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## **Immigration and Threat Perceptions: The Boogeyman of Modern European Politics**

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## **Immigration and Threat Perceptions: The Boogeyman of Modern European Politics**

## Introduction

From the early 2000s, the number of people who sought to start a new life in Europe has been rapidly increasing. Immigration wasn't a new experience for Europe at all, and it has long been there among other issues on the political agenda. In recent decades though, some studies pointed towards the need to recognize that this particular policy area is also becoming increasingly important to voters compared to more traditional issues.(De Vries, Hakhverdian, and Lancee 2013; Dancygier and Margalit 2020). This increasing salience of the issue has led to a surge in the support of political parties that took a firm stance on the policy of immigration (Dennison and Geddes 2019). Given that immigration has altered the dynamics of modern politics (De Vries et al. 2013), it is no surprise that various explanations unfolded to identify what prompted citizens to deem this issue as particularly important (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Sides and Citrin 2007 ).

A consensual point that emerged from studies that focused on how individual attitudes are shaped on the issue of immigration, is that the perception of threat that citizens experience in relation to the politicization of this issue exerts a remarkable influence on how they come to form their attitude on it (Sides and Citrin 2007; Hellwig and Kweon 2016; Manevska and Achterberg 2011; Malhotra, Margalit and Mo 2013). There are quite a few theoretical explanations to how the exact nature of this threat is, and what individual characteristics predict whether someone will see immigration as a threatening phenomenon. Scholars seem to agree on the idea that there are two main sources of such threat perceptions. The first main source of this threat is fear of the consequences that immigrants would mean for people's own material well-being (Heinmueller and Hiscox 2007; 2010; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Sides and Citrin 2007). The second perspective, on the other hand, argues that this opposition stems from citizens deeming immigrants as a threat to the cohesion of their group identity and culture (Manevska and Achterberg 2011; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). While both of these views have presented valid evidence that confirms the influence of interest and identity-based threats, respectively, some findings suggest that identity-based factors have a more significant influence on citizens' standpoints on immigration than interest-based, or economic threat (Manevska and Achterberg 2011; Heinmueller and Hiscox 2007), which had a weak effect on their attitudes (Heinmueller and Hiscox 2010).

Whether someone deems immigration as threatening or as a positive phenomenon for the country to a large extent depends on the values and norms that they hold prior to forming an attitude on this issue (Goodman 2021). The nature of such values does not only determine

whether someone will see immigration as a threat or not, but it also has consequences for the party identification of individuals (Petersen, Slothuus, and Togby 2010). Parties that clearly indicate the values that they hold to the public, by framing issues in a particular way that reflects the normative structure behind their position-taking on specific issues can enhance the quality of individuals' attitude formation, and make them less susceptible to manipulation (Petersen et al 2010). However, while this might be true for more traditional issues of politics, framing the issue of immigration in a way that reflects such values that prompt citizens to adopt a rather negative attitude towards them might worsen the quality of their position-taking. If a given party would deem immigration as threatening and made this explicit to their supporters, even if such a standpoint might not be justified by empirical reality, partisans still would adopt this view due to them feeling close to the party because of their aligned values. In fact, there is some evidence that even partisans who would not necessarily possess norms that would be associated with higher perceptions of threat, in reaction to threat frames, would shift their norms which would prompt them to adjust their views to a more conservative standpoint on this issue (Goodman 2021).

Building on social identity theory and framing theory, this article will aim to explore how political elites can influence the public's perceptions of immigrants as culturally threatening, or at least the portion of the public that is supportive of them. It will be argued that as parties can enhance the predisposing values of individuals based on which they choose to align themselves with a specific party, continuous frame threats communicated by the party leadership can lead to an enhanced level of cultural threat among such partisans.

Up to date, only a few articles have examined how individuals' perceptions of cultural threat in relation to immigration vary based on their party membership. By offering a cross-national analysis among western-European countries as it is one of the regions of the west which is a prime destination for immigrants, this article will aim to provide an assessment of how such cultural threat perceptions vary among partisans of different parties over time. As before the 2015 migration crisis, member states of the EU didn't deem this issue as prominent as after (Dennison and Geddes 2015) by focusing on a period before this event, this study will hope to reveal whether parties that signal to their supporters that immigration is a threat to the country are capable of establishing a higher perception of threat among their partisans over time, even in the absence of an empirical justification for them to feel threatened. By answering the question, *what influence does party identification has on the cultural threat of immigration* this study will aim to explore how political parties can potentially exploit the

trust their supporters place in them to gain a competitive advantage in the domestic political arena.

### **The perceived threat of immigration**

Since the early 2000s immigration has been on a good track to grow out to be one of the most prominent issues on the political agenda. The increasing popularity that anti-immigration parties have been gaining recently is a perfect indication of this issue becoming gradually more important to the electorate (Dennison and Geddes 2019; Boomgaarden and Vliegenhart 2007). The emergence of this particular social cleavage had significant consequences for the dynamics of contemporary politics, as it heightened in prominence in the eye of an average voter compared to more traditional issues (de Vries et al. 2013; Dennison and Geddes 2019). But what makes citizens concerned about immigration in the first place? What prompts them to favor a more restrictionist standpoint on this issue to a liberal one? It is clear that immigration-related threats are certainly detrimental to the attitude formation of citizens on this issue, as the fear they have for their country's cultural homogeneity significantly influences their political preferences (Sides and Citrin 2007; Manevska and Achterberg 2011; Hellwig and Kweon 2016). However, it is less clear what the exact factors that cause variation in these individual perceptions of cultural threat are, but political scientists seem to agree on the idea that it comes from two main sources (Manveska and Achterberg 2011; Sides and Citrin 2007, Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007).

The first one is a threat stemming from the fear of competition for either scarce economic resources or positions on the labor market, sometimes referred to as interest-based threats (Sides and Citrin 2007). The second one comprises of perceived threat towards the national identity, and the cultural homogeneity of the country (Sides and Citrin 2007). While it has been addressed in many studies that identity-based explanations have a greater impact on citizens attitudes than interest-based explanations (Manevska and Achterberg 2011; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Marhotra et al Mo 2013), the impact of economic threat although is less significant, but is still detectable when adequate designs are used to measure its effect on attitudes towards immigrants (Malhotra et al 2013; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010).

One of the most prominently applied theories in relation to conceptualizing and measuring such interest-based threats is the labor market competition theory. Through this 'lens', the competition immigrants mean on the labor market as well as fear of the scarcity of other economic resources evokes a corresponding change in citizens attitudes' towards

immigrants (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Sides and Citrin 2007). The most commonly used predictor of studies that have applied labor-market competition theory is the level of skill survey respondents had (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; 2010). This rests on the assumption that immigrants who had similar skill levels to natives could potentially threaten their position on the labor market by increasing competition for positions, and therefore they would expectably favor a more restrictionist immigration policy (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; 2010; Malhotra, Margalit and Mo 2013 ). While some of the findings confirm the idea that attitudes on immigration vary to an extent based on an individual's skill level, there are two potential problems with this proxy that could make some of the supporting findings for the influence of economic threat misleading.

The first one is that the level of skill individuals have in the labor market is largely dependent on the highest level of education they have completed (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Malhotra et al 2013). This means that while lower skill levels were associated with a preference for a more restrictionist immigration policy, such individuals also had a lower level of education, which in turn, has a significant influence on the identities that such people develop (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Malhotra, Margalit and Mo 2013). Low education was associated with racism, and lesser willingness to favor multiculturalism which means that in reality, the observed impact of skill level was not actually the result of fear over an increasing competition on the labor market, but rather the beliefs and values of individuals that were dependent on their level of education (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007). Even when occupational categorization was used as a predictor of economic threat, the predicting power of the level of education was still larger than this alternative measure of the level of skill (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007).

The second major problem is that even when studies took into account the difference in skill level between immigrant groups, and tested whether the preferences of natives varied based on the immigrants' skill level testing for a potential difference between citizens' attitudes towards high-skilled and low-skilled migrants, the influence that this difference had on their attitudes was still relatively modest (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Malhotra, Margalit and Mo 2013). By creating a sample of individuals that are all working in a specific sector of the economy, and asking them about whether they would accept immigrants to the country who work in the same sector as they do, one can reveal the influence that interest-based threat has on individual attitudes towards immigrants (Malhotra et al 2013). However, the fact that even with such a precise and focused sampling strategy there is only weak evidence that labor-market competition influences attitudes on immigration points towards the

idea, that the concern which prompted the average voter to deem immigration as a more prominent political issue is rather due to the cultural threat immigrants mean for the country's national identity.

This kind of cultural threat sometimes referred to as a symbolic threat (Sides and Citrin 2004) has been recognized as one of the main drivers of attitude changes towards immigrants. It is mainly conceptualized as a threat to the collective national identity (Schneider 2008; Sniderman et al 2004) as well as concerns regarding individual security (Brader, Valentino and Suhay 2008). The central assumption behind the hypothesized impact of this cultural threat is that the cultural differences between the in-group and outgroup, natives and immigrants, will produce more opposing attitudes towards the outgroup (Manevska and Achterberg 2013; D'Ancona 2016). Various answers are proposed to explain what factors contribute to the variation in the perception of this threat, some suggesting that this phenomenon generates opposition to immigration through invoking xenophobia (D'Ancona 2016) or ethnocentrism (Homola 2021). However, while evidence suggests that this kind of threat impacts how individuals will approach immigrants, there is also evidence that this perceived threat is not based on realistic estimations of the influence that immigrants could have on the cultural homogeneity of the country. For example, a comprehensive cross-national study presented evidence that individuals have a tendency to overestimate the size of the immigrant population, contributing to the development of anti-immigrant sentiment (Strabac 2011). Although it is worth noting that this article offers no evidence that the overestimation of the immigrant population would lead to a greater level of perceived threat, it seems that this would be the case. Some studies implicitly confirm this idea by observing that threat does not vary based on the size of the immigrant population, suggesting that this perception of threat is not completely realistic (Sides and Citrin 2007; Manevska and Achterberg 2013). So why would individuals deem immigrants as culturally threatening in the absence of any realistic basis for such concerns?

### **The role of parties and party identification**

Theories of group identities might be a good place to start if one seeks to understand why some citizens would tend to overestimate the level of threat immigrants mean for their country's culture. If their perceptions are not based on their empirical experience with immigrants as noted above, then the information gained on this issue which eventually leads to them forming an attitude towards outsiders must be derived from other actors.

So in a context where an individual lacks information about the actual level of threat

immigrants mean for the country, that person would likely turn to the political actor they feel closest to, to affirm or calm his concerns. This would be the case, as a shared social identity such as being committed to a specific political group eventually becomes an integral element of who those individuals are (Sniderman et al 2004), which would expectably make fellow members of that group trustworthy sources of information in their eyes. This would be the case, as one of the central ideas of social identity theory is that people evaluate the group that they belong to, the in-group more positively than the out-group, which implicitly worsens their perceptions about the relevant out-group (Sniderman et al 2004). It would seem reasonable that for this reason, committed partisans would develop perceptions about immigration similar to their supported parties over time. There is plenty of evidence that confirms this idea, finding that when a political party changes its position on a policy area, its supporters tend to follow that change by adjusting their views accordingly (Bisgaard and Sloothus 2018; Hellwig and Kweon 2016; ). But social identity theory by itself does not explain how such a party would shape the attitudes of its supporters in a way, that would lead to a higher perception of cultural threat in their eyes.

Before getting to the means by which the political elite can influence their supporters' attitudes on a specific issue, one needs to understand why would it be in the interest of a party to create a higher sense of cultural threat in the first place. Partisans tend to commit to parties ideologically when they have a stable set of pre-existing values (Feldman 2013), and those values are consequential for the choice individuals make when they subscribe to a particular party (Petersen et al 2010). Now, if the value of perceiving immigrants as a threat to the national identity is an internal part of the chosen party's ideology, it is reasonable to assume that the given party will attract individuals who were quite pessimistic about immigration in the first place. If such a party wants to maintain a stable base of supporters, it needs to clearly communicate to the partisans what the official standpoint is on the issue of immigration. By providing them with a clear ideological picture, such committed partisans can become better decision-makers, and less easy to manipulate in the case of more traditional issues of politics (Petersen et al 2010). However, a crucial question is whether such individuals become better decision-makers as democratic citizens, or do they become better decision-makers as committed partisans in the context of immigration. If the cultural threat of immigration is non-existent in the first place but due to their commitment to their social identity partisans still uphold these perceptions it can be rather costly for their democratic decision-making. Moreover, they would become loyal supporters of the specific party they choose to align with which is the ultimate goal for every party in the political arena.



This raises the possibility of anti-immigrant parties consciously influencing their supporter's level of cultural threat by sending them signals through the information that they choose to communicate towards them. If it is in the interest of such political elites to keep a higher level of cultural threat among their supporters to ensure their commitment to the party, it would seem reasonable that the messages they communicate are framed in a way that signals to partisans that immigration threatens the country's culture.

Framing issues in a specific way that invokes the – in some cases, latent – values of their partisans, political parties are capable of shaping their attitudes on political issues prompting them to become more aligned with the party ideologically (Chong and Druckman 2007). Furthermore, framing can also lead individuals to adjust their views on how they see the economic state of the country by responding to changes in their supported party's position (Chong and Druckman 2007; Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018). This would mean that as partisans are already committed to the party based on the shared values they have would be willing to adjust their own positions on policy areas as their preferred party would change its own. So if we take an anti-immigration party as an example, in hope of gathering broader support domestically it would be in its interest to frame immigration as a threatening phenomenon. In fact, some evidence exists that such a threat frame does not only strengthen the values of partisans who already oppose immigration due to their preexisting values, but it is also capable of shaping the value system of leftist voters, who are traditionally pro-immigration (Goodman 2021). While the immigration stance of the party is certainly not equal to sending information that frames immigration as a threat repeatedly to their supporters, committed supporters would expectably use the party's information sources, and rely on the communication channels of the party to help their attitude formation on this issue. Thus, the analysis of this paper will aim to test the following hypothesis:

H1: The more restrictionist a party's immigration policy preference becomes over time, the higher the perceived level of cultural threat will be for its supporters

### Research Design

If one wants to see how political parties' position changes influence the attitudes of their supporters on a specific issue over time, data gathered during a longitudinal study on the same survey participants would be the most suitable option. Although individual-level longitudinal data on specific political issue areas such as immigration exists, the exact items that would be required to model the macro-level influence of political parties on perceptions of cultural threat on the individual level would be quite hard to obtain. This certainly limits the scope of

the analysis, however, employing an over-time effect in one of the variables in a single year might be a fruitful alternative. By incorporating individuals' supported political parties' immigration policy stance change in a given time interval into a dataset that measures individual attitudes on immigration in a single time point, any potential relationship between the variables would be revealed. The direction of the relationship would show how perceptions about the cultural threat immigrants mean for the country are associated with a change in the supported party's immigration policy stance over time.

Using multiple regression to test the hypothesis of this paper six distinct models were created to examine the proposed relationship, with each of these models scrutinizing the level of cultural threat committed partisans have from Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Sweden, and Spain. The analysis will utilize the 2014 European Social Survey datasets individual-level data since the analysis will focus on Western European countries. The focus is placed on this region, as based on public data that is available on the annual report of EUROSTAT and distinct, single-year report of the European Commission, these countries have been accepting a relatively high number of refugees compared to Central and Eastern European EU member-states. The main independent variable, parties' stance on immigration policy will be based on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, which measures political parties' position taking on specific issue areas.

Now, to see how perceived cultural threat changes over time in reaction to changes in the party's position-taking, each respondent who identified with a specific political party was assigned the value of the difference between their supported party's position on immigration in 2006 and in 2014. The CHES dataset measures party's positions on immigration policy on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning that the party favors a liberal immigration policy, and 10 meaning that it favors a restrictionist immigration policy. A party's position was assessed by the leadership of that specific party, comprising of the party's chair, the party's presidium, and the parliamentary party. Such members have filled out the questionnaire themselves and given a self-assessment of their political group's position. In the ESS dataset, the item that asked respondents "which party do you feel closest to?" was used as a base variable for the main independent variable. By assigning the values of the over-time change in the party's position-taking to each of the respondents that are supportive of a specific party and thus, the corresponding variable in the ESS dataset, one can see how an individual's perception of cultural threat changes in reaction to a change in the presumably adopted position-change of the party. The original codes in the ESS dataset and the newly assigned codes reflecting immigration policy stance change for the party between the given period are shown in

appendix A.

The dependent variable, the cultural threat of immigration will be operationalized based on an ESS item that asked respondents to evaluate the statement: "immigrants enrich or undermine the country's culture". The responses to the variable are coded on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning that the individual viewed immigration as undermining the country's culture and 10 meaning that the person deemed immigration as enriching for the country's culture. The expectation is that this variable will vary depending on the extent to which a given respondent's preferred party changed its stance on immigration policy in the previous 8 years.

		Statistics						
		Country's cultural life enriched or undermined by immigrants	Immigration policy change Belgium	Immigration policy change Germany	Immigration policy change Spain	Immigration policy change France	Immigration policy change Netherlands	Immigration policy change Sweden
N	Valid	12160	854	1545	685	806	1034	1087
	Missing	206	11512	10821	11681	11560	11332	11279
Mean		6,11	,3375	-1,0978	,0977	,5834	-,9361	-2,4965
Std. Deviation		2,410	,77383	1,06366	1,10546	,56690	,49745	,64242
Range		10	2,50	2,81	3,20	1,71	1,92	2,79

The level of commitment that partisans have towards their favored party can certainly play a role in how much information they believe from what is communicated to them from the political elite. If party elites clearly signal that the party is becoming increasingly strict on immigration policy, partisans might adopt a rather intolerant attitude towards the idea of accepting immigrants in the country, which in theory would be consequential for the level of cultural threat they attribute to them. The variable that measures how close respondents feel to their party is coded from 1 to 4 with 1 meaning they feel very close and 4 meaning not close at all.

It is also necessary to control for other political issues that respondents might have been interested in and could influence their opinion on parties as well as their perceptions about immigration. The extent to which someone is Euroskeptic or supportive of European integration could be such an issue-area, as Euroskeptic parties such as PVV or Front National and their supporters have adopted a strict stance on immigration as well. Being skeptical about European integration could also be consequential for how individuals approach people from different cultures. For this variable, the survey item that asked respondents to evaluate the statement "European integration go further or went too far" will be used. The variable was coded on a 0 to 10 scale with 0 meaning that European unification has already gone too far

and 10 meaning that it can go further.

The second political issue that might influence which party an individual chooses to identify with and their level of cultural threat is how they deem the state of democracy within the country. Individuals satisfied with the functioning of their democracy might become more tolerant towards people with divergent opinions or appearances, leading them to favor a more liberal party from the palette of available parties. Such heightened tolerance would also plausibly shape their attitudes towards foreigners and refugees. Respondents' satisfaction with the functioning of their democracy was measured on a 0 to 10 scale, with 0 meaning extremely dissatisfied with how democracy works, and 10 meaning extremely satisfied.

As highlighted in the theory section, the economic state of the country and how a person perceives it can exert some influence over how individuals perceive immigration. While interest-based and cultural threats are two distinct concepts, as it was mentioned above one's economic conditions can influence the level of identity-based threat an individual experiences as well. The variable that asked respondents "how satisfied are you with the current state of the economy" is coded on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 meaning "extremely dissatisfied" and 10 meaning „extremely satisfied”.

The variable that measures the highest level of education completed for respondents from all the countries that were included in the survey round measures education on the scale of the ISCED, including 27 different categories. The codes of these different levels of educational attainments were ranging from 0 to 800 and were nominal variables. To make this variable suitable for a regression model, it needs to be recoded into a scale variable, possibly with a smaller range. If the values of these different levels of education would remain the same in the recoded variable then a one-unit change expectably wouldn't have a great impact on the dependent variable of the model due to the large interval between the values of the lowest and highest obtainable level. To solve this issue, these 27 categories were grouped into seven broader categories, ranging from 0 to 6.

Individuals' political interest is also necessary to control, as their awareness of the position-taking of their preferred party on the issue of immigration could be influenced by the level of interest that such citizens have. Political interest is coded from 1 to 4 with 1 meaning that the respondent was very interested in politics, and 4 meaning that the person is not at all interested. Respondents' self-placement on the left-right political scale is also highly important to control for, as it could influence both their party identification, and their position on the impact of immigration on the country's culture. The variable is coded from 0 to 10 with 0 meaning that the respondent identifies as an absolute leftist, and 10 meaning that the

respondent identifies as an absolute rightist. The gender of the respondent could also be an influential factor, in the ESS dataset female respondents are coded as 1 and male respondents are coded as 2. Similarly, respondents' level of income could also potentially influence their perceptions of immigrations' impact on the cultural life of the country, as well as their preferred political parties. As the individual level of income wasn't measured in the ESS survey, the statistical model will make use of respondents' household total net income. The variable is coded from 1 to 10, with each value indicating a different income decile, meaning that the first decile, or 1, is the lowest level of income, and the 10th decile is the highest level of income. Lastly, news consumption was also controlled for measured on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 meaning no time at all and 10 meaning more than 6 hours.

### **Analysis**

After preparing the data and running the six regression models, the results indicate that the variation between the additional independent variables and the dependent variable is quite different depending on contextual factors. The results of the analyses are shown in the tables below.

The first model worked with 891 observations with an adjusted R square of 0,482 meaning that the model explains 48,2% of the variation between the dependent and independent variables. The second model worked with 707 cases and had an adjusted R square value of 0,622 meaning that the model explains 62.2% of the variance. The third model worked with 899 cases and had an adjusted R square of 0,547 meaning that the portion of variance explained by the model is 54,7%. The fourth model worked with 442 cases and had an adjusted R square value of 0,407. The fifth model worked with 751 cases with an adjusted R square value of 0,384. The sixth and final model worked with 802 cases, and its adjusted R square value was 0,36. For the first three models, the amount of variance explained by the model seems acceptable, as all of them are way above the conventional 0,5 threshold of moderate effect size. For the second three models, however, the effect size was relatively weak.

The scatterplots in Appendix B indicate that neither the assumption of linearity nor homoscedasticity were violated in any of the models. Similarly, the VIF values from the collinearity diagnostics were also normal, indicating that there is no multicollinearity. The assumption of normality was not violated in any of the cases either, as the PP plots indicate. Lastly, the Durbin-Watson test indicated a negligible amount of autocorrelation in the case of 4 models. Model 3 worked with cases from Sweden and had a Durbin-Watson value of 2,211

which indicates a low negative autocorrelation, and Model 5 which worked with respondents from Belgium had a Durbin-Watson value of 1,765 which indicates a low positive autocorrelation.

The results from the regression model indicate no relationship between the dependent variable and the main independent variable. In neither of the six models was the immigration policy change of the party a statistically significant predictor of individual-level cultural threat. In Germany, a one-unit change in the parties' stance on immigration over time meant that the party shifting its standpoint towards a more restrictionist immigration policy preference increased perceptions of cultural threat by 0,019 among its supporters. In the case of France, the effect size was bigger as a one-unit change over time increased supporters' cultural threat by 0,113, however, the relationship was still statistically insignificant. In Sweden, a one-unit change in the party's position-taking over time increased perceptions of cultural threat by 0,091. In Spain, a one-unit change in the party's immigration policy preference over time increased the level of cultural threat by 0,043. The immigration policy preference of the party had exerted the highest influence on the individual-level cultural threat in the cases of Belgium and the Netherlands. In Belgium, a one-unit change in the party's position-taking over time heightened individual perceptions of cultural threat by 0,151. In the Netherlands, a one-unit change over time in the independent variable was negatively associated with the level of cultural threat, reducing its value by -0,249.

Considering that all of these findings were statistically insignificant, the alternative hypothesis was not supported. Although the direction of the relationship confirmed the expectation that a change towards a more restrictive immigration policy would result in a heightened perception of cultural threat in 5 of the 6 models, the effect size was extremely weak, almost non-existent. The cultural threat variable was measured on a scale from 0 to 10, so a 0,019 change or even the strongest effect among the models which was 0,151 can be considered negligible. The model that worked with the Netherlands deviated from the trend, as in model 6 an increase in the main independent variable was negatively associated with the dependent variable. This was plausibly the case, as the Netherlands was the only country where political parties between 2006 and 2014 all have shifted towards favoring a more liberal immigration policy over time.

It is quite interesting is that the individual-level control variables have differed quite a bit in terms of their effect, varying per model. The strongest predictor of cultural threat was the perception of individuals about the impact of immigration on the general atmosphere of the country. In all 6 models, this variable was statistically significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level

and caused a change of 0,407 to 0,753 in the dependent variable. This is not so surprising, considering that this measure tells something about individuals' general perceptions about immigrants which plausibly predisposes their level of cultural threat before they update their attitude on this issue according to their supported party's stance.

What is more surprising is that respondents' self-placement on the left-right scale also varied depending on the model. While in Germany, France, Sweden, and the Netherlands it was a statistically significant predictor of the level of cultural threat, its influence was insignificant in the case of Spain and Belgium. This also strengthens the idea that the level of cultural threat citizens experience in relation to immigration is not caused by their party's position-taking on this policy area, while also signaling that the traditional ideological scale works quite differently depending on the national context.

Similarly, the personal and not political characteristics of respondents have also varied in terms of their influence on the dependent variable. The level of education individuals had for example was statistically significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level in the models working with data from Belgium and the Netherlands, but in the first three models only in the first model was it a significant predictor of the dependent variable. This further strengthens the idea that individual characteristics are more detrimental to the level of cultural threat individuals have than the influence of their preferred political party's immigration policy change.

Nevertheless, the lack of substantive effect that some other independent variables had that were supposed to interact with the main independent variable also points towards the fact that changes in levels of cultural threat are not stemming from a change in party positions over time, but rather from individual-level factors. If the theory would've held, the strength of party identification as well as trust in politicians and level of political interest would have had a significant relationship with the dependent variable, which was the case only with political trust in 2 out of the 6 models. What this means within the frames of this paper, is that perceptions of cultural threat are not mainly caused by influence coming from the supported political elite, but rather varies based on individual characteristics and local contexts.

	Model 1 (Germany)	Model 2 (France)	Model 3 (Sweden)
Constant	2,124 (0,507)***	0,615 (0,555)	2,372 (0,435)***
Immigration policy change	0,019 (0,062)	0,113 (0115)	0,091 (0,087)
Age of respondent	-0,003 (0,003)	0,001 (0,004)	0,003 (0,003)
Gender	0,255 (0,110)*	0,192 (0,129)	0,235 (0,089)**
Highest level of education completed	0,111 (0,050)*	0,086 (0,059)	0,052 (0,043)
Placement on the left-right scale	-0,128 (0,032)***	-0,129 (0,025)***	-0,051 (0,023)*
How interested in politics	-0,021 (0,084)	-0,120 (0,082)	-0,183 (0,064)**
How close to the party	-0,016 (0,092)	0,011 (0,090)	0,029 (0,078)
Household's total net income	0,020 (0,020)	0,035 (0,025)	0,025 (0,017)
TV watching, news/politics/current affairs on average weekday	0,085 (0,052)	-0,042 (0,042)	-0,056 (0,044)
European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	0,067 (0,022)**	0,118 (0,026)***	-0,006 (0,021)
Trust in politicians	-0,083 (0,031)**	0,086 (0,038)*	0,004 (0,027)
How satisfied with the way democracy works in your country	-0,055 (0,042)	-0,059 (0,040)**	0,135 (0,039)***
How satisfied with present state of the economy in country	0,051 (0,033)	-0,063 (0,041)	0,057 (0,026)*
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	0,596 (0,030)***	0,753 (0,035)***	0,650 (0,026)***
R2	0,49	0,629	0,554
Adj R2	0,482	0,622	0,547
N	891	707	899

Results of multiple linear regression. First row shows unstandardized b coefficients. Second row shows standard errors in brackets. \* - statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  level \*\* - statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  level \*\*\* - statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  level



	Model 4 (Spain)	Model 5 (Belgium)	Model 6 (Netherlands)
Constant	3,246 (0,125)***	2,584 (0,610)***	3,122 (0,580)***
Immigration policy change	0,043 (0,125)	0,151 (0,085)	-0,249 (0,144)
Age of respondent	-0,013 (0,006)*	-0,009* (0,004)	-0,007 (0,004)
Gender	-0,036 (0,192)	0,078 (0,130)	0,029 (0,118)
Highest level of education completed	0,053 (0,086)	0,208 (0,063)***	0,173 (0,052)***
Placement on left right scale	-0,077 (0,059)	-0,059 (0,029)*	-0,107 (0,031)***
How interested in politics	-0,058 (0,120)	-0,099 (0,090)	-0,156 (0,089)
How close to party	-0,084 (0,144)	0,110 (0,121)	-0,050 (0,121)
Household's total net income	0,103 (0,041)*	0,019 (0,030)	0,024 (0,024)
TV watching, news/politics/current affairs on average weekday	0,007 (0,063)	-0,051 (0,062)	0,046 (0,045)
European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	0,080 (0,040)*	0,149 (0,027)***	0,094 (0,028)*
Trust in politicians	0,063 (0,046)	-0,023 (0,039)	0,016 (0,041)
How satisfied with the way democracy works in your country	-0,055 (0,042)	-0,059 (0,040)**	0,135 (0,039)***
How satisfied with present state of the economy in country	-0,025 (0,049)	-0,059 (0,040)	-0,041 (0,040)
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	0,621 (0,048)***	0,476 (0,034)***	0,407 (0,035)***
R2	0,426	0,395	0,371
Adj R2	0,407	0,384	0,36
N	446	751	802

Results of multiple linear regression. First row shows unstandardized b coefficients. Second row shows standard errors in brackets. \* - statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  level \*\* - statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  level \*\*\* - statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  level

## Conclusion

This study has aimed to explore how citizens' perceptions of the impact that immigration has on the cultural life of the country might vary among individuals who identify with a particular party. Building on the idea that the 2015 migration crisis in Europe brought the issue to the forefront of the political agenda in Western-European countries, and thus, it enhanced voters' preexisting beliefs about immigrants (Dennison and Geddes 2019) one of the main goals of this paper was to assess whether prior to this empirical experience it was detectable how committed partisans' perceptions about the cultural threat of immigration have changed over time in response to a change of their favored parties position-taking on this issue. As some have observed that immigration-related threats are not necessarily rooted in empirical reality (Schneider 2008; Strabac 2011) the analysis of this paper aimed to explore whether, before 2015 and the migration crisis' influence, partisans' still elicited a level of threat depending on the stance of their favored party on the issue of immigration. It was hypothesized that depending on whether a party favors a restrictive or liberal immigration policy, due to the shared values that bind such individuals together with the party, such individuals' perceptions of cultural threat might vary, as by taking a specific position on this issue parties can signal to their partisans how concerned they should be about this particular issue area (Chong and Druckman 2007; Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018). It was argued that framing the issue of immigration could theoretically gather broader support for the parties who use such threat frames regarding the issue of immigration, and thus, it would be in their interest of them to present immigration to the public as threatening. Based on the party signals, which would be the immigration policy stance of the supported party, a committed partisans' level of cultural threat would change over time responding to the change in the party's position.

The alternative hypothesis was not proven to be true, as in all 6 cases neither of the parties' immigration stance change overtime was a statistically significant predictor of the cultural threat of their supporters. Even though the countries examined were all Western-European states which means that immigration has been present on the political agenda for a relatively long time as these countries are prime destinations for immigrants, the influence of political parties over time seemed non-existent compared to individual-level issues as well as other political issues. While in most cases the predicted direction of the relationship was confirmed, the effect size was so negligible that one cannot conclude that a change in a party's position taking on immigration influences the level of cultural threat in any way. It was argued that anti-immigration parties would consciously alter their immigration stance so it can act as a signal to their supporters, inducing a higher level of cultural threat through

creating a stronger ideological commitment. This would have been the case because when citizens do not have perfect information about a given political issue, they often turn to their trusted actors in the political arena to complement this lack of knowledge (Chong and Druckman 2007).

Regardless of this paper finding no evidence that the proposed relationship, partisan stances' impact on cultural threat over time exists, one should not reject the idea that parties are capable of influencing their supporter's level of cultural threat. Depending on the nature of the information that is given to partisans by the political elite and how it is framed, it can potentially lead individuals with consistent values to overlook the empirical reality and overestimate the level of cultural threat that immigration comes with. This could have potential implications for the quality of the choice that citizens make when they decide which party would be the most adequate choice in the context of a national election. If specific parties own the issue of immigration, meaning that they are most broadly known for their position on this policy area, and they frame this issue as threatening for the country, they might have the ability to trick citizens into voting for them without the issue necessarily having significant empirical relevance for the domestic politics of the country. This would plausibly give such parties a competitive advantage in the political arena of a democratic system, which in the long term, could potentially result in the worsening of the quality of democracy, as citizens would cast their votes not in accordance with their overall views of which party would be the best for governing the country, but rather relying on their threat perceptions, and favor the party that could be the most competent at dealing with this particular issue. Even though this paper found no possibility of such direct influence, further research could explore this area more thoroughly in the following ways.

First, the research design worked with individual-level data from a single year, and only the macro-level, or party-level immigration policy position change was included as an over-time effect. By conducting a longitudinal study on individuals who are committed to a specific party, one could have a better assessment of how cultural threat changes in reaction to changes in a party's position.

Furthermore, a revised research design should incorporate two elements of the theory into it which weren't accounted for in the models created in this paper. It was assumed that each person who identified with a particular party had perfect knowledge of their preferred party's position on this issue and that due to their shared values they also adopted that position. While it is very likely that partisans indeed share some of the views and values with their favored parties, it is also very likely that this does not apply to every person who has a

avored party. The second assumption that needs to be included in the model is whether respondents have favored a particular party because of its position on the issue of immigration specifically, or due to other issue areas unrelated to it.

Second, it is probable that citizens choose to identify with a specific party because of their prior beliefs about the threat that immigration could mean for their country. For example, a supporter of a right-wing party could easily perceive immigration as a potential threat to the country because of his preexisting beliefs and values, not because he adjusted his views over time due to relying on the party's signals about the importance of taking a firm position on this policy area. As discussed in the previous sections, parties could enhance these preexisting beliefs which would theoretically lead to a heightened perception of cultural threat, but testing this idea would require the employment of longitudinal data and a direct measure of the values that could possibly prompt citizens to overestimate the cultural threat of immigration. By incorporating the value consistency of partisans, and the ideological consistency of parties as well, one would be able to tell whether parties are clearly influencing their supporters' perceptions of cultural threat or not.

Future research on this topic could further complicate the models that this study has worked with, better accounting for the limitations stemming from these untestable assumptions. Examining how partisans' perceptions of cultural threat change over time vis a vis their preferred party's radicalization on this issue could yield fruitful results, that would give a deeper insight into how political parties can influence their supporters' attitudes on immigration. Testing partisans' responsiveness to repeated information coming from a party framed as a threat could also tell us something about how likely committed partisans would overestimate the level of cultural threat if their supported parties tell them that it is significant.

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## Appendix A:

EDULVLB	EISCED
	0 Not possible to harmonise into ES-ISCED
0 Not completed ISCED level 1	
113 ISCED 1, completed primary education	1 ES-ISCED I, less than lower secondary
129 Vocational ISCED 2C < 2 years, no access ISCED 3	
212 General/pre-vocational ISCED 2A/2B, access ISCED 3 vocational	
213 General ISCED 2A, access ISCED 3A general/all 3	
221 Vocational ISCED 2C >= 2 years, no access ISCED 3	2 ES-ISCED II, lower secondary
222 Vocational ISCED 2A/2B, access ISCED 3 vocational	
223 Vocational ISCED 2, access ISCED 3 general/all	
229 Vocational ISCED 3C < 2 years, no access ISCED 5	
311 General ISCED 3 >=2 years, no access ISCED 5 *	3 ES-ISCED IIIb, lower tier upper secondary
312 General ISCED 3A/3B, access ISCED 5B/lower tier 5A	4 ES-ISCED IIIa, upper tier upper secondary
313 General ISCED 3A, access upper tier ISCED 5A/all 5	
321 Vocational ISCED 3C >= 2 years, no access ISCED 5	3 ES-ISCED IIIb, lower tier upper secondary
322 Vocational ISCED 3A/3B, access 5B/lower tier 5A	
323 Vocational ISCED 3A, access upper tier ISCED 5A/all 5	4 ES-ISCED IIIa, upper tier upper secondary
412 General ISCED 4A/4B, access ISCED 5B/lower tier 5A	
413 General ISCED 4A, access upper tier ISCED 5A/all 5	
421 ISCED 4 programmes without access ISCED 5	
422 Vocational ISCED 4A/4B, access ISCED 5B/lower tier 5A	5 ES-ISCED IV, advanced vocational, sub-degree
423 Vocational ISCED 4A, access upper tier ISCED 5A/all 5	
510 ISCED 5A short, intermediate/academic/general tertiary below	
520 ISCED 5B short, advanced vocational qualifications	
610 ISCED 5A medium, bachelor/equivalent from lower tier tertiary	6 ES-ISCED V1, lower tertiary education, BA level
620 ISCED 5A medium, bachelor/equivalent from upper/single tier	
710 ISCED 5A long, master/equivalent from lower tier tertiary	
720 ISCED 5A long, master/equivalent from upper/single tier tertiary	7 ES-ISCED V2, higher tertiary education, >= MA level
800 ISCED 6, doctoral degree	
5555 Other	55 Other

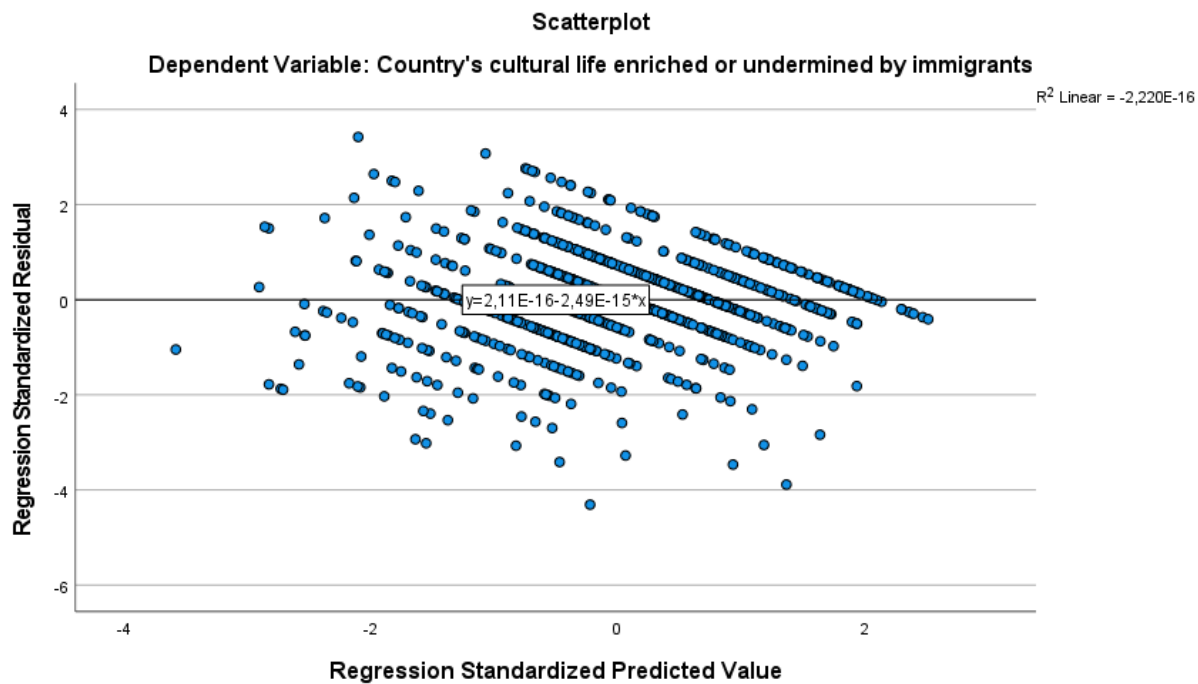
Country	Party Name	Original Value (ESS_2014)	CHES 2014 (Party position on immigration policy 2014)	CHES 2006 (Party position on immigration policy 2006)	Change in party's position over time
Germany:	CDU	1	5,73	7,71	-1,98
	SPD	2	3,91	5,43	-1,52
	Die Linke	3	4,0	3,17	0,83
	Die Grünen	4	2,09	1,86	0,23
	FDP	5	3,6	4,71	-1,11
France:	NC	1	6,67	5,86	0,81
	FN	2	9,8	8,57	1,23
	PCF	7	3,6	1,86	1,74
	PRG	8	4,0	2,29	1,71
	MPF	9	9,56	7,86	1,7
	PS	11	4,7	4,29	0,41
	UMP	12	7,6	7,57	0,03
	MODEM	13	6,33	4,78	1,55
Sweden	Center	1	1,94	5,56	-3,62
	KD	3	2,61	5,00	-2,39
	MP	4	0,56	2,33	-1,77
	M	5	2,61	5,67	-3,06
	SAP	6	2,33	4,78	-2,45
	V	7	0,56	1,89	-1,33
	Piratpartei	9	1,5	2,33	-0,83
Belgium:	CD&V	2	5,4	5,88	-0,48
	cdH	9	4,2	4,83	-0,63
	ECOLO	10	1,8	2,0	-0,2
	Groen	1	2,2	1,13	1,07
	MR	12	6,20	5,33	1,87
	N-VA	3	7,6	7,38	0,22
	PS	13	2,8	2,5	0,3
	PVDA	6	1,8	0,3	1,5
	SPA	5	3,4	3,75	-0,35
	VB	7	9,6	9,88	-0,28
	VLD	8	6,6	6,13	0,47
Spain:	PSOE	2	3,6	4,3	-0,7
	PP	1	8,1	6,8	1,3
	IU	4	1,6	3,5	-1,9
	Ciu	3	6,67	5,9	0,77
	PNV	7	6,44	5,63	0,81
	EA	5	5,83	4,75	1,08
	ERC	8	3,67	5,33	-0,53
	BNG	9	2,4	4,44	-1
	CC	10	6,44	6,38	0,87
	UPD	6	5,25	4,71	-0,64
Netherlands	CDA	5	6,5	6,33	-0,5
	PvdA	2	4,13	4,17	-1,05
	VVD	1	7,5	8,00	-0,95
	D66	6	2,13	4,00	-1,23
	GL	8	1,13	2,17	-1,51
	SP	4	4,38	5,33	-1,62
	CU	7	3,75	5,67	-1,15
	PVV	3	9,88	9,4	-0,12
		PvdD	10	2,33	3,5
	SGP	9	8,43	8,13	0,3

## Appendix B:

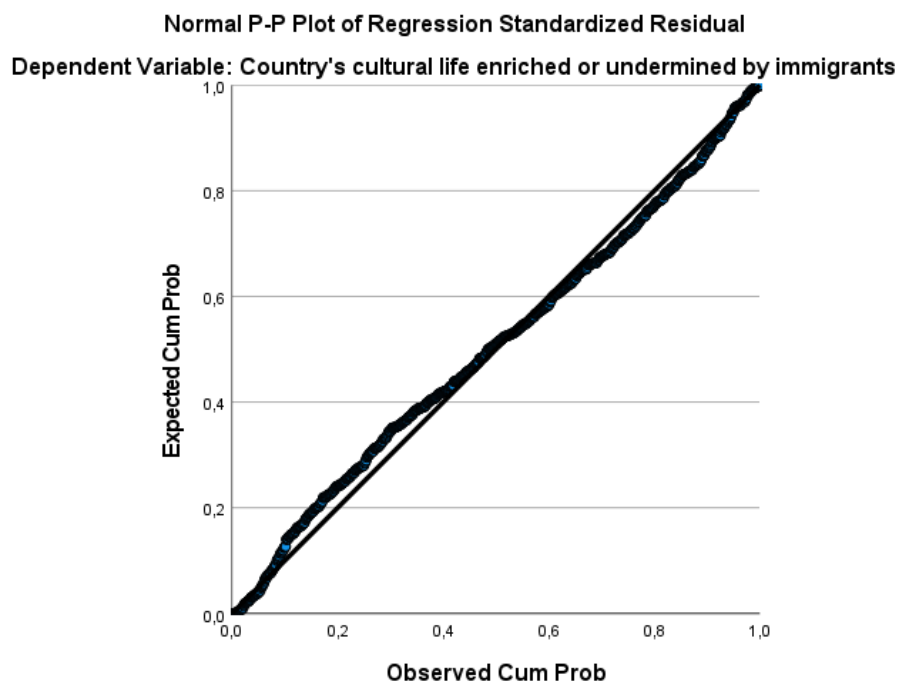
Regression assumptions model 1 (Germany):

Homoscedasticity and Linearity:





### Normality:

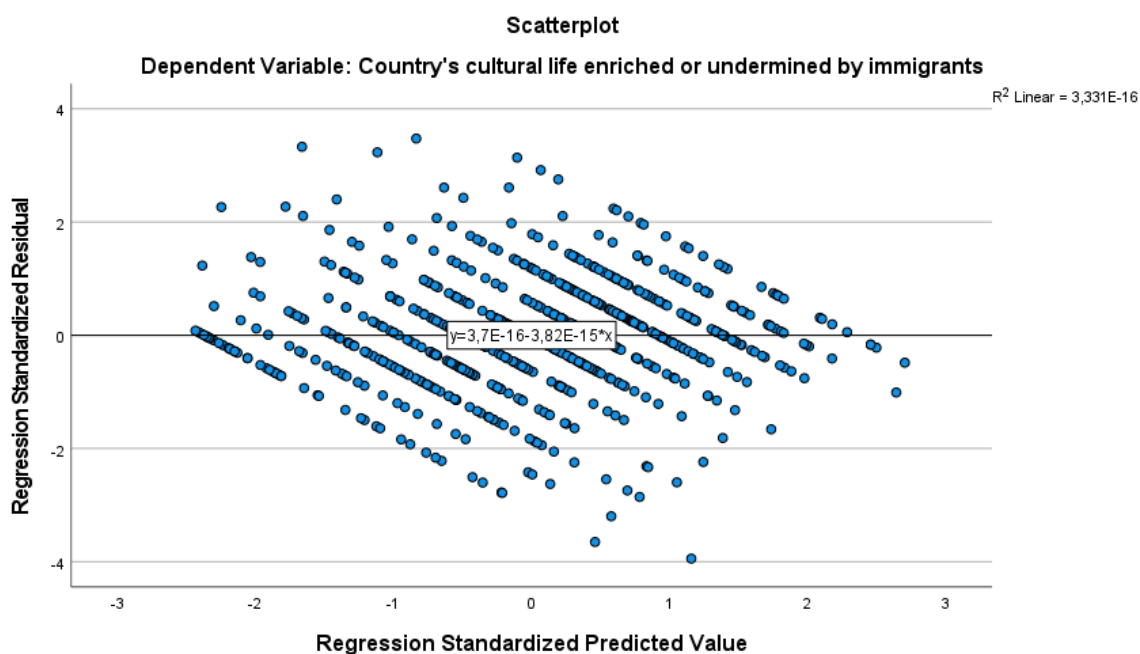


### Collinearity and auto-correlation:

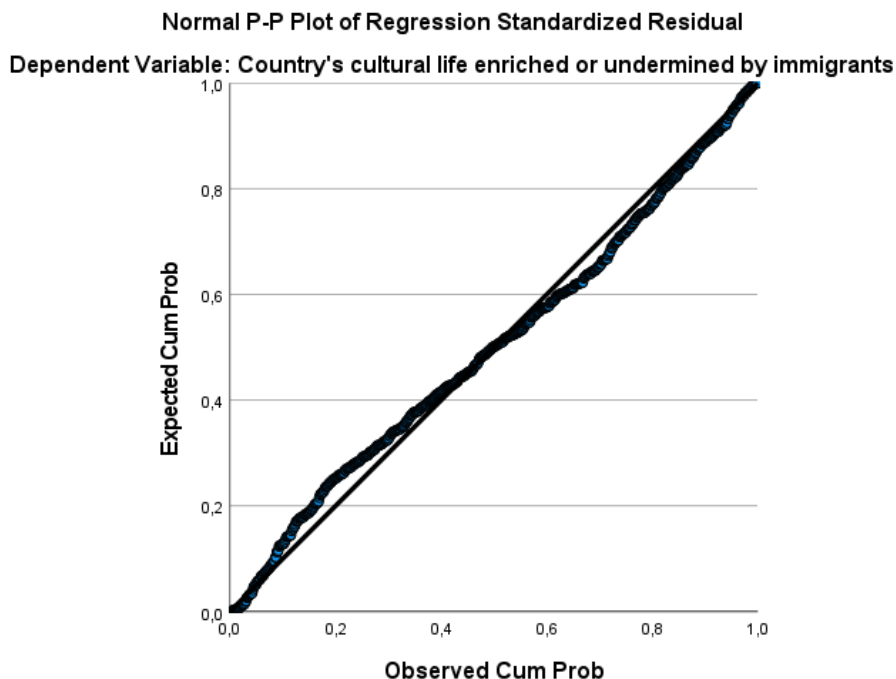
Germany	VIF
Constant	
Immigration policy change	1,725
Age of respondent	1,277
Gender	1,140
Highest level of education completed	1,234
Placement on left-right scale	1,587
How interested in politics	1,344
How close to <u>party</u>	1,075
Household's total net income	1,223
TV watching news/politics/current affairs on <u>average weekday</u>	1,315
European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	1,323
Trust in politicians	1,566
How satisfied with the way democracy works in your country	1,831
How satisfied with the present state of economy in country	1,541
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	1,451
Durbin-Watson	1,989

**Model 2 (France):**

**Homoscedasticity and Linearity:**



**Normality:**

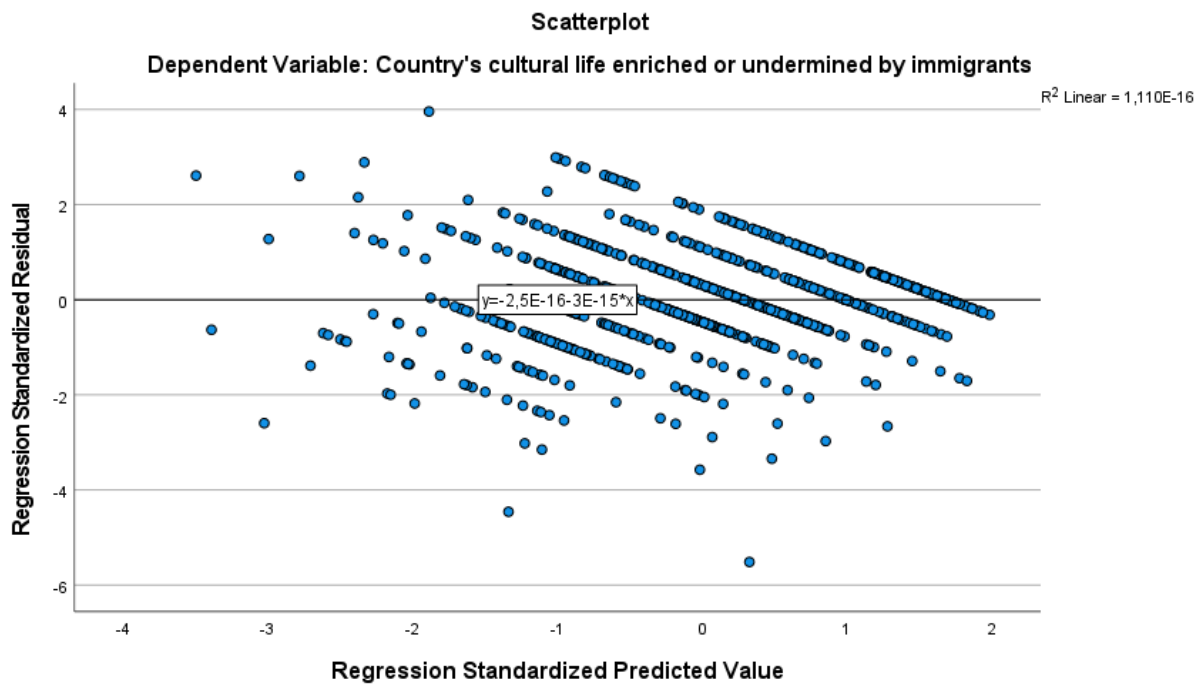


### Collinearity and auto-correlation:

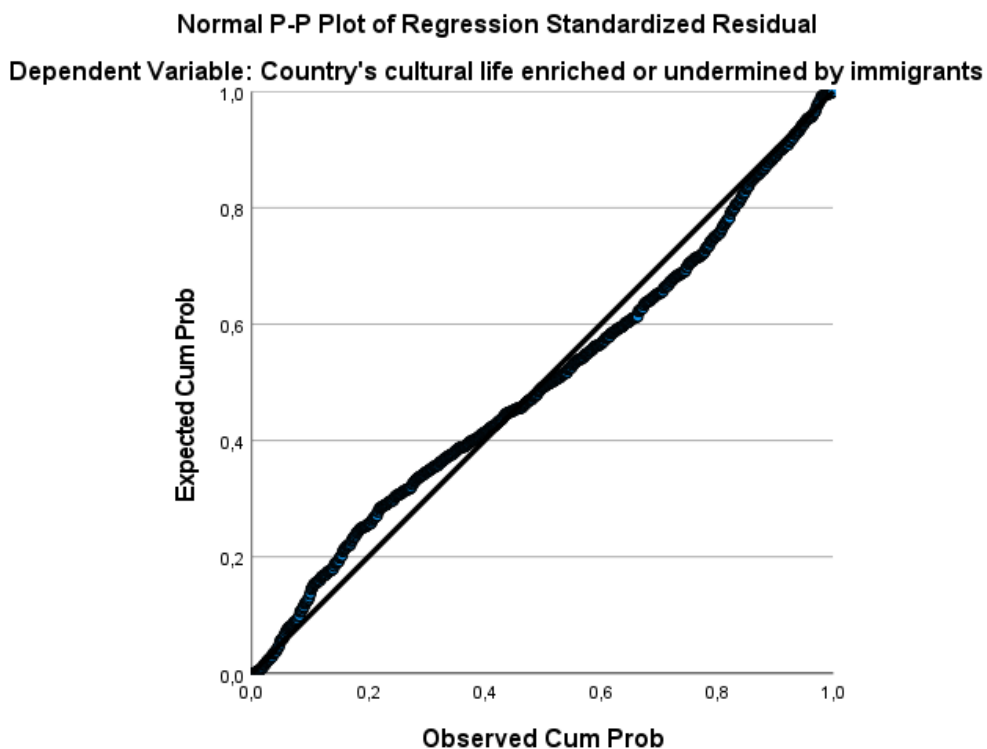
France	VIF
Constant	
Immigration policy change	1,120
Age of respondent	1,168
Gender	1,074
Highest level of education completed	1,385
Placement on left-right scale	1,211
How interested in politics	1,358
How close to party	1,102
Household's total net income	1,303
TV watching news/politics/current affairs on average weekday	1,176
European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	1,266
Trust in politicians	1,689
How satisfied with the way democracy works in your country	1,615
How satisfied with the present state of economy in country	1,602
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	1,504
Durbin-Watson	1,997

### Model 3 (Sweden):

#### Homoskedasticity and Linearity:



**Normality:**

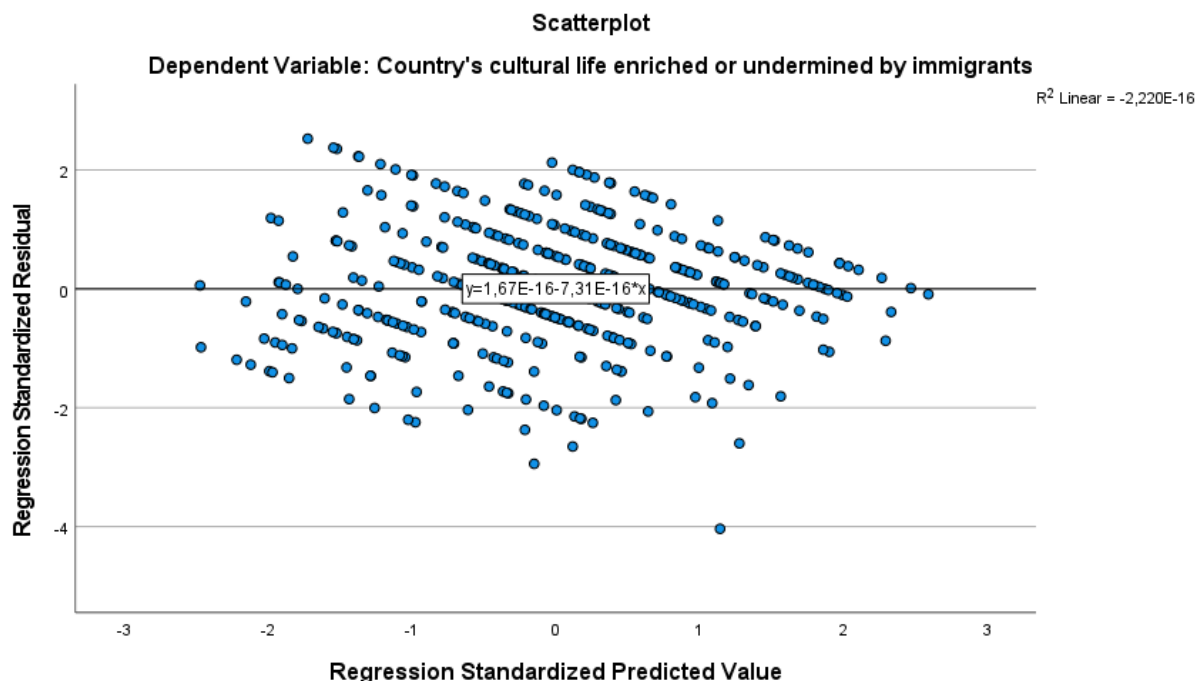


**Collinearity and auto-correlation:**

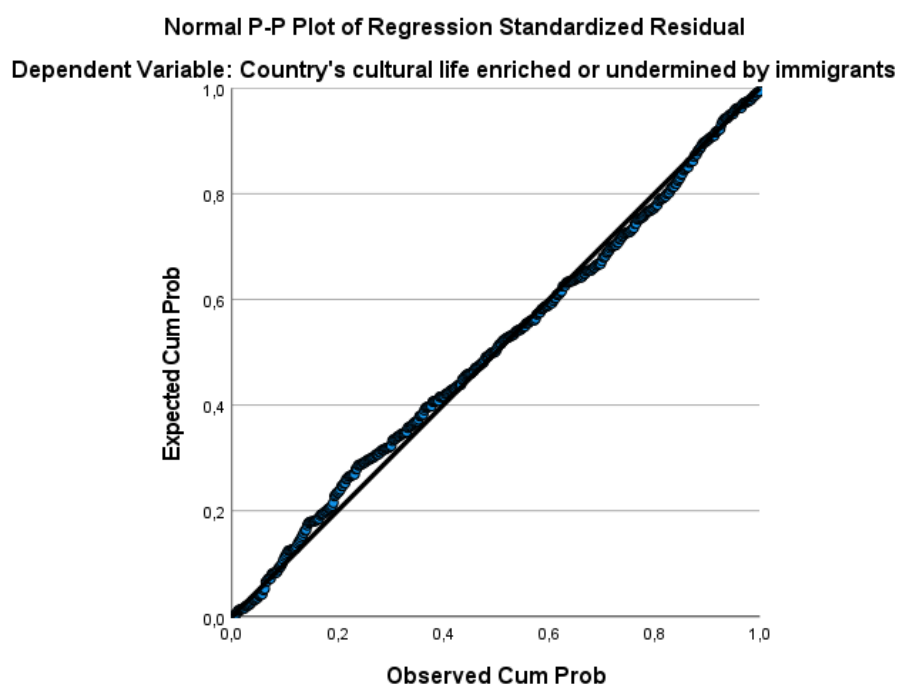
Sweden	VIF
Constant	
Immigration policy change	1,718
Age of respondent	1,432
Gender	1,087
Highest level of education completed	1,351
Placement on left-right scale	1,788
How interested in politics	1,252
How close to party	1,082
Household's total net income	1,211
TV watching news/politics/current affairs on average weekday	1,363
European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	1,121
Trust in politicians	1,454
How satisfied with the way democracy works in your country	1,473
How satisfied with the present state of economy in country	1,329
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	1,349
Durbin-Watson	2,211

**Model 4 (Spain):**

**Homoscedasticity and Linearity:**

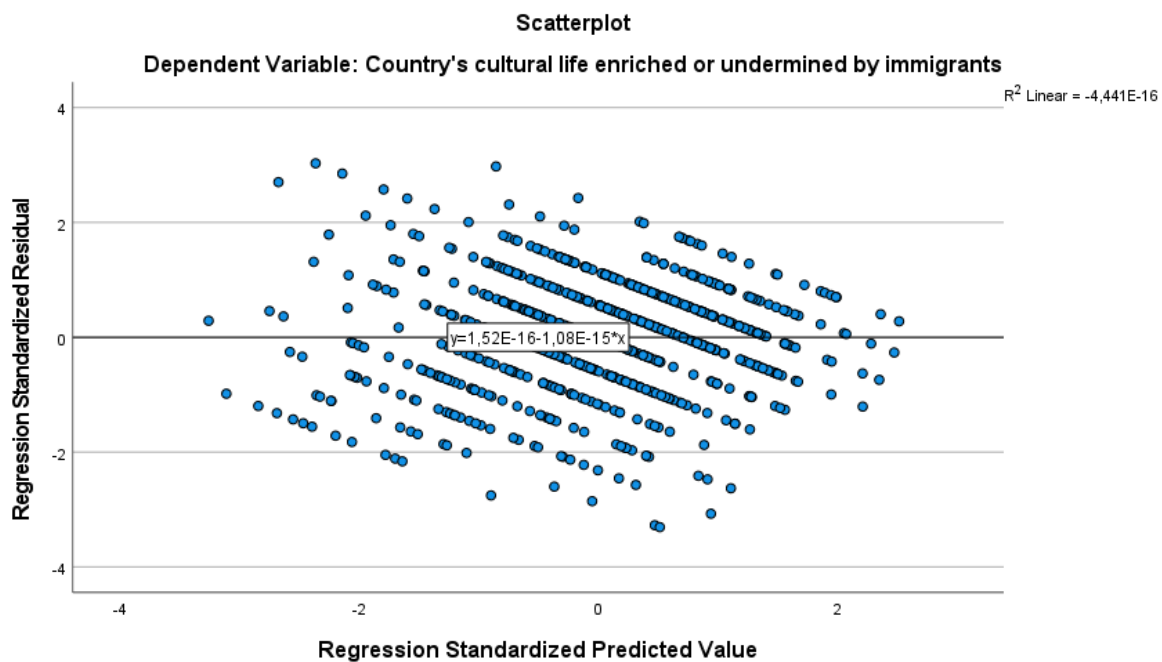
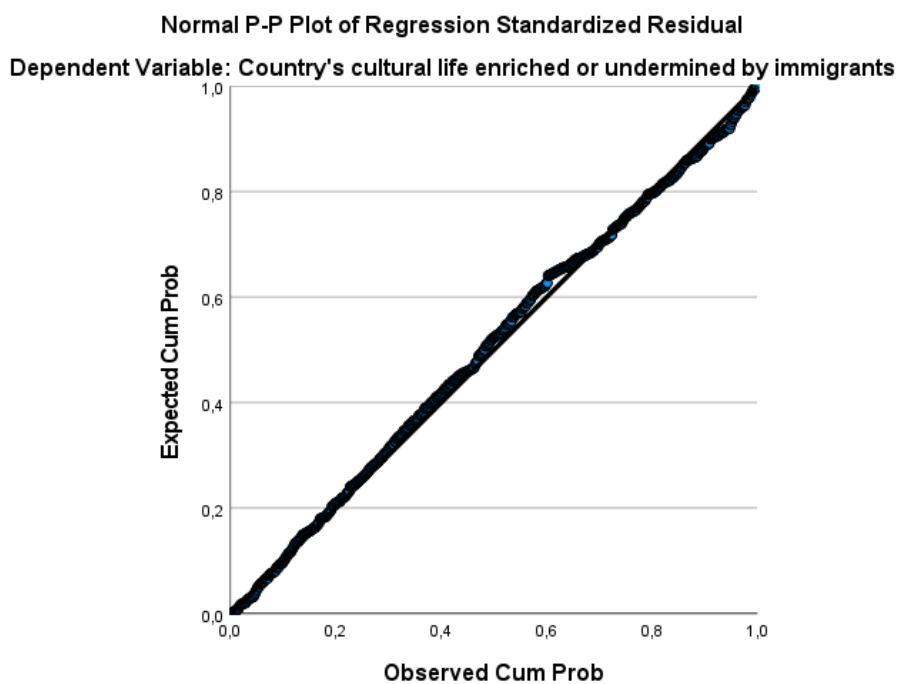


## Normality



### Collinearity and auto-correlation:

Spain	VIF
Constant	
Immigration policy change	2,360
Age of respondent	1,230
Gender	1,077
Highest level of education completed	1,760
Placement on left-right scale	1,504
How interested in politics	1,419
How close to party	1,167
Household's total net income	1,167
TV watching news/politics/current affairs on average weekday	1,157
European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	1,181
Trust in politicians	1,453
How satisfied with the way democracy works in your country	1,326
How satisfied with the present state of economy in country	1,456
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	1,268
Durbin-Watson	1,929

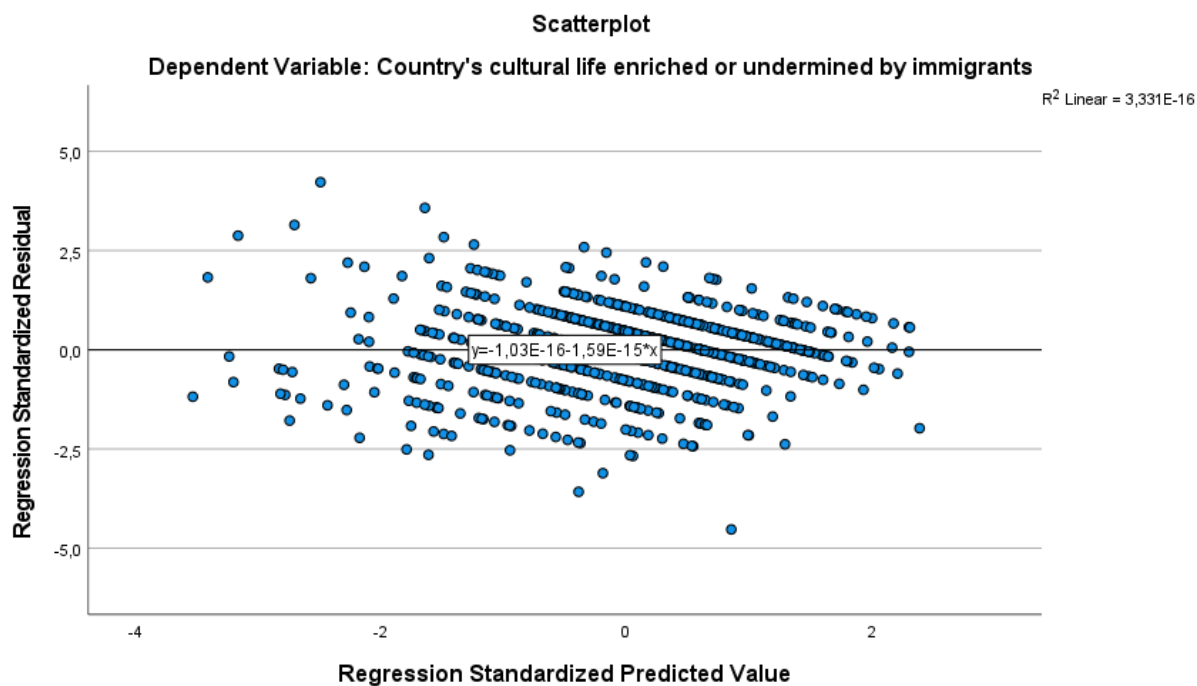
**Model 5 (Belgium):****Homoscedasticity and Linearity:****Normality:**

### Collinearity and auto-correlation:

Belgium	VIF
Constant	
Immigration policy change	1,060
Age of respondent	1,267
Gender	1,058
Highest level of education completed	1,473
Placement on left-right scale	1,067
How interested in politics	1,395
How close to party	1,102
Household's total net income	1,358
TV watching news/politics/current affairs on average weekday	1,255
European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	1,200
Trust in politicians	1,691
How satisfied with the way democracy works in your country	1,682
How satisfied with the present state of economy in country	1,459
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	1,333
Durbin-Watson	1,765

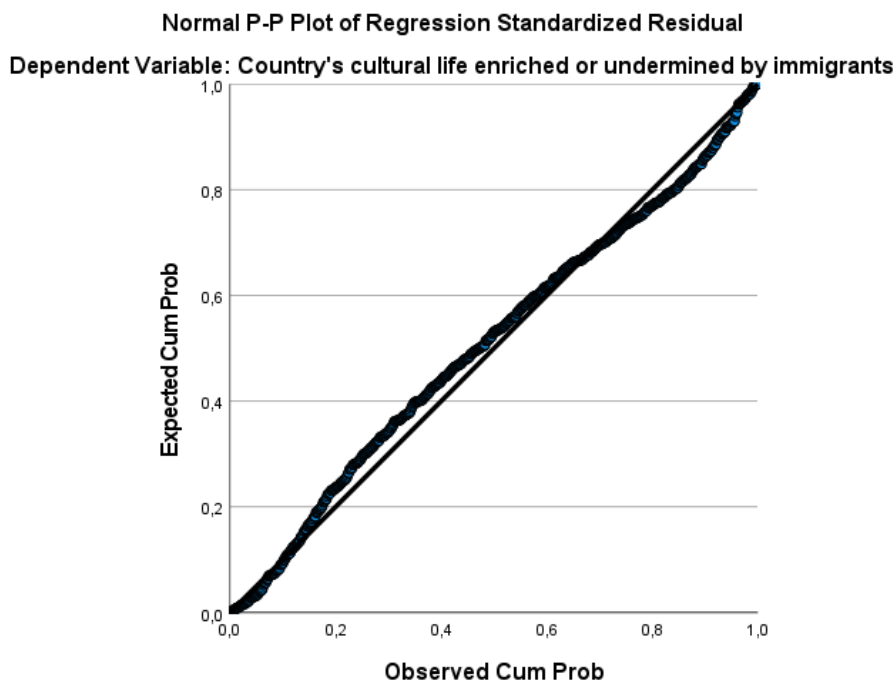
### Model 6 (NL):

### Homoscedasticity and Linearity:





## Normality:



## Collinearity and auto-correlation:

the Netherlands	VIF
Constant	
Immigration policy change	1,442
Age of respondent	1,186
Gender	1,077
Highest level of education completed	1,465
Placement on left-right scale	1,301
How interested in politics	1,279
How close to party	1,058
Household's total net income	1,274
TV watching news/politics/current affairs on average weekday	1,202
European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	1,344
Trust in politicians	2,052
How satisfied with the way democracy works in your country	1,852
How satisfied with the present state of economy in country	1,460
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	1,347
Durbin-Watson	1,985