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# **Unveiling the Nexus: Nationalist Sentiment and Policies on the Free Movement of People within the European Union: A Study on Posted Workers: A Study on Posted Workers**

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**Unveiling the Nexus: Nationalist Sentiment and Policies on  
the Free Movement of People within the European Union: A  
Study on Posted Workers**

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the reciprocal relationship between rising nationalist sentiments and policy changes in the European Union's free movement of people policies, particularly on posted workers. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, including descriptive data analysis and process tracing with comparative analysis, this study examines the change of nationalism in Germany, France and the UK from 2003 to 2013 and their subsequent policy changes on posted workers. Findings reveal a general trend of nationalism in rising. Rising nationalism in France and the UK is connected to the increasing number of incoming posted workers and therefore prompted significant policy responses aimed at protecting local workers and domestic labour conditions. Conversely, Germany's rising nationalism is less connected to posted workers, along with its more inclusive view of immigrants, resulting in fewer reactive policy changes.

## **Introduction**

The European Union (EU) stands as a beacon of regional integration, promoting the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people across its member states. However, this vision of seamless mobility has not been without its challenges, particularly with the rise of Euroscepticism across the continent in recent years. Empirical studies suggest that, despite the EU policies enabling free movement regardless of nation-state borders they have not eliminated the concept of nation-states and nationalism (Postelnicescu, 2016; Said 1995)). On the contrary, EU member states have become more nationalistic and conservative in the recent 20 years (Ibid).

This thesis explores the pivotal question: is there a relationship between nationalist sentiment and policies regarding the free movement of people within the European Union, and if so, how does this relationship manifest in policy-making processes? By delving into the intricate dynamics between nationalist sentiment and policies concerning posted workers within the EU, this study aims to shed light on the critical interaction between policy and public opinion, particularly, the nationalist sentiment. The change in nationalist sentiment is intricately linked with policy changes, and the evolving sentiment, in turn, influences future policymaking.

Among the various forms of labour and service mobility, the phenomenon of posted workers has garnered significant attention and scrutiny. Posted workers are those employees who are 'temporarily working in a Member State of the EU other than the member state in which the employer is established' (Article 56 TFEU). The employer "posts" the worker to perform services in another country while still maintaining an

employment relationship with them under local legal framework and policies. This practice is common in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and transportation, where companies may need to temporarily send workers to other EU countries to fulfil contracts or projects. Due to its complex legal compliance, the EU's non-unified social welfare and labour protection under the single market, this phenomenon has become emblematic of the complex intersection between economic integration, social cohesion, and national sovereignty within the EU. Since member states in Central and Eastern Europe have relatively weak laws on labour protection and social welfare, posted workers from these regions have a strong competitive advantage in the labor market of Western Europe and make local workers in Western Europe more vulnerable to exploitation. This social dumping phenomenon thus attracts the dissatisfaction of the local working class in Western Europe member states (De Wispelaere, De Smedt L. & Pacolet, J. 2022). For example, in 2009, British workers launched a series of strikes because European construction companies sent a large number of European workers to the UK to work in construction industries at lower wages and benefits<sup>1</sup>, and this squeezed out the development space for British skilled workers. The demonstrators demanded that the government change its attitude towards posted workers, granting them full equal treatment in wage and labour conditions to protect the interests of British workers (BBC, 2009). This strategy is to mitigate the competitive disadvantage posed by lower-wage foreign workers. By demanding standardized labour conditions, nationalists aim to protect local employment not

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<sup>1</sup> 2009 Lindsey Oil Refinery strikes

through exclusionary tactics, but by levelling the playing field in terms of minimum wages and social benefits.

This makes the phenomenon particularly intriguing: the orthodox view typically holds that nationalism and local protectionism favour preferential treatment for local workers. However, in the case of posted workers, nationalists paradoxically call for equal treatment of all workers. This unexpected alignment of nationalist rhetoric with egalitarian principles reveals a complex interplay between protectionist goals and equality-driven policies.

Investigating the reciprocal relationship between nationalist sentiment and policies on the free movement of people within the European Union, particularly in the context of posted worker, is of special significance today when the EU integration faces challenges from far-right populism and nationalism. As the EU grapples with rising nationalist movements and debates surrounding immigration, integration, and sovereignty, understanding the mechanisms through which nationalist sentiment influences policy is crucial for informing evidence-based policymaking and fostering greater integration within the Union. Moreover, elucidating how policies on labour mobility interact with nationalist sentiment provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of European integration and the challenges faced in balancing economic objectives with social and cultural concerns. By shedding light on this intricate interplay, the research not only contributes to academic scholarship but also offers practical implications for policymakers, stakeholders, and citizens navigating the complexities of EU governance and identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

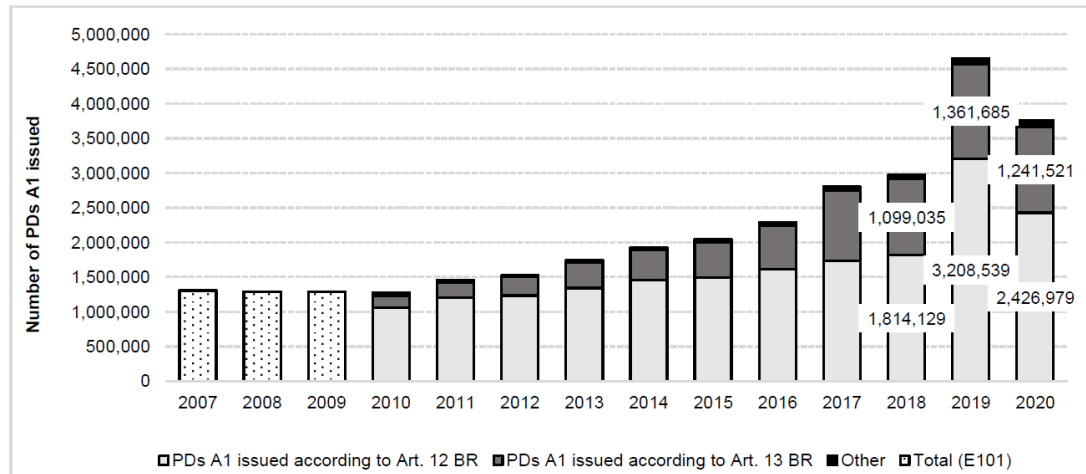
## **Posted Worker: Definition, Practice, and Regulations**

Free movement of labour, which later developed into the free movement of people, is an important pillar policy of the EU single market. Under this policy, labour mobility includes 'all movements of natural persons from one country to another for the purpose of employment or the provision of services' (UNECE, 2018). It can be as short as going to neighbouring countries to give lectures or attend meetings, it can also be as long as settling in and working in other member countries. In 2020, nearly 10 million individuals of working age locate their residence in a Member State where they are not citizens within the EU-27, accounting for 3.8% of the overall working-age population (Fries-Tersch et al., 2022). Among them, the posted worker is a special category: it represents a relatively temporary labour mobility. While the employee goes to work in the hosting country, the employee's labour relationship remains with the original company in the original country, and therefore the wage and labour condition standards of the original country apply. Since posted workers may sometimes only work in other countries for a few days or even a few hours, and given the differences in relevant laws between EU member states, the Posted Worker Directive 1996 provides an exception for equal treatment. When companies post employees to work temporarily in other member states, only minimum 'hardcore' rules on wage and labour conditions of the host country need to be observed. Despite the introduction of the Posting of Workers Directive in 1996, the issue of posting was not widely recognized as problematic prior to the enlargement of the EU due to the very limited number of posted workers and the



relatively homogenous socioeconomic conditions across member states (Kyriazi, 2023). However, with the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, the economic gap between Eastern and Western Europe, as well as the differences in regulations on minimum wage and labour conditions, have made this exception to facilitate companies problematic. Posting allows these workers to work under lower wages, worse working conditions with longer hours. For employers, hiring posted workers is far more cost-effective than hiring local Western European workers. Therefore, the job opportunities of Western European workers have been taken away by these posted workers to a certain extent. This is considered by some politicians and scholars as creating unfair competition in Western European countries' labour market (Kroet, 2023). At the same time, the existence of posted workers makes Western European employers reluctant to provide better working conditions to all the workers, which makes Western European workers also more vulnerable to exploitation (Ibid).

Statistics prove that the number of posted workers has been continuously increasing and the displacement of local workers is obvious. Figure 1 shows the changes in the number of posted workers from 2007 to 2020. Despite the vital enlargement in 2004, most of the previous EU member states stipulated a two-year transition period, during which the free movement of people and goods between the new and old member states was not fully possible. Therefore, there is a two-year gap between the 2004 enlargement and the statistics. As shown in the graph, after a brief stagnation of three years starting in 2007, the number of posted workers has risen significantly every year since 2010, with only a decline in 2020 due to the pandemic.



Source De Wispelaere et al., 2022b.

Figure 1: Number of postings in the EU/EFTA (incl. the UK) based on data from the Portable Documents A1, 2007-2020

Not only does the absolute number of Posted workers continue to grow, but it also significantly crowds out local workers in Western European countries. For instance, in the construction sector, which is one of the main industries for posted workers, posted workers provide 30% of the working hours in the French construction industry (Muñoz, 2022). In Belgium, one-fifth of total employment in the construction sector is contributed by posted workers while the number of local construction workers fell by 15,000 between 2011 and 2016 (Muñoz, 2021). The hiring of Belgian workers declined within Belgian companies by 2% during the year they commenced subcontracting services to posted workers (Ibid). In Germany, the share of posted workers is lower than the estimate in the European construction sector, but still, 10% of workers in German construction are posted workers (Albrecht et al., 2022).

Due to the displacement and potential regression of labour rights, several strikes and demonstrations, represented by the 2009 Lindsey Oil Refinery strike in the UK and the 2009 labour protest in France, occurred in Western Europe, forcing the government to

take measures to protect local labour rights and benefits. In March 2016, the Juncker Commission proposed a proposal to the European Parliament, amending the Posted Workers Directive 1996 to provide more equal treatment for posted workers, especially for those who work for longer periods. The 2016 proposal was not the Commission's first attempt to address the tension between economic freedom within a single market and the social dumping effect. Previous reforms had either been diluted or failed altogether, despite their less ambitious scope. When the Commission published its new proposal, it was not immediately clear that the outcome would be different this time (Cremers, 2016). The key turning point for this amendment was the strong support of the newly elected French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017 (Kyriazi, 2023). After two years of discussion and debate under Macron's promotion, the 1996 Posted Worker Directive has finally been revised in 2018. The amendment replaced the term 'pay' with 'remuneration', encompassing 'all elements [...] mandated by national law', which requires the inclusion of bonuses and allowances for posted workers as well (European Union, 2018). In addition, the amendment re-emphasizes the temporary nature of posting and retains the flexibility of short-term posting. But when an employee is posted abroad for more than 12 months, the new legislature requires that the posted worker shall be subject to the minimum wage and labour conditions of the hosting country and the original country, whichever is more favourable to labour (Ibid). While far from perfect, the 2018 amendment has helped to resolve the tension between the economic freedom of the unified market and the differences in social security and labour protection policies among EU countries. The amendment significantly diminished

employers' competitive advantage that stemmed from pay and social security disparities across the EU. At the same time, it preserves the flexibility for employees engaged in short-term cross-border work and maintains the economic freedom and vitality of the EU single market.

### **Theoretical Argument**

To address the reciprocal interaction between nationalism sentiment and policy on the posted worker, this section will first look at the general theories exploring the relationship between public opinion and policymaking, and then focus specifically on nationalism and the free movement of people. Previous research on nationalism and the free movement of people is further divided into two categories. The first category discusses the impact of integration policies represented by the free movement of people on domestic nationalism and national identity perceptions of member states. The second category explores the impact of nationalist sentiment on policy attitudes, particularly on immigration and the free movement of people policies.

#### The interplay between public opinion and policy

In democratic societies, the relationship between public opinion and public policy is a dynamic and multifaceted interplay, characterized by a constant exchange of influence. The 'Thermostatic Model' was developed to describe this complex interaction (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010). According to this model, the public is responsive to policy change.

The outcomes of policies directly impact public perceptions and attitudes. Positive outcomes, such as economic growth or improved healthcare access, can lead to greater public satisfaction and support for the governing administration or the specific policies implemented. Conversely, policies perceived as unfair or inequitable may generate public discontent (Elaine, 1999).

Public opinion, in turn, serves as a powerful force in shaping the policy agenda and policymaking content. When significant portions of the population express concerns or demands regarding specific issues, policymakers often feel compelled to address them, driven by electoral purpose or accountability consideration. This results in the prioritization of certain policies over others on the agenda based on public sentiment. The Thermostatic Model further proposes that policies adjust in response to public opinion and policy preferences. For instance, if the public desires increased spending, policy direction shifts upward; if the public desires less intervention, policy direction shifts downward. Specific policy preferences expressed by public opinions can be transformed into policy proposals through the mobilization of political parties and interest groups (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010).

Moreover, policies can sometimes serve as symbols of broader political values or ideologies, influencing public opinion not only through their tangible outcomes but also through the symbolic meaning attached to them (Laclau, 2007). This kind of manipulation will affect voters' interpretation of established phenomena or policy results. For example, the reduction in job opportunities may be perceived as a failure of specific economic policies or as a consequence of competition and crowding caused

by the influx of immigrants. Therefore, considering the complex interplay, social policy changes are significantly influenced by both public awareness of the effectiveness of existing programs and pre-existing public desires regarding the issues these programs aim to tackle (Elaine, 1999).

### Integration and Nationalism

Decades of integration efforts have failed to eliminate nationalism in Europe. Instead, the European Union has witnessed the rise of nationalist sentiments in the context of cultural preservation and economic interests. This trend has become particularly evident since the EU's enlargement in 2004, which made the union more diverse.

Before the 2004 enlargement, decades of efforts of integration proved unable to shake deep-rooted national identity among member states. For example, in the United Kingdom, Englishness remains delineated in opposition to Europeanness, with "Europe" serving as the antithesis of the national identity (Risse 2001). The diverse nature of EU member states makes it challenging for the EU to establish a common identity beyond the nation-state, despite that the EU member states were relatively homogeneous at the time. Instead, it remains a fragile mixed identity based on common values and economic interests (Said 1995).

Following the 2004 enlargement, the immigration crisis and the euro crisis brought the problems and negative effects of EU integration into sharp focus. In-depth integration has unprecedentedly impacted the institutions and ideologies of nation-states. As the number of member states increased to 25, and then to 27 in 2007, the EU became more

diverse, especially considering the gap in economic and social development between Western Europe and Central/Eastern Europe. This has led to greater divergence in many policies among EU member states. Meanwhile, with more and more issues and policies to be decided collectively by the EU, nation-state parties and governments struggle to propose sufficiently diverse and accountable policy proposals to their voters (Hix & Hoyland, 20022). This dynamic is shaking the support of EU citizens and political elites for the EU and EU policies. When they are dissatisfied with Brussels, citizens naturally seek more preferential national policies as alternatives (Karner & Kopytowska, 2017). The fragile nature of European identity, based on common values and economic interests, becomes even more apparent when economic interests are at stake. For instance, in matters such as the posted workers, where the rights and interests of local workers are jeopardized, national identity prevails and is even emphasized more to serve political agendas. In-depth content analysis research has even found that with the influx of immigration under the free movement of people policy, the nationalist narrative has been revived in many EU countries, which is reflected in the speeches of far-right political figures and their electoral victories (Wodak & Boukala, 2015).

Such research posits that nationalist sentiment intersects with economic anxieties and identity politics, particularly in the context of perceived disparities in wages, social security policies, and labour protections among EU member states. Accordingly, this research hypothesized that the free movement of people in the EU allows the large flow of labour after the 2004 enlargement of the EU, and this is connected with the rising anti-immigration nationalist sentiment in hosting countries (H1).

## **Nationalist Impact on Policy**

In empirical studies, it is contended that national identity, particularly a sense of identification with one's nation-state, stands as a substantial predictor of public opinion regarding EU control over immigration policy. Prior to the enlargement, empirical studies in quantitative survey research revealed a correlation: a stronger sense of national identity corresponds to diminished endorsement of EU integration. Factors such as the depth of national identity acknowledgement, the degree of allegiance to one's nation, and apprehensions about the encroachment of other identities and cultures on the predominant national ethos are pivotal in shaping this sentiment (Carey, 2002). Subsequent regression analysis indicates that individuals who are more identified with nation-states are more dissatisfied with immigration policy under EU control. This dissatisfaction can manifest as opposition to the EU's current immigration policies or resistance to transferring immigration policy-making authority to Brussels. This factor outweighed other factors such as personal economic benefits, political ideology and the overall attitude towards EU integration (Luedtke, 2005).

Specifically, regarding intra-EU migration, quantitative analysis shows that people with stronger identification with national identity and low human capital are more opposed to intra-EU migration (Vasilopoulou & Talving, 2019). The research also found that the impact of these two factors is limited by the domestic context: in affluent countries, the impact of these two factors is more significant, while in relatively less wealthy member states, the impact is less significant (Ibid).

These studies demonstrate a positive relationship between strong nationalist sentiments



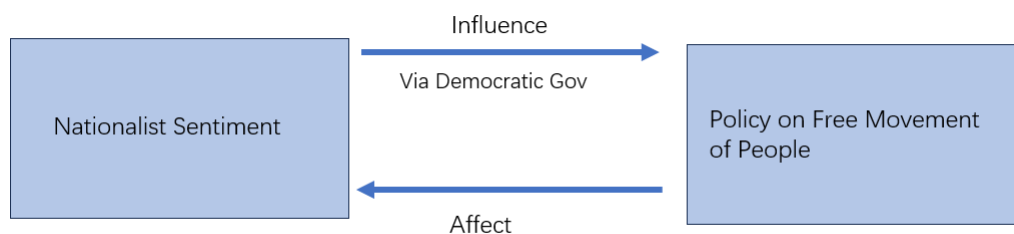
and opposition to the free movement of people policies. Consequently, it is hypothesized that nationalist sentiment has pressured Western European democratic governments to respond and influenced the EU to revise relevant policies to protect the rights and benefits of local workers (H2). In the case of posted workers, nationalist sentiments, marked by protectionist policy preferences, prompted the hosting countries to advocate for policy changes. This advocacy aimed to reduce the displacement of local workers, which ultimately led to the 2018 Posted Worker Directive Amendment.

## Hypothesis

To answer the research question, this research hypothesized that there exists a relationship between nationalist sentiment and policies regarding the free movement of people within the European Union. This relationship is a complex interplay as shown in the graph and is divided into two parts as follows:

*H1: The increase in the number of incoming posted workers leads to an increase in nationalist sentiment in hosting countries.*

*H2: Rising nationalist sentiment urges democratic governments to revise relevant policies to protect local workers' rights and benefits.*



## Method

This study employs a mixed research method, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the relationship between nationalist sentiment and policy changes regarding the free movement of people within the EU, specifically focusing on posted workers. The methodologies adopted are descriptive data analysis and process tracing with comparative analysis.

### Descriptive Data Analysis

To test H1, the first methodological approach involves a comprehensive descriptive data analysis to provide an overview of trends and patterns related to nationalism in the EU. Germany, France, and the UK are selected as the subject of this analysis since they are the top three major recipients of posted workers (De Wispelaere et al, 2022)<sup>2</sup>. Nationalism involves various aspects, including economy, culture, language, identity, etc. Considering that it is very difficult to directly establish a strict causal relationship between the increase in the influx of posted workers and the growth of nationalist sentiment, which requires many variables to be controlled, this study will rather focus on whether there is a trend of growing nationalist sentiment from 2003 to 2013. The year 2003 was just before the EU's crucial enlargement in 2004, while 2013 was after the expansion had been completed and developed for some time. Comparing the changes between these two years will reveal the changes in nationalist sentiment in

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<sup>2</sup> Other major recipients of posted workers include Netherlands and Belgium. Netherlands abstained from the 2013 survey and Belgium did not participate in the 2003 survey.

Western European hosting countries before and after the emergence of the posted worker phenomenon, which is based on the gap in economic and social development and the gap in labour protection between Eastern and Western Europe. This approach will help to ascertain whether there was a rise in nationalism from 2003 to 2013 and whether it is connected with the increase in the number of incoming posted workers.

#### Process Tracing with Comparative Analysis

To test H2, the second methodological approach combines process tracing with comparative analysis to explore the causal relationship between nationalist sentiment and policy changes concerning posted workers. This study focuses on the process of the EU's proposed amendment to the Posted Worker Directive in 2016 and its adoption in 2018. During this process, the three countries exhibited different policy responses based on their respective changes in nationalist sentiment.

The comparative analysis will identify similarities and differences in the policy responses of these countries, underscoring how nationalist sentiment affects democratic policy-making via referendum and election. Qualitative data collected includes media articles, key speeches made by political figures, and policy papers.

Synthesizing the findings from descriptive data analysis and process tracing with comparative analysis will provide a comprehensive understanding of the reciprocal relationship between nationalist sentiment and EU policies.

## **The rise of nationalism**

### *Data*

To assess nationalist sentiment, this research derives data from the 2003 and 2013 ‘National Identity’ modules of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), a reputable source for its extensive annual social surveys. This project replicates national surveys on nationalism in 53 countries, assessing nationalist sentiments from various aspects. The dataset includes a total of 8,431 participants from Germany, France, and the UK in both survey years. Given the large sample size and the demographic consistency between the sample and the actual populations of the selected countries, this dataset is regarded as reliable and representative of the general population trends and attitudes within these countries.

### *Measurement*

Nationalism is assessed by five different questions selected from the survey module. The original survey module covers various aspects of nationalism: identity proximity, language, culture, state performance in politics and economy, immigration, and so on. To focus on nationalism and the free movement of people, questions on general nationalist sentiment, attitudes towards foreign workers, and economic nationalism are selected.

Two questions focus on general attachment to national identity:

1. ‘How close do you feel to your own country?’
2. ‘How proud are you being a country national of your country?’.

Responses are assessed on a 4-point scale, ranging from ‘very close/proud’, ‘somewhat

close/proud', 'not very close/proud', to 'not close/proud at all'.

The other three questions examine attitudes toward immigrants and economic nationalism. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements:

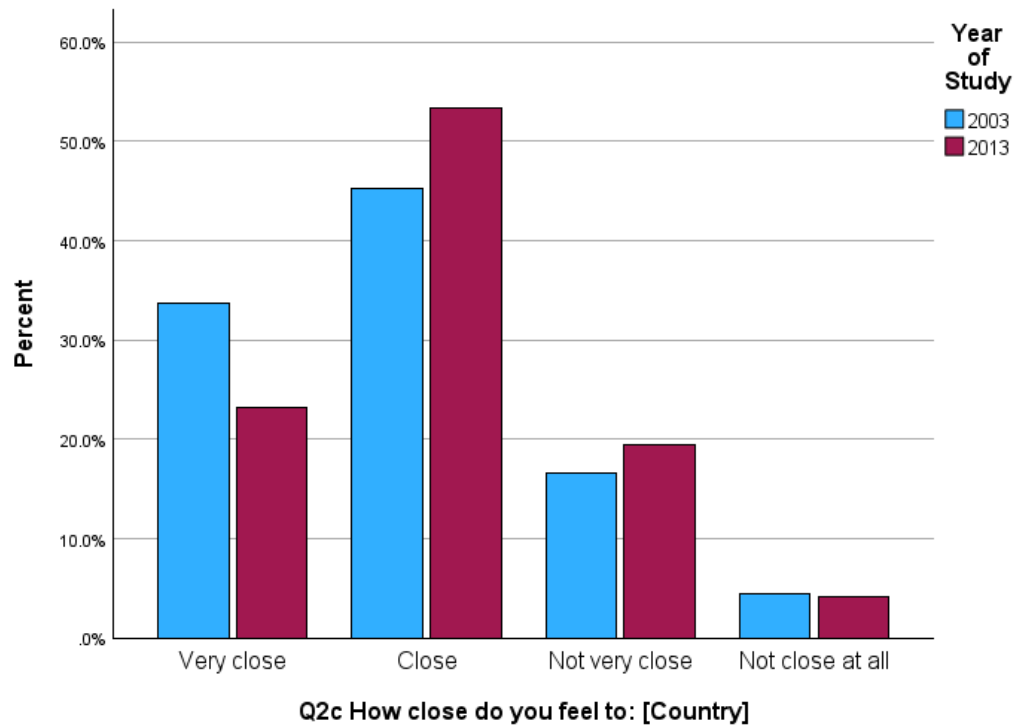
1. 'Immigrants are generally good for our economy.'
2. 'Immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in our country.'

The respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement is measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', to 'strongly disagree'.

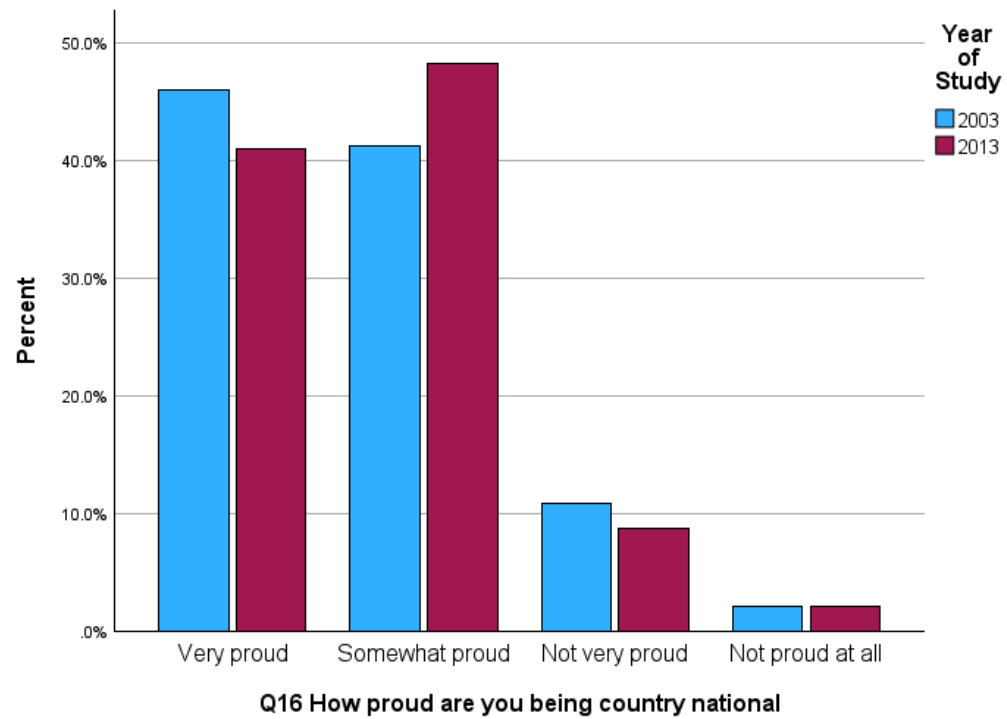
Additionally, respondents were asked to express their views on future immigration with the following options: 'increase a lot', 'increase some', 'stay the same', 'decrease some', or 'decrease a lot'. This question is particularly important for this study as it directly reflects public opinion and policy preference.

#### *Descriptive Analysis of Nationalism*

National Identity Proximity



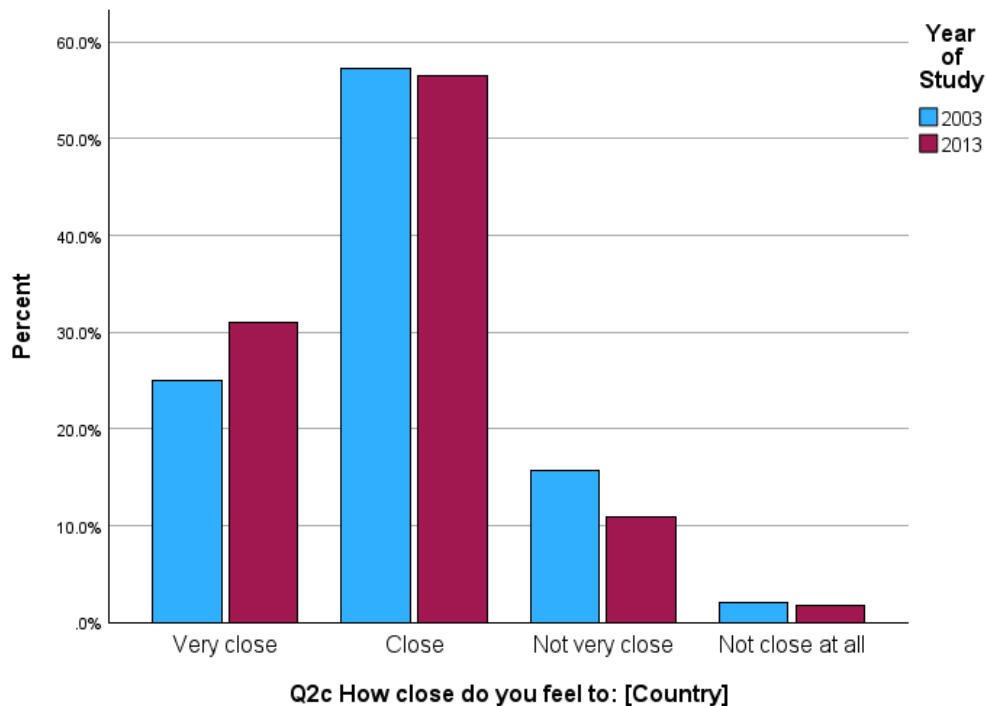
Graph1: UK-Q1



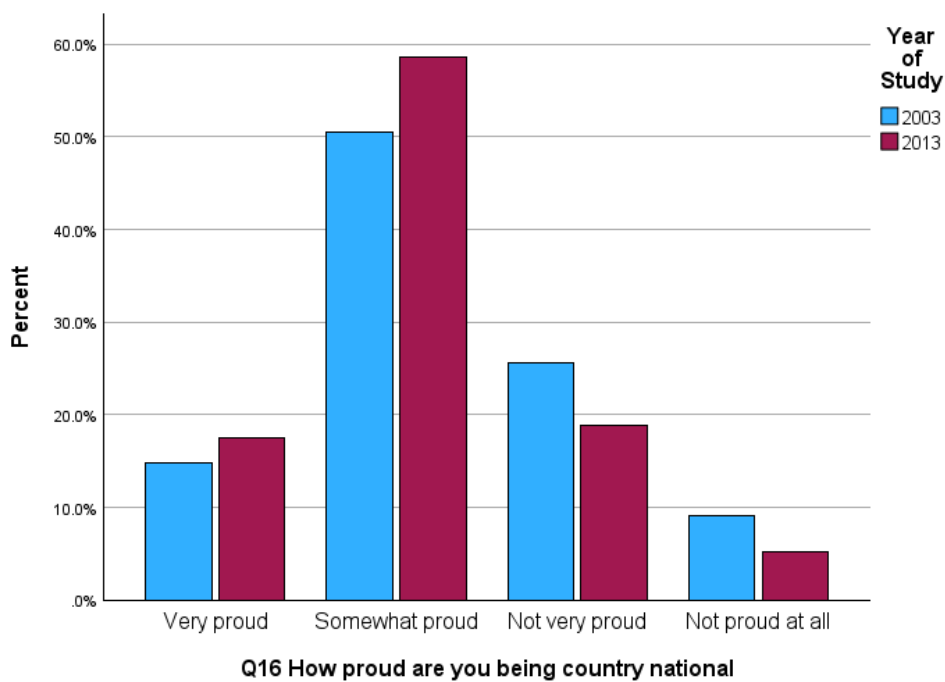
Graph2: UK-Q2

As shown by Graph 1, in 2003, 70% of British respondents had a strong or very strong national identity. From 2003 to 2013, British people's attitudes toward national proximity have changed slightly, but the general trend and mainstream remains. The number of respondents who chose to identify with their national identity the most strongly decreased by about 10%, while the number of respondents who chose to identify with their national identity relatively strongly increased by 8%, and the number of respondents who did not think their national identity was very strong also increased slightly. Despite these slight changes, overall, about 70% of respondents still have a strong or relatively strong national identity.

Graph 2 presents similar information: In 2003, 85% of respondents chose "very proud" or "somewhat proud" of their national identity. By 2013, this proportion had risen to 90%. Among those who are proud of their national identity, the percentage who feel very proud has fallen by about 5 percentage points from 2003 to 2013, while the percentage who feel somewhat proud has risen by 8 percentage points.



Graph 3 Germany-Q1



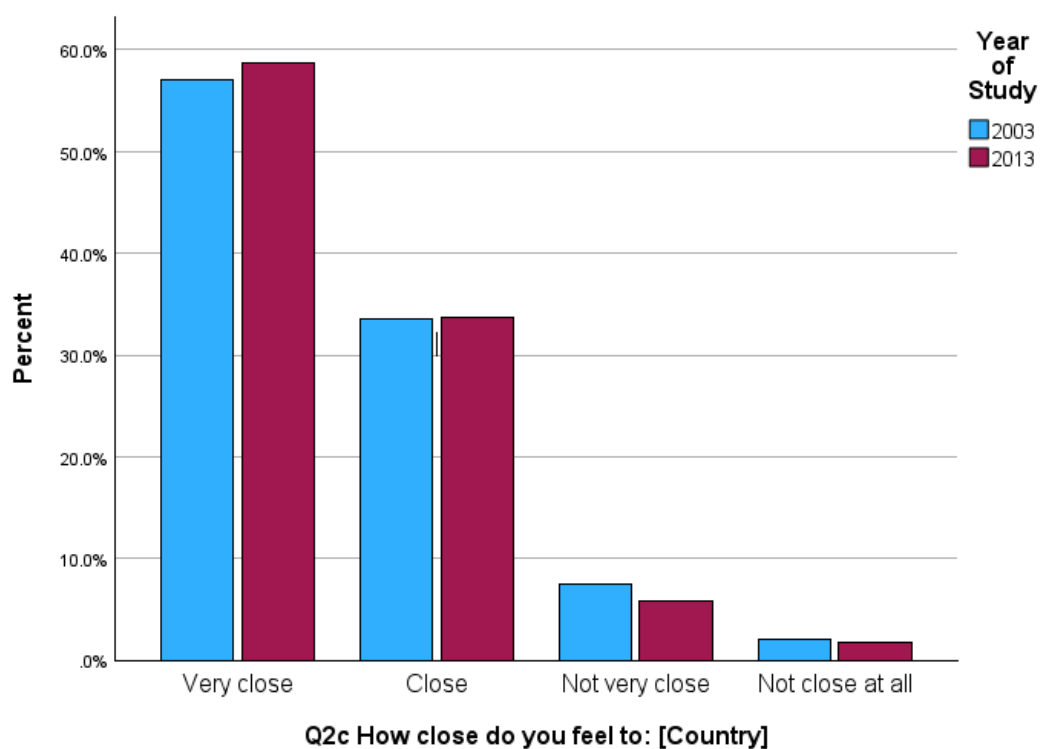
Graph 4 Germany-Q2

As evidenced by Graph 3, German respondents exhibited a heightened sense of nationalism when responding to inquiries regarding national identity proximity. In 2003, 80% of respondents expressed a strong sense of national identity. In 2013, this

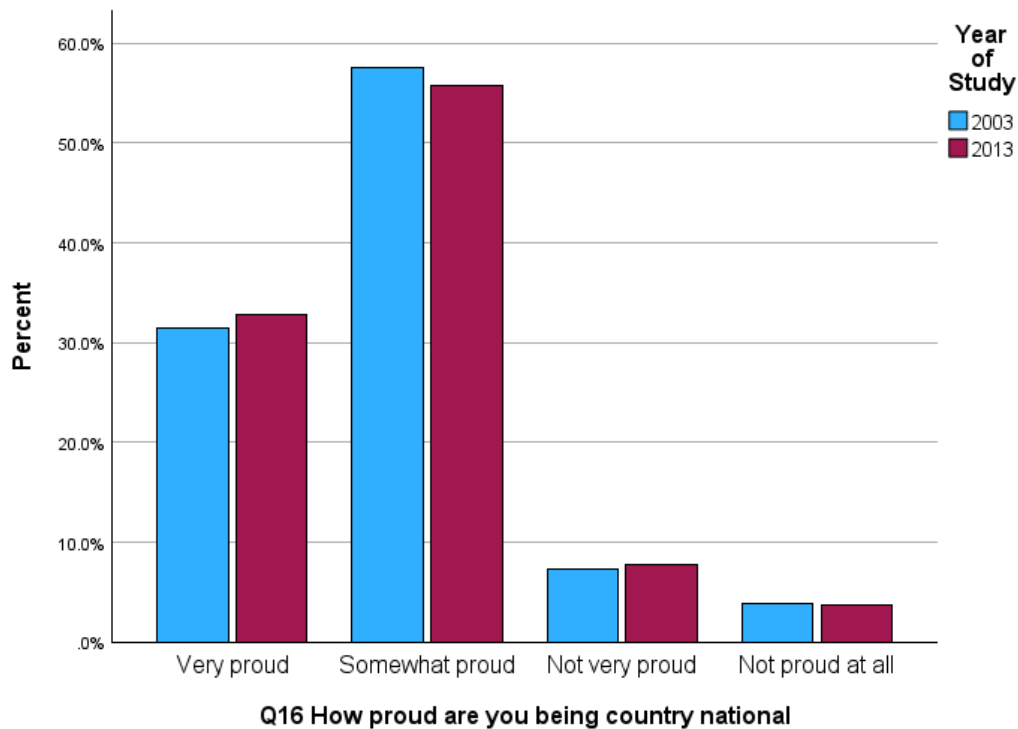


proportion rose by about 5%, all of which came from the option of feeling very close to national identity.

In terms of the pride of national identity shown by Graph 4, German respondents also showed a significant increase. In 2003, 65% of respondents were proud of their national identity. In 2013, this proportion exceeded 75%, and the proportion of those who felt very proud and somewhat proud both increased.



Graph 5 France-Q1



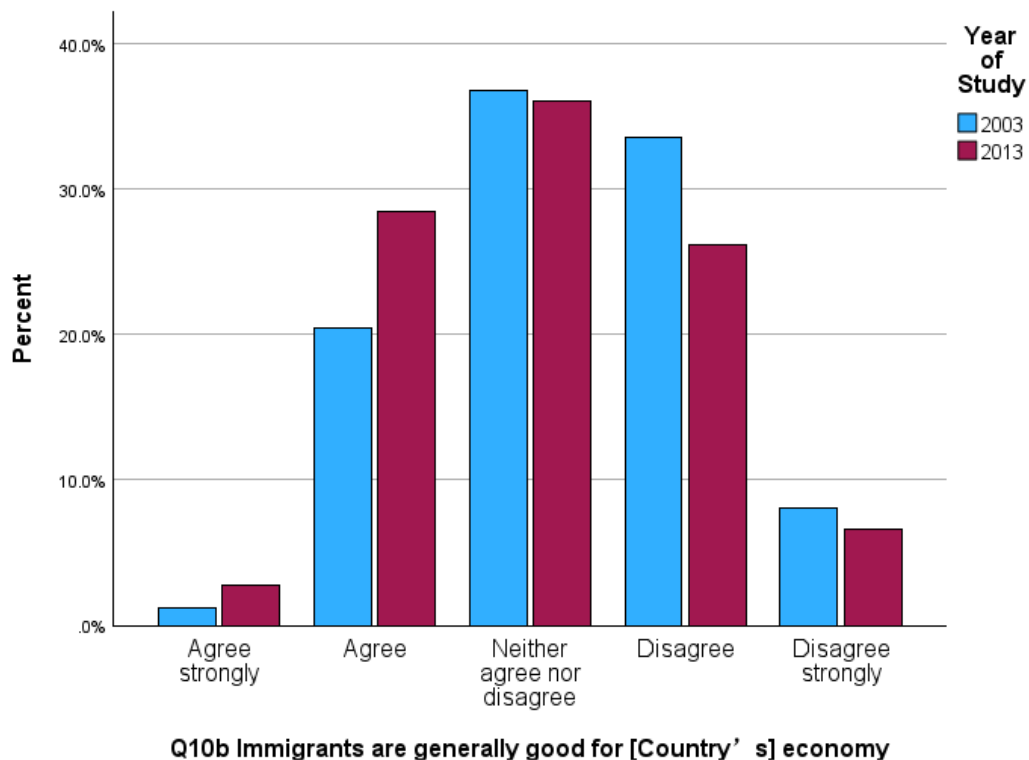
Graph 6 France-Q2

Comparatively, Graph 5 demonstrates that French respondents displayed a generally stronger sense of nationalist proximity than Germany and the UK. In 2003, 90% of respondents expressed a strong sense of national identity. This already high figure still rose by about 3% in 2013, with more respondents choosing options that were very close to their national identity.

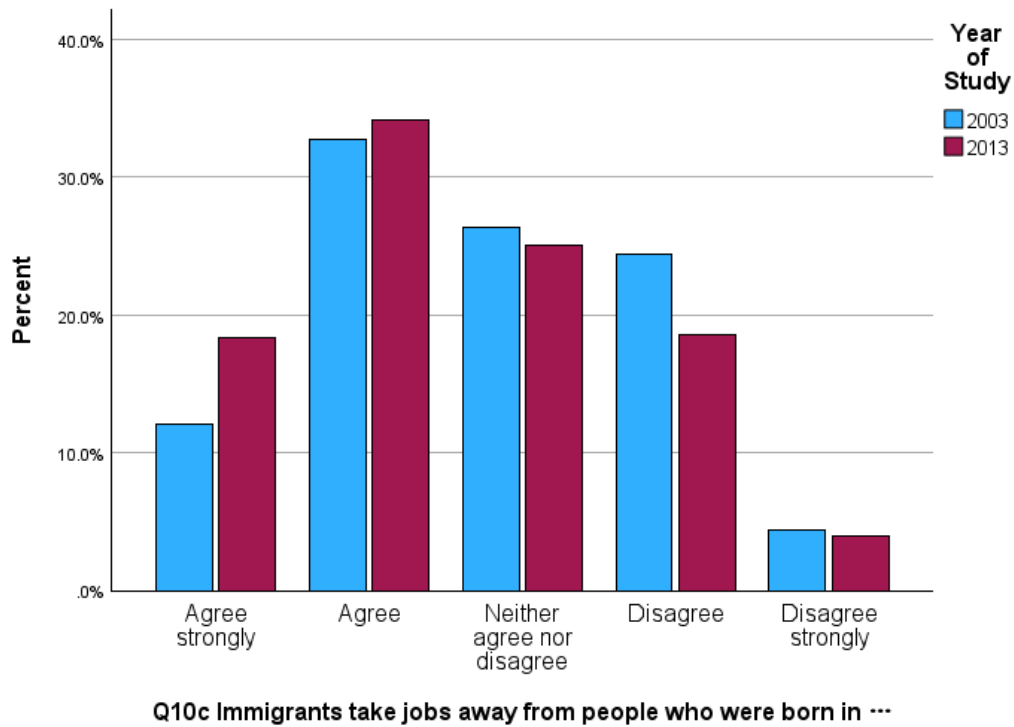
However, despite this robust national identity, French respondents demonstrated slightly less pride in their nation. Graph 6 shows that in 2003, nearly 90% of respondents were proud of their national identity. By 2013, that number had fallen by about 1%. This nuanced discrepancy might be attributed to dissatisfaction with specific French policies and governmental performance. Given the small magnitude of the change, the decline is not considered evidence that France has become less nationalist.

The data on national identity proximity reveals that, compared to the year 2003 when posted workers, as well as their associated social-dumping effect, had not yet emerged before the eastward expansion of the European Union, in the year 2013 when posted workers and their social-dumping effect attracted widespread attention and discussion, the national proximity of the three main recipient countries of the European Union, France, UK, and Germany, all experienced an increase.

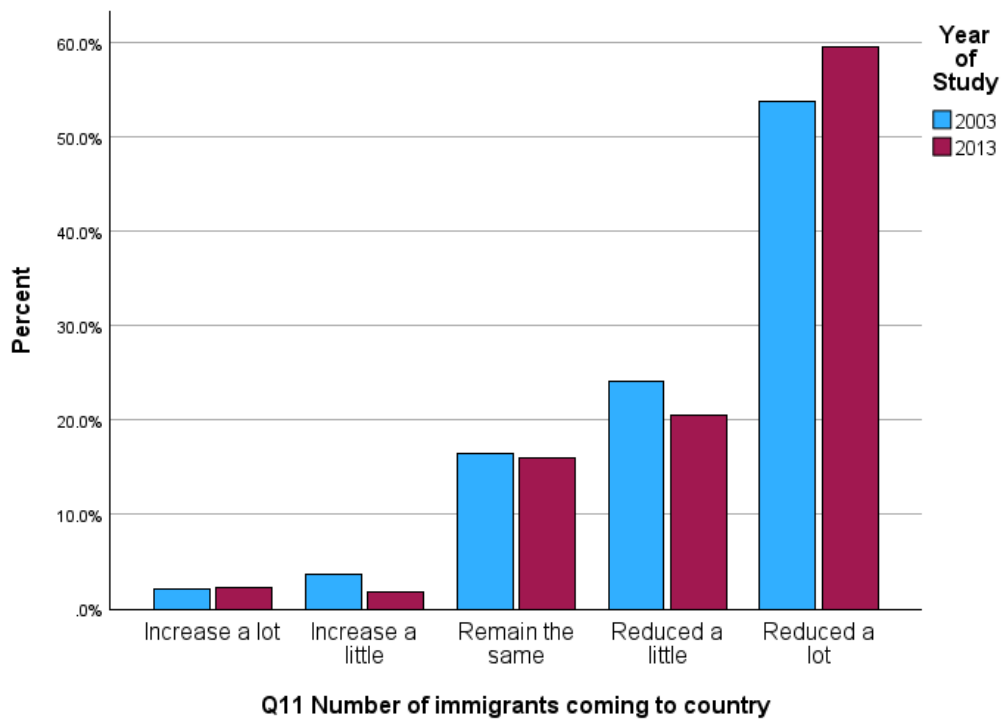
*Immigration Attitude and Economic Nationalism*



Graph 7 UK-Q3



Graph 8 UK-Q4



Graph 9 UK-Q5

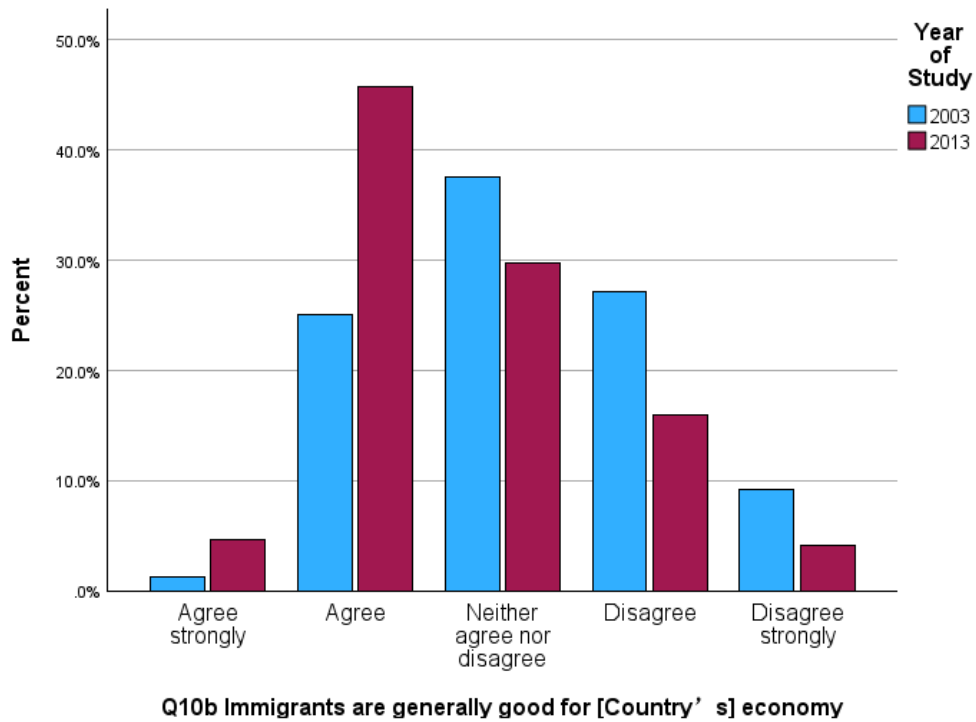
Respondents' views on immigration and economic nationalism are more nuanced.

In UK, Graph 7 demonstrates that with the influx of foreign workers from 2003 to 2013,

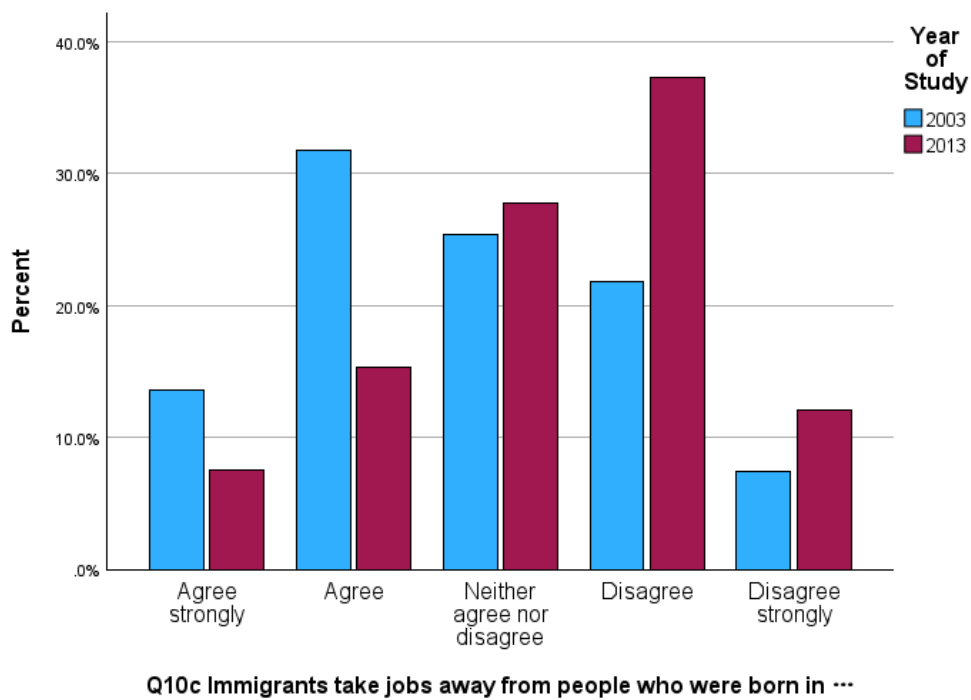
British views of immigrants' economic contribution became more positive. In 2003, only a little over 20% of the respondents recognized the economic benefits brought by immigrants, while more than 40% opposed the economic benefits brought by immigrants. By 2013, more than 30% of the respondents recognized the economic contribution brought by immigrants, the proportion of respondents with neutral views changed little, and the proportion opposed to the economic contributions brought by immigrants dropped significantly.

Interestingly, while the British are more likely to recognize the economic benefits of immigration, they are also more likely to believe that foreign workers are taking away British jobs. Graph 8 shows that, in 2003, 43% of respondents agreed that immigration brought challenges to local employment opportunities. In 2013, the proportion of people who agreed with this statement exceeded 50%.

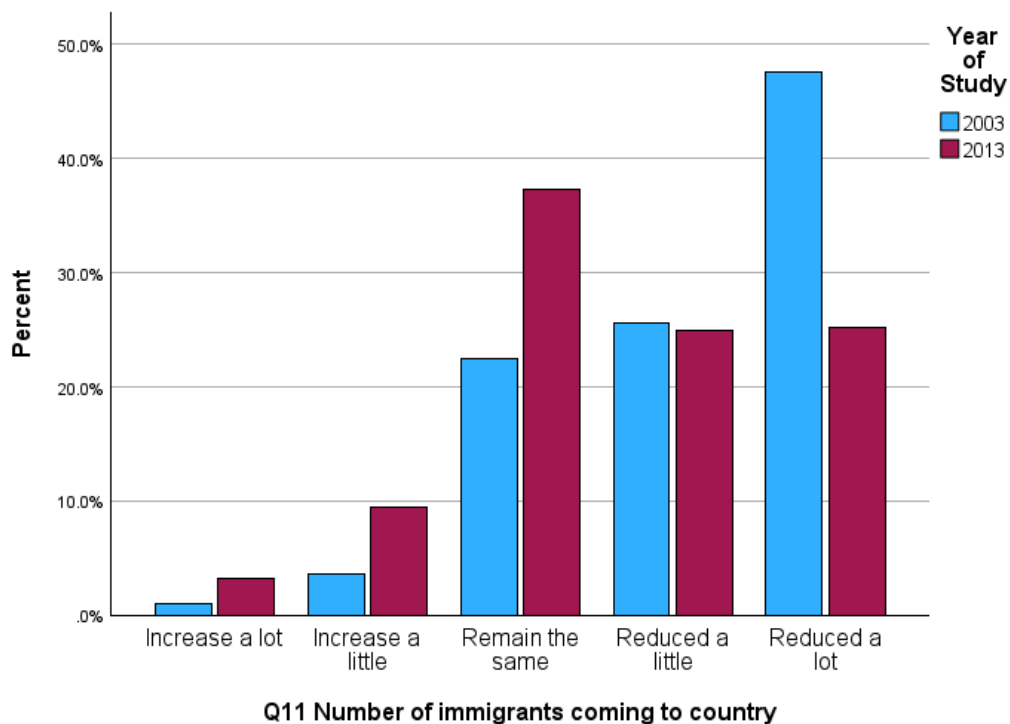
Graph 9 shows the same attitude of the British people towards the number of immigrants in the future as graph 8. Although they are more in favour of the economic benefits brought by immigrants, the British people disliked immigrants more between 2003 and 2013. In 2003, 75% of the respondents believed that the number of immigrants should be reduced in the future, and 52% of the respondents believed that the number of immigrants should be greatly reduced in the future. By 2013, the proportion of those who agreed to reduce immigration rose to 80%, and the proportion of those who believed that immigration should be greatly reduced was close to 60%.



Graph 10 Germany-Q3



Graph 11 Germany-Q4



Graph 12 Germany-Q5

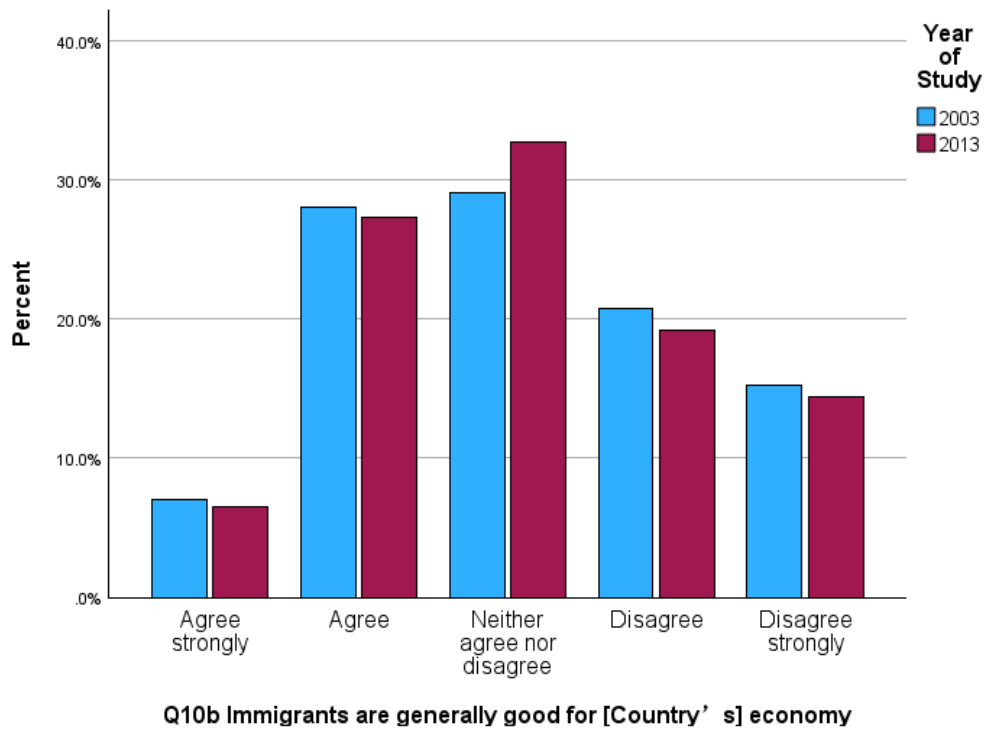
Although German respondents showed a more significant increase in national identity proximity, they showed a more friendly attitude towards immigrants and foreign workers. As demonstrated by Graph 10, between 2003 and 2013, more people believed that immigration was good for the economy, with the proportion of people who recognised the economic contribution of immigrants soaring from less than 30% to nearly 50%.

Graph 11 shows the changes in Germans' attitudes towards foreign workers and job opportunities, which is consistent with Graph 10. The mainstream view has changed from believing that immigrants take away job opportunities from locals to believing that immigrants do not bring about a squeeze on the labour market. In 2003, 45% of respondents believed that foreign workers were taking jobs away from Germans. In 2013, the percentage of respondents who agreed with this statement dropped sharply to

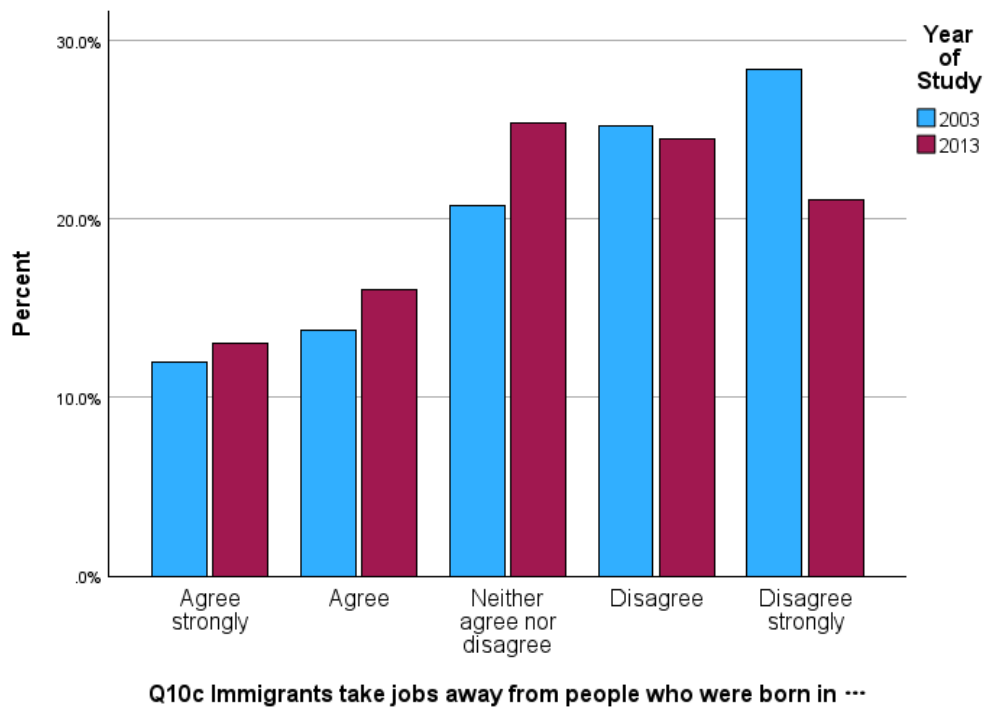
22%, while the percentage of those who opposed it was as high as 50%.

It's notable that as German respondents' attitudes toward immigration have notably warmed, their preferences for future immigration policies are also more friendly, despite remaining conservative and do not want immigration to increase. Graph 12 shows that the prevailing sentiment has shifted from advocating for significant reductions in future immigration to maintaining the status quo. In 2003, 70% of respondents wanted to reduce the number of immigrants in the future, while in 2013, less than 50% still held the same view. At the same time, the proportion of respondents who believed that immigration should increase rose from less than 10% to 14%, and the proportion who believed that immigration should remain the same also rose by 15%. This shift, alongside changes in respondents' views on other questions, suggests that Germans' rising nationalism primarily stems from factors other than economy and immigration.

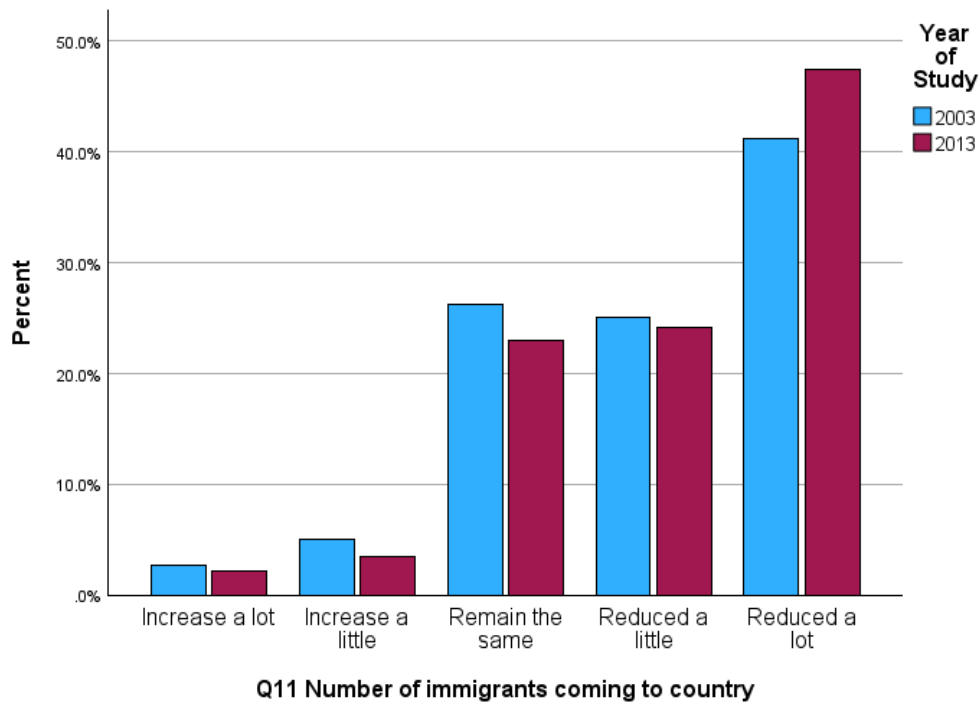




Graph 13 France-Q3



Graph 14 France-Q4



Graph 15 France-Q5

In contrast, French respondents have experienced a more modest increase in national identity proximity, yet their sentiments toward immigrants and foreign workers have significantly deteriorated. As shown by Graph 13, in 2003, 35% of French respondents believed that immigrants are beneficial to the economy. A decade later, the mainstream perspective shifted to a neutral stance: More than 30 per cent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that immigrants contribute to the economy. Graph 14 shows that in this decade, there is a heightened perception of job competition from foreign workers. In 2003, more than 50% of respondents did not think that immigrants posed challenges to job opportunities for French natives. However, by 2013, this proportion had dropped to 45%.

Graph 15 shows that the French were quite opposed to immigration in 2003, and this opposition became even stronger in 2013. In 2003, 64% of the respondents believed

that immigration should be reduced, and more than 40% believed that immigration should be reduced significantly. By 2013, the proportion of people who believed that immigration should be reduced rose to more than 70%, and those who believed that immigration should be reduced significantly rose to 56%.

With the influx of posted workers, the French are less able to recognize the economic contribution of immigrants, feel more strongly the competition for job opportunities brought by foreign workers, and therefore oppose immigration more strongly.

### Discussion

By comparing the nationalism survey data of 2003 and 2013, it is observed that there was a trend of rising nationalism over the decade. Public opinions in France and the UK indicate that this increase in nationalist sentiment is related to the influx of posted workers and foreign workers more broadly. It is worth noting that although the rise of nationalism is a general trend in hosting countries, Germany presents a different pattern compared to France and the UK.

From 2003 to 2013, France and the United Kingdom exhibited relatively stable performances in terms of national identity proximity. However, this stability is built on the fact that respondents in these two countries already had a strong national identity recognition. Therefore, this insignificant change in national identity proximity does not completely negate H1. In contrast, Germany, which had a relatively weak national identity proximity in 2003, scored significantly higher a decade later, which is consistent with H1 expectations.

Changes in attitudes toward immigrants and foreign workers among respondents in these countries are more nuanced. Despite the significant increase in national identity proximity in Germany from 2003 to 2013, this growing sense of nationalism does not correspond with more restrictive attitudes toward immigrants and foreign workers. On the contrary, German respondents have become more positive about the economic contributions of immigrants and do not view foreign workers as a threat to local employment. This decoupling indicates that German nationalism, as expressed through a stronger national identity, is not necessarily exclusionary or anti-immigrant. Instead, it may reflect a more inclusive form of nationalism that accommodates positive views on economic migration. Consequently, the increase in national identity proximity is not directly linked to the dynamics involving workers posted to Germany. The relationship between rising nationalism and the influx of posted workers is tenuous in the case of Germany.

In France, although nationalist sentiments in terms of national identity proximity have not increased significantly, there were stronger local protectionist and economic nationalist tendencies related to the emergence of posted workers. French respondents perceive stronger economic competition and believe that foreign workers are taking away their job opportunities. And the French perceive immigrants much more negatively in economic contribution. Correspondingly, the French are more strongly opposed to future immigration.

Public opinions expressed by the French people also support that the notion that the emergence of posted workers is related to the intensification of these anti-immigration

attitudes. Around 2010, the French organized several large-scale demonstrations on labour issues, mainly to express their dissatisfaction with unemployment and related social security issues. For instance, in 2009, between one million to 2.5 million people protested across towns in France (Robin, 2009). Protesters called on companies, employers, and the government to implement measures that benefit workers, jobseekers, and pensioners affected by the economic crisis, prioritizing saving jobs in the context of the economic crisis (Ibid). Although the French government managed to implement labour reform in 2013, the flexibility accord that encourages flexible working hours and strengthens social security for short-term contract workers is full of controversies: the hard-left union disputes its potential to improve economic competitiveness, while business owners criticize the government's excessive regulations on labour issues (Reuters, 5 March 2013). In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, France continued to struggle with double-digit unemployment rates. Concurrently, the number of posted workers entering France increased annually. This context has fueled a rise in nationalism, with growing anti-immigration attitudes specifically targeting foreign workers. High unemployment rates, despite being caused by complex and diverse economic factors, often led the public to attribute blame to the influx of foreign workers. The increasing presence of posted workers has been perceived as exacerbating economic insecurities and job competition, leading to heightened nationalist sentiments. Public demonstrations and widespread discontent with labour market conditions underscored how economic anxieties and the perceived threat posed by foreign workers have driven the rise of nationalism in France.

Despite the lack of a significant increase in nationalist sentiments regarding national identity proximity, French public opinion presented stronger economic nationalism, marked by local protectionist opposition to foreign workers and immigrants. This confirms that H1 has a certain degree of credibility in France.

The situation in the UK highlights a complex relationship between the influx of posted workers and rising nationalism. While British respondents recognize the economic benefits brought by immigrants, there is a strong belief that foreign workers are taking away British jobs, leading to demands for significantly reduced immigration. This sentiment is reflected not only in the ISSP survey (see graphs 8 and 9) but also in the DCLG 2010-2011 citizenship survey, where 37% of the respondents cited 'immigrants taking away jobs' as the primary reason for opposing immigration. Job competition is also the reason for the highest vote rate.

Despite acknowledging the economic contributions of immigrants, British public opinions lean towards economic nationalism and protectionist policies due to fierce competition for economic opportunities as the number of posted workers increased. The Lindsey Oil Refinery Strikes in 2009 exemplify this tension. On 28 January 2009, around 800 local contractors at the Lindsey Oil Refinery went on strike in response to the Italian construction contractor IREM hiring several hundred European workers during a period of high local and global unemployment (The Guardian, 30 January 2009). The action sparked solidarity strikes at several other UK sites and prompted a response from then-British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (Ibid). The strike participants, holding placards that read 'UK Jobs for British Workers' and 'Right to Work UK

Workers', argued that the 1996 Posted Worker Directive allowed European companies to send cheaper European workers to work in the UK, effectively depriving British workers of their jobs (Sawer, 2 Feb 2009). This incident further underscores that the influx of posted workers is closely linked to rising nationalism in the UK, driven by economic insecurities and a desire to protect domestic employment opportunities.

In summary, this section examines whether the increase in posted workers is connected with the rise of nationalism (H1) from 2003 to 2013. The ISSP survey data shows a trend of growing nationalist sentiment over this period. In the UK and France, the influx of posted workers is related to heightened nationalism, driven by economic insecurities and job competition. Strikes and public demonstrations in both countries reflect strong anti-immigration attitudes linked to the presence of foreign workers. In contrast, Germany's rising national identity does not correspond with anti-immigrant views, suggesting a more inclusive nationalism. Overall, the evidence partially supports H1, especially in the UK and France.

## **Policy Response to the Rising Nationalism**

### **Event List**

- January 1, 2015: Germany introduced a statutory minimum wage, covering international truck drivers, to be enforced in 2016.
- May 2015: France adopted the 'Macron's Law', concerning the French minimum wage in the transport sector, which applies to all workers including posted workers, to be enforced in 2016.

- March 8, 2016: The European Commission proposed the Posted Worker Directive Amendment Proposal.
- May 3, 2016: French and German laws on minimum wages were discussed by the European Parliament and European Commission.
- June 23, 2016: Brexit referendum.
- April 23-May 7, 2017: France Presidential Election.
- July-August 2017: Macron visited Central and Eastern Europe.
- July 9, 2018: Posted Worker Directive Amended.

To test H2, this section compares the policy changes on posted worker issues by the UK, France, and Germany to examine if there is a clear response to nationalist sentiment. As shown in the survey in the previous section, nationalist sentiment takes on different forms in different countries. Correspondingly, democratically elected governments have adopted different attitudes in response to varying forms of nationalist sentiment. Growing nationalist sentiment prompted governments to respond, culminating in the Posted Worker Directive Amendment passed in 2018. The analysis in this section compares the attitudes of the French, German and British governments on the issue of posted workers and explain how the different nationalist sentiments of the people affect government decision-making.

As shown in the event list, the first round of policy responses began as early as 2015. In January 2015, Germany took the lead in legislating to include posted workers in the transportation industry within the scope of its statutory Minimum Wage Act (Broughton et al., 2016). In the middle of the same year, France also introduced Loi Macron,



requiring all international truck drivers working in France to apply the French minimum wage standard. Although these measures are conducive to weakening the competitive advantage of posted workers and gaining job opportunities for local workers, the main discussion at the time focused on technical issues of EU law and member state law jurisdiction, instead of responding to nationalism or local employment issues. Throughout the year, the Commission organized several dialogues to explore whether the relevant laws aligned with EU law (Ibid). The Commission supported the progress of minimum wage legislation in protecting labour rights, but also noted that these measures were not in line with the 1996 Posting of Workers Directive, nor were they aligned with EU law on the freedom to provide services, and the free movement of goods and people (European Commission, 2015). Following discussions within the commission, in March 2016, the Juncker Commission submitted a proposal to the European Parliament to amend the 1996 Posting of Workers Directive (European Commission, 2016). Central and Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary opposed the amendment and the legislation of Germany and France, arguing that these regulations did not comply with EU law and were protectionist in nature. These countries decided to block the amendment collectively in the EU legislative process (Reuters, 8 April 2016; Reuters, 11 April 2016).

Despite attempts by France and Germany and the commission's efforts in amending the EU legislation on posted workers, it was still uncertain whether this proposal could make any progress, unlike previous failed attempts at amendment. In fact, this proposal

did not attract sustained attention in 2016 because, in June 2016, the UK made a more radical response: the Brexit referendum.

The unexpected success of the Brexit referendum can be attributed, at least in part, to the Leave Campaign's effective response to the rising tide of nationalism in the UK. While Brexit's causes are complex and multifaceted, the surge in nationalist sentiment played a significant role in shaping policy change (Taylor 2017). The Leave Campaign adeptly harnessed these sentiments, advocating for regaining control over laws, economic policies and borders to protect national sovereignty and prioritize British interests.

During the referendum campaign, British Justice Secretary Michael Gove argued in a public speech to the BBC that leaving the EU would be a better decision for the UK (The Guardian, 2016a). He claimed that leaving the EU was the only way for the UK to regain its sovereignty and domestic control over immigration and economic policies, echoing the nationalist rhetoric of reclaiming autonomy from supranational entities (Ibid). On the eve of the referendum, Nigel Farage, a key figure in the Leave Campaign, released the controversial breaking point poster to attack the EU's free movement and immigration policies (The Guardian, 2016b). He further accused the EU of 'having failed us all' in his speech, blaming the EU's single market and free movement policies for Britain's economic and immigration problem, further stoking nationalist sentiments (Ibid).

Post-referendum analyses suggest that the campaign polarized the electorate into two camps: The Remainers, who benefited from cosmopolitan liberalism and

multiculturalism, and the Leavers, who felt economically disadvantaged and threatened by European immigrants competing for jobs and public services (Harris 2016). The division underscores the impact of economic nationalism on policy preferences. Voter demographics further highlight this connection: regions with lower incomes, higher unemployment rates, traditional industrial employment and more significant impacts from economic recession were more likely to support leaving the EU (Hobolt, 2016). In these areas, nationalist sentiments were intensified by the perception that EU policies and foreign workers competing for jobs under these policies were detrimental to local communities.

Additionally, support for Brexit was significantly higher in areas with large inflows of immigrants from Eastern Europe (Becker, Fetzer, & Novy, 2017). As demonstrated by ISSP survey data and the 2009 Strike, foreign workers, represented by posted workers, fueled nationalist concerns over economic displacement. The Leave Campaign capitalized on these concerns by promising to restore control over immigration and national borders. The success of the Brexit referendum, therefore, can be regarded as a direct response to the rise in nationalist sentiment, manifesting in significant voting for policies aiming at reclaiming national sovereignty and prioritizing British interests.

The unexpected success of the Brexit referendum underscored the powerful influence of rising nationalism in Europe. In France, this sentiment also became a significant factor in the political landscape. A year after the uproar caused by Brexit, the uncertain future of the 2016 amendment proposal reached a turning point in its fate in mid-2017.

On 2 May 2017, Emmanuel Macron, the French presidential candidate at that time,

publicly announced that he would promote EU legislative reform on posted workers, making it his first primary policy after taking office as president (Reuters, 2017).

During the first round of the 2017 French presidential election, far-right candidate Marine Le Pen achieved unexpected success, winning 21.3% of the votes, second only to Macron's 24%, and advanced to the second round (Ipsos France, 2017). As a far-right candidate, Le Pen's campaign centred on a strong nationalist agenda. She explicitly framed the rejection of foreign workers as the core of solving the problem of unemployment. Her proposal prioritised hiring French employees and imposed extra taxes on employers who hired foreign workers. Particularly, if a certain industry has been proven to be difficult to support new hires, the arrival of foreign workers to this sector should be prohibited. Meanwhile, she called for a strict limitation on the annual number of legal immigrants, reducing to 10,000 per year. Asylum-seekers and family reunification applicants shall also be subject to stricter regulation (France 24, 2017). Le Pen's stance was a direct response to nationalist sentiment by positioning foreign workers as economic threats and highlighting the protection of local workers. Particularly, in the first round of elections, Le Pen received the highest votes among white-collar and blue-collar workers and people with a monthly household income of less than 2,000 euros (Ipsos France, 2017). Le Pen's approach resonated with these workers and those with lower household incomes, highlighting the depth of nationalist sentiment among economically vulnerable groups and the working class.

Although Le Pen failed to win the second round of the election, her significant support in the first round compelled Macron to address nationalist concerns in the second round.

As a centralist and pro-EU integration politician, Macron faced the challenge of responding to nationalism without fully embracing protectionist policies. Instead, he chose to focus on the issue of posted workers to navigate nationalist concerns. During the short time between the first and second rounds of the election, Macron promised on May 2 that he would intentionally push the EU to reform the legislation on the posting of workers to mitigate the social-dumping effect (Reuters, 2017). He described posted workers as 'creating unfair competition in the French labour market' and as 'an inferior group of people in terms of social welfare'. This narrative framed posted workers as a group suffering from inferior social welfare conditions, creating a social dumping effect on French society. Correspondingly, he advocated for reforms in relevant legislation aimed at achieving 'more equal treatment' (Macron, 2017).

Macron's promise to reform the EU law on posted workers represents a nuanced approach to addressing nationalist sentiments. By targeting posted workers, Macron aimed to mitigate what he described as the 'social dumping' effect, where posted workers are employed at lower wages and worse working conditions than local workers, thus addressing the economic insecurities of French workers without resorting to the exclusionary and xenophobic rhetoric characteristic of far-right nationalist politics. Additionally, by framing the reform as a push for 'more equal treatment', Macron managed to bridge the concerns of both left-wing voters, who prioritize social justice and equality, and nationalist voters, who are focused on protecting French jobs.

While Macron has never responded directly to nationalism, his push for equal treatment has de facto undermined the competitive advantage of posted workers and levelled the

playing field for French workers. This strategy allowed him to navigate the complex landscape of rising nationalism, addressing economic nationalism concerns without compromising his centrist and pro-European stances.

After being elected president of France, Macron embarked on a highly publicized visit to Eastern European states, aiming to gain support for the amending proposal (Reuters, 2017). Eventually, the coalition of Eastern European member states that had initially challenged the Commission's proposal was dismantled, clearing the way for the adoption of the Amendment to the Posted Worker Directive. The Directive was formally amended in mid-2018 after being approved by the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2018).

During the process, unlike France and the UK, where rising nationalism linked to the influx of posted workers prompted significant policy responses, Germany presented a different scenario. Despite facing increasing nationalist sentiments, Germany has not implemented specific policy changes regarding the free movement of people in response to the rising nationalism, apart from attempts to introduce a statutory minimum wage in 2015. This lack of policy response aligns with ISSP survey results indicating that Germans, while experiencing a rise in national identity proximity, are less concerned about economic competition from foreign workers compared to France and the UK. The rising nationalism in Germany has a weaker connection with the influx of posted workers and immigrants. Consequently, the German government and political parties are much less stressed to address the issue of posted workers as aggressively as France and the UK. Germany's case highlights the variability in how rising nationalism

influences policy responses across different European countries. While France and the UK adopted measures directly addressing nationalist concerns about posted workers, Germany's more positive perception of immigrants and different economic conditions led to a less reactive approach.

To sum up, the policy changes in the UK and France support H2, demonstrating that rising nationalism can drive democratic governments to shift policies to protect local workers' rights and benefits. In the UK, this shift is made by the Brexit referendum, underscoring the direct impact that public opinion can have on government actions in democracies. Similarly, rising nationalism prompted Emmanuel Macron to pledge to reform EU legislation on posted workers in the 2017 presidential election, addressing the concerns of French workers who felt threatened by what they perceived as unfair competition from posted workers. This response demonstrates how rising nationalism can prompt political leaders to adopt measures that protect local workers, even if indirectly. Germany, as a contrasting case, indicates that when the rise of nationalism has no obvious relationship with the influx of posted workers, rising nationalism will not necessarily force the government to make more protectionist, economic nationalist policy responses.

## **Conclusion**

This study shed light on the reciprocal relationship between rising nationalism and EU policies on the free movement of people, focusing on posted workers. By analyzing data from Germany, France, and the UK, the findings support both hypotheses,

demonstrating that the influx of posted workers correlates with heightened nationalist sentiments in France and the UK. These sentiments, in turn, have driven significant policy changes aimed at safeguarding local employment, exemplified by the Brexit referendum and Macron's effort to reform posted worker policies. Conversely, Germany's lack of connection between rising nationalism and the influx of posted workers resulted in less reactive policy changes. The varying responses of Germany, France, and the UK illustrate the diverse ways in which nationalist sentiment manifests and influences policy-making. These findings and comparisons illuminate the dynamic interplay between overarching EU policies and the nationalist sentiments within member states, serving as a reference for the trajectory of EU integration. Germany shows the possibility of a more economically inclusive EU integration, while Macron's strategy offers a way to balance nationalist sentiment during the process of EU integration.

However, this study also experiences several limitations and suggests avenues for future research. One primary limitation of the current research is the failure to establish a direct causal link between nationalist sentiment and specific policy changes due to the multitude of influencing factors. While correlations and general trends can be identified, definitive causation remains elusive. Additionally, the research focuses on a limited number of countries with distinct political, economic, and social contexts, which may not capture the broader European or global trends. This limited scope might potentially skew the generalizability of the findings.

Future research might consider conducting a broader comparative study to including



more EU member states, particularly those with varying degrees of exposure to posted workers and different levels of nationalist sentiment. In addition, future research might also evaluate the effectiveness of policy changes implemented in response to nationalist pressures, including assessing whether these policies achieve their intended goals of protecting local workers without adverse economic consequences or further polarization in public opinion.

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