

„Still divided but more open. Mapping European attitudes towards migration before and after the migration crisis”

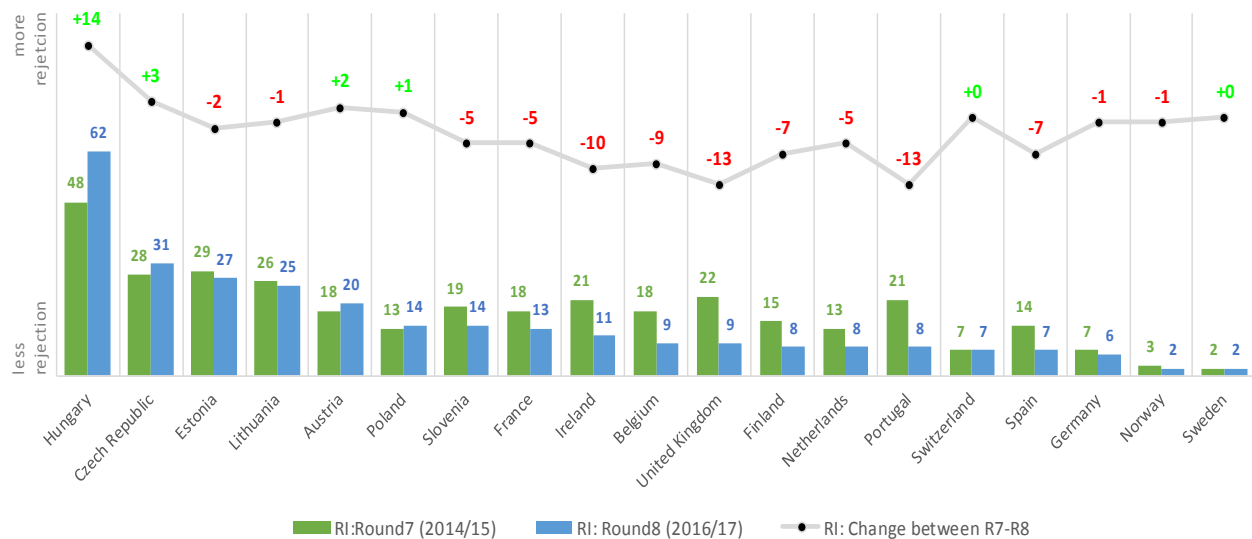
Vera Messing and Bence Ságvári

The study by Vera Messing and Bence Ságvári entitled „Still divided but more open. Mapping European attitudes towards migration before and after the migration crisis” investigated cross-national differences in attitudes towards migration and immigrants across European space and time. Using European Social Survey data it aimed to discover how attitudes towards immigrants have changed in the past over one and a half decade and find factors that may lie behind the immense differences in the acceptance or rejection of immigrants across European countries.

The analysis found that interestingly, attitudes towards migration in Europe – both its cognitive element, assessing how people perceive the consequences of migration (Perception Index) and its behavioural element, assessing how people would act if they were in charge (Rejection Index) - have generally become more positive in most countries after the 2015 refugee-crisis. The overall level of rejection has decreased from 15% in 2014/15 (before the flow of mass migration to Europe occurred) to 10% in 2016/17 (after the migration shock). Thus, in general, popular attitudes do not support the flourishing anti-migrant populist political discourse, and by the same token, increasingly loud anti-migrant populist narratives have not boosted the rejection of migrants. Outliers include Portugal, Belgium, the UK and Ireland, where people have become significantly more open and positive about migrants compared to the pre-migration crisis period, and Hungary, where general attitudes towards migrants have significantly deteriorated.

FIGURE 1

CHANGE OF REJECTION INDEX (RI)
 BETWEEN ESS R7 (2014/15) AND ESS R8 (2016/17)



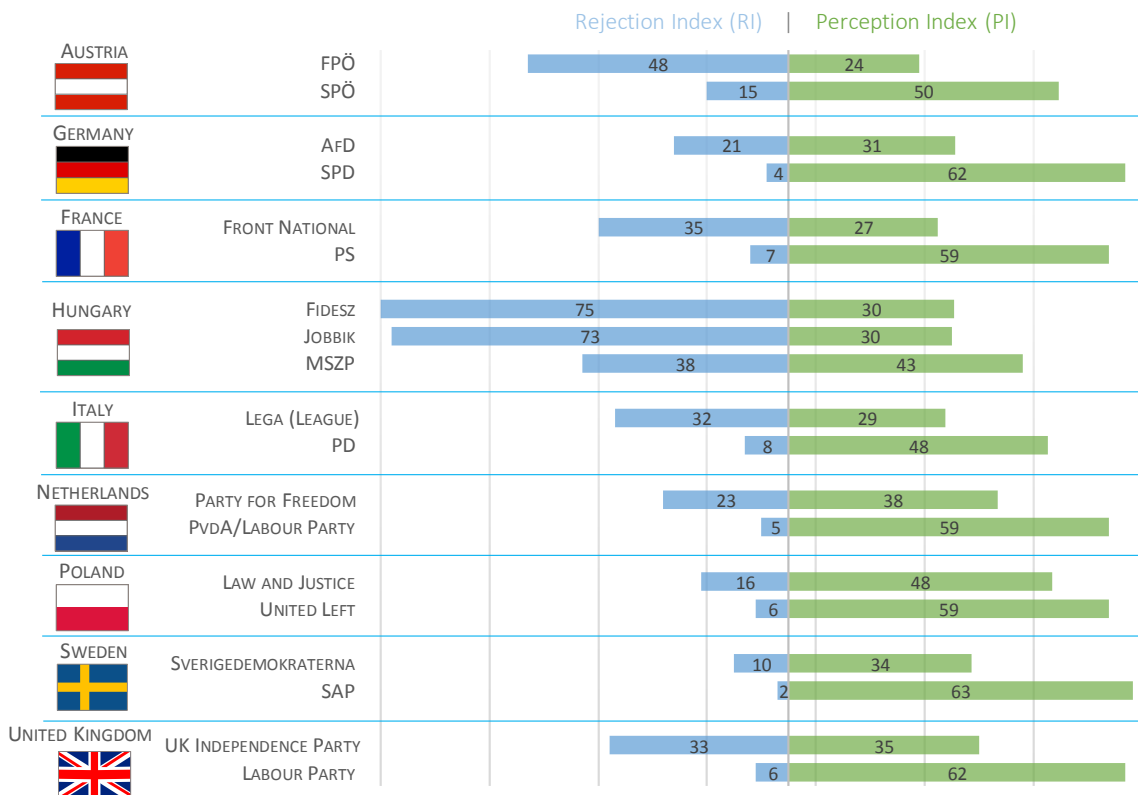
Looking at longer term trends the authors found a notable stability of attitudes: over a period of 16 years, based on data from 15 European countries, the overall perception of migration, as well as the share of those supporting the explicit rejection of migrants coming from poorer countries outside Europe, have not changed radically. Attitudes may have changed within shorter periods of time in certain countries, but in the longer run they have remained stable across the continent. Short-term changes in attitudes were brought about by the uncertainties of large-scale political changes, such as the enlargement of the EU in 2004, economic or labour market crises (2008), or traumatic events such as terrorist attacks or an overwhelming governmental anti-migrant campaign (in Hungary).

Referring to the most popular theories the analysis found that contact and control theories apply best to Europe's attitudinal map and its changes. Widespread and homogenizing anti-migrant attitudes in some countries have little to do with migrants; anti-migrant attitudes are strongest and are likely to increase further in countries where migrants are hardly present, where people don't have personal experiences with migrants but where they lack the feeling of safety and control, in general. By control the study refers to two levels of control: the feeling people have of being in control of their own lives, and the feeling that the government is in control of migration. The importance of the latter is shown by the case of Germany, where anti-migrant attitudes increased significantly between 2002 and 2004, probably due to the combination of the uncertainties brought about by the 2004 enlargement of the EU and the feared mass inflow from new EU member-states. However, as soon as the government introduced a set of legislation ensuring the controlled management of migration within the enlarged EU, anti-migrant attitudes abated.

One chapter of the study zooms to individuals whose attitudes are extremely hostile. It found that people who extremely and homogeneously reject migrants do not differ in their demographic characteristics from the rest of the population but in their subjective perceptions of control: to a much greater extent they feel that they have financial difficulties, are alienated from politics, lack trust, and hold security-focused, individualistic values. All in all, people who feel politically disempowered, financially insecure and without social support are the most likely to become extremely negative towards migrants. Projecting the map of political preferences and attitudes towards migrants tells us that right wing populist parties gather that part of the population which is very negative towards migrants and migration in general.

FIGURE 3

**REJECTION AND PERCEPTION INDEXES AMONG SUPPORTERS OF
 RIGHT-WING POPULIST AND SELECTED CENTRE-LEFT POLITICAL PARTIES**
 PARTY PREFERENCES BASED ON THE ITEM "WHICH PARTY DO YOU FEEL CLOSER TO"
 ESS R8 (2016/17)



In almost all countries one or two such parties exist, the difference lies rather in how powerful they are. The perception of the consequences of migration (PI) are quite similar (very negative) among voters of right wing populist countries across Europe. Still, the rejection of migrants is very alike: Rejecting any kind of migration is most explicit in Hungary, while in other countries, even the more negative perception of migration by supporters of right wing populist parties (FPÖ, FN, LN) results in a smaller share of those unconditionally rejecting migrants. This data again shows the degree to which dominant norms, set by mainstream politics, matter in terms of transforming aversion into an extreme rejection of migrants.

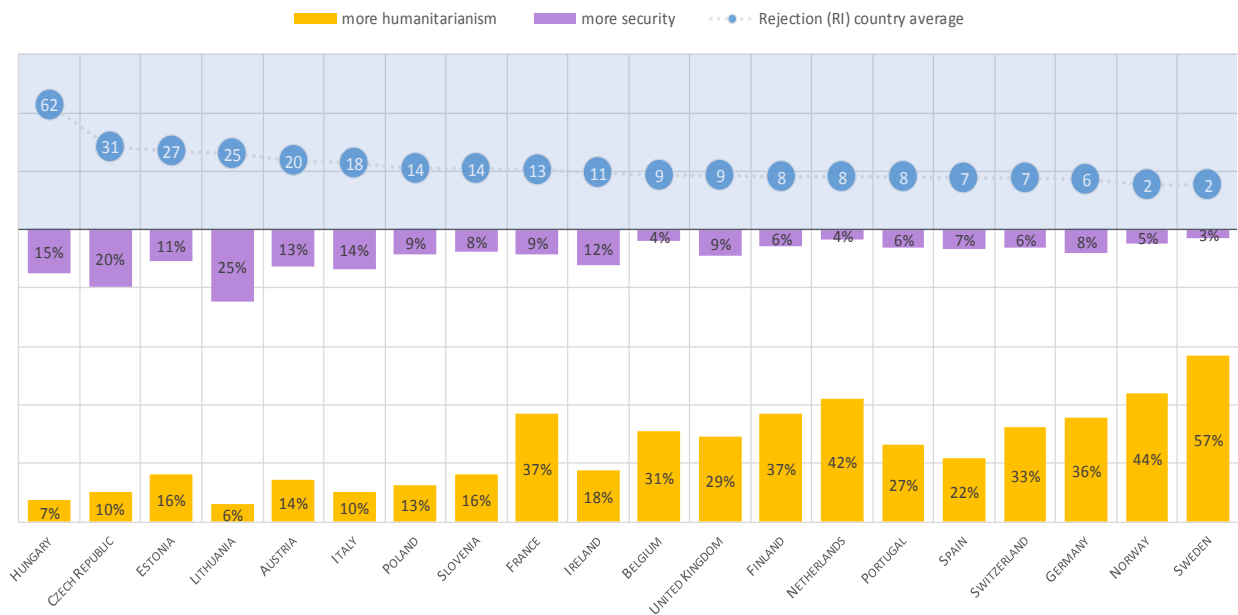
The final chapter analyses how basic human values (Schwartz model) influence attitudes. It shows that attitudes towards migration correlate very strongly with a complex set of questions mapping various aspect of basic human values, but there are two sets of values that crystalize very explicitly: security and humanitarianism. The more people yearn for security, the more negative their perception of the consequences of migration is, and hence the more they reject the

idea of any migrant settling in their country. The more people find respect for others and equality between people important, the more positive their attitudes are. Basic human values are also closely related to political preferences, so it is no surprise that attitudes towards migrants and political preferences correlate strongly.

FIGURE 3

HUMANITARIAN AND SECURITY VALUES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN COMPARISON TO REJECTION OF MIGRANTS

ESS R8, 2016/17



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