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Who is Less Welcome?: The Impact of Individuating Cues on Attitudes towards Immigrants

Sedef Turper, Shanto Iyengar, Kees Aarts and Minna van Gerven

Based on a novel experimental design, the current study examines the impact of economic and cultural characteristics of potential immigrants on anti-immigrant sentiments. We investigate the extent to which individuating cues affect public support for individual immigrants in the USA and the Netherlands through a series of online survey experiments carried out by the YouGov online panel in 2010 and the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences Panel in 2011. Our findings demonstrate that individual immigrants elicit different levels of public support for their temporary and permanent immigration applications, and that support depends overwhelmingly on educational and occupational credentials of potential immigrants. Other individual attributes, such as presence of family dependents, country of origin and skin complexion also affect acceptance rates, but to a much lesser extent.

Keywords: Attitudes towards Immigrants; Economic Threat; Cultural Threat; Survey Experiment

Introduction

In recent decades, large inflows of immigrants and immigration policies attempting to deal with the influx have become a salient issue in immigrant-receiving nations across

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the globe (Fetzer 2000; Card, Dustmann, and Preston 2005). In the USA, where immigration from south of the border has triggered concerns over economic and cultural threats posed by low-skilled and Spanish-speaking immigrants, the immigration debate has taken a new turn after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Harell et al. 2012). Recent studies provide evidence that terrorist attacks elicited support for tighter restrictions on civil liberties of immigrants (Davis and Silver 2004; Huddy et al. 2005). The immigration issue has proved just as controversial in the Netherlands. Although the Netherlands has long been known as a 'country with a tradition of tolerance', the consensus among political elites on multiculturalism which was developed in the 1980s (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007) has come to an end when the right-wing parties List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) and Party for Freedom (PVV) have enjoyed electoral success by campaigning on an anti-immigrant platform (Bos and van der Brug 2010).

Academic research into attitudes towards migrants derives from two prominent theories: realistic group conflict theory (Giles 1977; Hardin 1995; Pettigrew 1957; Quillian 1995) and social identity theory (Brewer 2001; Sides and Citrin 2007; Tajfel 1981). The former holds that opposition to immigration is a response to competition for scarce resources between natives and immigrants. The latter treats immigration-related attitudes as a symptom of in-group favouritism and out-group hostility. A large body of scholarly research adopting realistic group conflict and social identity perspectives treat immigrant groups as the relevant entities that drive opposition to immigration. However, the pitfall of these studies is that they fall short of measuring the effects of economic and cultural threat perceptions independently from relevant group sizes of the immigrant groups at regard. Addressing this gap, the current study investigates the role of economic and cultural characteristics of individual immigrants in shaping immigration-related attitudes.

Building on recent studies adopting a novel experimental design, the current study examines the impact of economic and cultural characteristics of potential immigrants on anti-immigrant sentiments in the USA and in the Netherlands. Although previous studies have well established how immigrant characteristics are affecting the level of support for immigrants in the USA and various Western democracies (Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2011; Harell et al. 2012; Iyengar et al. 2013), to the best of our knowledge, no previous research has explored the role of individuating cues in the Netherlands. In the current study, we investigate the extent to which individuating cues affect public support for immigrants in the USA and the Netherlands from a comparative perspective. Our findings suggest that potential immigrants with stronger economic credentials are significantly more welcomed both as temporary residents and as permanent citizens in the USA, and even more so in the Netherlands. Cultural attributes including country of origin and skin complexion, however, have only a minor impact, and those attributes are even less pronounced in the respondents' evaluations of immigrants for citizenship status.

Theory and Previous Research

Most research on the attitudes towards immigrants derives from two theories of inter-group relations. Realistic group conflict theory, also referred to as group conflict theory, applies a rational choice perspective to the field of immigration politics and focuses on the economic motives of natives to explain their preferences on immigration. The theory postulates that immigrant groups represent a threat to the economic interests of the dominant group members as they compete over resources (Austin and Worchel 1979; LeVine and Campbell 1972; Quillian 1995). In other words, the theory suggests that hostility towards immigrants is triggered by fear of adverse economic outcomes such as job loss, reduced social welfare benefits and increase in tax rate.

Applied at the individual level, realistic group conflict theory predicts that individuals will hold negative attitudes towards immigrants with whom they are in direct competition over a set of economic resources. The theory predicts, for instance, that low-skilled natives will express higher levels of hostility towards low-skilled immigrants than towards high-skilled immigrants as they are more likely to be in direct competition with the former. Applied at the macro-level, on the other hand, group conflict theory suggests that it is the threats against dominant group interests rather than the threats to self-interest that produces anti-immigrant sentiments. In other words, the theory as applied at macro-level, predicts that individuals will hold negative attitudes towards immigrants provided that those immigrants are perceived as posing a threat to collective economic interests of the native society. Therefore, it is foreseen that those immigrants who are economically competent will elicit higher levels of support in all segments of the native society.

The empirical studies demonstrate only limited traces of direct competition as a motivating factor for holding anti-immigrant sentiments. Palmer's (1996) study provides some confirmatory evidence for the direct self-interest hypothesis as it illustrates that unemployed individuals are more likely to believe that immigrants take jobs away. Similarly, Malchow-Moller et al. (2008) confirm that the unemployed are more likely to have negative out-group attitudes provided that they also think it is difficult to get a job. A recent study in the USA demonstrates that American technology workers are more likely to oppose the granting of temporary entry visas for overseas technology workers (Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013). On the other hand, there is an extensive body of research reporting that individuals whose interests are not directly threatened by immigrant groups are just as likely to oppose immigration as those who experience direct economic competition with immigrant groups (Fetzer 2000; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Sears and Funk 1991). These studies suggest that prejudice against immigrants results from a real or perceived threat to the collective interest of the dominant group rather than the self-interest of the individual himself. Studies testing expectations of realistic group conflict theory at the macro-level confirm the role of objective and perceived economic conditions as catalysts of anti-immigrant attitudes. Thus, opposition to immigration increases

during times of economic hardship (Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet 2009; Tienhaara 1974). The unemployment rate and relative size of the immigrant group are also found to trigger anti-immigrant sentiments (Quillian 1995; Schissel, Wanner, and Fridere 1989).

Social identity theory, on the other hand, centres on the notion of ‘in-group favouritism’ and focuses on the social and cultural aspects of immigration. It posits that prejudice towards immigrants stems from affective processes. People develop a strong sense of group identity and instinctively evaluate groups that constitute the basis of their identity (in groups) favourably, while evaluating other groups negatively (Tajfel 1981; Brewer 2001). The social identity perspective suggests that negative attitudes towards immigrants are not conditional on competition over resources. From this perspective, natives are expected to hold negative attitudes towards all immigrant groups, and those attitudes are fostered by cultural, religious and ethnic differences.

Many studies document that perceptions of social and cultural threat are the principal driving force behind immigration-related attitudes (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Schneider 2008; Sides and Citrin 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). These studies illustrate that anti-immigrant attitudes are attributable to beliefs that immigrants’ distinct cultural practices pose a threat to the cultural unity of the nation, that immigrants are unwilling to ‘fit in’ with mainstream values, and by the perceptions that immigrants are willing to engage in violent and criminal activities (Dinas and van Spanje 2011). Studies on ethnic hierarchies further illustrate that dominant group members also rank order minorities primarily on the basis of cultural differences (Hagendoorn and Drogendijk 1998; Verkuyten, Hagendoorn, and Masson 1996).

Phalet and Poppe (1997) illustrate that the perceived desirability of ethnic minorities is mostly affected by considerations of morality or benevolence of the ethnic groups rather than their competences. Therefore, from a social psychological perspective, cultural similarity signalling the benevolence of immigrant groups is expected to have greater influence on attitudes towards immigrant groups when compared to economic competences of those immigrant groups (Hagendoorn 2007). A thrust of previous work also suggests that group conflict contributes to anti-immigration sentiment, yet the evidence is stronger on the side of social identity theory. In their experimental study, Hagendoorn and Sniderman (2001) show that natives value cultural similarity over economic integration while evaluating immigrant groups and similar findings are documented by various studies investigating attitudes towards immigrant groups (Sides and Citrin 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). However, previous research demonstrates that the economic and cultural threat perceptions are magnified by the relative size of the immigrant groups (Quillian 1995; Savelkoul et al. 2011). Therefore, a pitfall of these studies is that they fail to disentangle the effects of cultural and economic threats independently of size of the immigrant communities in regard. Those studies focusing on individual immigrants, on the other hand,

illustrate that economic considerations play a larger role in shaping anti-immigrant attitudes when compared to the cultural considerations (Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2011; Harell et al. 2012; Iyengar et al. 2013).

Current Study

Current research investigates the role of economic and cultural cues in shaping public opinion on immigration in the USA and the Netherlands. Both the USA and the Netherlands are industrialised countries with noticeably sizable first-generation immigrant populations, amounting to 15 and 11% of their populations, respectively. While the USA has traditionally been an immigration country, the Netherlands has experienced large influx of immigration in the form of post-colonial immigration and labour recruitment after the Second World War (Bauer, Lofstrom, and Zimmermann 2000). Currently, immigration issue has been highly politicised in both countries as the right-wing parties brought the issue to front lines in their election campaigns. In the USA and the Netherlands alike, those election campaigns usually draw attention on cultural distinctiveness of the immigrant groups and also on the economic burden of immigration to mobilise support for more exclusionist immigration policies. Adopting realistic group conflict and the social identity frameworks, we examine the extent to which economic and cultural characteristics of immigrants affect public support for immigration in the USA and the Netherlands.

As mentioned earlier, the pitfall of earlier studies adopting realistic group conflict and the social identity frameworks is that they often treat immigrants as homogenous groups of individuals clustered on the basis of their ethnic and religious characteristics, if not as a single entity. Although a thrust of previous research explored the role of economic and social threat perceptions in shaping anti-immigrant sentiments towards various immigrant groups, only a handful of studies examine the role of economic and cultural threats as cues for evaluating individual immigrants (Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2011; Harell et al. 2012; Iyengar et al. 2013). Previous research allows us to understand the US case, however, to our knowledge no previous research examined the impact of individual characteristic of immigrants on their admissibility in the Netherlands. Addressing this gap, the current study builds on the works of those previous studies expanding the scope to previously untapped data on the Dutch case, and examines the role of individuating cues—economic and cultural characteristics of individual immigrants—in shaping evaluations of individual immigrants in the Netherlands and in the USA. The aim of the study is, firstly, to provide much needed direct evidence on the predictions of realistic group conflict and social identity theories through systematic manipulation of economic and cultural characteristics; and secondly, to test whether cultural and economic threat considerations apply to evaluation of potential immigrants in the same way they apply to assessment of immigrant groups.

Theoretical Expectations

Realistic group conflict and social identity theories postulate that the level of support for exclusionist immigration policies increases when the immigrants are perceived as economic and cultural threats. Therefore, we expect that respondents' willingness to admit potential immigrants in the country will be influenced by the degree of perceived economic and cultural threats they pose to native society.

As far as the economic cues are concerned, firstly, we anticipate respondents to prefer immigrants with higher levels of economic integration as this group of immigrants is expected to generate larger efficiency gains for the local economy (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). Previous research also demonstrates that immigrants with higher levels of occupational skills are less often exposed to unequal treatment while they are assessed for job positions (Bovenkerk et al. 1995; Carlsson and Rooth 2007), and natives, irrespective of their own occupational skills, prefer high-skilled immigrants over low-skilled immigrants (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2012). Therefore, we expect natives to prefer immigrants with high educational and occupational skills over their less-skilled counterparts. We formulate our hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Highly skilled potential immigrants should be supported for their temporary and permanent immigration applications more than their less-skilled counterparts.

Secondly, we anticipate that potential immigrants with family dependents will be perceived as economic threats since this group of immigrants are more likely to be recipients of government benefits, and the expected economic costs of immigration will be higher in their case. In the USA, research also documents that welfare programme participation rates for immigrant children are 15 percentage points higher than for the native children (Borjas 2011). As far as the high welfare dependency rates among immigrant children are concerned, we expect natives to evaluate potential immigrants with family dependents less favourably. Moreover, immigrant children who are raised in households that receive welfare assistance are found to be more likely to become welfare recipients themselves as adults (Borjas and Sueyoshi 1997). Therefore, we also expect natives to take long-term prospects of welfare dependency into account while evaluating admissibility of potential immigrants with family dependents, especially if the immigrants are unskilled, and hence more likely to become welfare recipients themselves. In other words, we expect credentials and family status of immigrants to interact in such a way that the presence of dependents will further decrease willingness to admit immigrants with less educational and occupational skills. We formulate our hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Potential immigrants with family dependents should be supported for their temporary and permanent immigration applications less than those immigrants without family dependents.

Hypothesis 3: Presence of family dependents should be a better predictor of support for admissibility of temporary and permanent immigrants when the potential immigrants are unskilled.

In the case of cultural cues, on the other hand, we anticipate respondents will evaluate potential immigrants less favourably if those immigrants are perceived to be less similar to natives in terms of their ethnic and cultural characteristics. Although a recent experimental study comparing the levels of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes demonstrates that Americans evaluate Muslim immigrants more favourably than immigrants in general (Strabac, Aalberg, and Valenta 2014), a thrust of previous research documents that, in the USA and in the Netherlands alike, Islamic groups constitute the least preferred immigrant groups (Hagendoorn 1995; Parrillo and Donoghue 2005). Consequently, we predict lower levels of approval for the Middle Eastern candidate in the USA. In a similar vein, we expect Dutch respondents to prefer Western and Hispanic candidates over potential immigrants from North Africa and South Asia. We further predict that Western candidates will be perceived as culturally more similar to the Dutch society, and they will be preferred also over their Hispanic counterparts. Hence, our fourth hypothesis reads as follows:

Hypothesis 4: In the USA, potential immigrants with Hispanic origin should be supported for their temporary and permanent immigration applications more than those immigrants with Middle Eastern background. In the Netherlands, potential immigrants with Western origin should be supported as temporary and permanent immigrants more than those immigrants with Hispanic, North African and South Asian backgrounds in an increasing order.

With regards to skin complexion, we expect immigrants with dark skin complexion to be perceived as culturally and ethnically less similar to the native group both in the USA and in the Netherlands. Earlier studies also indicate that individuals with dark skin complexion are perceived as ethnically more distinct (Hunter 2007), and that they are subject to higher levels of discrimination compared to lighter-skinned people of the same race or ethnicity (Espino and Franz 2002; Mason 2004). Therefore, we also anticipate that dark skin complexion will be perceived as more distinctive and therefore will lead to lower levels of admission.

Hypothesis 5: Potential immigrants with light skin complexion should be supported for their temporary and permanent immigration more than those immigrants with dark skin complexion.

Data

The data derive from a pair of online survey experiments conducted in the Netherlands the USA. The US study, fielded by YouGov in 2010, was administered on a sample of 1250 Americans recruited from the YouGov online panel (for details on the YouGov sampling methodology, see, Iyengar and Vavreck [2012]). The Dutch study was run in the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) Panel¹ in 2011 with the participation of 5049 respondents representative of the Dutch-speaking population aged over 16. Respondents in both studies were informed that the research concerned the public's view on immigration and related political issues.

Experimental Design

In both countries, respondents were randomly assigned to 16 experimental groups. Following a set of questions assessing their opinions on immigration policy and their beliefs about different immigrant groups in their respective nations, respondents in each experimental condition were presented with a vignette briefly describing a potential immigrant accompanied by a photo of the immigrant described in the vignette. The vignettes manipulated the potential immigrant's economic and cultural attributes. After reading the vignette, respondents were asked to play the role of government officials and decide either to approve or reject the temporary work permit and citizenship requests made by the candidate presented to them. While Dutch respondents were asked to evaluate only one potential immigrant, the US design required each respondent to evaluate two briefly described potential immigrants.

For the current study, we employed a factorial design with 16 experimental treatments in both countries. The US study design corresponds to $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design with two economic (high or low occupational status; none or three family dependents) and two cultural (Kuwaiti or Mexican nationality; light or dark skin complexion) attribute treatments. The Dutch study, on the other hand, utilised one economic treatment (high or low occupational status) and two cultural treatments (Canadian, Colombian, Libyan or Pakistani nationality; light or dark skin complexion), leading to a $2 \times 4 \times 2$ factorial design.

*Experimental Manipulations**Economic Cues*

The vignettes manipulated the economic status of the immigrant. In the 'high status' condition, potential immigrants are described as college-educated and having a high-skilled occupation (engineer or computer programmer). In the 'low status' condition, the immigrant is a high school graduate seeking to find work in a low-skilled job (construction and landscaping worker or waiter). Additionally, English language skills are also used to signal the economic status of the potential immigrants. In all the US conditions, the immigrant is described as learning English; in the high status conditions he is enrolled in a language course, in the low status conditions he is learning by conversing with friends who speak the language. In the Dutch study, high status immigrants are depicted as fluent in English, whereas low status immigrants are described as learning English. In addition to educational and occupational status, in the US design, we manipulated the family status of the immigrant; he is depicted as either single or married with two young children.

Cultural Cues

In both studies, we had two treatments speaking for the cultural threat hypothesis, namely; ethnicity and complexion. For ethnicity, we described the potential immigrants as coming from different nationality and cultural backgrounds. In the US case, half of the conditions feature a Mexican immigrant, whereas participants in

the remaining conditions encounter an immigrant from Kuwait. These two groups were selected on the basis of their relevance for current discussions of immigration in the USA; Hispanic immigrants constitute the largest group of immigrants and Middle Eastern immigrants have become focus of attention in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In the Dutch study, on the other hand, the potential immigrants were described as from four different countries—Canada, Colombia, Pakistan and Libya—representing Western, Hispanic, South Asian and North African immigrant groups, respectively. While both Libya and Pakistan are countries with predominantly Muslim populations, these two groups are expected to represent different levels of cultural proximity for a typical Dutch citizen; North African immigrants are much more visible in the Dutch population compared to South Asian immigrants. These four countries of origin were selected in order to enhance the realism of the vignette. Although immigrants from Turkey, Morocco and from other EU member states are more numerous in the Netherlands, for each of these states specific regulations may apply regarding work and residence permits. Therefore, four more distant countries were chosen.

Finally, in the case of the complexion treatment, we used visual images accompanying the texts presented to the respondents.² In order to manipulate for skin complexion, we used a morphing procedure where the original images are blended with either a Eurocentric or an Afrocentric image. For this procedure, we selected different images for each immigrant group. We further selected a Eurocentric image and an Afrocentric image. These images were selected from a database³ of faces previously rated for attractiveness and race stereotypicality. We used images with comparable levels of attractiveness and typicality. We generated images for light complexion condition by blending the original image of each immigrant with the Eurocentric image in the ratio of 6:4. Similarly, the images for the dark skin complexion condition are obtained mixtures of original immigrant images (60%) and the Afrocentric image (40%).

Variables

Dependent Variables

We assess the admissibility of potential immigrants in the country both as temporary workers and permanent citizens, using respondents' evaluations of the work permit and citizenship applications of the potential immigrants presented to them. The questions read as: (i) 'Given what you know about [potential immigrant] do you think his application for work permit should be approved or rejected?' and (ii) 'assume that [potential immigrant] comes to [country] on a work permit and then he decides to apply for citizenship. Do you think his citizenship application should be approved or rejected?' Response options are given in dichotomous format (0 = reject, 1 = approve).

Independent Variables

In our models, we introduce categorical variables for the experimental treatments of credentials (0 = low status; 1 = high status), country of origin (for USA, 0 = Mexico;

1 = Kuwait and for NL, 0 = Canada; 1 = Colombia; 2 = Pakistan; 3 = Libya) and complexion (0 = light; 1 = dark). We additionally include family status (0 = single; 1 = married with children) treatment condition in the US study.

Results

Immigration Attitudes

We assess general attitudes towards immigration and immigrants through a standard battery of questions on immigration policies and the salience of illegal immigration, together with questions tapping sympathy towards immigrants in general.⁴ Table 1 presents the standardised mean scores, where higher scores indicate higher levels of support for immigration on positive items and lower levels of support for negative items. The comparison of the US and Dutch cases reveals that Dutch people hold slightly more positive attitudes towards immigration, whereas Americans express higher levels of sympathy towards immigrants themselves. However, the responses for the negative items suggest that both Americans and Dutch people think that their countries are taking too many immigrants that immigrants are taking advantage of welfare benefits and that illegal immigration is an important problem.

Although many respondents expressed preference for more exclusionist immigration policies in both countries, they are inclined to evaluate individual immigrants favourably. As far as the response distributions of the questions on work permit, length of stay and citizenship are concerned, respondents were exceedingly willing to admit individual immigrants into the country (Figure 1). A large majority of American (70%) and Dutch respondents (57%) would grant a work permit to individual immigrants and admit them as temporary residents in the country. While the modal response to duration of the permit was 1 year in both countries, the

Table 1. General attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, the USA and the Netherlands.

	The USA	The Netherlands
Laws make it immigrants too difficult to acquire [American/Dutch] citizenship.	0.291	0.361
[The USA/the Netherlands] is taking in too many immigrants. ^a	0.702	0.622
Increasing cultural diversity in [the USA/the Netherlands] due to immigration is good.	0.459	0.431
Immigrants have a favourable effect on the country.	0.469	0.392
Immigrants come to [the USA/the Netherlands] to take advantage of welfare benefits. ^a	0.619	0.643
Compared to other problems, how important is illegal immigration? ^a	0.729	0.636
How sympathetic do you feel towards immigrants in general?	0.569	0.513
N	1699	2396

^aNegative items.

average duration was longer in the USA (19.4 months) than in the Netherlands (15.3 months). Approval of citizenship applications, or to put it differently, admissibility on a permanent basis was slightly less extensive than approval of temporary residence in the USA (65%) and substantially less extensive in the Netherlands (46%).

Support for Temporary and Permanent Immigrants: The Role of Economic and Cultural Cues

Our findings from the logistic regression models illustrate that the individual characteristics of individual immigrants significantly affect their levels of admissibility

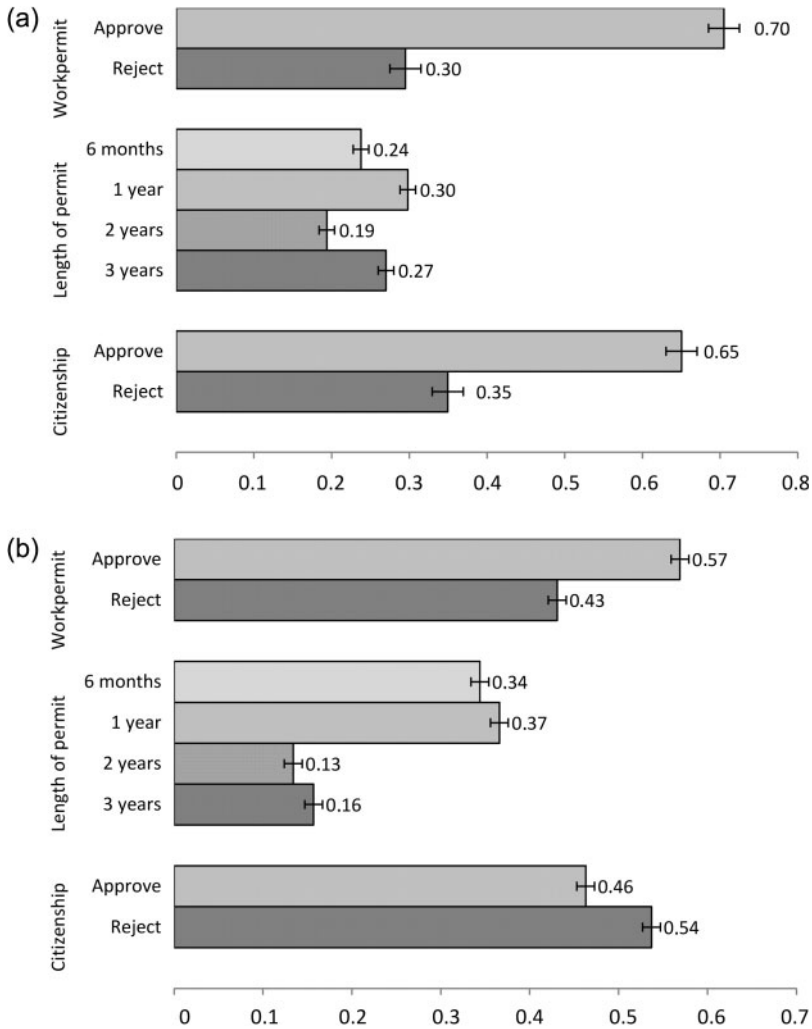


Figure 1. (a) Admissibility of individual immigrants in the USA. (b) Admissibility of individual immigrants in the Netherlands.

Table 2. Support for work permit and citizenship in the USA and the Netherlands by experimental manipulations.

	Work permit		Citizenship	
	The USA	The Netherlands	The USA	The Netherlands
Complexion	0.003 (0.078)	0.083 (0.062)	0.114 (0.085)	0.038 (0.058)
Job status	0.518*** (0.079)	1.654*** (0.063)	0.463*** (0.085)	0.885*** (0.059)
Family status	0.172** (0.078)	-	0.225*** (0.085)	-
Middle eastern	-0.423*** (0.078)	-	-0.430*** (0.084)	-
Colombian	-	-0.505*** (0.089)	-	-0.452*** (0.082)
Pakistani	-	-0.795*** (0.089)	-	-0.587*** (0.083)
Libyan	-	-0.722*** (0.089)	-	-0.533*** (0.082)
Constant	0.753*** (0.085)	-0.034 (0.073)	0.442*** (0.093)	-0.229*** (0.069)
Nagelkerke's R^2	0.034	0.204	0.035	0.075
N	3223	5019	2531	5017

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

in the country both as temporary and permanent immigrants in the USA and in the Netherlands. As shown in Table 2, respondents in both nations clearly reward individual immigrants with stronger occupational and educational credentials (*Hypothesis 1*). Respondents presented with high job status/high education immigrants were almost one and half times more likely to award work permit and citizenship applications in the USA. The predicted probabilities for American respondents to admit skilled candidates as temporary or permanent immigrants are found to be 10 percentage points higher when compared to admissibility levels of unskilled immigrants. Dutch respondents also rewarded economic credentials while assessing applications of individual immigrants, and they did even more so than their Americans counterparts. In the Netherlands, potential immigrants with high status credentials were approximately 5 times more likely to receive work permit approval than their low status counterparts, while these immigrants were also more than two times more likely to be granted citizenship. In the Dutch case, the effect size of occupational and educational credentials is observed to be as large as 34 and 22 percentage points for admissibility of temporary and permanent immigrants, respectively. Our findings illustrate that both American and Dutch have a strong preference for skilled immigrants over the unskilled.

The presence of family members, an attribute included in the US study only, proved marginally significant although the direct effects were not in the expected

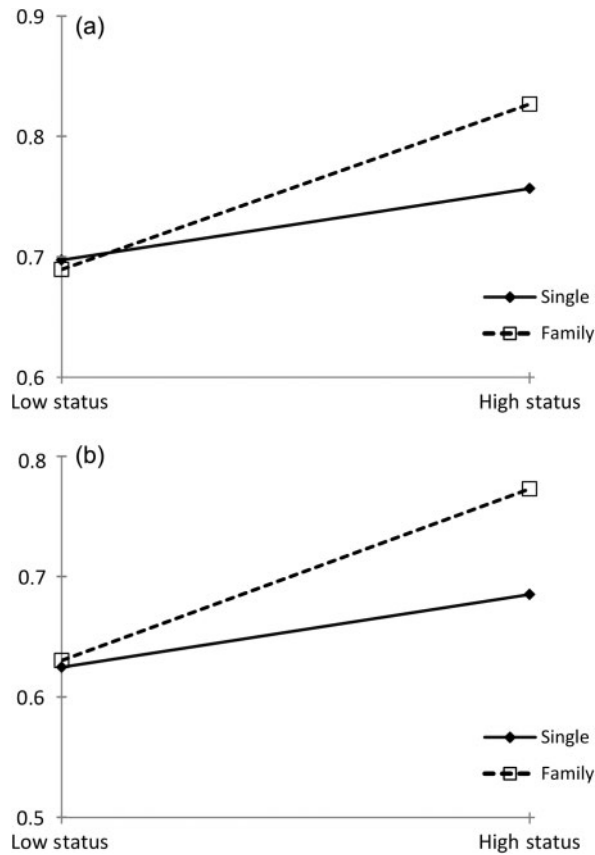


Figure 2. (a) Predicted support for work permit by credentials and family status (the USA).
(b) Predicted support for citizenship by credentials and family status (the USA).

direction. Contrary to our expectations (*Hypothesis 2*), we found that potential immigrants with family dependents were evaluated slightly more favourably than their single counterparts. When we further inspect the interaction between the two economic cues, however, we observe the expected credentials \times family status interaction effect (*Hypothesis 3*). [Figure 2](#) illustrates the joint effects of the two manipulations. The predicted mean levels of support for work permit and citizenship indicate that Americans have a slight preference for single immigrants over immigrants with family dependents in the low status condition. In the high status condition, on the other hand, they prefer immigrants with families over single immigrants. The significant interaction effect suggests that the presence of family members is seen as a potential economic threat in the case of unskilled immigrants.

Turning to our manipulations of cultural distinctiveness, nationality/ethnicity exerted significant effects in both countries ([Table 2](#)). In line with our expectations, the potential immigrants with Islamic backgrounds constituted the least welcomed group of immigrants in both countries (*Hypothesis 4*). In the USA, we observe that

Hispanic immigrants are strongly preferred over Middle Eastern immigrants. Moving from Hispanic to Middle Eastern candidate, support levels for temporary and permanent immigrants decreased by 11 and 10 percentage points, respectively. In the Netherlands, again in line with our expectations, Western and Hispanic candidates are clearly preferred over their North African and South Asian counterparts to a significant degree. As far as the temporary immigration is concerned, the level of support for Western immigrant is found to be decreasing 12, 17 and 19 percentage points as we move from the Western immigrant category to Hispanic, Libyan and Pakistani candidates, respectively. Our findings also indicate that Dutch respondents also rank potential immigrants in the same order when they evaluate their citizenship applications. The difference between the predicted levels of support for permanent immigration of potential immigrants decreases 10 percentage points for the Hispanic candidate and approximately 13 percentage points for the immigrants with Islamic backgrounds.

The effects of skin complexion, however, proved not to be significant in any of our models. Contrary to expectations, neither American nor Dutch respondents expressed any preference for immigrants with light skin complexion while evaluating the citizenship and work permit applications of potential immigrants (*Hypothesis 5*). Furthermore, we explored a possible interaction between the cultural treatments, and observed a significant interaction effect between complexion and ethnicity in the Dutch context. As [Figure 3](#) illustrates, Dutch respondents expressed higher levels of support for the Pakistani and the Libyan candidates with darker skin complexion. Moving from dark to light skin complexion, the predicted levels of support for work permit applications of Pakistani and Libyan candidates shift downward by 8 and 6%, respectively. This pattern is consistent with the notion that stereotype-consistent features elicit greater support. Light-skinned Pakistanis and Libyans might be perceived as 'strange', thus increasing the likelihood of rejection.

In the USA, the predicted levels of support for temporary and permanent immigrants vary approximately 23 percentage points depending on the economic and cultural characteristics of potential immigrants. Americans evaluate those highly skilled Hispanic immigrants with family dependents most favourably, whereas the least welcomed group of immigrants are observed to be those unskilled and single immigrants with Middle Eastern background. As we move from the former to the latter, the predicted level of support drops from 81 to 58% when those immigrants are evaluated as temporary immigrants, and it drops from 76 to 53% while they are assessed for a permanent immigrant status. When compared to the USA, we find that individual characteristics have a larger impact on the admissibility of immigrants in the Netherlands. The difference between the predicted levels of support for the most and the least welcomed immigrants are recorded to be as large as 53 percentage points for the temporary immigration and 38 percentage points for the permanent immigration. Like their American counterparts, Dutch respondents also evaluate highly skilled immigrants with similar cultural backgrounds most favourably. The predicted admissibility of a highly skilled immigrant with Western background as a

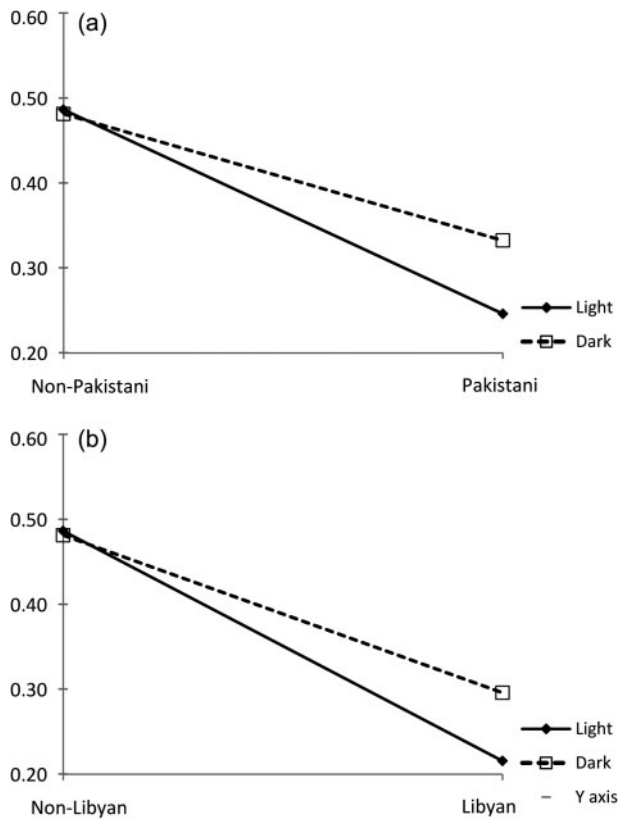


Figure 3. (a) Predicted support for work permit by complexion and Pakistani origin (the Netherlands). (b) Predicted support for work permit by complexion and Libyan origin (the Netherlands).

temporary immigrant is 83%, as oppose to 30% for an unskilled South Asian immigrant. When those immigrants are assessed for a citizenship application, the likelihood of an immigrant to be admitted in the country drops from 76 to 28% as we move from the most welcomed to the least welcomed immigrant.

Discussion

This study investigated the extent to which economic and cultural individuating cues affect public support for immigrants in the USA and the Netherlands. Through an experimental design, we manipulated economic and cultural characteristics of immigrants, making them appear more or less likely to pose an economic burden and to display cultural distinctiveness. Our analysis shows that the revealed levels of support for individual immigrants are sensitive to the economic and cultural attributes of these immigrants. We demonstrate that individual immigrants elicit markedly different levels of public support depending upon their educational and

occupational qualifications. Other attributes, such as the presence of family dependents, country of origin and skin complexion also affect the acceptance or rejection rates of individual immigrants, but to a much lesser extent. In particular, our study demonstrates that support for individual immigrants is predominantly influenced by considerations regarding the economic costs and benefits of immigration. Americans and Dutch citizens alike prefer highly skilled immigrants over their unskilled counterparts. We also find, in the US case, that the presence of family dependents makes natives' evaluations of unskilled immigrants more negative. In general, our findings suggest that natives' are more willing to admit candidates seen as more likely to contribute to the national economy and less likely to be recipients of government benefits. To put it differently, level of support for individual immigrants significantly decreases when the expected economic costs of admitting the immigrants are expected to be high.

Our results also demonstrate that cultural distinctiveness—as registered by the immigrant's ethnicity and complexion—affects citizens' evaluations of individual immigrants, but to a lesser extent. American and Dutch citizens prefer immigrants from countries perceived to be more similar to their own. In the USA, there is a strong preference for Hispanic immigrants over Middle Eastern immigrants, and in the Netherlands we observe that approval of the immigrant decreases as we move from immigrants of Western origin to those of Hispanic, North African and South Asian origins, respectively. Skin complexion, however, does not appear to matter greatly to evaluations of individual immigrants, at least in the USA. In the Netherlands, however, we observe an interaction between ethnicity and complexion; perhaps signalling a preference for dark skinned, stereotypical immigrants in the case of the Libyan and Pakistani cases.

Our findings suggest that economic and cultural considerations affect evaluations of immigrant groups and individual immigrants to different extents. While earlier studies indicate that negative attitudes towards immigrant groups are mainly driven by concerns over cultural unity, our findings illustrate that attitudes towards individual immigrants, on the contrary, are mainly driven by economic considerations. However, the experimental design of current study does not allow us to experimentally test the differences between the evaluations of individual immigrants and immigrant groups. Therefore, future research should try to validate our findings through the comparison of individual and groups of immigrants by employing further experimental manipulations.

Our results concerning the effects of the economic status manipulations should be interpreted with caution. Earlier studies on labour market discrimination point out that the level of discrimination against foreign workers is higher when the demand for skilled manpower is relatively low (Goldberg, Mourinho, and Kulke 1996). Therefore, the preferences of respondents for skilled or unskilled workers might be contingent on the perceived labour market needs of the country. Future research should try to validate these findings by increasing the number of occupational categories representative of high-skill and low-skill professions and by assessing

respondents' beliefs about the amount of employment demand for individuals in these categories.

In conclusion, our study makes it clear that attributes of immigrants influence public support for immigration. This research suggests that the attributes most relevant to American and Dutch citizens are immigrants' job skills. Economic qualifications dominate cultural attributes as a basis for evaluating individual immigrants.

- (1) LISS Panel is an online household panel administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands) through its MESS project funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research. The panel is set up in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands and it is based on a true probability sample of households. The sample employed in the panel study is representative of the Dutch-speaking population aged over 16. Panel members complete the questionnaires at their homes through Internet and those participants without Internet access at the time of recruitment are provided with necessary facilities to participate in the online survey. More information about the LISS panel can be found at: www.lissdata.nl.
- (2) See [Appendix](#) for the images used for skin complexion manipulation.
- (3) The face database is compiled in the Department of Psychology at Stanford University by Jennifer Eberhardt. The database consists of 100 European and 100 African American adult male images with neutral facial expressions. Images are rated for their levels of attractiveness and stereotypicality by a sample of undergraduate students on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high).
- (4) We measure immigration attitudes using respondents' assessments of five statements: (i) 'Laws make it too difficult foreign citizens to acquire [country] citizenship'; (ii) '[country] is taking too many immigrants'; (iii) 'increasing cultural diversity in [country] from immigration is good for country'; (iv) 'immigrants have favourable effect on country'; (v) 'immigrants come to [country] to take advantage of government benefits' (1 = disagree strongly; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = agree strongly). We measured sympathy towards immigrants in general on an 11-point scale where higher values indicated more positive evaluations. Original responses are rescaled to range between 0 and 1.

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Appendix: Skin Complexion Manipulation

Mexican



Kuwaiti



Canadian



Colombian



Pakistani



Libyan

