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PUBLIC OPINION and IMMIGRATION

in the EUROPEAN UNION

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Increasing body counts and dramatic sea rescues frontline the face of the immigration exodus across Europe. Upheavals across the Middle East region have triggered massive waves of migration west. Cities and regions in the EU are increasingly becoming immigrant destinations for the Middle East countries; however, acceptance of such an influx of people presents a growing problem for individuals in the EU. European countries possess a myriad of political, social, and economic dynamics hindering acceptance of immigrants. Media coverage expands beyond Europe telling the tale of Europe's immigration crisis and integration failures. Juxtaposed to immigration coverage, public opinion and attitudes toward immigration are closely monitored and reflected through widely circulated public opinion surveys. These surveys range from longstanding biannually public opinion polls conducted by the European Commission via the Eurobarometer1, to as equally established surveys as the World Values Survey (WVS) and European Values Survey (EVS).[2] By all accounts, these surveys provide necessary insight into the oscillation of public views and opinions. Citizens harbor various perceptions of immigrants, which relegates into the overall welcome of an immigrant in a given country and the political atmosphere. Policies and public acceptance of immigrants varies among the 28 member states and their respective citizens,[3] but the challenges presented to the EU by public opinion have strong implications to the future of immigration, integration, and Schengen.

Immigration and Shifts in Schengen
It can be ascertained that open and free borders are in fact not free; rather, borders reflect sovereign strategies of political inclusion and exclusion between citizens and the rest of humanity.[4] The year 2015 provoked the greatest threat to Schengen and movement through Europe since Schengen's incorporation to EU law in 1999,[5] and the 2004 directive allowing extra-communitarians (non-EU citizens) to move freely across EU borders. After the attacks at Charlie Hedbo in Paris in January 2015, EU-level initiatives for tightening and enhancing overall security were a major push for the EU, but these practices and initiatives challenged the freedom of movement around Europe.[6] Actions against Schengen continue to transpire on a country by country basis. Demonstrated by increased border security in Hungary or curfews and border checks in France,[7] the original seamless movement between EU countries into border checks and restrictions demonstrates backwards momentum to the EU's future and integration beyond the nation state level. The deepening of Schengen originally instilled by country cohesion now splits at the seams tearing the fabric of EU integration. Accompanied by public outcry denouncing increased immigration, European breakup is again a concern with the immigration crisis and a "lack of compromise and stubbornness which is now seeping into the cornerstones of the EU ever more."[8]

Facing challenges internally with Schengen, the view of immigrants grows dim negatively affecting citizen perception. Familiar territory for the EU, tensions regarding internal and external security were a pressing issue with enlargement and integration to Central and Eastern Europe in 2004.[9] Over a decade ago the countries showed signs of stress with accepting high levels of economic migrants. Fearing waves of immigrants from the former Soviet bloc would migrate west and saturate the labor market; countries feared immigration would suppress the economy. Increasing EU membership by one-third, the additional countries only added an additional 5 percent to the EU's overall GDP stressing concerns about immigration.[10] Immigration movements today present similar concerns across member states.

Elections and the Rise of Right Government

Protesting the growing number of immigrants and refugees, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam parties have gained popularity through country elections. In 2016, right-wing and far-right parties saw a surge in power across several countries (see Figure 1). Public opinion on border security, immigration policy, and the perceived take-over by immigrants are finding solace and support with anti-immigrant parties. While EU policy generally flows top-down, the voice of the people is affecting governments and immigration from the bottom-up.[11] It is apparent by the EU election results that trends with the rising right are reflective of current public discontent. Anti-Europe, anti-immigration, and anti-Islam sentiments are championed as the platform position of the right parties. Future results of French and German elections will further define the position and power of right governance and play a critical role in the reflection of public opinion.
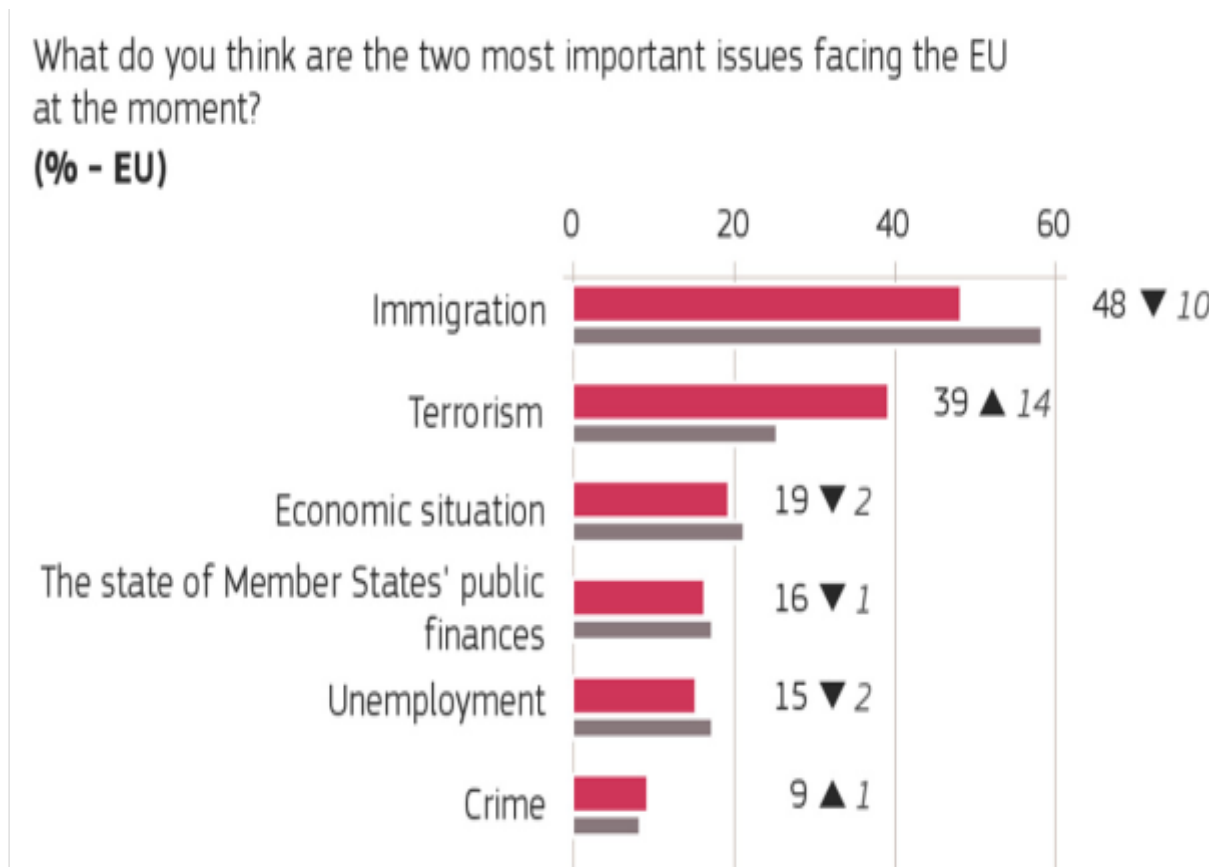
Figure 1

Source: New York Times[12]
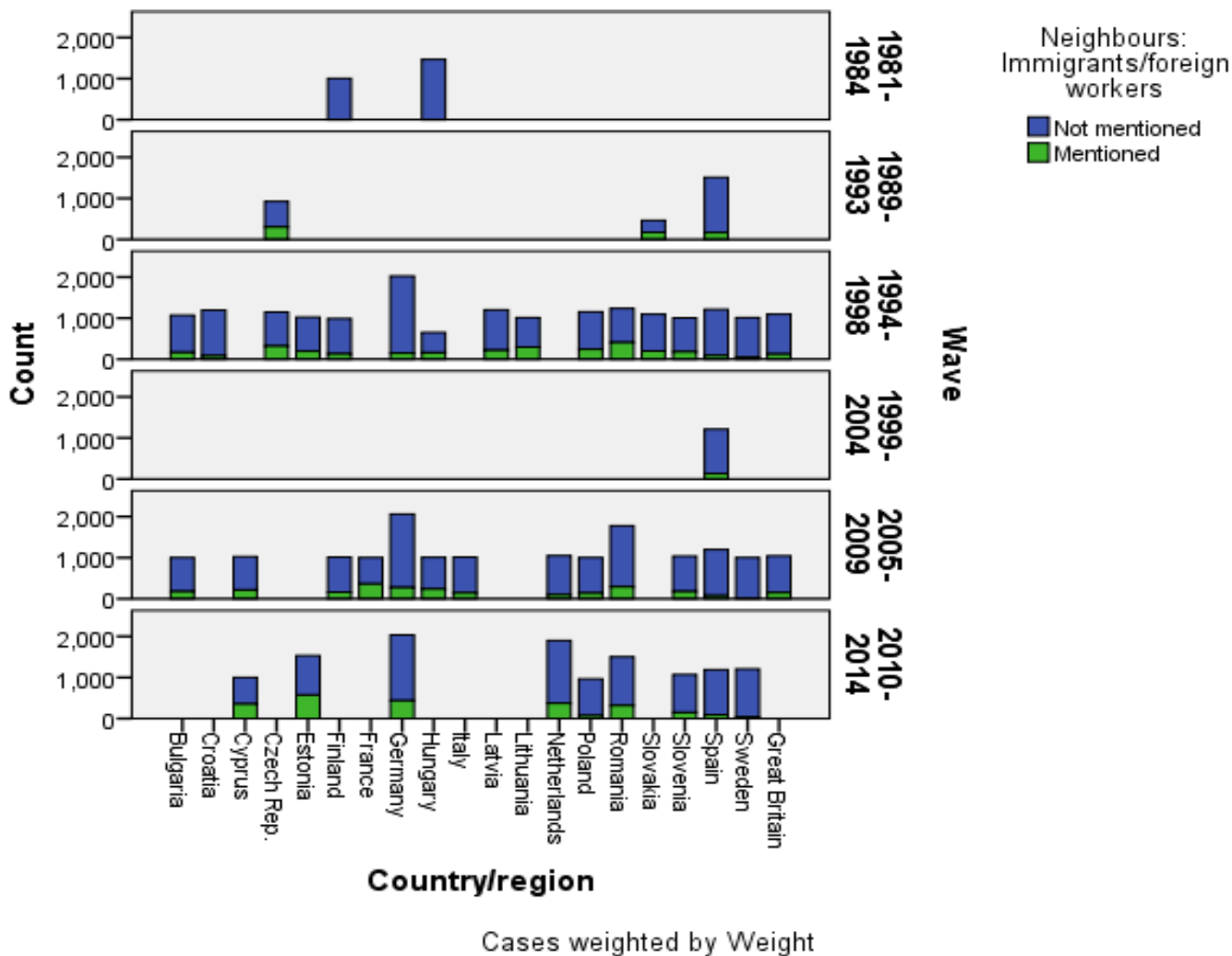
Public Opinion in the EU

A strong correlation between perceptions of the public and opinion on immigration appear throughout public opinion polls and available civic data. The most recent Eurobarometer survey ranks the concerns of EU citizens (see Figure 2).[13] Although dropping 10% to 48% from the previous survey, immigration remains as the most pressing public opinion issue and is reflected with current election trends followed by increased concern with terrorism. Using 30 years of data from the WVS/EVS and investigating the question of which European citizens want as their neighbor, the data revealed significant negative sentiments across countries with increases in the mentioning of immigrants as people they did not want as their neighbor (see Figure 3). 3

Figure 2

What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?
(% – EU)

Issue	%
Immigration	48 ▼ 10
Terrorism	39 ▲ 14
Economic situation	19 ▼ 2
The state of Member States' public finances	16 ▼ 1
Unemployment	15 ▼ 2
Crime	9 ▲ 1

Source: Eurobarometer

Figure 3

Cases weighted by Weight

The highest negative sentiment was 37% of Estonians surveyed mentioning they did not want immigrants as their neighbor demonstrating an increase of 97% from the first recorded wave. In Germany, 21.5% did not want immigrants as their neighbors recording the largest increase in negative sentiments of 199%. Missing data on a country per country and wave basis is noticeable; however, 10 countries report increases in negative perceptions between their first and last recorded statistic and three countries present in only a single wave (Latvia 18.3%, Lithuania 29.3%, France 36.6%) demonstrate negative sentiments significantly higher than the country averages of their respective waves. It is noted there are six countries with documented decreases in negative sentiments when mentioning wanting immigrants as their neighbors. With the exception of Spain and Sweden, these countries were either of communist rule or were involved in the Balkan crisis posting negative immigrant sentiments higher than the average for their respective waves. Of these six countries, Sweden, Spain, Slovenia, and Poland are the only countries reporting consistent decreases across all waves. Romania initially declined but data reveal an increase in negative perceptions towards immigrants; Slovakia remained the same.

The influencing voice of the people presents a major impact on immigration as seen with current election shifts. Furthermore, with historical trends on the state level gradually shifting away from historically liberal views, and voices becoming more anti-EU and anti-immigration, immigration across the EU is being affected by public opinion. Reflective in quarterly polls or historical trends, voices of frustration are overwhelming member states and the voices are becoming increasingly more anti-immigrant in an already struggling environment. The fate of Schengen and border control remains in jeopardy due to the clamorous voices of anti-immigration groups and shifts in political parties. Countries experiencing uncontrolled influxes of immigration, face daunting political and economic challenges. Resources and institutional capacities of member states become overwhelmed leaving immigrants overflowing into cities that are unable to manage or place the sheer number of people. Consequently, a country incapable of accommodating immigrants becomes a less desirable location and immigrants flee to locations with better conditions and acceptance.[14] In addition, member states that do not have the resources or experience to process and handle high levels of immigrants facilitate travel and relocation elsewhere by closing borders and implementing deterrence policies.

Immigration, Refugee, and Asylum Seeker Conflation

Immigration as a whole refers to the action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country.[15] When a person leaves their country to enter another country—legally or illegally— _regardless of the circumstance, it is considered an act of immigration. With growing numbers of individuals immigrating to Europe from the Middle East, the conflation and romanticizing of the term immigrant has been modified and used with inappropriate terminology. Asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees are terms conflated and used interchangeably in everyday language, media discourse, and academia. Such flippant usage of these identifiers, however, incorrectly floods language and misidentifies the status of those who are immigrating. It should be reiterated that asylum seekers and refugees are not the same carrying different implications. Statistically speaking, immigration numbers are encompassing of individuals who have entered a country regardless of status.

Refugee and asylum seeker are often used interchangeably to describe those entering another country. Irrespective of denoting a legal status, the terminology of refugee is generally preferred and adopted to denote people displaced due to war under the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, Article 1 stating, "A refugee is someone who is unable or willing to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion".[16] An asylum seeker is an individual who has applied for asylum in a country of which they have arrived. Legally speaking, refugees are asylum seekers whose asylum application has been successful. They are granted refugee status, which comes with the right to work, access to state benefits (such as housing and health), and they have the right to bring their family who will also receive refugee status. While the term is used to describe those fleeing worn torn Middle East regions, these "refugees" have been granted no legal status and are refugee by Geneva Refugee Convention terminology only. For citizens and their opinions on immigration, there is no distinction between terminologies; it is all encompassed under the umbrella of immigration.

Further Assessment

Challenges for the EU grow as immigration concerns continue and public dissatisfaction with immigration rises. Shifts in governance demonstrate acute listening to citizen voices and the anti-immigration sentiments, but the effects of this negative discourse will not be determined for several months. Reflecting over 30 years of data, it can be seen that such trends are not isolated to particular regions or dependent upon the length of time a country has been integrated into the EU. Anti-immigrant sentiments as a growing trend among EU member

states indicate that the threat to Schengen and plans for deepening integration remain in peril. Moving ahead, uncertainty for EU progress remains questionable. As one of the four basic freedoms, Schengen reflects a unified EU in a time when cohesion and unity are off keel but this too is now under increased scrutiny. Immigration contentions increase Euroskepticism as constancy and consensus across the EU raises realistic questions about a European Union in the near future.

References

1 Eurobarometer was first established in 1973 and conducts public opinion polls to monitor the status of citizens and the EU. Topics are of particular interest to EU officials and politicians as it provides an accurate assessment of where EU citizens are concerned.

2 The World Values Survey (WVS) is conducted worldwide assessing perceptions, values, and attitudes of human beliefs. The consistency of the survey provides valuable data regarding shifts and trends in values across countries. Similarly, the European Values Survey assesses only European countries collecting data since the 1970s.

3 Regarding the vote for the United Kingdom exit, at the time of writing, The UK is still considered one of the 28 member states until they officially leave or are granted exit.

4 Johnson, Corey, and Reece Jones. "Rethinking the Border in Border Studies." *Political Geography*, 2011: 61-2.

5 See the Amsterdam Treaty, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1482286194390&uri=CELEX:11997D/TXT.

6 Bigo, Didier, et al. *The EU Counter-Terrorism Policy Responses to the Attacks in Paris: Towards an EU Security and Liberty Agenda.* Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies, 2015.

7 The aftermath of both attacks in Paris led to border controls in France and increased concern of terrorism. Further terror attacks across Europe have also increased public concern for terrorism and a perceived association with terrorism and immigration. Alternatively, since the immigration influx and major entry point through Hungary, Hungary constructed a 100-mile long fence along its Serbian border to halt immigration through their country.

8 Casert, Raf. "EU President: "The risk of break-up is real"." *Business Insider.* February 2016, 2016. http://www.businessinsider.com/ap-eu-future-not-what-it-once-was-with-2-big-crises-at-summit-2016-2

9 Grabbe, Heather. "The Sharp Edges of Europe: Extening Schengen Eastwards." *International Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2000): 519-536.

10 Yesilada, Birol, and David Wood. *The Emerging European Union.* New York: Longman, 2010.

11 Varying on a country to country basis, member-states are enacting laws directly targeting immigration. To cite a few, Austria in 2015 temporarily sealed its borders and have engaged in identity checks and turning migrants and asylum seekers; Denmark implemented the "jewelry bill" in 2016 to seize jewelry and money to assist in migrant costs; France has implemented droves of intermittent border controls and identity checks and a ban of veils or face coverings in public; Greece and Italy remain main sea entry points and holding areas for tens of thousands of immigrants waiting to be relocated or receive asylum; Hungary has constructed border fence and expresses desire to build more fences; Slovakia publicly states they would take only Christian immigrants; Sweden notably accepts high proportions of immigrants, relative to their population; United Kingdom famously opted out of the EU with "Brexit" and has control over their borders and immigration.

12 Figure represents a compilation of election data for selected countries and includes 2016 presidential election results in Austria and Bulgaria. Red indicates right-wing populist and far-right parties. Sources for data came from European Election Database, Inter-Parliamentary Union, ElectionGuide.org, and other Government websites. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/22/world/europe/europe-right-wing-austria-hungary.html.

13 Eurobarometer 85, 2016. http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2130 .

14 Immigration trends and "migrant destinations" are noted through data on immigration. Where records of the largest quantities, concentrations, and sheer numbers of immigrants are settling can be found through numerous data sources: Eurostat explains migration and migrant population statistics in Europe, however, their data stands to be updated: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration and migrant population statistics; Migration Policy Institute tracks data worldwide with mid-2015 data of total immigrant populations by country: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/international-migration-statistics; Pew Research Center provides tracking information on immigrant, refugee, and asylum data: http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in- 2015/

15 Per definition of the Oxford Dictionary https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/immigration or Merriam-Webster https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/immigrant

16 UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention at Geneva, read at http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/3b66c2aa10