

The EU in the Refugee Crisis:
How National and European Identity Influence Public Opinion on
Immigration Policies and Threat Perception

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Abstract

The current refugee crisis embodies the most challenging political issue facing the European Union and divides citizens into halves. While some favor national control over the situation, others demand a common approach that comparts the responsibility due to European wide regulations. Previous research has consistently emphasized the relation between a citizen's identity and his political viewpoints in comparable debates. This paper aims to test whether the influence from national and European attachments on public opinions is applicable in the context of the refugee crisis. With the help of an online questionnaire data was gathered and a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the theorized relations. Findings indicated that the higher the national identity, the more likely was opposition toward European immigration policies and rejection of projects to help refugees. Identification with Europe compensated these effects and had the strongest influence on people with a dual identity, consisting of a strong identification with their nation as well as with Europe. This study stresses the potential for future research that could lead to more insights into the role of the relationship between the two identities in political conflicts at EU level.

The EU in the Refugee Crisis: How National and European Identity Influence Public Opinion on Immigration Policies and Threat Perception

The current refugee crisis is perceived as the “world’s largest humanitarian crisis” (Echo, 2017, 1. 3) of this time and is seen as the most important political issue facing the EU in the next years (European Commission, 2015). The subject is a continually growing concern of European citizens and its importance is ranked before that of education, taxation or terrorism (Kancs & Lecca, 2016; Bridges & Mateut, 2014; Luedtke, 2005). In order to deal with the growing rates of refugees, a common policy has been established, that grants Brussel expanded control of the situation (Jurje & Lavenex, 2014; Hollifield, Martin & Orrenius, 2014). The key concept of the resulting laws is known as the Dublin regulation, stating that immigrants have to claim asylum in the first European country they enter (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). However, due to recent events that caused a great influx of refugees the Dublin regulation lead to an overload for those states located at the European border. In response, the commission started to aim for a fairer share of responsibility and introduced the idea of redistribution (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016).

While some see an equal assignment of liability between European countries as a moral obligation, others react with resistance. Assurance of the refugee’s protection and integration requires resources in form of housing, jobs and education to be provided. That comes not only with a socio-economic burden for the host country, but it is also accompanied by an increase in security concerns (Kritzman-Amir, 2009). As a consequence, single member states voiced the demand for a limited intake of refugees for their country, in order to control resources independently. In current polls opinions of Europeans are torn back and forth between those who want to approach the crisis as a shared European responsibility and those who prefer national control of the situation.

Recent literature, such as Luedtke et al. (2005), has formulated the premise that the

citizen's opinions are caused neither by orientation on economic factors nor by the attitude toward the immigrants themselves, but is rather based on their feelings of national and European identity. In fact, it has been shown that the level of identity can be a powerful influence in shaping views toward political subjects (Hooghe & Marks, 2005). Several links have been found between the territorial identity of an individual and the attitude toward political debates at EU level (Carey, 2002; Christin & Trechsel, 2002). However, research on the influence of a citizen's identity on political conflicts in the context of the refugee crisis is largely absent.

The current study aims at demonstrating the relation between identity and political viewpoints regarding immigration policies and intents to measure how the influence through identity is expressed in shaping opinions toward current debates.

Social Identity Theory

For the purpose of this study the definition of 'identity' is derived from the field of social psychology. The social identity theory states that an individual's self-concept is partially defined by the membership in a social group (Trepte, 2006; Hogg & Abrahams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A positive impression of the own social group is therefore crucial to develop self-esteem and intrinsic value. That means, the formation of a social identity is often accompanied by processes, such as showing solidarity within the group and discrimination toward out-group members, which aim at enhancing the self (Trepte, 2006). A possible result is the tendency to favor the in-group and in extreme cases feelings of 'in-group love' and 'out-group hate' can be generated (Luedtke, 2005; Michinov, Michinov, & Toczec-Capelle, 2004; Brown, 2000). Those effects often do not derive from cognitive processes, which is why identity can have an influence on people's emotions and preferences independently of rational thought (Luedtke, 2005; Wenzel, 2002; Brown, 2000).

To elucidate the possible forms of group identification, a model by Marks (1999) will be used, which is called the *framing territorial identities* model (see Figure 1). It illustrates

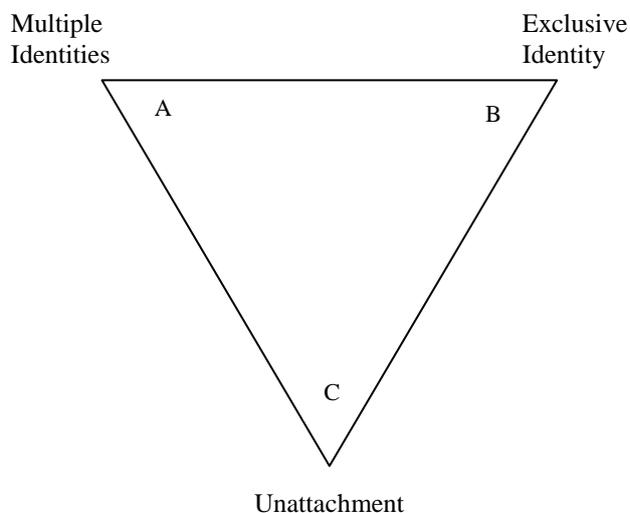


Figure 1. Framing Territorial Identity Model

three basic types of attachment.

Firstly, there are individuals that identify with several coexisting groups simultaneously. For example, a citizen can feel Welsh, British and European at the same time. This is called having *multiple identities* and is represented at A. Secondly, there are individuals that hold an *exclusive identity*, meaning that one single

identity of the person overwhelms all other possible attachments (B). An example would be someone who strongly feels identified with his nation, but rejects other possible groups, such as a personal attachment to Europe. C constitutes individuals in whom no specific identification is salient and only weak attachments to a group can be measured. The average individual is rarely placed at one of the three corners completely, but the position can shift fluently within all areas of the model. The spot someone is located at can have strong effects on his or her political viewpoints, as will be explained below.

Identities and their Influence on Political Opinions

The two types of identity that are relevant for this study are the national and the European identities of EU citizens. Both have shown to have a significant influence on political opinions (Christin & Trechsel, 2002). Previous research has indicated that common policies and collaboration between the member states were more likely supported by individuals that identified with Europe, while identification with the nation resulted in

opposition (Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Kriesi & Lachat, 2004; Christin & Trechsel, 2002).

In their paper Verhaegen, Hooghe & Quintelier (2014) offer a possible explanation for this connection by stating that “a common identity allows citizens to put the interests of the community before their personal interests and to accept the legitimacy of policies of solidarity and redistribution.” (p. 2). Accordingly, a common European identity offers citizens the possibility to experience the EU as an in-group. That leads them to be interested in fulfilling the group’s goals and act in accordance to European immigration policies. In connection with this study, the reference to redistribution is especially interesting, since redistributing the number of refugees among the member states is a current topic of discussion in EU immigration policies. Within the in-group acting solidarily and dealing with difficulties by sharing adequately can be seen as desirable behavior, which is why redistribution is likely to be supported.

People with a low European identity perceive only the nation as their in-group, which is why supporting the country’s interests is their highest goal. In this case, redistribution between the member states is comparable to compromising the facilities of the in-group, which results them to oppose the European immigration policies. This presumption leads to the first hypothesis. *H1: An individual’s level of national identity is positively related to opposition toward European immigration policies, while their level of European identity will show the reverse effect.*

Considering the substance of European wide policies, the concept of offering support to refugees is one that is of great importance. Carrera, Blockmans, Gros and Guild (2015) identified two key concepts: On the one hand, efforts to improve the situation in the respective country are being demanded. Furthermore, the idea of redistribution indicates that aid in the form of welcoming refugees to Europe and providing them with needed resources in the European states is inquired as well (Carrera et al., 2015). It has been reported that

individuals with a salient European identity are in favor of offering support to immigrants (McLaren, 2002). Therefore, it is expected that a European identity will be positively related to supporting projects to help refugees in the respective country as well as in Europe.

This effect is not expected to occur in people with a salient national identity. It has been demonstrated that people with a strong national identity are more likely to perceive immigration as threatening, especially, when they stand on the verge to come in close contact with the concerned group (Sides & Citrin, 2007). The idea of admitting refugees into the country would lead to this scenario (Newman, 2014). Consequently, attitudes toward helping behavior might as well be linked to the so called “not in my backyard” phenomenon, in which individuals show great resistance to the implementation of certain actions in their direct environment (Groh et al., 2008). A salient national identity is not assumed to have a direct effect on the willingness to help refugees in general. However, it is considered to have a negative influence on offering support when that would directly affect the own neighborhood. This leads to the next two hypotheses:

H2a: An individual's level of European identity is positively related with supporting refugees in general and supporting refugees with national resources.

H2b: An individual's level of national identity has no effect on the wish to support refugees in general and is negatively correlated with helping refugees with national resources.

Integrated Threat Theory

Experiencing a form of threat has shown to be a prior condition of any hostility or opposition to immigration (Sides & Citrin, 2007). In their model, called *integrated threat theory*, Stephan and Stephan (1996) distinguish between four different types of threat. The two types relevant for this research are called *symbolic* and *realistic threat*. Realistic threats concern the physical or material well-being of the in-group, whereas symbolic threats are described as threats to the worldview of the group, including morals, standards and values

(Stephan & Stephan, 1996). The model states that people, who come to the belief that their group is threatened, would likely react prejudicially in defense.

The level of perceived threat has shown to be a good predictor for negative attitudes and rejection toward immigration or racial out-groups (Velasco Gonzales, Verkuyten, Weesie & Poppe, 2008). Moreover, there was also found a connection between the level of perceived threat and the level of national identity; individuals with a salient national identity tend to perceive immigration to be more threatening than people who identify less with their nation (Kriesi & Lachat, 2004; Hooghe & Marks, 2002). As a result, they are more likely to develop an anti-immigration sentiment, which is said to be associated with skepticism toward the EU (Hooghe & Marks, 2005). This line of argument results in the third hypothesis. *H3: An individual's level of national identity is positively related to the perception of threat, while the level of European identity will show the reverse effect.*

Identity as a Moderator

An aspect that has to be taken under consideration is that the influence's intensity might differ between the two forms of identity. While the national identity is assumed to be the most powerful territorial identity there is, the existence of the European one is called into question. Some critics doubt the possibility of any form of collective identity in Europe to generate, due to the large variation in cultural norms (Marks, 1999). Although, research has shown that most EU citizens identify with Europe at least to some degree, no supranational attachments has ever proven to trigger such a high level of identification as the national one (Carey, 2002; Risse, 2002). Consequently, the influence of the national attachment should exceed the impact that identification with Europe has on political opinions. Therefore, national identity could act as a moderator between those two factors, decreasing the effect of European identity when being distinct. This expectation is formulated in the fourth hypothesis.

H4: An individual's level of European identity will only show an effect on political attitudes and threat perception, if the individual's level of national identity is low.

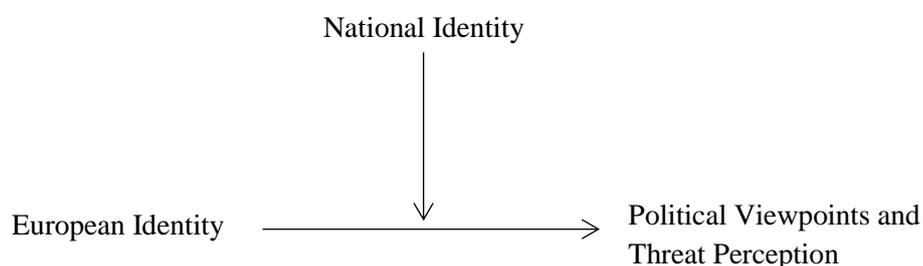


Figure 2. Moderation Effect of National Identity between European Identity and Political Viewpoints

Current Study

The hypotheses that have been made foresee a strong relation between an individual's identity and variables related to topics in immigration politics. First of all, it is expected that a high level of national identification is connected to opposition toward European wide policies in the refugee crisis. Moreover, it is hypothesized that national identity is related to a negative attitude toward aiding refugees in the own country, which could be caused by a higher perception of threat due to immigration. In contrast, identification with Europe is expected to be related to favoring EU immigration policies and helping refugees. Consequently, the level of perceived threat due to immigration is presumed to be lower. To test these predictions a questionnaire was developed, which aimed at measuring people's level of identification with said groups and their relation to the topics at hand.

Methods

Participants and Design

Participants were 224 students of the University of Twente (mean age = 20.6, $SD = 1.98$ range from 18 to 29 years) approached via the university's test subject pool. The sample consisted of 164 German and 46 Dutch students from which 30% mentioned to have another

ethnic background apart from their national affiliation. 30% of the participants were male and 70% female. A cross-sectional study design was used which had been approved by the ethical commission for Behavioral Sciences at the UT. 14 of the recorded surveys had to be excluded from analysis, because participants quit before they had reached the end of the questionnaire and did therefore not complete the survey properly. In total, the data of 210 respondents was used in the analysis.

Procedure and Measures

In order to participate subjects had to log on to the website of the test subject pool of the university. Before the questionnaire started an informed consent was shown to them, which included information on the data processing and the right of the respondents to stop at any given moment. Participants could go through the questionnaire in their own pace and had the possibility to pause and proceed with the questions some other time. The completion took approximately 20 minutes and was rewarded with points in the Sona system of the UT.

After demographic information was gathered, the questions of the study concentrated on the respondent's level of identification with territorial groups. Identity was measured by two scales focusing on *national identity* ($\alpha = .86$) and *European identity* ($\alpha = .85$). The scales consisted of 5 items each, estimating to what extent (0 = Disagree to 100 = Agree) the identification with said groups is part of the participant's self-perception, the level of pride experienced by belonging to this specific group and the level of attachment felt toward other members. Questions were based on a scale by Huddy & Kathib (2007). Examples of questions are "Being a Dutch/ German citizen is part of who I am" or "Being a Dutch/ German citizen makes me proud". One item that recurred in every scale respectively reported a low item correlation and was therefore excluded from the analysis.

The second part of the study contained questions on various topics in immigration politics. First of all, the attitude toward aiding refugees was estimated. To do so, two scales

were used. The first one, named *helping general*, put the focus on supporting refugees in general (“Refugees should be helped”, “It is a responsibility to offer help to refugees”) and reported a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .87$. The second scale, called *helping national*, laid the focus more on the particular country giving support ($\alpha = .94$). It was measured by items such as “The Dutch/ German people should offer help to refugees” and “The Dutch/ German people have the responsibility to offer help to refugees”. Agreement was estimated by a 7-point-likert scale that ranged from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree.

Secondly, *political attitudes* were estimated, by giving statements referring to current points of discussion in immigration politics (“Each member state of the EU should be allowed to introduce a limit for the amount of refugees they want to welcome in their country” or “The total number of refugees should be divided percentage wise between all member states”). One item was deleted due to low item correlation. The Cronbach's alpha for the remaining items was $\alpha = .87$. Respondents had to indicate their agreement with each statement by using a 7-point-likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree.

Thereafter, the study concentrated on the perception of threat due to immigration. It was measured with the help of two scales that consisted of several statements about refugees and immigration. Most items were derived from a survey conducted by Griffin in 2014, who used the 'Racial Attitudes Questionnaire' by Stephan (1993) as a basis. The scale was stocked up with a few items that explicitly referred to current issues in the refugee crisis. Respondents had to indicate their agreement with each statement through a 7-point-likert scale. The first scale aimed at measuring *realistic threat* ($\alpha = .93$) with items such as “Too much money is spent on educational programs that benefit refugees” or “The legal system is more forgiving on refugees than on other citizens”. The second scale measured *symbolic threat* ($\alpha = .88$) and used items such as “Refugees do not understand the way Dutch/ German citizens view the

world” and “Traditions of Dutch/ German citizens do not get as much respect from refugees as they deserve”. On the last page of the questionnaire respondents were thanked for participating and the aim of the study was fully explained.

Exploratory factor analysis supported the distinction that people were expected to make between their national and their European identity. The Varimax Rotation with Kaiser Normalization showed that national identity items loaded .75 or higher on one factor and European identity items .72 or higher on a second factor. The distinction made between symbolic and realistic threat was only partially supported; items for realistic threat loaded .60 or higher on one factor, but several items of symbolic threat showed loadings on two factors respectively. Moreover, the distinction between helping in general and helping with resources of the nation was not supported. Both helping scales scored .60 or higher on one factor. On account of the second hypothesis, the distinction between the two scales will be kept in the analysis for now. Table 1 displays scale means, standard deviations and inter-scale correlations.

Table 1
Scale means, standard deviations and inter-scale correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. National identity	58.27	20.01						
2. European identity	52.33	22.23	.35**					
3. EU opposition	3.51	1.53	.11	-.27**				
4. Helping in general	5.80	1.67	-.06	.33**	-.46**			
5. Helping national	5.26	1.05	.07	.35**	-.55**	.89**		
6. Realistic threat	2.86	1.11	.15*	-.24**	.46**	-.68**	-.72**	
7. Symbolic threat	3.90	1.00	.12	-.20**	.44**	-.55**	-.62**	.75**

Note: N = 210. *M* = Scale means, *SD* = standard deviation

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Results

Multiple linear regressions were used to examine if an individual's identity significantly predicted attitudes toward EU immigration policies, the support of refugees and threat perception. Table 2 provides a summary of all relevant results.

First of all, it was tested if opposition toward the EU could be predicted based on an individual's level of national and European identity. The results showed a significant regression equation (see Table 2). In line with the first hypothesis the analysis displayed that the higher the level of national identity was, the more likely people were to oppose European immigration policies. The identification with Europe showed to be negatively related to opposition (see Table 2).

Subsequently, multiple linear regressions were conducted to measure effects of identity on helping behavior. As it can be seen in Table 2, European identity was positively correlated with both helping scales and had significant results, which offers support for hypothesis 2a. Scores on the national identity scales had significant negative regression weights, indicating that national identity is negatively correlated with showing helping behavior for both scales (see Table 2). Since hypothesis 2b formulated the expectation that national identity would have no effect on the wish to help in general, this hypothesis gets rejected.

Furthermore, it was tested if national and European identity were significant predictors of threat perception. In line with the expectations, national identity was positively correlated with experiencing a high level of realistic as well as symbolic threat (see Table 2). In contrast, European identity was negatively related with scores on both variables (see Table 2).

Table 2*Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Political Attitude and Perceived Threat (N = 210)*

Variable	EU opposition			Helping general			Helping national			Realistic threat			Symbolic threat		
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
National identity	.303	2.75	.006**	-.167	-2.36	.019*	-.191	-2.72	.007**	.232	3.23	.001**	.187	2.53	.012*
European identity	-.546	-5.16	.000**	.408	5.99	.000**	.431	6.41	.000**	-.336	-4.82	.000**	-.275	-3.87	.000**
National identity*	-1.74	-2.14	.043*	.138	2.07	.039*	.136	2.07	.040*	-.133	-4.85	.051	-.106	-1.53	.128
European identity															
R ²		.143			.166			.185			.137			.091	

*Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01*

Finally, it was presumed that the effect of European identity on the various scales would only be significant, when the national identification of a subject was low. To begin with, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with EU opposition as dependent variable. In the first step national and European identity were included as independent variables and showed significant results ($R^2 = .124$, $F(2, 207) = 14.60$, $p < .001$).

Subsequently, an interaction term between the centered variables was created and added to the regression model in the second step. The second model accounted for significantly more variance than the two variables alone, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(1, 206) = 4.56$, $p = .034$. The interaction plot reported that the negative effect of European identity on EU opposition was the weakest, when the level of national identity was low ($b = -.024$, $t = -2.51$, $p = .013$), stronger when national identity was average ($b = -.36$, $t = -5.17$, $p < .001$) and the strongest, when national identity was high ($b = -.47$, $t = -5.54$, $p < .001$). In order to illustrate the results, the interaction plot was inserted into a SPSS-data set and with the Chart Builder

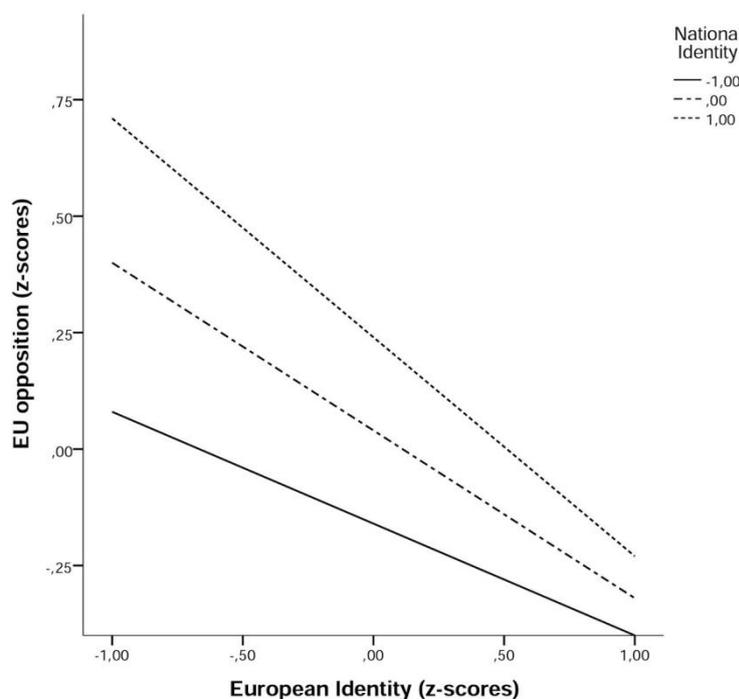


Figure 3. Interaction effect between national identity and European identity on EU opposition.

function a line graph was

created (see Figure 3).

The same process was applied to examine the interaction effect of national identity on European identity and helping behavior. Previous analysis displayed no variation in effects between the two helping scales, therefore, only the data measuring helping in general will be used to illustrate

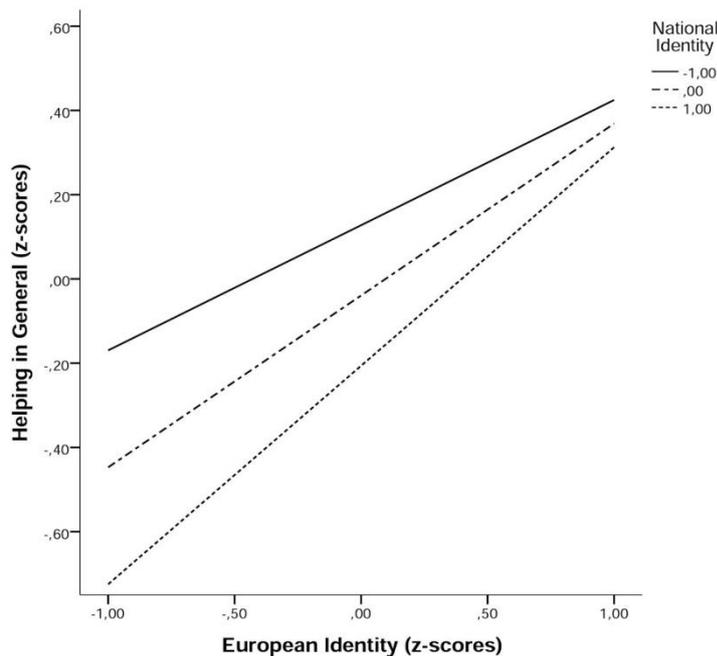


Figure 4. Interaction effect between national identity and European identity on helping behavior

the findings. Hierarchical regression analysis displayed a significant result for national and European identity as independent variables and helping in general as dependent variable ($R^2 = .15$, $F(2,207) = 18.11$, $p < .001$). Adding the interaction term to the analysis accounted for significantly more variance than the first model, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(3,206) = 4.30$, $p < .001$. Figure 4, created with the SPSS Chart Builder, displays the examination of the interaction plot. Positive effects of European identity on helping behavior were strongest when individuals reported a high level of national identity ($b = .52$, $t = 5.13$, $p < .001$), weaker when national identity was average ($b = .41$, $t = 5.50$, $p < .001$) and the weakest when national identity was low ($b = .30$, $t = 3.60$, $p < .001$).

The interaction effect on realistic and symbolic threat reported no significant results (see Table 2).

Exploratory analyses

Further noteworthy is that there was found a significant effect of the participant's gender and nationality on their level of identification. A one-way ANOVA determined that women scored significantly higher on the national identity scale ($M = 60.58$, $SD = 18.61$) than men ($M = 52.93$, $SD = 22.15$), $F(1, 210) = 6.70$, $p = .010$. The same effect was presented on the European identity scale as well, on which women scored $M = 56.61$ ($SD = 21.52$), which was significantly higher than the scores of men ($M = 42.26$, $SD = 20.69$), $F(1, 209) =$

20.10, $p < .001$. Moreover, identification with the nation was significantly lower in German ($M = 56.68$, $SD = 20.42$) than in Dutch respondents ($M = 63.85$, $SD = 17.58$), $F(1, 210) = 4.77$, $p = .030$. Scores on the European identity scale displayed the reverse effect, with German respondents scoring significantly higher ($M = 54.70$, $SD = 22.12$), than Dutch respondents ($M = 44.07$, $SD = 20.80$), $F(1, 209) = 8.65$, $p = .004$.

Discussion

This study supplements previous research by implementing reported effects from identity on political viewpoints in the context of the current refugee crisis. Taken together, the results reveal that the distinctness of people's national and European identity can predict their political attitudes as well as their perception of threat due to immigration. Furthermore, an interaction effect of the two forms of identity on political viewpoints has been found.

Identity and Political Sentiments

First of all, the results reveal that identity acts as a predictor for attitudes toward the policies concerning immigration. Experiencing a European identity seems to lead to higher support for regulations made by the EU, which aim at sharing the responsibility and redistributing the number of refugees over the member states. A strong national identity lead people to favor national immigration policies and independent control of the situation. These findings can be supported by previous studies examining similar topics (Risse, 2005; Hooghe & Marks, 2004; Carey, 2002; Christin & Trechsel, 2002; McLaren, 2002).

Secondly, the findings indicate a relation between identity and helping behavior in the refugee crisis. Identification with Europe was positively correlated with the wish to support refugees, whereas national identity lead to a smaller desire to help. It was hypothesized that national identity would not be related to refusing help to refugees in general, but only when helping refugees included using national resources. However, it was shown that national identity lead to rejection of offering help in both situations.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that during the factor analysis a distinction between the two helping scales was not supported, since all items loaded on the same factor. Based on this finding, an inaccuracy in the questionnaire that made the difference between the two scales not clear enough cannot be ruled out. Alternatively, it can be argued that the question if and in what form support for refugees should be provided is an often discussed topic in EU politics. Therefore, most citizens perceive the concept of offering help as a project linked to the European Union (European Commission, 2015). This might simply lead people to reduce the two concepts of helping behavior to one aspect and would explain why they did not react differently to the two scales. Future research that is conducted on this topic has to take this under consideration.

Thirdly, identity was also found to be a predictor for the perception of threat. It was shown that individuals with a salient national identity were more likely to perceive the immigration of refugees as threatening, than people with a distinct European identity. Threat was perceived concerning economic aspects, as well as cultural changes, which is supported by previous research (Velasco Gonzales et al., 2008; Sides & Critrin, 2007).

The Relationship between National and European Identity

Furthermore, the study provides understanding of the relation between national and European identity. In the beginning, the framing territorial identity model by Marks (1999) was used to illustrate the different forms of group attachments, called *exclusive identity*, *multiple identity* and *unattachment*. It was hypothesized that the influence from European identity would be strongest when national identity was low, thus, when individuals had an exclusive European identity. But the current findings strongly refute this presumption. A high level of national identity did not prevent individuals to be influenced by their European identity. Quite the contrary, the stronger both identities were perceived, the stronger was the effect of the European attachment on political viewpoints. Therefore, people with a dual

identity turned out to be more prone to the influence of their European sentiment.

The findings are of great importance, because they reflect a tendency in people's minds that has been desired since the founding of the EU. Marks (1999) describes how the European Union was established after the horrors of World War II, with the goal to create a supranational identity that would prevent destructive outlet of nationalism. It was never expected that any attachment to Europe would substitute the national identity of citizens, but people hoped that both could develop complementary (Marks, 1999).

This vision seemed to be unrealistic, since there were only reported weak relations between national and European identity in the years after the EU was founded until the 1990 (Duchesne & Frogner, 1995). In some cases, the development of the two identities even seemed to be antagonist (Duchesne & Frogner, 1995). However, it is claimed that European identity has increased during the last two decades (Bruter, 2008). The current findings show that the two identities can develop alongside each other, which indicates that the purpose to which the EU was founded is eventually attainable. Earlier research has already reported similar results (Duchesne & Frogner, 2008; Lutz, Kritzinger & Skirbekk, 2006; Licata, 2000).

What is new about the current findings is that they do not only examine the relationship between the two identities, but they also reveal how the relationship has an impact on political sentiments. That the endorsement of a dual identity in EU citizens could lead to a more European friendly society is a finding that future research can expand on, because it could be an important step in decreasing potential for conflicts in political issues.

Exploratory analyses

Finally, the study identified two factors that can influence the level of national and European identity. Firstly, women displayed a higher level of identification than men. This finding can be substantiated by the fact that women are generally thought to be more

emotionally involved in social contexts than men and men are less likely than women to express emotions in social bonding situations (Luedtke, 2005; Davis, Shaver & Vernon, 2003; Schmitt, 2003).

Furthermore, differences were found between the two nationalities. It was shown that German participants identified less with their nation, but more with the EU than their Dutch counterparts. According to Medrano (2003), aspects to explain these findings can be found in the country's history. Medrano argues that Germany's low identification with the own nation is caused by World-War II guilt and its high level of support for European membership would be based on the fact that the European Union gave a replacement for a conventional identity after the defeat (Medrano, 2003). This implication does not only stress the complexity of the European identity, but it also forms an important limitation to this study.

Limitations to the study

The results of the study at hand cannot be freely applied to citizens in other European member states. Each country of the EU has its own cultural history, which influences the course of political events and the perception of political decisions (Medrano, 2003). Moreover, it is shown that the size of the country and the economic consequences of the EU membership have an influence on the perception of current events as well (Licata, 2000). Therefore, this study offers insights into political sentiments of Dutch and German citizens, but before generalizing the results to other countries, the mentioned aspects have to be taken under consideration.

Furthermore, it has to be considered that the survey sample consisted of students of the University of Twente only. The student respondents are not representative of the Dutch or German population, which can impair the found results in two ways. Firstly, it was shown that being a student is related to a higher level of EU support (Luedtke, 2005). Secondly, young individuals tend to show more identification with the EU and perceive less threat due

to immigration than the older part of the population (De Vreese & Boomgarden, 2005). As a result, the findings might display a higher level of EU support than it is the case in the actual population.

Recommendations for Future Research

These impairments can act as orientation for future research. Investigating the effects, that were described above, in the different political and national contexts of other European member states, could provide more insights into the working mechanism of the European identity. Further opportunities lie in focusing on different generations and educational groups, which would expand knowledge about the personal issues affecting an individual's sentiment toward the EU. Research has particularly strong potential in further investigating the dual relationship between national and European identity, since empirical data on the political implications of this connection remain limited.

Eventually, it might be possible to apply these findings for political and societal purposes. Endorsing a European sentiment in order to create strong dual identities for EU citizens could crucially influence the course of political decision making processes concerning the EU.

Conclusion

The study at hand investigated the influence of national and European identity on attitudes concerning the current refugee crisis. Findings showed that the higher the national identity was, the more likely people were to oppose European immigration policies and projects to help refugees, while their perception of threat due to immigration was increased. Experiencing a European Identity compensated these effects and had the strongest influence on political sentiments when the perception of a national identity was high. In conclusion, individuals with a dual identity, meaning they were attached to Europe as well as to their nation, were influenced the strongest by their European identity. Further research could focus

on this relationship between national and European identity, which provides the opportunity to achieve a better understanding of political opinions in the context of the refugee crisis and immigration in Europe.

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