Article

European Journal of Industrial Relations

Union members' attitudes towards immigrant workers: A 14-country study

European Journal of
Industrial Relations
1–16

DOI: 10.1177/0959680115589490
ejd.sagepub.com
SAGE

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Abstract

Increasing immigration into Europe has presented unions with many dilemmas. A potentially important factor shaping their strategies is their members' attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. However, these attitudes have not been analysed systematically in Europe. Studies in Australia and North America have assumed that union membership is associated with hostility, resulting from the alleged threat of migrants to wages and working conditions. Yet, we hypothesize that the security gained from union membership should generate *less*, rather than more, hostility towards migrants. Our hypothesis is confirmed analysing data from the 2012 European Social Survey for 14 Western European countries.

Keywords

Anti-immigrant attitudes, exclusionary attitudes, immigration, migrant workers, trade unions, union membership

Introduction

Trade unions are potentially powerful agents for the integration of immigrant workers into host societies. Union leaderships, however, operate under various constraints, one of which is the attitude of their own members (the unionized workforce) towards immigration and immigrant workers. To the extent that such attitudes can be expected to help push union leaders' strategies in either an inclusionary or exclusionary direction, they

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may well be a crucial factor in explaining how unions have actually responded, in recent times, to the growing presence of immigrants within the national workforces of the advanced democracies (Facchini and Mayda, 2009: 295; Watts, 2002). Harcourt et al. (2008: 102) have proposed, in line with median voter theory, that union leaders are likely to respond to the preferences of the median union member – who typically belong to the majority ethnic group.[1] However, the issue of unionized workers' attitudes towards immigration and immigrants is, as we discuss below, under-theorized (Wilkes et al., 2008) and, in empirical terms (at least in Europe), under-studied, especially by means of systematic survey research.

Given these significant gaps in the literature, our goal in this article is two-fold. First, we develop a solid theoretical explanation for contemporary union members' attitudes (as compared to those of non-unionized workers) towards immigration and the perceived impact that immigrants exert on society. Second, we test this explanation empirically via a comparative study of 14 Western European countries, using data from the 2012 European Social Survey (ESS). Our research objective is to assess the attitudes of union members towards immigration and immigrant workers compared to those of non-union members and, if there is a difference, to explain why.

By studying the attitudes of unionized workers towards immigrants in 14 European countries, we add to the relatively small body of large-scale cross-national comparative research on the relationship between unions and immigrant workers (and build on our own recent comparative analysis of the issue: Gorodzeisky and Richards, 2013). Our analysis distinguishes between two broad types of opinion: public attitudes towards the phenomenon of immigration itself and attitudes towards immigrant workers. Specifically, we study, separately, native citizens' objections to admitting immigrants into society and their perceptions of the impact that immigrants exert on a society. In doing so, the article contributes to the need for conceptual clarity in research on anti-immigrant attitudes (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010).

In the next section, we present our theoretical discussion of the issue, including a summary of previous research. We then describe the data, variables and methodological strategy adopted in the article. After this, we present our empirical findings. Finally, we present our conclusions and discuss the implications of our findings for recent changes in the stance of unions towards immigration and immigrant workers.

Theoretical discussion

Despite its growing importance, the issue of unionized workers' attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, and the factors that shape them, have received very little attention in the European context, especially in terms of systematic research on public attitudes. It is notable that where this *has* been studied – mostly in Australia, Canada and the United States – the assumption has been that union membership is associated with negative attitudes towards immigration. This is true, for example, of the study of public opinion in the United States towards immigration reform by Citrin et al. (1997) and that of changing public attitudes in Canada towards immigration by Wilkes et al. (2008). Both studies stress the impact of national economic conditions on support for restricting immigration and find that exclusionary attitudes tend to be more pronounced when the

state of the national economy is poorer (or perceived to be poorer). With respect to the effect of union membership on attitudes, the empirical results of these studies are, in fact, inconclusive. Citrin et al. (1997) found that there was no effect of union membership on attitudes towards immigration reform in the United States in the first half of the 1990s, while Wilkes et al. (2008) found that the effect of union membership on attitudes towards immigration between 1980 and 2000 was mostly negative in Canada.

Several other studies which introduced union membership in the analysis mostly as a control variable have also produced inconsistent findings. The two large-N cross-national studies by Facchini and Mayda (2009) and Mayda (2006) found no effect of union membership on attitudes towards admitting immigrants into society in the mid-1990s, as did Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) who examined such attitudes in Europe in 2002. Other studies have presented mixed findings. For example, Pantoja (2006) found that union membership in the United States in the mid-1990s had a negative effect on attitudes towards granting social rights to immigrants but no effect on attitudes towards the admission of immigrants, while Mughan and Paxton (2006) in Australia in the same time period found that union membership had no effect on the perceived threat represented by immigration but did have a negative effect on attitudes towards the admission of immigrants.

The assumption of union members' hostility towards immigration and immigrant workers appears to rest on two foundations, both of which are now questionable. First, historical analyses of union movements, such as those in Australia (Quinlan, 1979; Quinlan and Lever-Tracy, 1990) and the United States, show that they were indeed exclusionary in both attitude and practice for a long time during the 20th century. Research on unions in Western Europe between the 1960s and 1990s also suggested that unions preferred restrictive immigration policies and focused on protecting the interests of their national members (Penninx and Roosblad, 2002). However, more recent empirical studies, beginning in the 1990s, show that union organizations are, in fact, becoming more inclusionary (Avci and McDonald, 2000; Freeman, 1995). In addition, there is now a very rich, mostly qualitative, body of literature which has documented the very considerable inclusionary efforts of certain unions – especially in the United States and to a lesser extent in Britain and elsewhere in Europe – to recruit immigrant workers as a means of boosting their memberships and halting long-term organizational decline (Holgate, 2005; Milkman, 2006; Ness, 2005; Trades Union Congress (TUC), 2003).

Second, the assumption that union members are hostile towards immigrants and immigration is typically based on their location in the labour market: their over-representation in blue-collar occupations and hence their greater likelihood of having to compete with immigrant workers for employment. We argue, however, that such hostility should be a function of occupation, not union membership per se. In fact, it is *non*-unionized workers in these occupations who should demonstrate higher levels of hostility towards immigrants, given that they lack the wage and job security enjoyed by their unionized counterparts.[2]

Moreover, the assumption that union membership should generate negative attitudes towards immigrants and immigration overall contradicts competitive threat theories. Hostility towards immigrants and immigration has often been viewed by social scientists as a reaction to competition, or threat of competition, in the labour market and in the

provision of social services (Bonacich, 2001 [1972]; Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Scheepers et al., 2002). Majority group members may feel the competitive socio-economic threat at two levels: individual and collective. The individual-level competitive threat reflects threats to self-interests, mostly in the labour market. Migrant workers are likely to be perceived by citizens as competitors for scarce resources (wages, jobs) and as a threat to their own economic well-being. Citizens in a vulnerable socio-economic position are more likely to feel threatened by the presence of immigrant workers and as a result are more likely to express exclusionary attitudes. Indeed, previous research in Europe found that unemployed native-born workers are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards immigrants than those who are fully employed. Likewise, less educated people and those with lower incomes are more likely to express anti-immigrant sentiment than the highly educated and those with high incomes (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Scheepers et al., 2002; Semyonov et al., 2008). The collective-level competitive threat pertains to the threat to the socio-economic interests of the collective to which the individual belongs. The greater the sense of threat to the interests of the dominant group (as a collective), the more likely are members of the in-group population to express negative and exclusionary views towards threatening outsiders (Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958; Bobo and Hutchings, 1996). Thus, hostility and exclusionary attitudes tend to be more pronounced when the presence of immigrant workers might undermine the position of the in-group population.

In the present article, we contend that hypotheses derived from theories of competitive threat with respect to *unionized* workers should *not* predict greater hostility towards immigrants. As described above, competitive threat theories claim that members of in-group populations react with negative attitudes towards out-group members since the latter pose a threat to the (individual or collective) interests of the former. Following this logic, the more vulnerable and threatened the in-group (of natives) feels because of the presence of out-group members (immigrants) in society, the higher the level of hostility their members will express. Thus, our core hypothesis is that union members (as a group) should be expected to hold more positive – *or at least not more negative* – attitudes towards immigrants than other workers in a similar labour market position, since unionized workers enjoy greater employment protection and better working conditions than non-unionized workers and are therefore less vulnerable to the alleged competitive threat of immigrant workers.

Data, variables and methodological strategy

Data were obtained from the sixth round of the ESS, conducted in 2012 (the most recent released). We used information provided for 14 Western European countries. In each country, information was gathered from a random probability national sample of the eligible resident populations aged 15 and over. The analysis reported here was restricted to respondents aged 18–65 years who were born in the country (majority group population). The total sample includes 5291 union members and 10,565 non-unionists. A list of the countries included in the analysis is presented in Table 3.

The first dependent variable – attitudes towards immigration (hereafter, exclusionary attitudes) – is an index constructed as the sum score of responses to the two following

questions: 'To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most [country] people to come and live here?' and 'How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people?' Responses to each question are coded on a 4-point scale; thus, responses of the constructed index range on an 8-point scale, with the highest value indicating the highest level of exclusionary attitudes.

The second dependent variable – attitudes towards immigrants (hereafter, negative views) – is an index constructed as the mean score of responses to three questions regarding views on the impact that immigrants exert on society. The questions are as follows: 'Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?' 'Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?' and 'Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?' Responses are coded according to an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (most positive) to 10 (most negative). Several previous studies have relied on these variables to construct an index that captures attitudes towards immigrants (Legewie, 2013; Semyonov et al., 2008).

As noted earlier, we distinguish between public attitudes towards immigration as a phenomenon (in other words, public support for the exclusion of immigrants) and public attitudes towards immigrants who have already entered the country. The article is therefore in keeping with other recent European studies that treat public support for the exclusion of foreigners as a concept distinct from other forms of hostility (Blinder, 2013; Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2009; Levanon and Lewin-Epstein, 2010).

The key independent variable, union membership, is a dummy variable that distinguishes between respondents who are current members of trade unions and those who are not current members of trade unions. Age, gender and place of residence (rural versus urban) were introduced into the analysis as demographic control variables.

The following variables were used as proxies of an individual's socio-economic position to capture the degree of socio-economic vulnerability: education (years of formal schooling), labour market position (a series of dummy variables that represent the following categories: employed, unemployed, being out of the labour force and being a student) and reported subjective income (insufficient versus sufficient). In addition, the following occupational categories were included in the analysis: white-collar occupations, sales and services occupations and blue-collar occupations.

As the first step in our empirical analysis, we examine the differences in levels of hostility towards immigration and immigrants between unionized and non-unionized workers in Western Europe in general (the 14 countries together) using a weighting procedure to adjust the sample size of each country to its share of the European population. In order to examine these differences further and in detail, *in the second step* we examine these differences for each country separately.

Findings

Aggregate results

Descriptive data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that in Western Europe in general, trade union members tend to express lower levels of objection to admitting foreigners

Table 1. Means (and standard deviations) for exclusionary attitudes and negative views by union membership.

	Union members	Non-members
Exclusionary attitudes[a]	4.23* (1.60)	4.45* (1.63)
Negative views[b]	4.28* (2.11)	4.65* (2.10)
N	5291	10,565

[a]8-point scale.
[b]11-point scale.
*Statistically significant differences were found between union members and non-members ($p < 0.05$).
Union Member is our key variable and we wished especially to highlight its effect

than do non-unionized workers. Unionized workers also view the impact of foreigners on society in more positive terms than do non-unionized workers. These findings are in line with our theoretical expectations.

Although interesting, the descriptive data do not provide information on the net effect that union membership exerts on hostility towards immigration and immigrants, since populations of unionized and non-unionized workers may differ in terms of demographic and socio-economic composition and of occupational distribution. In order to examine these net effects, we estimate a series of linear regression equations. Equations 1a and 1b predict exclusionary attitudes and negative views (respectively) as a function of union membership and demographic characteristics (gender, age and rural vs urban residence) and a series of dummy variables for each country (a fixed-effect model). To Equations 2a and 2b, we add indicators of socio-economic position (years of education, insufficient vs sufficient income and a series of dummy variables representing labour force positions). To Equations 3a and 3b, we also add a series of dummy variables representing occupational categories. We also estimated models (not presented here) including interaction terms between union membership and each socio-economic indicator and occupational category to examine whether union membership produces a divergent effect on attitudes towards immigration and immigrants across respondents holding different socio-economic positions and occupational categories. The results did not reveal any meaningful trends.

Before discussing the effect of our key independent variable, union membership, we briefly summarize results related to other predictors of hostility towards immigration and immigrants included in the models. These results are largely in line with the theoretical expectations of the 'competitive threat' model and with previous research. The data presented in Table 2 (models 3a and 3b) demonstrate that levels of both exclusionary attitudes and negative views towards immigrants tend to decrease with education and be higher among respondents who report insufficient income. Exclusionary attitudes and negative views are more pronounced among those in sales and services and blue-collar occupations than among those in white-collar occupations. Rural residents are more likely to express hostility towards immigration and immigrants than urban dwellers. Indeed, socio-economically vulnerable individuals, who according to competitive threat theories are more threatened by competition with out-group members, tend to express higher levels of hostility towards immigrants and immigration.

Table 2. Coefficients (and standard errors) of linear regression equations predicting exclusionary attitudes and negative views.[a]

	Exclusionary attitudes			Negative views		
	1a	2a	3a	1b	2b	3b
Intercept	4.27*	5.90*	5.43*	4.77*	7.19*	6.49*
Union member	**−0.153* (0.035)**	**−0.074* (0.034)**	**−0.074* (0.033)**	**−0.218* (0.045)**	**−0.080 (0.043)**	**−0.079 (0.043)**
Men	−0.05 (0.03)	−0.04 (0.03)	−0.11* (0.03)	−0.12* (0.04)	−0.10* (0.03)	−0.19* (0.03)
Age	0.01* (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	−0.00* (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)
Rural	0.23* (0.03)	0.15* (0.03)	0.12* (0.03)	0.32* (0.04)	0.19* (0.04)	0.15* (0.04)
Education	–	−0.10* (0.00)	−0.08* (0.00)	–	−0.15* (0.04)	−0.12* (0.01)
Insufficient income	–	0.36* (0.04)	0.30* (0.04)	–	0.58* (0.05)	0.49* (0.05)
Labour market position (reference category: employed)						
Unemployed	–	−0.02 (0.05)	−0.07 (0.05)	–	0.12 (0.07)	0.05 (0.06)
Out of the labour force	–	0.07 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	–	0.09 (0.05)	0.05 (0.04)
Student	–	−0.44* (0.06)	−0.49* (0.06)	–	−0.42* (0.08)	−0.49* (0.08)
Occupation (reference category: white-collar)						
Sales and services	–	–	0.28* (0.04)	–	–	0.46* (0.05)
Blue-collar	–	–	0.49* (0.03)	–	–	0.71* (0.04)
R^2	0.13	0.20	0.21	0.10	0.19	0.21

[a]All models also include a series of dummy variables representing each country (the coefficients are not presented).
*$p < 0.05$.

Table 3. Mean values for exclusionary attitudes and negative views by union membership.

	Exclusionary views		Negative attitudes	
	Members	Non-members	Members	Non-members
Spain	**4.2***	**4.5***	**4.1***	**4.5***
Switzerland	**4.0***	**4.3***	**3.8***	**4.3***
Ireland	**4.6***	**4.8***	**4.7***	**5.0***
Norway	**3.9***	**4.3***	**3.8***	**4.5***
Sweden	**3.3***	**3.8***	**3.4***	**3.8***
Germany	**3.7**	**3.8**	**3.8***	**4.2***
United Kingdom	4.9	5.1	5.2	5.4
Finland	4.6	4.6	3.8	3.9
The Netherlands	4.6	4.5	4.3	4.4
Denmark	4.2	4.0	4.1	4.0
Portugal	5.5	5.7	5.3	5.6
Cyprus	6.1	6.1	7.1	7.2
Belgium	*4.7**	*4.4**	*5.1*	*4.9*
Iceland	*3.5*	*3.2*	*3.6**	*3.2**

*Statistically significant differences between members and non-members ($p = <0.05$).

As to the effect of the key independent variable, results presented in Equation 1a demonstrate that beyond demographic characteristics (and taking differences between countries into account), union membership tends to reduce *exclusionary attitudes*: there is a statistically significant and negative coefficient ($b = -0.153$) for union membership. The inclusion of indicators of socio-economic position in Equation 2a reduces the coefficient of union membership by half ($b = -0.074$), but the effect of union membership remains statistically significant. Moreover, the effect of union membership remains statistically significant also in Equation 3a that includes, in addition to socio-economic position, occupational variables. Apparently, union membership exerts a *net* effect on exclusionary attitudes beyond and above demographic characteristics, socio-economic position and occupational category, although the size of the effect is quite small. In Western Europe in general, unionized workers express slightly lower levels of objection to admitting immigrants into society than non-unionized workers.[3]

Equation 1b shows that union membership entails a statistically significant reduction in *negative views* towards immigrants ($b = -0.218$), controlling for demographic characteristics (and taking differences between countries into account). Specifically, unionized workers view the impact of immigrants on society in more positive terms than non-unionists. However, when indicators of socio-economic position are added to the predictors of negative views in Equation 2b, the effect of union membership is reduced substantially and becomes statistically insignificant ($b = -0.080$). Thus, socio-economic position (as reflected in education, income and labour force position) is fully responsible for the relationship between union membership and views towards immigrants. Once socio-economic position is taken into account, there is no difference in the level of negative views towards immigrants between trade union members and non-members. The

inclusion of occupational categories into Equation 3b has not altered meaningfully the effects of other predictors in Equation 2b.

The results presented thus far support our theoretical expectation that unionized workers will express lower levels of objection to admitting foreigners into society than non-unionists. At the same time, a substantial part of the original differences between the two groups is explained by the higher socio-economic position (in terms of education or income) of union members and thus, according to competitive threat theory, the lower levels of competition (or threat of competition) that they face from immigrant workers. The results demonstrate that there is no difference between unionized and non-unionized workers in their level of negative views towards the impact of immigrants on society once differences in the socio-economic characteristics of the two groups of workers are taken into account. The differences in the results related to attitudes towards admitting foreigners into societies and negative views towards immigrants also stress the importance of distinguishing between two broad types of public views: attitudes towards the phenomenon of immigration itself (public support for the exclusion or admission of foreigners) and attitudes towards immigrant workers.

Countries

Further analysis provides a more detailed picture by examining the differences in the level of hostility between unionized and non-unionized workers in each country separately. Table 3 presents descriptive data by country. These demonstrate that in 6 out of 14 countries, unionized workers express, on average, a lower level of hostility towards immigration and immigrants than do non-unionists. More specifically, in Spain, Switzerland, Ireland, Norway and Sweden, presented in bold in Table 3, levels of both exclusionary attitudes and negative views among unionized workers are lower than those among non-unionists (the differences are statistically significant). In Germany, a statistically significant difference between union members and non-members was found only with respect to the level of negative views. In six countries (the United Kingdom, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal and Cyprus), statistically significant differences between unionized and non-unionized workers were found neither in the level of exclusionary attitudes nor negative views. It should be noted, however, that most of the (statistically insignificant) differences in these countries indicate that non-unionists in the sample tend to express higher levels of hostility than do unionized workers. Only in 2 out of the 14 countries, presented in italics in Table 3, do trade union members tend to express, on average, higher levels of hostility towards immigration or immigrants (and only on one of two indicators) than non-members. In Belgium, unionized workers report, on average, higher levels of exclusionary attitudes and in Iceland, higher levels of negative views towards immigrants.

These descriptive findings provide additional support to the theoretical argument, suggesting that the level of hostility towards immigration and immigrants among unionized workers should not be higher than that among non-unionists.

In order to test the effect of union membership on exclusionary attitudes and negative views in each country, net of demographic characteristics, socio-economic position and occupational category, we estimate linear regression equations for each

Table 4. Coefficients (and standard errors) of union membership from linear regression equations predicting exclusionary attitudes (A) and negative views (B).[a]

	A	B
Spain	−0.32* (0.14)	0.24 (0.16)
Switzerland	−0.23 (0.13)	−0.31 (0.17)
Ireland	−0.01 (0.11)	0.12 (0.15)
Norway	−0.33* (0.08)	−0.37* (0.11)
Sweden	−0.23* (0.08)	0.01 (0.12)
Germany	−0.08 (0.09)	−0.22 (0.12)
United Kingdom	0.01 (0.11)	0.20 (0.16)
Finland	0.10 (0.07)	0.06 (0.09)
The Netherlands	0.16 (0.11)	0.05 (0.11)
Denmark	0.15 (0.10)	0.29 (0.15)
Portugal	0.01 (0.22)	0.08 (0.24)
Cyprus	0.03 (0.12)	0.03 (0.18)
Belgium	0.12 (0.09)	−0.04 (0.10)
Iceland	0.14 (0.14)	0.36*(0.18)

[a]Equations also include age, gender, rural residence, education, income, labour market position and occupational category (the coefficients are not presented).
*$p < 0.05$.

country separately. Equations A and B (given in Table 4) predict exclusionary attitudes and negative views (respectively) as a function of union membership, demographic characteristics, indicators of socio-economic position and a series of dummy variables representing occupational categories. We estimate these linear regression equations also for countries in which no differences between unionized and non-unionized workers were found in the level of hostility, since dissimilarities in socio-economic characteristics and occupational distribution between the two groups of workers may not only activate but also suppress the effect of union membership.

In Table 4, we present only the coefficients for the *union membership* variable from each of the equations described above (full models are available by request from the authors). The results of Equation A demonstrate that union membership exerts a statistically significant negative *net* effect on *exclusionary attitudes* towards immigrants in Spain, Norway and Sweden ($b = -0.32$, -0.33 and -0.23, respectively). In these countries, union members express lower levels of objection to admitting foreigners into their countries, even after controlling for demographic characteristics, socio-economic position and occupation. In the remaining countries, union membership does not exert a statistically significant *net* effect on exclusionary attitudes (over and above demographic characteristics, socio-economic position and occupation). Apparently, in 11 Western European countries, unionized and non-unionized workers do not differ in their levels of objection to admitting immigrants into society once basic demographic and socio-economic characteristics and occupational categories are taken into account.

The results related to the impact of union membership on *negative attitudes* towards immigrants in the equations estimated for each country separately (a series of Equation

B by country in Table 4) strongly resemble those for Western Europe in general (Equation 3b in Table 3). In 12 of the countries, union membership does not exert a *net* effect on negative views towards immigrants. In other words, there are no differences between unionized and non-unionized workers in their perception of the impact of immigrants on society, once demographic, socio-economic and occupational attributes are taken into account. And only in Norway are unionized workers less likely to view the impact of immigrants on society in negative terms than their non-unionized compatriots with the same demographic, socio-economic and occupational attributes.

Iceland is definitely an exception: only in this country do results before and after controlling for demographic, socio-economic and occupational attributes demonstrate that unionized workers view immigrants in more negative terms than non-unionized workers (the coefficient is positive and significant). At the same time, Iceland also looks like an outlier with respect to several other factors related to the labour market, unions and migrants: it has, on the one hand, very high labour market flexibility and, on the other, a very high rate of unionization which has consistently exceeded that for other OECD countries (OECD, 2015). In the current sample, the unionization rate in Iceland is highest among all countries: 85 percent for the currently working population and 77 percent for the general sample (including those currently unemployed, students and those outside the active labour force). In addition, the residents of Iceland overall perceive the impact of immigrants on their society in more positive terms than in all other countries in our study.

In sum, the results of the analysis by country also confirm the hypothesis derived from competitive threat theory according to which unionized workers should not express higher levels of hostility towards immigrants. Likewise, the results of the analysis by country – demonstrating that union membership is more likely to exert a net positive effect on attitudes towards immigration itself (attitudes towards admitting foreigners into society) than on attitudes towards immigrants – confirms the relevance of treating public support for admission or exclusion as a distinct concept from other forms of hostility.

Conclusion

Our main objective in this study was to examine the attitudes of unionized workers towards immigration and immigrants, as compared to non-unionists. Our argument based on competitive threat theories contradicts the assumptions of previous research in the field. We suggest that union members should express lower – or at least no higher – levels of hostility towards immigration and immigrants, since as a group they are less vulnerable to the consequences of competition (or the threat of such competition) that immigrants may pose in the labour market. The empirical analysis based on Western Europe as a whole supports our hypothesis: unionized workers are likely to express lower levels of objection to admitting immigrants into society or, in other words, to express more positive attitudes towards the phenomenon of immigration itself. Unionized workers also tend to view the impact of immigrants on society in more positive terms than non-unionists.

Multivariate analysis based on Western Europe as a whole reveals that union membership exerts a net positive effect on attitudes towards immigration (admitting immigrants

into society) above and beyond socio-economic position and occupational distribution. Following our theoretical expectation, we suggest that this difference could be attributed to the greater job security enjoyed by unionized workers in comparison with non-unionists. It is also possible that these slightly more positive attitudes on the part of union members could be attributed to their greater political awareness or to trade union values of solidarity, or be the result of the unions' own action in fighting discrimination against immigrants. However, socio-economic position fully accounts for the association between union membership and attitudes towards immigrants (the perception of the impact that immigrants exert on society).

Further descriptive analysis of each country separately demonstrates that in 6 out of 14 countries, unionized workers express more positive attitudes towards both immigration and immigrants. In a further six countries, the differences between union members and non-union members were not statistically significant. Only in Belgium and Iceland did trade union members tend to express, on average, higher levels of hostility towards either immigration or immigrants than non-members. In the Belgian case, we suggest two explanations. First, Belgium is the only country in the sample where a higher percentage of union members than non-unionists report insufficient income. Second, union members are the most heavily concentrated in blue-collar occupations, in comparison with other countries in the sample. When we control (in the multivariate analysis) for the variations between union members and non-unionists in Belgium, the differences in exclusionary attitudes between these two groups disappear. Thus, Iceland remains the only exception after the multivariate analysis.

Multivariate analysis demonstrates that union membership exerts a *net* negative effect on the objection to admitting immigrants into society in two Scandinavian countries, Sweden and Norway, and in Spain: in other words, in these countries unionized workers tend to express more inclusionary views than their non-unionized compatriots with the same demographic, socio-economic and occupational attributes. In the other 11 countries, the level of objection of unionized workers to admitting immigrants into society does not differ from that of non-unionists with the same socio-economic characteristics. As to attitudes towards immigrants, in most of the countries (12 out of 14), union membership exerts no statistically significant *net* effect (beyond socio-economic position) on negative attitudes towards immigrants. Most of the country-specific differences can be explained by variation in the socio-economic composition and occupational distribution of union members and non-union members across countries. In fact, we would emphasize that regardless of important cross-national differences in labour market structures and the strength of union movements, our results across countries are quite consistent.

In general, our results provide strong support for our theoretical argument that unionized workers should express more positive (or in any case not more negative) views towards immigration and immigrants. A substantial part of this effect is explained by union members being in a more secure socio-economic position. The remainder could reflect the higher level of employment protection and conditions enjoyed by unionized workers compared to their non-unionized counterparts sharing the same socio-economic characteristics and therefore their lower vulnerability to the alleged competitive threat of immigrant workers. Our study therefore brings additional support to the tenets of competitive threat

theories while providing a first large-scale, systematic, comparative analysis of the attitudes of union members towards immigration and immigrants in Europe.

Our findings contain several interesting implications, although we would stress that they are no more than implications. Far from being institutions dedicated above all to protecting the interests of a relatively privileged section of the workforce, unions are – at least *potentially* – important agents of inclusion and integration of migrant workers into national labour markets. If it is indeed the case that union members hold more positive (or at least not more negative) views on immigrants and immigration than non-members, then union leaderships may be in a stronger position than is usually assumed to make the case for incorporating migrant workers into their own ranks. Our analysis complements McGovern's discussion of the historical dilemmas that unions have faced regarding immigration and immigrants. He describes how, recently, both the US and British union movements, for example, have softened their long-standing resistance to the phenomenon of immigration and have made much greater efforts to recruit and organize migrant workers themselves. McGovern (2007) notes that 'there is little empirical support for the idea that immigrants, including those from ethnic minorities, are inimical to trade unionism' (p. 228). Our own findings here – that native unionized workers do not hold such hostile attitudes towards immigration and immigrants as is normally assumed – might contribute to explaining 'why trade unions have begun to embrace immigrants after decades of suspicion' (McGovern, 2007: 230).

Furthermore, the incorporation of immigrants into unions and, as a result, into collective bargaining systems and collective agreements between employers and unions could substantially reduce the alleged competitive threat to wages and employment opportunities posed by migrants – the very threat that generates negative attitudes and hostility towards immigrants. Whether such potential consequences become reality may well depend on the actions of unions themselves. It is important to remember that in a context of general decline, there is still very significant cross-national variation in the situation of unions, whether measured in terms of membership levels, unionization rates, collective bargaining coverage or institutional support. Put simply, some union movements are considerably weaker than others, and the implications of this for their propensity to incorporate migrants into their ranks represent an important line of research. Migrant workers tend to be located in more marginalized sectors of the labour market, thereby representing a potentially costly organizing target for the unions. In our own previous research (Gorodzeisky and Richards, 2013), we investigated the conditions in which unions might be willing to assume such costs, finding that in those countries in which unions were less institutionally secure, the gap between the unionization rate of native and migrant workers was lower than in those cases in which they were more secure. A clear implication of this finding is that weaker union movements may well have a stronger incentive to unionize migrant workers as a means of renewal and recovery. Whether they act on that incentive is another matter, and in this context the *attitudes* of existing union members towards immigrants and immigrations may well be an important factor in shaping the strategy of union leaderships. This article in demonstrating that union members are, in fact, more positive – or at least not more negative – than non-members in their attitudes suggests that union leaders may have more room for manoeuvre than is commonly assumed.

Acknowledgements

The authors are very grateful to Gustavo Gallardo Alvarez for his excellent research assistance.

Funding

The work was supported by the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union (EU) Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007-2013) under REA grant agreement PCIG11-GA-2012-321730.

Notes

1. A traditional assumption has been that the negative attitudes of union members towards immigration and immigrant workers have constrained union leaders, since for a long period of the 20th century the latter were, in general, hostile to immigration (Bonacich, 2001 [1972]; Quinlan, 1979). The question whether union leaders today still perceive their members' attitudes towards immigrants as a constraint is under-studied. There is some limited anecdotal evidence in Europe to suggest that this remains the case. For example, in Italy, the national secretary of the *Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici* (FIOM-CGIL) engineering trade union noted that there was a 'certain resistance' among existing union members to involvement by their union officials in anti-racist campaigns: 'it's not a question that our members … consider a priority' (Jefferys, 2007: 119). The complicated relationship between the action of union leaders and their perception of members' attitudes towards immigrants was captured nicely in remarks made in 2006 by Jack Dromey, Deputy General Secretary of Britain's (then) Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). He noted that on the one hand, the task for his union was to embrace migrant workers and that the union itself had been constructed on successive waves of Jewish, Irish, Caribbean, African and European Union (EU) member-state migration. On the other hand, he acknowledged a degree of resistance from some TGWU members to the use of union resources to recruiting migrants (TUC Conference, 'Building Support for Migrant Workers', London, 11 December 2006). There is clearly a need, though, for systematic cross-national analysis of this issue.
2. We acknowledge that in many countries, sectoral and/or company-level agreements guarantee equal wages for both members and non-members. Nonetheless, we posit that unionized workers are likely to enjoy greater job security than their non-unionized counterparts.
3. As one of the anonymous reviewers for this article pointed out, the concentration of migrant workers in low-status jobs in specific industrial sectors in which the competition between them and national workers is higher (because of this concentration), but in which the presence of trade unions is weaker, could account, partially, for lower hostility among union members. We tested this argument empirically by introducing into our model 3a a series of dummy variables representing six industrial sectors. The results did not change; even after controlling for sector, union members still express lower levels of exclusionary attitudes.

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