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MWP 2014/08
Max Weber Programme

Competition and Solidarity: Union Members and
Immigration in Europe

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EUI Working Paper **MWP** 2014/08

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ISSN 1830-7728

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Printed in Italy
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
www.eui.eu
cadmus.eui.eu

Abstract

In this paper, I address an under-studied question in the comparative political economy of migration. How have trade unions shaped the attitudes of their members toward immigration? Unions are at the core of left wing politics in most European countries, and support for immigration is usually a left-wing position. However, many of the core constituents of unions are those whose interests are most adversely affected by an increase in the supply of labor. I show that the pattern of European trade-union leaders becoming supportive of open immigration policies (identified in previous literature) has solidified over the past decade. After discussing how unions have overcome the key economic dilemma in their rhetoric, I provide evidence that this rhetoric has shaped the attitudes of union members, that the effect has become stronger over time, and that the effect is (mostly) robust to the exclusion of countries where self-selection into unions on the basis of ideology is likely to be strongest.

Keywords

Immigration; Public Opinion; Unions; Europe; Opinion Leader.

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Introduction

Left wing organizations — especially trade unions — in Europe and North America face complex challenges in dealing with immigration. Penninx and Roosblad (2000) identify three dilemmas facing unions. In this paper, I examine how unions have reacted to the first of these dilemmas — whether to resist or cooperate in the migration process — and show that unions have, on the whole, taken a pro-immigration position in Europe. To demonstrate this, I combine a brief review of recent public positioning by union leaders with an analysis of the European Social Survey (ESS). Together these two exercises suggest that unions do, in fact, influence attitudes, and they do so primarily by convincing members to embrace the cultural diversity brought by immigration. This pattern was increasingly strong for the first decade of the new millennium, though this increase slowed after the onset of the economic crisis.

Theories of unions and immigration

In a recent article on the politics of immigration in Western Europe, Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010), after concluding that the framing of immigration makes a very large difference in responses to survey questions, called for more research into the institutions and political actors that have the power to shape the debate. They argued:

A much more fruitful approach, we think, would be for political-economic analysis to focus less on people's responses to opinion surveys about immigration and more on self-interested actors operating as organised groups to lobby policymakers and frame public debates in ways that benefit them. (p. 80)

This paper takes their challenge seriously, using survey evidence as an important piece of the argument nonetheless. Since I assume that unions play a large role in framing many political issues for their members, and a smaller role in framing those issues for non-members,¹ I can use individual responses to detect an ideological effect, which I think of as simply the cumulative effect of repeated framing effects. To show that unions frame the debate in a solidaristic way, I first examine the relationship between existing policies and outcomes, on the one hand, and union positions, on the other. Next, I review some of the literature on union rhetoric and lobbying. I then provide a few examples of recent union rhetoric. Finally, I turn to the literature on immigration attitude formation before presenting survey evidence.

The simplest frame for thinking about the relationship between trade unions and immigration predicts that unions, by advocating restrictionist immigration policies, will reduce the supply of labor in their country and increase the wages of their members. This fits neatly with basic economic theory, embodied in the factor price equalization models of trade and migration discussed by Samuelson (1948) and frequently known as the Heckscher-Olin or Hecksher-Olin-Samuelson (HOS) model. The HOS model predicts that wages will be higher in countries where labor is scarce relative to capital and land. Cross-national variation in wages, the price of labor, will be reduced by the flow of labor intensive goods from countries where labor is abundant, relative to the other factors, to countries where labor is scarce.² Alternatively, labor itself can move. If immigrants move from low wage areas to high wage areas, they raise wages in the areas they leave and lower wages in the areas to which they go. The empirical basis for this claim is not as strong as the theoretical basis. There is an extensive literature on the impact of immigration on wages (Pischke and Velling, 1997; Borjas, 2003; Zorlu and Hartog, 2005; Venturini and Villosio, 2006). A reasonable interpretation of this literature (though by no means the only possible interpretation) is that low-skill immigration has a small negative impact on the wages of low-skilled natives, a moderate

¹Certainly, unions may help frame political debates for the public at large, but my evidence relies on the assumption that this effect is smaller than the effect on members. According to the ETUC (2003, pp. 10), when unions issue publications and conduct public campaigns concerning migration and ethnic discrimination, “[t]rade union members are the main intended audience of the material, followed by emigrant and ethnic minority members who are in the union.”

²This is a straightforward application of the principle of comparative advantage described by Ricardo (1996).

negative impact on the wages of previous low-skill immigrants, and a small or negligible positive effect for the rest of the population.

Past research on union position taking with regard to immigration has often simply assumed that unions believe that immigration has a negative impact on union bargaining power,³ though some of the work that focused on Western Europe recognised that unions play a more complex role (Schmitter, 1981). More recent work has highlighted the diversity of positions taken by union leaders, a diversity that can be seen over time, across countries, and across unions within a country (Haus, 2002). As Pajares (2008) argues about a basic supply-demand framework, “(t)hese ideas carry a lot of weight in the trade union tradition, even though...It is now understood that segmentation of the labour market means that competition between already established workers — the local workforce — and those recently arrived exists to only a very limited extent.” Briggs (Briggs, 2001) details the history of unions in the United States, arguing that until shortly before his book was published, American unions had consistently assumed that they were in competition with immigrants and acted to limit that competition by limiting immigration. While he acknowledges that the AFL-CIO had adapted some of its rhetoric to account for the possibility that enforcement was not possible, he was unsure whether this was an honest and sustainable policy shift.

Policy context Watts (2002). argues that union leadership in France, Italy,⁴ and Spain has moved toward supporting more open immigration policies. She projects that leadership in the US will do so as well, an argument that was mostly correct, as can be seen from recent statements by unions or the two umbrella labor organizations in the US.⁵ The main mechanism that drives her theory is competition and a pragmatic fear of a two-tier labor market, but all of the countries she examines are in situations where the status quo involves poor enforcement of immigration and large numbers of undocumented immigrants. Watts argues that union leaders see immigrants as a potential source of new members, but that as long as they remain undocumented, they undermine the national social contract and depress wages for native and documented immigrant union members. While the Spanish, French, and Italian labor movements have used different tactics to woo immigrants, the goal is to increase union density and power by attracting immigrants to unions and the political positions they endorse, as well as to decrease competition from the unregulated sector of the labor market.

This position is driven by the belief that the state either will not or cannot control immigration from poor countries. The European Trade Union Commission (ETUC), writing in 2004, argued that so-called ‘zero-immigration’ policies “offered European citizens a false sense of protection” (ETUC, 2004, pp. 3) Given that assumption, it is easy to see why unions would become more supportive of open immigration policies. The most rational strategy for union leaders, especially those who lead low-skill unions, is to try to eliminate the underground economy by strengthening enforcement of immigration and employment laws while allowing more immigrants to enter the country. This should lead to better working conditions for migrants (who are vulnerable to exploitation by employers because of their tenuous status and unwillingness to engage with authorities), while also ensuring that the various social contracts unions have negotiated in the last half of the twentieth century, which include such benefits as a minimum wage, job security, and safe working conditions, can be upheld.

On the other hand, union elites have long been thought to maintain a conception of the economy in which labor is arrayed against capital, and all members of the working class would benefit from solidaristic collective action. This should lead union elites to think of immigrants as fellow members of the working class, and therefore members of an in-group. This is obviously complicated by racial and linguistic differences (Schmitter, 1981; Frymer, 2008), but more ideologically driven unions are likely to overcome these problems. By identifying a common opponent in the form of employers, it seems

³One historical study, for instance, notes that American unions in the late 19th century demanded more restrictions to combat “cheap contract workers.” However, she also points out that there was a clear note of xenophobia in much union rhetoric at the time (Collomp, 1988).

⁴Early evidence of this transition can be seen in (Pinna, 1986).

⁵See, for instance, (AFL-CIO and CTW, 2009).

reasonable to suppose that union leaders and immigrants may be able to consider each other members of a single class. More ideological unions will lead their members to focus more on class and less on other differences, and the typical member of such unions will have greater reason to consider class the relevant framework for thinking about immigration policy. Identification with one's class can then lead an individual to prefer policies that benefit other members of that class (such as poor immigrants, in the case of the working class).

Types of unions Solidarity is a particular form of social identification. It is closely tied to what Dawson (1994) called "linked fate," or the belief that one's own life prospects are closely tied to the prospects of a group of which one is a member. The relationship between identification with one's class and union membership is not entirely clear, since causation can run both ways. Kelly and Kelly (1994) argue that participation in union activities is the result of identification, while Cregan, Bartram and Stanton (2009) argue that effective union leaders engender identification, which, in turn, leads to participation. In using solidarity to explain the relationship between union membership and attitudes toward immigration, I am assuming that union membership leads to identification, rather than attitudes leading to union membership.

This is, of course, an important inferential problem for studies of unions's effects on their members. Traditional approaches to examining the selection effect of union membership include controlling for the various demographics that predict attitudes and controlling for ideological self-placement (arguing that this is more stable than other attitudes, and so can be seen as a proxy for pre-unionization attitudes). In this paper, I use both of these strategies, but I also introduce a third approach. I argue that, based on the institutional context and past strategic decisions, unions in some countries are substantially more activist-based than in other countries.

The selection effect will be strongest in countries where the collective action problem faced by unions is most severe. In countries like France, where collective bargaining coverage is substantially wider than union membership, there is a strong incentive to free-ride on the union representation of others. Only those members who feel ideologically committed to the union are likely to join. At the other extreme is the closed-shop system, such as that found in the United States, where almost all workers who are represented by a union are also members. Because they become members by virtue of taking a job, considerations other than ideology likely dominate their decision-making process, and so selection is probably quite weak. Below, I demonstrate that survey responses provide some support for this argument, as the difference between members and non-members is much stronger in countries where labor market institutions encourage self-selection.

Public Rhetoric

In 2003, the ETUC published a report on the approach of unions to immigration and ethnic discrimination. It took for granted that all of the national confederations it surveyed were relatively pro-immigration and anti-discrimination. This clearly holds for discrimination, but their positions on migration were less clear. Only seven of the 24 confederations they surveyed had recently campaigned for less restrictive laws, while sixteen had campaigned against discrimination (ETUC, 2003, pp. 90). In some cases, this may simply have been the result of a lack of salience for immigration, but it could also be because of divisions within the unions about the proper response. Over the last decade, though, unions across Europe have addressed the issue, which is not so central to political conflict in many countries, that taking a position is a necessary part of participating in politics.

Unions have many ways of addressing their members. While researchers are not often privy to internal union discussions, it is possible to examine the way unions use the media to shape the opinions of their members. We can see both normative and practical arguments at work in the public statements of unions. For instance, the ETUC, along with a number of NGOs issued a joint statement in 2007 (ETUC, Solididar and Picum, 2007). This statement began by taking a clear position:

All individuals residing on the European Union territory, regardless of their legal status, are human beings and as such are the subjects of fundamental human rights. When they are performing work, they are subjects of fundamental rights at work, as acknowledged in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, and in other international instruments. Any instrument aiming at reducing irregular migration must recognize and promote these rights.

The statement continues in this vein, though it contains a number of statements that could be interpreted as reactions to illegal competition, tying further immigration reform to employer accountability for compliance with all labor regulations. Similarly, the 2004 ETUC response to the Commission's Green Paper on economic migration emphasizes the Commission's failure to ground its analysis in fundamental human rights, but goes on to say that this grounding is important precisely because it prevents a two-tier labor market ETUC (2004).

The ETUC's 2013 Action Plan on Migration (ETUC, 2013) is justified on both practical and humanitarian grounds. Repeatedly invoking the importance of equal treatment for the maintenance of labor market standards, the argument the Executive Committee lays out is that most current policies fail to recognize the fundamental rights of migrants, which is both wrong in itself and contributes to the weakening of native workers' rights. This rhetorical strategy — arguing that native and migrant workers share the same basic interests — allows the ETUC to sit comfortably within the left-labor coalition that Watts (2002) identifies as a sometimes uncomfortable alliance. By focusing on an aspect of the economic impact of migration that would be improved through more immigrant-friendly policies, the ETUC acknowledges the concerns of many members without weakening the overall pro-migrant message.

National Confederations National trade union confederations strike a similar balance, though they tend to fall more on the pragmatic side, focusing on the importance of maintaining labor standards in the face of inflows of (often undocumented) migrants who often work in the informal sector. One of the most common refrains is that unions have the 'realistic' view, while opponents of immigration — especially those on the populist right — are naive to believe that these flows can be reversed. The national confederations in Belgium, France, Ireland, and the UK have all recently lobbied in favor of steps to regularize the status of undocumented migrants (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler, 2009, pp. 131), largely on practical grounds.

The Danish employment ministry recently conducted a survey of Poles living in Copenhagen. While the results are interesting in themselves, the ways in which the survey was described by the labor group are also interesting. In response to the survey, the LO (the Danish labor umbrella organization), emphasized the importance of one finding, which suggested that few Poles had been approached about joining trade unions, but most would be open to it (Landsorganisationen i Danmark, 2009). This echoes the account of Watts (2002), who also argued that labor movements in Europe would see immigrants as potential new members, rather than as competitors.

The British Trade Union Confederation, despite a legacy of protectionist activism in the post-war period and a calculated silence on migration issues into the 1990s (Jefferys, 2004), now "supports the freedom of movement of workers in the European Union and we support a managed migration system for those outside the EU, based on the principles of workers rights" (TUC, 2010). In an effort to demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of immigrants in Britain, the same organization has issued pamphlets in numerous languages to make the transition easier for migrants, and to promote their safety while at work. The easiest way to understand this willingness to promote immigration is through a solidarity account of union opinion.

In the wake of the recent Swiss referendum to restrict immigration, trade union officials took the side of the mainstream political parties and the main business confederation, providing many arguments for a 'No' vote. Rechsteiner, Rieger and Ambrosetti (2014) highlighted the parts of the referendum most problematic from the union leadership's point of view, saying that they opposed it "because it ran roughshod over the rights of migrants; because it weakened measures to protect wages and employment conditions; and because it essentially cast doubt on the bilateral accords with the EU." This argument

begins with a solidaristic claim and follows with an argument that is more in the competitive vein, acknowledging the economic trade-offs.⁶

North American Comparisons American unions, while frequently citing covert competition (a term I will use as shorthand for competition in the context of poorly enforced restrictions) as a reason for supporting immigration reform, have also continuously emphasized the importance of aiding immigrants for immigrants' sake. The top link on the AFL-CIO's immigration web site is a report documenting the importance of unions for immigrants' social mobility (Schmitt, 2010). The Change to Win Coalition is made up of a number of unions, the largest of which (SEIU) has a relatively large immigrant membership. In many of its public statements, Change to Win strikes a balance in its advocacy for immigration reform between preventing covert competition and promoting solidarity, beginning with a call for a path to legalization, emphasizing the importance of immigrant rights, and continuing with a series of arguments about the benefits for the native work force (see, for instance, Change to Win, 2010).

Canadian trade unions, too, use a combination of covert competition language and solidaristic rhetoric. Their arguments center on the concept of human rights, decrying the stronger position of employers relative to foreign workers. On April 13, one labor leader criticized the government for detaining Thai workers who had overstayed their visas. He said, "(t)his is the latest example that both the Harper government and the farm industry are both complicit in a system designed to exploit foreign workers and dispose of them," while an official at the Canadian Labor Congress criticized the Temporary Foreign Worker program under which those workers had entered, accusing the government of being "unabashedly proud this program is employer driven" (Congress, 2010). This is the rhetoric of a group that sees poorer immigrants arrayed with them against employers and against the Conservative government.

On the whole, then, it appears that the patterns identified by Watts (2002) generally hold for union elites. Recognizing that undocumented migrants and migrants on temporary labor contracts are unlikely to disappear, unions argue that freer immigration would strengthen the position of native labor, though there is an equally strong emphasis on solidarity and human rights. This rhetoric appears to be common across immigrant-receiving wealthy countries. There are (at least) two ways that this rhetoric could influence policy outcomes. First, it could influence policymakers directly, shaping their understanding of immigration or their beliefs about the constellation of forces for and against changes in current policy. Second, this rhetoric could influence union members, shaping *their* understanding of immigration and, ultimately, their choices in the voting booth.

However, demonstrating that leaders take a position in public is not sufficient evidence that they are communicating this message to members. In particular, while I have identified a few common themes in trade union statements, the extent to which this rhetoric is pursued in the workplace, in union halls, and in other places that union members may be influenced by their leaders, is unclear. If the public rhetoric and policy statements cited above do not resemble the kinds of arguments made in internal union discussions, then the differences between members and non-members on immigration may be negligible. Similarly, union members might ignore their leaders, preferring to develop their political opinions from mass media or other sources.

Elite-mass connections

Union elites are a subset of potential opinion leaders, or political elites whose positions or personal choices lead them to acquire more information about public policy and to communicate norms based on that information to others. The public opinion literature on opinion leaders is quite large, but the core of this argument is clear. According to Converse (1964, pp. 35)

⁶When explaining their failure to win the referendum, these same officials point out that illegal work practices such as unofficial wage garnishing are more common among migrants, suggesting that even a relatively open migration system cannot always solve the enforceability dilemma.

If it is true that the mass of less knowledgeable people rely upon informal communication from a few more informed people for cues about desirable or appropriate behavior, then the lines of behavior choices followed in politics might indeed show strong sociostructural patterns, even though many uninformed actors have little of the opinion leaders' coherent and organized understanding of why one behavior is more appropriate than another.

Union leaders fit this mold well. They have both professional and, often, personal commitments to the politics of labor relations, and they are therefore likely to pay more attention to issues like immigration than the typical member. If members believe that the leaders are honest or share their interests, they are likely to trust union elites over other potential opinion leaders.

The first key question, then, is whether union members trust their own leaders. The simple fact that union leaders are usually elected is certainly not sufficient to generate trust, as can be seen from any survey on trust in elected politicians. Empirical evidence on trust in trade unions is mixed. Indeed, Greene, Black and Ackers (2000) demonstrate that it can vary sharply even between two neighboring plants. However, their professional incentives usually mesh with the (economic) interests of their members, so members are likely to trust leaders' analyses of public policy in most cases, and are also more likely to embrace the positions taken by leaders than are non-members.

The second key question is whether union members receive policy messages from their leaders. If members attend regular meetings,⁷ this is, of course, an easy task. However, there are many other ways that unions communicate with members. They often have newsletters, web sites, and media-relations personnel to make their positions known. Particularly during political campaigns, they also go door-to-door to communicate endorsements and policy preferences. Together, these tools are probably sufficient to make sure that most union members understand the basic orientation of their leaders' positions, even if the details are less clear.

Survey Analysis

Given conflicting theories about the position-taking of union elites, the effect of union membership on support for open immigration policies remains an open question. To test the effects, I use the European Social Survey (ESS, 2012), examining the differences between members and non-members across twenty-eight countries and six survey round (running from 2002 to 2013). This survey asked respondents six questions concerning immigration⁸

- Should we allow many or few immigrants a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people?
- How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people?
- How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe?
- Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?
- [W]ould you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?
- Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

⁷Data on attendance at union meetings is scarce, but Rothstein (2001, pp. 223) reports that in the early 1990s, just over a third of Swedish employees had attended a meeting in the previous month.

⁸Round one includes additional immigration questions, but these six questions were asked across all six rounds, allowing us to compare the effect of unions across a wide variety of countries.

These six questions address different types of immigration attitudes, but are generally very closely related. They vary along two dimensions. First, they differ on whether their emphasis is the economic or cultural dimension of immigration politics and, second, they vary on whether they are asking about perceived impact or preferred policy. Table 1 displays this categorization.⁹

	Evaluation	Policy preference
Ethnic-cultural	Cultural impact	Different ethnicity
Ambiguous	Overall impact	Immigrants from poor countries
Economic	Economic impact	Same ethnicity

Table 1: This displays the six questions concerning immigration that are regularly asked in the ESS. The six variables are closely related to each other (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$), but can be conceptually distinguished on two dimensions: Whether the question asks for an evaluation of immigration's impact vs. a policy preference, and whether the question primarily raises economic vs. ethno-cultural concerns.

In order to facilitate comparison across variables, I rescale these variables from 0 to 1. Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of these and other variables used below. These are weighted using design weights for each country but not for country/population weights, so these are not 'representative' of the European population.

The pattern of means on the immigration scales meets our expectations. Respondents have a marginally more negative attitude toward migrants from poor countries (0.49) than those who are of a different race or ethnicity (0.51), but this difference is much smaller than that between these immigrants and those who share the same race or ethnicity as the country's majority (0.61). The European public also seems to evaluate the cultural impact (0.58) of migration more positively than the economic impact (0.50).

This pattern could be a genuine difference or it could be the result of social desirability bias (Malhotra, Margalit and Mo, 2011). If it is a genuine difference, then Europeans are more willing to embrace cultural diversity than we might, perhaps, have thought. If, on the other hand, this is about social desirability, this difference may not reflect underlying attitudes as clearly. Since survey respondents are often reluctant to appear racist, giving negative answers to a question about the cultural impact of immigration can be fraught. A key caveat for the analysis below, then, is that if this bias is of a different strength for union members and non-members, the results may not accurately measure the differential strengths of union effects on cultural and economic attitudes.

Across all six questions, union members are more positive (pro-immigration) than similar non-members. Figure 1 shows the output of OLS regressions¹⁰ with standard demographic controls and country fixed effects. It also displays the effect of one additional year of education on each of the variables for comparison. It shows that, across all six attitudes, unions have an impact similar to that of one year of education. Given the importance of education in the literature on immigration attitudes (Mayda, 2006; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014), an effect of a similar magnitude suggests that union membership is an important determinant of support for immigration.

Figure 1 also contains hints of a union's position as a cross-pressured group. The two weakest effects (and the only two that appear to be weaker than the effects of education) appear when the dependent variable contains an economic emphasis. In the first case, when asked whether immigrants who share the majority ethnicity should be allowed to move to their country, union members are weakly more positive

⁹It is true that the policy question about individuals from the same ethnicity may still raise cultural concerns, but since it is asked immediately after the question about individuals of a different ethnicity, the respondent is likely to perceive the question as downplaying cultural concerns.

¹⁰In all cases, ordered probit or logit regressions produce similar results.

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
Union	0	1	0.23	0.42
ESS Round	1	6	3.45	1.69
Year	2002	2013	2007.20	3.42
Urban	0	1	0.17	0.37
Rural	0	1	0.40	0.49
Log-Income	6.09	12.13	10.04	0.92
Education (Years)	0	56	12.26	3.98
Education (> Median)	0	1	0.44	0.50
Male	0	1	0.48	0.50
Age	13	103	45.95	18.25
Immigration Scale	0	1	0.53	0.21
Imm. Policy	0	1	0.54	0.26
Imm. Evaluation	0	1	0.52	0.20
Imm. Cultural	0	1	0.55	0.23
Imm. Economic	0	1	0.55	0.22
Imm. Poor	0	1	0.49	0.29
Imm. Same Race	0	1	0.61	0.28
Imm. Different Race	0	1	0.51	0.29
Imm. Better/Worse	0	1	0.50	0.22
Imm. Cultural Evaluation	0	1	0.58	0.25
Imm. Economic Evaluation	0	1	0.50	0.24
Variable				N
Countries				25
Country-Years				124
Respondents				236,667

Table 2: This table displays the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis below. Note that the number of respondents included in the models below is less than displayed here due to missing data and that I have excluded Israel, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

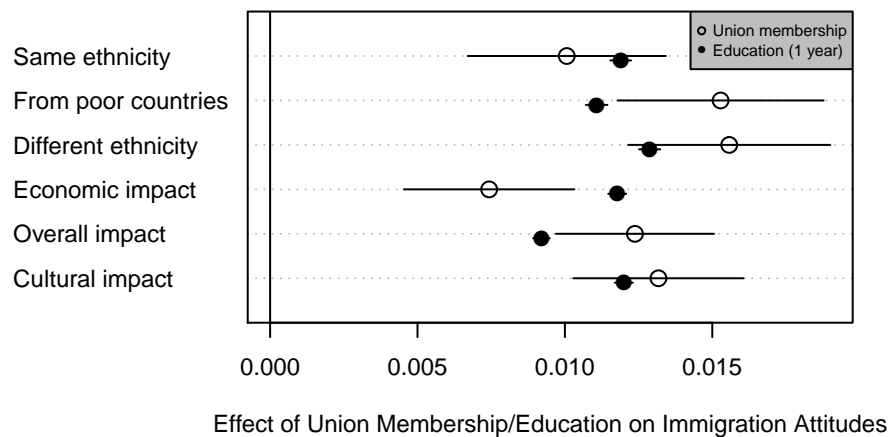


Figure 1: This shows the difference between the responses of union members and non-members on six immigration questions after controlling for education, income (logged), age, age², gender, living in a rural setting, being a native, survey round, and country fixed effects. For comparison, the coefficient on age at completion of education is also displayed for each question. Note that all dependent variables are scaled to run from 0 (least immigrant friendly) to 1 (most immigrant friendly).

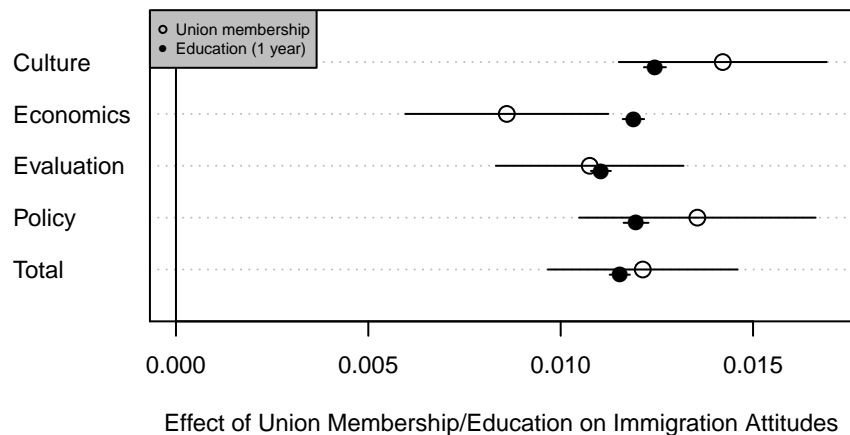


Figure 2: This shows the difference between the responses of union members and non-members on six immigration questions after controlling for education, income (logged), age, age², gender, living in a rural setting, being a native, survey round, and country fixed effects. For comparison, the coefficient on age at completion of education is also displayed for each question. Note that all dependent variables are scaled to run from 0 (least friendly to immigration) to 1 (most friendly to immigration).

than non-members. The effect is much stronger when asked to think about potential immigrants of a different race or ethnicity. Similarly, when asked to describe the economic impact of immigration, the difference between members and non-members is muted compared to the corresponding difference over the cultural impact. From Table 1 and the results presented in Figure 1, five logical combinations of immigration questions can be constructed. First, I construct a simple average of the six questions, each normalized to run from 0 (most anti-immigration) to 1 (most pro-immigration). This scale, which by construction also runs from 0 to 1, has a Cronbach's α of 0.88 in the full sample, suggesting that it measures a single general orientation toward immigrants fairly well.

Next, I divide Table 1 vertically, distinguishing between evaluations of immigration's impact on the host society on the one hand and policy preferences on the other. This yields two additional scales with fairly strong reliability measures ($\alpha = 0.85$ and $\alpha = 0.87$). Finally, I divide the table vertically, using the top row and the bottom row as scales measuring ethnic/cultural concerns and economic concerns, respectively. These two-item scales are also quite strongly correlated, though their reliability scores are substantially weaker (0.6 and 0.66).¹¹

Figure 2 compares the effect of union membership and education on the five scales discussed above. It shows that union membership is more strongly associated with cultural variables than with economic variables, and slightly more strongly associated with policy variables than with evaluations. This pattern is consistent with union leaders' public rhetorical positions. They recognize the economic tradeoffs, but for both practical and solidaristic reasons, they take a strong stand in favor of a more open policy.

This effect has been getting stronger over time. Figure 3 shows that mean effect of union membership on immigration attitudes was quite weak in the first round of the ESS (2002), and became stronger over time. This is consistent with the fact that almost all of the recent union rhetoric is strongly supportive of immigration, while that of the late twentieth century was less reliably pro-migrant.

The slight dip in the strength of the effect in the fifth wave, which took place at the height of the crisis (2010 and 2011), is also consistent with the results of Dancygier and Donnelly (2014). They showed

¹¹Eisinga, Grotenhuis and Pelzer (2013) caution against over-interpreting Cronbach's α with two-item scales, saying that they are likely to underestimate the reliability of such scales, and recommend using the Spearman-Brown formula, which in this case produces virtually identical results.

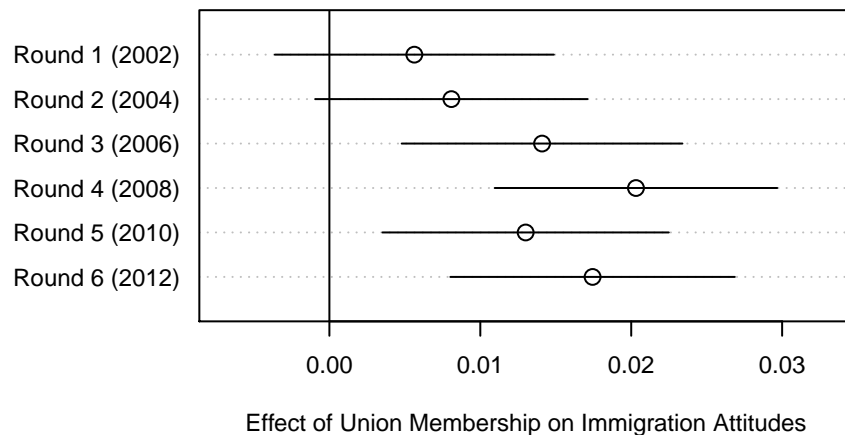


Figure 3: This shows the difference between the responses of union members and non-members on six immigration questions after controlling for education, income (logged), age, age², gender, living in a rural setting, being a native, survey round, and country random effects (with the coefficient on union membership allowed to vary at the country level). Note that the dependent variable is scaled to run from 0 (least friendly to immigration) to 1 (most friendly to immigration).

that the effect of the economic crisis on immigration attitudes was not to shift the level of support for immigration, but rather the composition, leading groups who are traditionally the ‘losers’ of globalization to turn against immigration somewhat (a turn that was, to a large degree, canceled out by increased support among other groups). Figure 3 though, suggests that even this moderate effect of the crisis may be diminished, since by the sixth round, the effect of union membership appears to be increasing again.

The time trend in the effect of union membership is statistically significant in a variety of hierarchical models.¹² Since the exact sample of countries changes year to year and survey round to survey round, these models (including that on which Figure 3 is based) allow the effect of union membership to vary by country. That the differences remain so stark suggests that trade unions have, over the last decade, either become more strongly committed to open immigration policies or have done a better job of convincing their members. It is certainly some combination of these two factors, but, given the findings of Haus (2002) and Watts (2002), it seems likely that the move toward favoring pro-immigrant policies had been mostly completed among European trade unions by the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the time trend depicted here is driven by more stable and convincing arguments by union leaders.

The problem of self-selection

The fact that union members are substantially more favorable toward immigration than similar non-members suggests that the pro-immigration message of union leaders is getting through to their members. However, it is also possible that union members join unions because they are ideologically left-leaning, rather than the other way around.¹³ If pro-immigration workers choose to join unions to further their political preferences, the results displayed in Figure 1 cannot tell us much about the effect of unions on attitudes.

The standard approaches for dealing with this challenge are to use demographic and attitudinal controls to account for the possibility of self-selection. Any set of controls requires, of course, that those

¹²Results available on request.

¹³Stegmueller and Becher (2104) deal with a similar challenge in the literature on unions and voter turnout, using US panel data to show that the effect of self-selection is real, but modest.

variables be observed. Since public opinion surveys are limited in the amount of information they can collect, simply controlling for all possible demographics in a ‘kitchen sink’ regression would still leave open the possibility of substantial omitted variable bias.

Using attitudes as controls to account for differences between members and non-members is likely to reduce this problem, but introduces another challenge. Since unions may affect attitudes other than those concerning immigration, controlling for a measure of ideology raises the issue of post-treatment bias (King and Zeng, 2006). If joining a union changes one’s ideas about politics, surely one of the things changed is left-right self-placement. The structure of causation among ideas that are all measured on the same survey at the same time simply cannot be determined with any certainty, and there are plausible theories suggesting the causal arrows could flow in a number of patterns.

In this section, I introduce an alternative method of detecting selection bias. I consider the effects of unions separately in countries where the economic, legal, and social incentives are strong enough to induce most eligible workers to join a union and those countries where such incentives are weaker. Using measures of collective bargaining coverage and union density from Visser (2011), I calculate the percentage of individuals covered by collective bargaining who are union members.¹⁴ Within the Western and Southern European immigration-receiving countries, this number, which I will call the density ratio (DR), ranges from 0.18 in France to slightly more than 1 in Cyprus.¹⁵

In many cases, the coverage of collectively bargained contracts in France and other low-density countries is extended to non-unionized firms and to non-members who work alongside union members. Unions in these countries solve the basic public goods problem¹⁶ by recruiting ideologically committed workers to join and run the union. Haus (2002) argues that

French unions operate more in the realm of ideas and are more radical in their vision. Their behavior is more ideational than that of their counterparts in the United States.

Thus, self-selection should be strongest in countries like France. On the other hand, where unions administer health insurance and pensions only to their members, and where reaping the benefits of collective bargaining requires joining the union, they take on the character of so-called ‘club goods,’ and most individuals will join the union for reasons that have little to do with politics. Here, union activists and the rank and file may well have substantially different opinions across a range of issues, including immigration.

To the extent that the effects identified in Figure 1 are stronger in the countries that rely on ideological commitment to recruit members, we have good reason to suspect that the relationship is driven by self-selection, rather than a true effect of union membership on attitudes. Figure 4 shows that the selection effect is strongest on economic questions. In countries where the selection effect is strongest (those with a low density ratio), the relationship between union membership and beliefs about the economic impact of immigration is much stronger than in countries where self-selection is likely to be weaker. The same is not true, however, for cultural attitudes, and is only weakly true for those indices that mix economic and cultural questions.

The fact that self-selection is a problem in estimating the impact of unions on economic attitudes but not for other aspects of immigration attitudes suggests that union activists (members in low DR countries, leaders in high DR countries) reject the simple supply and demand story of immigration and wages, preferring to emphasize the economic benefits. Since high DR effect in Figure 4 depicts the difference between non-members and a mix of member types, activists do not appear to be particularly successful in convincing the rank and file of the economic benefits of immigration. They do, however, appear to

¹⁴For reasons related to completeness, I use Visser’s “Adjusted Coverage” rather than “Coverage.” This decision does not affect the results displayed below.

¹⁵Within Western and Southern Europe, there is no country whose DR falls between Switzerland (0.54) and the United Kingdom (0.72). This is the break I use to delineate high and low DRs.

¹⁶For a discussion of the various ways unions solve the challenge of convincing workers to contribute membership dues and work for the management of the union and the collective bargaining process, see Olson (1971).

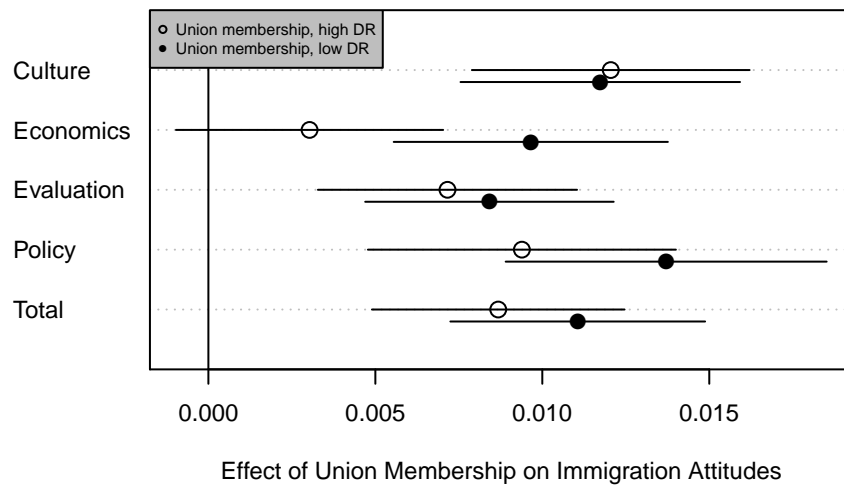


Figure 4: This shows the difference between the responses of union members and non-members on five immigration indices after controlling for education, income (logged), age, age², gender, living in a rural setting, being a native, survey round, and country fixed effects. Note that all dependent variables are scaled to run from 0 (least immigrant friendly) to 1 (most immigrant friendly).

convince members to ignore cultural arguments against immigration. A long literature on the role of unions in building a working class identity (e.g. Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Frymer, 2008) suggests that one of the key roles of unions is to emphasize class solidarity over racial or cultural cleavages. These results suggest that contemporary European unions are succeeding at this task.

Conclusion

The evidence presented above confirms the now conventional wisdom that trade unions in most of Europe have joined the pro-immigrant coalition, suggests that the content of the message (unambiguously in favor of migrants on non-discrimination grounds, ambiguous on economic grounds) has reached their members, and shows that this effect has become stronger over time. The magnitude of this effect is approximately equal to that of a year of education, an individual characteristic whose importance for immigration attitudes is unquestioned. Leaders of unions (and other interest groups) can take heart from these results. Despite a wealth of evidence on the transitory nature of political messaging and skepticism about the importance of opinion leaders in an age of mass internet access,¹⁷ their message does seem to get across to their members. Their preferences affect those of their members, giving them a way to shape the political process beyond the direct lobbying that is often seen as the key mechanism of influence.

What does this mean for research on public attitudes toward immigration? There are two important lessons to draw from these results. First, they suggest that scholars of public opinion in general, and public opinion toward immigration in particular, should pay more attention to groups that fall between the individual and the nation or state.¹⁸ The focus in past work has generally been on individual characteristics (age, education, income) contextual effects (local labor markets, regional concentration of migrants) or national effects (migrant population, unemployment rate). Union membership, when addressed, has

¹⁷Prior (2005) has provided good reason to be skeptical that increasing access to internet news and policy analysis will decrease the knowledge gap between the mass public and political elites, and his arguments apply just as well to opinion leaders and their followers.

¹⁸For examples of recent work emphasizing this need, see Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg (2014) and Donnelly (2013).

typically been treated as an individual characteristic. Explicitly tying this characteristic to the attitudes of union leaders allows us to theorize and examine a more complete causal chain.

In this respect, examining the change over time in the effects of union membership on attitudes — which is consistent with, if lagging, the change in union elite attitudes — allows us to better understand how attitudes are formed in context. A central debate in the political behavior literature turns on the reliability of survey responses as a measure of public opinion. The results here contribute to that line of thinking by embedding a survey response that falls between those often thought to be quite ephemeral or context-dependent (such as attitudes toward particular regulations) and those often thought to be much more stable (ideological self-placement). Though survey respondents socially embedded in a union are slow to respond to changes at the elite level, they do, in fact, tend to follow the leader.

The second important lesson for scholars of immigration politics is that the nuanced arguments unions seem to be putting forward on the economic effects of immigration produce weaker effects than the clear non-discrimination arguments that produce strong effects on cultural attitudes. This could be because economic messages are inherently harder to communicate, because unions are genuinely ambivalent about the economic impact of immigration, or because the nuanced message is simply harder to interpret. Future research should examine whether, and to what extent, strong, unambiguous economic arguments in favor of migration from credible sources¹⁹ produces clearer positive effects. The question of whether perceptions of economic interest are as susceptible to political messaging is an open, and important, one.

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¹⁹I am assuming that union leaders are typically trusted by union members. Other possible sources of this messaging include religious leaders, trusted politicians, and leaders of various organized interest groups.

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