The Flag or the Pocketbook: To What are Immigrants a Threat

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of immigrants and rising unemployment rates are widely thought to contribute to the electoral success of extreme right parties in Western Europe. However, no study explicitly posits the causal mechanism that links the aggregate level factors of immigration and unemployment to the electoral success of extreme right parties, and systematically analyzes whether and how this mechanism works. Thus, the causal connection between immigration, unemployment and extreme right success remains at best ambiguous. I argue that the causal mechanism linking immigration and unemployment to extreme right electoral performance is the development of anti-immigrant attitudes at the individual level. In this paper, I examine how unemployment and immigration affect individuals’ attitudes toward immigrants. This examination furthers our understanding of the actual dynamics of how unemployment and immigration influences the electoral success of extreme right parties. I find that greater unemployment rates increase the probability that an individual will have an anti-immigrant attitude only when immigration is already at a high level. Similarly, increasing immigration alone does not always increase the probability that an individual will have an anti-immigrant attitude.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, research on the performance of extreme right parties has paid particular attention to exploring the relationship between aggregate level country factors of unemployment and immigration and the electoral success of these parties (Golder, 2003; Lewis-Beck and Mitchell, 1993). In general, increasing immigration and unemployment are thought to contribute to the success of extreme right parties. However, the evidence for the impact of immigration and unemployment on electoral success of...
extreme right is mixed. Several studies found that increasing levels of unemployment help radical right parties (Jackman and Volpert, 1996) while others do not find such a pattern (Knigge, 1998; Lubbers, Scheepers and Billiet, 2000; Van der Brug, et al., 2005). Similarly, some studies find a positive relationship between levels of immigration and electoral success of radical right parties (Knigge, 1998; Lubbers, et al., 2000) while others do not (Coffé, Heyndels and Vermeir, 2007).

Despite a wealth of studies on the topic, the causal connection between immigration, unemployment, and extreme right success thus remains ambiguous. This is because no study posits and systematically examines the causal mechanism that links the aggregate level factors of immigration and unemployment to the electoral performance of extreme right parties. I argue that this causal mechanism is the development of anti-immigrant attitudes.¹ In this paper, I specify the mechanism needed for the aggregate level arguments in the literature to hold and systematically analyze whether and how this mechanism works.

In the following section I review the aggregate and individual level studies on the electoral performance of extreme right parties in Western Europe. Aggregate level studies examine the impact of unemployment rate and the level of immigration in a given country on the electoral success of extreme right parties. Individual level studies, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of peoples’ attitudes toward immigrants in determining their likelihood to vote for an extreme right party. The outstanding problem with the aggregate level studies is that no causal mechanism is systematically posited and tested to link unemployment and immigration to extreme right success.²

In order to tackle this problem, I link the two bodies of research in the theory section. I show that the factor individual level studies find to be most important, namely, anti-immigrant attitudes, is the necessary mechanism in the aggregate level theories. In the theory section I propose hypotheses to test the mechanism. Finally, I present the results of my analysis, explaining the implications these results have for the existing theoretical viewpoints.

WHAT EXPLAINS SUCCESS

The electoral success of extreme right parties has varied across time and countries in Western Europe.³ Numerous studies in the political science
literature attempt to explain variation in the electoral success of extreme right parties. The primary focus of these studies is either on aggregate level country characteristics or individual level socio-economic factors. Some very recent research examines the impact of both levels of factors (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006).

**Aggregate Level Studies: Unemployment and Immigration**

Aggregate level studies evaluate the impact of country characteristics on the percentage of total votes received by extreme right parties (Abedi, 2002; Golder, 2003; Husbands, 1996; Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Knigge, 1998;). Scholars studying the influence of aggregate level factors on extreme right performance emphasize the importance of immigration and unemployment. There are two key arguments regarding the impact of unemployment and immigration in the literature: the materialist impact argument and cultural impact argument.4

**Unemployment: Materialist Impact Argument**

The arguments linking unemployment to the success of the extreme right are built upon the theory of economic interest (Blalock, 1967; Lubbers, et al., 2002; Olzak, 1992). According to the proponents of the theory of economic interest, competition over scarce economic resources creates inter-group conflict in society (Lubbers, et al., 2002). In such a setting, people generally blame “others” for dire circumstances and ascribe negatively valued characteristics to “others” (Lubbers, et al., 2002: 349). Thus, people who belong to the so-called “out-groups”, such as immigrants, become the targets of those who are in larger and better established “in-groups” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Although there is not much evidence that immigration actually increases unemployment (Hunt, 1992; Zimmerman, 1995), under deteriorating economic conditions people typically think of immigrants as the cause or one of the prime causes of the worsening conditions. For example, in a 1985 interview with Liberation, Jacques Chirac lent credibility to such views in answering a question about whether immigrants were behind decaying economic conditions asserting: “Naturally. If there were fewer immigrants, there would be less unemployment, fewer tensions in certain towns and neighborhoods, and lower social cost” (Dustmann and Preston, 2000: 3). As Chirac is not even the leader of an extreme right party, it is not too difficult to imagine how these conceptions become widely accepted.
Numerous studies in the literature examine the impact of unemployment on the electoral performance of the extreme right. The results vary more than theory would lead us to believe. For instance, Knigge (1998) finds that higher levels of unemployment actually lessen support for extreme right parties. Jackman and Volpert (1996) find that the extreme right has more success when employment is scarce relative to when jobs are plentiful. On the other hand, Lewis-Beck and Mitchell (1993) and Golder (2003) find that the impact of unemployment on extreme right success depends on what the level of immigration is.

In sum, a review of these varied findings indicates that the scholars studying the influence of unemployment on extreme right party performance have not determined exactly how this relationship works. I argue that the lack of attention given to the mechanism linking unemployment to extreme right success through individual beliefs prevents us from understanding the actual dynamics of how unemployment influences the electoral success of extreme right parties.

**Immigration: Cultural Impact Argument**

The argument in the literature regarding the influence of immigration on extreme right success is what I term the “cultural impact” argument. The “cultural impact” argument focuses on the way native citizens perceive immigrants’ impact on their respective country’s national identity and culture (Golder, 2003). Proponents of this argument suggest that increasing immigration leads to increasing success for extreme right parties. However, in contrast to the materialist impact argument, the reason is not immigrants’ threat to natives’ material well-being. According to the cultural impact argument, increasing immigration leads to increasing success for extreme right parties because native citizens perceive immigrants as a threat to their national identity and culture. Thus, if this argument is correct we should expect increasing immigration to contribute to the success of the extreme right regardless of economic circumstances (e.g., unemployment rate).

Scholars attempting to uncover whether immigration always contributes to extreme right success have not yet reached a consensus. Golder (2003) argues that increasing immigration increases the electoral success of extreme right parties regardless of economic conditions and concludes that the cultural impact argument is correct. Martin (1996) and Anderson (1996) argue along the same lines, asserting that immigration always increases extreme right success. Interestingly, in a more detailed study,
Givens (2000) shows that extreme right parties are not more successful in regions of Germany where there are a higher numbers of immigrants as opposed to regions where there are not as many. In short, the results of the studies regarding the impact of immigration do not produce fully convincing results. Regardless of whether the argument is correct, increasing immigration again must be linked to extreme right performance through a mechanism accounting for its impact on individual voters’ attitudes.

**Individual Level Studies: Importance of Attitudes**

Individual level studies analyze the relationship between individual characteristics and an individual’s likelihood to vote for an extreme right party (Billiet and Witte, 1995; Hainsworth, 1992; Kitschelt, 1995; Lubbers, et al., 2002; Van der Brug and Fennema, 2000). Scholars using this approach mostly focus on the influence of demographic variables such as of age, education, social class, and gender, but they also analyze the affects of attitudes towards immigrants.

The results regarding the importance of socioeconomic background vary in the literature, while the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes is always significant. While Kitschelt (1995) and Van der Brug and Fennema (2000) argue that socioeconomic background characteristics are of minor importance in explaining extreme right voting, Mayer (1999) makes the opposite case. In their study on the extreme right in Belgium, Billiet and Witte (1995) conclude that a negative attitude towards immigrants is the best predictor for a person’s likelihood to vote for extremist Vlaams Blok. Van der Brug and Fennema (2000) also find intolerant attitudes toward immigrants to be a very strong predictor of extreme right voting. In sum, the individual level studies strongly emphasize the importance of anti-immigrant attitudes in predicting an individual’s likelihood to vote for an extreme right party.

**Connecting the Two Levels**

The causal mechanism linking the aggregate level factors of immigration and unemployment to extreme right electoral performance is the development of anti-immigrant attitudes, the factor emphasized by the individual level studies. Surprisingly, there is no quantitative empirical research in political science literature examining whether and how immigration and unemployment influence peoples’ attitudes towards
immigrants. In what follows, I present an empirical analysis with the goal of closing this gap in the literature.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

Materialist Impact Hypothesis

The full causal story behind the materialist impact argument is as follows: increasing unemployment in a country increases the competition over scarce resources. Under these conditions people have a propensity to blame immigrants and to develop anti-immigrant attitudes. This in turn leads people to vote for an extreme right party. One important thing to note here is that for the scape-goating suggested by the theory to occur, immigrants must be a visible and thus supposedly relevant group in society. Thus, I propose that the following hypothesis will hold true if the argument derived from the theory is correct.

Hypothesis 1

Rising unemployment increases the probability that an individual has an anti-immigrant attitude when immigration is at a high level.

Cultural Impact Hypothesis

The full causal story behind the cultural impact of immigration argument is as follows: increasing immigration within a country causes people to perceive immigrants as a threat to cultural homogeneity and national identity. The individuals perceiving this threat develop anti-immigrant attitudes. As extreme right parties are notorious for making anti-immigrant appeals to voters, individuals with anti-immigrant attitudes are more likely to vote for these parties than individuals lacking anti-immigrant attitudes. Development of anti-immigrant attitudes is the hypothesized mechanism through which immigration contributes to extreme right success. In light of this, I propose that the following hypothesis will hold true if the cultural impact of immigration argument is indeed correct.

Hypothesis 2

Rising immigration increases the probability that an individual has an anti-immigrant attitude regardless of the unemployment level.
DATA AND VARIABLES

The dataset used in this study was compiled from four different Eurobarometer surveys. In this analysis the 1991 (EB 35), 1995 (EB 39), 1997 (EB 47.1), and 2000 (EB 53) Eurobarometer surveys are used. The countries in the analysis are France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Germany, Belgium and Italy. The choice of these particular years and countries is related to availability of data on the dependent variable. There are only a handful of Eurobarometer series that ask the respondents questions regarding their attitudes towards immigrants. Moreover, for all the years studied in this paper the Eurobarometer series did not include the same number of countries and exactly the same countries. Thus, only the countries included in all relevant surveys are present in the dataset.

The dependent variable “Anti-Immigrant” indicates whether the respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude. This variable is constructed using a question that appeared consistently in the included Eurobarometer series. The question asks the respondents whether there are “too many”, “a lot but not too many”, or “not many” foreigners living in their country. Using this question, I created a binary variable, which is equal to 1 if the respondent thinks that there are too many foreigners in the country and zero otherwise. If a respondent states that there are “too many” immigrants in the country, this is a very strong indication that he/she views the presence of and continued influx of immigrants negatively.

There are two main independent variables in the statistical model: the unemployment level and the immigration level. Unemployment measures the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed nationally by year, while immigration is measured as the percentage of the population that is composed of foreign citizens. Part of the data for unemployment and immigration was taken from Golder (2003). For the missing years I referred to SOPEMI publications. For each year in the data, I took the unemployment and immigration levels one year before the survey years. This allows the respondents a reasonable amount of time to get informed. An interactive term “Unemployment*Immigration” is included in the model to observe the conditional influences of immigration and unemployment on the dependent variable.

I also control for the influence of several demographic variables. The more important individual characteristics hypothesized to affect peoples’
likelihood to vote for the extreme right and thus to form an anti-immigrant attitude are respondents’ age (Age), educational attainment (Education), and gender (Male). Age is the respondents’ exact age. Male is a dummy variable, taking the value of 1 if the respondent is male and 0 otherwise. Education is calculated using the respondents’ answer to the question: How old were you when you finished your full-time education? Since the start year for education in most European countries is the age 6, I deducted this number from the age of the respondent.

Education has been shown to reduce the hostility toward out-groups and positively influence peoples’ favourable opinions about immigrants (Mayda, 2006). It is also thought that better educated individuals are better able to understand economic conditions and the impact immigration has on economic conditions, and are less likely to use immigrants as scapegoats. Thus, I expect that increasing education levels decrease peoples’ probability to be anti-immigrant. Survey evidence also has shown that the extreme right voter is typically male. This is because the competition for jobs with immigrants is stiffer for males than females, as more of the jobs supposedly taken by the immigrants are in industries that are male dominated (e.g., automobile manufacturing) (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Betz, 1994; Lubbers, et al., 2002). Thus, I expect that being a male will increase the probability that the person has an anti-immigrant attitude.

Arguments regarding age are twofold. On the one hand, scholars studying extreme right voters argue that extreme right voters are mostly young people. Betz (1994) labels the group of voter for extreme right as “losers of modernity”. They are poorly educated young males that are most influenced by the influx of immigrants. On the other hand, sociologists studying peoples’ attitudes towards foreigners argue that older people are less likely to welcome foreigners. They are more conservative and less open to change in society. In any event studies on extreme right voters show that an individual’s age is an important variable to control for. Accordingly, it is included in the statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The dependent variable is a binary outcome qualitative dependent variable. Accordingly, a logit model is employed. Predicted values of the dependent variable are interpreted as the probability that the individual
has an anti-immigrant attitude given his/her individual characteristics and country conditions.

There are several modelling choices and assumptions that require discussion before moving on. The observations in the data are sampled in groups (countries) and are not sampled randomly. Thus, we cannot assume that the observations in a given country are independent from each other. If we do so, the estimates of standard errors may be too small. Thus, to provide corrected estimates of the standard errors, clustering is used. Another important thing to note is that dummy variables for individual countries and time are not included in the main regression model. The assumption is that the explanatory variables affect individuals across time and across countries in the same way. As a robustness check I also estimate the model with country and year dummies. The second column in Table 1 shows the estimation results for the model with time and year fixed effects. Overall, the sign and significance of the relationship between the variables of interest do not change much at all. The coefficients of immigration, unemployment, and the interaction term all have the same sign. Unemployment seems to attain significance in the second model. However, it is important to note that these coefficients by themselves do not tell us much about the actual relationship, as I explain in the following sections. To check the robustness of the findings I also estimated the models seven times, each time excluding one of the seven countries. The estimation results were close to each other.

Given that the statistical model has a nonlinear functional form, the coefficients displayed in Table 1 are not directly interpretable beyond

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regressor</th>
<th>Model I</th>
<th>Model II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>-.0527*** (.0079)</td>
<td>-.1181** (.0702)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-.0013 (.0211)</td>
<td>-.1263*** (.0311)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment*Immigration</td>
<td>.0079*** (.0026)</td>
<td>.0116** (.0056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.0087*** (.0028)</td>
<td>.0090*** (.0008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.1018*** (.0109)</td>
<td>-.1049*** (.0046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.0580 (.0432)</td>
<td>.0604** (.0266)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.0334 (.2971)</td>
<td>.5970** (.3506)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Observations</td>
<td>27359</td>
<td>27359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-18283.656</td>
<td>-17989.864</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** p-value < 0.01, ** p-value < 0.05, * p-value < 0.10.
sign and statistical significance. Predicted probabilities are necessary to assess the substantive significance of the independent variables. Additionally, the interactive term, Immigration*Unemployment, makes the interpretation of the unemployment and immigration coefficients especially problematic. As Braumoeller (2004) notes: “because interactive relationships imply that the impact of X1 on Y varies depending on the level of X2, the idea of ‘‘the impact of X1 on Y in general is in fact a meaningless one’’(Braumoeller, 2004: 810). The influence of unemployment on the probability that the respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude depends on the level of immigration and vice versa. Thus, we need to examine how the effects of unemployment and immigration on the dependent variable change at varying levels of the modifying variable. Moreover, as Ai and Norton (2003) illustrate, the statistical significance of the interaction effect cannot be tested with a simple t-test on the coefficient of the interaction term. Furthermore, the sign of the interaction term does not even necessarily show the sign of the interaction effect in general. Thus, the coefficient and the standard errors of the interaction term in Table 1 alone do not tell us much about the interaction effect and its statistical significance. Accordingly, I examine the impact and significance of immigration, unemployment and their interaction using the techniques suggested by Ai and Norton (2003).

In what follows, I first calculate the predicted probabilities that a respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude at various configurations of the independent variables. Second, I plot 3-dimensional graphs showing the change in the probability that a respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude at varying levels of both immigration and unemployment. Finally, I plot the z-statistics of interaction effect against predicted probabilities that the respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude. The last plot facilitates interpretation of the significance of the interaction term.

To provide a quick look at the impact of immigration and unemployment on the dependent variable, the predicted probabilities of having an anti-immigrant attitude under different scenarios are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 illustrates the change in predicted probabilities when unemployment is at its minimum, mean, and maximum values respectively. For all probabilities in Table 2, immigration level, age, and education are held at their mean values and the respondent is assumed to be male.9

The first column in Table 2 shows that when all variables except unemployment are held constant at their mean values and unemployment is
set to its minimum value, the probability that the person is anti-immigrant is around .40. When unemployment increases to its mean value, this probability increases to .48. Increasing the level of unemployment to its maximum value also increases the probability to .52. Thus, this brief look shows that increasing unemployment is increasing the probability that an individual is anti-immigrant when all the other variables are held at their mean values.

The same analysis can be carried out to examine the impact increasing immigration has on the probability of being anti-immigrant. The third column of Table 3 shows the probability of a person being anti-immigrant when all variables including immigration are held at their mean values. As observed in the first column of Table 3, when immigration is decreased to its minimum value the probability slightly drops to .47. When immigration increases to its maximum value the probability increases to .54. Thus, as in the previous example increasing immigration when unemployment is at its mean value increases the probability that an individual is anti-immigrant.

As I have already cautioned, Tables 1, 2 and 3 provide us with limited information about the influence of the variables of interest on the dependent variable. To fully understand the impact of immigration on the probability that the respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude, we need to examine its impact for the full range of values of unemployment.
Similarly, we need to examine the influence unemployment has over the entire range that immigration takes in the data.

The graphs in Figures 1 and 2 plot the probability that the respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude as we vary unemployment and immigration levels in the respondent’s country. In both of the graphs, immigration and unemployment are placed on the horizontal axes and probability that the person has an anti-immigrant attitude is on the vertical axis. In Figure 1, as we move from the front bottom left corner of the plot to the front bottom right corner, the unemployment level decreases. As we move from the front bottom right corner of the plot to the rear bottom right corner, immigration level increases. Similarly, as we move from the front bottom left corner to the upper left corner, probability that the person has an anti-immigrant attitude increases. The dimensions of the graph in Figure 2 can be explained in a similar fashion.

In Figure 1, the side of the plot that faces the reader illustrates the cases where the unemployment level varied. This plot shows that when immigration is at very low levels, the impact of increasing unemployment is negative, as it decreases the probability that the person has an
anti-immigrant attitude. However, as immigration increases, the effect of unemployment becomes positive. For example, when level of immigration is around 15 per cent, increasing unemployment increases the probability that the person is anti-immigrant. Thus, Figure 1 nicely illustrates that if the number of immigrants in a country is high, worsening economic conditions lead people to develop anti-immigrant attitudes. However, when the number of immigrants is low, unemployment does not increase—it even decreases—the probability that an individual is anti-immigrant. This finding sounds counterintuitive but is in line with Knigge’s finding that high levels of unemployment prevent right-wing extremism (Knigge, 1998: 266). When there are a lot of immigrants and unemployment is high it is easier for the natives to blame immigrants. The high number of immigrants makes them more visible and an easier target of scapegoating. However, when the number of immigrants is low and unemployment is high it is harder to blame immigrants. Under such conditions immigrants are less visible. Besides, the argument that a small group of immigrants can cause an important economic problem is less convincing. Possibly under such conditions, people tend to learn more about the actual reasons behind worsening economic conditions and develop better-informed attitudes regarding immigrants.
In Figure 2 the side of the plot, which faces the reader, illustrates the cases where the immigration level varies. When the unemployment level is very low, increasing immigration does not have any impact on the probability that the respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude, as it does not change predicted probabilities. (Notice the essentially straight line of the shaded area along the immigration dimension.) However, as the level of unemployment increases, the effect of immigration is dramatic, as it sharply increases the probability that the person is anti-immigrant. Thus, if the economic conditions in the country are favorable, increasing the number of immigrants in the country does not lead people to develop anti-immigrant attitudes. However, when economic conditions become unfavorable, increasing immigration increases anti-immigrant attitudes.

Previously in Table 1 we saw that the coefficient of the interaction term for unemployment and immigration is positive and significant. However, as I notified before, we cannot gauge the statistical significance of the interaction term just by looking at standard errors and z-statistic of the interaction term (Ai and Norton, 2003). We need to examine how statistical significance of the interactive term changes across individual observations. The graph in Figure 3 plots z-statistics of the interaction effect against predicted probabilities. The x-axis in the graph is the predicted probability that the respondent has an anti-immigrant attitude. The y-axis is the calculated z-statistic values for each observation in the dataset. The lines above and below the zero line show the critical z-statistic.

FIGURE 3
STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERACTION TERM
values (i.e. the endpoints of the 95% confidence interval). Most of the calculated z values for the observations in the dataset exceed the critical z values, leading us to reject the null hypothesis that the coefficient of interaction term is zero. Thus, for most of the observations (i.e. when predicted probability is above .2) the interaction effect attains statistical significance. Only for those observations in the sample where predicted probability is below .2 the interaction effect loses its significance.10

Before commenting the wider implications of these findings, I discuss the demographic variables. Most of the coefficients of the demographic variables are all in the expected direction. To provide a better understanding of the impact of these variables I preset the predicted probability that a person is anti-immigrant under different scenarios of interest in Table 4.

The second column of Table 4 shows the predicted probability that a 43-year-old male with 12 years of education is anti-immigrant holding levels of unemployment and immigration at their respective means. This probability is .48. Changing the respondent’s gender to female leads to a drop in probability of being anti-immigrant to .47. The fourth column of Table 4 shows that increasing the male respondent’s education to over 15 years the probability decreases to .37. Lastly, the impact of age is observed by comparing the second and the fifth columns. When the age of the respondents is set to its maximum value, the probability increases to .60. The analysis of the control variables results shows that the control variables were significant and this supports the inclusion of these factors.

### DISCUSSION

In order for the mechanism to work as it needs to in the materialist impact argument, increasing unemployment in a country where immigration is already high must increase the probability that an individual is anti-immigrant. If this is true, then the results are consistent with
the posited mechanism. The analysis shows that unemployment does not have a positive effect when immigration is low, but at higher levels of immigration, increasing unemployment increases the probability that an individual is anti-immigrant. Thus, Hypothesis 2 receives empirical support and the results are consistent with the hypothesized mechanism.

If an individual perceives immigrants as a threat to national culture and unity, economic conditions should not be relevant to the probability that he or she is anti-immigrant. The findings of the paper show that increasing immigration leads people to develop anti-immigrant attitudes only when economic conditions in the country are unfavorable. However, if economic circumstances are favourable, people are not as likely to think negatively of immigrants. Therefore, evidence supporting Hypothesis 2 is not strong because when unemployment is low, the impact of increasing immigration on individuals’ propensity to be anti-immigrant is negligible. In short, the results show that the mechanism required by the cultural argument does not receive consistent support.

In summary, the underlying mechanism in the materialist impact argument is better supported than that of the cultural impact argument. I argue that the most important factor influencing individuals’ attitudes towards immigrants is their economic circumstances. While more detailed and extensive interview or survey data is needed to more conclusively show that the attitudes are shaped by economic constraints, the findings in the paper are promising for the materialist impact argument. The statistical results lend systematic support to a line of argument that is widely supported by anecdotal evidence. For example, an article published by the Swedish Institute argues that when there was a labor shortage and Sweden enjoyed favorable economic conditions, government’s immigration policy reflected this. However,

“the image of immigration has been affected by these developments (high unemployment). When the economy is weakening, unemployment is rising and the influx of refugees is meanwhile growing, it is easy for people to become dissatisfied with the situation. In the early 1990s, a reaction against immigration policy, but also against immigrants already living in Sweden, began to emerge” (Jederlund, 1992: 2).

The findings of my analysis my analyses are promising and they suggest several directions for future research. First of all, future research
could examine how changes in economic conditions over time influence peoples’ attitudes towards immigrants. If people were less opposed to immigration as their economic conditions improve, this would provide even stronger additional support. Second, future studies might attempt to examine how the existence of an extreme right party in a country influences peoples’ attitudes toward immigrants. It would be interesting to see whether extreme right parties emerge in countries with anti-immigrant publics or whether they bring about the development of anti-immigrant sentiments. Exploration of these issues will shed considerable light on the origins of anti-immigrant sentiments in Western Europe.

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NOTES

1. See (Elster, 1998: 45–52) for the differences between laws and mechanisms and (Little, 1991: 14–15) for a good definition of what a causal mechanism is.
2. This is essentially the classical ecological inference problem.
3. Numerous detailed classifications of what constitutes an extreme right party exist in the literature (Betz, 1994; Ignazi, 1992; Kitschelt, 1995), but because they are not of direct relevance to the study at hand I will not go into great detail describing them. Regardless of the exact classification used, extreme right parties have a restrictive immigration policy as one of their few key issues. Hainsworth (1992) states that immigration is “the extreme right’s issue par excellence, while similarly Husbands (1992) states that “what unites all of those parties is their particular commitment to some sort of ethnic exclusionism, a hostility to foreigners, immigrants, Third World asylum-seekers, and similar outgroups.” Thus, there is a large consensus among scholars about the association between extreme right parties and anti-immigration policy stances.
4. Terms material and cultural impact are partly taken from Golder (2003).
5. Golder (2003) calls this the “ideational” argument.
6. In reviewing the research on the determinants of anti-immigrant attitudes conducted by economists, I found that they have typically focused on the impact of individuals’ specific labor market concerns on attitudes or have more generally studied the determinants of preferences over various immigration policies (Citrin et al., 1997; Dustmann and Preston, 2000; Scheve
and Slaughter, 2001). “Over the years, conjectures on the determinants of anti-immigrant sentiments have been more on heavy theorizing and causal inference” (Gang, et al., 2002, 5).

7. In this paper being anti-immigrant means that the person perceives immigrants to be negative force in the society. Thus, the respondent is against the influx of new immigrants into the country and also thinks that there are already too many existing immigrants in the country.

8. Anti-Immigrant is a binary variable to decrease the chance of measurement error. While three different levels of attitudes could have been measured using the three responses, the second response is too ambiguous, being “a lot but not too many” because this response does not necessarily indicate a “moderate” attitude towards immigrants. Thus, two of the three responses indicate that the respondent does not have an anti-immigrant attitude.

9. Specifically, the probabilities are for a 43 year old, male respondent, possessing 12 years of education, living in a country where approximately 7 percent of the population is composed of foreign citizens.

10. Examination of Figures 1 and 2 show that this is a very small portion of range for either variable, as well as being a very small portion of the sample.

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