

# Immigration and the Imagined Community in Europe and the United States

Jack Citrin

University of California

John Sides

George Washington University

Both Europe and the United States are confronting the challenges of economic and cultural integration posed by immigration. This article uses the ESS and CID surveys to compare transatlantic public opinion about immigrants and immigration. We find more tolerance for cultural diversity in the United States, but we also find that Americans, like Europeans, tend to overestimate the number of immigrants in their countries and tend to favor lower levels of immigration. The underpinnings of individual attitudes are similar in all countries and immigration attitudes are surprisingly unrelated to country-level differences in GDP, unemployment and the number and composition of the foreign born. An implication of these findings is that acceptance of higher levels of immigration, deemed by many to be an economic need, will require both more selective immigration policies and an emphasis on the cultural assimilation of newcomers.

Immigration brings strangers into 'our' homeland, complicating the balance between unity and diversity. In the United States, repeated waves of immigration over two centuries have created a remarkably diverse society, with significant groups coming from nearly every continent. Who should be allowed to come to America, how many, and what should be expected of them once in the United States are old, though enduring, political issues. *E pluribus unum* remains the national motto even as debates about its feasibility intensify. A striking aspect of contemporary immigration, however, is that it is affecting not only 'settler societies' such as the United States, Canada and Australia, but also many other countries whose sense of identity has been far less inclusive and whose boundaries have been less porous, at least until now. In particular, many European countries are confronting the challenges of ethnic relations and social cohesion associated with the arrival and settlement of large numbers of culturally, religiously and racially different people. This article uses the European Social Survey (ESS) and the 'Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy' (CID) study to compare what citizens on both sides of the Atlantic think about immigration. Has American history produced a distinctive set of attitudes toward immigration, a relatively welcoming outlook that forms part of an 'exceptional' political culture? Or do Western publics on both sides of the Atlantic converge in their opinions, notwithstanding the differences in their countries' past experience and policy? And what factors explain any cross-national differences in attitudes? For example, does the degree of concern about immigration within a country derive from its economic health, or the size and composition of its own immigrant population?

## Immigrants in the Narratives of Nationhood

The comparison of popular attitudes is intriguing because America and Europe approach the dilemmas of contemporary immigration from radically different historical perspectives. Immigration is a fundamental part of America's founding myth. The repeated proclamation by presidents and lesser politicians that 'we are a nation of immigrants' elicits virtually no rhetorical dissent. Most Americans acknowledge that all of us 'here' now – Native Americans aside – originated from somewhere over 'there'. Indeed, immigrants are often portrayed as 'foreigner-founders', the quintessential Americans, adherents of the values of personal responsibility and hard work that are distinctive of American political culture and symbols of an optimistic 'new' nation constantly renewing its consent-based, individualist identity through the arrival of people leaving their past behind (see Honig, 2001). Although the historical reality is that legal immigration to the United States often was difficult and that immigration policy before the 1960s was founded on ethnic prejudice, the welcoming figure of the Statue of Liberty, and Ellis Island, the landing place for 'the huddled masses yearning to be free', are symbols of American national identity as potent as Plymouth Rock and Jamestown.

In Europe, the story is quite different. Immigration does not figure in the construction of identities of most nation states in the ever-expanding European Union; instead, these states define themselves in bounded ethnic terms. The demographic fact may be that Germany has a large foreign-born population, but the often-mocked official position that 'Germany is not a country of immigration' is broadly accurate in describing how ethnic minorities, even if born in Germany, fit into the political community (Hansen, 2007). Unlike the American experience, immigration came to the nations of Western Europe more recently and reactively, first as a response to the consequences of the Second World War and then as a result of the political convulsions in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere.

In Europe, early post-Second World War immigration was a market-driven economy, with 'guest workers' and residents of former colonies recruited to fill the need for labor. After the oil shock of the mid-1970s, European countries reversed course and pursued zero-immigration policies while also attempting to reduce their foreign-born populations through forced and voluntary return (Parsons and Smeeding, 2006). In the late 1990s, however, shortages of skilled labor created in part by competition with the booming American economy led European countries to shift from stemming immigration to selective solicitation of high-tech and professional workers. Demographic considerations also prompted a more positive orientation toward immigration. Birth rates below replacement levels and increased longevity mean that there is a potential shortfall in the resources required to fund politically entrenched entitlement programs. Immigration arguably could mitigate the consequences of declining populations,

but ironically the more inclusive and generous benefits programs in Europe seem to have impeded the economic integration of these immigrants relative to the United States and Canada (Hansen, 2007).

In both the United States and Europe, the debate about immigration – who should be allowed to come and how many – has two distinct primary dimensions, the economic and the cultural. On the economic side, there is a highly technical debate about the consequences of immigration for employment, wage levels and public finance. In the United States, reviews of recent evidence (Altonji and Card, 1992; Borjas, 2003; Brimelow, 2007; Camorata, 2007) conclude that there is a small macroeconomic benefit of immigration, but that this is accompanied by adverse impacts on the employment and wage levels of native workers.

Concerns about the cultural consequences of immigration have a long ancestry. From the 1840s on, nativist resistance to immigration in the United States rested on claims that the newcomers, particularly those differing from previous immigrants, would not or could not assimilate to America's democratic values. Most recently and trenchantly, Samuel Huntington (2004) has worried that the large and ongoing influx of immigrants from Mexico poses a threat to America's linguistic and cultural identity. Although future trends may differ, the available evidence to date suggests that by the third generation, the vast majority of Hispanic immigrants are monolingual in English, identify as Americans rather than as members of their country of origin and express patriotic sentiments as strongly as non-Hispanic whites (Citrin *et al.*, 2007).

In Europe, similar concerns about the linguistic and political integration of immigrants have grown and policy has taken another restrictionist turn. Indeed, the greater cultural distance between immigrants and native populations in Europe arguably makes the ideal of national solidarity based on shared values harder to achieve. Since 1990, many immigrants to Europe have been Muslims whose values are thought by many native citizens to conflict with the norms of a liberal, secular democratic state (Hansen, 2007). This sense of cultural threat, fueled by terrorist attacks in Britain and Spain and by the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands, has swung the policy pendulum from multiculturalism to assimilation. The celebration of diversity has given way to support for language tests and knowledge of national history and cultural norms as conditions of immigration and naturalization.

The delicate balance between economic need and cultural threat makes immigration policy a highly sensitive political issue. Nathan Glazer (2007) has noted the pervasive disjunction between American public opinion, which tends to favor less immigration and more restricted access to government benefits, and the balance of political forces that has allowed an alliance of business groups and ethnic minorities to sustain policies that generally mean more immigrants. In Europe too, the public is more opposed to immigration than the political

establishment (Sides and Citrin, 2007). And where leaders periodically must seek re-election to stay in power, public opinion does constrain what officials may safely contemplate – as the recent failure of immigration reform in the US Congress illustrates.

For this reason alone, it is important to explore in greater detail the attitudes of contemporary publics toward immigration and to consider whether there is a common syndrome of attitudes toward immigration in Europe and the United States despite the contrasting nationalist narratives alluded to above and the differences in the size and composition of their foreign-born populations (Sides and Citrin, 2007). The evidence that a sense of cultural threat dominates the formation of opinion toward immigrants has obvious policy implications. A more positive outlook toward immigration then would have to be based more on an inclusive redefinition of the national political community and on efforts to integrate newcomers than on the calculus of purely economic costs and benefits.

### Comparing Attitudes Toward Immigration in the United States and Europe

Although the contrasting American and European histories of immigration are familiar, we have few systematic comparisons of American and European opinions about immigration policy. The many extant studies of attitudes toward immigration either focus on single countries – e.g. the United States (Citrin *et al.*, 1997), the Netherlands (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004) or Italy (Sniderman *et al.*, 2000) – or draw comparisons only among European countries (e.g. Lahav, 2004; McLaren, 2001; Sides and Citrin, 2007). Comparisons of the United States and Europe have typically included only a handful of European countries (Fetzer, 2000; Simon and Lynch, 1999) and often lacked comparable survey items. The ESS and CID studies, detailed elsewhere in this symposium, allow us to compare the United States and twenty different European countries.<sup>1</sup> These two studies also include a sizeable number of items that speak to the preferred composition of the state, knowledge about the immigrant population, the desired qualities of immigrants and the perceived consequences of immigration.

The first goal of the analysis is simply to compare aggregate opinion in each of these countries. These comparisons will suggest how attitudes in the United States compare to those in these European countries and whether the United States is ‘exceptional’. We then present an individual-level model of beliefs about the perceived consequences of immigration, which will suggest whether the underpinnings of immigration are comparable across countries. Finally, we determine whether the aggregate level of opinion is associated with factors such as the size, growth and composition of the foreign-born population, the state of the economy and citizenship policy. Although it is not our principal purpose here to test alternative theories regarding the origins of public attitudes about immigra-

tion and immigrants, a topic we have explored elsewhere (Sides and Citrin, 2007), we will show below that perceptions of cultural threat, linked to a preference for linguistic unity and social cohesion, are an influential correlate of hostility to immigration in most countries. At the same time, the explanatory power of country-level factors is minimal.

### *Cultural Diversity*

We begin with two items that tap attitudes toward the broader notion of cultural diversity, without specific reference to immigrants. Respondents in both the ESS and CID were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

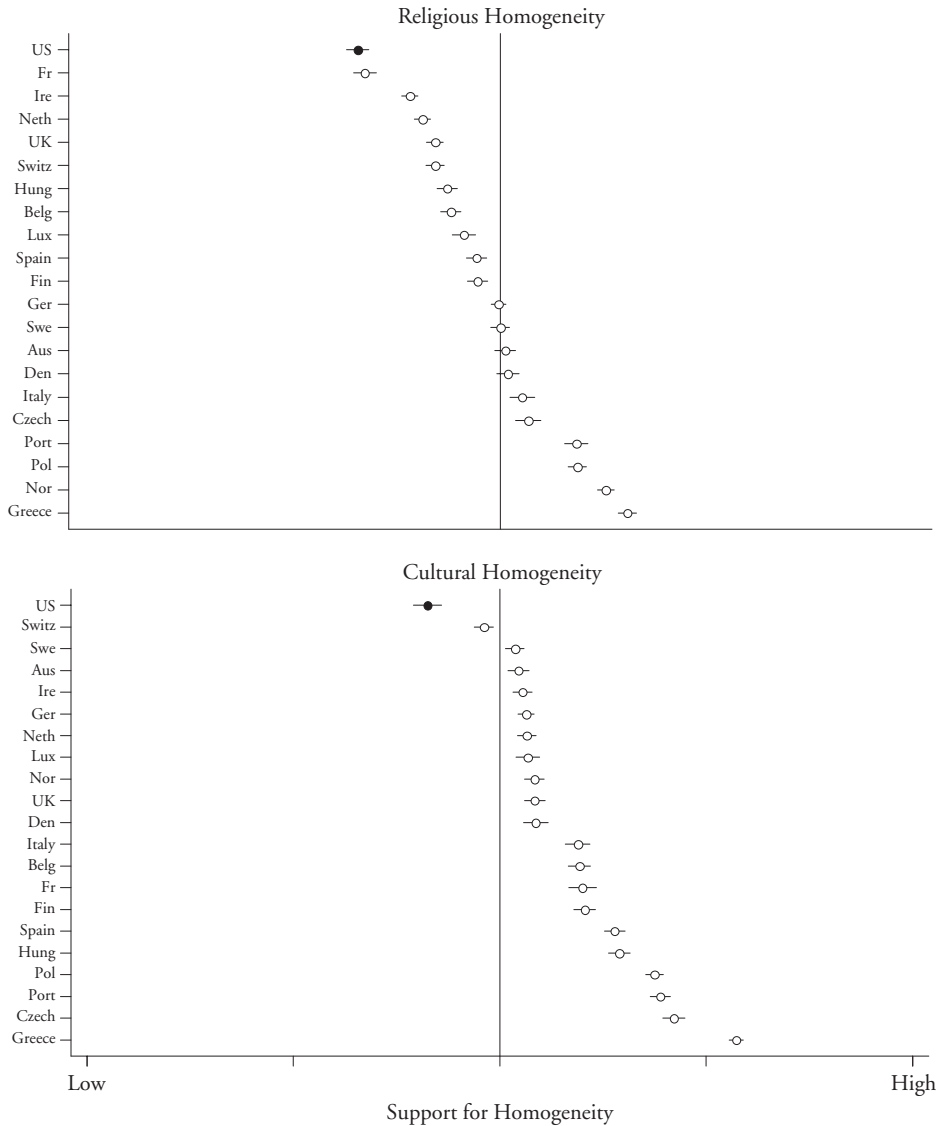
- ‘It is better for a country if almost everyone shares the same customs and traditions’.
- ‘It is better for a country if there are a variety of religions among its people’.

Each item was coded so that high values equal support for homogeneity – i.e. agreement with the first statement and disagreement with the second. In Figure 1, we present the country-level means for each item, along with the 95 per cent confidence interval for each country’s mean. The data point for the United States is darkened to highlight any differences between the US and these European countries. In each graph, the x-axis ranges between the minimum and maximum value for that item – in this case, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, or *vice versa*. The vertical line in each graph denotes the midpoint of the scale.

The results suggest first that countries are relatively evenly distributed between a tendency to oppose and a tendency to support religious homogeneity. However, the majority of countries tend to support the idea of cultural homogeneity; on average, majorities in nineteen of these twenty-one countries agree that ‘It is better for a country if almost everyone shares the same customs and traditions’. Countries from Eastern and Southern Europe, especially the Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal and Greece, had the highest apparent level of support for homogeneity.

By contrast, the United States appears distinct in its greater tolerance of cultural and religious diversity. With regard to religious homogeneity, the United States and France are more opposed to this ideal than nearly every other country in the sample.<sup>2</sup> With regard to cultural homogeneity, the United States is less supportive than every European country in the sample. It appears that the long history of ethnic and religious diversity in the United States has produced a distinctive, and more favorable, orientation toward cultural heterogeneity.<sup>3</sup> However, as we show below, in the United States as elsewhere, those less accepting of cultural diversity tend to be more opposed to immigration.

Figure 1: Beliefs about Societal Homogeneity



Note: Data points are country-level means, with 95% confidence intervals.  
 Source: ESS (2002) and CID.

### Desired Qualities

A second set of items speaks to the qualities that people desire in immigrants. The ESS and CID asked respondents to rate the importance of three different qualities on a 0–10 scale, from ‘not important’ to ‘very important’:<sup>4</sup>

Please tell me how important you think each of these things should be in deciding whether someone born and raised outside [country] should be able to come and live here:

- (a) Close family living here
- (b) Be able to speak [language]
- (c) Be white.

Figure 2 presents the average importance of each item in each country. The results suggest that, overall, the ability to speak the host country's language is the most important quality, while being white is the least important. In fact, a white racial background is, on average, considered unimportant in every single nation – though a skeptic might wonder if some respondents are merely giving the socially desirable answer. Among these countries, the Swedish sample stands out as less insistent on each of these three criteria.

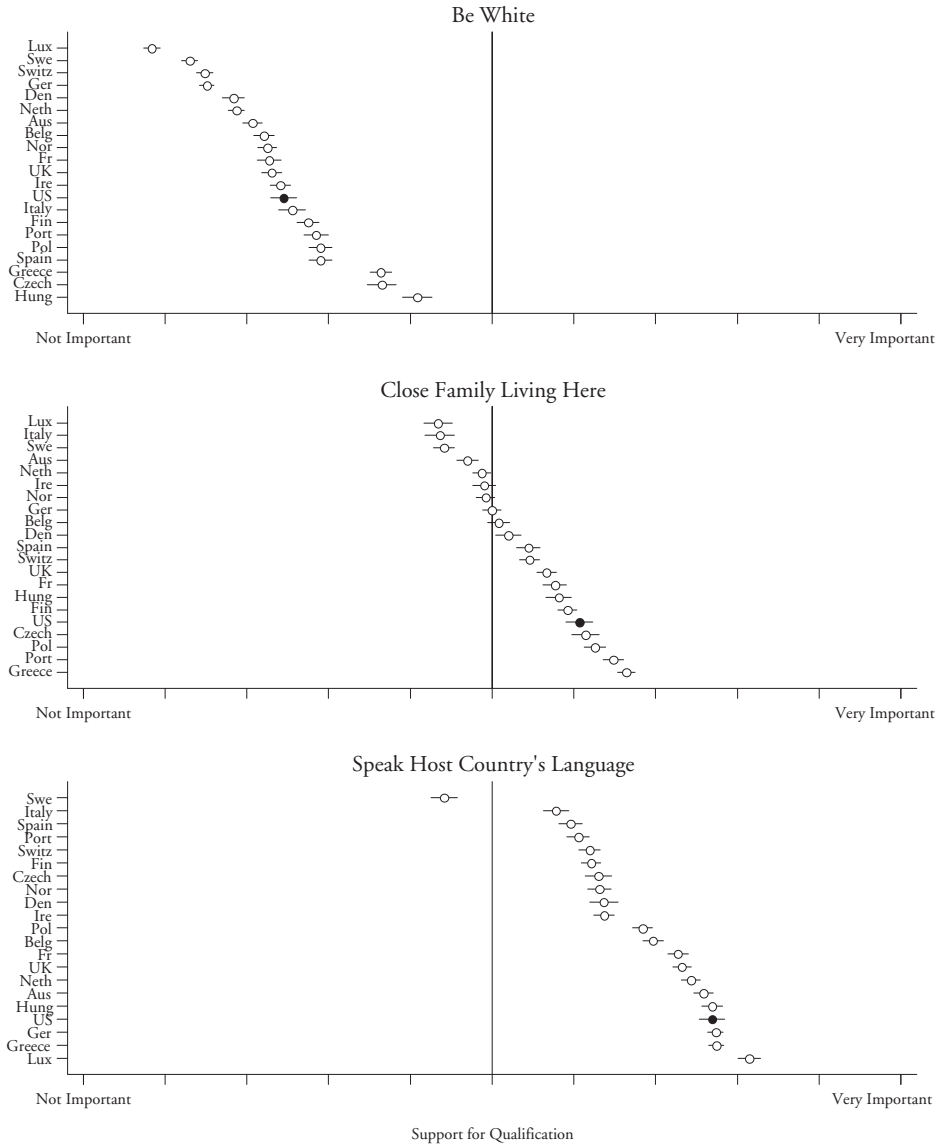
Americans actually appear relatively more likely than citizens of most European countries to prioritize each of these three qualities, especially linguistic ability and the presence of close family. Support for giving priority to family ties dovetails with US immigration policy, which focuses on family reunification and admits the majority of legal immigrants based on this principle. The desire for immigrants to speak English is also consistent with persistent efforts, particularly at the local and state levels, to make English the 'official' language (see Schildkraut, 2005). Although Americans tend to favor cultural diversity in the abstract, they appear to regard linguistic separatism as beyond the pale. Speaking a foreign language is viewed as a benefit and bilingual education is accepted as long as it is implemented as a pathway to fluency in English. Not 'English only' perhaps, but 'English first' is the defining cultural outlook. Americans seem to regard speaking English as an indispensable glue in a country made up of diverse groups and as a necessary skill for economic mobility and civic engagement. Polls consistently show that Americans of all ethnic backgrounds agree that speaking English is very important for making one 'truly American' (Citrin *et al.*, 2001).

### *Perceptions of Numbers*

What do Americans and Europeans know about the size of the immigrant population? Do their perceptions mirror reality or are they systematically biased in some way? There is every reason to believe that these perceptions will be upwardly biased. A robust finding in the literature on beliefs about minority populations is that, on average, citizens tend to overestimate the size of these populations (e.g. Nadeau *et al.*, 1993). We expect a similar degree of 'innumeracy' with respect to immigrants.

The ESS and CID asked respondents to estimate the size of the foreign-born population: 'Out of every 100 people living in [country], how many do you think were born outside of [country]?' Thus, respondents are being asked

Figure 2: Beliefs about Qualifications for Immigrants

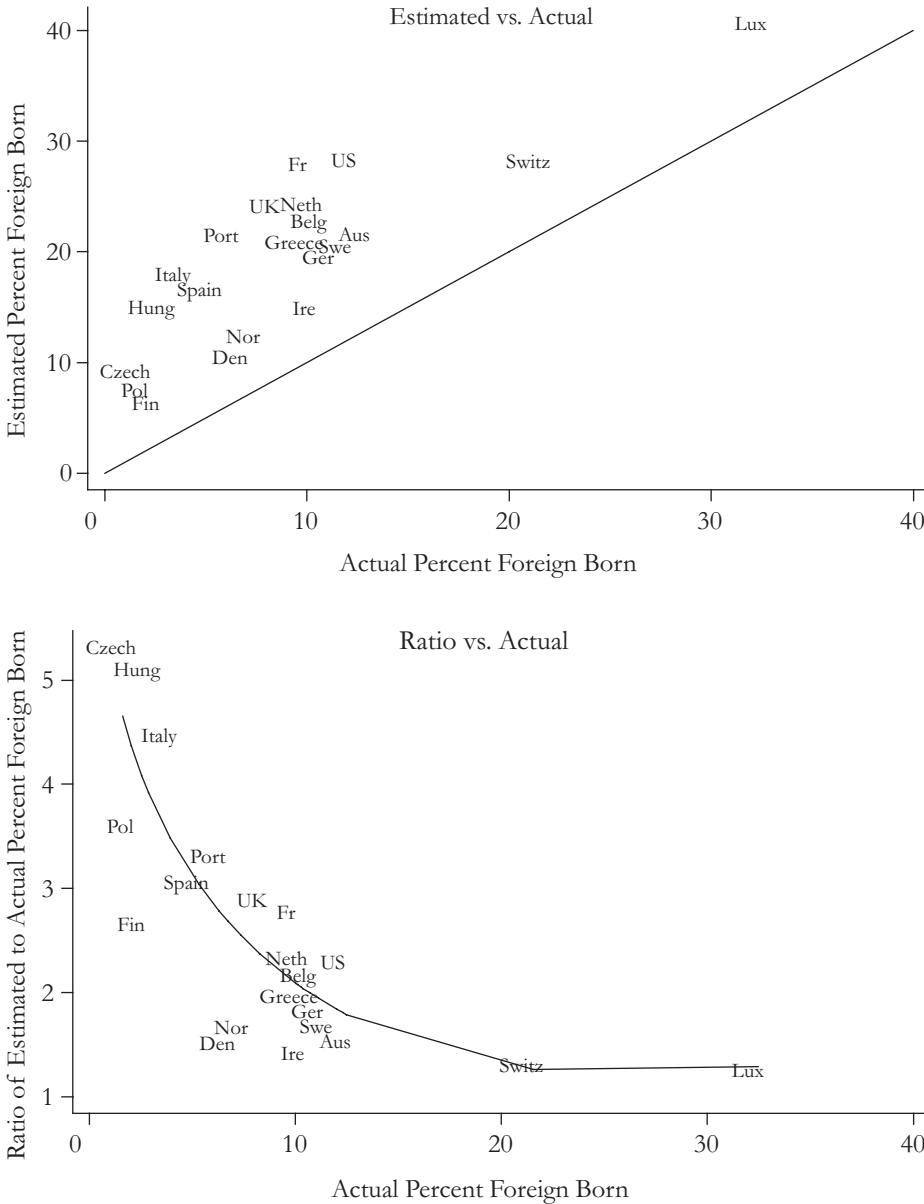


Note: Data points are country-level means, with 95% confidence intervals.  
 Source: ESS (2002) and CID.

implicitly to provide a percentage estimate. In Figure 3, we first plot the average estimate in each country against the actual size of the foreign-born population, which is derived from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) data (see Sides and Citrin, 2007).<sup>5</sup> A 45-degree line indicates



Figure 3: Perceptions of Immigrant Number



Source: ESS (2002), CID and OECD.

perfect correspondence between estimate and reality. The fact of overestimation in every country is obvious: the estimate in every single country is above the line. Americans are some of the more egregious overestimators, if overestimation is measured as the percentage-point difference between the perceived

number and the actual number. The average estimate in the CID sample is 28 per cent, while in reality only 12 per cent of the United States population is foreign born.

A problem with thinking of overestimation in percentage-point terms is that the meaning of a particular percentage-point difference depends on the actual level of overestimation. An eight-point overestimate is arguably less consequential in a country that is 20 per cent foreign born than in a country that is 2 per cent foreign born. Thus, in the second panel of Figure 3 we include a different measure of overestimation: the ratio of the estimated percentage to the actual percentage. We also plot this ratio against the actual percentage, along with a polynomial fit line. The scatter of data points and the steep downward slope of the fit line suggest that the magnitude of overestimation is much higher in countries with relatively few immigrants. For example, the amount of overestimation is large in the Czech Republic and Hungary, which have relatively few immigrants (approximately 1.6 and 3.0 per cent foreign born, respectively) but an average estimate of 8.5 and 14.7 per cent, respectively.

This measure of overestimation may, in a way, be biased against countries because it is easier to be wrong in a country with a low actual proportion of immigrants where an additional percentage point necessarily is a greater proportion of the base. It may also be that where there are relatively few immigrants (or visibly distinctive people), each encounter has a vivid quality that imprints itself on one's memory and contributes to overestimates. The main point to be made here, however, is that by this ratio measure, the level of overestimation in the United States is quite close to the fit line, suggesting that the public's mean estimate is not egregiously large relative to those of other nations, despite the larger size of its foreign-born population.

### *Perceived Consequences of Immigration*

A second kind of perception concerns the effects of immigration. As noted earlier, the debate about immigration often involves arguments about whether immigration helps or hurts the receiving country. Such potential effects are defined both in tangible, material terms, often using economic indicators, and in 'symbolic' terms, with reference to such things as language, religion, customs and culture more generally. The ESS and CID included three measures of immigration's perceived consequences:

- 'Taxes': 'Most people who come to live in [country] work and pay taxes. They also use health and social services. On balance, do you think people who come here take out more than they put in or put in more than they take out?'
- 'Culture': 'And would you say that [country's] cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?'

- ‘Crime’: ‘In general, do you think that [country’s] crime problems are made worse or better by people coming to live here from other countries?’

Evaluations were again measured on a 0–10 scale, where higher values indicate more concern about the consequences of immigration. Figure 4 plots the country-level means.

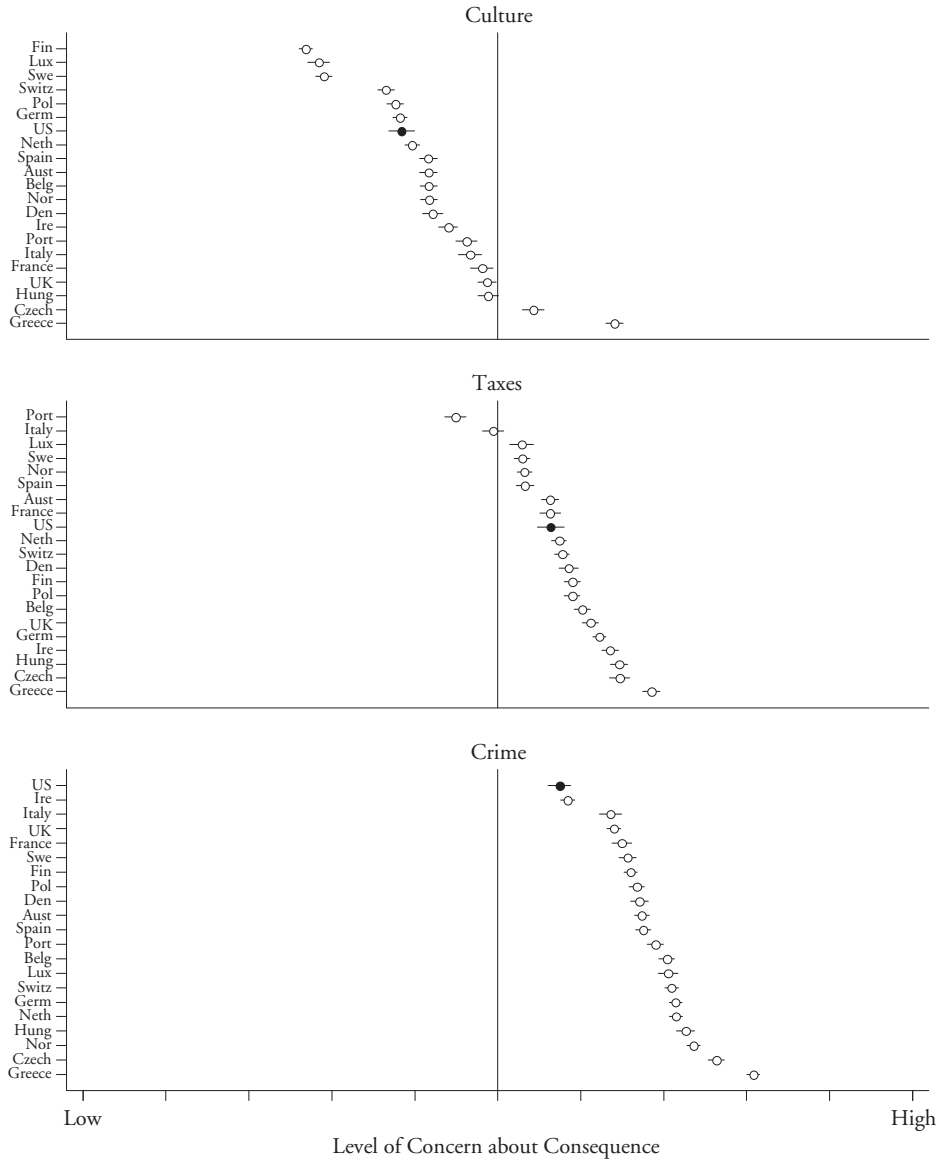
In most of these countries, there are systematic differences in concern between these three areas. Although the cultural practices of immigrants often engender controversy – e.g. the wearing of headscarves by some Muslim women – respondents in the United States and Europe tend to believe that immigration enriches, rather than undermines, cultural life. Possibly respondents have in mind dimensions of culture such as music and cuisine.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, there is significantly more concern both about the economic costs of immigrants and about their effect on crime. Across all three indicators, several countries emerge as particularly unfavorable to immigrants, notably Greece, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Americans, by contrast, tend to be less concerned about the consequences of immigration than respondents in most European countries. They are below the median with regard to culture and taxes and, moreover, are the least concerned about immigration’s consequences for crime. However, on average, Americans do believe that immigration exacerbates the problem of crime – although analysis of Census data suggests that incarceration rates in the United States tend to be lower among the foreign born than the native born (Rumbaut *et al.*, 2006).<sup>7</sup>

### *Preferred Level of Immigration*

The most basic question of immigration policy is how many newcomers to let in. To evaluate American and European opinion about this topic, we turn to a different set of data, the 2003 International Social Survey Program (ISSP), because the ESS and CID gauged respondents’ preferred level of immigration in very different ways.<sup>8</sup> The ESS first asked: ‘To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most [country] people to come and live here?’ Then respondents were asked about ‘people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people’ as well as about people ‘from the richer countries in Europe’, ‘from the poorer countries in Europe’, ‘from the richer countries outside Europe’ and ‘the poorer countries outside Europe’. In each case, the response options were: allow many, allow some, allow a few or allow none. (See Sides and Citrin, 2007 for analysis of these items.) By contrast, the CID asked a single question that replicated an item used in other American surveys: ‘Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the US to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?’ The 2003 ISSP item is much more comparable to the CID item: ‘Do you think the number of immigrants to [country] nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, left

Figure 4: Perceived Consequences of Immigration



Note: Data points are country-level means, with 95% confidence intervals.

Source: ESS (2002) and CID.

the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?’ The particular set of countries included in the ISSP is somewhat different than in the ESS, but we are still able to compare the United States and a wide range of countries in Western and Eastern Europe.

For the purposes of space, we do not present descriptive statistics for this item, but merely summarize the main findings. The most evident feature of preferred levels of immigration is the general desire to decrease immigration. In each of these 25 countries, the mean falls on the 'decrease' side of the spectrum. The lowest averages – that is, the averages closest to 'left the same' – are found in Canada, Finland (where very few residents are foreign born) and Australia. The highest numerical averages – indicating the strongest desire to decrease immigration – are found in a mixture of countries from Eastern and Western Europe, including West and East Germany, Britain, Russia and the Czech Republic. The mean for the United States sample is lower than in a majority of the countries, but the confidence intervals suggest that there is no statistically significant difference between the US mean and those of many other countries.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Americans' preferred level of immigration – that is, a lower level – is quite similar to the preferred level of most European publics. Of course, in countries with relatively liberal immigration policies, such as the United States, a preference for leaving the annual number of new immigrants 'the same as it is now' probably indicates a tolerant and inclusive orientation. Moreover, a policy of reducing immigration a little would not greatly alter the impact of the immigrants already settled.

### The Psychological Origins of Attitudes toward Immigrants

Thus far, we have addressed how people feel about immigrants and immigration, but we have not addressed *why* they feel this way. What factors are associated with attitudes toward immigration, and do these vary across countries? Is the architecture of attitudes distinct in the United States as opposed to Europe? We begin by selecting as a measure of attitudes the three items about the consequences of immigration. These items were combined into an index of 'perceived consequences'.<sup>10</sup> This index was then regressed on several individual-level variables that have been shown to affect attitudes toward immigrants: orientations toward both religious and cultural homogeneity, a sense of financial uncertainty or insecurity, social trust, formal education, political ideology and immigrant status. (See Sides and Citrin, 2007 for more details about these measures.) We expect that concern about immigration's consequences will be higher among those who: favor homogeneity, are financially insecure, are distrustful of others, have fewer years of formal education, are politically conservative and are not themselves immigrants. These hypotheses are grounded in the theorizing of previous research (Citrin *et al.*, 1997; Lahav, 2004; Sides and Citrin, 2007), indicating that feelings of economic and cultural threat reflecting group interests and identifications, as well as a generalized hostility toward ethnic 'others' motivate opposition to liberal immigration policies. The connection between more formal education and greater acceptance of immigrants is a constant finding, although how much this represents self-interest and how much genuine tolerance of outsiders and minority groups continues to be debated (Lahav, 2004).

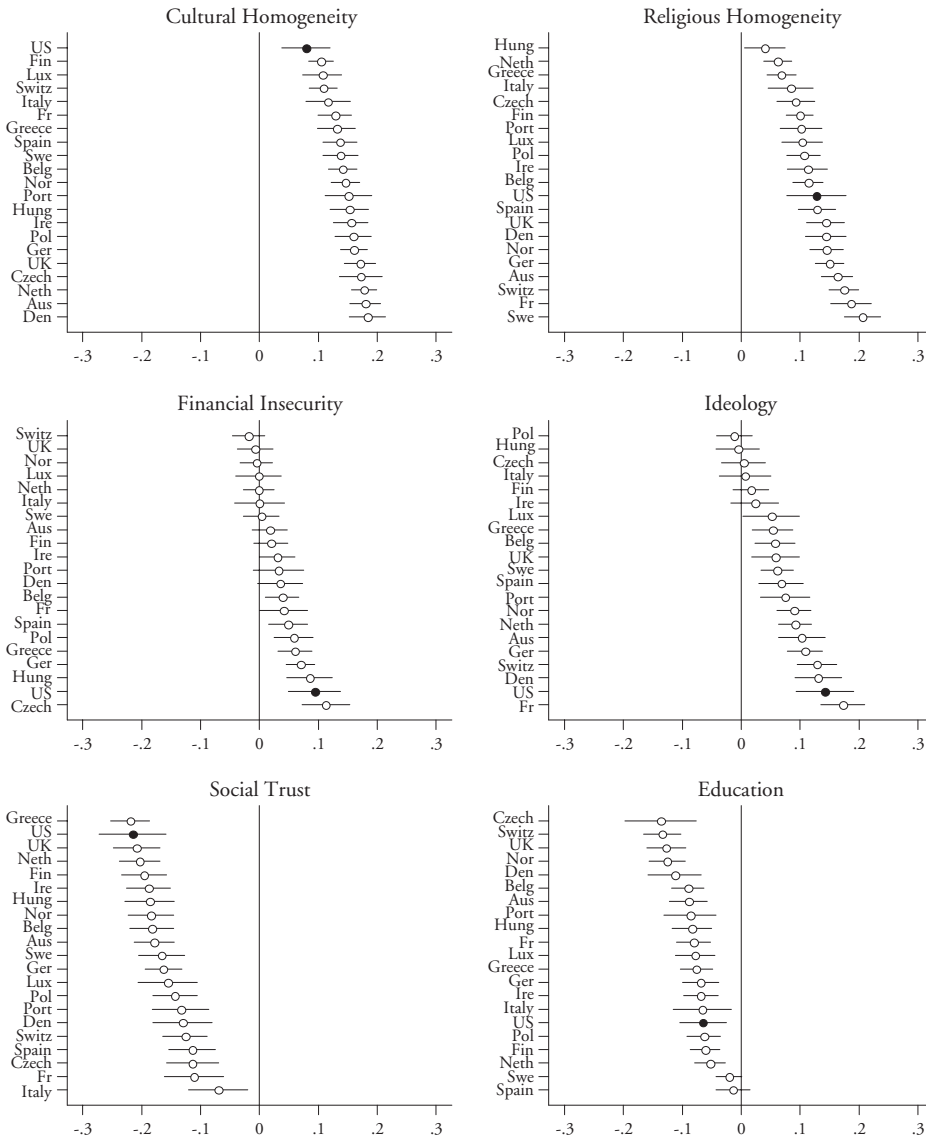
Figure 5 presents the coefficients and confidence intervals from models estimated separately for each country in the ESS and CID.<sup>11</sup> The dependent and independent variables are all scaled on the 0–1 interval, facilitating comparison among these variables' effects. There are many ways to present these data; here, we choose to focus individually on each variable, sorting countries by the magnitude of that variable's effect in each country, and highlighting its effect in the United States. This does not permit easy comparisons among variables within countries but it will tell us something about the overall effect of each variable and about the distinctiveness of each variable's effect in the United States relative to Europe.

Figure 5 demonstrates that the underpinnings of attitudes toward immigration are similar across nations. In most countries, each of these six variables has a statistically significant effect in the direction hypothesized. Beliefs about the value of cultural homogeneity, social trust and education have particularly robust effects. The effect of education suggests one reason why immigration policies tend to be more permissive than the public is itself: if educated people are simultaneously more supportive of immigration and more likely to participate in politics, then the 'signal' being received by policy makers may be skewed somewhat toward opening the 'golden door'. The effects of both measures of homogeneity, especially when compared to the notable but less robust effects of financial insecurity, suggest that attitudes toward immigrants depend more on 'symbolic' attitudes toward cultural unity than the material circumstances of respondents.

Despite the broad cross-national similarity in the correlates of opposition to immigration, a common imprint despite the variations in historical experience, national self-conceptions and institutional settings among these countries, there are distinguishing features of the underpinnings of attitudes in the United States. For one, the effects of symbolic and material factors are closer to parity in the United States, whereas in these European countries the symbolic tends to outweigh the material. The effect of support for cultural homogeneity is smaller in the United States than in most other European countries, while the effect of financial insecurity is greater. In fact, the US is the only country in which the magnitude of the coefficient for financial insecurity exceeds that of the coefficient for cultural homogeneity. To be sure, beliefs about religious homogeneity are important in the US as elsewhere, and the differences between these countries are not always statistically significant – as suggested by the overlapping confidence intervals within each plot. Nevertheless, the United States seems somewhat distinctive in the combination of economic and cultural factors that underlie attitudes.

Finally, the effect of both social trust and ideology are larger in absolute magnitude in the United States than in most other European countries. We do not have any ready explanation for the social trust findings, and, in any case, the difference between the US and the other countries is not statistically significant. The larger effect of ideology suggests that attitudes on immigration map more cleanly on to existing ideological and partisan cleavages in the United States, even though

**Figure 5: The Relationship between Individual-Level Factors and Attitudes toward Immigration**



Notes: Data points are regression coefficients, with 95% confidence intervals, from country-specific models of attitudes. The dependent variable is the three-item scale of the perceived consequences of immigration. All variables are scaled 0–1.

Source: ESS and CID.

immigration is often believed to create intra-party cleavages, at least at the elite levels. In other countries, and particularly in the former communist countries (Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic), there is less or little evidence of any ideological divisions. We cannot provide here a full accounting of the politics of immigration in these 21 countries, but the variations in ideology's effect suggest no consistent relationship between attitudes and the conventional left–right distinction.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, these results suggest similar social-psychological origins of attitudes across countries, and a particularly important role for fundamental personal and political values. Social trust and attitudes toward cultural and religious homogeneity strongly affect attitudes toward immigrants, and their effects are both robust across countries and, on average, larger in magnitude than other factors. Attitudes toward immigrants and immigration are grounded in predispositions that, relative to education levels or financial satisfaction, are less susceptible to change. This firm foundation suggests that attitudes toward immigrants will themselves prove somewhat impervious to political and societal currents, although the salience of the issue may vary.

### Explaining Cross-National Variation in Attitudes

Although one can extract some generalizations from the data presented thus far – e.g. there is little enthusiasm for increasing immigration – the differences between these countries are also evident. What accounts for these differences? What, for example, 'makes' Greek respondents apparently more unfavorable toward immigration than Swedes? Can we identify factors at the country level that are associated with attitudes toward immigrants?

We examine three primary factors: the economy, demography and citizenship policy. Some extant work has suggested that support for restrictions on immigration and for right-wing anti-immigrant parties increases when economic health is poor (e.g. Fetzer, 2000; Jackman and Volpert, 1996). We operationalize economic health in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita as well as the unemployment rate, looking both at levels in the year prior to the survey (2001 for the ESS countries, 2004 for the US) as well as changes from five years before.<sup>13</sup>

The role of demographic factors – in particular, the size and composition of the foreign-born population – suggests the classic 'power threat' or 'group conflict' hypothesis (Key, 1949): the larger the size of a minority population, the more threatened majority group members are in the ethnic competition for economic and political resources and therefore the more hostile they are toward the minority group – in this case visibly different immigrants. Some scholars find an aggregate relationship between the size of the foreign-born population and attitudes toward immigrants (e.g. Lahav, 2004; but see Sides and Citrin, 2007).



Here we operationalize this demographic ‘threat’ in terms of both *size*, the percentage of each country’s population that is foreign born and the percentage that is foreign born and ethnically more distinctive (that is, from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia or East Asia), and *flow*, the change in the proportion of foreign nationals in the three years prior to the survey.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, we consider citizenship policy. Extant research suggests that there is wide variation in countries’ willingness to extend citizenship to foreign nationals, the stringency of the requirements for naturalization and whether dual citizenship is allowed. We might expect a relationship between citizenship policy and attitudes for two reasons. First, citizenship policies may be a reflection of mass attitudes if policy makers take into account public opinion. Although we have suggested that, in general, immigration policies appear less restrictive than the public apparently desires, there may still be a relationship between opinion and policy across countries. Second, and conversely, citizenship policies are the outcome of elite decisions and thus may function as a signal of the ‘correct’ position for the general public to take (Zaller, 1992). This top-down influence arguably would be greater where partisan conflict over citizenship and immigration policy is muted. We employ the measure of citizenship policy proposed by Marc Morjé Howard (2005; 2006). This index summarizes the dimensions noted above (citizenship, naturalization and dual citizenship) and combines them into a scale that ranges from 0, the most restrictive citizenship policy, to 6, the least restrictive.

To capture the associations between these factors and attitudes, we return to the country-specific, individual-level models of the perceived consequences index. From these models, we take the constant term for each country as an indicator of the overall ‘level’ on this index, after having taken into account the role of individual-level factors. Higher values again suggest more concern about the consequences of immigration. We then simply regress these constant term values against each of the various country-level indicators, generating bivariate coefficients and standard errors.<sup>15</sup>

Table 1 presents the expected direction of the relationship between each country-level factor and immigration attitudes, as well as the coefficient and standard error. The first two rows depict the relationship between attitudes and GDP levels and trends. In each case, we expect to see negatively sloping lines: concern about immigration’s consequences should be lower in wealthier countries, and in countries whose per capita wealth has increased relative to five years ago. In each case, however, the opposite emerges. If anything, there is more concern in countries that are wealthier or becoming more so. However, these relationships are weak, suggesting little significant association in either direction.

The next two rows depict the relationship between attitudes and unemployment. In this case, we expect unemployment, as well as increases in unemployment over time, to be associated with higher levels of concern. Again, this expectation is not borne out. There is a mild negative relationship between concern about immi-

**Table 1: The Relationship between Country-Level Factors and Attitudes toward Immigration**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Expected direction</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
GDP per capita	–	0.0005	0.002
Change in GDP	–	0.001	0.001
Unemployment rate	+	–0.003	0.004
Change in unemployment	+	0.0001	0.0004
Percent foreign born	+	0.0005	0.002
Percent foreign born (ethnically distinctive)	+	–0.006	0.006
Change in % foreign born	+	–0.00005	0.00003
Citizenship policy index	–	0.006	0.007

*Notes: Cell entries are unstandardized bivariate regression coefficients, with estimated standard errors. The dependent variable is the constant from the country-specific regression models described in the text. Higher values of this variable indicate a greater level of concern about the consequences of immigration.*

grants and the unemployment rate, and essentially no relationship between concern and changes in unemployment. Neither indicator of economic health appears associated with attitudes in these countries.

Furthermore, attitudes do not depend on the size or composition of the foreign-born population. The per cent foreign born is weakly associated with attitudes. The same is true when we limit ‘foreign born’ to those born outside North America and Europe. In fact, if anything, concern is slightly lower in those countries with larger populations of ‘non-Western’ immigrants, such as the United States, although it must be noted that the proportion of Muslims among America’s foreign born is smaller than elsewhere. Moreover, a larger increase in the inflow of foreign nationals, relative to three years prior, is not associated with higher levels of concern about immigration.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, there appears to be a very weak relationship between citizenship policy and attitudes, and, in fact, the fit line slopes in the opposite direction than expected, with concern slightly higher in countries with less restrictive policies. This may reflect the fact that where citizenship policies are less restrictive, immigrants have an incentive to come and the latent or not so latent hostility in the mass public is then engaged. But again, the large standard error suggests much uncertainty about this association. As Howard (2006) also notes, there is simply little relationship between mass attitudes and citizenship policies. The upshot of all of these results is that cross-national differences in attitudes toward immigrants are not readily explained by conventional theories, suggesting a need to explore the role of additional individual-level factors such as fear of terrorism and aggregate-level factors such as conceptions of national identity and cultural attitudes regarding equality and social responsibility.

## Conclusion

There are differences in American and European attitudes toward immigration consistent with the divergent national myths and experience with foreign migration. The evidence from the ESS and CID surveys indicates that Americans appear more tolerant of diversity yet simultaneously a little more concerned about the potential negative consequences of higher levels of immigration. However, here the differences are not so stark as to indicate a true 'American exceptionalism'. More striking are the similarities in opinion across countries. In the United States and virtually every European country polled, the mass public has similar views about immigrants' qualifications, with less emphasis placed on their color and more on their ability to speak the language of the receiving country. This latter criterion – as salient in the US as in Europe, if not more so – suggests that citizens everywhere worry about the integration of immigrants. On the whole, there is a pervasive *syndrome* of opinions about immigration: the public overestimates their number, favors fewer immigrants and perceives the consequences of immigration for public finance and safety as negative. Furthermore, the main determinants of anti-immigrant attitudes tend to be the same in countries on both sides of the Atlantic: social trust, education and leftist political views make one more favorable; feelings of economic insecurity and the desire for a culturally and religiously homogeneous society make one less favorable.

This common syndrome of opinions means that in most countries there is a disjunction between public opinion and the dominant view of political elites, which tend to be more favorable to immigrants. In the United States, this disconnect is striking, but perhaps because both the Republican and Democratic parties are divided on this issue and because diverse legislators with ties to immigrant groups, ethnic activists and business interests can prevent significant change, public policies have generally continued to favor more immigrants. In 2006, the potential to end this disconnect seemingly emerged. Anger about illegal immigration led one side to demand more stringent border control and the other to demonstrate in favor of immigrant rights and the legalization of the millions of undocumented aliens in the United States. Legislation attempting to deal with both issues – the problem of illegal immigration and the demand for both unskilled and highly educated workers – finally emerged in 2007. One component of the bipartisan proposal was to tilt the balance of legal immigration away from family reunification and toward admitting English-speaking migrants with specialized skills. Another was to provide a path toward legalizing the status of long-term residents who were illegal immigrants. A third plank of the complex legislation was to create a guest worker program. Finally, the legislation promised to commit increased resources to 'border control' in the hope of stemming the influx of illegal immigrants.

The public outlook toward these proposals was both divided and ambivalent. A 2004 national survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 30

per cent of the public felt that overall the large influx of recent immigrants has been good for the United States, 39 per cent said the impact was bad and 28 per cent said that recent immigration had not made much difference. When questions focused on illegal immigrants, however, opinion was decidedly negative. Among non-immigrants, 62 per cent agreed that recent immigrants do not pay their fair share of taxes, 51 per cent said illegal immigrants take jobs away from American workers and 66 per cent believed that government was not tough enough on immigration. Moreover, while 64 per cent described the United States as a country made up of 'many cultures and values that change as new people come here', 62 per cent felt the country should have a 'basic American culture that immigrants take on when they come here'. Only 39 per cent of immigrants expressed this normative position, a gap that arguably feeds concern about the cultural threat posed by large-scale immigration. In May 2007, with the congressional debate on the Bush-backed legislation under way, a *New York Times* poll found that 90 per cent of the public believe that US immigration policy should either be 'completely rebuilt' or needs 'fundamental change'. Fully 82 per cent believed that the government was not doing enough to deal with illegal immigration, named by 63 per cent as a very serious problem. While recognizing that illegal immigrants generally fill jobs Americans do not want, 70 per cent of the public believed that the tax burden imposed by immigration was not worth this benefit. Increasing border control and punishing employers who hire illegal immigrants were named as the most effective ways of stemming illegal immigration, though there was no great confidence in the government's ability to implement these measures. Finally, a slim majority of the public did favor some process by which to legalize the estimated twelve million illegal immigrants in the country.

The public mood emerging from these recent polls is largely consistent with the CID data reported here and makes it easy to understand how conservative activists were able to mobilize public opposition against the proposed legislation by arguing that it would be ineffective in protecting the border while rewarding those who were in the country by breaking the law. After two months of legislative effort, the proposal died, but it seems likely that any future effort to overcome the American political system's barriers against change must have the same flavor of compromise. Whatever the intensity of public anger about illegal immigration, the impracticality of mass deportation and the belief that all people deserve consideration and fair treatment make a truly draconian response unlikely.

The interplay between public opinion about immigration and public policy in Europe obviously is varied and overarching generalizations are foolhardy. Within Europe, after the Second World War, former colonial powers (France, Britain and the Netherlands) admitted erstwhile colonial subjects who were allowed to become permanent residents and citizens, whereas others, such as Germany and Switzerland, admitted 'guest workers' who were expected, wrongly as it turns out,

to be temporary residents. European countries also differ in their national traditions and these have sustained divergent approaches to defining citizenship and minority cultural rights. Ruud Koopmans *et al.* (2005) conclude that there has been a general move away from an ethnic definition of citizenship, a move that appears to diverge from a significant body of public opinion, but that policies regarding minority group rights and state support for cultural diversity vary – with Britain more tolerant of multiculturalism than France or Switzerland. Similarly, the Scandinavian welfare regimes are more open to immigrants than the neoliberal British.

The European Union further complicates the task of disentangling the influence of mass attitudes on public policy. The European Commission and Court of Justice sometimes push toward the liberalization of treatment of immigrants and toward ‘post-national’ norms, but it also is the case that the Union has facilitated the ability of nation states to cooperate in enforcing border controls and other anti-immigration measures in the name of security. Beyond this, the enlargement of the Union has made citizens of people who once would have been immigrants, further muddying the meaning of insiders and outsiders.

Evidence suggests that large-scale cultural integration occurs when countries facilitate the acquisition of citizenship while expecting migrants to absorb the values that receiving countries confidently espouse (Hansen, 2007; Koopmans *et al.*, 2005). When this process of integration is perceived to be occurring, the expectations of the public are met and, as a consequence, conflict over immigration is likely to wane. But if integration appears to founder, then many European countries, especially those with various anti-immigrant political parties, and a proportional representation electoral system that makes it easier for them to win seats, will continue to experience significant political conflict about their huddled masses.

Howard (2007) has pointed to the democratic deficit in immigration policy in both Europe and the United States while also warning about the ‘trap’ of populism. Ironically, liberal immigration policies are facilitated by institutional arrangements limiting the power of the people. An important irony is that the public continues to crave a generous welfare state while opposing one source of assistance in funding it – immigration. In the end, though, immigration is about who is ‘inside’ and who is ‘outside’ the polity and public opinion about immigrants and immigration both reflects and shapes how that boundary is changing.

(*Accepted*: 24 September 2007)

### About the Authors

**Jack Citrin**, Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA; email: [gojack@berkeley.edu](mailto:gojack@berkeley.edu)

**John Sides**, Department of Political Science, George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, USA; email: [jsides@gwu.edu](mailto:jsides@gwu.edu)

## Notes

The authors thank Matthew Wright for his assistance in data analysis and the preparation of this article.

- 1 Further information about the ESS is available from its website: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>. We exclude two countries from the ESS sample: Israel and Slovenia. The former is obviously not part of Europe, and thus falls outside the scope of this study. We exclude Slovenia because we lack comparable country-level data on the volume of immigration, which is a part of subsequent analysis. Information about the CID is available from its website: <http://www.uscidsurvey.org/>.
- 2 It is worth noting that this first wave of the ESS took place in the fall of 2002, which preceded the riots in the French *banlieues* as well as the 2004 law banning the wearing of headscarves and other religious symbols. Both of these events could have heightened the level of concern about different religions (Islam in particular). Unfortunately, the second wave of the ESS, which was fielded in the fall of 2004, did not include this item.
- 3 However, the response options of the CID and ESS items were not strictly comparable. In the ESS, the middle option was labeled 'neither agree nor disagree', but in the CID it was labeled 'uncertain'. On average 21 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively, of ESS respondents selected this category for the cultural and religious homogeneity items. The comparable figures for CID respondents are 8 per cent and 10 per cent. Thus, it seems likely that some CID respondents chose to agree or disagree when they might have remained neutral if given the ESS wording. The question is whether CID respondents who would have preferred neutrality ended up evenly divided between 'agree' and 'disagree' – in which case there is no systematic bias in the US country mean in Figure 1 – or whether they were more likely to gravitate toward a particular side. We do not think there is any *a priori* reason to expect a systematic bias, but nevertheless some caution is appropriate in interpreting Figure 1.
- 4 The CID also included an item about 'good educational qualifications and work skills'. However, the ESS separated education and skills into two separate items. This complicates any comparison between the American and European samples, so we focus on the three items common to both surveys.
- 5 The fraction of respondents unwilling to provide an estimate ranges widely across countries – between 6 per cent (Switzerland) and 41 per cent (Spain). Because these 'missing' respondents are likely not a random sub-set, this has potential consequences for the estimation of the means in Figure 3. We imputed estimates for missing respondents on a country-by-country basis using three factors known to be associated with such estimates – education, gender and whether the respondent is an immigrant – and then recomputed the country-level means. These means were nearly identical to the ones reported in Figure 3, with an average difference between the original and imputed means of less than half a percentage point.
- 6 The culture item was repeated in the 2004 ESS, which included samples in nineteen of the twenty European countries in Figure 4 (excluding only Italy). There is little evidence that aggregate opinion shifted much between 2002 and 2004. Across these nineteen countries, the average shift on the 10-point scale is a negligible 0.19 points.
- 7 At the bivariate level, there are significant correlations among beliefs about cultural and religious diversity, the desired qualities of immigrants, perceptions of immigrant numbers and the perceived consequences of immigration (analysis not shown). Not surprisingly, greater concern about immigration's consequences is associated with support for cultural and religious homogeneity, stronger beliefs in the importance of immigrants' ethnicity and language and larger estimates of immigrant populations.
- 8 Information about the ISSP is available at its website: <http://www.issp.org/>. The ISSP data utilized in this article were documented and made available by the Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung, Köln. The data for the ISSP were collected by independent institutions in each country. Neither the original data collectors nor the Zentralarchiv bear any responsibility for the analyses of conclusions presented here.
- 9 The ISSP and CID means are virtually identical. We report the ISSP mean for the sake of comparability with the other European countries in the ISSP sample.
- 10 This index is also highly correlated with the preferred level of immigration. In the ESS sample, the overall correlation between the index and a similar index of the levels items is  $r = 0.49$ . The correlation in the US – using the CID's different question about preferred level – is  $r = 0.45$ . We rely on the perceived consequences measures because they were comparable in the ESS and CID.
- 11 For the sake of brevity, we do not present the coefficients for immigrant status. As expected, they were negatively signed in each country – suggesting that immigrants are less concerned about immigration's consequences – and statistically significant in sixteen out of the twenty-one countries.
- 12 Of course, if beliefs about cultural and religious homogeneity map consistently on to the left-right dimension, then their impact may reflect an ideological cleavage. Other analysis does suggest a positive relationship between support for homogeneity and conservatism in most, though not all, countries. In particular, this relationship is weaker in the post-communist countries, suggesting again that there the politics of identity and immigration are not straightforwardly ideological.
- 13 All economic and demographic data are from the OECD. Further details are available from the authors.

- 14 We choose three years because the data become sparser before 1998. The OECD notes that figures for the Czech Republic are not strictly comparable before and after 2001, so we do not include the Czech Republic when we consider over-time changes in the inflow of immigrants.
- 15 We employ bivariate regression models to understand better the basic relationships in these data. Multivariate models reinforce the basic thrust of these findings: small and statistically insignificant effects, often in the direction opposite to our expectations.
- 16 The negatively sloping fit line – which suggests a relationship opposite to the hypothesis – is strongly affected by the presence of several outliers, notably Poland, Spain and especially Portugal. If we remove these outliers, there is a mild positive relationship, as expected, but it is not statistically significant.

## References

- Altonji, J. G. and Card, D. (1992) 'The Effects of Immigration on the Labor Market Outcomes of Less-Skilled Natives', in J. M. Abowd and R. B. Freeman (eds), *Immigration, Trade and the Labor Market*. Chicago IL: Chicago University Press, pp. 201–34.
- Borjas, G. (2003) 'The Labor Demand Curve is Downward Sloping: Re-examining the Impact of Immigration on The Labor Market', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 118 (4), 1335–74.
- Brimelow, P. (2007) 'Economics of Immigration and the Course of the Debate since 1994', in C. Swain (ed.), *Debating Immigration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 157–64.
- Camorata, S. A. (2007) 'Immigration Employment Gains and Losses', in C. Swain (ed.), *Debating Immigration*. Cambridge IL: Cambridge University Press, pp. 139–56.
- Citrin, J., Green, D. P., Muste, C. and Wong, C. (1997) 'Public Opinion toward Immigration Reform: The Role of Economic Motivations', *Journal of Politics*, 59 (3), 858–81.
- Citrin, J., Lerman, A., Murakami, M. and Pearson, K. (2007) 'Testing Huntington: Is Hispanic Immigration a Threat to American Identity?', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5 (1), 31–48.
- Citrin, J., Wong, C. and Duff, B. (2001) 'The Meaning of American National Identity', in R. D. Ashmore, L. Jussim and D. Wilder (eds), *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict and Conflict Resolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 71–100.
- Fetzer, J. (2000) *Public Attitudes toward Immigration in the United States, France, and Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Glazer, N. (2007) 'Concluding Observations', in C. Swain (ed.), *Debating Immigration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 257–68.
- Hansen, R. (2007) 'The Free Economy and the Jacobin State, or How Europe can Cope with the Coming Immigration Wave', in C. Swain (ed.), *Debating Immigration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 223–36.
- Honig, B. (2001) *Democracy and the Foreigner*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Howard, M. (2005) 'Variation in the Dual Citizenship Policies of the Countries of the EU', *International Migration Review*, 39 (3), 697–720.
- Howard, M. (2006) 'Comparative Citizenship: An Agenda for Cross-National Research', *Perspectives on Politics*, 4 (3), 443–55.
- Howard, M. (2007) 'The Politics of Immigration and Citizenship in Europe', in C. Swain (ed.), *Debating Immigration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 237–56.
- Huntington, S. (2004) *Who Are We? Challenges to American National Identity*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jackman, R. W. and Volpert, K. (1996) 'Conditions Favoring Parties of the Extreme Right in Western Europe', *British Journal of Political Science*, 26 (43), 501–21.
- Key, V. O. (1949) *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. New York: Knopf.
- Koopmans, R., Statham P., Giugni, M. and Passy, F. (2005) *Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe*. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lahav, G. (2004) *Immigration and Politics in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McLaren, L. (2001) 'Immigration and the New Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in the European Union', *European Journal of Political Research*, 39 (1), 81–108.

- Nadeau, R., Niemi, R. G. and Levine, J. (1993) 'Innumeracy about Minority Populations', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 57 (3), 332–47.
- Parsons, C. A. and Smeeding, T. M. (2006) *Immigration and the Transformation of Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rumbaut, R. G., Gonzales, R. G., Komaie, G. and Morgan, C. V. (2006) *Debunking the Myth of Immigrant Criminality: Imprisonment Among First- and Second-Generation Young Men* [online]. Available from: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=403%20> [Accessed 29 May 2007].
- Schildkraut, D. J. (2005) *Press One for English: Language Policy, Public Opinion, and American Identity*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sides, J. and Citrin, J. (2007) 'European Attitudes toward Immigration: The Role of Interests, Identities, and Information', *British Journal of Political Science*, 37 (3), 477–504.
- Simon, R. J. and Lynch, J. P. (1999) 'A Comparative Assessment of Public Opinion toward Immigrants and Immigration Policies', *International Migration Review*, 33 (2), 455–67.
- Sniderman, P. M., Hougendoorn, L. and Prior, M. (2004) 'Predispositional Factors and Situational Triggers: Exclusionary Reactions to Immigrant Minorities', *American Political Science Review*, 98 (1), 35–50.
- Sniderman, P. M., Peri, P., de Figuieredo, R. and Piazza, T. (2000) *The Outsider: Prejudice and Politics in Italy*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zaller, J. (1992) *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.