

# Reconsidering Views on Immigration in Europe

## *A Cross-National and Longitudinal Study*

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### **Abstract**

This article examines public opinion on immigration in 28 European countries. Using data from the European Social Survey (2003-2011), we assess whether the current polarizing and populist political discourse on immigration is reflected in the attitudes of European citizens. The analysis shows that public opinion on immigration in Europe is predominately neutral. Moreover, European citizens have not adopted a more negative view on immigration. Attitudes about both the policy and the impact of immigration remained stable between 2003 and 2011. Some countries even moved towards a more tolerant attitude. No European country, however, reports a growing intolerance towards the arrival of migrants in the past decade. The prevailing view that the tougher political stance on immigration reflects changed attitudes of European citizens must therefore be reconsidered.

*Keywords:* immigration, immigration attitudes, public opinion, political discourse, multiculturalism, Europe

### **Introduction**

In several European countries, immigration is a sensitive issue. Media analysis of the subject often reveals heated debates. In the Netherlands, a parliamentary proposal by the Party for Freedom (PVV) to calculate the costs of immigration struck a sensitive chord with other political parties. Democrats 66-leader Alexander Pechtold opposed the plan fiercely, stating that immigrants cannot be viewed as “economic goods with a profit and loss account”. In other European countries, the debate is no less contentious. Italy drew both national and international comparisons with the former South African apartheid regime, when the city of Foggia arranged to transport migrants via separate bus lines in 2010. In Switzerland, the People's Party (SVP) gained support for a referendum on annual "quota" for migrants, to counter the alleged “mass-immigration” into the country. Starting from similar sentiments, Schengen member Denmark even reintroduced border controls. The measure was quickly withdrawn, however, after the electoral victory of the Social Democrats in 2011. And with the political coming-out of Deutsche Bank director Thilo Sarrazin, Germany saw a revival of the domestic immigration debate. In his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010) Sarrazin wrote that Muslim immigrants cost the country a lot of money, provoking intense counter-reactions in the media and the national parliament.

Most discussions on immigration can roughly be traced to two clashing visions (cf. Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). On the one hand, immigration is seen as an economic and cultural enrichment. In this view, immigration provides companies with employees, compensates for the aging of the local population and injects new cultural and intellectual life into society. On the other hand, the fear exists that immigrants take

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away jobs from local workers, consume more government support in the form of social services than they return in taxes, and contribute to the formation of “ethnic enclaves”, crime and other social troubles (see e.g. Tibi, 2002). In recent years, the latter view prevailed politically. It resulted in stricter immigration policies in various countries, and nourished the growth of nationalism and anti-immigration movements in parts of Europe (Rydgren, 2008).

It is often assumed that the tougher political stance on immigration reflects the views of European citizens. Until the early 2000s, European countries supposedly engaged in a too liberal immigration policy, against the wishes of its citizens (Lahav, 2004). In this light, the current developments in parliament and the media indicate the new *Zeitgeist*. But perhaps the political discourse on immigration develops relatively independently from attitudes of European citizens. Longitudinal research by Schalk-Soekar et al. (2010), shows that Dutch citizens have barely changed their views about the multicultural society in the last twenty years. The survey data reveal that the recent polarizing and populist discourse about the multicultural society does not reflect wider attitudes in the Netherlands. On average, Dutch citizens are neither very positive nor very negative about various aspects of multiculturalism. Attitudes on the subject furthermore remained stable over the years. Even events like 9/11 and the murder of film-maker Theo van Gogh by Muslim radical Mohammed B. caused little change in the figures (see Schalk-Soekar et al., 2010: 277). Perhaps in other European countries ways of thinking about related subjects such as immigration, are also less pronounced than is usually assumed.

In this article we examine public opinion on immigration more closely. The reason is the lack of a representative and longitudinal picture of public attitudes on immigration (measures) in Europe. To what extent is the populist and polarizing political discourse on immigration reflected in the attitudes of European citizens? How did public ideas on the subject develop over time? And can differences be observed between European countries? For our analysis we use the first five measurements (2003-2011) of the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS is a biennial academic survey that maps beliefs and behaviours of Europeans on a range of social indicators. On average, the ESS consists of data of approximately 45,000 respondents from 25 countries per round. Sampling is done randomly (based on population registers) and the questionnaires meet scientific validity standards. Data from the ESS can thus be considered representative and reliable.

### **Previous research on immigration attitudes**

Immigration has been a subject of social scientific study since the beginning of the last century (see e.g. Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918). Contemporary research focuses - among other topics - on Eastern European labour migration to Western Europe (e.g. Black et al., 2010), transnational networks (e.g. Van Bochove et al., 2009), civil rights of migrants (e.g. Castles and Davidson, 2000) and the relationship between migration and crime (e.g. Freilich and Guerette, 2006). How citizens in “receiving countries” view the settlement of migrants has been less frequently examined. The first cross-national study of anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe is provided by Card et al. (2005). It used data from the first ESS round in 2003. The analysis shows that age and educational level positively correlate with tolerant attitudes toward the settlement of newcomers. This indicates that young and less educated citizens are prone to be more restrictive towards immigration. It also appears that at the beginning of the millennium, respondents from Sweden held relatively tolerant attitudes towards immigration, while Greeks and Hungarians reported a stronger preference for limiting immigration.

Sides and Citrin (2007) and Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) also analysed data from the first ESS round. Sides and Citrin found that respondents who expressed a preference for cultural unity were less tolerant towards immigration. Economic uncertainty played a smaller role than expected. The analysis of Hain Mueller and Hiscox shows that a large part of the effect on ideas about immigration can be explained by differences in education. Higher-educated respondents attach greater importance to cultural diversity than less-educated respondents and consequently, the former more often regard immigration as beneficial to the receiving country<sup>1</sup>. Earlier, Fetzer (2000) showed, on the basis of opinion polls in France and Germany, that

feelings of cultural marginality can evoke opposition to immigration. Contrary to what is generally perceived, the relationship with economic marginality was much weaker. Research by Lahav (2004), which used data from the Eurobarometer, indicates that the number of migrants in a country plays a role in the opinion on newcomers. Countries with substantial immigrant populations display a stronger anti-immigration sentiment than countries with a relatively small number of migrants.

Recently published data from the Atlas of European Values (2011) - a consortium of European universities and research institutes - indicate negative attitudes of citizens<sup>2</sup>. Through some provocative assertions, the Atlas polled public opinion on the effects of immigration. The survey reveals that in 2008, a majority of Britons (60%), Turks (62%) and Russians (58%) believed that "immigrants undermine the cultural life". It was also found that majorities of respondents agree with the statement "immigrants make crime problems worse". For several countries the response rate for the latter assertion exceeded 70 percent (this is the case for Austria, Russia, Norway and the Czech Republic). However, data on the number of respondents per country and method of sampling are absent. The most recent indication of European public opinion on immigration has a non-academic origin. From a global Internet poll conducted by research firm IPSOS in 2011 among more than 17,000 people in 23 countries, it would appear that Europe is gripped by an anti-immigration sentiment (IPSOS, 2011). Of the Spaniards, Italians and Britons who took part in the survey, 65 percent felt that there were too many immigrants in their country. Sweden and Poland were the only participating European countries where the majority does not display negative views on immigration. Still, according to the IPSOS data, no European country has a majority that feels that the presence of immigrants creates added value.

Although the Atlas of European Values and the IPSOS poll demonstrate a serious anti-immigration sentiment, the representativeness and validity of the outcomes are questionable. IPSOS acquired data via ad-hoc internet panels, which indicates a high risk of self-selection. Moreover, the IPSOS survey presents the theme of immigration very directly instead of mapping underlying attitudes. This may also have influenced the opinion of respondents. Similar methodological critique applies to the Atlas of European Values. The rather bold statements of the Atlas even exhibit characteristics of what in journalism is known as a "push poll", a technique by which the opinion of respondents is controlled by selective and suggestive questioning. A limitation of the previously discussed academic studies on immigration attitudes is that they are somewhat dated and biased in terms of the formulated research questions and hypotheses; the available scientific research is based on data that does not extend beyond 2003, comprises single measurement, and seeks to explain a presupposed anti-immigration sentiment. Because of the lack of longitudinal data, it is also impossible to determine to what extent the recent populist and polarizing political and media discourse on immigration coincides with attitudes of European citizens.

### **Three dimensions: attitudes, place and time**

Recent polls and the rise of populist, anti-immigration movements in parts of Europe suggest a serious anti-immigration sentiment in various European countries. However, a thorough analysis of public attitudes on immigration is required. The political discourse may not be a good indicator of public opinion, and the IPSOS poll and the Atlas of European Values cannot be followed blindly, due to their methodological shortcomings. Because of the lack of longitudinal data, it is also impossible to determine how public ideas about immigration have developed over time. In short, what is lacking is a clear and complete picture of the attitudes of European citizens on immigration. To complete this picture, in this article we focus on three dimensions: underlying attitudes, time and place.

Specifically, we distinguish between beliefs about the *policy* on immigration and the *impact* of immigration, or – to put it another way - the attitude towards the influx of newcomers as such versus how the social, cultural and economic effects of their arrival are valued. This is an important distinction, because in the public debate these themes - roughly, immigration versus integration - are frequently used interchangeably (Lucassen and Lucassen, 2011). Also, for our analysis we did not use suggestive assertions,

but rather relied on different scales that combine underlying attitudes about the topic<sup>3</sup>. This gives the analysis more statistical power. In this way results are also more easily organized and displayed by country and time measurement. Finally, the scales yield a more nuanced picture than the usual dichotomous agree / disagree response categories of public opinion polls mentioned earlier.

The article also provides a closer look at Western European countries that displayed a growth of political “anti-immigration” movements in the last decade. It is often assumed that the emergence of these parties can be explained by a more restrictive approach to immigration among the wider population. Until the early 2000s, European countries supposedly engaged in a too liberal immigration policy, against the wishes of its citizens (Lahav, 2004). By zooming in on the voting behaviour in some of these countries and by comparing these with the ESS data, we try to assess whether a more restrictive political stance on immigration indeed can be explained by a change in public opinion.

## **Two dependent variables: immigration policy and impact of immigration**

### ***Immigration policy***

Views on immigration policy was measured by combining three different items:

- How do you feel about the arrival in your country of people of the same race or ethnic group?
- How do you feel about the arrival in your country of people of different race or ethnic groups?
- How do you feel about the arrival in your country of people from poorer countries outside Europe?

Respondents could answer on a 4-point scale (from 1) "Allow many of these people to come and live here" to 4) "Allow none of these people to come and live here"). These three items were combined into a single scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88. A factor analysis reveals that the items represent one underlying dimension<sup>4</sup>.

### ***Impact of immigration***

Opinion on the impact of immigration was also measured by combining three items:

- Would you say it is generally bad or good for the country's economy that people come to live here from other countries?
- Would you say that the country's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?
- Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

Respondents could answer each of these three items on an 11-point scale. For item 1 the scale runs from "bad for the economy" to "good for the economy", for item 2 from "cultural life undermined" to "cultural life enriched" and for item 3 from "worse place to live" to "better place to live". For the purpose of analysis, the response scores of the three items were recoded so that an increasing score reflects a more negative attitude towards the impact of immigration. The three items were combined into a scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. We did not reduce the items to a 4-point scale, as this would reduce the nuance in the answers. A factor analysis reveals that the items represent one underlying dimension<sup>5</sup>.

## **Results**

### ***Immigration policy***

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics of the views on immigration by country and ESS round (2003-2011). The mean values in the table indicate the tolerance level towards the arrival of newcomers. The first thing to note is that European countries on the whole score neutral on the scale. The mean values fluctuate around the equilibrium of 2.5. Moreover, there are no significant changes visible in time. European attitudes in this respect are quite stable. In the Netherlands, for instance, the average score of Dutch respondents balances stable around the 2.5 value over the years, which indicates that the settlement of migrants is valued highly neutral by the Dutch. The most recent Dutch measurements in 2009 and 2011 even show a slightly more tolerant attitude compared to previous years. Switzerland and Denmark are on the tolerant side of the scale as well. These are countries that have a visible anti-immigrant party and in recent years regularly reached the news with corresponding anti-immigration legislation and rhetoric. Like the Netherlands, the Swiss and Danish data show no significant fluctuations in the period 2003-2011. However, there are some exceptions to the overall image of neutrality. Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and Turkey report a more intolerant attitude towards the arrival of migrants, with means pushing the three-point boundary. Greece and Turkey in particular score relatively high on the scale and do so for all ESS rounds in which the countries participated. There also a few outliers in the opposite direction. Bulgaria, Norway, Poland and especially

Sweden, are relatively more tolerant of immigration than other countries. Sweden is the only country that on the scale drops below the two point mark.

It is noteworthy that the countries that lack a recognizable anti-immigration party (e.g. Portugal, Greece, Turkey), show a more negative attitude towards the arrival of immigrants than countries that are represented by such a party in the national parliament (e.g. the PVV in the Netherlands and People's Party in both Denmark and Switzerland). Further analysis shows that a statistical distinction can be made between "tolerant" (more often northern European countries) and "intolerant" countries (more often southern European countries). If we zoom in on Cyprus, for example, a Bonferroni post-hoc test reveals a significant difference in the opinion on immigration policy between Cyprus and other countries ( $P < 0.01$ ), but not between Cyprus and other (southern) countries that tend toward intolerance, such as Hungary and Portugal. The same pattern occurs for the "tolerant" countries. Norway, for example, differs significantly from other countries ( $P < 0.01$ ) but not from the countries that also report a relative tolerance towards the arrival of newcomers, such as Bulgaria, Switzerland and Ireland. The Swedes, on the other hand, are so unique in their tolerance level, that they herein significantly differ from all other Europeans (Bonferroni post-hoc test  $P < 0.01$ ).

Finally, a few countries moved towards a more tolerant attitude on immigration between 2003 and 2011. This applies to Bulgaria, Estonia, Norway, Poland and Sweden. It constitutes a modest movement in time, but the trend towards greater support for the settlement of newcomers in these countries over the years is evident. No European country on the other hand, reports a growing *intolerance* towards migrants since 2003. This can be considered a remarkable result, given the previously outlined political developments in Europe and the at times heated local discourse on immigration in the media.

### ***Impact of immigration***

Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics of the views on the impact of immigration by country and ESS round (2003-2011). The mean values in the table indicate how Europeans value the social, cultural and economic effects of the arrival of newcomers. A higher score corresponds to a more negative assessment. As with attitudes about the policy, mean scores are predominantly neutral and stable over time. Again, the reported values fluctuate around the middle (5 points), or sometimes ending a little above it, sometimes dropping slightly below it. There are no significant differences to speak of between the different time measurements. Belgium, for example, shows the exact same mean in 2011 as in the first ESS measurement in 2003, namely 5.10. The Netherlands remains on the positive side of the scale in all ESS rounds, i.e. below the five-point boundary. On average, the Dutch are even more positive about the impact of immigration in 2011 than in 2003 - despite the political rhetoric about the alleged negative effects of mass immigration from the PVV. The same applies to Switzerland and Denmark, also two countries with an influential anti-immigration movement.

Regarding the outliers, partly the same countries surface as in Table 1. Cyprus, Greece, Hungary and Turkey are relatively negative about the impact of immigration, but this time Portugal reports neutral figures. What is new is the relatively high score of the Czech Republic. Over the years, the Czechs also assess the effects of immigration slightly more negatively. Russia now also joins the ranks of countries that judge the arrival of newcomers rather as a sort of degradation than an enrichment. Together with the Greeks and the Turks, the Russians display the most negative views about the impact of immigration, with mean values of well over 6 points since 2007. The Bonferroni post-hoc reveals that the Greeks and Russians differ significantly in their valuation of the impact of immigration compared to respondents from other countries ( $P < 0.01$ ).

Switzerland, Finland, Poland, Luxembourg, and Sweden are the opposite outliers. Compared to other European countries, these countries are relatively positive about the impact of immigration. Again, the Swedes are the most optimistic. Swedish citizens observe the effects of immigration as relatively positive. It is - with the exception of Luxembourg in 2003 - the only country that drops below the 4-point threshold on the scale. The prevailing positive attitude in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Finland is remarkable. In

recent years these countries showed a polarizing multicultural discourse, and saw a rise of political parties that related many social problems to the presence of foreigners (respectively the Swiss People's Party, the PVV and the True Finns).

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics of dependent variable “Immigration policy”, per country and ESS-round 2003-2011 (scale 1-4, 1 = very tolerant towards arrival of migrants, 4 = very intolerant towards arrival of migrants)

ESS Round	2003 (N = 39.860)		2005 (N = 48.487)		2007 (N = 43.000)		2009 (N = 48.652)		2011 (N = 38.974)	
	Mean	S.D.								
Austria	2.63	0.72	2.41	0.78	2.49	0.75	-	-	-	-
Belgium	2.41	0.74	2.46	0.66	2.37	0.75	2.31	0.75	2.43	0.77
Bulgaria*	-	-	-	-	2.27	0.98	<u>2.17</u>	0.95	2.10	0.94
Switzerland	<u>2.15</u>	0.60	2.18	0.66	2.24	0.64	2.20	0.62	2.23	0.66
Cyprus	-	-	-	-	<b><u>2.94</u></b>	0.60	2.71	0.51	-	-
Czech Republic	2.54	0.72	2.67	0.80	-	-	2.74	0.75	2.78	0.77
Germany	2.31	0.70	2.46	0.78	2.45	0.77	2.18	0.75	2.24	0.74
Denmark	2.35	0.67	2.37	0.68	2.29	0.65	2.27	0.67	2.24	0.66
Estonia*	-	-	2.74	0.78	2.67	0.76	2.63	0.79	2.53	0.72
Spain	2.39	0.83	2.34	0.85	2.50	0.86	2.61	0.85	2.64	0.88
Finland	2.52	0.68	2.56	0.67	2.54	0.66	2.66	0.68	2.62	0.65
France	2.48	0.71	2.50	0.67	2.48	0.72	2.42	0.70	2.44	0.72
United Kingdom	2.50	0.74	2.46	0.75	2.55	0.76	2.52	0.75	2.59	0.80
Greece	<b><u>2.97</u></b>	0.65	<b><u>2.91</u></b>	0.72	-	-	<b><u>2.95</u></b>	0.70	-	-
Hungary	<b><u>2.84</u></b>	0.63	<b><u>2.93</u></b>	0.77	-	-	<b><u>2.83</u></b>	0.71	2.79	0.74
Ireland	2.22	0.67	2.22	0.75	2.49	0.76	2.35	0.78	-	-
Italy	2.25	0.80	2.40	0.85	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	2.49	0.80	2.49	0.80	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	2.42	0.67	2.46	0.73	2.49	0.76	2.32	0.71	2.36	0.73
Norway*	2.26	0.66	2.25	0.66	2.21	0.67	<u>2.15</u>	0.64	<u>2.16</u>	0.66
Poland*	2.36	0.69	2.26	0.77	<u>2.07</u>	0.77	<u>2.04</u>	0.73	<u>2.05</u>	0.73
Portugal	2.75	0.82	<b><u>2.85</u></b>	0.80	<b><u>2.86</u></b>	0.85	<b><u>2.80</u></b>	0.86	2.75	0.82
Russia	-	-	-	-	<u>2.57</u>	0.85	2.55	0.83	2.50	0.84
Sweden*	1.88	0.64	1.88	0.69	<u>1.82</u>	0.67	<u>1.79</u>	0.65	<u>1.75</u>	0.63
Slovenia	2.42	0.70	2.43	0.78	2.43	0.75	2.36	0.74	2.34	0.73
Slovakia	-	-	2.25	0.83	2.26	0.85	2.38	0.88	-	-
Turkey	-	-	<b><u>2.98</u></b>	0.93	-	-	<b><u>2.98</u></b>	0.92	-	-
Ukraine	-	-	<u>2.12</u>	0.87	2.22	0.88	2.30	0.91	-	-

\* Countries that report an increasing tolerance towards the arrival of migrants between 2003-2011.

Underlined values represent relative tolerance (mean  $\leq$  2.20). Bold and underlined values represent relative intolerance (mean  $\geq$  2.80). A hyphen means no data available.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics of dependent variable “Impact of immigration”, per country and ESS-round 2003-2011 (scale 0-10, 0 = very positive about consequences of immigration, 10 = very negative about consequences of immigration)

ESS Round	2003 (N = 39.860)		2005 (N = 48.487)		2007 (N = 43.000)		2009 (N = 48.652)		2011 (N = 38.974)	
	Mean	S.D.								
Austria	4.64	2.04	5.16	2.14	5.25	2.22	-	-	-	-
Belgium	5.10	1.66	5.18	1.97	4.96	1.83	4.81	1.80	5.10	1.78
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	4.36	2.68	4.58	2.38	4.55	2.37
Switzerland	4.16	1.66	4.36	1.87	4.24	1.83	4.01	1.74	<u>4.11</u>	1.71
Cyprus	4.65	1.88	-	-	<b><u>5.97</u></b>	2.09	5.56	2.09	-	-
Czech Republic	5.58	1.91	5.73	2.09	-	-	5.70	1.97	<b><u>6.00</u></b>	1.94
Germany	4.65	1.88	5.08	2.10	5.06	2.04	4.57	2.04	4.77	2.07
Denmark	4.65	2.00	4.64	2.08	4.25	2.02	4.32	2.01	4.29	1.91
Estonia	-	-	5.66	2.04	5.46	2.03	5.27	2.02	5.25	1.90
Spain	4.73	1.74	4.46	2.03	4.56	1.99	4.77	2.03	4.66	1.91
Finland	<u>4.05</u>	1.66	<u>4.16</u>	1.76	<u>3.99</u>	1.69	<u>3.91</u>	1.66	4.21	1.73
France	5.09	2.17	5.27	2.16	5.25	2.26	5.01	2.06	5.17	2.12
United Kingdom	5.31	2.04	5.31	2.16	5.46	2.30	5.37	2.28	5.38	2.21
Greece	<b><u>6.47</u></b>	2.20	<b><u>6.30</u></b>	2.24	-	-	<b><u>6.62</u></b>	2.18	-	-
Hungary	5.63	1.89	<b><u>5.80</u></b>	2.04	<b><u>5.99</u></b>	2.26	<b><u>5.89</u></b>	2.07	5.55	1.96
Ireland	4.70	2.12	4.22	2.13	<u>4.13</u>	2.21	4.56	2.12	-	-
Italy	4.96	1.80	5.58	2.18	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	<u>3.43</u>	1.98	<u>4.11</u>	2.07	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	4.83	1.65	4.92	1.71	4.54	1.58	4.45	1.61	4.46	1.56
Norway	4.65	1.72	4.72	1.82	4.51	1.81	4.34	1.78	4.40	1.79
Poland	4.68	1.79	4.34	1.97	<u>4.01</u>	1.92	<u>4.06</u>	1.82	<u>4.10</u>	1.80
Portugal	5.28	1.89	5.73	1.85	5.30	1.93	5.06	1.96	5.32	1.71
Russia	-	-	-	-	<b><u>6.59</u></b>	2.35	<b><u>6.25</u></b>	2.22	<b><u>6.28</u></b>	2.20
Sweden	<u>3.76</u>	1.87	<u>4.01</u>	1.98	<u>3.89</u>	1.93	<u>3.78</u>	1.87	<u>3.46</u>	1.89
Slovenia	5.35	1.70	5.39	1.97	5.37	2.09	5.33	2.08	5.55	2.03
Slovakia	-	-	5.34	1.95	5.04	1.87	5.34	1.88	-	-
Turkey	-	-	<b><u>6.30</u></b>	2.41	-	-	<b><u>6.21</u></b>	2.57	-	-
Ukraine	-	-	5.20	2.41	5.51	2.41	5.60	2.44	-	-

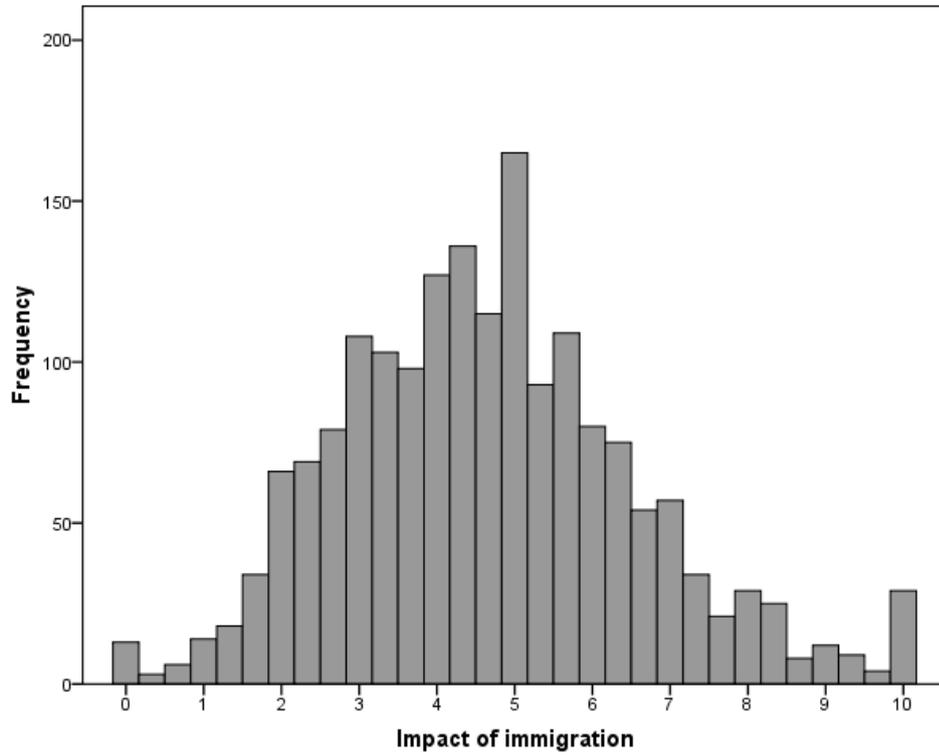
Underlined values represent a relative positive attitude (mean  $\leq$  4.20). Bold and underlined values represent a relative negative attitude (mean  $\geq$  5.80). A hyphen means no data available.

### *A closer look at country distributions and voting behaviour*

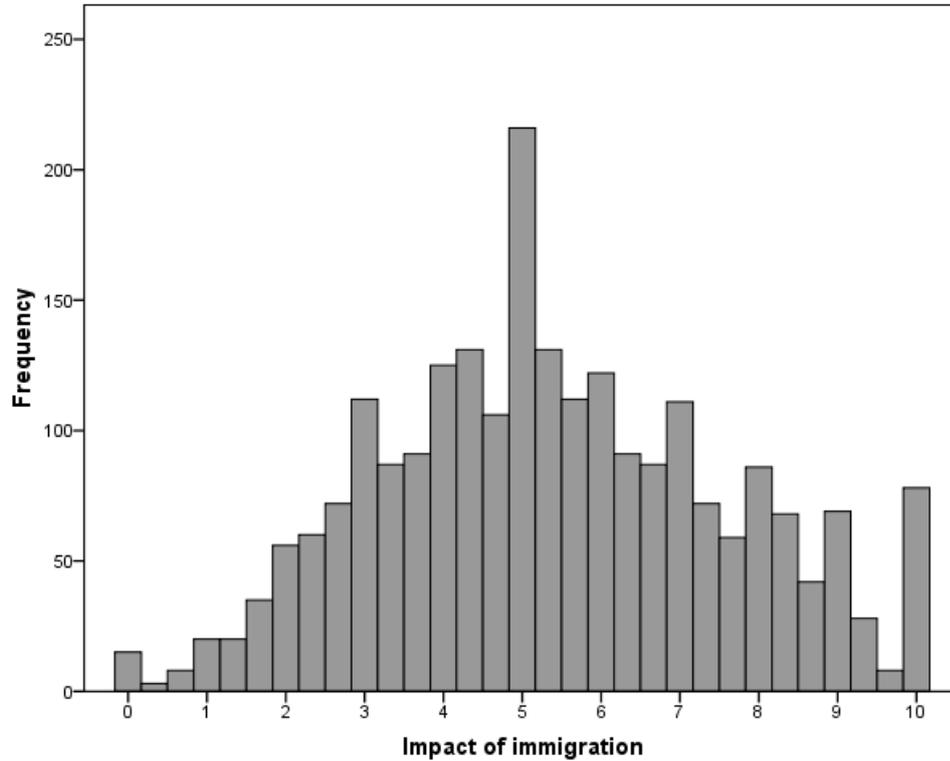
It is important to note that, despite some cross-national differences, European countries on the whole are neutral in their views on immigration. The middle-position that Europeans occupy in this respect becomes visual when the frequency of the distributions of the variable "impact of immigration" is displayed in graphs. For reasons of illustration and comparison, we select from the ESS measurement of 2011 two countries where according to the IPSOS survey a large majority of the population is negative towards immigration, namely Spain and Britain. In addition, we present the distributions of countries that show moderately negative and positive attitudes in the ESS measurement of 2011; the Czech Republic and Russia, and Switzerland, Finland, and Sweden. We also added the Netherlands to this list.

The frequency distributions of the "IPSOS countries" and the "positive" countries sometimes lean to either side of the scale, but otherwise are normally distributed (see Figures 1, 2, 5 and 6). The Netherlands appears to be a paragon of immigration neutrality, with almost a textbook normal curve. Only the two countries that on average report the most negative attitudes about the impact of immigration - Russia and the Czech Republic – show a somewhat different pattern. Russia shows a U-shape, with values slightly situated on the right side of the scale. This indicates that views of Russian citizens tend to be polarized, yet the effects of immigration are either assessed neutrally, or very negatively. The distribution of the Czech Republic clusters more on the right side of the scale: the views of most Czech respondents about the impact of immigration tend to be disapproving. The frequency of Sweden shows an L-shape: Swedish citizens perceive immigration predominantly as an enrichment for society.

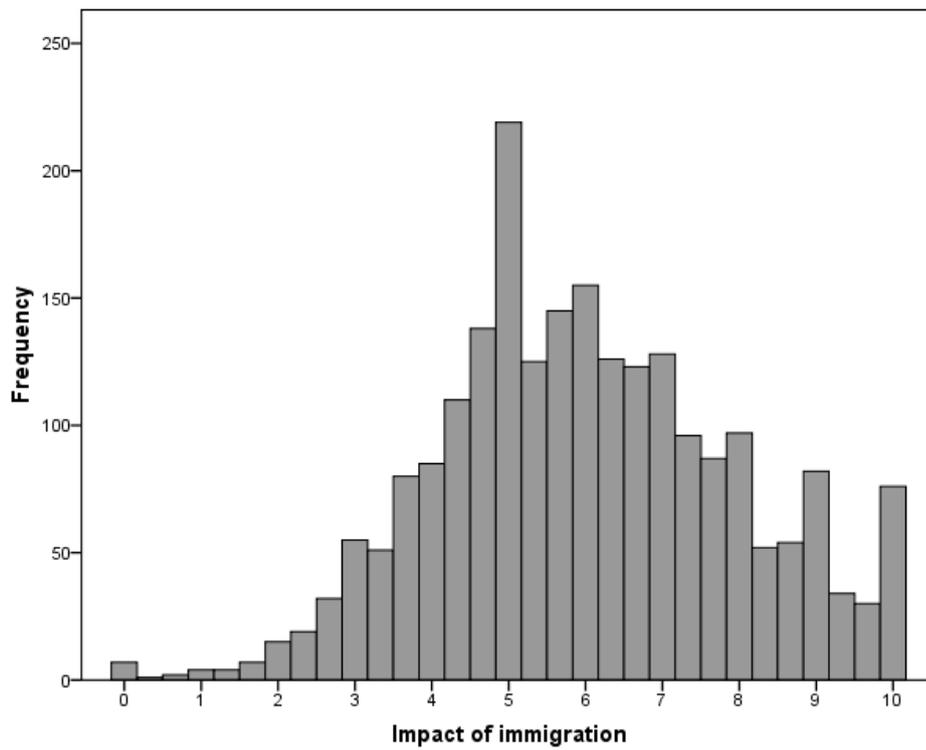
**Figure 1** Frequency distribution Spain “Impact of immigration” ESS-round 2011 (N = 1.793)



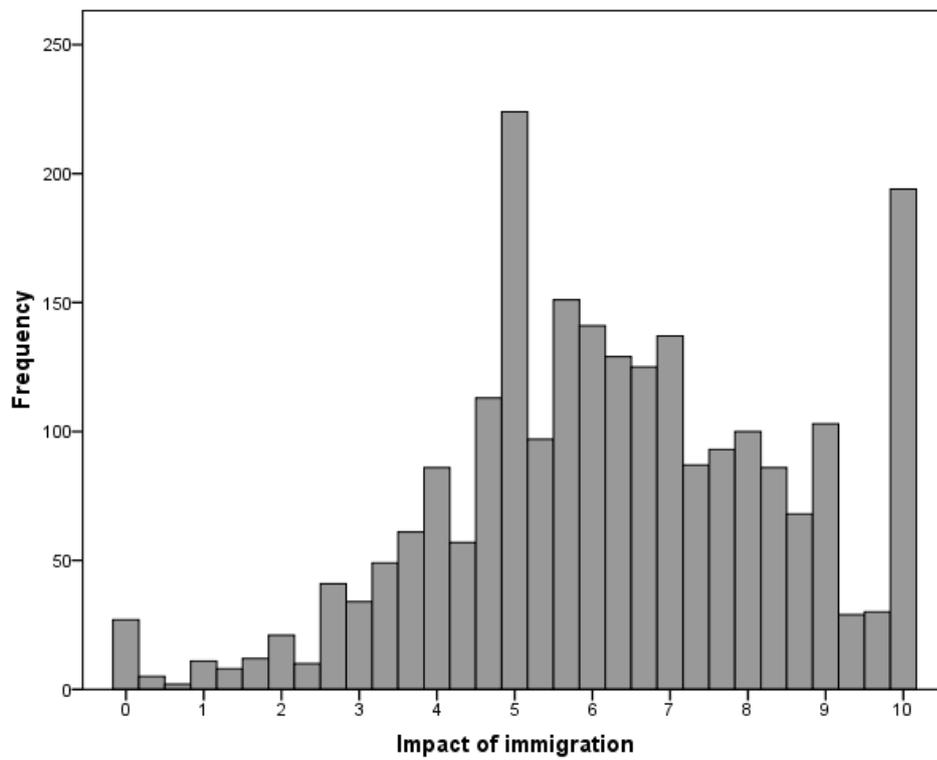
**Figure 2** Frequency distribution United Kingdom “Impact of immigration” ESS-round 2011 (N = 2.321)



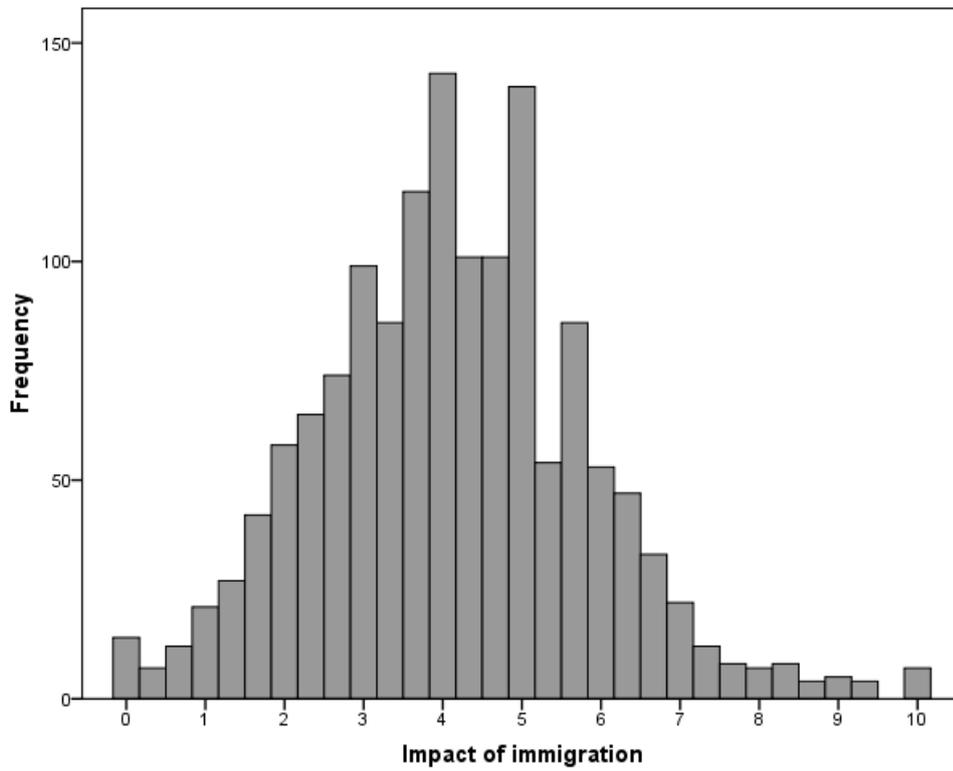
**Figure 3** Frequency distribution Czech Republic “Impact of immigration” ESS-round 2011 (N = 1.936)



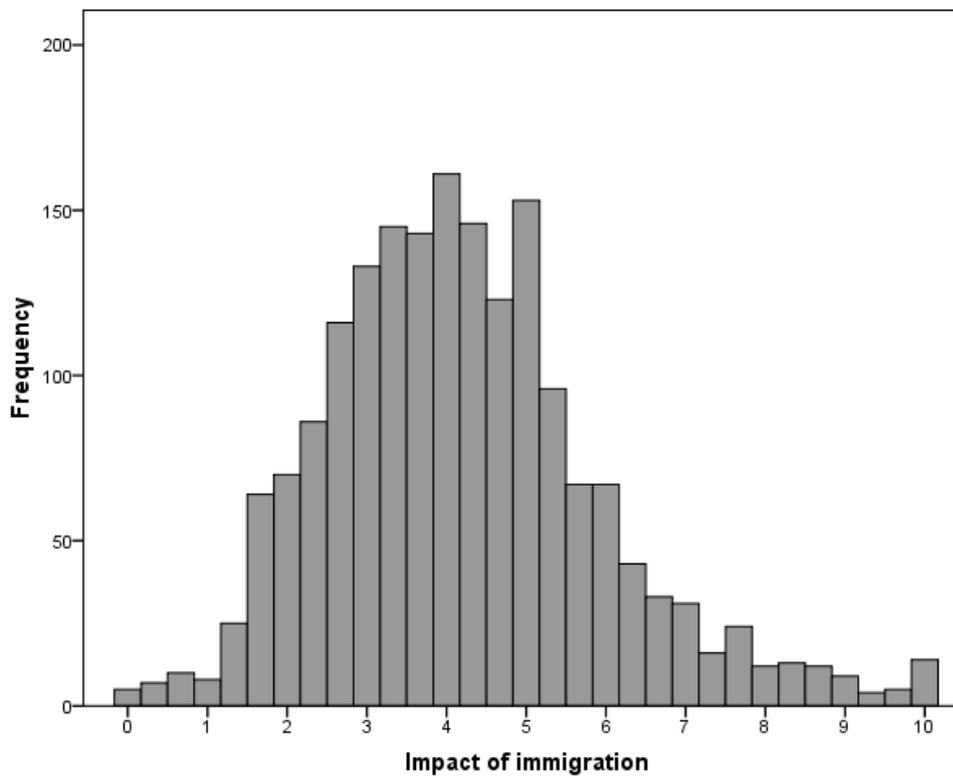
**Figure 4** Frequency distribution Russia “Impact of immigration” ESS-round 2011 (N = 2.203)



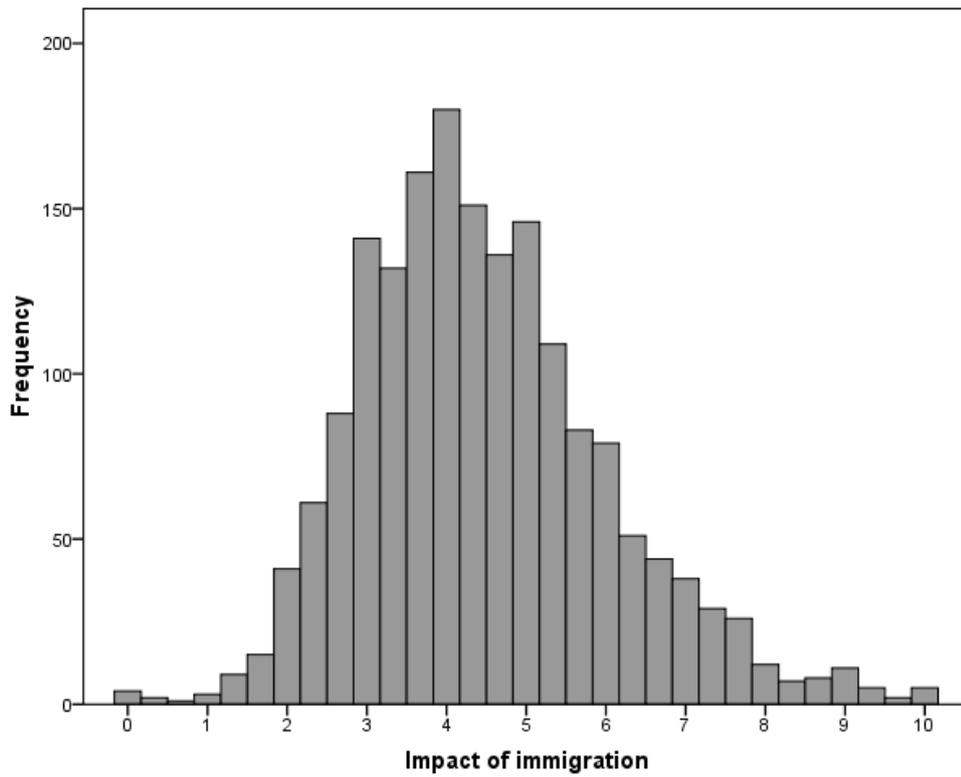
**Figure 5** Frequency distribution Switzerland “Impact of immigration” ESS-round 2011 (N = 1.708)



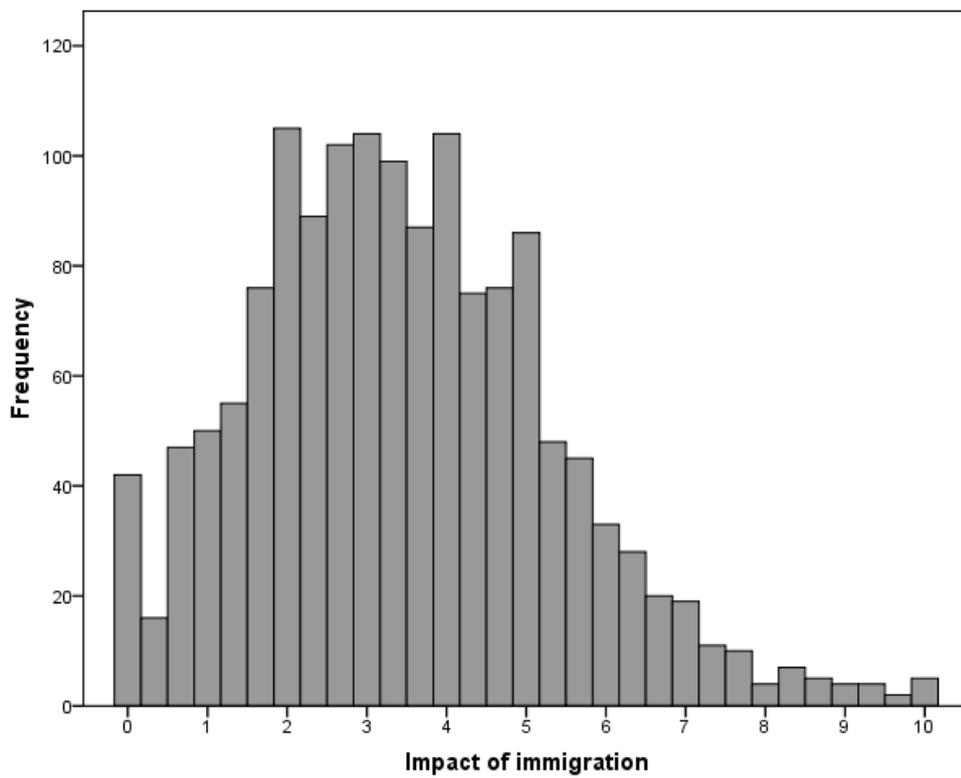
**Figure 6** Frequency distribution Finland “Impact of immigration” ESS-round 2011 (N = 1.735)



**Figure 7** Frequency distribution the Netherlands “Impact of immigration” ESS-round 2011 (N = 1.558)



**Figure 8** Frequency distribution Sweden “Impact of immigration” ESS-round 2011 (N = 1.888)



How has public opinion on immigration developed in countries that showed an above average growth of anti-immigration movements over the past decade? By zooming in on the voting behaviour in some of these countries and by comparing these with the ESS data, we offer an additional test of the supposed link between a more restrictive immigration policy and a changed public opinion on immigration. For this we look at the voting behaviour of political parties in four countries: the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, and Denmark. As a guideline, we selected the parties that score higher than 8.5 points on Immerzeel and Lubbers' (2011) scale of "immigration restriction" (see Table 3)<sup>6</sup>.

**Table 3** Scores of European political parties on immigration restriction scale per country

Country	Anti-immigration party	Score on immigration restriction scale <sup>a</sup> 2001	Score immigration restriction scale <sup>a</sup> 2011
<b>Netherlands<sup>b</sup></b>	Lijst Pim Fortuyn	(founded 2002)	8.7
	Partij voor de Vrijheid	(founded 2006)	9.7
	Trots op Nederland	(founded 2007)	8.9
<b>Austria</b>	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	9.1	9.6
	Bündnis Zukunft Österreich	(founded 2005)	8.6
<b>Switzerland</b>	Freiheits-Partei der Schweiz	9.5	9.6
	Schweizer Demokraten	9.7	9.8
	Schweizerische Volkspartei	9.1	9.6
	Lega dei Ticinesi	9.6	9.7
<b>Denmark</b>	Dansk Folkeparti	9.7	9.6
	Fremskridtspartiet	9.2	-

Source: Lubbers (2001) and Immerzeel and Lubbers (2011). <sup>a</sup> On a scale of 0-10. <sup>b</sup> In 2002 the 'Centrum democraten' party was officially dissolved. In 2001 it scored 9.7 on the scale.

Table 4 provides an overview of the electoral support for parties who proclaim strong anti-immigration views in the Netherlands. The bold results indicate participation in the national government. From scratch, the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) obtained seventeen percent of the votes in 2002, but their existence in Dutch national politics was short-lived (partly due to the murder of its leader Pim Fortuyn). The Party for Freedom (PVV) ensured that in 2010, anti-immigration policy firmly returned on the political agenda. That year, the proportion of citizens that agreed with anti-immigrant parties virtually resumed the same level as in 2002. When we compare this with the data in Tables 1 and 2, it becomes clear that despite the large electoral victory of the PVV in the Netherlands, the attitudes of Dutch citizens on both the migration policy and the impact of migration are not particularly extreme and stable over time. Over the years, the Dutch even developed a slightly more optimistic outlook on the consequences of immigration, and currently think more positive about immigration than before the electoral gains of the PVV (see Table 2).

**Table 4** Voting behaviour on anti-immigration parties in the Netherlands. Percentage of valid votes in parliamentary elections.

	May 2002	January 2003	November 2006	June 2010
<b>Lijst Pim Fortuyn</b>	<b>17%</b>	5.7%	0.2%	-
<b>Leefbaar Nederland</b>	1.6%	0.4%	-	-
<b>Partij voor de Vrijheid</b>	-*	-	5.9%	<b>15.4% (government support)</b>
<b>Trots op Nederland</b>	-	-	-	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>16%</b>

Source: [www.electionguide.org](http://www.electionguide.org). \* Party not (yet) participating in elections.

In Austria, the parliamentary representation of anti-immigration parties shows a strong upward trend since 2002 (see Table 5). The political support for the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) and Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ) increased considerably in the 2000's, from more than ten percent in 2002 to more than 28 percent in 2008. In 2002, the FPÖ participated in the national government; the BZÖ did so in 2006. In 2008, both parties were excluded from participation in government, despite large electoral gains. However, the substantial electoral support for restrictive immigration parties does not correspond to the wider attitude towards immigration policy and the impact of immigration of Austrians in the ESS sample. These results in fact cannot be labelled as extreme anti-immigration and are stable over time, and are therefore not consistent with the surge of parliamentary representation of anti-immigration movements in Austria.

**Table 5** Voting behaviour on anti-immigration parties in Austria. Percentage of valid votes in parliamentary elections.

	November 2002	October 2006	September 2008
<b>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	11.0%	17.5%
<b>Bündnis Zukunft Österreich</b>	-*	<b>4.1%</b>	10.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>28.2%</b>

Source: [www.electionguide.org](http://www.electionguide.org). \* Party not yet participating in elections.

In Switzerland, the number of citizens that vote for anti-immigrant parties is consistently high (see Table 6), even compared to other European countries with influential anti-immigration movements. The proportion of voters that agreed with such parties is close to thirty percent in 2003, 2007 and 2011. By far the largest anti-immigration party is the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP), which has a stable support of over a quarter of the Swiss voters. Remarkably, in the ESS data Switzerland scores average or below average when it comes to the tolerance of the arrival of migrants (see Table 1). In fact, the Swiss view the effects of immigration more positively than many other European countries (see Figure 5), and in 2011 scored even lower on both scales than the average of European countries (means scores of 2.23 / 2.40 for immigration policy and 4.11 / 4.87 for impact of immigration).

**Table 6** Voting behaviour on anti-immigration parties in Switzerland. Percentage of valid votes in parliamentary elections.

	October 2003	October 2007	October 2011
<b>Schweizerische Volkspartei</b>	<b>26.7 %</b>	<b>28.9 %</b>	<b>26.6 %</b>
<b>Freiheits-Partei der Schweiz</b>	0.2 %	0.1 %	-
<b>Schweizer Demokraten</b>	<b>1.0 %</b>	0.5 %	0.2 %
<b>Lega dei Ticinesi</b>	<b>0.4 %</b>	<b>0.6 %</b>	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	27.9 %	29.5 %	27.6 %

Source: [www.electionguide.org](http://www.electionguide.org) and Wikipedia.

In Denmark, the Dansk Folkeparti (DF) has a relatively stable electoral following of between 12 and 14 percent. From 2001 to 2011, the DF functioned as an informal partner of the official government parties, providing them with a parliamentary majority (as the PVV currently does in The Netherlands). In the ESS data we see that the ideas of the Danes on immigration policy and the impact of immigration are relatively moderate. In fact, since 2005 the Danes have become slightly more tolerant towards the arrival of migrants (see Table 1). Here, the political representation thus roughly corresponds to the overall attitude of Danes towards migration, although the Danish People's Party in recent years evidently wrongly tried to cultivate the image of the Danish people as being "anti-immigration".

**Table 7** Voting behaviour on anti-immigration parties in Denmark. Percentage of valid votes in parliamentary elections.

	November 2001	February 2005	November 2007	September 2011
<b>Dansk Folkeparti</b>	<b>12%</b> (government support)	<b>13.2%</b> (government support)	<b>13.9%</b> (government support)	12.3%
<b>Fremskridtspartiet</b>	0.6%	-*	-*	-*
<b>Total</b>	12.6%	13.2%	13.9%	12.3%

Source: [www.electionguide.org](http://www.electionguide.org). \* Party did not participate in these elections

## Conclusions

Until now, a representative and longitudinal picture of public attitudes on immigration (measures) in Europe was incomplete. Our analysis of ESS data shows that – apart from some cross-national variations - opinion on immigration in Europe is predominantly neutral. The prevailing idea that the increasing restrictive political policies on immigration reflect the wider views of citizens must be reconsidered. Furthermore, the analysis provides no evidence that Europeans overwhelmingly judge immigration as a negative phenomenon. On average, Europeans value immigration neither as a degradation, nor as an enrichment of society. The views on immigration policy and the impact of the arrival of migrants - roughly the difference between immigration and integration - largely overlap. Attitudes about both the policy and the impact of immigration were also remarkably stable between 2003 and 2011. Public opinion therefore does not run parallel to polarizing and populist discourse on immigration that in this period manifested itself more firmly in politics and the media.

In a representative democracy, the electoral results of a country are often perceived as a direct translation of domestic social sentiments. What is especially noticeable in the European political landscape since the early 2000s is the rise of anti-immigrant parties. This may create the impression that voting for these parties mainly stems from growing anti-immigration sentiments among the wider population. The ESS data do not justify this conclusion. Even European countries with visible anti-immigration parties that in recent years regularly reached the news with anti-immigration laws and anti-newcomers rhetoric (e.g. Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, the Netherlands), score either neutral or relatively tolerant on both scales.

The Dutch are currently even more positive about the consequences of immigration than ten years ago. Even more noteworthy is that between 2003 and 2011, several countries have shifted towards a more tolerant attitude on the arrival of newcomers. This is the case for Bulgaria, Estonia, Norway, Poland and Sweden. No European country, on the other hand, reports a greater intolerance since 2003. In other words, during the examined period we detect no growing discontent towards migrants in Europe. The growth potential of voting behaviour for anti-immigration parties barely rises above the 25% level, but some countries do report more right-wing voting over the years (see Tables 3 to 7). In other words, the potential for dissatisfaction with newcomers is perhaps better mobilized politically, but essentially not much has changed in terms of underlying attitudes of the population at large.

Only Greece, Russia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Turkey occupy a slightly different position. Most of these countries also surfaced in the analysis of Card et al. (2005), that used data from the first ESS round. On average, citizens from these countries are more negative towards the phenomenon of immigration, yet their attitudes have remained fairly stable over time. There is no indication of a more intolerant trend in these countries since 2003, although in recent years the Czech Republic moved toward slightly more disapproving attitudes. Only the Swedes seem to be ubiquitously positive about immigration. In general, Northern European countries seem to be slightly more sympathetic towards newcomers than southern European countries, but an unmistakable difference in outlook between the two regions does not emerge. There is also no sign of a fundamental difference between Eastern Europe and Western Europe. The “continent moving West” (Black et al., 2010) does not differ in its views on immigration from the continent of destination, nor are Eastern European (emigration) countries themselves united in their judgment. For example, while Hungary is relatively intolerant, Bulgaria is somewhat more tolerant. In other words, there is no indication that residents of countries that benefit from migration also have a more positive outlook on migration itself. The post-hoc tests do show that the opinion of the most “negative” and “positive” countries differ significantly, but it remains unclear how this should be interpreted. In sum, Europeans on the whole have been neutral on immigration since the early 2000’s. Differences between countries are marginal – i.e., some countries are slightly more positive, some slightly more negative - and immigration countries do not differ in their views from emigration countries.

## Discussion

Why is it that our neutral outcomes are so different from previous immigration polls and seem contrary to popular belief? The first explanation must be sought in the selection of respondents. ESS sampling is done randomly, based on population registers. This avoids the problem of self-selection. Panel data are less immune to this methodological flaw, since participants can anticipate on the topic being surveyed. When polling a theme such as immigration, it stands to reason that the people who are most willing to participate, are also the ones who have the most negative preconceptions about that theme (cf. Ziliak and McCloskey, 2008). Secondly, the style of questioning of previous surveys may have had an adverse impact on results. In the IPSOS survey and the Atlas of European Values, the theme of immigration is incorporated explicitly in the questionnaires. In this way, the topic is in effect psychologically “framed” *a priori*. This increases the chance of influencing the choices of respondents. If a person has to respond to the statement “Immigrants make crime problems worse”, as in the Atlas of European Values, this implicitly suggests a causal link between immigration and crime. Cognitive psychology has shown that people intuitively tend to structure phenomena by logical relationships, even if there is no such relationship (Chapman, 1967; Tversky and Kahneman, 1973; see also Taleb, 2007: 62-84). It is not difficult to imagine what the potential effect of such primed formulations could be on respondents filling out immigration surveys.

Opinion polls and surveys also seem to take little account of a negativity bias. Information that is presented in negative terms is more likely to prompt consent than when it is packaged in a positive formulation (Wason, 1959; see also Baumeister et al., 2001). In opinion polls on immigration, assertions are often phrased negatively (e.g. “This country has too many immigrants”, IPSOS). In the ESS items we used

for our analysis, such psychological disturbance factors were absent. In order to avoid negative connotations or semantic priming, concepts were measured without explicating the investigated theme. The terms "immigration" and "immigrants" were absent from the ESS survey all together. Instead, we analysed underlying attitudes – as did Schalk-Soekar et al. (2010) in their study on support for Dutch multiculturalism - such as how one thinks about the arrival of people from other countries and whether this should be viewed as an enrichment or degradation for economic or cultural life. Also, using the scales, ESS respondents were presented with more choices, which in turn enabled a more nuanced view on these issues than the rigid agree/disagree categories of most opinion polls.

Although public opinion on immigration should not be put on par with xenophobia or interethnic perceptions (see Rydgren 2008), our findings do shed new light on forecasts about multicultural coexistence in Europe. It turns out that most Europeans are not very hostile to the idea of newcomers settling in their country. Public views about the social, economic and cultural consequences of immigration are also less grim than is often assumed. The prevailing negative image about this is generated by polarized debates in parliament and media, but finds no legitimacy in empirical observations. This discrepancy between political discourse and public opinion possibly applies to other socio-political themes as well. Obviously, such a notion has implications for the role of public opinion research in contemporary deliberative democracies. To what extent are current polls able to expose "the secret" of its citizens (Tiemeijer, 2006)? And can conventional opinion polls be considered a legitimate instrument of political action? Pierre Bourdieu (1990) once characterized public opinion research as a science without scientists. According to Bourdieu, public opinion is often constructed by commercial agencies ("merchants of illusion") who have an interest in accommodating certain political ideas or in exalting newsworthy outcomes (see also Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Lewis, 2001). But the allegation of a social construction of public opinion cannot be unilaterally blamed on market researchers. An equally relevant point of discussion concerns the investigation of immigration views in academia. For how meaningful are previous scientific findings about determinants of *anti*-immigration attitudes when in effect the overall opinion on the subject is neutral?

Reliable analyses by Fiorina et al. (2010) in the United States refute many axioms about the alleged polarized state of American society. Americans are not nearly as divided on political hot buttons like abortion and homosexuality as the heated debates in Congress or the cosmetic polls in the media seem to suggest. Yet at the same time in Europe, as in the United States, the political debate on various social topics is becoming more intense. Immigration is just one of the controversies. Now that the media is increasingly eager to present itself as the primary political battleground, and in the process regularly polls the opinion of "the people", social science has a more urgent task than ever to present the facts.

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<sup>1</sup> Recent analysis of the relation between views on immigration and social class shows a more differentiated picture (Lubbers and Lucassen, forthcoming). The 'higher' classes are strongly divided on the topic, and a considerable part is as strongly opposed to immigration as the 'lower' classes.

<sup>2</sup> Although the Atlas for European Values is longitudinal in its design (with measurements in 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008), items about immigration were not included until the 2008 survey, with results published in 2011.

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<sup>3</sup> Prior to the analysis, all six immigration items were combined in one factor analysis. This revealed that the items have two separate underlying dimensions, which can be divided in immigration policy and impact of immigration.

<sup>4</sup> The underlying dimension has an eigenvalue of 2.42 and explains 80.5 percent of the total variance. Factor loadings vary from 0.86 to 0.90. These are values based on the total dataset. As an extra check, separate factor analyses were conducted for separate countries and time measurements. This turned out not to have any influence on the outcomes.

<sup>5</sup> The underlying dimension has an eigenvalue of 2.29 and explains 76.5 percent of the total variance. Factor loadings vary from 0.86 to 0.89. These are values based on the total dataset. As an extra check, separate factor analyses were conducted for separate countries and time measurements. This turned out not to have any influence on the outcomes.

<sup>6</sup> Lubbers (2001) and Immerzeel and Lubbers (2011) constructed their scale on the basis of expert-data. Political scientists, sociologists and survey scientists were asked to classify national political parties in relation to their views on immigration policy.