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Who Can Enter? A Multilevel Analysis on Public Support for Immigration Criteria across 20 European Countries

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Drawing on social psychological threat theories and extending them to a national level, this study investigated individual- and country-level predictors of Europeans' support for immigration criteria. Endorsement of ascribed and acquired immigration standards was analysed with survey data across 20 nations. Multi-level regression analyses revealed that among the individual-level predictors, perceived threat had the strongest relationship with support for both entry criteria. Low gross domestic product (GDP) and low refugee rate predicted approval of ascribed criteria. Cross-level interactions revealed that relationships between perceived threat and approval of acquired entry criteria were intensified in high GDP and high refugee rate contexts. The results corroborate predictions of social psychological threat theories and underscore the importance of including macro-social factors in the cross-national study of immigration attitudes.

KEYWORDS country-level indicators, European Social Survey, immigration attitudes, perceived threat

DESPITE prevailing multicultural and egalitarian discourses, hostile reactions towards immigrants remain common in Europe and other parts of the world. For example, the implementation of the Schengen Agreement, facilitating the movement of people within the member states of the European Union, has raised controversy throughout Europe. Debates on criteria defining who are 'appropriate' immigrants or qualify as legitimate refugees have high priority on the political agendas of governments. Given the public salience of this debate, many of us have built an opinion about 'appropriate' immigration. In social psychological literature, both real and perceived threats have been shown to be important determinants of prejudice, anti-immigrant attitudes, and exclusion of outgroup members

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more generally (Allport, 1954; Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998; Stephan & Renfro, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 2000; see Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006 for a meta-analysis).

This paper aims to make a contribution by examining the role of individual- and contextual-level indicators on immigration policy attitudes across 20 European countries. More specifically, drawing on social psychological threat theories (e.g. Esses et al., 2001; Esses et al., 1998; Stephan & Renfro, 2003) and extending them to a national level (Coenders, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2005; Quillian, 1995; Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Coenders, 2002), this research investigates how European citizens define a suitable immigrant. Social psychological literature abounds with research on attitudes towards immigrants (e.g. Dovidio & Esses, 2001; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Pettigrew et al., 1998; Sanchez-Mazas, 2004) and their acculturation strategies (e.g. Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Senécal, 1997; Van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). Thereby, these studies focus on an outgroup population that is already present in a country. However, to my knowledge, little research exists on the endorsement of criteria set for immigrants attempting to enter a country. Denial of entry to a country is one of the most drastic forms of exclusion that results in an absolute impermeability of ingroup territory boundaries. Though in the comprehensive threat models (e.g. Stephan & Renfro, 2003) societal factors are conceptualized as antecedents of threat, the impact of these factors as moderators of threat perceptions in the model are rarely tested empirically in social psychological research.

The present investigation of support for immigration criteria across 20 European countries offers a cross-national perspective for studying group processes, more specifically the threat underlying immigration attitudes. This article focuses, on the one hand, on the predictive power of individual threat perceptions and social status in host populations. On the other hand, it investigates the role of potential collective-level predictors of the endorsement of acquired and ascribed immigration criteria. In the following, the distinction between acquired and ascribed immigration criteria is described. Then, individual-level threat models are briefly reviewed and, building on individual-level models, the role of country-level indicators on immigration attitudes is discussed. Finally, a multi-level analysis is carried out on survey data drawn from the European Social Survey.

Acquired and ascribed immigration criteria

Government immigration policies legally outline the conditions under which immigrants are granted the right to enter national territory. These policies often define desirable attributes of potential immigrants, for example in terms of their economic status or their level of education (Bourhis et al., 1997; Brochmann, 1999). Citizens of host countries can agree more or less with these policies. In the investigation of the role of threat on support for immigration criteria among host country citizens, an important distinction concerns acquired and ascribed criteria (Green, 2007). Acquired immigration criteria include individual competence and attitudes that can facilitate adaptation to the host country, such as having particular working skills or endorsement of core values of the host country. To the extent that individuals have at least partial control over the acquisition of these standards, in principle, anyone willing could attain them. For example, individuals applying for permits to immigrate as a professional or skilled worker to Canada are assessed with a point system based on their qualifications, work experience, adaptability to way of life, and knowledge of English or French language (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, governmental department, 2008).

Ascribed immigration criteria, in turn, are categorical qualities related to inherent, collective characteristics that define a social group. These criteria are inflexible insofar as individuals who do not fulfil the criteria (e.g. in terms of skin colour, national origin or religion) hardly have a chance in fulfilling the requirements. For example, political debates focusing on halting Muslim immigration refer to ascribed criteria

(e.g. Zolberg & Woon, 1999). Illustrating the political use of ascribed immigration criteria, Swiss immigration policy is largely based on the geographical origins of potential immigrants: explicit immigration priority is granted to citizens of the European Union and of other countries deemed culturally close to Switzerland, while immigrants from the 'rest of the world' are most likely refused residence and work permits (e.g. Piguet, 2004). The absence of individual control over the criteria is a crucial distinction between ascribed criteria and acquired criteria. From a social psychological point of view, acquired criteria are based on an individual person perception, whereas ascribed criteria are based on categorical person perception (e.g. Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Different ideological stances are assumed to underlie support for ascribed and acquired immigration criteria (e.g. Bourhis et al., 1997; Verkuyten, 2007). Endorsement of ascribed criteria is likely to depict an explicitly xenophobic and ethnist stance, to the extent that entire categories of people are excluded from the possibility of immigration on the sole basis of category membership. Endorsement of acquired criteria, in turn, refers to a meritocratic and selective immigration policy attitude whereby immigrants are expected to adopt the host country's values and practices. Support for acquired immigration criteria is a strategy to restrict entry to desirable immigration candidates that have the potential to conform to the way of life and practices of the host culture (Bourhis et al., 1997). Assimilationist ideologies underlie support for acquired criteria to the extent that newly arrived immigrants are expected to abandon their cultural heritage and adopt the host culture (Bowskill, Lyons, & Coyle, 2007). However, support for acquired criteria can presumably also be driven by pluralistic or multicultural ideologies; in this case, immigrants are expected to adopt public values of the host country, while the maintenance of their cultural distinctiveness is recognized or even encouraged. Yet support for ascribed and for acquired criteria have both been shown to relate to negative attitudes towards immigrants such as perceiving stopping immigration as a means to reduce tensions in the country, and reluctance to have a person of a different ethnicity as one's boss (see Green, 2007). Overall, support for acquired criteria should nevertheless be greater than support for ascribed criteria because it is a more normative and acceptable stance in line with widespread meritocratic values, and does not imply an explicit manifestation of xenophobia. As threat perceptions underlie prejudiced attitudes towards immigrants, perceived threat associated with immigration should also drive support for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria.

Perceived threat, social status, and regulation of immigration

Threat appraisals originate from the anticipation of negative consequences of immigration presence leading to support for strict immigration criteria. A considerable body of research employing social psychological threat models has revealed a range of threats underlying antagonistic attitudes towards immigration (e.g. Esses et al., 1998; Stephan & Renfro, 2003; see also Falomir-Pichastor, Munoz-Rojas, Invernizzi, & Mugny, 2004; Zárate, Garcia, Garza, & Hitlan, 2004). Whilst the integrated threat model (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) suggested that four types of threat (i.e. realistic threat, symbolic threat, negative stereotypes, and intergroup anxiety) are related to prejudice toward outgroups, realistic and symbolic threats have been the most commonly examined dimensions.

Competition over scarce resources between social groups—that is, objective threat—has been shown to lead to conflict between groups and, accordingly, to negative attitudes towards outgroups (Bobo, 1983; Sherif, 1967). Viewing immigrant outgroups as competitors leads to prejudice, regardless of whether an objective threat exists (Jackson & Esses, 2000). Perceived competition takes the form of a zero-sum game whereby the ingroups' gains are proportionate to the immigrant groups' losses (Esses et al., 2001). This group-position perspective assesses the

degree to which individuals feel their group (i.e. majority members) is at risk to lose resources, for example jobs or housing, to immigrant outgroups (Pratto & Lemieux, 2001). In the integrated threat model (Stephan & Renfro, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 2000), realistic threat is conceived more broadly, including any perceived threat to the welfare of the group or its members. Therefore, reluctance to share material resources with outgroup members and other perceived tangible threats such as fear of outgroup crime should be strong motivations underlying support for regulating entry of immigrants in host countries.

Symbolic threat, in turn, encompasses nontangible negative consequences of immigrant presence. Differing belief systems, worldviews, and morality elicit symbolic threat (Azzi, 1998; Biernat & Vescio, 2005; Sears & Henry, 2005). The expectancy that all community members share values and conform to common norms makes diversity a potential threat to the majority's worldviews, to supposed cultural homogeneity, and to national unity (Esses, Dovidio, Semenya, & Jackson, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Intergroup differences lead to prejudice towards immigrants when these differences violate a more inclusive category prototype (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Consequently, values of the national majority group are the frame of reference for judging national minorities, such as immigrants. For example, value differences between immigrants and the host population can be perceived as a symbolic threat that should motivate support for regulating entry of immigrants. Support for immigration criteria thus asserts and bolsters common values within a country (e.g. Sears & Henry, 2005). The symbolic threat is thus based on a defense of the identity of the national majority instead of its material interests.

Perceived realistic and symbolic threats provide different, but not mutually exclusive, motivational explanations of immigration attitudes (Riek et al., 2006; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004). In an experimental study, Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, and Martin (2005) demonstrated that attitudes towards an immigrant group were the most negative when the group posed both realistic and symbolic threats to the ingroup. It is expected that threat affects support for strict immigration criteria in the same way as it affects negative immigration attitudes in general. Interpreting immigration as a realistic or as a symbolic threat should therefore amplify support for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria.

Some individuals are nevertheless more likely to experience immigration as threatening than others. Members of low-status categories, in terms of education and income, are more likely than members of high-status categories to be confronted by immigrants insofar as immigrants often occupy low-status positions. They may, therefore, be interested in similar resources such as affordable housing and jobs. Indeed, the relationship between low social position of host country members and negative immigration attitudes has often been demonstrated (Coenders et al., 2005; Quillian, 1995; Scheepers et al., 2002). Likewise, immigrants may not be in a position to compete for resources with high-status social categories in the host country, therefore these categories should experience less threat. Sensitivity to threat then hinges upon individuals' position in the social hierarchy. Therefore, members of low-status categories should be more inclined to reject immigrants by supporting acquired and ascribed immigration criteria.

Country-level indicators of societal threat and immigration attitudes

Up until now, this paper has discussed threat as inducing individual motivations underlying immigration attitudes (Esses et al., 2001; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). But threat can also be generated on a collective and contextual level (Coenders et al., 2005; Hjerm, 2007; Quillian, 1995; Scheepers et al., 2002; Sides & Citrin, 2007) and situational factors can create and transform the experience of threat on the individual level (Stephan & Renfro, 2003). Accounting for the effects of macro-social factors on endorsement of entry criteria for immigrants extends the role of threat in explaining immigration attitudes to a national level.

Societal conditions are thought of as general indicators of a more or less threatening social climate within a country that shapes attitudes towards immigration. Thus, macro-social factors are *indirect* indicators of threat provoked by a collective context that should, in addition to individual-level perceptions of threat, determine support or opposition to immigration criteria (Quillian, 1995; Scheepers et al., 2002). In the current research, collective-level threat is conceptualized by means of the economic context and by migration patterns prevailing in different countries.

Economic conditions of a nation are likely to modulate competition between host country members and immigrants. In a disadvantaged economic context, indexed by a low GDP per capita, competition for scarce resources is likely to be greater than in an advantaged economic context (Esses et al., 2001; Quillian, 1995; Scheepers et al., 2002). To the extent that immigrants are potential competitors, country-level realistic threat should result in greater support for severe immigration entry policies. In advantaged economic contexts, in turn, competition should be dampened and therefore the support for strict immigration criteria should be smaller.

A high proportion of migrants in a country may be seen as diluting and menacing the local culture and values, and challenging established social arrangements. It may also be seen as deteriorating the economic conditions and welfare of local inhabitants by increasing competition and feelings of insecurity (Quillian, 1995; see also Stephan & Renfro, 2003). Hence, a high ratio of immigrants can elicit symbolic and realistic threat. According to this view, a greater number of immigrants or refugees living in the host country should predict support for strict immigration criteria. While the evidence is equivocal, previous research has nevertheless shown a positive relationship between the relative size of immigrant population and antagonistic reactions to immigrants (e.g., Scheepers et al., 2002). Quillian (1995) demonstrated interactive context effects in which the number of non-European immigrants and poor economic conditions intensify each other, so that prejudice is greater when a large foreign presence coincides with poor economic conditions.

The moderating roles of economic context and immigration rate on the relationship between individual-level threat and support for immigration criteria also need to be considered. It is plausible that in settings where societal threats are greater (poor economic conditions and strong immigrant presence) the relationship between threat perceptions and support for both acquired and ascribed immigration criteria is intensified. In the same vein, the relationship between objective threat (low social status) and support for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria should be intensified in contexts of societal threat.

Current study

Endorsement of acquired and ascribed criteria for immigration was studied across 20 European countries. Based on the predictions of the role of threat on prejudice, individual- and contextual-level threat indicators should influence endorsement of both acquired and ascribed immigration criteria. The current study first tested the predictions that individual-level perceptions of threat, low social status, as well as disadvantaged economic and high immigration national contexts, enhance endorsement of strict acquired and ascribed immigration criteria. Second, the study examined the extent to which the country-level indicators moderated the relationships between threat and endorsement of acquired and ascribed immigration criteria, as well as between low status and endorsement of immigration criteria. The predictions were tested by means of multi-level analysis that allows simultaneous modelling of individual- and country-level effects (Hox, 2002).

Method

Participants and procedure

The overall sample consisted of 32,717 citizens from 20 European countries (Table 1) drawn from the 2003 *European Social Survey* (ESS) (Jowell and the Central Coordinating Team, European Social

Table 1. Number of participants, survey language, means, standard deviations and reliabilities for acquired criteria, ascribed criteria and perceived threat across countries, and country-level indicators

			Acquired		Ascribed		Perceived threat		GDP per	Refugee
Country	*N*	Language	*M (SD)*	α	*M (SD)*	α	*M (SD)*	α	capita[a]	ratio %[b]
Austria	1,741	German	7.12 (2.18)	.80	2.64 (2.59)	.70	.54 (.19)	.79	25.09	.19
Belgium	1,531	Flemish, French	6.90 (2.06)	.79	2.51 (2.50)	.75	.55 (.16)	.76	25.44	.18
Czech Republic	1,107	Czech	7.09 (2.07)	.77	3.71 (2.71)	.70	.59 (.21)	.81	13.02	.01
Denmark	1,335	Danish	6.48 (2.31)	.78	2.68 (2.49)	.66	.52 (.17)	.77	25.87	1.34
Finland	1,901	Finnish, Swedish	6.89 (1.84)	.79	3.27 (2.65)	.72	.54 (.14)	.73	23.10	.26
France	1,323	French	6.84 (2.03)	.77	2.71 (2.50)	.73	.56 (.17)	.81	22.90	.22
Germany	2,605	German	7.38 (1.92)	.78	2.00 (2.22)	.64	.57 (.15)	.79	23.74	1.10
Greece	2,085	Greek	7.99 (1.51)	.65	4.77 (2.87)	.69	.74 (.16)	.77	15.41	.06
Hungary	1,334	Hungarian	7.90 (1.66)	.67	4.40 (3.02)	.67	.61 (.20)	.74	11.43	.05
Ireland	1,716	English	6.48 (2.08)	.77	2.90 (2.57)	.73	.55 (.17)	.79	25.92	.07
Italy	1,052	Italian	6.29 (1.92)	.74	3.50 (2.56)	.69	.55 (.17)	.73	22.17	.01
Netherlands	2,147	Dutch	6.76 (1.92)	.76	2.28 (2.20)	.69	.52 (.14)	.75	24.22	.93
Norway	1,907	Norwegian	5.98 (2.11)	.76	2.82 (2.38)	.73	.53 (.13)	.75	28.43	1.08
Poland	1,810	Polish	6.64 (2.12)	.76	3.85 (2.90)	.72	.52 (.14)	.75	8.45	.01
Portugal	1,242	Portuguese	6.64 (1.92)	.78	3.30 (2.56)	.71	.60 (.18)	.76	16.06	.01
Slovenia	1,324	Slovenian	7.25 (2.04)	.72	3.11 (2.98)	.75	.59 (.16)	.74	15.98	.14
Spain	1,295	Catalan, Castilian	6.52 (2.09)	.78	3.43 (2.73)	.81	.54 (.18)	.74	18.08	.02
Sweden	1,763	Swedish	5.43 (2.46)	.81	1.81 (2.15)	.68	.48 (.15)	.81	22.64	1.77
Switzerland	1,670	German, French, Italian	6.42 (1.97)	.74	2.19 (2.14)	.63	.52 (.14)	.73	27.17	.80
United Kingdom	1,829	English	7.00 (1.99)	.81	2.82 (2.53)	.72	.58 (.15)	.80	22.09	.20
Total	32,717		6.83 (2.10)	.77	2.94 (2.67)	.72	.56 (.17)	.79	21.90	.41

Note: Acquired and ascribed criteria are measured from 0 (*extremely unimportant*) to 10 (*extremely important*), perceived threat varies from 0 to 1.

[a] GDP per capita PPP$ in 1999 (UNDP, 2004).

[b] Proportion of refugees in 2000 (in 2001 for Italy; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), 2003) to the total population.

Survey 2003).[1] This article focuses on the opinions of self-declared members of the national majority in each country (92% of the survey participants). The data was collected in face-to-face interviews in national languages conducted by collaborating local research agencies. Full coverage of the target populations, sufficient response rates, and sample sizes guaranteed representative samples with comparable estimates across nations (Jowell et al., 2003).

Measures

Dependent variables To assess support for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria, participants were asked how important six characteristics were in deciding whether someone born, brought up, and living outside the country should be allowed to come and live in the host country.[2] The 11-point scale ranged from 0 (*extremely unimportant*) to 10 (*extremely important*). Green (2007) demonstrated with exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses that acquired and ascribed immigration criteria loaded on two factors in the ESS data set. However, the tested model also included another factor. Therefore to examine structural equivalence of a two-factor model separating *acquired* and *ascribed* criteria, confirmatory (AMOS 5.0) and exploratory factor analyses were carried out on the pooled sample as well as within each country. Four acquired criteria, defined by individual competence and values (work and language skills, good education, committed to way of life) loaded on the first factor. The second factor covered two ascribed criteria related to intrinsic characteristics (white skin colour, Christian religion). Loadings of the confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis are reported in Table 2.

Model fit was good when distinguishing acquired and ascribed entry factors, χ^2 (8) = 1090.22, $p < .001$, GFI = .99, CFI = .98 and RMSEA = .06.[3] The two factors were correlated (φ = .56). In the country-specific analyses, GFI and CFI statistics were acceptable (i.e. above .90) in all countries (e.g. Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). RMSEA statistics were acceptable (i.e. below .08; Browne & Cudeck, 1993) in 11 countries excluding Austria (.09), Czech Republic (.11), Denmark (.13), France (.11), Greece (.11), Italy (.09), Poland (.10), Portugal (.11), and Slovenia (.09). As the tested one-factor model was clearly inferior to the two-factor model with the pooled data, χ^2 (9) = 9099.42, $p < .001$, GFI = .92, CFI = .83 and RMSEA = .17, as well as within the nine countries with the modest RMSEA statistics for the two-factor model (RMSEA .15–.21; also GFI .87–.93, CFI .76–.87), acquired and ascribed criteria were investigated as separate dimensions. Table 1 reports adequate internal consistencies and mean composite scores of the two dimensions for the pooled sample and within countries. Importantly, absolute support for acquired criteria was substantially greater than support for ascribed criteria (in all countries *t*s $p < .001$).

Socio-demographic predictors Education and income, assessed as indicators of *social status*, were expected to predict endorsement of immigration criteria. Mean length of education was 12 years, with country means varying between

Table 2. Confirmatory (CFA) and Exploratory (EFA) Factor Analyses with items defining entry criteria

	Factor 1		Factor 2	
Item	CFA	EFA	CFA	EFA
Work skills	.78	.80		.22
Good education	.70	.78		.14
Language skills	.69	.76		.18
Committed to way of life	.54	.66		.15
Christian		.25	.82	.84
White		.15	.69	.89

Note: Standardized Factor Loadings for CFA.
Loadings after VARIMAX rotation for EFA.

7.5 and 13 years. Household income was measured with a country-specific question. Due to high rate of non-response (20%), missing values were imputed by the country-specific mean. In preliminary analyses, elimination of participants refusing to indicate household income did not alter the results. To enable cross-national comparisons, income was divided by the mean income of each country.

Sex, age, political orientation, and residence were controlled for in the models. Fifty-three percent of respondents were female. Mean age was 48 years, with country means varying between 44 and 53 years. Political orientation was measured on a continuum ranging from 0 (*left*) to 10 (*right*). The political orientation measure was transformed such that the respondents were grouped into left (responses from 0 to 3), right (responses from 7 to 10), centre (responses 4 and 6). Non-responses were grouped in a separate category which was used as a reference category (dummy code), because missing values were common (ranging from 2% to 23% in the 20 countries) and because we did not want to lose participants who refused to indicate their political orientation. Participants indicated whether they lived in a big city (17%), a suburb (14%), a small town (30%), a village (32%), or the countryside (7%).

Individual-level threat predictor Perceived threat was employed as a predictor of support for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria. *Perceived realistic threat* was measured with four items assessing the degree to which respondents agreed that 'average wages are generally brought down by people coming to live and work here', 'people who come to live and work here generally harm the economic prospects of the poor more than the rich', 'people who come to live here generally take jobs away for workers in [country]', and 'it is generally bad for [country's] economy that people come to live here from other countries'. *Perceived symbolic threat* was assessed with three items: 'it is better for a country if almost everyone shares the same customs and traditions', '[country's] cultural life is generally undermined by people coming to live here from other countries', and 'it is better for a country if there are a variety of different religions (reversed)'. Due to scale differences, the seven items were linearly transformed into 0 to 1 scales. Confirmatory factor analyses on these items were conducted on the overall sample and separately in all countries. Model fit was satisfactory in a model distinguishing perceived realistic and symbolic threat items, χ^2 (11) = 1284.87, $p < .001$, GFI = .97, CFI = .98 and RMSEA = .06. Because the two factors were highly correlated ($\varphi = .87$), a one-factor model was tested. Model fit remained adequate χ^2 (12) = 1901.40, $p < .001$, GFI = .99, CFI = .97 and RMSEA = .07. GFI and CFI statistics were above .90 in all countries. RMSEA statistics were below .08 in all countries with the exception of Germany (.10). For the sake of parsimony, and due to equivalency in model fit and high correlation of the two latent factors, perceived threat was measured as one dimension in the following analyses (see Table 1). When separately entered in the models, symbolic and realistic threat yielded nearly identical results.

Country-level predictors Macro-social variables for each country are presented in Table 1. GDP per capita was an indicator of the national *economic condition* (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2004). *Migration presence*, in turn, was measured with proportion of refugees to the whole population (UNECE, 2003). Low GDP and high ratio of refugees designated macro-level threat. All individual- and country-level predictors (without the categorical variables) were centred by the grand mean across countries.

Results

To test the hypotheses on the impact of different levels of threat on endorsement of immigration criteria, multi-level regression analyses were conducted with MLwiN (software package for fitting multi-level models). The structure of the data is such that individual citizens are nested within countries (citizens are level-1 and countries are level-2 units in the analysis). Multi-level modelling allows the testing of which part of the variation in individual-level dependent variables is explained by country-level effects

(GDP per capita, refugee rate), and which part by individual-level effects (perceived threat, low social status) (Hox, 2002; Nezlek, 2008). Individual observations are not completely independent of the country contexts, therefore, neglecting this hierarchical structure and the error terms at level-2 underestimates the standard errors of the dependent variables and could lead to incorrect confirmation of hypotheses. Besides differentiating levels of variation, multi-level modelling enables measurement of varying relationships between variables at different levels (i.e. cross-level interactions). One can, for example, examine the extent to which country GDP moderates the relationship between perceived threat and support for immigration criteria; that is, whether the support for immigration criteria is predicted differently by perceived threat at different levels of GDP. In the following, multi-level results for support for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria are reported in parallel.

Multilevel model fit for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria

First, by adding predictors in the model step-by-step, improvement of goodness-of-fit statistics was examined in Table 3, with the left panel presenting model fits for acquired criteria and the right panel presenting model fits for ascribed criteria. The baseline model included an intercept with only individual-level variation. Inclusion of country-level variation in Model 1 significantly decreased the loglikelihood (χ^2 distribution) for both criteria, indicating that model fit was improved. This indicates that country-level variation was substantial for support for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria, and that pursuing model building by including country-level predictors would be informative. Country variation accounted for 8% of the total variation for acquired and for ascribed criteria. Model building was pursued by adding social status and other sociodemographic control factors (Model 2), next adding threat perceptions (Model 3), and then including the country-level predictors (Model 4). All models, besides Model 4 for acquired criteria, resulted in a significant decrease of the

Table 3. Change in model fit for multilevel models on acquired and ascribed immigration criteria

		Acquired			Ascribed		
Model		–2*loglikelihood	Δdf	Δ–2*loglikelihood	–2*loglikelihood	Δdf	Δ–2*loglikelihood
0	Intercept (individual-level variation)	141266			156869		
1	+random variation at country-level	138581	1	2685***	154079	1	2790***
2	+social status and control variables	135759	11	2822***	149125	11	4954***
3	+perceived threat	133156	1	2603***	146018	1	3107***
4	+country-level indicators	133153	2	3	146002	2	16***
5	+random slopes for threat, income, and education	132509	9	644***	145862	9	140***
6	+interaction terms	132498	2	11**	145859	2	3

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

loglikelihood compared to the previous model, and were thus examined in detail.

Differential effects of threat and social status (i.e. education and income) were further examined in Model 5 by allowing the specific slopes to vary across countries (i.e., the slope was estimated for each country). The random slopes for these variables increased the model fit indicating that the slopes are not parallel across countries. Model 5 is a preliminary step to test Model 6 and is thus not presented. Model 5 merely indicated that the slopes of threat and of social status vary across countries, but not *how* the slopes varied. Therefore, the extent to which the impact of threat and of social status varies as a function of contextual threat was studied with cross-level interaction terms in Model 6. To reduce multicollinearity, cross-level interaction terms between contextual characteristics and threat perceptions as well as between contextual characteristics and social status indicators were initially included in separate equations. Then only significant terms were included simultaneously in Model 6. Inclusion of cross-level interactions improved model fit for acquired criteria, but not for ascribed criteria.

Social status and perceived threat

Next, the impact of individual-level factors on support for acquired and ascribed immigration criteria was examined. The upper panels of Tables 4 and 5 present the parameter estimates of the multilevel models. Model 2 demonstrated that social status indicators and socio-demographic control variables explain variation in support for the criteria. In line with the prediction that low social status was related to support for strict immigration criteria, individuals with a lower level of education endorsed both immigration criteria more than individuals with a higher level ($B = -.06$ for acquired criteria and $B = -.09$ for ascribed criteria, $p < .001$). Also, lower household income predicted support for ascribed criteria ($B = -.40$, $p < .001$).

The control variables were also related to endorsement of immigration criteria (see middle panels of Tables 4 and 5). Whereas men were more supportive of acquired criteria than women, women were more supportive than men of ascribed criteria. Older people endorsed both immigration criteria more than younger people. Right-wing and centre political orientation predicted support to criteria, whereas left-wing orientation predicted opposition. In big cities, acquired criteria received less support than in the countryside. For ascribed criteria, in turn, support gradually decreased the more urbanized the residential area was. Inclusion of social status and control variables decreased the variance between individuals for both criteria, and slightly decreased the variance between countries for ascribed criteria (as shown by variance components in lower panels of Tables 4 and 5). The latter result implies that differences between countries on endorsement of ascribed criteria are partly driven by different socio-demographic compositions within countries.

In Model 3, the hypothesis regarding the impact of perceived threat on endorsement of immigration criteria was tested. As expected, perceived threat strongly predicted support for both acquired ($B = 4.16$, $p < .001$) and ascribed criteria ($B = 5.55$, $p < .001$), over and above the impact of social status. Put another way, support for immigration criteria was greater among individuals perceiving immigrant threat. The inclusion of perceived threat in the model for acquired criteria reversed the effect of income ($B = .11$, $p < .001$). High household income was related to support for acquired immigration criteria suggesting that, once threat was controlled for, high income categories supported individualized regulation of immigration more than low income categories. Moreover, the effects in education ($B = -.04$, $p < .001$) and income ($B = -.22$, $p < .001$) on support for ascribed criteria were reduced when threat perceptions were accounted for in the model. After including threat perceptions, 15% (acquired criteria) and 22% (ascribed criteria) of variance between individuals was explained. In addition, inclusion of threat perceptions resulted in a substantial decrease in variance between countries, 44% and 52% of between-country variance was explained for acquired and ascribed criteria respectively.

Country-level threat

The results have thus far demonstrated that low social status and threat perceptions predict support for both immigration criteria. The prediction that endorsement of immigration criteria would be greater in countries with high levels of contextual threats was tested in Model 4, in which two macro-social indicators were included.

Direct country-level effects were only found for ascribed criteria (Table 3). Table 5 demonstrates that both low GDP ($B = -.04$, $p < .05$) and low refugee ratio ($B = -.04$, $p < .05$) were significantly related to support for ascribed criteria. In line with threat theories, economic hardship on the collective level was related to support for ascribed criteria. However a greater number of refugees led to less support of the criteria. This result is presumably in part due to the strong relationship between GDP and refugee rate at the national level, $r = .54$, $p < .05$. Inclusion of country-level predictors decreased the variance between countries for ascribed criteria: a major part of the country-level variance was explained (79%).

Indirect country-level effects were only found for acquired criteria (Table 3), and therefore further models were not presented for ascribed criteria. Building on the findings of Model 5, cross-level interactions were finally examined in Model 6 to test the moderating role of contextual factors on the impact of social status and of threat perceptions on acquired immigration attitudes (Table 4). It was expected that threatening collective contexts enhanced the relationships between social status and support for immigration criteria as well as between threat perceptions and support for immigration criteria. When GDP is low and refugee rate high, the effects of perceived threat and social status are expected to be stronger.

The cross-level interactions provided mixed evidence on the moderating role of threatening national contexts. The relationship between threat and support for acquired immigration criteria was moderated by GDP ($B = .13$, $p < .001$). Also, the effect of education on acquired criteria was moderated by refugee rate ($B = -.003$, $p < .001$). Slopes for threat (mean GDP and +/– 1 SD from mean) as well as slopes for education (mean refugee rate and +/– 1 SD from mean) were estimated. Observation of Figure 1 reveals that, contrary to our predictions, perceived threat increased support for acquired criteria more strongly in high GDP countries (e.g. Norway, Switzerland, Ireland, Denmark) than in low GDP countries (e.g. Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Greece). In line with our predictions (Figure 2), a high level of education reduced support more strongly in contexts with high refugee rates (e.g. Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Norway) than in contexts with low refugee rates (e.g. Czech Republic, Italy, Poland, Portugal). No other cross-level interactions reached significance and were thus not included in the final model.

The lower section of Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate that the variance between individuals within countries was much greater than the variance between countries for both acquired and ascribed immigration criteria. That is, differences *within* countries in support for immigration criteria were greater than differences *between* countries.

Discussion

This research investigated the impact of individual- and country-level threat on support for acquired and ascribed types of immigration criteria in Europe; that is, attributes considered to define an acceptable immigrant. Acquired criteria refer to requirements in terms of individual competence and attitudes, whereas ascribed criteria are intrinsic collective characteristics of potential immigrants. While individual-level factors predicted acquired and ascribed criteria similarly, country-level factors had differential effects on the two criteria. First, the results showed that perceived threat and low social status predict support for both criteria. Second, country-level threat predictors had direct effects only on ascribed criteria. Poor economic conditions (low GDP) and, unexpectedly, low refugee rate were related to endorsement of ascribed criteria. Third, interactions between individual and collective levels of threat were revealed. Country-level

Table 4. Unstandardized parameter estimates from multilevel models on acquired immigration criteria; standard errors in parentheses

Predictor variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 6
Intercept	6.78 (.012)	6.90 (.139)	6.74 (.109)	6.73 (.103)	6.77 (.10)
Individual-level indicators (N = 32,717)					
Social status					
Years of education		–.06(.003)***	–.02(.003) ***	–.02(.003) ***	–.03(.007) ***
Household income		–.02(.035)	.11(.033) ***	.11(.033) ***	.08(.033) *
Perceived threat			4.16(.08) ***	4.16(.08) ***	4.15(.27) ***
Country-level indicators (N = 20)					
GDP per capita				–.01(.019)	–.02(.018)
Refugee ratio				–.03(.020)	–.01(.019)
Interaction terms					
GDP per capita* perceived threat					.13(.038)***
Refugee ratio * education					–.003(.001)**
Control variables					
female		–.11(.021) ***	–.08(.02) ***	–.08(.02) ***	–.06(.02) ***
age		.02(.001) ***	.02(.001) ***	.02(.001) ***	.02(.001) ***
Political orientation:					
left		–.41(.038) ***	–.26(.036) ***	–.26(.036) ***	–.24(.036) ***
(ref: non-response)					
centre		.10(.036) **	.12(.034) ***	.12(.034) ***	.11(.034) **
right		.42(.039) ***	.39(.039) ***	.39(.038) ***	.39(.037) ***
Residence (ref: countryside):					
Big city		–.21(.051) ***	–.11(.049) *	–.11(.049) *	–.09(.048)
Suburb		–.05(.049)	–.01(.047)	–.01(.047)	.04(.047)
Small town		–.08(.046)	–.04(.044)	–.04(.044)	–.01(.044)
Village		–.01(.046)	–.01(.044)	–.01(.044)	.05(.044)
Variance components (% explained)					
Individual	4.03	3.70 (8%)	3.42 (15%)	3.42 (15%)	
Country	.34	.33 (1%)	.19 (44%)	.16 (52%)	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 5. Unstandardized parameter estimates from multilevel models on ascribed immigration criteria; standard errors in parentheses

Predictor variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	3.02(.165)	3.23(.172)	3.02(.130)	2.98 (.098)
Individual-level indicators (N = 32,717)				
Social status				
Years of education		–.09 (.004) ***	–.04 (.004) ***	–.04 (.004) ***
Household income		–.40 (.043) ***	–.22 (.041) ***	–.22 (.041) ***
Perceived threat			5.55 (.097) ***	5.54 (.097) ***
Country-level indicators (N = 20)				
GDP per capita				–.04 (.016) *
Refugee ratio				–.04 (.017) *
Control variables				
female		.02 (.026)	.05 (.025) *	.05 (.025) *
age		.03 (.001) ***	.03 (.001) ***	.03 (.001) ***
Political orientation:				
left		–.30 (.046) ***	–.09 (.044) *	–.09 (.044) *
(ref: non-response)				
centre		.21 (.044) ***	.24 (.042) ***	.24 (.042) ***
right		.77 (.048) ***	.73 (.046) ***	.73 (.046) ***
Residence (ref: countryside):				
Big city		–.65 (.062) ***	–.52 (.059) ***	–.53 (.059) ***
Suburb		–.46 (.061) ***	–.39 (.058) ***	–.40 (.058) ***
Small town		–.47 (.057) ***	–.41 (.054) ***	–.41 (.054) ***
Village		–.17 (.057) **	–.16 (.054) **	–.16 (.054) **
Variance components (% explained)				
Individual	6.48	5.57 (14%)	5.07 (22%)	5.07 (22%)
Country	.54	.51 (6%)	.26 (52%)	.12 (79%)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

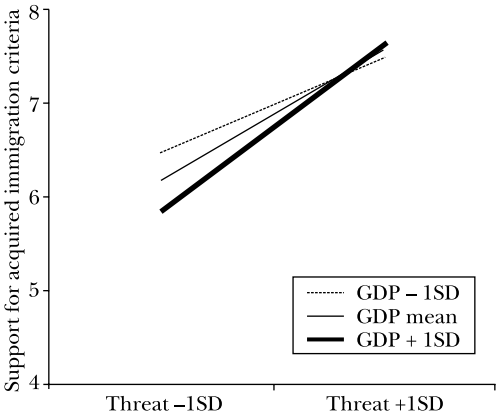

Figure 1. Support for acquired immigration criteria as a function of perceived threat and GDP. *Note*: Acquired criteria are measured from 0 (*extremely unimportant*) to 10 (*extremely important*).

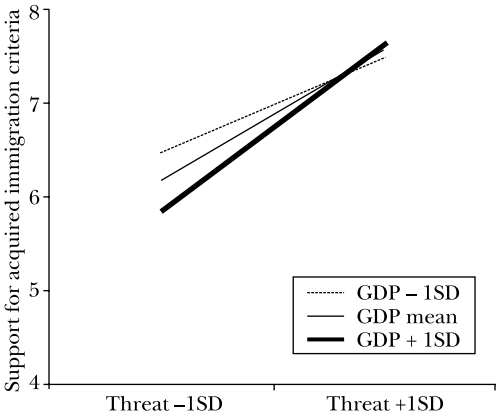

Figure 2. Support for acquired immigration criteria as a function of education and refugee rate. *Note*: Acquired criteria are measured from 0 (*extremely unimportant*) to 10 (*extremely important*).

threat predictors moderated the relationship between perceived threat and support for acquired criteria as well as the relationship between low education and support for acquired criteria.

Relationship between individual-level threat and two types of immigration criteria

Corroborating hypotheses derived from social psychological threat theories, perceived threat predicted support for both acquired and ascribed criteria. While low social status (low education and low income) was also related to support for these criteria, perceived threat had the strongest impact among the individual-level predictors. Interestingly, when perceived threat was accounted for in the model on support for acquired criteria, high household income – that is high status – predicted support for acquired immigration criteria. Research on the relationship between group status and individual and collective differentiation can be drawn upon to speculate on this finding (see Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2006 for an overview). Both experimental and survey research has shown that high-status groups (e.g. men, individuals with high socio-economic status) perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, in terms of individual attributes and preferences, employ dispositional explanations, and explain success with individual achievements. Low-status groups (e.g. women, individuals with low socio-economic status), in contrast, perceive themselves and are perceived by others with holistic and categorical features, group membership and social roles (Beauvois, Gilibert, Pansu, & Abdelaoui, 1998; Deschamps, 1982; Jackman & Sheuer Senter, 1980; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1998). Moreover, Stephens, Markus, and Townsend (2007) recently demonstrated, across five studies, that normative guidelines, that is, how to be a 'good' person, vary as a function of social class, such that working-class contexts reflect a normative preference for similarity to others, whereas middle-class contexts emphasize a preference for difference from others. This research suggests that as individuals from high-status groups tend to perceive themselves and others as unique and distinct individuals, they might also expect potential immigrants to excel on individual qualities, such as language and work skills, that define acquired immigration criteria. In line with this reasoning, low-status groups tend to perceive themselves and others more in terms of category membership. Indeed, members of low-status groups support the category-based

ascribed immigration criteria more than members of high-status groups after accounting for perceived threat.

Besides low household income, individual-level threat variables predicted similarly the endorsement of the two sets of immigration criteria. One might then argue that the distinction between acquired and ascribed criteria is unnecessary. Yet, empirically and conceptually, the two criteria are distinct. Confirmatory factor analyses support the separation of the two criteria in the ESS dataset in all of the countries, despite modest RMSEA statistics in nine countries. Moreover, the absolute support for acquired criteria is greater than support for ascribed criteria in all countries. While it is unambiguous that support for ascribed criteria is a form of xenophobia, the xenophobic undertone of support for acquired criteria is less straightforward. It could be argued that support for acquired criteria is driven by two incompatible ideological motivations. On the one hand, support for acquired criteria can be driven by assimilationist motives which are based on the requirements of conforming to the host culture values and practices (Bourhis et al., 1997). As immigrants are perceived as potential value violators, this support can be considered a covert form of xenophobia akin to symbolic racism (Sears & Henry, 2005). On the other hand, if support for acquired criteria is coupled with a simultaneous encouragement of maintenance of immigrants' cultural heritage, then support can be an indicator of endorsement of multiculturalism. Our results do not allow differentiating these two interpretations. Future research is needed to uncover the ideological underpinnings of support for immigration criteria, to examine how host country members perceive the expected consequences of acquired immigration criteria (e.g., Bowskill et al., 2007), and how variations in country-level immigration policies might influence the distinction and support for different immigration criteria (Hjerm, 2007).

Societal context and support for immigration criteria

In support of country-level threat predictions, poor economic conditions (low GDP), which from a threat theory perspective imply an economically threatening context, were related to endorsement of ascribed criteria. In contrast, low refugee rate, which implies a less threatening context in terms of the number of foreigners, was also related to support for ascribed criteria. The latter result is in line with the assumptions of intergroup contact theories (e.g. Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Wagner, Van Dick, Pettigrew, & Christ, 2003), suggesting that exposure to immigrants is related to more indulgent immigration attitudes. Insofar as the study accounted for refugee rates on the national level (while controlling for levels of GDP), the contact with refugees implied by this indicator is distant at best. The overlap of advantaged economic conditions and greater amounts of refugees explains partially why the threat framework does not apply for the impact of refugee rates.

While societal conditions do not have direct effects on support for acquired criteria, they moderated the relationship between perceived threat and support for acquired criteria as well as between social status and support for acquired criteria. The findings indicate an intensified relationship between perceived threat and support for acquired criteria in favourable economic contexts as opposed to unfavourable economic contexts. Low education has a stronger relationship with acquired criteria when refugee rate is high than when it is low. These results further support the distinction between ascribed and acquired immigration criteria. While the relationship between perceived threat and support for ascribed criteria is constant across the 20 national contexts, the cross-level interactions demonstrate that the relationship between perceived threat and acquired criteria varies across national contexts.

Previous research has revealed that the relationship between low status and prejudice is weakened in disadvantageous economic contexts. Kunovich (2004) showed that the relationships between status and prejudice were weaker in East Europe compared to West Europe and speculated that this finding was due to immigrants being perceived less threatening if they are as much or even more affected by economic scarcity than host-country members. However, one should keep in mind that national wealth,

immigration history, and tradition of welfare state systems frequently coincide. The countries with high levels of GDP in the current study are Western and Northern European countries that have fairly developed welfare systems, a tradition of labour importing, or a colonial past (Geddes, 2003; Sassen, 1999). In these contexts, paradoxically, immigrants appear less threatening, but the relationship between perceived threat and hostile attitudes is stronger. Since individuals are more accustomed to immigration, they may also have more established attitudes about disadvantages (e.g. costs to the welfare system) or advantages (e.g. necessary labour force) of immigration. This would then translate into stronger relationships between perceived threat and immigration attitudes. East and South Europe, in turn, are the low GDP countries where large-scale immigration is a more recent trend. Therefore, attitudes towards immigration may be less crystallized, which would explain the weaker links between perceived threats and support for immigration criteria. These differential links might also be explained by an ideological asymmetry effect such that in relatively dominant European countries (richer and more powerful), the relationship between ideological attitudes is stronger than in subordinate countries that are poorer and less powerful (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Limits

The results from this cross-national dataset contribute to social psychological threat literature by investigating country-level threat and interactions between levels of threat on support for immigration criteria. The use of a country as a unit of analysis has limits because nation-level indicators do not capture individuals' proximal context. Macro-social factors may, in some situations, be more region-specific, such that in a given country some regions may host more immigrants than others. For example, Wagner, Christ, Pettigrew, Stellmacher, and Wolf (2006) demonstrated that, in line with intergroup contact approaches, an increase in the percentage of ethnic minorities in German districts *reduced* prejudice. Nonetheless, the use of country-level data is more convenient in cross-national studies due to the availability of comparable indicators (Quillian, 1995). Still, one must be cautious when comparing national macro-social statistics because of national differences in definitions, in modes of registration, and in reliability of statistics.

Though symbolic and realistic threat have been conceptually separated in the integrated threat theory (Stephan & Renfro, 2003), the separation is not empirically supported with this cross-national dataset (Coenders et al., 2005; Scheepers et al., 2002; see also Ward & Masgoret, 2006). Still, when included separately in the multilevel models, perceived symbolic and realistic threat similarly predict support for both immigration criteria. These results nevertheless do not contradict the integrated threat theory which posits that perceived threat in general is an antecedent of prejudice. Moreover, Stephan et al. (2005, Study 1) demonstrated in an experimental study that symbolic and realistic threat had a joint effect, but not independent effects, on immigration attitudes.

Conclusion

Immigration attitudes reflect a general atmosphere among the host population in the country into which immigrants wish to enter. These attitudes can be considered as implicit or indirect forms of immigration control (Brochmann, 1999). Insofar as public opinion exerts pressure on new immigration policies (e.g. Burns & Gimpel, 2000; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005), the investigation of European citizens' attitudes towards admission criteria for immigrants is critical. Understanding the social psychological underpinnings of individual and contextual threat provides a more complete picture of the determinants of immigration attitudes. Thereby, such knowledge may, in the long run, contribute to the reduction of hostility towards immigrants. In light of the results of this research, political efforts on a national and on a European level to support development of national economies and of welfare systems,

and better integration policies, would also be beneficial for diminishing national threat as was conceptualized in this study. In addition, efforts to actively refute the image of immigrants as the threatening 'other' are urgently needed.

Notes

1. The results remained identical when Luxemburg was omitted due to weak structural equivalence of attitudinal measures.
2. An item inquiring the importance of wealth for entry was eliminated due to an incorrect translation in the Italian and French questionnaires. We also discarded the item 'important to have close family living in the country', because it did not theoretically fit in the acquired–ascribed conceptualization employed in this paper. Moreover, preliminary analyses supported this omission. Exploratory factor analyses carried out within countries revealed that this item was unstable. It had equal loadings in three countries, loaded on a separate factor in one country, had lower loadings compared to other items in eight countries, and loaded on one or the other factors in eight countries.
3. The χ^2-statistic tests for *absolute* fit of the factorial model in reproducing the correlation/covariance matrix. The χ^2-statistic is high due to the large sample which leads to detecting even small and unimportant discrepancies between the covariance matrix implied by the model and the population covariance matrix (e.g. Kelloway, 1998).

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Erratum

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In this article, Figure 2 was printed incorrectly. The correct version is shown below:

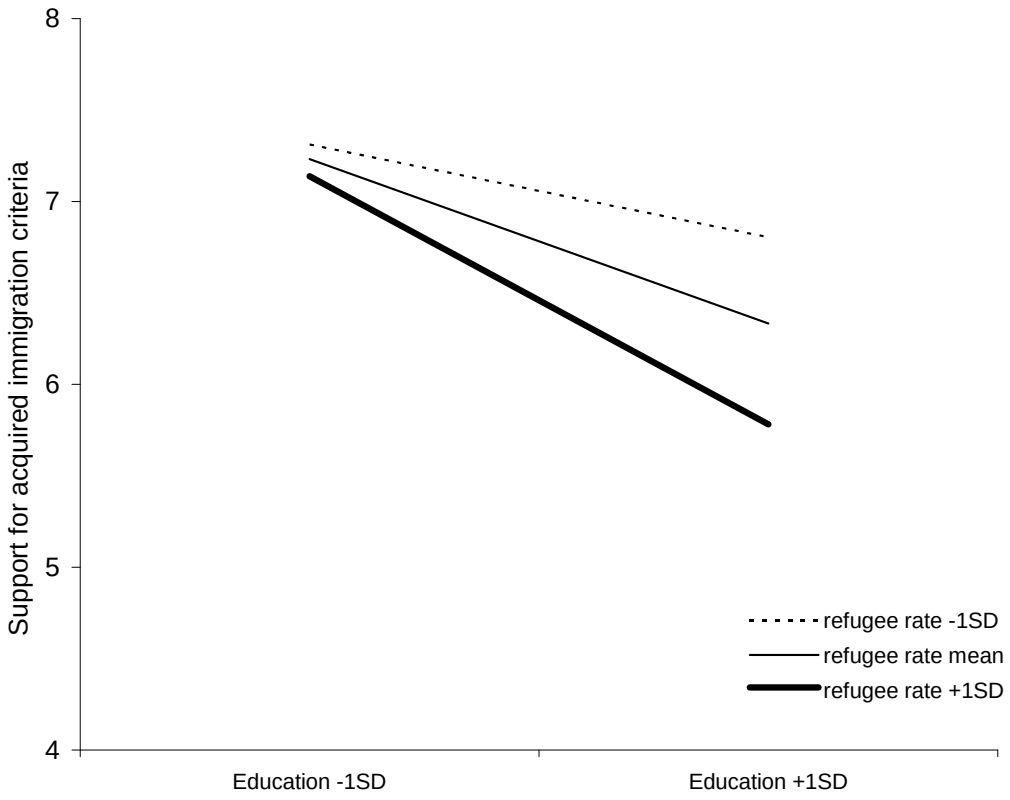

Figure 2. Support for acquired immigration criteria as a function of education and refugee rate.
Note: Acquired criteria are measured from 0 (*extremely unimportant*) to 10 (*extremely important*).