Generalised Trust and Perceptions of Immigration in Europe

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Abstract

As a consequence of global labour mobility, armed conflicts, and climate change, international migration is continuously growing, making the study of intergroup relations increasingly relevant. Perceptions of immigrants and immigration of the native population can be a factor that either supports or discourages immigrants' social inclusion in the destination countries. This article examines the link between generalised social trust and threat perceptions both at the aggregated and the individual level. Generalised trust has, at the aggregated level been described as a characteristic of societies that are more egalitarian, more cooperative and more integrated. In a similar vein, high-trusting individuals have been found to be more tolerant and willing to empower new minorities. While the significance of generalised trust on feelings of threat has been under some scrutiny in previous research, we contribute by examining whether or not the association between generalised trust and perceptions of threat varies between country clusters of high, medium or low contextual trust. Our data come from the 7th European Social Survey. The study shows that generalised trust is, indeed, closely correlated with lesser feelings of threat, and the effect is further enhanced when the overall level of generalised trust is high.

Key words: Immigration, integration, generalised social trust, perceptions of threat, contextual trust

Introduction

In 2016 Europe is seeking solutions for several overlapping crises. The economic crisis, with its starting point in 2008, has raised questions about solidarity between Europeans and European countries, while the refugee crisis has extended the ongoing public debate on solidarity towards third country nationals seeking either asylum or better future prospects. The diverse challenges have led to
growing Euroscepticism and the rise of populism across Europe. Moreover, the refugee crisis has challenged European states’ commitment to the Schengen agreement: in the light of the growing burden that the refugees are perceived to bring about, and in the fear of international crime and terrorism, an “open Europe” no longer seems an ideal model. While the debate over immigration is extremely topical at the moment, it has, however, for long time been one of the most difficult political issues in European politics.

Previous research has identified a number of issues that significantly affect the public opinion on immigration. One such issue is the perceived threat to the dominant group's economic, political and cultural status. A range of studies have concentrated on factors that increase the perception of threat posed by immigrants. There are, however, also factors that may reduce the level of perceived threat, such as experience and contact with outgroups (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). More recently, generalised social trust, i.e. the feeling that ‘most people can be trusted’, has been found to have positive effects on attitudes towards immigrants and immigration as it promotes attitudes of tolerance, cooperation and inclusion (Uslaner 2002; 2012). Generalised trust has, at the aggregated level been described as a characteristic of societies that are more egalitarian, more cooperative and more integrated (Putnam 2000, 137; Herreros and Criado 2009, 337–338). In a similar vein, individuals who trust 'most people in general' are more accepting of people different from themselves and they are less afraid of empowering new minorities (Uslaner 2002, 197, 215). While there is little argument about the significance of generalised trust in shaping public opinions on immigration, there are few studies that actually investigate the effect of generalised trust on immigration-related opinions across different European countries or contexts. In this article, we argue that once other relevant variables are controlled for, generalised trust is one of the most important factors reducing the threat that immigration and immigrants are felt to pose. In addition, we are interested in finding out, whether contextual trust, i.e. the overall level of generalised trust has an effect on the mechanism between generalised trust and perceptions of threat at the individual level.

The expected results will be in line with previous research (e.g. Bäck and Christensen 2016), in which the effect of generalised trust at the individual level has been found to be moderated by the general level of trust in society. High aggregate levels of trust have been seen as a sign of social cohesion, which in turn is much needed in diverse societies (Stolle 2002). However, the causal mechanism is not straightforward. A high level of generalised trust in the society can, theoretically, either reinforce or weaken the individual-level relationship between generalised trust and perceptions of threat. Bäck
and Christensen (2016) outline two different expectations of how the level of aggregate level of generalised trust may affect political participation. According to the rainmaker effect, high aggregate levels of generalised trust in the society are associated with high levels of political participation, reducing the effect at the individual level. This is because it is expected that generalised trust works like rain: it also falls on people who are not trusting. In other words, generalised trust is not only enjoyed by those who create it, but also those who do not. This leads to the expectation that individual-level trust is less needed when the surrounding level of trust is high, thus reducing its effects (van der Meer 2003, 134). However, there is also a possibility for a different causal mechanism. According to the sunmaker effect the effect of individual-level trust is reinforced when the surrounding level of generalised trust is also high (Bäck and Christensen 2016). The rationale is that generalised trust spreads more easily in contexts where it is already at a high level, increasing the effects also at the individual level. Conversely, when the individuals’ trust decreases, there will also be less contextual trust to go around, making its effects smaller (Uslaner 1999, 132). Similar expectations are valid when examining the effect of generalised trust on perceptions of threat: a high level of aggregate trust may either reduce or reinforce the individual level effect of generalised trust.

The article has the following structure: in the first part of the article we review the existing literature on perceptions on immigration as well as the economic and cultural threat hypotheses that have been used to explain prevailing attitudes. We discuss individual level attributes that, in turn, may affect feelings of threat. The focus is naturally on the theoretical and previously found empirical links between generalised trust and opinions on immigration. We also discuss how and why the overall level of generalised trust matters for the individual-level relationship between trust and perceptions of threat. In the second section, we discuss the data and the selection of variables for our study. We analyse three sets of factors that are expected to significantly affect the perceived threats of immigration: social background, economic and political group- and self-interest, and social interaction and trust. Moreover, we run our regression models within three country clusters, consisting of countries with high, medium and low (aggregated) generalised trust in order to investigate whether either the rainmaker or the sunmaker hypotheses receives support. Finally, we summarise our findings and provide our conclusions.
Explaining Attitudes towards Immigration

Immigration as a Threat to Economic and Political Power and Cultural Values

An important aspect that can be either directly or indirectly connected to the success of integration is the public opinion and attitudes on immigrants and immigration. According to Borjas (1999, 126), several issues determine the direction of the immigration debate. These issues may be economic, such as the large redistribution of wealth induced by immigration, or political, such as the redistribution of political power that immigration can bring about. Some issues may be social and cultural, such as the impact of immigration on ethnic diversity and on the cultural cohesion of the society. This reflects the idea of the realistic conflict theory, which holds that both socio-economic and cultural competition over scarce resources (such as real or imagined threat to the safety of the group, economic interests, political advantage, military consideration, or social status) between groups may result in hostility and unfavourable attitudes towards out-groups (Sherif and Sherif 1979; Blalock 1967). It is often argued that perceptions of immigration and immigrant-related issues could be even more important for shaping migration policies than factual information (Borjas 1999, 126; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007, 2010).

Discriminatory intergroup effects can also be analysed on the basis of the social identity theory, according to which an essential element of individuals’ sense of who they are is based on what groups they belong to or identify with (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Aspiring for positive self-concept and positive group distinctiveness, people have a tendency to positively evaluate groups that are the basis of their social identity (Tajfel 1981). Simultaneously they often evaluate other groups negatively (Brewer 2001). A positive social identity can be achieved and enhanced through intergroup social comparisons, which include discriminatory intergroup effects. Since immigrants often belong to different racial and ethnic groups than the natives, and have different religious, political, and cultural backgrounds, their presence may be perceived as a symbolic threat to the way of life and social status of the natives (Card, Dustmann and Preston 2005; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007). Especially recent or rapid increases of diversity can intensify perceived cultural threat (Putnam 2007; Hooghe, Stolle and Trappers 2009).

When studying economic determinants of attitudes towards immigrants, the most researchers find that individuals seek to maximize their self-interest i.e. consider the impact of immigration on their
own utility. In the core of these arguments are concerns that the immigrants either replace the native workers or depress their wages (e.g. Borjas 1999, 62–86; Mayda 2006), and also rely more heavily on social welfare programs than the natives due to lower level of human capital and other socio-economic characteristics (e.g. Borjas 1999, 105–126; Hansen and Lofstrom 2003; Riphahn, Sander and Wunder 2010). Theory holds that in the labour market, income-distribution effects of immigration depend on the skill composition of immigrants relative to natives. If the immigrants are, on average, less skilled than the natives, the unskilled native workers are likely to face more competition in the labour market. If, on the other hand, the immigrants are more skilled than the natives, the opposite should hold (Mayda 2006; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Borjas 1999, 62–86).

In well-developed welfare states, in which social benefits constitute a large share of the GDP, immigrants may also be considered less entitled to these benefits due to lack of contribution. If immigrants are perceived to receive a disproportionately large share of the welfare benefits distributed, members of the majority may reason that immigrants accrue scarce resources, and pose a burden on society (Borjas 1999, 105). Especially the lower-educated tend to combine economic egalitarianism with welfare chauvinism. It seems that class interests, tied to an economically insecure position, are not universal, but conditional on the ethnic group to which one belongs (Van der Waal et al. 2010).

Scholars have also maintained that the economic threat itself is not the driving force behind negative attitudes towards immigrants. Instead, arguments on how the newcomers form an economic burden on society may be a way to conceal negative, more symbolic prejudiced attitudes towards outgroups under arguments that are perceived more legitimate in the current post-modern climate of opinion characterised by egalitarianism and anti-discrimination (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Dustmann and Preston 2007). Indeed, actual economic impacts of immigration on most national economies have been estimated as modest (Friedberg and Hunt 1995; Card 2005; Dustmann, Fabbri and Preston 2005; Borjas 1999, 126). Hence, it is not as much the negative aspects of immigration (i.e. realistic threat) than the perceived negative aspects that attract the most attention. Many recent studies also suggest that racial and cultural prejudices, i.e. non-economic determinants, are more important sources to negative attitudes towards immigrants than economic determinants (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Card, Dustmann and Preston 2005, 2012; Sniderman, Hagendoorn and Prior 2004). Studies also show that dominant group members, whose individual interests (economic or otherwise) are not directly threatened by an opposing group, are often as likely to express racial prejudice as those whose
interests are directly threatened (e.g. Bobo 1983; Quillian 1995; Ford 2011; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). In sum, it can be assumed that immigration preferences reflect symbolic group level concerns over national and cultural unity rather than personal self-interest.

**The Moderating Effect of Contact and Generalised Trust on Perceptions of Threat**

During the last decade, researchers have drawn their attention to ethnic diversity and its impact on civic engagement, social connectedness and interpersonal trust. The results are rather mixed on whether ethnic diversity erodes or enriches the aforementioned community virtues. For example, in a study on ethnic and racial neighbourhood diversity, Putnam (2007) finds that diversity has negative short-term effects on interpersonal trust, civic attitudes and community cooperation. Putnam argues, however, that in the long run, successful immigrant societies may overcome such fragmentation if they are able to create new cross-cutting forms of social solidarity.

According to the contact hypothesis, interaction with disliked groups can, under the right circumstances\(^1\), lead to reduced prejudice toward these groups (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). It has been emphasized that face-to-face interaction is of essence for the contact hypothesis to hold, as simply living in the same community without actually interacting would not constitute the kind of contact required. Living in a diverse neighbourhood may, in fact, increase the level of perceived threat, in case the individual has no personal contact with other ethnic groups. For those who have regular, personal interactions with their neighbours, a diverse neighbourhood context may pose a lesser problem (Stolle, Soroka and Johnston 2008; Laurence 2014). Uslaner (2012, 36) also emphasises that a lack of intergroup contact will likely lead to residential concentration of minorities, resulting in development of strong separate identities, as well as separate local institutions and political bodies. Segregation may also lead to intensified political organisation by minority groups, creating particularised ingroup trust instead of generalised intergroup trust. Thus, while increasing ethnic diversity in terms of coexistence of segregated groups does have an undesirable effect on inter-ethnic attitudes, contact lessens the negative effect of community diversity.

Who, then, is likely to enter into contact with strangers and interpret a positive contact with an immigrant as an experience that makes also future contact more likely? We argue that at this point the discussion comes to generalised social trust. While social trust refers to interpersonal trust as a
whole, we will here concentrate on generalised social trust, as opposed to particularised social trust, since we believe that the former is relevant in terms of intergroup relations. While particularised trusters only direct their trust to individuals who they already know, and whose trustworthiness they can assess according to previous experiences, generalised trusters believe that 'most people', even those they do not know from before, can be trusted. Generalised trusters have positive views toward both their own ingroup and outgroups whereas particularised trusters tend to avoid contact with people outside their own ingroups (Uslaner 2002, 32–34).

There are several possible ways that lead from generalised trust to more positive and accepting views on immigrants and immigration, and the paths may be either direct or indirect. First, individuals who have high generalised trust hold less prejudiced views and are not as suspicious of people from other cultures as mistrusters. This is because they do not feel that immigrants will take away benefits, increase crime rates or take away jobs from natives (Uslaner 2002, 194–196). Second, generalised trust breeds solidarity and tolerance (Misztal 1996). People who trust 'most people in general' believe in a common culture and the obligation to cooperate with and empower minorities and new ethnic groups (Uslaner 2002, 197, 215). Third, it may be easier for countries to commit to helping refugees, when governments believe that others will do the same. Conversely, a lack of trust leads to non-cooperation, even if it can be expected that everybody loses in such a situation. Generalised trust can be seen both as an individual and an aggregate level trait. If trusting people are more prone to donate money to charity, and demonstrate higher levels of tolerance and solidarity, countries with high aggregated generalised trust can be expected to be more willing to receive refugees and grant them asylum (Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). To sum up, generalised trust makes people want to work together for the common good by promoting cooperative social relations (Newton 2006). It has the potential to bring people with different backgrounds together and improve social cohesion between groups.

Much of the literature on social trust is closely related to research on social capital, which according to its most well-known definition is defined as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam 2000, 19–20). Social capital has both an individual and a public facet, and hence, it makes sense to study the effects of social trust both at the individual as well as the community (aggregate) level. Communities may be characterised by a certain level of generalised trust, and within these communities there are individuals with varying stocks of (individual) trust. In a multilevel study of the interplay between
generalised trust at the individual and societal level and their effect on political participation, Bäck and Christensen (2016) find that the aggregate level of trust does, indeed, matter for the individual-level relationship between generalised trust and political participation. While we are interested in studying the mechanism between generalised trust and perceptions of threat at the individual level, and not the independent effect of the context, we also want to examine if the individual-level mechanism varies between contexts of high, medium or low social trust.

In their study, Bäck and Christensen present two contradicting hypotheses of the moderating effect of aggregate-level trust: the ‘rainmaker’ and the ‘sunmaker’ hypotheses. According to Putnam (2000, 20), there may be spillover-effects from the societal level to individuals, in the way that individuals with low trust may benefit from a society where the overall level of trust is high (see also van der Meer [2003] on this subject). The rainmaker effect entails the idea that high aggregate levels of generalised trust weaken the effects of generalised trust at the individual level, since individual trust is simply less needed and individuals with low trust benefit from the surrounding (high) level of trust. This would mean that even if the direction of the relationship between generalised trust and perceptions of threat is the same within all three groups of countries, generalised trust would have a lesser effect in the country cluster where the aggregate level of generalised trust is the highest.

However, there is an opposite causal mechanism that seems equally plausible. According to the sunmaker hypothesis, the effects of individual generalised trust are further enhanced in contexts of high (aggregate) trust. According to Uslaner (1999) generalised trust spreads more easily in contexts where it is already high, making its effects even more prominent. Conversely, in contexts of low generalised trust the effects at the individual level will also be lower. Studying different forms of political participation, research indicates that individuals with high generalised trust are also optimistic about the benevolent intentions of others, which makes them even more likely to participate and achieve collective goals (see e.g. Uslaner 1999; Benson and Rochon 2004; Offe 1999). This is also in line with what Putnam (1993, 177) refers to as a ‘virtuous circle’, stating that stocks of social capital – and consequently also generalised trust – are often self-reinforcing and cumulative, which promotes the collective well-being. The same could well be argued to hold for perceptions of threat: a high overall level of generalised trust is expected to create a more tolerant, empathetic and open atmosphere, which reinforces the effect of individual-level trust on perceptions of threat.
While the overall level of generalised social trust constitutes a contextual determinant that may affect the relationship between trust and perceptions on immigration at the individual level, we recognise that it is only one of many possible contextual determinants. For instance, citizens in countries with high democratic and institutional stability could be argued to feel less threatened by immigration because the political systems are less vulnerable to external threats, and more prepared for handling the pressure that comes with e.g. masses of refugees. However, many of the characteristics of democratic and institutionally stable countries are strongly correlated with generalised trust. Several studies show, for instance, that high-trusting countries are less corrupt, have a greater degree of economic equality and put higher effort in helping those who have fewer resources (Rothstein and Uslaner 2005; Bäck, 2011). Thus, it makes sense to investigate generalised trust as an important contextual factor. In summary, our main hypothesis is

H1: The higher an individual’s generalised trust, the lower the likelihood of that individual to perceive immigration and immigrants as a threat. The assumption applies both at the aggregated and the individual level.

As the ‘rainmaker’ and ‘sunmaker’ effects of the aggregate-level of generalised trust seem equally plausible, we will allow for two additional, contradicting hypotheses, and let the empirical evidence either verify or falsify one or both of them.

H2a: A high overall level of generalised trust decreases the individual-level effect of generalised trust on perceptions of threat (rainmaker effect)

H2b: A high overall level of generalised trust increases the individual-level effect of generalised trust on perceptions of threat (sunmaker effect)

Data and Methods

In this study, data come from wave 7 (2014) of the European Social Survey (ESS). The survey includes a module of questions on attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in a number of countries. For this study, 18 countries are included: Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, United Kingdom, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway,
Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Slovenia. The method of analysis is multivariate (ordinary least squares) regression.

**The Dependent Variable**

In order to grasp a general perception of the threat (instead of comparing the relative importance of economic, political, social, or cultural issues), six survey questions are used as a *Perceptions of Threat Index*, representing all the mentioned threat dimensions. The response categories all range from 0 to 10, with 0 representing the most negative view and 10 representing the most positive view (see appendix for the exact wording and coding). The index was coded to have the same range, and then reversed to be more comprehensive. In other words, the higher the score, the higher the perception of threat.

1) Would you say that people who come to live here generally take jobs away from workers in your country, or generally help to create new jobs?

2) Most people who come to live here work and pay taxes. They also use health and welfare services. On balance, do you think that people who come to live here take out more than they put in or put in more than they take out?

3) Would you say it is generally bad or good for your country's economy that people come to live here from other countries?

4) Would you say that your country's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?

5) Is your country made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

6) Are your country's crime problems made worse or better by people coming to live here from other countries?

**Independent Variables**

The independent variables of the study are added to the regression models in blocks. The first block consists of a number of social background variables (gender, age, education, belonging to an ethnic
minority, ideological position on a left–right scale). In most of the studies concerning the public opinion towards immigration gender is not a statistically significant factor. Age, in turn, may affect immigration attitudes, since it is a direct measure of life experience, marks the position of the individual in their economic cycle, and captures generational differences, as people of certain age cohorts are likely to have been affected by the attitudinal climate when they grew up (Dustmann and Preston 2007; Heath and Tilley 2005; Ford 2011).

Numerous studies show that the most important social factor is the level of education, as the lower educated hold more unfavourable attitudes towards immigration than higher educated citizens. Lower-educated are less understanding of welfare support for immigrants (van der Waal et al. 2010) and less-skilled workers are more likely to prefer limiting immigration due to risk of growing labour market competition (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Mayda 2006). In contrast, Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) argue that instead of being afraid of labour-market competition, lower-educated are place less value on cultural diversity than their more educated counterparts. While higher level of formal education and greater acceptance of immigrants is a general finding, there are mixed interpretations of whether it reflects calculation of self-interest or genuine tolerance of minority groups.

Foreign-born respondents are more likely to favour immigration than their native counterparts (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007), although the longer time they have spent in the country, the more their views on immigration start to resemble the view of the natives, and the more willing they are to extend restrictions on immigration (de la Garza and DeSipio 1998). It could therefore be hypothesised that people who themselves belong to an ethnic minority, are more understanding and less likely to experience other (new) minorities as a threat. Thus, we also control for ‘belonging to an ethnic minority’ in our regression model.

In addition, we control for placement on the left–right scale, which is one of the two essential dimensions necessary to explain the structure of political positions in Europe. Placement on the left–right scale describes the structure of citizens’ political attitudes regarding economic issues, while placement on the liberal–conservative scale describes citizens’ preferences regarding cultural matters. While both of these scales would be necessary in order to control for individuals’ political preferences, our data lacks survey items that could be properly used for measuring placement on the liberal–conservative scale. However, European leftism is often generally associated with universal solidarity and egalitarianism, while placement to the right of the scale is associated with conservatism.
(e.g. Sassoon 2010). While this presumption does not come without reservations, it is assumed that respondents with leftist ideology are more favourable towards immigrants than those on the right.

The second block consists of economic and political self- and group interest variables that are of interest as they constitute potential explanations especially to feelings of economic threat. Previous studies have shown that people with an optimistic view of the economy are more favourable towards immigration than those with a pessimistic view (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Citrin et al. 1997). According to this, we include a survey item of general satisfaction with the economy in the respondent’s country. In a similar vein, we include a survey item on the respondents’ feeling of household income and unemployment. However, in line with previous research (Citrin et al. 1997; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010) we expect that experienced group-level threat (national economy) is a more important determinant than perceived individual-level threat (personal economy).

Furthermore, we include survey items of both external and internal political efficacy to the self- and group interest-block. Internal efficacy reflects the personal understanding of one’s own political competence, i.e. the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered, and also, whether he or she can participate effectively in politics (Zaller 1992, 21; Niemi, Craig and Mattei 1991). Latent fears and prejudices of immigration are often exploited in electoral campaigns through ‘migration issue-framing’ (Lahav 2013, 244) and it is likely that threatening rhetoric about immigration is more successful in evoking anxieties among the less politically efficacious. External efficacy, on the other hand, refers to beliefs about and trust in the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands (Niemi, Craig and Mattei 1991). Since previous research has recognised a divergence of opinion on the immigration issue between the public and the governing elites, the latter seeming to nurture more liberal view towards immigration than the former (e.g. Morales, Pilet and Ruedin 2015; Citrin and Sides 2008), it is likely that in terms of immigration policy, the public may feel that the governing elite does not respond to its demands. In sum, it can be hypothesised that citizens who have difficulties to understand political processes, who feel that their personal power to influence agenda setting is limited, and who feel alienated from mainstream political institutions are less likely to accept immigrants.

The final and third block is the most relevant for our study. It includes variables that adhere to the contact hypothesis and the expected effect of generalised trust. This social interaction block consists
of survey items on connections to immigrants, or people representing different racial or ethnic backgrounds, either through friendship or by living in a diverse cultural/racial/ethnic neighbourhood and generalised trust. The latter is measured with the 11-point ‘standard question’ of generalised social trust asking ‘Generally speaking, do you think that most people can be trusted, or can you never be too careful’? This question is the most commonly used when measuring generalised trust.

The main hypothesis (H1) is that the higher an individual’s generalised trust, the lower the likelihood of that individual to perceive immigration and immigrants as a threat. The assumption applies both at the aggregated and the individual level. The hypothesis will be tested with the Perceptions of threat-index described above. The independent variables are entered into the regression equation (ordinary least squares) hierarchically, beginning with the social background variables (Model 1), followed by economic self- and group interest variables (Model 2) and social interaction variables (Model 3). The regressions will be run first for the whole sample, and then within groups of countries according to their general level of trust, in order to explore whether the rainmaker or the sunmaker hypotheses (H2a and H2b) receive support. Figure 1 illustrates the design of the study.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Analysis and Results

Figures 2 and 3 summarise the mean values for both the Perceptions of Threat Index and generalised trust in 18 European countries. As can be seen, the feelings of threat are the lowest in Sweden, Germany, Finland, Switzerland, and Norway. The respondents of the Czech Republic and Hungary feel the most threatened by immigrants. Whereas the Czech Republic and Hungary demonstrate low levels of aggregate generalised trust, the level of trust is very high in Sweden, Finland, Switzerland and Norway. Germany displays medium-level scores when it comes to aggregated trust. Figure 4 illustrates these observations.

[FIGURES 2, 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE]
The scatter diagram shows that there is, indeed, a significant aggregate-level correlation between generalised social trust and the index of threat. The $R^2$ Linear 0.333 is significant at the 0.05-level and most countries are placed quite neatly along the regression line. The Czech Republic and Sweden are also placed along the line, albeit slightly further away.

Table 1 shows our regression model including all 18 countries. The independent variables have been entered into the regression equation in three blocks, as described above. The first model includes only social background variables, which explain 10.7 percent of the variation. All variables are statistically significant. The second block, consisting of variables describing economic and political self- and group interest, improves the model by 14.5 percentage points. Especially satisfaction with national economy and external political efficacy turn out to be important variables. Finally, the third block of variables is included, and the full model now explains 28 percent of the total variance when it comes to perceptions of threat.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

As expected, generalised trust significantly lessens the perceptions of threat: a one-point-increase on the trust-score decreases the score on the threat-index by 0.112. In the social background block, placement on the left–right scale and level of education are the most relevant. As expected, the well-educated and left-oriented are more favourable towards immigration. These two variables are closely linked to the individual’s social position in society and to individual values: those who identify more closely with the political left, have traditionally strongly emphasised solidarity and equal rights between people and nations, and the same ideals of tolerance and common good often come with higher education.

Anti-immigrant sentiments of the lower-educated are also explained by perceived deprivation: lower level of political competence, weaker economic position, and limited amount of cultural capital result in higher perceptions of threat. Since the lower-educated are more often in a less secure economic position compared to the higher educated, a view that increased immigration creates pressure on the welfare system may lead to fear that it reduces the respondents own possibilities for receiving welfare
benefits (van der Waal et al. 2010). Indeed, out of the variables in the second block, satisfaction with national economy and external political efficacy are the most important. Those respondents who are satisfied with the economy, and believe that their government is capable of taking into account the concerns of the public, are less threatened by immigration. In contrast, those who feel that they do not have a say in how the country is run, feel more threatened by immigration. As is the case with education, political efficacy divides people into ‘Haves’ and ‘Have-nots’, who feel that they have more to lose than gain from immigration. Previous research has also indicated that in most countries, there is a disjunction between public opinion and the dominant view of political elites: while public policies favour more immigrants, the public wishes to restrict the immigration policies (e.g. Citrin and Sides 2008). This way immigration is often a factor that fans resentment towards the governing elites among the people who are dissatisfied with the status quo.

Finally, in addition to generalised trust, having few or several friends of foreign origin lowers the perception of threat by 0.358. This result highlights the importance of personal contact in intergroup relations, since only living in a diverse neighbourhood does not significantly lower the threat perceptions. The results are in line with previous studies arguing that a diverse neighbourhood can either have a positive or a negative impact, depending on the individual’s personal inter-ethnic ties (Stolle, Soroka and Johnston 2008; Laurence 2014).

After determining the importance of generalised trust and other independent variables, we run the analyses for three country clusters. The countries are clustered into groups of high, medium, or low-level trust based on their mean values for generalised social trust, using percentile cut-off points. Cut point for 33.333 percentile is 4.68 and for 66.666 percentile 5.60, implying that countries that fall below 4.68 are in the ‘low trust’-group, whereas countries that score above 5.60 are in the ‘high trust’-group. The rest of the countries are placed in the ‘medium trust’-group. The results are presented in Table 2.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Overall, the directions of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables are the expected. Education and placement on the left–right scale are the most important background variables: in each country group, placement on the political left as well as higher level of education
reduce anti-immigrant sentiments. The second block of economic and political self and group interest confirms that respondents with weaker external and internal political efficacy, the less satisfied with the national economy and those who have a negative feeling about the household’s income, feel more threatened by immigration. In the high-trust countries, however, the economic variables play a less significant role than in the medium- and low-trust countries, where satisfaction with national economy is the most important predictor of immigration attitudes in the second block. Unemployment does not significantly increase perceptions of threat in any country group. External political efficacy has the most significant impact in high-trust country cluster. However, it is an important predictor also in the other two clusters.

The overall explanatory power of our model is the weakest in the low-trust group (24.4 %), and the highest in the medium-trust group (30.8 %). In the high-trust country cluster, the model explains 24.4 percent of the variation. The inclusion of the social interaction block improves the model in all country groups, most notably in the medium-trust group (3.7 %).

Having friends of foreign origin decreases the threat score most in the low-trust group (β=-0.459), whereas the effect is -0.366 in the high-trust group and -0.342 in the medium-trust group. Ethnic diversity in a neighbourhood does not have much weight in reducing anti-immigrant views. Either way, it has more weight in the high-trust country cluster (β=0.123) than in the medium-trust cluster (β=-0.074), while it is not significant in the low-trust group. A possible interpretation of the results is that high aggregate-level trust may lower the risks of interethnic contact, creating a friendlier environment where people perceive ethnic diversity as a positive thing. This finding, however, is probably also linked to other contextual factors in high trusting countries.

Finally, in all country groups a one-point increment in generalised trust decreases the perception of threat. In high-trust countries a one-point increment in trust decreases the threat-score on average by 0.122, and in medium-trust countries by 0.147. However, generalised trust lessens the perceptions of threat only by 0.084 in the low-trust group. In the medium-trust group generalised trust is the second most important variable out of all variables included in the full model, while in the high-trust group it is the third most important variable. In the low-trust group it has less weight, being the sixth most important variable.
We do not include tables for the individual countries, but nevertheless, the following observations regarding the effect of generalised trust on the perceptions of threat-index can be made after running the regressions for the 18 countries separately. Generalised trust significantly affects threat perceptions in all countries except for Ireland, Poland, and Slovenia. Generalised trust has by far the strongest effect in the United Kingdom, where a one-point increment on the trust scale decreases the threat score by 0.179. In addition to the UK, generalised trust has the strongest effect in Belgium (β=-0.170), Denmark (β=-0.168), Norway (β=-0.162), Austria (β=-0.159), and Portugal (β=-0.151). There are many explanations for the differences between the countries both when it comes to generalised trust and perceptions of threat, and naturally these also affect the link between the two variables. This is an interesting question, which cannot be studied further in the length/limit of this article, but is of relevance for future research.

**Conclusions**

Generalised trust, faith in strangers, is a moral value that promotes interaction between people different from each other. Its value is constantly growing in importance, as countries that have developed into welfare societies during the past century now need to share this welfare with new citizens of foreign origin. In this article, we have examined whether generalised social trust has the ability to lower the perceived threat by immigration at the individual level. Indeed, the evidence from the European Social Survey indicates that those who are more trusting towards people in general also feel less threatened by immigration and immigrants. Citizens who trust ‘most people in general’ are less afraid that immigrants threaten their welfare, culture and own possibilities for a good life. They feel that their country is generally enriched by immigrants and that immigrants will contribute to the society rather than live off social benefits. Hence, generalised trusters prevent the society from splitting into groups that only foster particularised trust (Uslaner 2002, 191). Thus, a high level of generalised trust at both the individual and the aggregate level is a key to a more tolerant and cooperative society.

In this article we also wanted to examine whether or not the individual-level link between generalised trust and perceptions of threat is the same when the aggregate level of trust varies. We did this by running our regression models within three groups of countries, according to their general level of trust (high, medium or low). More specifically, our interest was in finding out whether high aggregate
level of generalised trust weakens the effects of generalised trust at the individual level (rainmaker hypothesis), or, in contrast, whether the effects of individual generalised trust would be further enhanced in contexts of high aggregate trust (sunmaker hypothesis).

Our results do not clearly support either one of the hypotheses, because the effect of generalised trust at the individual level is highest in the medium-trust cluster. While generalised trust had the weakest individual-level effect in the low-trust group, we would have expected the highest individual-level effect of generalised trust to be present in the high-trust cluster, for the sunmaker hypothesis to hold. Even if neither the sunmaker nor the rainmaker hypothesis can be inconclusively verified with this study, it does not mean that they are completely inaccurate. With multi-level applications it is possible to take into account the exact and independent effect of certain contextual aspects (such as aggregated generalised trust). Our study has, however, focused on the mechanism at the individual level, and thus, the comparison on contextual and individual determinants will have to be left for further investigations. Our article shows that generalised trust has important effects both at the individual and the societal levels, and that the individual-level mechanism is different between contexts.

While the explanatory power of our model can be considered satisfactory, it is evident that there may be variables that have been omitted from the model. It is likely that many of these are linked to contextual factors. High aggregate-level trust is closely linked to other societal characteristics that may affect the relationship between trust and perceptions on immigration at the individual level. For instance, high democratic and institutional stability is arguably an important factor in terms of growing diversity of the population. Moreover, some countries are more affected by immigration than others, and it could be expected that this has consequences on the social and welfare systems in these countries. Europe has also seen a rise in support for populist right-wing parties in many countries. While these parties, depending on their electoral success, have varying influence in governmental policies, they do have the ability to affect the public opinion. Interestingly, and somewhat discouragingly, societies with high generalised trust seem to be equally affected by populism as countries with lower general levels of trust. Social trust has, however, been found to decrease both individual and neighbourhood radical right-wing populist party preferences (see e.g. Berning & Ziller 2016). Thus, while it is likely, that the effects of generalised social trust are positive, both at the individual and the societal levels, a more difficult question is how it can be developed and maintained in societies with increased immigration and diversity.
Notes

1 Allport (1954, 281) has suggested that unless prejudice is deeply rooted in the character of the individual, it may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation and institutional support (law, custom, or local atmosphere).

2 Data from Estonia and Lithuania was available but could not be employed for multivariate analyses due to their small N. Data was also available from Israel, but was excluded, since the focus of this study is on Europe. Population and design weights have been applied in the analyses.

3 The inter-correlation between the variables provides strong evidence for the fact that the chosen survey questions are correlated and measure the same underlying dimension (KMO-index is 0.857). A factor analysis with oblimin rotation confirms that the items clearly load on a single principal component with the eigenvalue of 3.436. The eigenvalues of the other components are less than one.

References


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Appendices

Variable codings

Dependent variable

Perception of threat by immigration-index is a scale with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.854, composed of six items, with response categories that range from 0 to 10 (0 representing the most negative view and 10 representing the most positive view). The index is coded to have the same range, and then reversed to be more comprehensive: the higher the score, the higher the perception of threat:

1) ‘Would you say that people who come to live here generally take jobs away from workers in [country], or generally help to create new jobs?’ Take jobs away (0)…Create new jobs (10)

2) ‘Most people who come to live here work and pay taxes. They also use health and welfare services. On balance, do you think that people who come to live here take out more than they put in or put in more than they take out?’ Generally take out more (0)…Generally put in more (10)

3) ‘Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]’s economy that people come to live here from other countries?’ Bad for the economy (0)…Good for the economy (10)

4) ‘Would you say that [country]’s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?’ Cultural life undermined (0)…Cultural life enriched (10)

5) ‘Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?’ Worse place to live (0)…Better place to live (10)

6) ‘Are [country]’s crime problems made worse or better by people coming to live here from other countries?’ Crime problems made worse (0)…Crime problems made better (10)

Independent variables

Age: in years (from 18–)

Gender: female (0) or male (1)

Education: in years of full time education

Placement on left-right scale: ‘In politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?’ Left (0)…Right (10)

Belong to an ethnic minority group: ‘Do you belong to a minority ethnic group in [country]?’ No (0) or yes (1)
Feeling about household’s income: “Living comfortably on present income” and “Coping on present income” (1); “Finding it difficult on present income” and “Finding it very difficult on present income” (0)

Unemployed: no (0); “unemployed, actively looking for job”; “unemployed, not actively looking for job” (1)

Satisfaction with the present state of economy: ‘On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?’ Extremely dissatisfied (0)…Extremely satisfied (10)

External efficacy is a scale (Cronbach’s alpha 0.807) composed of three items:

1) ‘How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?’ Not at all (0)…Completely (10)

2) ‘How much would you say that the political system in [country] allows people like you to have an influence on politics?’ Not at all (0)…Completely (10)

3) ‘How much would you say that politicians care what people like you think?’ Not at all (0)…Completely (10)

Internal efficacy is a scale (Cronbach’s alpha 0.809) composed of three items:

1) ‘How able do you think you are to take an active role in a group involved with political issues?’ Not at all able (0)…Completely able (10)

2) ‘How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?’ Not at all confident (0)…Completely confident (10)

3) ‘How easy do you personally find it to take part in politics?’ Not at all easy (0)…Extremely easy (10)

Immigrant neighbours: ‘How would you describe the area where you currently live?’ Almost nobody is of a different race or ethnic group (0); some or many people are of a different race or ethnic group (1)

Immigrant friends: ‘Do you have any close friends who are of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people?’ None at all (0); a few or several (1)

Generalised trust: ‘Generally speaking, do you think that most people can be trusted, or can you never be too careful?’ You can’t be too careful (0)…Most people can be trusted (10)
Table 1. Determinants of threat perceptions in 18 European countries. OLS regression estimates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>M1</th>
<th>M2</th>
<th>M3</th>
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<td>(t)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling of household income</td>
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<td>Internal political efficacy</td>
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<td>Diverse neighbourhood</td>
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<td>Generalised trust</td>
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<td>25475</td>
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<td>Adj. (R^2)</td>
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<td>0.252</td>
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Notes: Unstandardized beta coefficients are reported with \(t\)-statistics. *\(p<0.05\), **\(p<0.01\), ***\(p<0.001\). Gender (0=female, 1=male), age (continuous), education (continuous, years of full time education), placement on left-right scale (0=left...10=right), belong to an ethnic minority group (0=no, 1=yes), feeling about household’s income (dummy-coded, 0=mainly negative, 1=mainly positive), unemployed (0=no, 1=yes), satisfaction with the present state of economy (0=extremely dissatisfied...10=extremely satisfied), external political efficacy (0=extremely weak...10=extremely strong), internal political efficacy (0=extremely weak...10=extremely strong), immigrant neighbours (dummy-coded, 0=almost none, 1=a few/some-many), immigrant friends (dummy-coded, 0=none at all, 1=a few or several), generalised trust (0=you can’t be too careful...10=most people can be trusted).
Table 2. Determinants of threat perceptions according to high, medium and low level of generalised trust. OLS regression estimates (reported only for the full model).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggregate-level generalised trust in country</th>
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<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<td>( t )</td>
<td>( \beta )</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>-4.457</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.052***</td>
<td>-8.636</td>
<td>-0.062***</td>
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<td>Left-Right orientation</td>
<td>0.133***</td>
<td>12.361</td>
<td>0.177***</td>
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<td>Ethnic minority background</td>
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<td>-0.557***</td>
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<td><strong>Economic and political self and group interest</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling of household income</td>
<td>-0.090</td>
<td>-1.130</td>
<td>-0.317***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>-0.536</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with national economy</td>
<td>-0.102***</td>
<td>-8.436</td>
<td>-0.129***</td>
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<td>External political efficacy</td>
<td>-0.143***</td>
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<td>-0.130***</td>
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<td>Internal political efficacy</td>
<td>-0.069***</td>
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<td><strong>Social interaction</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse neighbourhood</td>
<td>-0.123**</td>
<td>-2.692</td>
<td>-0.074**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigrant friends</td>
<td>-0.366***</td>
<td>-7.778</td>
<td>-0.342***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalised trust</td>
<td>-0.122***</td>
<td>-9.719</td>
<td>-0.147***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                                           | 3371          | 14075         | 8001          |
| Adj. \( R^2 \)                              | 0.284         | 0.308         | 0.244         |

Notes: HIGH=Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland (mean value > 5.60), MEDIUM=Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Spain, United Kingdom (mean value 4.68–5.60), LOW=Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia (mean value < 4.68). For interpretation of coefficients see Table 1.
**Figure 1.** Design of the study.
Figure 2. Mean values for the Perceptions of Threat Index.

Notes: (0=no perceived threat…10=extremely high perception of threat); Austria N=635, Belgium N=899, Switzerland N=625, Czech Republic N=758, Germany N=6524, Denmark N=433, Spain N=3262, Finland N=427, France N=5062, United Kingdom N=4820, Hungary N=660, Ireland N=304, Netherlands N=1253, Norway N=400, Poland N=2498, Portugal N=601, Sweden N=702, Slovenia N=130.

Figure 3. Mean values for generalised trust.

Notes: (0=you can’t be too careful…10=most people can be trusted); Generalised trust: Austria N=728, Belgium N=930, Switzerland N=693, Czech Republic, N=892, Germany N=7010, Denmark N=465, Spain N=3949, Finland N=455, France N=5361, United Kingdom N=5284, Hungary =844, Ireland N=359, Netherlands N=1396, Norway N=417, Poland N=3626, Portugal N=696, Sweden N=799, Slovenia N=175.
Figure 4. Mean values for generalised social trust and the Perceptions of Threat Index in 18 European countries (data is weighted with design and population weights).