Fearing what? Vignette experiments on anti-immigrant sentiments

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To cite this article: Sedef Turper (2016): Fearing what? Vignette experiments on anti-immigrant sentiments, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2016.1263554

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1263554
Fearing what? Vignette experiments on anti-immigrant sentiments

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of economic and safety threat perceptions on anti-immigrant sentiments. We investigate the extent to which public support for individual immigrants is affected by considerations about economic prospects and criminality of potential immigrants. We utilise survey vignette experiments conducted as part of the Panel Component of the European Social Survey in the Netherlands with a representative sample of the Dutch population. In the vignette experiments, we manipulated economic prospects and criminal background characteristics of immigrants, making them appear more or less likely to be an economic burden for and to pose a safety threat to the host society. Our findings demonstrate that both economic and safety considerations highly influence the public support for individual immigrants. We find that citizens’ views on admissibility of individual immigrants are predominantly shaped by considerations about social welfare costs and criminality of potential immigrants. Our findings further illustrate that safety concerns are yielding to more exclusionist immigration policy preferences than economic threat considerations, especially when those safety threats are measured at the individual level rather than at the collective level.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 21 January 2016
Accepted 17 November 2016

KEYWORDS
Attitudes towards immigrants; economic threat; safety threat; survey experiment

1. Introduction

Immigration policies have become prominent issues that dominate election campaigns and public discussions in many European countries as these have witnessed large inflows of immigrants over the last few decades (Card, Dustmann, and Preston 2005). Previous research firmly has established a strong positive link between anti-immigration attitudes and support for right-wing parties (Lewis-Beck and Mitchell 1993; Knigge 1998; Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002). As those parties increasingly gain power in Europe, public attitudes towards immigrants and immigration policy preferences have become even more crucial in understanding contemporary European politics.

Academic research into attitudes towards immigrants mainly adopts a ‘threat framework’ to explain anti-immigrant sentiments and support for exclusionist immigration policies. Based on the premises of group conflict (Blumer 1958; Quillian 1995) and social identity theories (Tajfel 1981; Brewer 2001), earlier research explored the role of economic
interests and social identities in explaining immigration-related attitudes. Following these two lines of reasoning, previous research has established that both economic and cultural threat considerations play a crucial role in shaping public attitudes towards immigrants. However, previous research has not generally considered the role of emerging safety threats in shaping attitudes towards immigrants even though these are heavily emphasised in the political discussions on and media coverage of immigration issues.

Recent studies exploring the influence of safety threats on immigration-related attitudes illustrate that an increasing concern over ‘national security’ leads to more restrictive immigration policies (Bigo 2002) and exclusionary public opinion towards immigrants (Lahav and Courtemanche 2012). These studies indicate that safety threat framework can contribute to our understanding of immigration-related attitudes. Yet, they focus only on aggregate-level life- and property-threatening risks that are rare and highly destructive such as the events on 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks. The impact of perceived safety risks that are less destructive but more likely, is still an understudied area in studies on attitudes towards immigrants.

By utilising a novel experimental design, this study examines the impact of economic and safety concerns on immigration-related attitudes from a group conflict theory perspective. Based on survey vignette experiments conducted as part of the Panel Component of the European Social Survey (ESS) with a representative sample of the Dutch population, we investigate the extent to which considerations about economic costs and criminality of immigrants are affecting immigration-related attitudes in the Netherlands.

Our findings illustrate that safety concerns are yielding to more exclusionist immigration policy preferences than economic threat considerations, especially when those safety threats are measured at the individual level rather than at the collective level. Building on this point, we further elaborate on the type and domain of safety concerns that trigger anti-immigrant attitudes. The experimental design of the study also allows us to make comparison between the severity of demanded punishment for immigrant and for native defendants.

2. Theoretical framework and previous research

Group conflict theory argues that negative sentiments towards out-groups stem from the view that their members challenge certain prerogatives of the dominant group (Blumer 1958; Hardin 1995; Quillian 1995). In other words, group conflict theory adopts a rational choice perspective in explaining attitudes towards immigrants and postulates that natives’ negative attitudes towards immigrants originate from their perceptions of immigrants as a threat to their self-interests defined either at the individual or at the collective level, or both (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007, 77). The theory predicts anti-immigrant attitudes and preferences for more exclusionist immigration policies to be fuelled by natives’ fears of adverse outcomes of immigration, such as economic hardship, increased job competition, reduced social welfare benefits and increased taxes (Sides and Citrin 2007), loss of political power (Stephan et al. 2005), and increased crime rates (Sides and Citrin 2007) defined either at the individual or at the collective level.

2.1. Immigrants as economic threats

Group conflict theory predicts natives to hold anti-immigrant sentiments to the extent that they perceive out-group members as threatening their in-group prerogatives. These
prerogatives include economic interests, and natives are expected to express hostility towards immigrants when they perceive immigrants as economically detrimental either to their self-interests or to the collective interests of the nation.

As far as the motivating role of economic self-interest is concerned, group conflict theory foresees those individuals who are in direct competition with immigrants in job market or in accessing social welfare benefits to be more threatened by immigrants, and hence, to display higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes. Consequently, the theory anticipates, for instance, low-skilled natives to display higher levels of hostility towards low-skilled immigrants than towards high-skilled immigrants because they are more likely to be in direct competition with the former. As far as the motivating role of collective economic interest of the nation is concerned, however, the theory foresees natives to hold anti-immigrant sentiments if they perceive immigrants as detrimental to the collective economic interests of the host society as a whole, even if they consider their individual economic interests not to be at risk. Accordingly, when applied at the collective level, the theory anticipates those natives who are not in direct competition with immigrants in the job market or in accessing social welfare benefits to display anti-immigrant sentiments when they consider immigrants as posing a threat to economic prerogatives of their fellow nationals. Therefore, the theory predicts natives to display higher levels of anti-immigrant sentiments as the expected contribution of immigrants to the national economy decreases.

Earlier research adopting a group conflict theory perspective found limited traces of self-interest as a motivating factor (Fetzer 2000; Malchow-Møller et al. 2008; Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013), whereas studies firmly established that perceptions of economic threats to collective interests of the dominant group play a crucial role in shaping anti-immigrant sentiments and support for more exclusionist immigration policies (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Schneider 2008; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010), especially during times of economic hardship (Sides and Citrin 2007; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). Furthermore, experimental studies focusing on evaluations of immigrants on individual basis illustrate that economic considerations are the principal driving force behind the support for individual immigrants (Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2012; Iyengar et al. 2013; Turper et al. 2014).

2.2. Immigrants as threats to law and order

Immigrants are frequently portrayed as threats to law and order due to their allegedly greater involvement in criminal activities (Agozino 1996; Bigo 2002). Although a recent literature review of studies on immigrant criminality indicates that there is no consensus over immigrants’ elevating effect on crime rates (Hiatt 2007), concerns over law compliance of immigrants are increasingly emphasised in public discussions on immigrants and immigration policies in Western democracies. Political discourse utilised by anti-immigrant parties often connects the issue of crime rates with immigration (Mudde 2007; Dinas and van Spanje 2011; Mudde 2012). Many anti-immigrant parties including the Freedom Party of Austria and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands have consistently targeted immigrants and blamed them for being the main reason for crime (Ignazi 2005, 114; Martins 2012; Ray 2012). While in Italy, banners in an anti-immigrant march organised by the Northern League read as ‘Immigrants = Criminals’ (Baker, Cappel, and Carlisle
2002), the former leader of the German Republican Party, Franz Schönhuber, publicly labelled immigrants as ‘carriers of crime’ (Ignazi 2005, 72). In a similar vein, news coverage on immigrants and immigration disproportionately reports immigrants in association with criminal activities (van Dijk 1993; Burns and Gimpel 2000). A content analysis of Dutch newspapers covering the period between 1990 and 1995 illustrates that 34 per cent of the news coverage on immigrants and ethnic minorities in the largest Dutch newspaper _Telegraaf_ was on violation of law by ethnic minorities and immigrants (Lubbers, Scheepers, and Wester 1998).

Previous research illustrates that political discourse and representations in the media can be fairly influential in shaping public attitudes towards immigrants, especially for those citizens who lack personal contact with immigrants, and hence rely on the information they acquire through public discussions for forming their judgements on immigrants. Earlier research illustrated that voter support for anti-immigrant parties are effectively mobilised by discourses linking immigration to criminality and social unrest (Rydgren 2008). Similarly, frequent representations of immigrants as outlaws in the media lead people to perceive immigrants as threats to law and order (Lubbers, Scheepers, and Vergeer 2000), and elicit anti-immigrant sentiments and support for harsher punitive attitudes towards immigrants (Windzio and Kleiman 2009; Meeussen et al. 2013).

In accordance with the tone of public representations of immigrants as outlaws and criminals, the idea that immigration has an elevating effect on crime is a commonly held belief among European publics. According to ESS data with questions tapping considerations about the presumed consequences of immigration, respondents are mostly concerned with increasing crime rates in 20 of the 21 European countries (Ceobanu 2010). However, research focusing on the immigration and crime relationship mainly concentrated on comparing crime rates for immigrant and native populations (Engbersen, van der Leun, and de Boom 2007; Melossi 2014), the impact of ethnic composition on the perceptions of neighbourhood safety (Semyonov, Gorodzeisky, and Glikman 2012) and previous studies often overlooked the relationship between immigration attitudes and natives’ perceptions of immigrants as threats to law and order.

From a group conflict theory perspective, natives are expected to perceive immigrants as endangering their prerogatives when those immigrants pose a real or perceived threat to their personal safety or to collective safety. Therefore, according to the theory, concerns about immigrant delinquency – both at the personal and the collective level – are expected to lead to anti-immigrant sentiments. However, there are only few studies focusing on how perceptions of immigrants as threats to personal and collective safety affect attitudes towards immigrants. Existing research illustrate that concerns about the crimes committed by immigrants are strongly related to immigration attitudes and support for more exclusionist immigration policies (Mayda 2006; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; McLaren and Johnson 2007), and lends support to the predictions the group conflict theory regarding the relationship between safety threat perceptions and anti-immigrant sentiments. Those studies testing the expectations of the theory at the collective level by utilising longitudinal and experimental data illustrate that concerns about immigrants’ impact on crime rates in the society is a strong predictor of anti-immigrant sentiments. A recent panel study demonstrates that fear of crime affects immigration attitudes even after controlling for pre-existing immigration attitudes (Fitzgerald, Curtis, and Corliss 2011). Similarly, the decoupling experiments aiming at disentangling the relationship
between safety threat perceptions and attitudes towards the immigrant groups that allegedly pose these threats, demonstrate that fear of increasing violence and vandalism in the Dutch society as a whole plays a significant role in shaping hostility towards immigrants (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). Empirical studies testing the predictions of group conflict theory at the individual level, however, are far more scarce, and they suggest concerns over personal safety not to be a significant predictor of anti-immigrant sentiments (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007).

3. Current study

The current study investigates to what extent concerns about economic costs of immigrants and the threats to social law and order that those immigrants pose in the host society affect the level of support for individual immigrants. By utilising data from survey experiments, this study provides much needed direct evidence for investigating the impact of economic and safety threats on natives’ evaluations of individual immigrants. In the first experimental study, we investigate the extent to which economic considerations and concerns over law and order affect support for individual immigrants. The second experimental study focuses on concerns over law and order only, and it explores to what extent different types of minor criminal offenses that are frequently associated with immigrants affect the levels of support for individual immigrants. Furthermore, we explore the extent to which the severity of punitive judgements differs for native and immigrant defendants.

3.1. Theoretical expectations

Group conflict theory predicts that natives’ willingness to admit immigrants to the country would be affected by their perceptions of immigrants as economic threats. More specifically, concerns over increasing burden to the welfare state and increasing labour and self-employment market competition are expected to influence attitudes towards individual immigrants. Previous research illustrates that concerns over welfare costs of immigration (Dustmann and Preston 2004), and the fear of adverse outcomes of immigration on job competition lead to anti-immigrant sentiments (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Malchow-Møller et al. 2008). Furthermore, Helbling and Kriesi (2014) illustrate that concerns over welfare costs of immigrants better explain public attitudes towards less-skilled immigrants when compared to the concerns over increased job competition. Therefore, we expect the level of support for individual immigrants to be influenced more by considerations over social welfare costs of immigrants than by considerations over increased job competition due to immigration, and we formulate our first hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1. The level of support for individual immigrants is lower for those immigrants posing burden on the social welfare system than those immigrants contributing to job competition.

Although there is no conclusive evidence indicating immigrants’ aggravating effect on crime rates, immigrants are often portrayed as threats to social law and order in the host country. Anti-immigrant parties in Western democracies explicitly associate crime and immigration issues and hold immigrants responsible for crime. Similarly, news coverage
on immigrants disproportionately reports crimes with immigrant defendants. Previous research demonstrated that both the frequency and the tone of news coverage of immigrant actors affect immigration-related attitudes (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009), and negative news about immigrants boost opposition to immigration (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008). Given the recurring emphasis on immigrant criminality in public discussions, we expect considerations over immigrant criminality to affect natives’ willingness to admit individual immigrants in the country. Therefore, we formulate our second hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 2. The level of support for individual immigrants is higher for immigrants who are law abiding compared to those immigrants who are not.

Furthermore, earlier research adopting a group conflict theory perspective found limited traces of concerns over individual safety as a motivating factor for anti-immigrant sentiments (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007), whereas studies testing the predictions of group conflict theory at the collective level suggested that concerns about immigrants’ impact on crime rates in the society play a crucial role in shaping anti-immigrant sentiments and support for more exclusionist immigration policies (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Fitzgerald, Curtis, and Corliss 2011). Therefore, we expect safety threats at the collective level to lead higher levels of anti-immigrant sentiments when compared to safety threats at the individual level, and formulate our third hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 3. The level of support for individual immigrants is lower for those immigrants posing threats to safety in the society as a whole than those immigrants posing threats to individual safety.

Cases involving immigrant defendants committing crimes against natives are hypothesised to be treated as matters of intergroup conflict. Accordingly, natives are expected to use ethnicity as an heuristic cue for judging the defendants’ blameworthiness and deservingness of punishment (Eberhardt et al. 2006). Previous research confirms that perceptions of ethnic and immigrant populations as threats to social law and order excite support for harsher punitive policies (King and Wheelock 2007). Studies demonstrate that ethnic typification of crime is a significant predictor of punitive attitudes (Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz 2004), and ethnic minorities are more severely punished than natives for criminal offenses they commit against the members of the dominant group (Eberhardt et al. 2006). Consequently, we expect immigrant defendants to be evaluated as deserving harsher punishment than their native counterparts. Our fourth hypothesis reads as follows:

Hypothesis 4. The proposed punishment is more severe for immigrant defendants compared to native defendants who committed the same criminal offense.

3.2. Data

For the current study, we utilise data from survey experiments conducted as part of the Panel Component of the ESS. The panel study started with ESS Round-5 in October 2010 and with the participation of 1829 respondents representative of the Dutch population over the age 16. After completing the ESS questionnaire, all respondents were
approached to take part in the four-wave panel study to which 1501 agreed. The subsequent waves of the study were conducted between May 2011 and January 2013 with eight-month intervals in-between. The response rates for the panel study were .60 in the initial ESS Round-5 study and .72, .70 and .86 in subsequent waves, respectively. A total of 647 respondents completed the final wave of the panel study.2

The first experimental study was conducted as part of the third wave of the panel study with a subsample of 275 Dutch respondents excluding first generation immigrants. For the second experimental study, we utilised data obtained from the survey experiments conducted as part of the fourth wave of the study, which was completed with the participation of a full sample of 619 Dutch respondents born in the Netherlands.

3.3. Study 1

3.3.1. Experimental design

In the first experimental study, we investigated the extent to which the economic considerations and concerns over law and order affect the support for individual immigrants. To this end, respondents were randomly assigned to three experimental groups. Respondents in each experimental condition were presented with a brief vignette text describing an immigrant who placed a request for extending his residence permit (Online Appendix A). The vignettes manipulated immigrants’ economic attributes as well as their levels of respect for law and order. Respondents were then asked to decide whether they would approve or reject the residence permit extension application placed by the immigrant presented to them.

As presented in Table 1, we employed a 3*2 between-subjects factorial design with six experimental conditions corresponding to three economic (self-employment prospect or paid-employment prospect or unemployment prospect) and two respect for law and order (law-abiding and not law-abiding) attribute treatments. Respondents in each experimental group were asked to evaluate two immigrants.3

3.3.2. Experimental manipulations

3.3.2.1. Economic cues. The vignettes manipulated the economic prospects of the immigrants by presenting them as potential sources of more or less economic burden for the national economy. The immigrants were described as having either unemployment, or paid-employment or self-employment prospects. In all three experimental conditions the immigrants are depicted as individuals whose work contracts are about to expire in two months’ time. While the unemployment prospect condition featured immigrants willing to receive unemployment benefits, respondents in the paid-employment prospect condition are presented with immigrants who are willing to seek a new employment once their residence permit is extended. In the self-employment prospect condition,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic prospects</th>
<th>Law compliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law-abiding</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not law-abiding</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cells marked with ‘R’ indicate experimental conditions where ‘residence permit’ questions were present.
immigrants are depicted as individuals who are willing to start up their own business in the Netherlands once their application for residence permit extension is approved. To put it differently, unemployment prospect condition speaks to ‘social welfare threat’, whereas paid- and self-employment prospect conditions represent ‘job competition threat’ for the salaried and the self-employed segments of the society, respectively.

3.3.2.2. Respect for law and order cues. The vignettes further manipulated immigrants’ level of respect for law and order. In half of the vignettes the immigrant is described as a person who is known to be complying with laws, whereas the other half featured an immigrant who is known to be not always complying with laws. The experimental conditions deliberately left this vague to allow respondents to utilise their pre-existing definitions of law-abidingness.

3.3.3. Variables
3.3.3.1. Dependent variable. We assess the admissibility of individual immigrants by using respondents’ evaluations of residence permit extension applications placed by the immigrants presented to them. The question read as ‘Please indicate whether you would approve or disapprove a residence permit application of the individual described above?’, and the response options are given in dichotomous format (0 = approve, 1 = disapprove).

3.3.3.2. Independent variables. We utilise categorical variables for the experimental treatments of economic prospects (0 = self-employment prospect, 1 = paid-employment prospect, 2 = unemployment prospect), and law compliance (0 = law-abiding, 1 = not law-abiding).

3.3.4. Results
The response distributions across experimental treatment groups are presented in Table 2. Inspection of the Table suggests that both the economic prospects and the law compliance of potential immigrants affect the level of public support for individual immigrants. We further investigate the extent to which the economic considerations and concerns over law and order affect the level of support for individual immigrants by conducting a logistic regression analysis.

Our findings from logistic regression models demonstrate that natives’ willingness to admit immigrants in the country, in other words admissibility of immigrants, is affected by both the economic prospects and the law compliance of potential immigrants. As
presented in Table 3, respondents clearly prefer immigrants with employment prospects over their counterparts with unemployment prospects. Compared to potential entrepreneurs, immigrants depicted as potential recipients of unemployment benefits are approximately four and a half times more likely to have their application for an extended residence permit rejected. As illustrated in Figure 1, the predicted probabilities of admitting law-abiding immigrants who wish to receive unemployment benefits are found to be 34 percentage points lower than those of their potential entrepreneur counterparts. Similarly, the level of support for immigrants who do not always comply with the law decreases by 15 percentage points as we move from self-employment to unemployment prospect condition. The differences between the levels of support for immigrants with self-employment and paid-employment prospects are found not to be statistically significant. Our findings of economic prospect manipulations demonstrate that admissibility of individual immigrants are to a greater extent affected by concerns about social welfare costs of immigrants than by considerations over increased competition in the labour and self-employment market.

While the economic prospects of immigrants have a considerable impact on the admissibility of individual immigrants, our results demonstrate that law compliance of potential immigrants is a much stronger predictor of support for individual immigrants. Those immigrants who are depicted as not always complying with the laws are found to be 16 times more likely to be rejected for their applications to extend their resident permit than their law-abiding counterparts. As we move from the law-abiding to the non-law-abiding category, the predicted probabilities of approving residence permit applications of immigrants drop by approximately 60 percentage points for immigrants with employment prospects and by 42 percentage points for immigrants with unemployment prospects.

Our findings demonstrate that both the economic threat perceptions and the concerns about social law and order are significant predictors of support for individual immigrants. Our findings provide support for Hypothesis 1 suggesting that the support for individual immigrants will be lower for those immigrants posing burden on the social welfare system than those immigrants contributing to job competition. We find that those immigrants described as having unemployment prospects elicited significantly lower levels of support when compared to their counterparts both with self-employment and paid-employment prospects. Hence, our findings reveal that considerations about welfare costs of potential immigrants play a larger role in shaping natives’ willingness to admit

| Table 3. Disapproval of extended residence permit applications by economic and safety threat manipulations. |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| **Economic prospects**           | B         | S.E.      | Exp(B)   |
| Paid-employment                  | .236      | (.268)    | 1.230    |
| Unemployment                     | 1.562***  | (.302)    | 4.636    |
| **Law compliance**               |           |           |          |
| Not law-abiding                  | 2.825***  | (.243)    | 16.528   |
| Constant                         | −1.498*** | (.236)    |          |
| Nagelkerke’s R square            |           |           | .439     |
| Hosmer and Lemeshow test         |           |           | .903     |
| N                               |           |           | 492      |

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
individual immigrants to the country than the fear that immigrants will increase competition in the labour and self-employment market. In line with our expectations stated in Hypothesis 2, we find that level of support for individual immigrants is higher for law-abiding immigrants when compared to their non-law-abiding counterparts. Our findings further demonstrate that law compliance of potential immigrants is a much stronger determinant of admissibility of individual immigrants in the country.

3.4. Study 2

3.4.1. Experimental design

In the second experimental study, we investigate the extent to which those criminal offenses that are frequently associated with immigrants influence the level of support for individual immigrants. To this end, respondents were randomly assigned to four experimental groups. Respondents in each experimental condition were presented with a brief vignette describing either an immigrant who placed an application to extend his residence permit, or a native citizen (Online Appendix B). The vignettes manipulated the criminal background of both the immigrants and the natives described in the vignettes. Respondents who were presented with immigrant vignettes were first asked to decide whether they would approve or reject the application for an extended residence permit. Secondly, they were asked to indicate how severely they would like the immigrant to be punished provided that he would actually be proven guilty for committing the criminal offense described in the vignette. Respondents who were presented with native citizen vignettes were only asked to indicate how severely they would like this person to be punished provided that he committed the described criminal offense.

In this experimental study, we employed a factorial design with eight experimental conditions corresponding to a 2*4 between-subjects factorial design with two nationality (Dutch citizen or non-naturalised immigrant), and four types of criminal offense.
(public property or individual property or public safety or individual safety) treatments. We included one further experimental condition where the immigrant was depicted as being not accused of any criminal activities. Respondents presented with this vignette were requested only to state whether they would approve or disapprove the residence permit extension application placed by the immigrant described in the vignette, and they were not presented with the severity of punishment question. As Table 4 illustrates, the design includes nine experimental conditions. While in all four of the experimental groups respondents were asked to evaluate two immigrant or two native subjects, respondents in one of the experimental groups evaluating native subjects were further asked to evaluate the resident permit application of the immigrant depicted as being not accused of any criminal offenses.

### 3.4.2. Experimental manipulations

#### 3.4.2.1. Citizenship status cues

Five of the experimental conditions featured an immigrant who has been living in the Netherlands for two years and whose residence permit is about to expire in two months’ time, whereas the respondents in the remaining experimental conditions were presented with a Dutch citizen.

#### 3.4.2.2. Criminal offense cues

The vignettes further manipulate the criminal background of the immigrants and natives presented to the respondents. The vignettes manipulated the domain of criminal offense by making immigrants and natives appear as threats either to the general public or to individuals, and also the type of criminal offense by presenting those immigrants and natives as posing threats either to physical safety or to property. Except for the vignette which featured an immigrant who has not been accused of any criminal offenses, all vignette texts featured immigrants and natives who were described as having been accused of one of the four types of minor criminal offenses, namely public property, individual property, public safety and individual safety. In the public property offense condition, immigrants and the Dutch citizens are described as having been accused of making an exaggerated insurance claim, whereas in the individual property condition they are depicted as having been accused of house squatting. The distinction between the public safety and private safety conditions is drawn based on presence or absence of targeted victims, and the public safety and individual safety conditions featured immigrants and natives who have been accused of drunken driving and slight bodily assault offenses, respectively. While the public property and public safety manipulations speak to ‘safety threats at the collective level’, individual property and individual physical safety conditions speak to ‘safety threats at individual level’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship status</th>
<th>Public offense</th>
<th>Individual offense</th>
<th>No criminal offense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Property</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>R – P</td>
<td>R – P</td>
<td>R – P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cells marked with ‘R’ indicate experimental conditions where ‘residence permit’ questions were present. Cells marked with ‘P’ indicate experimental conditions where ‘severity of punishment’ questions were present.
3.4.3. Variables

3.4.3.1. Dependent variables. We measure the admissibility of individual immigrants through respondents’ assessments of residence permit extension applications placed by the immigrants presented to them, and the response options are given in dichotomous format (0 = approve, 1 = disapprove). We further measure the severity of punitive judgements on an 11-point scale by using respondents’ responses for the question asking ‘assuming that this person has actually committed the above-mentioned offense, how severely do you think he should be punished?’ (0 = not severely at all, 10 = very severely).

3.4.3.2. Independent variables. To predict the level of support for individual immigrants, we utilise categorical variables for experimental manipulations of domain of criminal offense (0 = offenses against public, 1 = offenses against individual) and type of criminal offense (0 = offenses against property, 1 = offenses against physical safety). The models predicting the severity of punishment further include citizenship of the person described in the vignette (0 = Dutch citizen, 1 = immigrant).

3.4.4. Results

To investigate to what extent that minor criminal offenses affect the level of support for individual immigrants, we first focus on those vignettes featuring potential immigrants. Table 5 presents the response distributions across experimental treatment groups for the question asking whether the respondents would be willing to grant a resident permit to the immigrant presented to them. The inspection of the Table suggests that the level of support for individual immigrants decreases for the potential immigrants who have been accused of criminal offenses when compared to the support for their counterparts with no criminal record. To investigate the extent to which domain and type of criminal offenses affect the level of support for individual immigrants, we further conduct a logistic regression analysis.

Our findings from logistic regression models predicting the likelihood of rejecting resident permit applications of individual immigrants are presented in Table 6 and they show that the admissibility of immigrants is contingent upon the criminal offenses that they were accused of. Our findings demonstrate that both the domain and the type of criminal offenses affect admissibility of individual immigrants in the country.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the predicted probabilities of disapproving resident permit applications of immigrants gradually increase as we move from the ‘no criminal offense’ category to the categories of offenses against ‘public safety’, ‘public property’,

Table 5. Response distributions by experimental treatments (raw numbers, percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Approve</th>
<th>Disapprove</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No criminal record</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(75.0)</td>
<td>(12.8)</td>
<td>(14.6)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/property safety</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(61.8)</td>
<td>(25.0)</td>
<td>(13.2)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Physical safety</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(71.4)</td>
<td>(22.4)</td>
<td>(6.2)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Property safety</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(52.8)</td>
<td>(38.5)</td>
<td>(8.7)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Physical safety</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(37.5)</td>
<td>(44.1)</td>
<td>(18.4)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘individual property’ and ‘individual safety’. While the predicted probability of disapproving resident permit applications of the immigrants with no criminal charge records is 15 per cent, those immigrants who have been accused of committing offenses against public safety and property are approximately two times more likely to be rejected for their resident permit applications. The disapproval rates for those immigrants who have been accused of committing drunken driving and making exaggerated insurance claim offenses in the public safety and public property conditions are predicted as 24 and 29 per cent, respectively.

While the concerns about criminal offenses against public property and public safety have a considerable impact on the admissibility of individual immigrants in the country, the effect size of individual property and individual safety treatments are observed to be even larger. When compared to the applications of immigrants with no criminal charge records, the resident permit applications placed by those immigrants who were accused of offenses against individual property and physical safety are approximately four times more likely to be disapproved. The predicted level of support for individual immigrants who have been accused of house squatting is 27 percentage points lower than that for their counterparts with no criminal charge records. Similarly, as we move from the ‘no

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offenses against</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>.859**</td>
<td>(.314)</td>
<td>2.362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>1.450***</td>
<td>(.299)</td>
<td>4.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Safety</td>
<td>−.256</td>
<td>(.271)</td>
<td>.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction terms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual*Physical safety</td>
<td>.733*</td>
<td>(.366)</td>
<td>2.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−1.765***</td>
<td>(.248)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nagelkerke’s $R^2$ square 1.000
Hosmer and Lemeshow test 1.000
N 684

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities for rejecting resident permit applications of immigrants by safety threat manipulations.
criminal offense’ condition to the ‘individual safety’ condition, the predicted probabilities of approving resident permit applications of individual immigrants decrease 39 percentage points. Consequently, those immigrants who were accused of committing a slight bodily assault in the individual safety condition are observed to be the immigrants who are most likely to be disapproved for their resident permit applications (54 percent).

Contrary to our expectations from *Hypothesis 3* suggesting that the level of public support for immigrants endangering public safety would be lower than that for those endangering individual safety, our findings clearly demonstrate that immigrants posing safety threats at the individual level are less likely to elicit public support than their counterparts posing safety threats at the collective level. We find that the residence permit applications of those immigrants posing threats to individual safety are approximately two times more likely to be rejected than those of their counterparts posing safety threats to the society as a whole. Therefore, our findings suggest that public support for individual immigrants is shaped to a larger extent by concerns over safety at the individual level than by concerns over safety at the collective level.

Inspection of the regression coefficients presented in Table 4 and the predicted probabilities illustrated in Figure 2 further reveals that there is a significant interaction between the *type* and the *domain* manipulations. The predicted mean levels of rejecting resident permit applications of individual immigrants indicate that natives are more concerned about offenses against property at the collective level. At the individual level, however, concerns over physical safety plays a larger role in shaping attitudes towards immigrants.

So far, our findings from experimental study 2 illustrated that natives’ views on the admissibility of immigrants vary by the threats these immigrants pose to law and order. Next, we investigate whether the severity of punitive judgements of respondents differ for immigrant and native defendants.

*Table 7* presents the mean levels of punishment recommended for the immigrant and native defendants provided that they are found guilty of committing one of the four criminal offenses discussed. The higher values in the Table indicate harsher punitive attitudes, whereas lower values signify more lenient punitive attitudes. The inspection of the Table suggests that the severity of punishment demanded for the defendants varies depending on the type and domain of the criminal offense as well as on the citizenship status of the defendant. To disentangle the role of citizenship status, as well as the type and the domain of the criminal offense in shaping punitive attitudes, we further run a multiple regression model predicting the severity of punishment demanded for the individual described in the vignette provided that he is found guilty.

**Table 7.** Mean levels of severity of punishment by experimental treatments (means, SD).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Immigrant defendant</th>
<th>Native defendant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Property safety</td>
<td>Physical safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public safety</td>
<td>5.60 (2.15)</td>
<td>6.60 (1.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>157</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual safety</td>
<td>4.28 (2.61)</td>
<td>6.77 (1.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>159</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.31 (2.50)</td>
<td>6.76 (1.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>157</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S. TURPER
Table 8 presents the results of the regression analysis with experimental treatments and significant interaction terms. As the Table demonstrates, severity of the punishment demanded for offenses against public is found to be significantly higher than severity of punishment demanded for offenses against individuals. As illustrated in Figure 3, in almost all experimental conditions, the predicted levels of punishment is higher for offenses committed against public when compared to those corresponding offenses committed against individuals. Only in those experimental conditions featuring immigrant defendants committing offenses against physical safety, natives are found to be supporting slightly harsher punishment for defendants committing offenses against individuals than for those committing offenses against the general public. To put it briefly, our findings demonstrate that safety threats at the collective level are more likely to stimulate higher levels of support for harsher punishment when compared to safety threats at the individual level.

Our findings further show that those defendants committing offenses against physical safety are evaluated as deserving harsher punishment when compared to their counterparts committing offenses against public and individual property. In case of offenses against public safety, severity of punishment demanded for defendants are predicted to be 1.25 points higher on an 11-point scale than for those offenses against public property. In a similar vein, the severity of punishment for those offenses committed against individual physical safety are found to be approximately 2.45 points higher when compared to the demanded punishment for those offenses against individual property.

Furthermore, contrary to our expectations from Hypothesis 4, the severity of punishment demanded for immigrant defendants is found not to be higher than the punishment demanded for their native counterparts. Inspection of Figure 3 illustrating the predicted levels of punishment by experimental treatments reveals that the predicted levels of punishment are similar for native and immigrant defendants in the cases of offenses against individuals; whereas, in a sharp contrast to our expectations, the severity of punishment demanded for the native defendants are noticeably higher for those offenses against public safety and public property.

To summarise, our findings from the second experimental study demonstrate that citizens’ views on immigrants’ admissibility and deservingness of punishment vary by the type and domain of the threats that immigrants pose to law and order. Our findings illustrate that concerns about criminal offenses against individual property and safety have a

<p>| Table 8. Severity of punishment by safety threat and origin of defendant manipulations. |
|---------------------------------|----------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>−.934***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenses against</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>−2.103***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>1.251***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction terms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant*Safety</td>
<td>.923***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual*Safety</td>
<td>1.219***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>6.403***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R square</td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1205</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.
considerable impact on the admissibility of individual immigrants in the country, whereas concerns about criminal offenses against public property and safety affect the admissibility rates of immigrants to a lesser extent. Our findings further indicate that when compared to their native counterparts, immigrant defendants are evaluated as deserving similar punishment for offenses against individuals, whereas, they are evaluated markedly more leniently for offenses against the public.

4. Discussion

In this study, we investigated the extent to which public support for individual immigrants is affected by the considerations about economic prospects and criminality of potential immigrants. By utilising a novel experimental design, we manipulated economic and criminal background characteristics of immigrants, making them appear more or less likely to be an economic burden and to pose various safety threats to the host society. Our findings demonstrate that public support for individual immigrants is highly influenced by the considerations about both economic and safety costs of admitting individual immigrants in the country.

Regarding economic threat perceptions, our findings reveal that considerations about economic prospects of potential immigrants play a crucial role in shaping public support for individual immigrants. We find that natives’ willingness to admit individual immigrants in the country significantly decreases when the immigrants are presented as potential recipients of welfare benefits. Those immigrants with unemployment prospects who are presented as potential recipients of welfare benefits are considerably less welcomed when compared to their counterparts with paid- and self-employment prospects. Our findings from economic prospect manipulations demonstrate that the concerns over welfare costs of immigration is more critical in explaining public support for individual immigrants when compared to the concerns over adverse effects of immigrants on labour and self-employment market competition.

While the economic prospects of immigrants have a considerable impact on the admissibility of individual immigrants, our results demonstrate that safety concerns are stronger
predictors of public support for individual immigrants. We find that citizens’ views on admissibility of individual immigrants are predominantly shaped by considerations about law compliance and criminality of potential immigrants. Public support for non-law-abiding individual immigrants is found to be profoundly lower when compared to their law-abiding counterparts. In particular, public support for individual immigrants is found to be sensitive to the domain and type of minor safety threats that the individual immigrants pose. We find that concerns about criminal offenses against individual property and safety have a considerable impact on the admissibility of individual immigrants in the country, whereas concerns about criminal offenses against public property and safety affect the admissibility rates of immigrants to a lesser extent. As far as the role of minor criminal offenses in shaping public attitudes towards immigrants are concerned, our findings indicate that considerations about safety at the collective level and, to a larger extent, at the individual level are crucial in explaining public support for individual immigrants. Furthermore, the comparison of the disapproval rates for those immigrants described as non-law-abiding with those for the immigrants presented as committing minor criminal offenses suggests that although concerns over minor criminal offenses cannot fully account for the immigration induced safety threat perceptions, they nevertheless play a considerable role in shaping public attitudes towards individual immigrants.

Our findings further show that the domain of criminal offense also plays a significant role in shaping punitive attitudes towards immigrant and native defendants. We find that respondents are willing to punish those immigrants who pose threats to physical safety and property of individuals equally severely as their native counterparts. In case of public offenses, on the other hand, immigrant defendants are evaluated considerably more leniently than native defendants. While a thrust of earlier research on the punitive judgements for criminal offenses suggests that those defendants of non-native origin are more likely to be punished more severely, our findings are in disagreement with those studies. Previous research on the relationship between the punitive attitudes and the social category of the defendant suggests that in-group defendants can at times be judged more negatively than out-group defenders for their norm-deviant behaviours, a phenomenon known as the ‘black sheep effect’ (Marques, Yzerbyt, and Leyens 1988). The black sheep effect is likely to occur only in situations where full responsibility of the offender cannot be plausibly denied (Van Prooijen 2009), and it serves the function of communicating moral condemnation of norm-deviant behaviour and solidifying the support for the group norms (Gollwitzer, Keller, and Braun 2012). Previous studies document that while in-group subjects are given the benefit of the doubt and judged less negatively than out-group suspects when the evidence establishing their misconduct is weak, they are attributed more guilt (Kerr et al. 1995), aroused feelings of anger to a greater extent and recommended to be punished more severely (Van Prooijen 2006) than their out-group counterparts when the evidence establishing their involvement in deviant behaviour is strong. As far as the experimental design of the current study is concerned, we speculate that the presentation of strong evidence in the form of asking respondents to assume that the person described to them in the vignette text is actually guilty of the offense in regard might have led this black sheep effect to be observed. However, we still cannot rule out the ‘patronising leniency’ explanations suggesting that the in-group members might refrain from imposing harsh retributive sanctions on out-group offenders with the reservation that they might be conceived as discriminating against the out-group
members (Gollwitzer, Keller, and Braun 2012). Therefore, future research should try to disentangle contextual factors shaping the punitive attitudes towards native and immigrant defendants.

It should be noted that the current study investigates the impact of considerations about economic prospects and criminality on public support for individual immigrants, and our research design does not allow us to experimentally test the differences between assessments of individual immigrants and immigrant groups. Therefore, future research should try to validate the findings of the current study by utilising experimental manipulations for immigrant groups, and investigate whether the findings of the current study also apply to the evaluations of immigrant groups. Furthermore, the current study’s empirical domain is restricted to the Netherlands. Although previous research on impact of individuating cues on public support for individual immigrants demonstrated that individuating cues affect public sentiments similarly in various settings, future research should also investigate whether the findings of the study are generalisable to other countries.

To conclude, the current study clearly illustrates that the concerns over economic prospects and criminality of individual immigrants are significant predictors of support for individual immigrants. Hence, further research adopting the group conflict theory perspective should not only focus on the economic considerations but also focus more on the crime aspect of immigration when investigating the public sentiments towards immigrants.

Notes

1. Panel Component of the ESS is a developmental project aiming at facilitating the biannual cross-sectional ESS.
2. The comparison of initial and final samples in terms of key demographic variables suggests that the differences in the age, gender and residential composition of the two samples are not statistically significant, whereas panel attrition rate is observed to be slightly higher among less educated respondents. However, the differences in mean levels of completed years of formal schooling for the initial and final samples found to be not substantial (13.40 and 13.89, respectively).
3. Number of respondents in experimental groups ranged between 70 and 108. Post hoc statistical power analyses indicate that our samples are sufficient for detecting medium and large effect sizes with statistical power of .80 ($\alpha = .05$). For a discussion of effect sizes, please see Cohen (1977).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by Dutch Research Foundation (NWO) under Grant 471-09-003.

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