

# Do Threats Galvanize Authoritarians or Mobilize Non-Authoritarians? Experimental Tests from 19 European Societies

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## Abstract

Authoritarian predispositions and contextual threats are both thought to produce intolerance and prejudice towards immigrants and other minorities. Yet there is considerable dispute as to how authoritarianism and threats interact to produce an “authoritarian dynamic.” Some scholars argue that threats increase intolerance by “galvanizing” authoritarians. Others claim that authoritarians are always intolerant toward outgroups, with threat instead “mobilizing” non-authoritarians. Using experimental manipulations of immigrant cultural threat embedded in nationally-representative samples from 19 European societies, this study offers a dispositive test of these competing hypotheses. While we find some evidence for the “galvanizing” hypothesis, we find no evidence for the “mobilizing” hypothesis. The effects vary considerably across national samples however, with immigrants from Muslim societies being particularly likely to activate authoritarian predispositions. These findings show how the migration of culturally distinctive groups has the potential to activate authoritarian dispositions, thereby pushing the issue of immigration to the center of political debates.

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At times, immigrants and refugees are tolerated, accepted, and possibly even welcomed. Yet at other times, they are disliked and vilified. As little as a year or so may separate periods of tolerance from periods of hostility, suggesting – as Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004, 35) put it – the “flash potential” of the issue of immigration.<sup>1</sup>

A theory that is particularly well-suited to explain the flash potential of anti-immigrant politics is the notion of the “authoritarian dynamic” (Stenner 2005). Long associated with support for aggressive leadership, a valorization of the ingroup, and an intolerance of difference (Altemeyer 1981; Feldman 2003), authoritarianism has also been linked with anti-immigration sentiment (Cohrs and Stelzl 2010; Dinesen, Klemmensen, and Nørgaard 2016; Ford 2011; Pettigrew and Christ 2007). Although it was originally conceived as a stable personality trait (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1981), subsequent research contends that authoritarianism can be activated by threats to the social fabric (Feldman 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). The combination of authoritarian dispositions – which are stable – and threats to cultural norms – which may arrive suddenly – allows this theory of the authoritarian dynamic to account for unexpected eruptions of intolerance.

There is, however, considerable controversy about how this dynamic works. Initial research argued that threats galvanize hostility and intolerance among those already predisposed towards authoritarianism (Feldman 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005; see also Lavine et al. 2002; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). More recent research contends, however, that threats instead mobilize intolerance among those who are not very authoritarian to begin with (Hetherington and Suhay 2011; see also Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, and Foucault 2008).<sup>2</sup> These theories suggest very different patterns of public opinion change following rising

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<sup>1</sup>For example, the Ipsos “Immigration and Refugee Poll” shows 20 percentage point changes in attitudes toward immigration over periods of just a year or two in countries such as Turkey, Spain and the UK (Ipsos 2017). Even more marked shifts of opinion are visible for questions regarding the relative importance of the issue of immigration (Dennison and Geddes 2018).

<sup>2</sup>Feldman and Stenner (1997) describe their theory as involving the “activation” of authoritarian

threat perceptions: according to the “galvanizing” theory, flare-ups of prejudice are largely due to increased hostilities among a small but core group of authoritarians; according to the mobilizing theory it is the widening pool of intolerant individuals that is responsible (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). Determining whether the dynamic is a galvanizing or mobilizing one thus speaks to important questions about whether individuals who are not predisposed towards prejudice can be triggered into intolerance by particular threats.

Existing tests of these theories have been limited in several respects. They have relied almost exclusively on observational research designs despite the difficulties of testing interactive, causal theories without experimental manipulations (Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). Threat has furthermore been inconsistently conceptualized and measured. Finally, despite the apparent universality of the theory of the authoritarian dynamic (Stenner 2005), it has seldom been tested outside a single society – the United States.

This paper aims to provide a dispositive test of the theory of the authoritarian dynamic by addressing all these shortcomings. In particular, we examine how authoritarian values interact with cultural threat in shaping immigration attitudes in 19 European societies. Cultural threat is, moreover, experimentally manipulated by varying whether respondents were exposed to a more culturally familiar immigrant group or a more culturally distant one.<sup>3</sup>

We find a fair degree of support for the galvanizing theory, but no support at all for the mobilizing theory. In other words, to the extent that threat interacts with authoritarian values, it galvanizes authoritarians rather than mobilizes non-authoritarians. Yet we also find considerable variation across the 19 samples in the extent to which threat and authoritarianism interact. We show values. We instead adopt the “galvanizing” versus “mobilizing” terminology from Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004), who – like us – describe the alternative ways in which predispositions (albeit not authoritarianism) interact with situational triggers.

<sup>3</sup>The experiment was embedded in the seventh European Social Survey, which was conducted in 2014. See Ford and Mellon (2018).

that this variation is, in large part, due to differences in outgroup characteristics, with immigrants from Muslim-majority societies being particularly likely to provoke authoritarians.

## **The Authoritarian Dynamic**

Scholars have long sought explanations for prejudice and intolerance in the stable bedrock of personality. Perhaps the most prominent example is the classic theory of the “authoritarian personality,” which was originally described by Adorno et al. (1950) and later updated by Altemeyer (1981), who refined the concept, trimmed it of its psychodynamic interpretation, and renamed it “Right-Wing Authoritarianism” (RWA). Altemeyer (1981) also narrowed its focus, reducing Adorno et al.’s original nine components down to three: conventionalism, submission to strong leaders, and aggression toward outsiders.

Moreover, the three core components of RWA map neatly on to the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of the authoritarian personality. Authoritarians are more likely to prefer order and social control (Huddy et al. 2005), support dominant and aggressive leaders (McCann 1997), and react with prejudice and intolerance toward outgroups (Altemeyer 1981; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). As such, Altemeyer’s streamlined and updated concept of RWA has proved enormously popular with scholars of prejudice and intolerance.

Authoritarianism has, however, also long been associated with threat. The classic study of Sales (1973) demonstrated that behavioral expressions of authoritarianism become increasingly prevalent as contexts become more threatening (see also, Doty, Peterson, and Winter 1991). Yet this finding sits uneasily alongside the conceptualization of authoritarianism as a dimension of personality. It is not clear how such a deeply-rooted disposition can be so easily shaped by variations in context.

A solution to this paradox was proposed by Feldman and Stenner (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). They distinguished authoritarianism from personality, recasting the former as a core value that captures a tension between the conflicting desires of personal autonomy and social conformity (see also Duckitt and Sibley 2009). Feldman and Stenner

then proposed an interactive relationship between authoritarianism and threat, on the one hand, and expressions of authoritarianism, on the other. In conditions of material abundance and social stability, authoritarians and non-authoritarians have similar political preferences. When contexts are threatening, however, the authoritarian desire for social control is challenged. These threats “activate” authoritarian predispositions, with the result that authoritarians begin to diverge from non-authoritarians in their desire for order, conformity, and aggressive leadership.

This theory of the “authoritarian dynamic” revitalized the study of authoritarianism. Not only did it provide a compelling theoretical foundation for the concept, the specification of a fairly stable cluster of values acting in concert with contextual triggers also allowed the theory of authoritarianism to account for the “flash potential” of prejudice and intolerance toward outgroups (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004, 35).

However, while scholars appreciated the power of this theory, they disagreed regarding the details of how authoritarianism and threat interact. Some subsequent studies found similar results to Feldman and Stenner: threats increase prejudice and intolerance but especially for those subscribing to authoritarian values (Lavine et al. 2002; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). Threats therefore “galvanize” authoritarians, to use the terminology of Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004). Others found instead that it is non-authoritarians (or fellow travelers) who are most susceptible to threat (Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, and Foucault 2008).<sup>4</sup> Threats therefore “mobilize” hostility among non-authoritarians, reducing the gap between them and authoritarians.

It is perhaps not surprising that this literature reaches conflicting conclusions, because existing studies are riven with conceptual slippages and methodological limitations. There are three in particular.

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<sup>4</sup>This line of research is related to social psychological studies of “reactive liberals” (Nail et al. 2009) or conservatism as “motivated social cognition” (Jost et al. 2003), which find that ideological liberals are most susceptible to threats. These studies are distinct from those considered in this paper in that the concept of authoritarianism is not invoked.

First, observational research designs abound (e.g., Feldman and Stenner 1997; Feldman 2003; Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Vasilopoulos, Marcus, and Foucault 2008). These are of course far from ideal for testing causal conclusions, especially in the presence of a hypothesized interaction between two variables. Moreover, studies that do use experimental manipulations of threat have only small convenience samples (e.g., Lavine et al. 2002; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). These have their own problems, notably a surprisingly high likelihood of finding significant effects in the “wrong” direction (Gelman and Carlin 2014).

Second, widely-varying conceptualizations and measures of threat are employed. Hetherington and Suhay (2011) focus on the physical threats posed by terrorism, as do Merolla and Zechmeister (2009). Vasilopoulos, Marcus, and Foucault (2008) use the emotions of anger and fear in place of threat (they also use left-right ideology as a proxy for authoritarianism). These are all quite distinct from the threats to social cohesion and cultural norms proposed as activators of authoritarianism by Feldman (2003) and Stenner (2005).

Finally, existing tests focus almost entirely on the context of the United States, despite claims regarding the universality of concept of authoritarian values (Feldman 2003) and the theory of the authoritarian dynamic (Stenner 2005).<sup>5</sup>

## **Opposition to Immigration**

Opinions towards immigrants and immigration provide a useful testing ground for the theory of the authoritarian dynamic. Immigration has long been argued to be threatening to natives and it regularly features among the most salient political issues in many Western democracies (Dennison and Geddes 2018; Ford, Jennings, and Somerville 2015; Newport 2018). Cultural threats posed by immigration have been shown to have particularly powerful effects (e.g., Brader, Valentino,

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<sup>5</sup>Vasilopoulos, Marcus, and Foucault (2008) use a French sample, and one of Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) samples are drawn from Mexico. Tests in a wider range of contexts are sorely lacking.

and Suhay 2008; Ford 2011; McLaren 2003; Sides and Citrin 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004), and these closely match the threats to conformity and social order proposed by Feldman and Stenner in the original theory of the authoritarian dynamic. Specifically, immigrants are often seen as a significant threat to the social norms underpinning the certainty and social order that authoritarians crave. Not surprisingly, authoritarianism is regularly posited as a wellspring of anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g., Cohrs and Stelzl 2010; Ford 2011; Pettigrew and Christ 2007).

The “galvanizing” and “mobilizing” versions of the authoritarian dynamic theory predict that authoritarians and non-authoritarians would react in different ways when they perceive a group of immigrants to be threatening to a society’s cultural identity. The galvanizing theory, espoused by Feldman and Stenner, argues that it will be those individuals with the strongest needs for order and social conformity – i.e., the authoritarians – who react negatively to culturally distinctive migrants. Threats to cultural identity and norms trigger a larger anti-immigration backlash among authoritarians than for everyone else. The galvanizing theory would predict, therefore, that authoritarianism and cultural threat will show a positive interaction effect on opposition to immigration.

In contrast, the mobilizing theory claims that it is the individuals with the lowest levels of authoritarian values who would react most strongly to culturally distinctive migrants. As Hetherington and Suhay (2011) argue, authoritarians experience near-constant states of heightened threat and anxiety and thus would be expected to express consistent levels of intolerance regardless of threat level. Threats to cultural identity and norms therefore mobilize non-authoritarians more than they galvanize authoritarians, leading to an anti-immigrant backlash among the former. The galvanizing argument would, therefore, predict that authoritarianism and cultural threat will show a negative interaction effect on opposition to immigration.

These differing predictions have significant implications for the periodic advance of anti-immigration sentiment. If the galvanizing theory is correct, intolerance would generally be limited to authoritarians. Although the strength of their intolerance – and perhaps the salience with which they view the issue of immigration – grows, the pool of intolerant individuals does not expand by much. The mobilizing theory, in contrast, presents the possibility that this pool of individuals

might expand significantly as threat increases, perhaps ultimately becoming large enough to be mobilized against the target of intolerance – in this case, migrants.

## **Data and Methods**

We investigate these propositions using nationally-representative survey samples from 19 European countries. These surveys were fielded in 2014 as part of the seventh round of the European Social Survey (ESS). Our interest in this survey stems from the inclusion of a survey experiment in the 19 samples.<sup>6</sup> The experiment was designed to “test the relative contributions of economic threat and cultural/identity threat to opposition to migrants comparatively and within individual nations” (European Social Survey 2015). Economic threat was manipulated using an immigrant skill manipulation (professional vs. unskilled) while cultural threat was manipulated using an immigrant national origin manipulation (European vs. non-European origin). Respondents received both an immigrant skill and immigrant national origin treatment, in a  $2 \times 2$  factorial design.<sup>7</sup>

### **Measuring Cultural Threat and Opposition to Immigration**

We make use of the national origin (European vs. non-European country) manipulation to measure cultural threat (the economic threat manipulation will be used below for the robustness tests). Specifically, respondents from each ESS sample country were randomly assigned to be asked about

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<sup>6</sup>The experiment was fielded in 21 countries but we do not include the sample from Israel because its distinct immigration regime (which involves ethno-religious identity) means that the immigrant origin experiment is unlikely to manipulate cultural threat. We also exclude the Portuguese sample because initial findings indicate that its experimental manipulation did not manipulate cultural threat due to the specific choice of countries used in the manipulation: in particular, the use of Brazil as the culturally distinct non-European source of immigrants (Ford and Mellon 2018).

<sup>7</sup>See also Kentmen-Cin and Erisen (2017) and Azrout and Wojcieszak (2017) for other examples of immigrant origin cues in European survey experiments.

migrants from either (a) “a poor European country providing [the] largest number of migrants” to that sample country, or (b) “a poor country outside Europe providing [the] largest number of migrants” (European Social Survey 2015, 17).<sup>8</sup> The list of migrant-sending countries used in the survey is provided in Figure 1. The question wording of the experiment is as follows:

Please tell me to what extent you think [country] should allow [professionals / unskilled labourers] from [poor European country providing largest number of migrants / poor country outside Europe providing largest number of migrants] to come to live in [country] – Allow many to come and live here, Allow some, Allow a few, Allow none.

Our hypotheses focus on the impact of the national origin cues on authoritarian attitudes to immigrant exclusion. However, we also report results for the immigrant skill manipulation with the expectation that it will not interact with authoritarianism. It is the potential threat to cultural norms posed by the origin manipulation (see Azrout and Wojcieszak 2017; Kentmen-Cin and Erisen 2017), rather than the threat to egocentric or sociotropic economic welfare posed by the skill manipulation, which is expected to prompt differing responses from authoritarians and non-authoritarians.

[Figure 1 here]

The main effects of authoritarianism and the immigrant origin and immigrant skills manipulations on respondents’ opposition to immigration are displayed in Figure 1. The figure reveals that the immigration origin experiment significantly increases opposition to immigration in 13 out of the 19 national samples. The average effect, pooled across national samples, is also positive and

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<sup>8</sup>The designers of the experiment defend this approach as follows: “This way we ensure that the immigrant group used is consistently the most locally salient and representative nation from within each broader category (more culturally-similar European migrants; more culturally-distant non-European migrants). This will ensure relevance within each nation, but by employing a unified logic will also allow for sensible comparison of reactions across nations” (European Social Survey 2015, 17).

significant. European respondents, in other words, are usually more opposed to immigration when the immigrants in question are framed as non-European rather than European. The immigrant origin experiment does not universally harden attitudes to immigration, suggesting variations in either the receiving country contexts or in the threat posed by particular immigrant-sending countries. We return to this issue later in the analysis.

Figure 1 further demonstrates that the immigrant skill experiment has positive effects on opposition to immigration. These effects hold in all of the 19 samples, and are in fact substantially larger than the effects of the immigrant origin experiment. Yet immigrant skill is not expected to galvanize or mobilize the effect of authoritarianism, so plays only a supporting role in our paper.<sup>9</sup>

### **Measuring Authoritarianism**

The ESS includes the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ), a 21-item battery designed to measure Schwartz's (1992) human values dimensions. Feldman (2003) demonstrates that several of these items can be combined to form a valid and reliable measure of authoritarianism (see also Duckitt and Sibley 2009; Norris and Inglehart 2019). In particular, Feldman (2003) recommends combining the "conformity" and "tradition" value scales to measure "support for social conformity" and combining the "self-direction" and "stimulation" value scales to measure "support for personal autonomy." Because authoritarianism captures the trade-off between social conformity and personal autonomy, Feldman recommends subtracting the latter from the former.<sup>10</sup> He shows that the resulting authoritarian values scale correlates at 0.68 with Altemeyer's right-wing authoritarianism scale, which demonstrates its validity. Indeed, Feldman (2003) was sufficiently impressed

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<sup>9</sup>Specifically, we use the immigrant skill experiment to provide a robustness check of our tests of the mobilizing versus galvanizing hypotheses. For further analysis and discussion of both of these experimental manipulations, see Ford and Mellon (2018).

<sup>10</sup>Doing so has the additional benefit of adjusting for respondent acquiescence bias (Cohrs et al. 2005; Schwartz 1992).

by the PVQ measure of authoritarianism to add those items to the authoritarianism battery he had developed.

We follow Feldman's recommendations, but also include a fifth Schwartz value, security, in the social conformity scale because further research has demonstrated its empirical linkages with authoritarianism (Cohrs et al. 2005; Feather and McKee 2012; Norris and Inglehart 2019). In sum, we use an additive scale of the six PVQ items corresponding to conformity, tradition, and security values to measure support for social conformity (Cronbach's alpha = 0.71), and an additive scale of the four items corresponding to self-direction and stimulation values to measure support for personal autonomy (Cronbach's alpha = 0.65). Finally, as per Feldman, we subtract the latter from the former to obtain our measure of authoritarian values.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between authoritarianism and opposition to immigration (as measured by the experimental question above). This figure reveals that authoritarian values are always associated with more restrictive attitudes towards immigrants.<sup>11</sup> This is hardly surprising given extant research on the authoritarian hostility toward difference and diversity (Altemeyer 1981; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Pettigrew and Christ 2007; Cohrs and Stelzl 2010). It is also consistent with Davidov and Schmidt (2008), who find a positive association between Schwartz's tradition and conformity values (which form the core of our authoritarianism scale) and opposition to immigration.

## **Other Variables**

Cultural threat is experimentally manipulated and is therefore exogenous (within country). Authoritarianism is, however, measured observationally. We therefore include several control variables in our analyses.

The first control variable is another major dimension of values, which we call dominance values due to their conceptual overlap with Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) social dominance orien-

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<sup>11</sup>The underlying ordered probit models include control variables, which are described in the next sub-section.

tation (SDO). SDO has been shown to be strongly connected to prejudice (e.g., Esses et al. 2001). Dominance values are measured using four of Schwartz’s values from the ESS PVQ. As suggested by Schwartz (1996), to measure “self-transcendence,” we combine the PVQ “universalism” and “benevolence” scales (five items; Cronbach’s alpha = 0.73), and to measure “self-enhancement,” we combine the “achievement” and “power scales” (four items; Cronbach’s alpha = 0.73). Other scholars have demonstrated that self-transcendence is negatively correlated, and self-enhancement, positively correlated, with SDO (Feather 1996; Cohrs et al. 2005). As such, we calculate dominance values by subtracting the former from the latter, as per the logic of Feldman (2003). Dominance values therefore measure the relative preference for personal status, power, and wealth versus solidarity, equality, and caring for others and the environment. Like SDO, dominance values are largely independent of authoritarianism (the correlation in the pooled dataset is  $-0.10$ )

We also include several demographic variables. These are: respondents’ perceived financial comfort (a 4-point Likert scale), age (coded to a 4-category nominal variable), education (a 3-category nominal variable), employment status (a 3-category nominal variable), and dummy variables for gender, whether the respondent is born in country, speaks an official language (e.g., Dutch, French, or German in Belgium), is religious (i.e., identifies religion as “none”), and lives in an urban area. Descriptive statistics for all variables are provided in the Online Appendix.

## **Empirical Strategy**

The ESS immigrant origin experiment randomly allocates respondents to experimental treatments, but non-randomly chooses which countries feature in those treatments. Indeed, the pair of immigrant origin countries are selected based on existing migration flows in the destination country. The design of the ESS immigrant origin experiment therefore introduces endogeneity at the level of country (although retaining an exogenous measure of threat within countries). We use two methods in this paper to account for the cross-national variance in the independent variable. First, we conduct our analyses separately by country, in effect treating the 19 country samples as separate experiments. Second, we apply multilevel models to the pooled sample, allowing the effects of the

key variables to vary across countries. Since the dependent variable is an ordered factor, we furthermore use ordered probit regression models. Finally, all analyses are weighted using the design weights provided by the ESS.

## **Results**

We present our results in three stages. First, we analyse the interaction effects (and marginal effects) of authoritarianism and cultural threat to verify whether the evidence supports either the galvanizing or mobilizing theories. Next, as robustness tests, we test whether other measures of values (dominance values and left-right ideology) and threat (economic threat) also produce a galvanizing effect. Finally, we examine the cross-country variance in the authoritarianism-threat marginal effects in an effort to understand the moderators of these relationships.

### **Interaction Effects of Authoritarianism and Cultural Threat**

The theory of the authoritarian dynamic focuses on the interplay between authoritarian values and threat. This hypothesis is usually tested using an interaction between these variables (e.g., Feldman and Stenner 1997; Hetherington and Suhay 2011). We use the same specification, adding an interaction term between cultural threat (immigrant origin) and authoritarian values to a model which includes the main effects of these variables and the full set of control variables. Results are shown in Figure 2, with the first panel displaying the interaction effects.

[Figure 2 here]

Recall that Feldman and Stenner proposed a positive interaction, with threat galvanizing authoritarians, while Hetherington and Suhay predicted a negative interaction as threat “mobilizes” non-authoritarians. Like Feldman and Stenner, we find that the average interaction effect across our 19 samples is positive and significant. Analyzing the effect separately by country, we find a positive and significant effect in seven of the 19 samples, a positive but insignificant effect in eight, and a negative but insignificant effect in four. We therefore find some support for the galvanizing hypothesis but no support at all for the mobilizing theory.

The two versions of the authoritarian-threat theory make predictions about the marginal effects of threat as well as the sign of the overall interaction between threat and authoritarianism. These marginal effects of threat are displayed in the second panel of Figure 2. The hollow circles display the marginal effects of threat when authoritarian values are low; the filled circles display the marginal effects of threat when authoritarian values are high (one standard deviation above).

The galvanizing theory predicts that the marginal effect of threat will be positive among authoritarians (it is agnostic about the marginal effect among non-authoritarians other than that it will be weaker). The mobilizing theory, in contrast, predicts that the marginal effect will be positive among non-authoritarians. We can see that the prediction of the galvanizing theory is borne out in 14 of the 19 national samples, as well as the average effect estimated from the pooled sample. In the remaining five national samples, the marginal effect is insignificant. In sum, when it comes to the marginal effects of cultural threat, the evidence again generally supports the galvanizing theory and does not support the mobilizing theory.

### **Robustness tests**

The theory of the authoritarian dynamic holds that it is threats to cultural norms specifically that activate authoritarian values in particular. To further test this hypothesis we examine whether galvanizing effects can be found using other measures of threat and other measures of values. Evidence of either type would undermine the case for the galvanizing theory. Contrariwise, if no such results obtain, the evidence for the theory of the authoritarian dynamic is strengthened. These analyses therefore function as placebo tests.

[Figure 3 here]

Our first placebo test examines whether economic threats – in the guise of immigrants presented as unskilled laborers vs. professionals – might also galvanize authoritarians. Figure 3 presents the results of ordered probit models that include interactions between immigrant skill and authoritarianism. As before, the interaction effects are presented in the first panel, with the marginal effects of immigrant skill in the second. It is clear that there is no overall interaction

between immigrant skill and authoritarianism. The average effect is virtually zero. Only two of the national-sample effects are significantly different to zero, with one negative (Slovenia) and the other positive (the UK). There is therefore no evidence that threat posed by unskilled immigrants activates authoritarianism predispositions.

For our second placebo test, we interact the immigrant origin treatment with two alternative measures of respondent dispositions: dominance values and left-right ideological positions (see, e.g., Vasilopoulos, Marcus, and Foucault 2008). In results presented in the online supplementary materials, we show that both the dominance-threat and ideology-threat interaction effects are, on average, very small and entirely insignificant. These results confirm that it is authoritarian values in particular that are activated by cultural threats, exactly as predicted by Feldman and Stenner's theory of the authoritarian dynamic.

Both placebo tests therefore confirm that the galvanizing effects we have observed are confined to individuals with authoritarian values who are presented with threats to cultural norms. There is no general tendency for contextual threats to interact with socio-political values.

### **The Conditioning Effect of Immigrant Origin Country Factors**

The evidence is not wholly in favor of the galvanizing theory, however. There is considerable variance in the authoritarianism-threat interaction effects, with many of these insignificant. In this section, we explore why there might be such variation. To do so, we calculate the marginal effects of authoritarian values when immigrants are presented either as European or non-European.<sup>12</sup> We then model these 38 marginal effects as the dependent variable in an OLS regression. This allows us to further analyze the moderators of the authoritarianism-immigration opposition link in all 38

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<sup>12</sup>Note that these are not the same marginal effects reported in Figure 2. There, we examined the effects of immigrant origin when authoritarianism was either high or low; now we examine the effects of authoritarianism when immigrant origin is either European or non-European.

sample-immigrant origin country dyads (presented in Figure 1).<sup>13</sup>

As independent variables in this OLS regression, we include measures of several features of the immigrant origin countries. In particular, we include two indicators of potential cultural threat: (1) linguistic distance and (2) the proportion of the origin country population that identifies as Muslim. We also include a measure of potential economic threat posed by each migrant group. Linguistic distances measure the number of changes in pronunciation required between a pair of languages, across a list of basic words – a method known as “lexicostatistics”.<sup>14</sup> Under the assumption that linguistic differences mirror historical population divisions, these measures capture the cultural drift or distance between two societies (see Fearon 2003; Spolaore and Wacziarg 2016). Our second variable, Muslim population share, then captures the likelihood of an immigrant from a particular country being Muslim, a group that many Europeans find particularly threatening (Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2016; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2009; Strabac and Listhaug 2008; cf. Strabac, Aalberg, and Valenta 2014; Helbing and Traunmüller 2018).<sup>15</sup> Potential economic threat is measured using the log of GDP per capita for each migrant sending country.<sup>16</sup> This allows us to examine whether the varying levels of development evident in the list of immigrant origin countries influences the threat felt by respondents.

[Table 1 here]

The results are presented in Table 1. Muslim population share alone accounts for a substan-

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<sup>13</sup>Sides and Citrin (2007) use a similar method to unpack the conditioning effect of contextual factors on opposition to immigration in Europe.

<sup>14</sup>We use data on linguistic distances between all world languages provided by the Automated Similarity Judgment Program (ASJP; <https://asjp.c1ld.org/>).

<sup>15</sup>The data come from the “Global Religious Futures” project run by the Pew Research Center (<http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/>).

<sup>16</sup>GDP per capita estimated in 2014 by the International Monetary Fund using purchasing power parity adjustments.

tial proportion of the variance (30%) in the marginal effects of immigrant origin. The coefficient is significant and positive, indicating that authoritarians become more opposed to immigration (compared with non-authoritarians) to the extent that immigrants are perceived as originating in a Muslim-majority country. Muslim migrants therefore appear to be particularly likely to activate authoritarian dispositions. This is consistent with existing research highlighting the significant threat to the values, norms and worldview of natives presented by Muslims in many European countries (Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2016; Azrout and Wojcieszak 2017; Kentmen-Cin and Erisen 2017; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2009; Strabac and Listhaug 2008; cf. Strabac, Aalberg, and Valenta 2014; Helbing and Traunmüller 2018). Neither linguistic distance nor GDP per capita has a significant effect. Adding country fixed effects to control for sample country characteristics (Model 1.2) does not greatly alter the relationship between authoritarian marginal effects and Muslim population share. Country fixed effects do add considerably to model fit however, suggesting that idiosyncrasies in each sample country underpin a fair proportion of variance in authoritarian-threat interactions.

[Figure 4 here]

We then confirm these results using a simpler method (e.g., Sides and Citrin 2007): plotting the 38 marginal effects of authoritarianism by the two measures of cultural threat, proportion Muslim and linguistic distance. Figure 4 confirms the findings of Table 1. The Muslim share of the immigrant origin country population is positively correlated with the effect of authoritarianism on immigrant opposition. There is no correlation between linguistic distance and immigrant opposition.

In sum, this analysis shows that variability in the effects of the authoritarian dynamic are partly due to features of both immigrant origin countries and the sample countries. In particular, if immigrants originate in Muslim-majority countries, authoritarianism becomes more charged, exerting a more powerful influence on immigration preferences. However, cultural difference per se – as measured by linguistic distances – plays little to no role in enhancing or dampening the effects of authoritarianism.

## **Conclusion**

Existing research emphasizes the significant consequences of authoritarianism for prejudice and intolerance of minorities (Altemeyer 1981; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005), including prejudice against immigrant-origin minorities (e.g., Cohrs and Stelzl 2010; Ford 2011; Pettigrew and Christ 2007; Davidov and Schmidt 2008). Our findings similarly show that authoritarians are more likely than non-authoritarians to reject new immigrants in all 19 European societies we examine. However, our findings also show that the extent of negative reaction to new migrants varies significantly depending on the specific threat presented, with authoritarian opposition to new migrants increasing even further when the immigrants are culturally distinct. Culturally distinct immigrants thus activate authoritarian values, galvanizing hostility and resistance to immigration. Although it might have been expected that authoritarians would be consistently negative about all forms of migration and that the response of non-authoritarians would vary depending on the level of threat (e.g., building on the arguments developed by Hetherington and Suhay (2011), we find no evidence to support this proposition. Thus, for scholars and policymakers concerned about intolerance against target groups being activated among wider populations, our results indicate that this is unlikely to be the case, and that it is primarily individuals with authoritarian predispositions who become increasingly intolerant in the face of threats to social conformity.

These findings provide some insight into how cultural threats and authoritarianism together shape the politics of immigration. While research on attitudes to immigrants suggests that “situational triggers” may prompt an increase in anti-immigrant prejudice and that the trigger of cultural threat is particularly powerful (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004), our study indicates that such triggers may, in fact, have variable effects. The strong need for conformity on the part of those with authoritarian predispositions (Feldman 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005) makes these individuals more likely to react negatively when presented with potential threats to conformity. Culturally distinct migrants present precisely such a threat, and our findings suggest that Muslim migrants are especially likely to activate the authoritarian dynamic.

Our results present the possibility that it may be those with authoritarian predispositions who are driving much of the rise in hostility and tension surrounding immigration in European societies. The findings, in turn, suggest very different policies to ameliorate immigration-related tension than those being pursued in some European countries. Namely, policies that focus on reducing the normative threat felt by authoritarians may be more effective at reducing tension surrounding this issue than more blanket-approach immigration policies such as a wholesale reduction in immigration, which may be unnecessary for much of the rest of a population and damaging to wider societal needs (e.g., filling labor shortages in health care services).

Our findings also shed some light on how migration may prompt substantial increases in support for far-right anti-immigration parties. We show how migrants from Muslim countries in particular are likely to activate the authoritarian-threat dynamic. Increases in the numbers of such migrants – or even the potential threat of increases (for instance during the Syrian refugee crisis) – may suddenly activate authoritarians, prompting a surge in the salience of the issue of immigration, and increased voting for the far-right (e.g. Dennison and Geddes 2018).

It must be emphasized that the pattern found in many of the countries investigated here does not hold in all societies. In twelve of the national samples, there is no authoritarianism-threat interaction. This suggests that the link between authoritarianism and cultural threat requires greater investigation. What contextual factors, for example, produce such marked threats to social conformity to activate the authoritarian dispositions of native citizens? Our analysis of immigrant country-of-origin features suggested that cultural distance is not especially threatening. Neither does economic threat activate authoritarian values to any great extent. Rather, immigrants from Muslim-majority countries were most likely to activate authoritarian dispositions, and were therefore most threatening to native citizens. It is unlikely that Muslim-origin immigration is the sole threat to social conformity that concerns authoritarians, however, and future research could go further in understanding these threats and their variable impact on European societies.

The broader question of how the authoritarian-threat dynamic plays out in the realm of immigration politics – particularly in terms of individual behavior – is another avenue for fur-

ther research. For instance, how does this dynamic impact voting behavior and the rise of anti-immigration parties? Moreover, how does the rhetoric of these parties interact with the authoritarian dynamic to produce particular patterns of behavior? And to what extent does education – known to be important in producing a “sober second thought” in the realm of tolerance (e.g. Bobo and Licari 1989) – moderate the strength of the authoritarian dynamic? Nevertheless, our findings contribute to understanding how the authoritarian dynamic plays out in the European context and for an increasingly controversial and sizable target of intolerance, immigrant-origin minorities.

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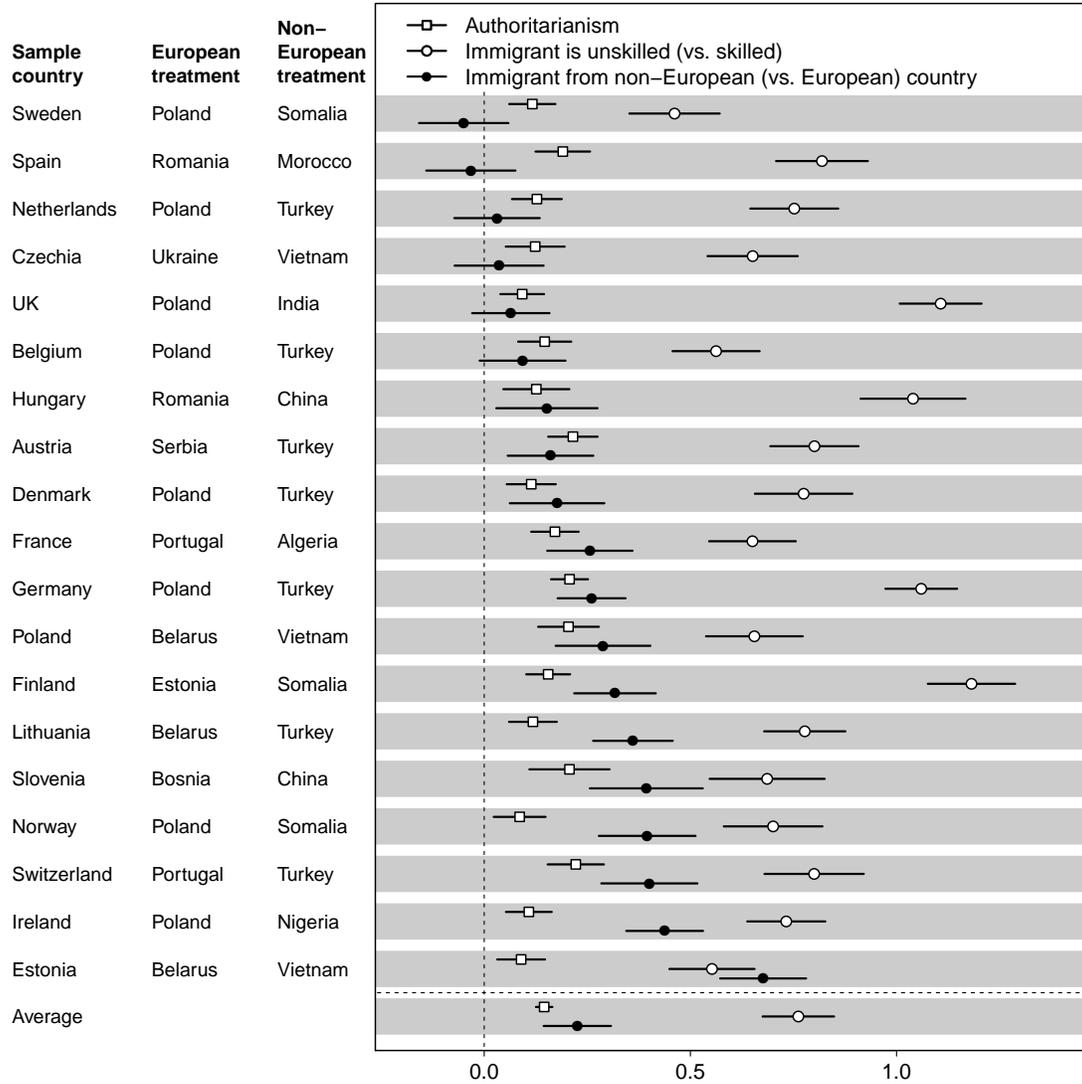
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**Table 1.** The Conditioning Effect of Immigrant Origin Country Factors

	Model 1.1	Model 1.2
Intercept	.223 (.119)	.359 (.174)
Linguistic distance	-.078 (.076)	.021 (.087)
Proportion Muslim	.091 (.025)***	.073 (.027)*
log GDP per capita	-.004 (.010)	-.020 (.013)
Country fixed effects		✓
<i>N</i>	38	38
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.327	.752
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.268	.427
Regression standard error	.062	.055

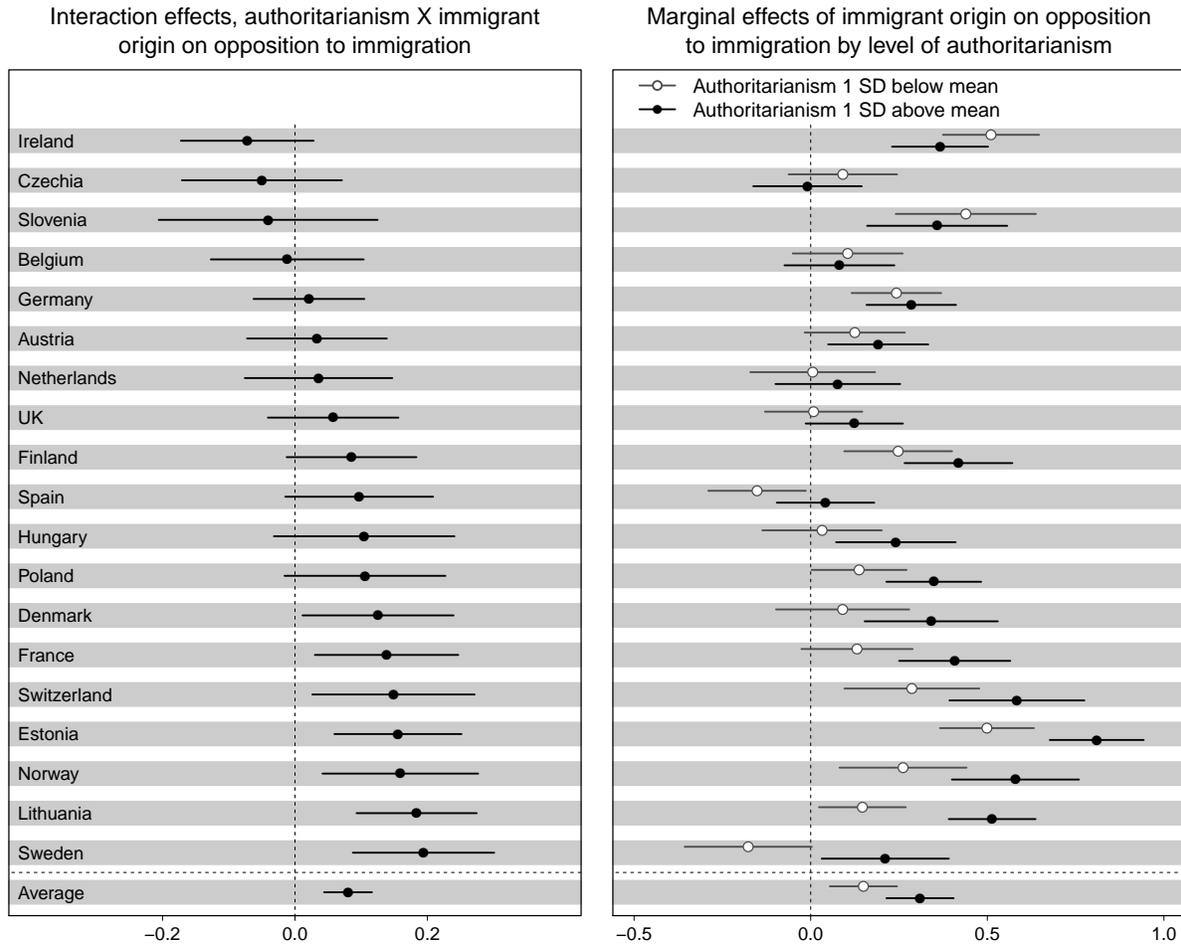
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . OLS models with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the 38 marginal effects of cultural threat, as depicted in Figure 2, panel 2.

**Figure 1.** Effects of Authoritarianism and Immigrant Origin on Opposition to Immigration by Sample



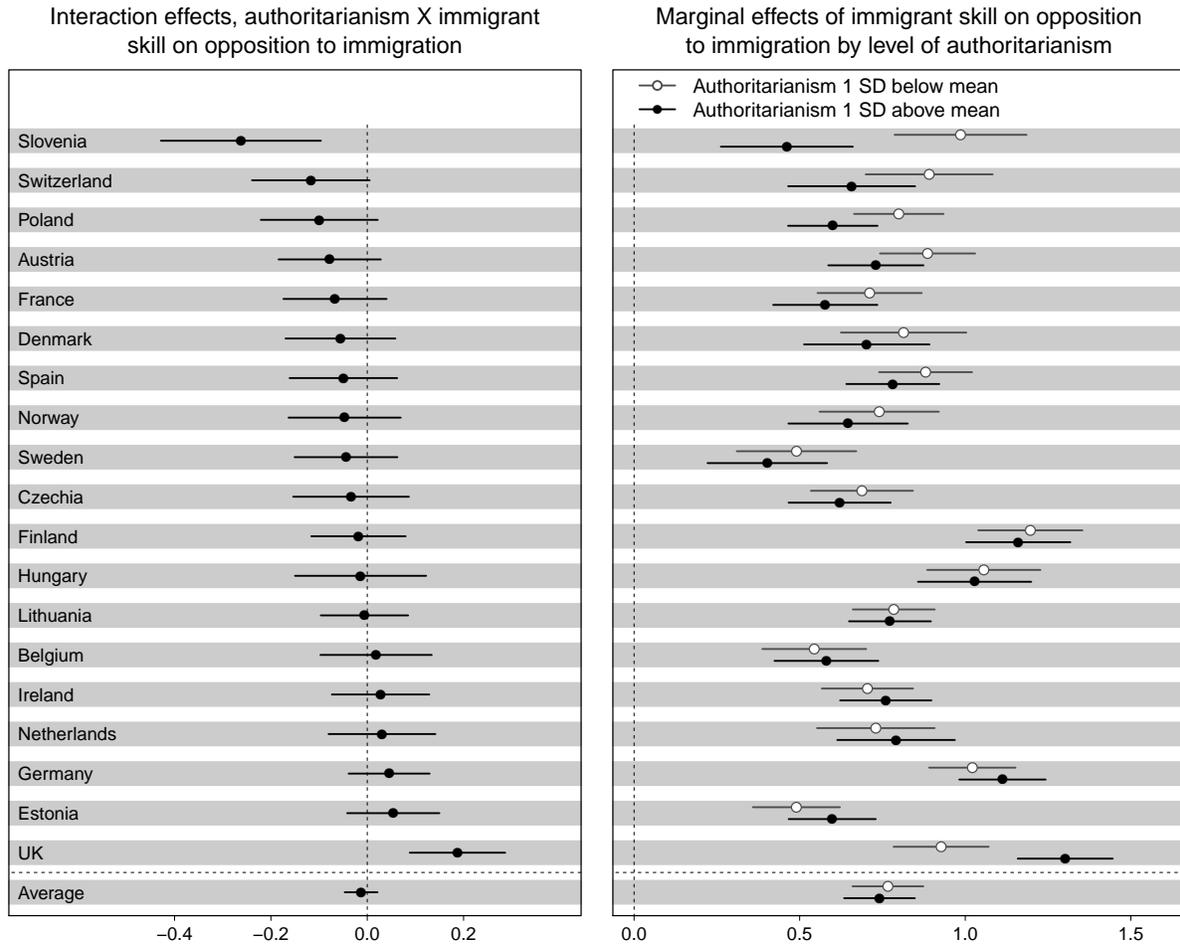
The plot displays the regression effects of authoritarianism (hollow squares), immigrant skill experiment (unskilled vs. skilled; hollow circles), and the immigrant origin treatment (non-European vs. European; filled circles). Separate ordered probit models were fit for each country, with controls for respondents' dominance values, perceived financial comfort, gender, age, education, employment status, whether born in country, speaks a national language, is religious, and lives in an urban area. The "average" estimate is obtained from a multilevel ordered probit model applied to the pooled sample, with the slopes for authoritarianism, immigrant origin, and immigrant skill allowed to vary by country. Authoritarianism is unit-normal standardized ( $z$ -score) while the experimental treatments are dichotomous. The sample countries and manipulated immigrant origin countries (European and non-European) are shown on the left.

**Figure 2.** Authoritarianism and Immigrant Origin: Interaction and Marginal Effects



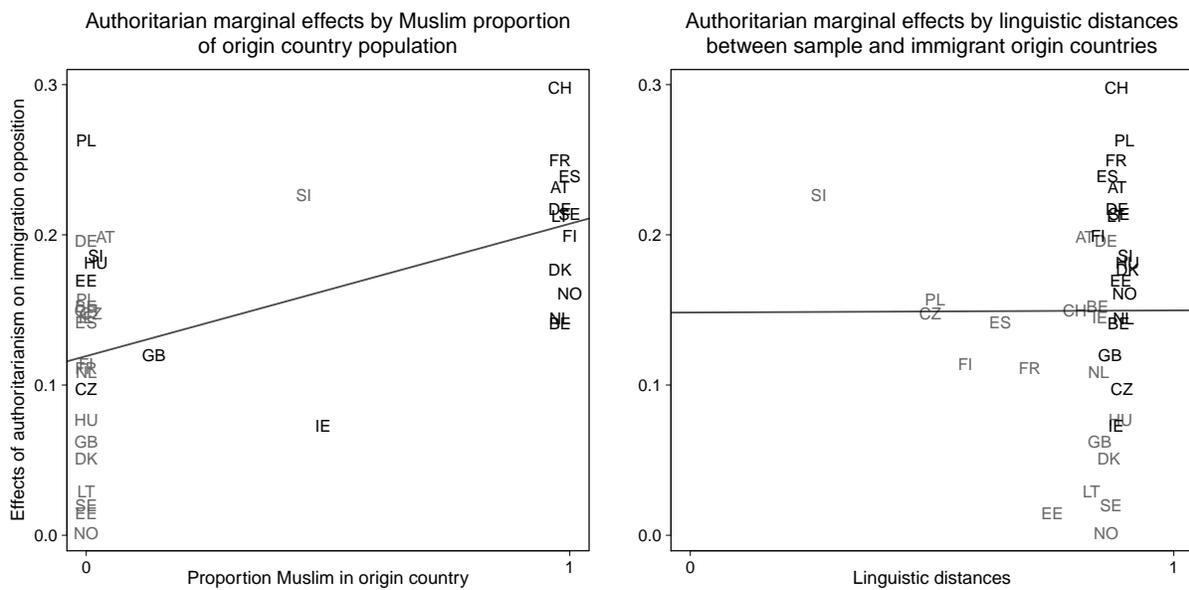
The first panel displays the interaction effects of authoritarianism and immigrant origin. The second panel displays the marginal effects of immigrant origin when authoritarianism is either low (hollow circles) or high (filled circles). Separate ordered probit models were fit for each country, with controls for respondents' dominance values, perceived financial comfort, gender, age, education, employment status, whether born in country, speaks a national language, is religious, and lives in an urban area. The "average" estimate is obtained from a multilevel ordered probit model applied to the pooled sample, with the slopes for authoritarianism, immigrant origin, and their interaction allowed to vary by country.

**Figure 3. Authoritarianism and Immigrant Skill: Interaction and Marginal Effects**



The first panel displays the interaction effects of authoritarianism and immigrant skill. The second panel displays the marginal effects of immigrant skill when authoritarianism is either low (hollow circles) or high (filled circles). Separate ordered probit models were fit for each country, with controls for respondents' dominance values, perceived financial comfort, gender, age, education, employment status, whether born in country, speaks a national language, is religious, and lives in an urban area. The "average" estimate is obtained from a multilevel ordered probit model with the slopes for authoritarianism, immigrant skill, and their interaction allowed to vary by country.

**Figure 4.** The Effects of Authoritarianism on Immigrant Opposition Varying by Contextual Measures of Cultural Threat



These scatterplots show the how marginal effects of authoritarianism on immigrant opposition covary with two contextual measures of cultural threat: the Muslim proportion of the origin country population (first plot); and the linguistic distances between the sample and immigrant origin countries (second plot). Points are indicated using the ISO-2 country code for the ESS sample country; these are either grey, when the manipulated immigrant origin country is European, or black, when the the manipulated immigrant origin country is non-European. The grey lines show the bivariate least-squares fit. Authoritarianism marginal effects are extracted from the 19 country-specific ordered probit models described above.