WORKING PAPER

Emigration narratives: what migrants believe and why it matters

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Abstract

Why do some people choose to migrate whereas others do not? Why are some willing to do so via irregular channels and some unwilling? Given the salience, uncertainty, complexity, risk and novelty of migration—as well as its emotive and value-driven nature—we can expect narratives to play a powerful and rich role in emigration decisions. This article uses the Swiss-Subsaharan Migration Network's S-SAM Survey – Health, Migration, and Uncertainty (Adetutu et al, 2021), which asks individuals in major origin countries—Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa—about their migration plans and narrative beliefs amongst other things. In line with findings elsewhere, around 90 percent of the population of each country has some level of aspiration to migrate, though only small percentages would be willing to do so irregularly. Planned destination countries and methods of irregularity are shown to vary. The article then shows the extent to which twenty narratives are believed by various groups and their—in some cases—large effects on migration decisions. Future research should test these and other narratives via experimental studies.

Keywords

Introduction

Why do some people choose to migrate and some people not? Why are some willing to do so via irregular channels and some unwilling? Answering these questions is not purely an academic exercise. Correctly identifying causes allows us to design better interventions to achieve migration policy objectives such as "safe, regular, and orderly migration". Moreover, the scale of migration as a policy issue has grown exponentially and will likely do so further in coming decades, making it one of the defining political issues of the twenty-first century. Although scholars have made several advances in explaining migration—broadly defined and regarding specific categories therein—our explanatory ability remains limited. Scientifically, this is more problematic given the theoretical consequences for understanding human behaviour *in toto* and across all of the sciences that advances in the specific, timeless, yet increasingly important and prevalent topic of migration an offer.

This study introduces the explanatory factor of narratives and belief in them. It builds on recent scientific advances in understanding the behavioural importance of narratives and suggests that their importance in migration decision-making is likely large, perhaps even beyond that of their role in immigration attitudinal formation, which is even more regularly cited by international organisations, academics, NGOs, etc. (Dennison, 2021). To describe belief in narratives and test their explanatory power on migration behaviour—both regular and irregular—this study makes use of a novel data source: the Swiss-Subsaharan Migration Network (S-SAM)'s *S-SAM Survey – Health, Migration, and Uncertainty* (Adetutu et al, 2021), the data of which was generously given to the author for the purposes of this artcle. The survey asked representative samples of Kenyans, Nigerians, and South Africans—three major origin countries of migrants in the Euro-Mediterranean region (and destination countries in their own right)—about their migration aspirations, plans, and preparations, along with scores of further questions on their perceptions of migration, including their belief in 20 common migration narratives. The use of this survey facilitates the broader goal of this study: to provide the richest understanding of the relationship between narrative belief and migration behaviour to date.

The article proceeds as follows: First, we briefly overview academic findings on the causes of variation in migration behaviour and narratives, respectively, building on recent work (Dennison, 2022; 2021). Second, we describe the data used in more depth. Third, we overview several aspects of the data: first, migration propensies including aspirations, plans, and preparations and desired countries of destination; second, we consider willingness to migrate irregularly and which methods of irregularity are planned; third, we look at the migration calculus in terms of stated motives, acknowledged push factors, and perceived challenges; finally, the analyses moves on to narratives, both describing the extent to which 20 narratives are believed and then modelling their effects on migration and irregularity. Finally, the article concludes and discusses next steps for research and practice.

Literature

The determinants of emigration

Academics have devoted substantial effort into understanding the causes of variation in emigration (Carling and Collins, 2018; Tjaden et al, 2018; see Dennison, 2022, for review). This literature lead Black et al (2011: S5) to produce a theoretical model of the decision to migrate (see Figure 1 below) that combines macro contextual factors (politics and economics, but also environmental, social and demographic issues) with the individual's socio-demographic characteristics and 'intervening obstacles and facilitators'.

At the micro-level, socio-demographic findings are relatively uncontentious: being male, youthful, educated, urban, single, and having a migrant background increase one's chance of migrating (see Hiskey et al., 2014; Migali and Scipioni, 2018). At the meso-level, factors are numerous, though the most investigated is probably access to migrant networks, leading to heightened informational, logistical, and social support, along with diminished perceived risk (e.g., Bertoli and Ruyssen, 2016; Migali and Scipioni, 2018). Other correlated elements involve geographical and cultural proximity to the country of destination (Dao et al., 2018; Mai, 2005) and the use of social media (Dekker and Engbersen, 2013). At the macro-level, economic development has been shown to relate to migration as a so-called inverse U-curve, so that likelihood rises up to a certain point-—as of 2018 around $6000 GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP; i.e. the level of Angola, Uzbekistan, or Vietnam) before falling again (Esipova, Ray and Pugliese, 2011; Migali and Scipioni, 2018; Dennison, 2022). Other macro factors include the quality of the democratic system, access to public services, safety, corruption, and conflict (Van Dalen and Henkens, 2007; Dustmann and Okatenko, 2014; Begović et al., 2020; Hiskey et al., 2014). "Pull factors"—some of which are simply the inverse or other side of "push factors" (e.g. cultural proximity)—include the demand for labour (Sirojudin, 2009) and improved living conditions, freedoms, education, medical care, and security (Mohamed and Abdul-Talib, 2020).

Psychological factors have been somewhat overlooked in the literature, which particularly fails to take into account internal motivational differences between individuals (Dennison (2022; 2020). Hiskey et al (2014: 93) also note that 'very little work exists on the cognitive process that precedes the actual act of emigration'. That said, there has been work showing the effects of emotions and desires (Carling and Collins, 2018); diverse values and expectations of where those values will be realised (de Jong, 1999), norms (de Jong, 2000), identity (Tharenou, 2010), personality (Frieze and Li, 2010), and willingness to bear the psychic costs of cutting old ties and forging new ones (Massey et al, 1993). Boneva and Frieza (2021: 477) show that those who migrate tend to be 'more work-oriented and to have higher achievement and power motivation, but lower affiliation motivation and family centrality'. Berlinschi and Harutyunyan (2019: 831) show that migrants are more optimistic and less risk averse, along with several political psychological findings. Self-efficacy and trust have also been shown to increase one's chances of migrating (Hoppe and Fujishiro, 2015; Tilly, 2007). Overall, Dennison (2022) shows that, 12 MENA countries the most prevalent factors are youth, university education, being male, and stress levels as well as negative economic and political perceptions, being unmarried, trust in social media, remittances, and low religiosity. Notably, economic factors such as unemployment and income are shown to rarely have an effect. The determinants of being willing to emigrate without papers are fewer and distinct: gender and lower income especially as well as lower education and negative economic and political perceptions.

On narratives

In addition to the above factors, narratives are highly likely to affect migration decisions. Dennison (2021) states that 'Narratives are regularly cited by migration policymakers and communicators as some of the most important determinants of public attitudes and behaviour regarding migration and a particularly powerful source of our perceptions and misperceptions'. He defines narratives as: *selective depictions of reality across at least two points in time that include a causal claim*. Such narratives are (1) Necessary for humans to make sense of and give meaning to complex reality; (2) Generalisable and applicable to multiple situations, unlike specific stories; (3) Distinct from related concepts such as frames (which do not necessarily include a dynamic component; see Goffman, 1974) and discourses (broader and used to separate that which is normal from that which is not; Hajer and Versteeg, 2005); (4) Implicitly or explicitly normative, in terms of efficacy or justice; (5) Essentially limitless in number, but with few gaining widespread popularity. Dennison (2021: 9) brings the literature explaining the spread of narratives together to produce a theoretical framework based on the salience, uncertainty, complexity, risk and novelty of migration—as well as its emotive and value-based content (on emotions Dennison, 2023a; on values Dennison, 2020; on salience

Dennison, 2019).

Given the salience, uncertainty, complexity, risk and novelty of migration—as well as its emotive and value-driven nature (on emotions Dennison, 2023; on values Dennison, 2020; on salience Dennison, 2019)—we can expect narratives to play a powerful and rich role in emigration decisions.

Data

To test the role of narratives in affecting migration decisions—and understanding the nature and causes of migration moreover—we make use of the *S-SAM Survey – Health, Migration, and Uncertainty* (Adetutu et al, 2021), the data of which was generously given to the author for the purposes of this article and will be made open access soon. The survey seeks to better understand the role of health, uncertainty, and other factors in migration. For the purposes of this study, we focus on its questions on narratives, migration behaviour and various motivations and challenges. The migration behaviour questions are based on those of Gallup (see Migali and Scipioni, 2018). The survey was carried out in Kenya, Nairobi, and South Africa (see Table 1). The survey was carried out in the frame of the Swiss-Subsaharan Migration Network (S-SAM) and is a collaboration of many network members. The dataset's codebook states that 'To approximate a random sample, soft quotas were used for: gender and age group. Only respondents aged 18+ were included in the survey, and a GeoIP filter was in place to ensure respondents are located in the country. Speeders who took less than one third of the median completion time were removed.' For further details on the dataset including contacts, see the project's website.[1]

Table 1: Data collection

Country	Begin	End	Observations
Kenya	2021-04-14	2021-05-25	1775
Nigeria	2021-04-15	2021-05-31	1775
South Africa	2021-04-14	2021-05-21	1775

Analyses

Migration propensities: aspirations, plans, and preparations

Migration propensity overall and by country

We now consider three questions that collectively measure one's propensity to migrate based on the three steps of aspiration, planning, and preparation. The questions measuring each of the three steps are as follows: Aspiration: Would you like to someday live in another country?; Plan (if yes to aspiration): Will you try to go to another country within the next five years?; Preparation (if yes to plan): Have you done any preparation for this move?.[2] As such, the entire sample falls into one of four groups: (1) those with no aspirations, (2) those with aspirations to migrate but who do not plan to within the next five years, (3) those with plans to but who have not made preparations; and (4) those who have made preparations. The distribution of these responses overall and by country is displayed in Table 2. The distributions are highly similar across the three countries with around half stating that they have plans to leave in the next five years but have not made preparations, around a third (with significant variation by country) stating that they have prepared, and only very low combined percentages stating that they have no aspirations or that they have aspirations but have made no plans. These figures are in line with previous findings elsewhere (Ruedin et al, 2018; Migali and Scipioni, 2018).

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1 https://www.unine.ch/sfm/home/formation/ssam.html
2 The S-SAM dataset also includes answers to "What preparations have you done? (multiple answers possible)"

Table 2: Migration propensities: aspirations, plans, preparations

	Overall	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
No aspiration	9.6	9.2	3.1	16.8
Aspiration but no plans	8.0	11.0	2.6	10.6
Plans but no preparation	50.4	48.4	52.9	49.9
Preparation	32.0	31.4	41.4	22.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Desired continent and country destinations

In Table 3, we see responses to the question "Where would you like to move?" amongst those who have plans or have made preparations. The vast majority desire to move to Europe or North America and, unsurprisingly given linguistic and other historic links, the USA, the UK, and Canada are the most common countries in every case (that said, see Australia).

Table 3: Desired continent and country destinations (only asked to those with "plans" or "preparations")

	Overall	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
Africa	5.6	8.2	1.9	7.8
Asia	6.9	5.9	7.3	7.6
Europe	44.0	42.0	44.0	46.5
North America	36.8	38.7	41.4	28.3
South America	3.1	2.7	2.4	4.7
Oceania	3.5	2.6	3.1	5.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Specific country				
USA	18.7	21.8	16.2	18.6
UK	16.3	13.4	19.3	15.4
Canada	16.0	14.0	24.0	7.2
Germany	5.1	6.7	5.5	2.6
France	3.8	3.9	2.9	5.0
Switzerland	2.5	2.7	1.8	3.2
Netherlands	1.9	2.1	1.2	2.7
Australia	1.7	1.7	1.5	2.0
Spain	1.5	1.2	1.3	2.2
Italy	1.5	0.7	1.0	3.0
New Zealand	1.5	0.6	1.1	3.1
Brazil	1.3	1.6	0.6	1.8
Norway	1.2	1.6	1.1	0.9
Belgium	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.1
Denmark	1.1	1.9	0.6	0.9
UAE	1.1	0.4	1.5	1.3
Austria	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1
China	1.1	0.8	1.2	1.3
South Africa	1.1	2.4	0.5	0.3

Japan	1.1	0.9	0.5	2.0
Ireland	1.1	0.4	1.1	1.8
Other	18.3	18.8	14.9	22.4
Total	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9

Irregular emigration: willingness and methods of irregularity

Amongst those who answered that they have some aspiration to emigrate (or more), respondents were also asked about their willingness to migrate irregularly: 'If you cannot migrate legally through getting the necessary documents and following required procedures, are you willing to migrate without necessary documents of without following official procedures?' Amongst those who respond "yes", individuals are also asked about their planned method of irregularity: 'What method do you plan to use? (multiple answers possible)'. The distribution of responses to both questions is displayed in Table 4. As can be seen, regardless of level of preparation, the proportion willing to emigrate irregularly is small—overall just 7.3 per cent. That said, it increases with the amount of planning and preparation that the aspiring migrant has made. When the (small) proportions who state that they would be willing to emigrate irregularly are asked their method, just over half in every country state that it would be by overstaying one's visa, around a third (with greater variation) state it would be by making a false asylum claim, around a fifth by irregular border crossing, and a smaller percentage say by bribing officials.

Table 4: Irregularity willingness and method

	Overall	Aspiration only	Plans only	Preparation
Willing to travel without documents	7.3	2.9	5.9	10.6
Unilling to travel without documents	92.7	97.1	94.1	89.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1
Method («willing» only)				
Irregular border crossing	21.5	27.3	23.4	19.3
Bribing officials	12.1	0.0	8.5	16.2
Overstaying Visa	54.3	54.6	55.3	53.4
Making a false asylum claim	38.0	27.3	36.2	40.4

The migration calculus: motives, push factors, and challenges

We now turn to considering the perceived motives, push factors, and challenges of migrants. The survey asks those who respond that they have aspirations to migrate about their motivations, asking: "What is the main reason you want to move to another country?" offering the four responses shown in Table 5. Overall, we see that by far the most common response is work (61.8 per cent), with a quarter stating education and slightly more than 5 per cent stating family reunification and asylum respectively. Across the various levels of preparedness and considering those who are willing to migrate irregularly, we see relatively little variation *except* that asylum is considerably more commonly stated amongst would-be irregular migrants.

We can also see responses to when respondents are asked about the presence of so-called "push factors" in their desire to migrate ('Did any of these reasons influence your desire to leave the country?'). Notably, those who have made more preparations cited a larger number of push factors. Overall, however, the order of stated push factors are fairly similar by group: a large majority stating 'unemployment and lack of economic perspectives' and a smaller group stating 'corruption', around a third stating 'poverty and hunger'

Table 5. Migration motives, push factors, and challenges by migration behaviour and irregularity

	Overall	Aspiration but no plans	Plans but no preparation	Preparation	Irregular willing
Motive					
Work	61.8	58.4	61.9	62.4	61.5
Education	26.6	24.9	26.9	26.7	21.9
Join family	5.2	7.2	4.9	5.2	5.3
Political asylum, safety	6.4	9.6	6.4	5.7	11.3
Push factors					
unemployment, lack of economic perspectives	73.8	72.9	73.9	73.9	64.5
corruption	56.1	55.5	55.6	57.1	56.2
poverty and hunger	35.1	22.0	33.0	41.8	39.9
political unrest, political instability	31.9	22.8	31.2	35.4	33.9
lack of infrastructure	29.9	19.4	30.2	32.1	25.9
social inequalities	29.6	26.2	27.7	33.6	31.6
disrespect for human rights	27.2	21.8	26.5	29.6	26.8
poor health	22.2	15.5	21.7	24.8	23.0
high taxes	21.2	23.7	20.2	22.1	31.6
discrimination	16.0	20.3	15.8	15.4	18.9
lack of land, too many people, scarcity of natural resources	9.4	9.4	9.1	9.9	13.1
civil war, genocide	5.3	3.4	4.7	6.6	7.7
natural disaster, climate change	2.6	1.7	2.3	3.4	7.0
Challenges					
challenges reaching the destination country?	73.9	78.1	76.8	68.6	80.5
challenges finding a job in the destination country?	66.6	78.2	71.2	56.6	74.7
discrimination because of your origin in the destination country?	65.8	68.8	67.9	61.7	67.1
challenges finding a job that meets your skills and ability?	59.4	68.7	62.1	52.8	66.8
accepting a job that can compromise your health?	38.9	36.5	39.9	37.8	61.6
being deported from the destination country?	23.2	23.2	25.1	20.4	42.8
being robbed or defrauded during the journey?	21.6	27.8	22.5	18.9	36.8
Health perceptions					
exposure to health risk during journey	13.2	17.0	12.5	13.2	17.9

Finally, onto challenges (including those of health), around three quarters expect challenges—though notably this figure falls as an individuals level of preparedness increases. Those willing to migrate irregularly have the highest expectation of challenges, however. The joint most commonly expected challenge (around two-third each) is finding a job in the destination country and discrimination in the destination country, followed by finding a job that meets one's level of skills and ability. Notably, small percentages believe they will be deported (even amongst those who plan to migrate irregularly, though the proportion is higher). An even smaller proportion expects exposure to any health risk during the journey—13.2 per cent overall and 17.9 per cent amongst those willing to migrate irregularly.

Enter narratives: twenty migration narratives and who believes them

We now move on to considering migration narrative belief. Respondents are asked: 'There is a lot of information and many stories about migration. Which of the following statements do you believe are true? (multiple answers possible)'. The percent responding to each overall and by propensity to migrate is shown in Table 6 (and by country in the appendices in Table A1. For the effects of socio-demographics on belief in each narrative, see Table A5). Notably, even those who express no aspiration to migrate are asked this question. We can see significant divergence in narrative belief between those with no aspirations, those with aspirations, and those willing to migrate irregularly. However, there is far less between those at different stages of preparedness. Only one narrative is believed by all groups: 'There are more employment opportunities abroad', though not by overwhelming percentages and notably by relatively fewer would-be irregular migrants. The only other narrative believed by a majority is amongst those with 'no aspiration', with 54 per cent agreeing that 'Home is home, even if I'm not rich.' Notably, would-be irregular migrants are less likely than the overall average to believe that: (1) migrants face discrimination abroad, (2) Home is home, even if I'm not rich; (3) Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it and more likely to believe that (1) Life abroad is comfortable; (2) Life abroad is safer; (3) It's my right to have a better life abroad, (4) The only way to get rich is by going abroad; and (5) Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot as well as numerous other differences. Notably, however, only small percentages of any group believe many of these narratives or that, for example, 'It's easy to get to Europe overland'.

Table 6: Migration narrative belief overall, by extent of preparation, and irregularity willingness

	Overall	No aspiration	Aspiration but no plans	Plans but no preparation	Preparation	Irregular willing
There are more employment opportunities abroad.	61.8	52.5	65.4	63.4	61.1	53.7
Migrants face discrimination abroad.	45.1	46.3	43.6	45.2	44.9	41.9
Home is home, even if I'm not rich.	34.8	53.8	42.1	33.0	30.1	31.0
Migrants contribute to the economic development at home.	34.7	28.0	34.6	34.1	37.8	30.0
Life abroad is comfortable.	31.1	14.8	20.3	31.3	38.3	36.7
Life abroad is safer.	30.1	20.9	27.4	28.7	35.7	34.5

The hardest part of migration is getting to the country of destination.	26.1	18.5	29.1	26.7	26.7	26.8
Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it.	24.2	29.6	24.5	23.5	23.5	21.1
Life is tough abroad.	23.9	33.1	30.8	21.7	22.9	20.8
It's my right to have a better life abroad.	21.2	13.8	17.4	21.7	23.6	26.2
The hardest part of migration is living in the country of destination.	19.9	19.3	22.8	19.4	20.4	20.5
Destiny decides if migrants succeed.	18.2	17.0	16.2	17.1	20.6	22.7
Many immigrants die on their way to Europe.	16.6	15.4	14.8	16.8	17.1	19.5
People abroad show solidarity to refugees.	10.5	4.7	7.8	9.9	13.9	16.6
Coming from [country], I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA	9.8	5.9	7.3	9.2	12.7	14.7
The only way to get rich is by going abroad.	8.1	5.3	7.8	8.5	8.3	16.6
Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot.	5.9	3.0	6.1	6.1	6.4	11.8
Colonialism has destroyed our economy, so now we have to take something back.	5.2	4.3	4.6	5.0	6.1	11.2
It's easy to get to Europe overland.	3.6	2.6	2.9	3.4	4.2	8.3
Migrants help monitor politicians.	2.8	1.4	2.7	2.3	3.9	5.1

The power of narratives: which narratives cause emigration and irregularity

We now move on to considering the explanatory power of narratives on two outcomes of interest. The first is a four-point emigration scale (no aspiration; aspiration but no plans to leave in the next five years; plans but no preparation to emigrate; and preparation). This scale is standardised.[3] The second is a simple dichotomous (i.e. 1 or 0) variable measuring willingness to emigration without papers, i.e. irregularity.

Before outlining the explanatory power of the twenty narratives on these two variables, respectively, we consider the outcomes of two models that do not include such narratives but instead include a range of socio-demographic, economic and psychological indicators. These two models are presented in the Appendices in Table A2. The findings are displayed in Table 7. As we can see, aside from youth and high social trust, the positive determinants of migration and irregularity are distinct. Whereas the former is driven by employment, years of education, urbanity, and risk appetite, the latter is driven by being male, being less well-off, and one's religion. Migration and irregularity share the negative determinant of perceiving one's self as poor (despite the positive effect of real terms relative deprivation on irregularity). Years of education and—counter-intuitively—risk appetite also reduce irregularity.

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3 Standardising variables centres its mean at 0 and rescales its range of outcomes so that they are normally distributed. Doing so makes variables such as our more interpretable when used in models.

Table 7. Effects of variables in models predicting, respectively migration and irregularity (full models in Table A2)

	Migration	Irregularity
Increases likelihood	Living in Nigeria (rather than Kenya)	Living in Kenya (rather than Nigeria)
	Being young	Being male
	Being in full-time employment	Being young
	Years of education	Lower relative income
	Living in an urban area	Being Islamic (rather than Christian)
	Risk appetite	Social trust
	Social trust	
Decreases likelihood	Living in South Africa (rather than Kenya)	Having neither a partner nor children (rather than having a partner and no children)
	Perceiving oneself as poor	Being a single parent
		Being in training (rather than full-time employment)
		Perceiving oneself as poor
		Years of education
		Risk appetite
No statistically significant effect	Being male	Living in South Africa (rather than Kenya)
	Partner and parental status	Being unemployed
	Relative income	Living in an urban area
	Religion	

We now move onto the models that include the variables above but also include belief in the twenty narratives included in the dataset. Belief in each narrative is included in a separate model so that there are twenty models predicting migration and irregularity respectively. These are displayed in full in the Appendices in Tables A3 and A4 and summarised in Table 8.

The strength of the effect of belief in each narrative on each of the two outcomes is given in brackets—for "migration" the figure represents the increase that belief in each narrative causes on the four point scale; for "irregularity" the figure represents the increased in likelihood of being willing to migrate irregularly rather than not.

The power of narratives on migration and irregularity share similarities and differences. In terms of similarities, believing the following has positive effects on both: (1) Life abroad is comfortable; (2) Life abroad is safer; (3) People abroad show solidarity to refugees; (4) The only way to get rich is by going abroad; (5) Migrants help monitor politicians; (6) Coming from [country], I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA; and (7) Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot. However, no narratives have negative effects on both outcomes.

Table 8. Effects of belief in respective narratives in models predicting, respectively migration and irregularity (full models in Tables A3 and A4)

	Migration	Irregularity
Increases likelihood	Coming from [country], I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA (0.25)	It's easy to get to Europe overland. (0.09)
	Migrants help monitor politicians. (0.24)	Colonialism has destroyed our economy, so now we have to take something back. (0.08)
	It's my right to have a better life abroad. (0.21)	The only way to get rich is by going abroad. (0.07)
	People abroad show solidarity to refugees. (0.21)	Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot. (0.06)
	Life abroad is comfortable. (0.20)	Migrants help monitor politicians. (0.04)
	Life abroad is safer. (0.20)	People abroad show solidarity to refugees. (0.03)
	The only way to get rich is by going abroad. (0.19)	Coming from [country], I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA (0.03)
	Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot. (0.12)	Destiny decides if migrants succeed. (0.02)
	The hardest part of migration is getting to the country of destination. (0.10)	Many immigrants die on their way to Europe. (0.02)
	Migrants contribute to the economic development at home. (0.06)	Life abroad is comfortable. (0.02)
		Life abroad is safer. (0.02)
Decreases likelihood	Home is home, even if I'm not rich. (-0.18)	There are more employment opportunities abroad. (-0.02)
	Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it. (-0.11)	Migrants contribute to the economic development at home. (-0.02)
	Migrants face discrimination abroad. (-0.08)	
	Life is tough abroad. (-0.08)	
No statistically significant effect	There are more employment opportunities abroad.	Life is tough abroad.
	Colonialism has destroyed our economy, so now we have to take something back.	Home is home, even if I'm not rich.
	It's easy to get to Europe overland.	It's my right to have a better life abroad.
	Many immigrants die on their way to Europe.	Migrants face discrimination abroad.
	The hardest part of migration is living in the country of destination.	Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it.
	Destiny decides if migrants succeed.	Migrants contribute to the economic development at home.
		The hardest part of migration is getting to the country of destination.
		The hardest part of migration is living in the country of destination.

Those narratives that only positively affect emigration are: (1) It's my right to have a better life abroad; (2) Migrants contribute to the economic development at home; and (3) The hardest part of migration is getting to the country of destination. By contrast, the narratives that only positively affect irregularity are: (1) It's easy to get to Europe overland; (2) Many immigrants die on their way to Europe; (3) Colonialism has destroyed our economy, so now we have to take something back; and (4) Destiny decides if migrants succeed.

Those narratives that only negatively affect emigration are: (1) Life is tough abroad; (2) Home is home, even if I'm not rich; (3) Migrants face discrimination abroad; and (4) Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it. By contrast, the narratives that only negatively affect irregularity are: (1) There are more employment opportunities abroad; and (2) Migrants contribute to the economic development at home.

Conclusion and discussion

Why do some people choose to migrate and some people not? Why are some willing to do so via irregular channels and some unwilling? Answering these questions allows us to design better interventions to achieve migration policy objectives such as "safe, regular, and orderly migration". It also helps us answer profound scientific questions using the timeless yet increasingly important case of migration. Given the salience, uncertainty, complexity, risk and novelty of migration—as well as its emotive and value-driven nature—we can expect narratives to play a powerful and rich role in emigration decisions. This article built on recent findings and cutting-edge data to investigate the role of narratives in affecting variation in various forms of migration behaviour. It used the Swiss-Subsaharan Migration Network's *S-SAM Survey – Health, Migration, and Uncertainty* (Adetutu et al, 2021), which asks individuals in major origin countries about their migration plans and narrative beliefs, amongst other things.

Despite widespread migration aspirations, plans, and preparations, relatively few (7.3 per cent overall) in any country would be willing to travelling without papers. The article overviews the various methods by which individuals plan to migrate irregularly, before considering motivations, push factors and challenges. Notably, low percetnages believe they will be deported (even amongst those who plan to migrate irregularly, though the proportion is higher) and fewer expect exposure to any health risk during the journey. The article then outlines the twenty narratives and the extent to which they are believed by various groups. Models are run—first, without narratives—that consider various socio-demographic, economic, and psychological determinants of emigration and irregularity.

Models showing the effects of the 20 narratives on migration behaviour and irregularity are then presented. These models not only confirm the strong effects of narratives on emigration decision making, but suggest which narratives communicators should emphasise or undermine to affect the recipients' behaviour. The most powerful narrative to increase migration propensity is 'Coming from [country], I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA' whereas for irregularity it is 'It's easy to get to Europe overland'. By contrast, the most powerful narrative to decrease migration propensity is 'Home is home, even if I'm not rich' whereas few narratives have a negative effect on irregularity.'

Moving forward, practitioners should test the extent to which belief in the narratives that they wish to use are associated with the migratory behaviours that they wish to change, not least because several of the narratives tested here are shown to—in some cases, surprisingly—have little effect whereas others have strong effects. Academics and practitioners should cooperate to produce further research that experimentally tests the effects of narratives and communications that use them given the grave importance of the subject matter and its scientifically profound implications. Furthermore, following Dennison (2022; 2023a; 2023b), the relationship between the belief in narratives and broader psychological predispositions and emotions should also be investigated.

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Appendices

Table A1: Migration narrative belief overall and by country

	Overall	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
There are more employment opportunities abroad.	63.2	64.7	63.7	55.5
Migrants face discrimination abroad.	46.6	49.5	48.5	37.7
Home is home, even if I'm not rich.	36.3	41.0	24.4	40.1
Migrants contribute to the economic development at home.	35.7	52.6	30.9	20.2
Life abroad is comfortable.	31.7	21.9	47.6	22.9
Life abroad is safer.	31.0	14.9	41.4	33.8
The hardest part of migration is getting to the country of destination.	26.8	30.4	23.4	24.2
Life is tough abroad.	25.1	28.7	18.3	26.0
Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it.	25.0	27.9	26.8	18.0
It's my right to have a better life abroad.	21.8	13.1	21.4	29.1
The hardest part of migration is living in the country of destination.	20.6	24.6	13.9	21.4
Destiny decides if migrants succeed.	18.8	17.0	21.2	16.5
Many immigrants die on their way to Europe.	17.3	13.5	25.7	11.2
People abroad show solidarity to refugees.	10.9	9.4	12.0	10.3
Coming from Nigeria, I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA	10.0	6.7	9.4	13.1
The only way to get rich is by going abroad.	8.4	6.8	4.7	12.8
Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot.	6.0	5.8	5.3	6.4
Colonialism has destroyed our economy, so now we have to take something back.	5.5	5.4	4.2	6.6
It's easy to get to Europe overland.	3.6	2.8	2.8	4.8
Migrants help monitor politicians.	2.8	2.3	3.1	2.9

Table A2: Effects of variables in models predicting, respectively migration and irregularity

	(1) Migration	(2) Irregularity
Country (ref: Kenya)		
Nigeria	0.27***	-0.03***
	(0.03)	(0.01)
South Africa	-0.12***	-0.01
	(0.04)	(0.01)
Gender (ref: male)		
Female	0.00	-0.02**
	(0.03)	(0.01)
Other	0.05	-0.01
	(0.11)	(0.04)
Age	-0.02***	-0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Partner status (ref: with partner, no children)		
With partner, children	0.01	-0.01
	(0.04)	(0.01)
No partner, no children	0.02	-0.04**
	(0.06)	(0.02)
No partner, children	0.02	-0.05**
	(0.07)	(0.02)
Other (e.g. shared community)	-0.07	-0.07***
	(0.07)	(0.02)
Employment (ref: full-time)		
Part-time	-0.03	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.01)
Informal	0.05	0.01
	(0.05)	(0.02)
In training	-0.25***	-0.03**
	(0.05)	(0.01)
Retired	-0.77***	0.02
	(0.10)	(0.04)
Unemployed	-0.27***	-0.01
	(0.04)	(0.01)
Perceive self as poor	-0.09***	-0.02***
	(0.02)	(0.01)
Relative income	0.02	-0.02***
	(0.02)	(0.01)
Years of education	0.02***	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Religion (ref: Christian)		
Islam	0.04	0.05***
	(0.05)	(0.01)
Traditional	-0.01	-0.03
	(0.13)	(0.04)
Hinduism	-0.07	-0.02
	(0.18)	(0.06)
Buddhism	0.15	0.01
	(0.29)	(0.09)

Judaism	0.45	0.05
	(0.28)	(0.09)
Bahá'í	0.09	0.00
	(0.91)	(0.26)
Taoism	0.41	-0.08
	(0.64)	(0.18)
Other religion	0.12	0.00
	(0.10)	(0.03)
No religion	0.11	-0.00
	(0.07)	(0.02)
Rural	-0.08***	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.00)
Risk taking	0.13***	-0.01**
	(0.02)	(0.01)
Trust	0.08***	0.03***
	(0.01)	(0.00)
Constant	1.26***	0.47***
	(0.22)	(0.07)
Observations	5,128	4,261
R-squared	0.18	0.04

Table A3: Effects of belief in respective narratives in models predicting migration

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
Country (ref: Kenya)																					
Nigeria	0.27***	0.22***	0.27***	0.26***	0.24***	0.26***	0.28***	0.22***	0.27***	0.27***	0.27***	0.28***	0.28***	0.28***	0.29***	0.27***	0.27***	0.28***	0.28***	0.27***	0.27***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
South Africa	-0.11***	-0.11***	-0.11***	-0.11***	-0.11***	-0.14***	-0.11***	-0.15***	-0.11***	-0.12***	-0.12***	-0.12***	-0.11***	-0.11***	-0.09***	-0.11***	-0.13***	-0.10***	-0.11***	-0.11***	-0.11***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.02***	-0.01***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.02***	-0.01***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.01***	-0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Employment (ref: full-time)																					
Part-time	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Informal	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
In training	-0.25***	-0.24***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.26***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.26***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.25***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Retired	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.76***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.77***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.79***	-0.77***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***	-0.78***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Unemployed	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.27***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.28***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Unwealthy	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.09***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.10***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Years of education	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Rural	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Risk taking	0.14***	0.13***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.13***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.13***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Trust	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.07***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Life abroad is comfortable.		0.20***																			
		(0.03)																			
There are more employment opportunities abroad.			0.04																		
			(0.03)																		
Life is tough abroad.				-0.08***																	
				(0.03)																	
Home is home, even if I'm not rich.					-0.18***																
					(0.03)																
It's my right to have a better life abroad.						0.21***															
						(0.03)															
Colonialism has destroyed our economy, so now we have to take something back.							0.08														
							(0.06)														
Life abroad is safer.								0.20***													
								(0.03)													
People abroad show solidarity to refugees.									0.21***												
									(0.04)												
Migrants face discrimination abroad.										-0.08***											
										(0.03)											
Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it.											-0.11***										
											(0.03)										
The only way to get rich is by going abroad.												0.19***									
												(0.05)									
It's easy to get to Europe overland.													0.11								
													(0.07)								
Many immigrants die on their way to Europe.														-0.05							
														(0.03)							
Migrants contribute to the economic development at home.															0.06**						
															(0.03)						
Migrants help monitor politicians.																0.24***					
																(0.08)					
Coming from Nigeria, I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA																	0.25***				
																	(0.04)				
The hardest part of migration is getting to the country of destination.																		0.10***			
																		(0.03)			
The hardest part of migration is living in the country of destination.																			0.04		
																			(0.03)		
Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot.																				0.12**	

																				(0.05)
Destiny decides if migrants succeed.																				0.05
																				(0.03)
Constant	1.28***	1.30***	1.28***	1.30***	1.34***	1.27***	1.27***	1.40***	1.30***	1.32***	1.29***	1.25***	1.27***	1.27***	1.28***	1.26***	1.30***	1.28***	1.27***	1.26***	1.28***
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.20)
Observations	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156	5,156
R-squared	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18

Table A4: Effects of belief in respective narratives in models predicting irregularity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
Country (ref: Kenya)																					
Nigeria	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03**	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03**	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
South Africa	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02*	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender (ref: male)																					
Female	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02***	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.02**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Other	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Age	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Partner status (ref: with partner, no children)																					
With partner, children	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
No partner, no children	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03**	-0.03*	-0.03**	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03**	-0.03*	-0.03**	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.03**	-0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
No partner, children	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.04**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Other (e.g. shared community)	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.06***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.06***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Employment (ref: full-time)																					
Part-time	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Informal	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
In training	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Retired	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Unemployed	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Perceive self as poor	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.01***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Relative income	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Years of education	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Religion (ref: Christian)																					
Islam	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Traditional	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Hinduism	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Buddhism	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Judaism	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.06
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Bahá'í	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Taoism	-0.08	-0.07	-0.07	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.08	-0.08	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.08	-0.07	-0.08	-0.08	-0.07	-0.07
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Other religion	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
No religion	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Risk taking	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Trust	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Life abroad is comfortable.		0.02*																			
		(0.01)																			
There are more employment opportunities abroad.			-0.02**																		
			(0.01)																		
Life is tough abroad.				-0.01																	
				(0.01)																	
Home is home, even if I'm not rich.					-0.01																
					(0.01)																

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
It's my right to have a better life abroad.					0.02																
					(0.01)																
Colonialism has destroyed our economy, so now we have to take something back.						0.08***															
						(0.02)															
Life abroad is safer.							0.02*														
							(0.01)														
People abroad show solidarity to refugees.								0.03**													
								(0.01)													
Migrants face discrimination abroad.									0.00												
									(0.01)												
Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it.										-0.00											
										(0.01)											
The only way to get rich is by going abroad.											0.07***										
											(0.01)										
It's easy to get to Europe overland.												0.09***									
												(0.02)									
Many immigrants die on their way to Europe.													0.02*								
													(0.01)								
Migrants contribute to the economic development at home.														-0.02***							
														(0.01)							
Migrants help monitor politicians.															0.04*						
															(0.02)						
Coming from Nigeria, I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA																0.03**					
																(0.01)					
The hardest part of migration is getting to the country of destination.																	-0.00				
																	(0.01)				
The hardest part of migration is living in the country of destination.																		0.00			
																		(0.01)			
Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot.																			0.06***		
																			(0.02)		
Destiny decides if migrants succeed.																				0.02**	
																				(0.01)	
Constant	0.45***	0.45***	0.45***	0.45***	0.46***	0.45***	0.44***	0.46***	0.46***	0.45***	0.45***	0.44***	0.45***	0.46***	0.45***	0.45***	0.45***	0.45***	0.44***	0.45***	0.45***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Observations	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261	4,261
R-squared	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04

Table A5: Effects of socio-demographics on belief in each narrrative

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)
	"Life abroad is comfortable"	"There are more employment opportunities abroad"	"Life is tough abroad"	"Home is home, even if I'm not rich"	"It's my right to have a better life"	"Colonisation has destroyed our economy, so now we have to take something back"	"Life abroad is safer"	"People abroad show solidarity to refugees"	"Migrants face discrimination abroad"	"Most migrants fail, but they would not admit it"	"The only way to get rich is by going abroad"	"It's easy to get to Europe overland"	"Many immigrants die on their way to Europe"	"Migrants contribute to economic development at home"	"Migrants help monitor politicians"	"Coming from [Nigeria], I have a right to asylum in Europe and the USA"	"The hardest part of migration is getting to the country of destination"	"The hardest part of migration is living in the country of destination"	"Migrants are lucky, they have hit the jackpot"	"Destiny decides if migrants succeed"
Country ref: Kenya																				
Nigeria	0.25***	-0.01	-0.10***	-0.16***	0.08***	-0.01*	0.26***	0.02**	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02**	-0.00	0.12***	-0.22***	0.01	0.03***	-0.07***	-0.11***	-0.00	0.04***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
South Africa	0.01	-0.09***	-0.03**	-0.02	0.15***	0.02**	0.18***	0.01	-0.09***	-0.10***	0.05***	0.02***	-0.03**	-0.32***	0.01	0.06***	-0.07***	-0.02	0.01	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender ref: male																				
Female	-0.01	0.01	0.04***	-0.02	-0.03**	0.00	-0.04***	-0.04***	0.02	-0.02	0.01	-0.01**	-0.05***	-0.04***	-0.01	-0.03***	-0.02	0.01	-0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Birth year	0.00***	0.00***	0.00**	0.00*	0.00***	-0.00***	0.01***	0.00	-0.00***	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	0.00***	0.00***	0.00	0.00***	0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00**	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Years of education	0.01**	0.01**	0.00	-0.00	-0.00*	0.00	0.01***	0.00	0.01***	0.00	-0.00***	0.00	0.00**	0.01***	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	0.00*	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-0.14**	0.36***	0.12*	0.37***	0.01	0.11***	-0.63***	0.03	0.64***	0.19***	0.18***	0.02	-0.20***	0.19***	0.03	-0.00	0.19***	0.38***	0.16***	0.12**
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Observations	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325	5,325
R-squared	0.07	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.09	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.04	0.09	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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