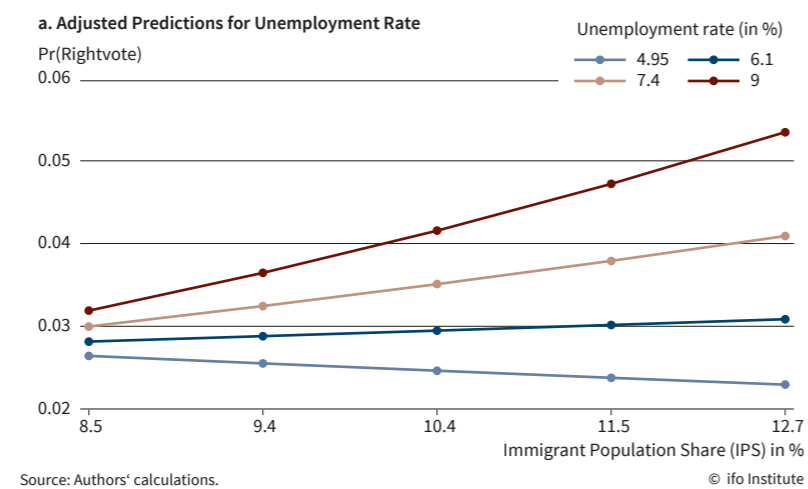
Source: Authors' calculations.   © ifo Institute

Figure 5

Macro-Cultural Channels and IPS-Far-Right Relationship

a. Adjusted Predictions for Collectivistic Culture

b. Adjusted Predictions for Individualistic Culture

Source: Authors' calculations.   © ifo Institute

In Davis and Deole (2016), we find that far-right voting is closely related to cultural concerns over immigration. Motivated by this finding, we consider a measure of individualism developed by Hofstede (2001) that reflects the importance of social relationships to an individual's identity (Gorodnichenko and Roland 2011). If people in individualist societies tend to have weaker parochial, ethnic and religious attachments, they may be less sensitive to the potential threats to these groups and identities posed by immigration. They may also be more prone to judge immigrants as individuals, rather than as members of a larger group.

Figure 5 shows the relationship between immigrant population share and far-right voting for countries with high and low levels of individualism. The more individualist societies in our sample are Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden. As seen, in more individualist societies, the IPS-FRV locus is essentially flat, while

in collectivist societies, it has the familiar positive slope. These results suggest that national culture plays an important role in mediating the relationship between immigration and support for far-right political parties. Overall, voters in more individualist societies appear less likely to respond to immigration by embracing an ethno-nationalist ideology.

CONCLUSION

The rapid rate of European immigration has breathed life into far-right political movements which, if they continue to gain power, may come to pose fundamental challenges to Europe's governing institutions and to its continued development as a modern, post-ethnic society. Broadly speaking, the potential for immigration to alter the political equilibrium within European countries suggests that immigration policy should not be considered in a vacuum.

More narrowly, the analysis presented here has two implications for European immigration policy. First, the current commitment to relatively free population movements across most European countries may not constitute an equilibrium policy. Continued rapid immigration may foster additional support for far-right parties and the ethno-nationalist identities that support them. And of course, if political support for far-right parties translates into actual political power, as it has in Hungary, for example, it might have significant implications not only for European immigration policies, but also for the stability of trans-European institutions that support the current liberal order. The willingness of left and center right parties to consider marginal adjustments to European immigration policies may be necessary to reduce support for political parties that would institute far more dramatic changes to European policies and institutions.

Second, the analysis suggests that the relationship between immigration and far-right voting differs significantly across well-defined population subgroups and countries with different macroeconomic conditions and national cultures. This information may be of use when considering the appropriate criteria for allocating refugees across European societies (e.g. European Commission 2015).

REFERENCES

Allport, G. (1954), *The nature of prejudice*, Addison-Wesley, Cambridge, MA.

Barone, G., A. D'Ignazio, G. de Blasio and P. Naticchioni (2016), "Mr. Rossi, Mr. Hu and politics. The role of immigration in shaping natives' voting behaviour", *Journal of Public Economics* 136 (8228), 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2016.03.002.

Becker, S. O. and T. Fetzer (2016), "Does Migration Cause Extreme Voting?", *Warwick Working Paper Series* 306.

Blalock, H. M. (1967), *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations. A Capricorn Giant*, Wiley, NY.

Blumer, H. (1958), "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position", *The Pacific Sociological Review* 1, no. 1, 3–7.

Brunner, B. and A. Kuhn (2014)," Immigration, Cultural Distance and Natives`Attitudes Towards Immigration: Evidence from Swiss Voting Results", *IZA Discussion Papers* 8409 , https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2492436.

Davis, L. and S. S. Deole (2016)," Immigration, Attitudes and the Rise of the Political Right: The Role of Cultural and Economic Concerns Over Immigration", *CESifo Working Paper Series* No. 5680, https://ssrn.com/abstract=2727101.

Dustmann, C., K. Vasiljeva and A. Piil (n.d.), "Refugee Migration and Electoral Outcomes", *CReAM Discussion Paper Series* CPD 19/16, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1043-2760(97)84344-5.

European Commission (2015), "Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the council, the European Economic and social committee and the committee of the regions: A European agenda on migration", http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/european-agenda-migration-communication.

Hainmueller, J. and M. J. Hiscox (2007), "Educated Preferences: Explaining Attitudes Toward Immigration in Europe", *International Organization* 61, no. 02.

Halla, M., A. F. Wagner and J. Zweimüller (2017), „Immigration and Voting for the Far Right", *Journal of the European Economic Association*, forthcoming, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2103623.

Harmon, N. A. (2017), "Immigration, Ethnic Diversity and Political Outcomes : Evidence from Denmark", *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, accepted, https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/sjoe.12239.

Hofstede, G. H. (2001), "Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations", *SAGE Publications*.

Ivarsflaten, E. (2006), "Reputational Shields: Why Most Anti-Immigrant Parties Failed in Western Europe, 1980–2005", *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, 1–24.

Mudde, C. (2012),"The Relationship Between Immigration and Nativism in Europe and North America", *Migration Policy Institute*.

Mudde, C. (2013), "Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe: So What?", *European Journal of Political Research* 52, no. 1 , 1–19.

OECD (2016), "International Migration Outlook 2016", *OECD Publishing*, Paris.

O'Rourke, H. Kevin and R. Sinnott (2006), "The Determinants of Individual Attitudes towards Immigration," *European Journal of Political Economy* 22, no. 4, 838–961.

Otto, A. H. and M. F. Steinhardt (2014), "Immigration and Election outcomes – Evidence from City Districts in Hamburg", *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 45(1), 67–79.

Quillian, L . (1995), "Prejudice as a Response to Perceived Group Threat: Population Composition and Anti-Immigrant and Racial Prejudice in Europe", *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 4, 586.

Rydgren, J. (2008), "Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists? Radical Right-Wing Voting in Six West European Countries", *European Journal of Political Research* 47, no. 6, 737–765.

Sekeris, P. and C. Vasilakis (2016), "The Mediterranean Refugees Crisis and Extreme Right Parties: Evidence from Greece", *MPRA Paper* 72222, 1–14. https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/72222/1/MPRA_paper_72222.pdf.

Steinmayr, A. (2016), "Exposure to Refugees and Voting for the Far-Right: (Unexpected) Results from Austria", *IZA Discussion Paper* No. 9790.

Vertier, P. and M. Viskanic (2017), "Dismantling the 'Jungle': Refugee Relocation and Extreme Voting in France", *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2963641.