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Evidence from a cross-national conjoint experiment

Anne-Marie Jeannet, Esther Ademmer, Martin Ruhs, Tobias Stöhr

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EUI Working Paper **RSCAS** 2019/73

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ISSN 1028-3625

© Anne-Marie Jeannet, Esther Ademmer, Martin Ruhs, Tobias Stöhr, 2019

Printed in Italy, October 2019

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Abstract

This article provides the first-ever analysis of the structure of public preferences for asylum and refugee policy, a highly politicized policy area that has attracted little scholarly attention to date. We first conceptualise the core dimensions of asylum and refugee policy and then conduct an original conjoint experiment with 12,000 respondents across eight European countries to examine how different policy designs impact on public support. Our results demonstrate that Europeans are generally committed to policies that provide protection to asylum-seekers and refugees but this commitment tends to be contingent upon policy features which allow for a means of control, namely through the implementation of limits or conditions. We find this pattern of preferences to be remarkably similar in both the old and more recent EU Member States that we surveyed. Our results imply that some aspects of the current model of the international refugee system are misaligned with the more control-based model that Europeans would prefer. We conclude by discussing our findings in the context of existing research and ongoing political debates about policy reforms.

Keywords

Asylum and refugee policy; policy preferences; Europe

Introduction*

Asylum and refugee policies around the world have faced considerable public scrutiny in recent years. The rapid increase in the global numbers of asylum seekers and refugees over the past five years (UNHCR, 2019) highlights the inherent volatility of the number of people displaced across borders and seeking protection in any given year. In some countries, especially in those experiencing large increases in inflows of asylum seekers and other migrants during the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015-6, this volatility has contributed to an acute sense of loss of control and to a public perception that asylum and refugee procedures are mishandled by governing institutions (Connor, 2018). As a result, political pressure has mounted to reform national and supra-national asylum and refugee policies.

Various policy reforms have been proposed, offering contrasting ideas about the meaning and scope of the right to asylum, resettlement of refugees from conflict regions, minimum standards of protection, assistance and cooperation with origin and transit countries, and responsibility-sharing across receiving countries (see, for example, Betts and Collier, 2017; Hathaway, 2018; UNHCR, 2018; Lücke et al, 2018). Some of these proposals include policies that would violate aspects of existing principles and international norms on asylum and refugees as set out in the 1951 Geneva Convention, to make them, as the proponents of these new policies argue, more suitable to deal with new realities (Collier 2016; Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2018).

Despite this increased public scrutiny and intense political debates, very little is known about what the public preferences are in this policy area, and about the extent to which there is a widespread willingness to move away from the status quo. While the scholarship on attitudes to asylum seekers and refugees has been growing in recent years, it remains much smaller than the large body of work on attitudes to immigration and immigrants in general (see Hainmuller and Hopkins 2014). A few landmark studies focus on the characteristics of asylum-seekers and refugees preferred by the public (Bansak et al. 2016; Hager and Veit forthcoming). Studies that investigate public preferences for asylum and refugee *policies*, however, are still rare, with a few notable exceptions that tend to examine specific aspects such as the redistribution of asylum seekers across host countries (Bansak et al. 2017; Heizman and Ziller forthcoming), the number of asylum claims that should be granted (Andersson et al. 2018; Hercowitz-Amir and Rajjman 2019), or how changes in inflows of asylum seekers affect existing residents’ attitudes and selected policy preferences (Hangartner et al. 2018). As a consequence, the current scholarly understanding of public preferences vis-à-vis asylum and refugee policies remains very limited. Importantly, to our knowledge, there is no existing research that explicitly recognizes and studies these public preferences through the prism of multi-dimensionality which, we argue, is crucial to this policy area.

To fill this gap, this article employs an original conjoint experiment to examine the structure of public preferences for asylum and refugee policy. We first conceptualise the core dimensions of asylum and refugee policy and then examine how different policy designs impact on public support. Our analysis focuses on Europe, the continent receiving the most applications for asylum during the global “refugee crisis” in 2015-16, and where we can also observe various national contexts. We conducted this experiment with 12,000 respondents across eight different population-based samples in Europe, covering Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. By employing this experimental research design, we have the unique ability to isolate the separate causal effects of particular features of asylum and refugee policy in garnering public support or opposition. Unlike previous observational research, the conjoint design helps us to minimize the possibility of social desirability bias in this policy area that is strongly subject to ethical and humanitarian considerations.

* This Working Paper is part of the MEDAM project (Mercator Dialogue on Asylum and Migration, <https://www.medam-migration.eu/en/>). 

Results based on nationally representative samples suggest that Europeans in these eight countries are generally committed to policies that provide protection to asylum-seekers and refugees but this commitment tends to be contingent upon policy features which allow for a means of control, namely through the implementation of limits or conditions. In contrast to the highly divisive political debates between European countries about how to reform asylum and refugee policies, we find remarkable consistency in public asylum and refugee policy preferences across the different countries we surveyed. In spite of some cross-country differences in public preferences, in each of the eight countries included in our study, the public tends to prefer asylum and refugee policies that feature limits and conditions over policy alternatives which either abolish protection or provide it unconditionally. Even in Hungary – which since the 2015 refugee crisis has become well-known for the government’s anti-refugee policy positions – the public supports policies that provide certain conditional and limited protections, rather than rescinding protection altogether.

This study makes several contributions. First, it provides the first-ever analysis of the public’s multidimensional preferences for asylum and refugee policy, a policy area that has attracted little scholarly attention to date. The few existing studies have provided a unidimensional understanding of public preferences in this policy area, such as how to allocate asylum seekers across host countries. In practice, however, asylum and refugee policies are inherently multi-dimensional, as they involve decisions on various aspects of the governance of the asylum process and the scope of the protection of refugees, as well as the different ways of cross-country cooperation and assistance. Our categorization and empirical analysis of multidimensional asylum and refugee policies take all these policy aspects into consideration, thus making an important conceptual and empirical contribution.

Additionally, we move beyond the common practice of thinking about public preferences for asylum and refugee policy in binary terms (i.e. ‘support’ vs. ‘oppose’). Our approach allows for non-binary policy choices, whereby asylum and refugee policies do not only vary according to whether or not they provide protection and assistance in certain policy dimensions but also according to whether and how they limit the general offer of protection by using limits and conditions. Exploiting our experimental design, we are able to contribute to the literature on policy preferences by considering how public support or opposition is contingent on the use of such policy controls, and thus on the overall design of the policy. Finally, our analysis also provides timely and relevant findings that can inform ongoing policy debates about how to reform asylum and refugee policies in Europe and beyond.

Conceptualizing Multi-Dimensional Asylum and Refugee Policies

We suggest that the most important dimensions of asylum and refugee policies relate to: 1) the right to apply for asylum; 2) the resettlement of already recognized refugees; 3) the return of asylum seekers whose applications for protection have been unsuccessful; 4) family reunification for recognized refugees; 5) how national governments work with supranational institutions such as the EU to govern the asylum and refugee process; and 6) the provision of financial assistance to so-called “first countries of asylum”, i.e. lower-income countries that host large numbers of refugees near conflict regions. Within all these dimensions, we differentiate between policy specifications that utilize limits or conditions and those that do not.

Our conceptualization builds on existing approaches to measuring asylum and refugee policies that can be found in the small existing research literature (see Hatton 2016; Helbling et al. 2017). Similar to existing approaches, we distinguish between policies regulating the admission/access of asylum seekers and refugees to the country on the one hand (dimensions 1 and 2), and the treatment and rights of asylum seekers and refugees after admission on the other (dimensions 3 and 4). Our approach differs by extending the scope to two policy areas that relate to governance (dimension 5) and financial assistance to lower-income countries hosting refugees near conflict regions (dimension 6). This allows us to cover the most important areas discussed in public policy debates on asylum and refugee protection over the past decade. Our conceptualization of asylum and refugee policies is thus informed by both academic

research and the proposals for policy reform that are currently debated around the world. Rather than focusing on preferences towards very specific policy proposals, we aim to focus on the basic principles underlying different refugee and asylum policies.

While our conceptualization of asylum and refugee policy applies to all high-income countries, the focus of the empirical analysis in this paper is on Europe. For this reason, we elaborate the following six policy dimensions below in the specific context of recent European policies and policy debates.

(1) Asylum

Countries that have ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention are obligated to examine applications for asylum from any non-citizen on their territory, without any numerical limits or conditions. However, there is no legal requirement for countries to facilitate legal travel and immigration to claim asylum. In practice, most high-income countries do not offer asylum seekers, especially those from lower-income countries, the opportunity to travel to their countries legally to apply for asylum. As a consequence, most of the world's forced migrants who are trying to claim asylum in high-income countries must do so by engaging in unauthorized crossing of national borders that often involves long and dangerous journeys across land or sea.

This policy dimension aims to capture the extent to which the right to apply for asylum (as stipulated in the Geneva Convention and also in European asylum laws) is respected or limited in some ways. Following the large increase in asylum applications in the EU in 2015 and 2016 – when applications exceeded 1.2 million per year, up from 431 thousand in 2013 – several European countries have openly debated restricting the right to asylum in one way or another. For example, Germany, which received almost half of all asylum applications made in the EU during 2015-16, began to discuss the introduction of annual limits (*'Obergrenze'*) on the number of asylum applications¹, while a joint 'vision statement' for reforming Europe's asylum and refugee policies published by the Austrian and Danish governments in November 2018 proposed to limit the right to apply for asylum to people fleeing from countries bordering the European Union. The Austrian-Danish proposal suggests that others would need to apply for asylum in the 'safe haven' that is closest to their home countries.²

(2) Resettlement

A second important policy dimension relates to the scale of resettlement facilitated by the overall asylum and refugee policy. Resettlement involves the transfer of refugees, whose refugee status has been determined by UNHCR, from a 'country of first asylum' (i.e. a host country in or near the region of conflict) to another state that has agreed to admit them. With 85 percent of the world's recognized refugees hosted by lower-income countries, resettlement to higher-income countries can, in theory, be an important tool for reducing global inequalities in the protection of refugees.

However, states decide about the scope and hence, the limits of resettlement. Currently, such limits are widely implemented: the global numbers of resettled people have typically been very small compared to the total number of refugees in the world. Resettled people constitute less than five percent of the global refugee population, and recent global trends have been downward.³ For example, in 2018, only 56,000 refugees were resettled, down from 65,000 in 2017 and an over 50% reduction from 2016 (126,000). Among EU Member States, resettlement has increased in recent years – from 8,000 in 2015 to 25,000 in 2018 – but it remains at a relatively low level. There is considerable between country variation in the EU: while a small number of countries (the UK, Sweden, France, and Germany) admitted

¹ See <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2018-02/grosse-koalition-obergrenze-koalitionsverhandlungen-spd-union>

² See <http://uim.dk/filer/nyheder-2018/vision-for-a-better-protection-system-in-a-globalized-world.pdf>

³ See <https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement-data.html>

most resettled refugees in the EU over the past few years, some EU countries such as Austria, Poland, Hungary, and Denmark did not allow any resettlement in 2018.⁴ Because the overall numbers are now so low, for the great majority of refugees in lower-income countries resettlement does not currently constitute a realistic legal pathway to protection in European or other high-income countries. The UNHCR has, for many years, been urging high-income countries to open up to more resettlement (see, for example, UNHCR 2019).

(3) *Asylum seekers whose applications for protection have been unsuccessful*

A fundamental question in asylum and refugee policies is how to deal with asylum-seekers whose applications have been unsuccessful. Under what conditions can and should they be sent back to their home countries? This is a critical and highly contested issue in Europe as more than half of applications for asylum in EU countries are unsuccessful (Eurostat 2018).

According to the international legal framework for refugees, states are bound to the principle of *non-refoulement*, which is a core principle enshrined in the Geneva Convention and forbids states to return failed asylum-seekers to countries where they are likely to face serious harm and danger. There is an ongoing debate about the extent to which some of the EU's current policies adhere to the principle of *non-refoulement*. For example, the EU's refugee deal with Turkey (European Council 2016), which stipulated that all new asylum seekers irregularly entering Greece from Turkey would be returned to Turkey, has been criticized for violating the principle of *non-refoulement* (e.g. Carrera, den Hertog, & Stefan 2017). Similarly, *non-refoulement* has been at the centre of recent controversies about rescue missions carried out by European boats in the Mediterranean (Cogolati, Verlinden, & Schmitt 2015).

(4) *Family reunification*

Next, we consider the rights that recognized refugees are given to bring their family members into the European country providing protection to the refugee. While nation states are not legally bound to guarantee family reunification to recognized refugees, family reunification is widely considered a *de facto* human right, the underlying humanitarian principle being that the family unit is deserving of protection, not simply the individual (Cholewinski 2002). Over the past few years, the regulation, limits, and conditions associated with family reunification for refugees have been key issues in public debates about immigration in many EU countries. EU laws, especially the EU Directive on family reunification, provide a framework for the regulation of family reunification but they still leave EU Member States considerable room for manoeuvre. In practice, national regulations vary across countries. They have become more restrictive in some EU Member States and some have started to introduce conditions such as requiring that individuals demonstrate that they can financially support their family members (see Council of Europe 2017 and 2018). Minimum income requirements are common in the regulation of family reunification of labour migrants, but international norms and EU laws encourage countries to waive such material requirements for refugees.

(5) *Governance*

A central question in the governance of the asylum process and refugee protection in Europe relates to the role of the European Union. Currently, the asylum process is mostly under the control of Member States. The Common European Asylum System specifies common minimum standards that asylum procedures must fulfil at the European level but the examination of asylum applications and the decision whether to grant or reject an application rests with Member States. There has been great variation across EU Member States in the number of asylum applications received, the length of the asylum process, and the acceptance rates of applications from asylum seekers from the same countries. In response, it has

⁴ See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tps00195&language=en>

been proposed that some aspects of policymaking on asylum and refugees should be shifted from the national to the EU level (see Lücke et al 2018). Those in favour argue that a centralized European agency would ensure more uniformity and fairness in the asylum process by standardizing the asylum process and the criteria for obtaining protection. Advocates of greater centralization of European asylum processes (supported by greater joint financing) have also suggested that it may help ease the burden on the countries that currently receive most asylum seekers.

(6) Financial assistance to low income countries hosting refugees near conflict regions

A sixth important dimension of a country's overall asylum and refugee policy relates to how much and what types of economic and financial assistance it provides to 'first countries of asylum' in or near conflict regions. Providing financial assistance to non-EU countries hosting large numbers of refugees is an important policy tool. A number of European political leaders have advocated a radical paradigm shift in Europe's asylum and refugee policies, away from protecting refugees in Europe to assisting first countries of asylum near conflict regions to protect refugees and facilitate their economic and social integration in the host country (see, for example, Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration 2018). The justifications for this approach typically include the argument that those refugees who make it to Europe are not among the most vulnerable, and that it would be significantly cheaper to help protect and integrate refugees in lower-income countries near conflict regions rather than in Europe (e.g. Betts and Collier 2017).

In addition to the question of how much financial assistance should be provided to first countries of asylum, a key policy question relates to whether and how this assistance should be conditional on these countries' efforts to help control migration to Europe. For example, under the EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement made in 2016, the EU provides 6 billion Euros in assistance to Turkey to help with the protection and integration of refugees in Turkey, and in exchange for a range of measures, including stepped-up coast guard activities that help reduce onward migration of refugees.

Empirical Approach

To examine the structure of public preferences for asylum and refugee policy, we draw on an original conjoint experiment. Conjoint experiments are particularly useful for studying public preferences towards multi-dimensional policy issues. Rather than asking respondents to assess and rate certain aspects of policies independently of one another, conjoint experiments require respondents to make a series of constrained choices between pairs of hypothetical policy options that differ across several dimensions that make up the overall policy. Since the features of the policy dimensions are fully randomized across each respondent, it is possible to identify the relative causal impact of the different policy features of these dimensions on public support for the overall asylum and refugee policy. Moreover, a conjoint design minimizes social desirability bias, which is of concern when surveying respondents about sensitive issues such as refugees and asylum-seekers. It does so by minimizing the ability of respondents to select a response they believe to be politically correct (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto 2015), as the policy options vary across several dimensions.

We conducted a fully randomized choice-based conjoint experiment that was fielded online by the survey company Respondi in May 2019 in eight European countries: Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. The countries have been selected on the basis that they represent a variety of experiences with refugees and asylum seekers, cover several geographic areas of the European Union, and include a wide variety of labour market, welfare, and cultural institutions. These countries are also among the most populous countries in the European Union, also making our overall sample more representative of overall European public preferences. In each country, we conducted a survey using a nationally representative sample of individuals (n=1500) who are 18 years of age or older.

As the design of the conjoint experiment is central to our analysis, it is important to explain it in some detail. After a short introduction that explained the exercise and briefly defined the terms *asylum-seeker*, *refugee*, and *resettlement* (for details, see Table A4 in the appendix), individuals participating in the survey were given five conjoint tasks, consisting of two policies each. This means that, over the course of the experiment, each participant evaluated ten randomly generated policies. In each of the five conjoint tasks, respondents were presented with two policies side by side which differed randomly in their policy features across six policy dimensions. The policy dimensions presented in the conjoint experiment, and the various policy features that are randomly assigned within each dimension, were informed by our conceptualization of multi-dimensional asylum and refugee policy discussed earlier in this paper. Each of the six dimensions could take on two or three possible features, which are all listed in Table 1. An example of a conjoint task as it appeared in our survey can be found in Figure A6 in the appendix. The order in which the dimensions were listed was randomized for each of the respondents.

Table 1. Experimental policy features, by six policy dimensions of asylum and refugee policy

Policy Dimension	Randomly Allocated Experimental Features
Asylum Applications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anyone can apply for asylum in [YOUR COUNTRY] <u>without annual limits</u>. 2. Anyone can apply for asylum in [YOUR COUNTRY] until an <u>annual limit is reached</u>.
Resettlement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>No resettlement</u> of United Nations-recognized refugees to [YOUR COUNTRY] 2. <u>Low resettlement</u> of United Nations-recognized refugees to [YOUR COUNTRY] (1 person per 10000 citizens per year, i.e. [country specific population]). 3. <u>High resettlement</u> of United Nations-recognized refugees to [YOUR COUNTRY] (2 or more persons per 10000 citizens per year, i.e. [country specific population]).
Return to Harm	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refused asylum-seekers are <u>never</u> sent back to countries where they could face serious harm 2. <u>In some cases</u>, refused asylum-seekers can be sent back to countries where they could face serious harm.
Family Reunification	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognized refugee <u>can always</u> bring his/her spouse and children 2. Recognized refugee can bring his/her spouse and children <u>only if refugee can pay for their cost of living</u> 3. Recognized refugee <u>cannot</u> bring his/her spouse and children
Decision-making	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Each EU country</u> makes its own decisions on asylum applications within its territory. 2. <u>A centralised European Union agency</u> decides on applications for asylum for all EU countries
Financial solidarity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. [YOUR COUNTRY] provides <u>unconditional</u> financial assistance to non-EU countries that host refugees. 2. [YOUR COUNTRY] provides financial assistance to non-EU countries that host refugees <u>only if</u> they help reduce asylum seekers coming to Europe. 3. [YOUR COUNTRY] provides <u>no</u> financial assistance to non-EU countries that host refugees.

In each conjoint task, respondents were asked to make their policy choice in two ways. First, respondents had to make a binary choice about which policy they preferred. In our analysis, a policy takes on the value of 1 if the person chose the policy in a conjoint task or 0 if the person did not choose the policy. The binary choice constrained respondents to make trade-offs and decide between the two policies they faced. Second, respondents were asked to rank their support for each policy on a scale from 1 (highly

unsupportive) to 7 (highly supportive). These ratings can be used in robustness checks to compare regression coefficients for specific policy components to the experimental estimates of policy features from the conjoint. Moreover, by comparing preferences according to both ratings and the binary conjoint choice, we can identify individuals who were inattentive (e.g. because they gave inconsistent answers) and whose choices may thus decrease data quality.

Immediately following the five conjoint tasks, the survey asked respondents a series of questions about their age, gender, education, political orientation, preferred scale of immigration, and political trust. The precise wording of all these questions can be found in the Supplemental Information in the appendix. The order of these questions was randomly assigned although they always followed the conjoint tasks.

Following Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) we analyse the results of the experiment by computing the average marginal component effects (AMCEs). The AMCE represents the average difference in the probability that a policy is supported when comparing two possible features within the same policy dimension, where the average is taken over all possible combinations of other policy dimensions (Hainmueller et al. 2014, p.11). This is estimated by regressing an indicator for whether the respondent chooses a given policy on the various dimensions of the policies that are listed above.

The unit of analysis is the rated policy, meaning that we have 120,000 observations in our models. Each of the respondents (n=12,000) has made five choices, each of which included two different policies. When computing the AMCEs, we follow standard practice and apply cluster-robust standard errors at the respondent level to correct for possible within-respondent clustering. In all our analyses, we use entropy-balancing survey weights to correct for sampling error.

The number of times each policy feature (i.e. a possible value that a dimension can take on) has been shown in an experimental task is shown in Figure A1. As expected for a large sample size such as ours, the differences in the number of times that different features have been shown are small. By design, features of the policy dimensions that have three possible features were shown less often than features in policy dimensions with only two possible features. Regardless, due to our large sample size, the experiment was designed to have sufficient power.

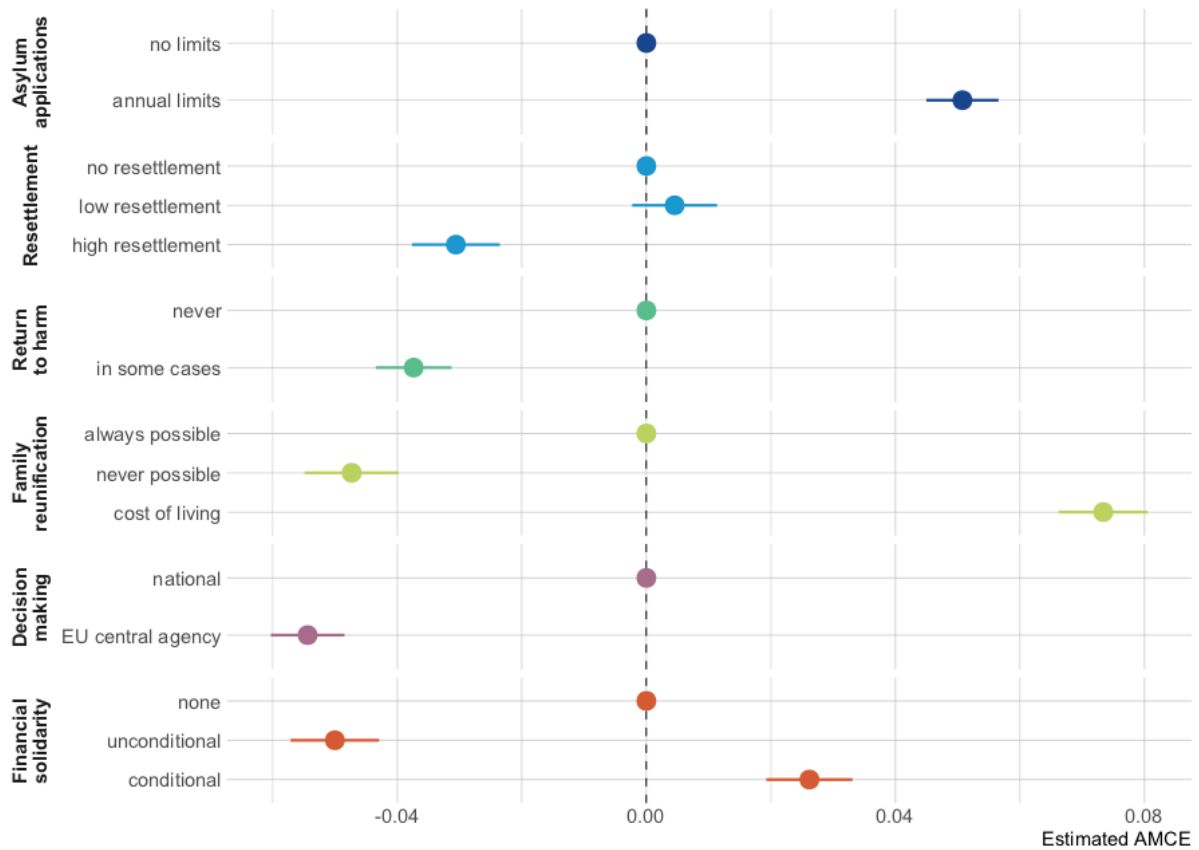
Results

The Effects of Policy Features on Support for Asylum and Refugee Policy

We begin by examining what types of asylum and refugee policies are supported or opposed by our European respondents. Figure 1 shows the results of our conjoint experiment. It displays average marginal component effects (AMCEs) to indicate the effects of policy features on the probability of accepting an asylum and refugee policy relative to the dimension's reference category. Figure A2 in the Appendix shows the marginal means for all policy features across the six dimensions, including the reference categories.⁵ The dots indicate point estimates and the bars indicate the 95% confidence intervals around those points. The dots that do not have confidence intervals indicate the reference categories for each policy dimension. The reference category for each policy dimension is meant to capture the closest approximation of the current status quo in asylum and refugee policy.

⁵ One of the advantages of marginal means (MMs) over AMCEs is that MMs do not depend on the choice of reference category. In a forced choice design such as ours, where respondents need to choose exactly one of the two policies they are shown, a person randomizing their choice would select each policy feature with a probability of 50 percent. A marginal mean of, for example, 55 percent indicates that policies that include this particular feature are selected with a probability of 55 percent. The difference compared to other features can be interpreted independent of the choice of reference category (for more discussion, see Leeper et al, forthcoming).

Figure 1: Effects of policy features on the probability of accepting an asylum and refugee policy



Note: The effects of the policy features on the probability of accepting the asylum and refugee policy. Dots indicate point estimates with 95% confidence intervals from linear (weighted) least squares regression. Those on the zero line without confidence intervals denote the reference category for each policy dimension.

Our results suggest that Europeans are generally committed to providing protection to asylum-seekers and refugees, meaning that they do not systematically prefer the most restrictive policy feature in each dimension. For example, policies that return refused asylum seekers to situations where they could face harm *reduce* public support for the asylum and refugee policy when compared to policies which never return refused asylum-seekers to such situations (AMCE=-0.037 meaning that public support for the asylum and refugee policy is reduced by about 4 percentage points). Similarly, policies that do not provide any opportunities for family reunification for recognized refugees reduce public support when compared to policies that always allow family reunification (AMCE=-0.047).

However, our results also suggest that Europeans' commitment to providing asylum and refugee protection is contingent upon policy features which allow for a means of control, namely through the implementation of limits or conditions. As shown in Figure 1 above, along several dimensions, the public is most supportive of policy features which include limitations and conditions without fully eliminating opportunities for protection. For instance, when it comes to family reunification, policies that require refugees to cover the cost of living of their family members are significantly preferred to family reunification without this condition. (AMCE=0.074). Similarly, the public is more supportive of policies that condition financial assistance on these countries' efforts to help reduce the number of

asylum-seekers coming to Europe than to policies that provide no financial assistance at all (AMCE=0.026) or that provide unconditional financial assistance (AMCE=-0.050). While respondents have not penalized policies that include low levels of refugee resettlement, they have penalized policies that include high resettlement: these policies are 3.1 percentage points less likely to be chosen than policies that include the baseline of “no resettlement”.

Underlining the focus on limits and conditions, policies which place annual limits on the number of asylum applications are significantly more supported than those that do not apply limits (AMCE=0.051). Finally, the issue of whether asylum-seeking is governed at the national or the EU level has an important impact on public preferences. Policies that involve an EU central agency for processing and deciding asylum applications in Europe are significantly more penalized than policies where asylum assessments and decisions are made by national governments (AMCE=-0.054).

Country-level Results

Remarkably, people prefer similar types of asylum and refugee policies in all the eight European countries we surveyed. Figure 2 reports the AMCEs for each country separately (and Figure A3 in the Appendix shows the marginal means for all policy features across the six dimensions, including the reference categories). In almost all countries, there is a clear preference for decisions on asylum applications to be made by national government rather than a centralized European agency. Regarding the types of policies that are preferred, we find that the public systematically prefer policies that feature controls and conditions over policy alternatives that either abolish protection or provide it unconditionally, with few exceptions. As shown in Figure 2, respondents in all countries place a premium in terms of their support on policies that place annual limits on asylum-seekers over those that do not feature limits and, in almost all countries, penalize policies which feature high levels of refugee resettlement. Moreover, in almost all countries, the public places a premium on policies that feature conditional family reunification for recognized refugees. Most countries also have publics that support policies that provide conditional financial support to non-European countries near or in conflict regions.

Figure 2: Effects of policy features on the probability of accepting an asylum and refugee policy, by country (estimated AMCEs)

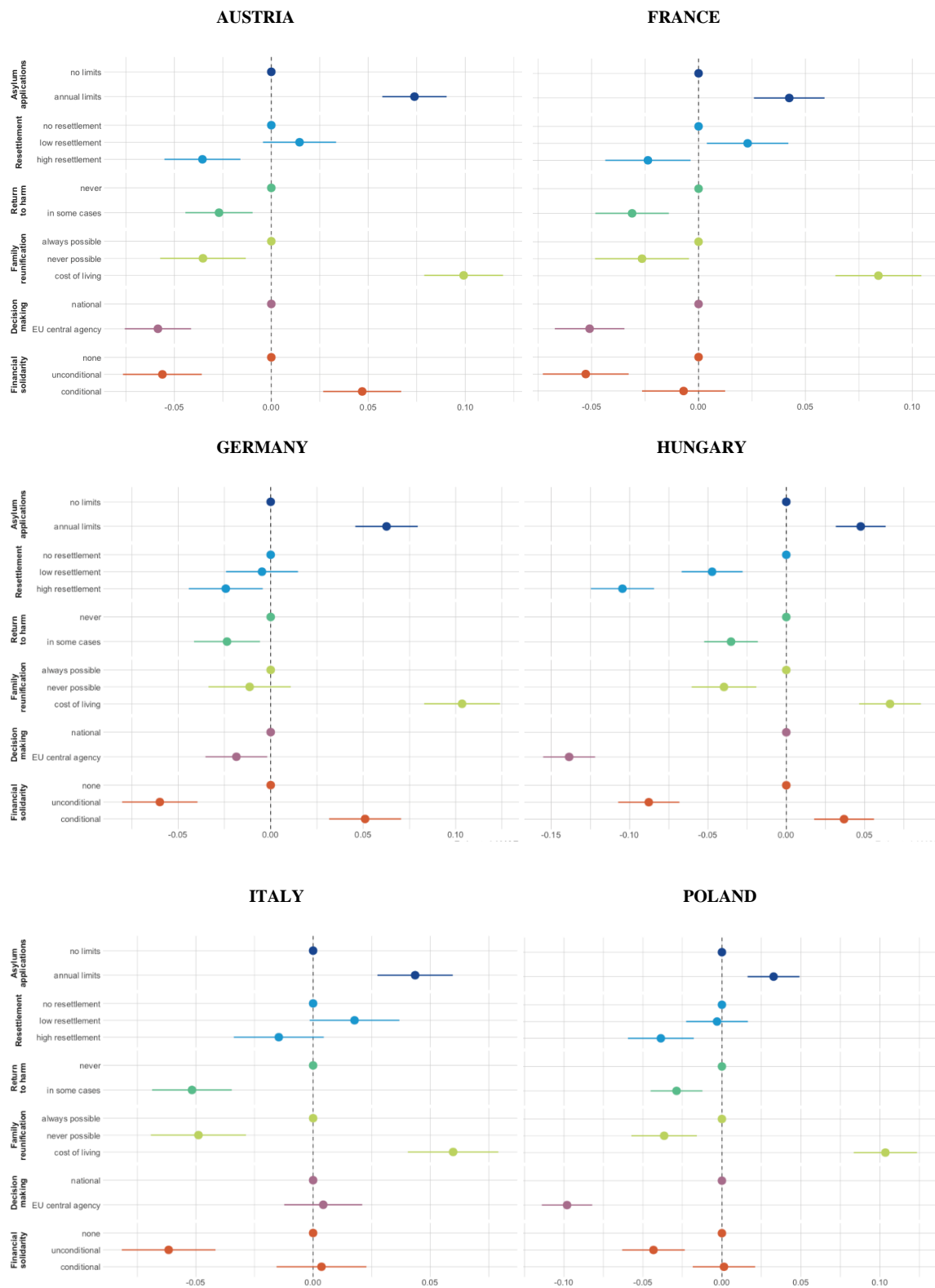
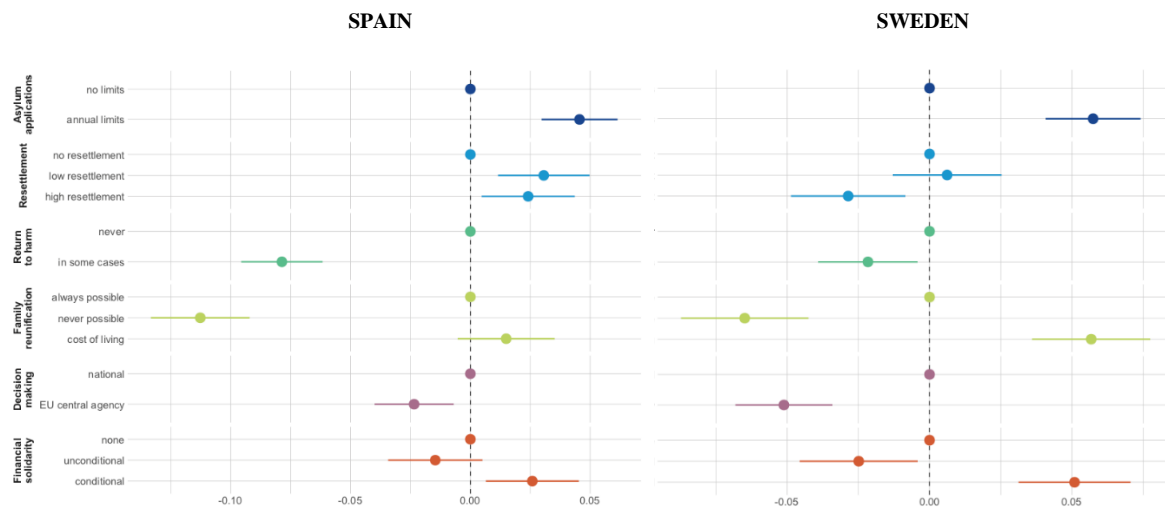


Figure 2 (continued): Effects of policy features on the probability of accepting an asylum and refugee policy, by country (estimated AMCEs)



Note: The effects of policy feature on the probability of accepting the asylum and refugee policy. Dots indicate point estimates with 95% confidence intervals from linear (weighted) least squares regression. Those on the zero line without confidence intervals denote the reference category for each policy dimension.

We also observe a strong commitment to upholding certain principles of protection for asylum seekers and refugees across the countries in our study. None of the countries in our study favour policies that feature returning refused asylum seekers to places where they might face serious harm. This is true even in Hungary – which since the 2015 refugee crisis has become notorious for its government’s anti-refugee policy positions: Hungarians are significantly more likely to penalize policies that feature returning refused asylum seekers if they might face serious harm. Moreover, in almost all countries, the public penalizes policies that feature the abolition of family reunification for recognized refugees.

Despite these commonalities across European countries, there are still some differences: For instance, in Hungary the public penalizes both high and low resettlement. In contrast, people in Spain place a premium on policies that include low or high levels of refugee resettlement. In a few countries there is no premium for conditional financial assistance to non-EU countries hosting refugees compared to no financial solidarity (France, Italy, and Poland). In Spain, the public does not give a premium to policies that provide conditional family reunification nor does it penalize policies for providing unconditional financial assistance to low-income countries. Finally, in Italy there is no penalty for policies where a central European agency assesses and decides asylum applications in Europe. This study is not intended to analyse the causes of these differences across countries. Our research design allows us only to speculate that these country differences could be attributed to a range of issues including, for example, the heterogeneous exposure to the “refugee crisis” in 2015-16, historical experiences with immigration, welfare state generosity, the state of the national economy, and various other socio-cultural differences.

Robustness

We have subjected our findings to a series of robustness checks. First, Table A1 in the appendix displays the results when we include additional controls (individuals’ attitudes towards immigration, age, education level, political orientation, and their trust in EU and national institutions, for details see Table A2) in our analysis of how different policy features across the six dimensions affect support for asylum and refugee policy. As the table indicates, the direct AMCEs remain mostly unaffected by additional controls and only sometimes decrease somewhat in absolute value. All statistically significant results

remain so throughout. These results show that our experimental estimates are remarkably robust across all six policy dimensions to the inclusion of additional control variables at the individual level. Among other things, this confirms that the experimental setup has successfully randomized policy features across different individuals, thus underscoring the internal validity of the results.

Conjoint tasks can be cognitively taxing on respondents because they require a certain degree of concentration. Typically, we would expect fatigued respondents to choose a random policy package, thus creating a bias towards non-effects. Still, there could be other heuristics at play such as stronger reactions to particular policy features. To reduce the risk of bias from survey fatigue we restricted the number of tasks to five per individual, which is well within the number of tasks that a respondent can complete before survey sufficing downgrades response quality (Bansak et al. 2018). To help participants sufficiently focus on the conjoint tasks, we required them to participate only on a computer and not on a smart device such as a tablet or cell phone. In addition, we analyse whether estimated preferences change as more tasks are conducted to ensure that any remaining form of fatigue does not affect our results strongly. The estimates reported in in Figure A4 in the Appendix show no statistically significant changes in estimates. Survey fatigue thus does not seem to pose a problem within our experiment. If anything, it biases our results towards insignificance.

While our results can be interpreted as internally valid, the results have to be interpreted subject to our choice of applying equal weights for each country (due to the similar sample size in each of the countries included in our analysis). To arrive at the estimates for the preferences of an average citizen across the eight countries, we reweighted the results using the size of the represented population in each country (see Table A3). The results are shown in Figure A5 in the appendix.

Discussion and Conclusion

The protection of asylum seekers and refugees has become one of the most politicized and contested public policy issues in many high-income countries, yet there has been no research on the structure of public preferences for asylum and refugee policies. We find that Europeans are supportive of policies that provide protection to asylum-seekers and refugees but this support tends to be contingent upon policy features which allow for a means of control, namely through the implementation of limits or conditions. Our research design allows us to examine simultaneously the separate impacts of multiple dimensions of policy on public preferences, revealing that Europeans generally prefer to uphold protections for individuals who face persecution but in a more controlled way, using limits and conditions, than is currently the case. These general findings are remarkably consistent across the different European countries included in our study.

Our findings urge the current scholarship to move beyond a simplistic continuum of restrictive vs. permissive policy preferences for asylum and refugee policy. While scholars have certainly acknowledged that asylum and refugee policies are inherently multidimensional (see Helbling et al. 2017), the study of public preferences in this policy area has remained remarkably unidimensional. Our study goes beyond existing approaches to demonstrate that public preferences tend to opt for an alternative path which neither endorses the unlimited and unconditional provision of rights and protections nor the other extreme of abandoning them entirely. The alternative path that emerges from public preferences attempts to reconcile both the provision of protection for asylum seekers and refugees while maintaining a certain degree of control through policy instruments such as limits and conditions. This finding also has relevance for the larger body of literature on immigration policy preferences in general, where a great deal of scholarship has focused on what migrant characteristics the public prefers, such as skills, gender, labour market status, or ethnicity rather than on public preferences for the multidimensional policies and procedures which govern migrants' admission and integration.

It seems then that some aspects of the current model of the international refugee system are misaligned with the more control-based model that Europeans would prefer. For example, an annual

limit on the number of asylum seekers would be incompatible with the 1951 Geneva Convention which most high-income countries (including all EU countries) have ratified. While public policies do not always reflect public preferences, in light of the recent politicization of asylum and refugee policy across European countries our results raise questions about the political sustainability of some aspects of the status quo of international asylum and refugee policies. Our findings also demonstrate, however, that policy-makers have considerable room to manoeuvre in terms of public preferences.

The findings of this paper challenge the conventional understanding that Europeans are hopelessly divided over asylum and refugee policies. Across all the European countries in our study, including those countries whose governments have been more hostile to accepting refugees such as Hungary or Poland, we find no evidence of widespread public support for policies that eliminate protection and assistance for refugees. Contrary to the impression created in public debates in many European countries, our findings from all eight countries suggest that there *is* a basis for garnering public support across Europe for asylum and refugee policies that provide protection and assistance but, to achieve this, our results indicate a need to consider different policy designs that make greater use of limits and conditions.⁶

Looking ahead, our findings raise many questions for future research. For example, an important issue for future analysis relates to the potential interactions and trade-offs between preferred policy features across different dimensions of asylum and refugee policies. Are individuals who prefer policies that include a limit on the annual number of applications for asylum more likely to express support for policies that include more generous family reunification policies? In other words, are public preferences characterized by trade-offs between the quantity and quality of protection offered to asylum seekers and refugees? Given their emphasis on the multidimensionality of policy issues, conjoint survey experiments would be particularly suited to address such questions.

⁶ As our study was designed to examine support for basic policy principles of asylum and refugee protection (such as *non-refoulement*) rather than specific policy features (such as an annual limit on the number of asylum applications), we argue that the implications of our analysis for policy debates relate to the use of limits and conditions in general rather than to the use of any of the specific restrictions analysed in our paper.

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Appendix: Supplemental Information

Table A1. The Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) of Asylum and Refugee Policy Features on Public Preferences, with increasing numbers of controls

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	0.5286 ***	0.5286 ***	0.5286 ***	0.5286 ***	0.5286 ***
	(0.0043)	(0.0043)	(0.0043)	(0.0059)	(0.0067)
Asylum Applications: Baseline = No Limits					
Asylum Applications: Annual Limits	0.0508 ***	0.0508 ***	0.0508 ***	0.0508 ***	0.0508 ***
	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)
Resettlement: Baseline = No Resettlement					
Resettlement: High resettlement	-0.0306 ***	-0.0306 ***	-0.0306 ***	-0.0306 ***	-0.0306 ***
	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)
Resettlement: Low resettlement	0.0045	0.0045	0.0045	0.0045	0.0045
	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)
Return to Harm: Baseline = Never					
Return to Harm: In Some Cases	-0.0374 ***	-0.0374 ***	-0.0374 ***	-0.0374 ***	-0.0374 ***
	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)
Family Reunification: Baseline = Always possible					
Family Reunification: Cost of Living	0.0734 ***	0.0734 ***	0.0734 ***	0.0734 ***	0.0734 ***
	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)
Family Reunification: Never Possible	-0.0473 ***	-0.0473 ***	-0.0473 ***	-0.0473 ***	-0.0473 ***
	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)
Decision making: Baseline = National					
Decision making: EU	-0.0544 ***	-0.0544 ***	-0.0544 ***	-0.0544 ***	-0.0544 ***
	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0028)
Financial Solidarity: Baseline = None					
Financial Solidarity: Conditional	0.0262 ***	0.0262 ***	0.0262 ***	0.0262 ***	0.0262 ***
	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)
Financial Solidarity: Unconditional	-0.0500 ***	-0.0500 ***	-0.0500 ***	-0.0500 ***	-0.0500 ***
	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)
Controls for EU and national trust	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Controls for attitude towards migration	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Controls for education & age	no	no	no	yes	yes
Controls for liberalism	no	no	no	no	yes
N	128210	128210	128210	128210	128210

Notes: *** and ** indicate statistical significance at the 1% and 5% level, respectively. Standard errors cluster at the individual level. Estimates are average marginal component effects (AMCEs). Results are weighted with individual-level weights to provide national representativeness. All participating countries are weighted equally. Due to the experimental setup, adding control variables does not affect estimates and only changes the intercept slightly. For information about how the variables are measured, see Table A2. Coefficients on the controls are below 0.001 in absolute value.

Table A2: Definitions of control variables

National government trust: “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. Please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust national government institutions“. Answer scale: Entirely trusting, Somewhat trusting, A little bit trusting, Somewhat distrusting, Entirely distrusting. This item is included in Table A1 as a linear variable.
EU trust: “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. Please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust European Union institutions“. Answer scale: Entirely trusting, Somewhat trusting, A little bit trusting, Somewhat distrusting, Entirely distrusting. This item is included in Table A1 as a linear variable.
Attitude towards migration: “Do you think the number of immigrants in [YOUR COUNTRY] nowadays should be:” Answer scale: Increased a lot, Increased a little, Kept the same, Decreased a little, Decreased a lot. This item is included in Table A1 as a linear variable.
Age: “How old are you?” Answer scale: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-70. This variable is always included as a factor, i.e. separate dummy variables for each level.
High skill: “What is the highest educational level that you have attained?” This is included as a dummy. No formal education; Incomplete primary school; Complete primary school; Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type; Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type; Incomplete secondary: university-preparatory type; Complete secondary: university-preparatory type; Some university-level education, without degree; University-level education, with degree. In the models in Tables A1, we include a dummy variable taking the value one for the latter two levels.
Liberalism: “Which of the following comes closest to describing your political views?” Answer scale: Very conservative, Moderately conservative, Neutral/centrist, Moderately progressive/liberal, Very progressive/liberal, None of the above, Don’t know/Not sure. To reduce the number of different levels, we aggregate these values in the following four groups: Conservative, Neutral/Centrist, Progressive/liberal, None/Don't know/Unsure. These are then included as a factor, i.e. separate dummy variables for each level.

Table A3: Approximate population size represented by the experiment

Country	Population
Austria	7,551,861
France	54,812,530
Germany	71,615,384
Hungary	8,360,507
Italy	52,379,121
Poland	32,204,231
Spain	39,659,680
Sweden	8,328,959
Notes: Adult population on January 1, 2018 from Eurostat. Partly estimates.	

Table A4. Definitions of Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Resettlement, provided to respondents at the beginning of the survey

In the survey, we use the terms “asylum seekers”, “refugees”, and “resettlement.” It is important to be clear about the different meanings of these terms.

An “asylum-seeker” is someone who enters your country to ask for protection, but whose application for protection has not yet been decided by your government. If their application is unsuccessful, the person is considered a “refused asylum-seeker.”

If an asylum-seeker’s application for protection is successful, he or she is given the formal status of a “refugee.” This means that “refugees” are formally recognized to be in need of protection.

“Resettlement”: Instead of people coming to [YOUR COUNTRY] to apply for asylum, the process of resettlement involves the transfer of people who are already recognized “refugees”, from a non-EU country that hosts large numbers of “refugees” (e.g. in “refugee” camps) directly to [YOUR COUNTRY]. In contrast to the asylum process, where your government considers and decides on whether the application for protection is successful, under resettlement it is the United Nations that has decided and granted the formal status of a “refugee”.

Figure A1. Display of frequencies of policy features within and across policy dimensions

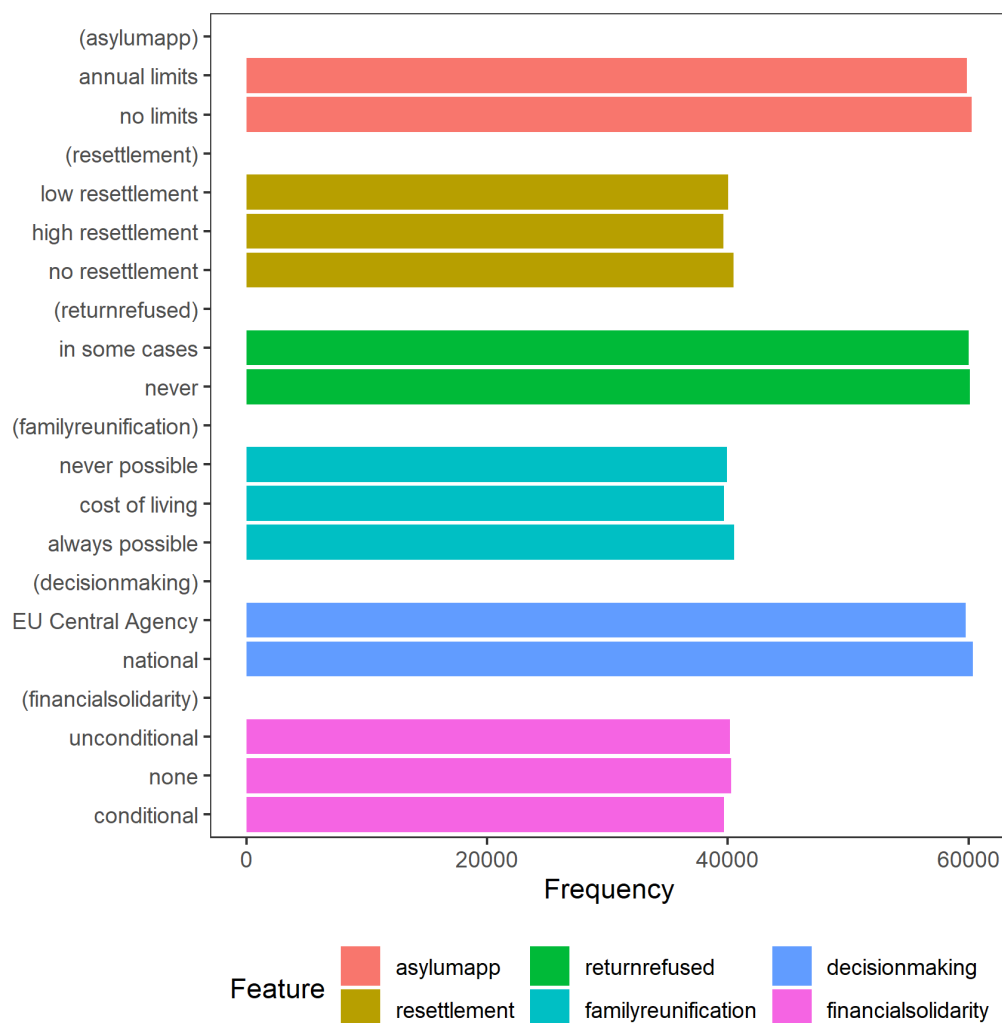


Figure A2. Marginal Means, all countries

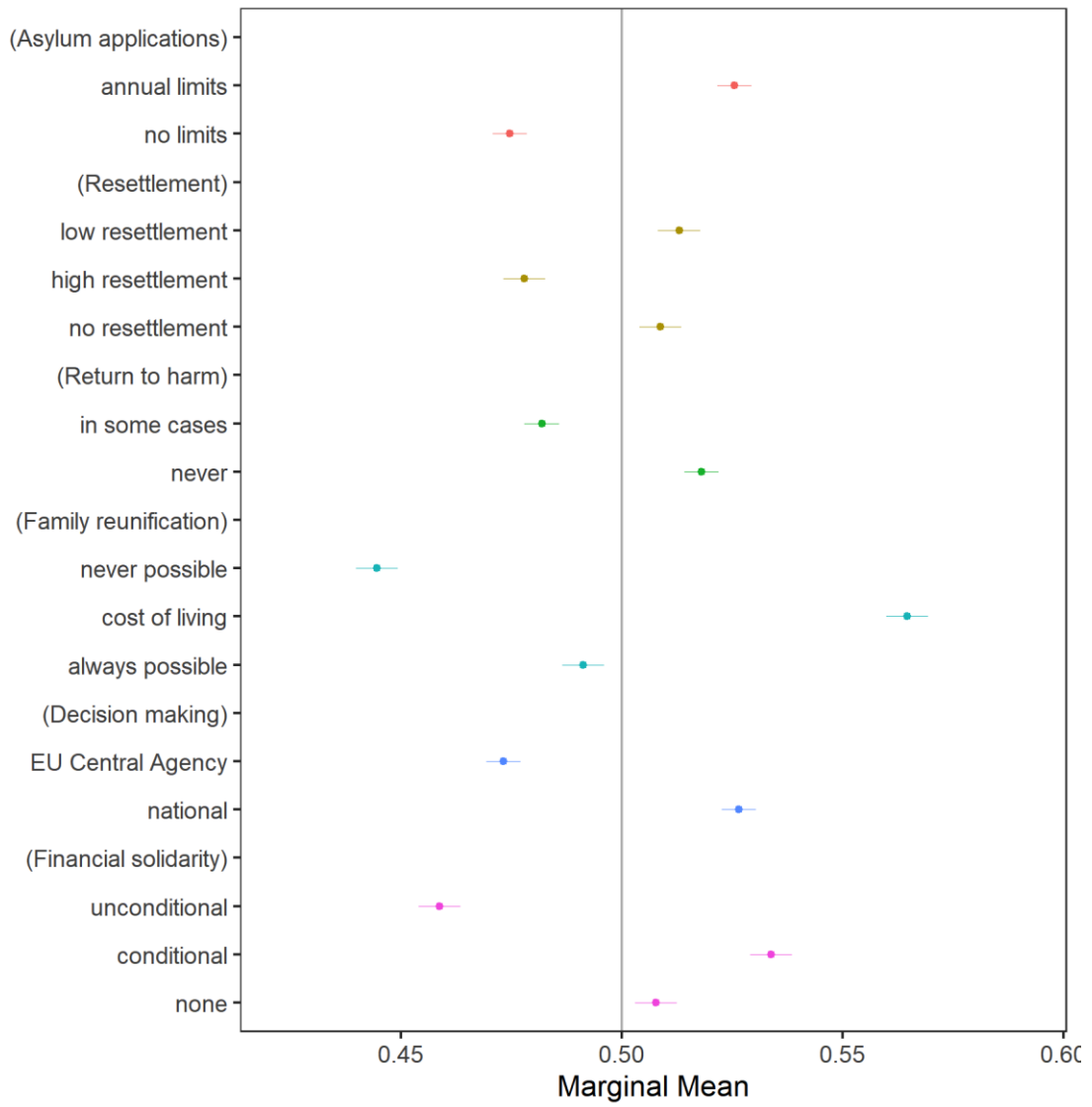


Figure A3: Marginal Means for individual countries

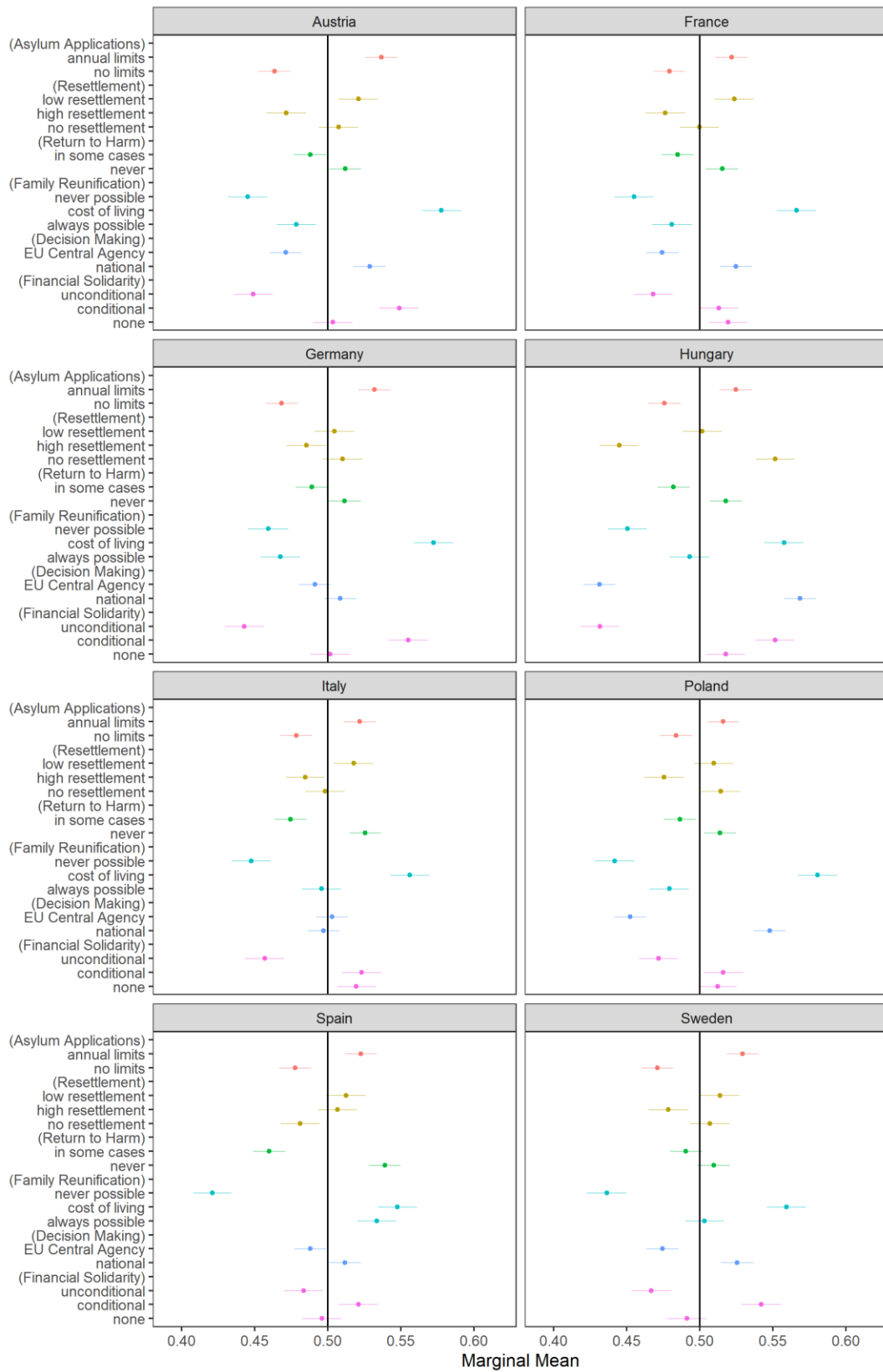
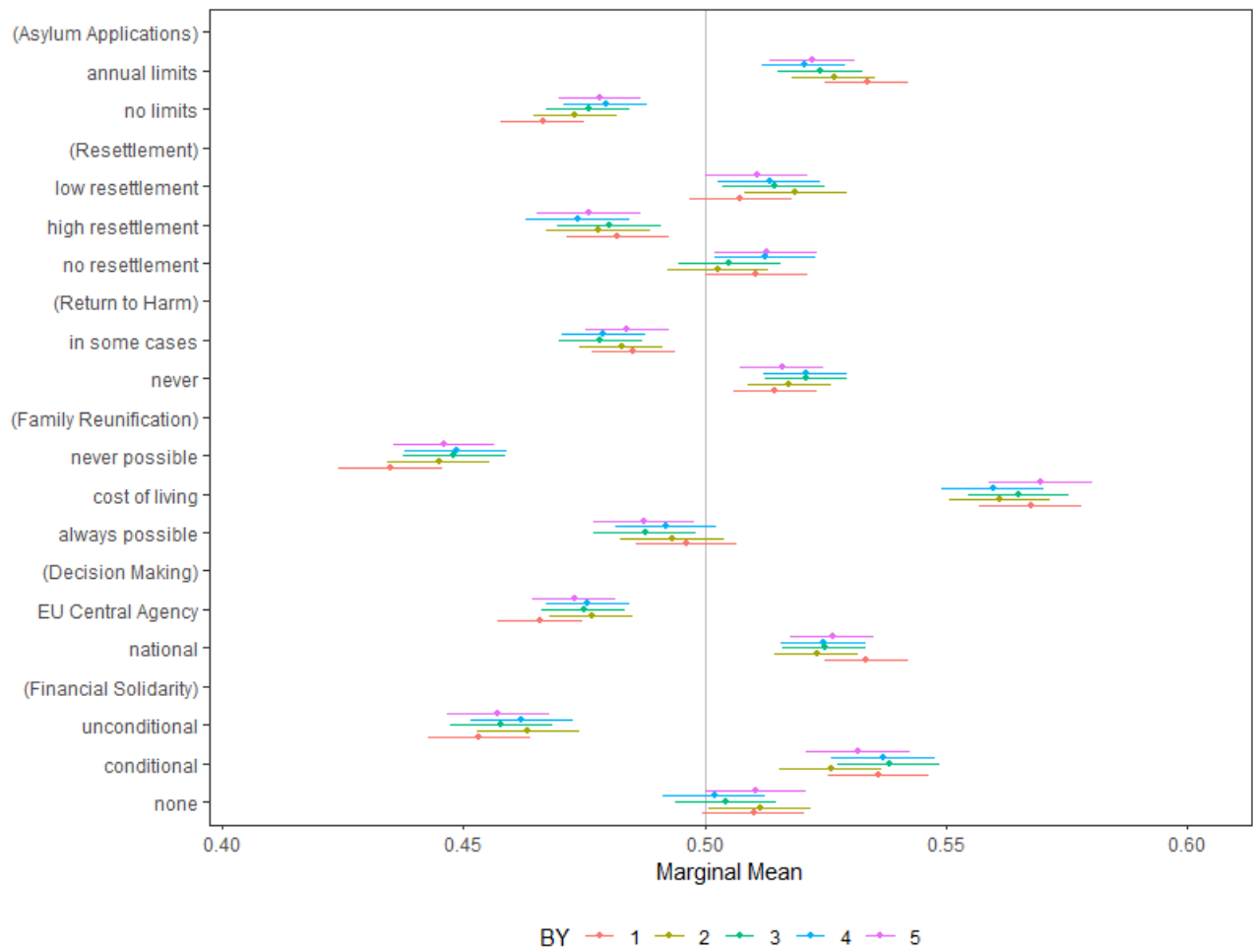
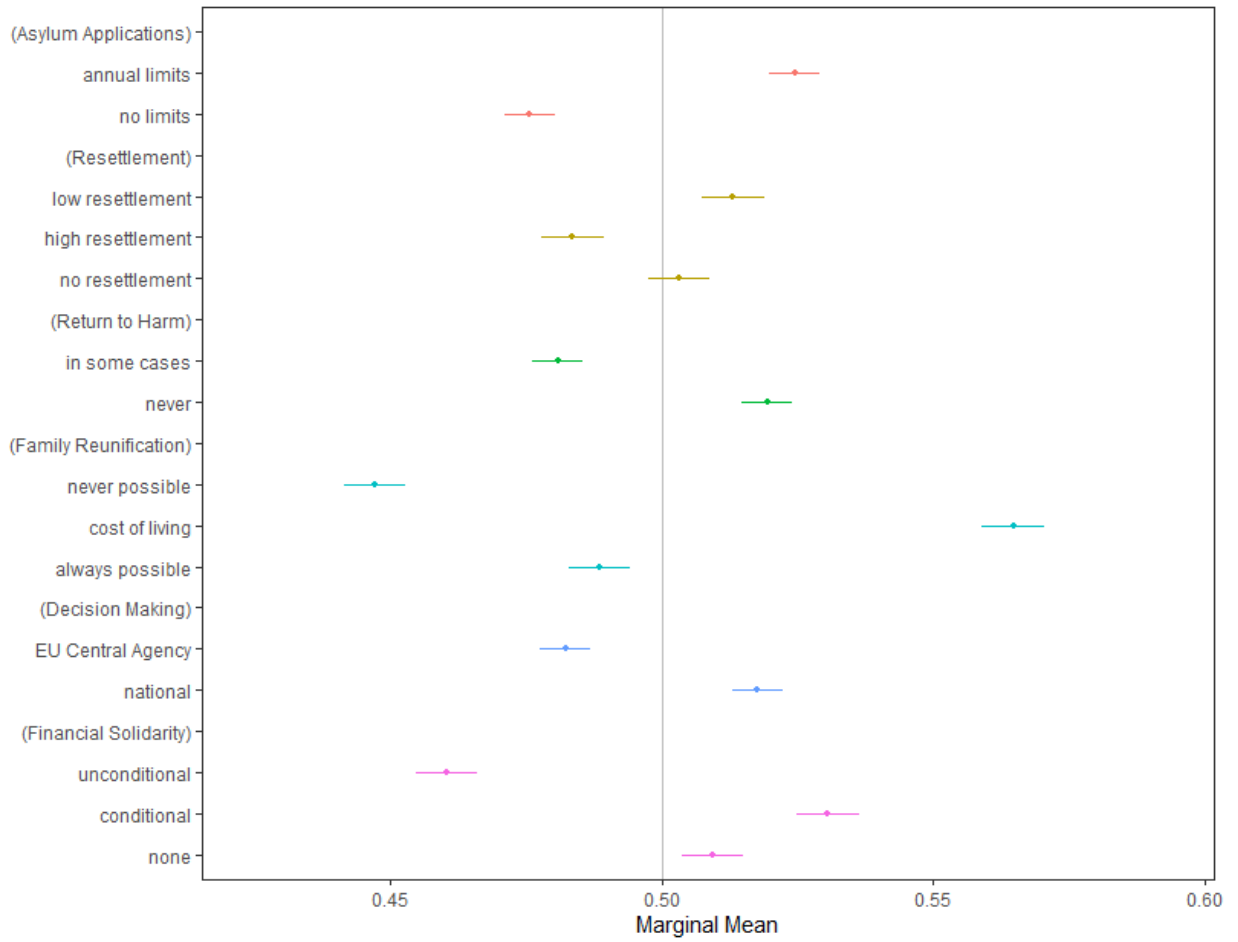


Figure A4: No worrying evidence of survey fatigue



Notes: Reporting results from separate analyses based on the task number, i.e. whether this was the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth conjoint task for an individual. Specification otherwise as in the rest of the paper.

Figure A5: Marginal means using population-weighted results



Note: Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. Standard errors cluster at the respondent level. Respondents reweighted using individual weight and size of adult population in the respective country (see Table A3).

Figure A6. Sample Conjoint Task (Germany)

	POLITISCHE OPTION A	POLITISCHE OPTION B
Familienzusammenführung für anerkannte Flüchtlinge	Ein anerkannter Flüchtling kann seine(n) Ehepartner(in) und Kinder <u>nicht</u> mitbringen	Ein anerkannter Flüchtling kann seine/ihre Ehepartner(in) und Kinder <u>nur mitbringen, wenn der Flüchtling für deren Lebenshaltungskosten aufkommen kann</u>
Asylanträge	Jeder kann in Deutschland Asyl beantragen, <u>ohne jährliche Höchstgrenzen</u>	Jeder kann in Deutschland Asyl beantragen, bis eine <u>jährliche Höchstgrenze</u> erreicht wurde
Rückkehr von Asylbewerbern, deren Anträge abgewiesen wurden	Abgelehnte Asylbewerber werden <u>nie</u> in Staaten zurückgeschickt, in denen Sie einen ernsthaften Schaden erleiden könnten	Abgelehnte Asylbewerber werden <u>nie</u> in Staaten zurückgeschickt, in denen Sie einen ernsthaften Schaden erleiden könnten
Finanzielle Unterstützung für Nicht-EU-Staaten	Deutschland bietet Nicht-EU-Staaten, die Flüchtlinge aufnehmen, <u>nur</u> dann finanzielle Unterstützung, wenn diese helfen, die Anzahl der Asylbewerber zu reduzieren, die nach Europa kommen	Deutschland bietet Nicht-EU-Staaten, die Flüchtlinge aufnehmen, <u>nur</u> dann finanzielle Unterstützung, wenn diese helfen, die Anzahl der Asylbewerber zu reduzieren, die nach Europa kommen
"Resettlement" anerkannter Flüchtlinge	<u>Es gibt viel</u> "Resettlement" von durch die Vereinten Nationen anerkannten Flüchtlingen direkt von an Konfliktregionen angrenzenden Nicht-EU-Staaten nach Deutschland (2 Personen oder mehr pro 10.000 Staatsbürger pro Jahr, d. h. 16.600 Flüchtlinge)	<u>Es gibt kein</u> "Resettlement" von durch die Vereinten Nationen anerkannten Flüchtlingen direkt von an Konfliktregionen angrenzenden Nicht-EU-Staaten nach Deutschland
Entscheidungen über Asylanträge	<u>Jeder EU-Staat</u> trifft eigene Entscheidungen in Bezug auf Asylanträge in seinem Hoheitsgebiet	<u>Eine zentralisierte Agentur der Europäischen Union</u> entscheidet Asylanträge für alle EU-Staaten

Von den zwei vorgestellten politischen Optionen, wählen Sie bitte die eine aus, die Sie persönlich lieber in Deutschland umgesetzt sehen würden.

	Politische Option A	Politische Option B
Ich persönlich würde folgende Option bevorzugen:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>