

DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

IZA DP No. 12630

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Anxious? Appreciating Concerns of Host  
Country Population Improves Attitudes  
Towards Immigrants**

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## ABSTRACT

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# Conflicting Identities: Cosmopolitan or Anxious? Appreciating Concerns of Host Country Population Improves Attitudes Towards Immigrants

This paper connects insights from the literature on cosmopolitan values in political science, anxiety in social psychology, and identity economics in a vignette-style experiment. We asked German respondents about their attitudes towards a Syrian refugee, randomizing components of his description (N=662). The main treatment describes the refugee as being aware of and empathetic towards potential Germans' worries about cultural change, costs and violence associated with refugee inflows. This increases reported levels of sympathy and trust substantially, especially for risk averse people. We argue that acknowledging concerns of the host population relieves the tension between an anxious and a cosmopolitan part of peoples' identities. When one aspect of identity is already acknowledged (expressing anxieties) it has less influence on actual behavior (expressing sympathy). In addition, we find that previous contact with foreigners and a higher willingness to take risks are important factors to determine an individual's willingness to interact with refugees.

**JEL Classification:** F22, Z10, Z12

**Keywords:** identity, integration, attitudes, immigration, refugees

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# 1 Introduction

The social and economic integration of the many recent refugees is one of the greatest challenges that EU countries currently face since most of these refugees are unlikely to be able to return to their origin countries shortly. Moreover, successful integration of immigrants not only decreases the fiscal costs associated with hosting them. It can increase cultural diversity, which has been found to be beneficial for long run economic development (cf. Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005). A lack of integration, by contrast, can breed discontent, segregation and potentially lead to violent extremism (Bisin et al., 2011). Thus, many across the political spectrum demand that refugees actively integrate or assimilate into host populations.

Successful integration, however, is not simply the choice of refugees. A lot depends on the willingness of the local host population to interact with and trust their new neighbors. Unfortunately, host populations often exhibit a tangible in-group bias (e.g. Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014) that makes them less willing to interact with foreigners. Also, native populations are often reluctant to let newcomers benefit from existing societal arrangements (e.g. Dahlberg et al., 2012; Alesina et al., 2018). Yet, simple negative utility from interacting (i.e. a preference-based explanation) and plain economic motives are insufficient in explaining observed patterns in society (for a detailed literature review, see Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014).

In this paper, we connect insights from three different disciplines - political science, social psychology, and economics - to further study the determinants of successful integration. Recently, more and more scholars in political science share the view that the emergence of anti-immigrant parties in parts of the EU is closely connected to a new cleavage in the political system that cuts across the left-right dimension. This is often labeled “cosmopolitan versus communitarian”, “open versus closed” or “green-alternative-libertarian versus traditional-authoritarian-nationalist” (GAL/TAN), see e.g. Zürn and de

Wilde (2016), Maxwell (2019). Many of the political parties on the “closed” part of the spectrum use topics such as the risk of crimes committed by irregular immigrants to make migration-related issues more salient, potentially build on existing inter-group anxiety and thus mobilize voters.

Social psychologists offer lots of insights on the drivers of inter-group anxiety, among them personal characteristics and attitudes, situational factors, and experiences (e.g. Stephan and Stephan, 1985; see Stephan, 2014, for a review). Contact with out-group members usually triggers some form of anxiety which in turn influences behavior and attitudes towards the out-group.<sup>1</sup>

Both the possibly existing new political cleavage and intergroup anxiety may, thus, be closely linked. To think more formally about this relationship, we rely on the way social identity is understood by Akerlof and Kranton (2000), who introduced the idea into economics. Individuals possess different layers of identity that can become relevant depending on the context or on queues provided by another person. Since identities overlap and several layers can be relevant in any given situation, they may come into conflict.<sup>2</sup> An extensive literature in clinical psychology argues that in order to alleviate the effects of anxiety, acceptance (instead of suppression) is an important step (e.g. Barlow et al., 2004; or Levitt et al., 2004).<sup>3</sup> Based on the literature, we suspected that this mechanism can be used even at the individual level and without involvement by public authorities to reduce intergroup anxiety to improve attitudes towards refugees. Thus, our hypothesis was that an empathetic statement acknowledging *less open* traits – related to intergroup-anxiety – in the host population would actually foster *more open* attitudes towards the refugee.

To explore this hypothesis, we conducted an experiment in which citizens were asked

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<sup>1</sup>Initial levels of course differ between individuals. In line with the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954) much of the host population’s anxiety may vanish if natives and immigrants actually meet. When the abstract phenomenon of migration is replaced by the presence of actual immigrants this may further decrease concerns (see e.g. Steinmayr, 2016).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Wichardt, 2009, for a discussion of effects of conflicting identities.

<sup>3</sup>In fact, there is a whole branch of behavioral therapy under the name of “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy” (e.g. Swain et al., 2013).

to rate a person described as a Syrian refugee with respect to their general liking, trust, empathy as well as their willingness to interact personally with this person. As main treatment in a between-subject design, we introduced a statement in which the refugee shows empathy regarding worries of the host population regarding “over-foreignization”, fiscal costs, and increasing violence. Furthermore, he mentions the need for mutual respect and good community spirit.<sup>4</sup> To better understand the mechanisms, we also randomized the religion of the refugee (Muslim/Christian) and had an additional treatment where the person was described as German citizen and not as a refugee.<sup>5</sup>

In line with our hypothesis, we find that when the refugee is described as being empathetic towards concerns in the German population reported levels of likability and trustworthiness increased substantially, in particular for more risk averse people, a character trait closely linked to lower openness towards other people or new experiences. In a follow-up experiment, we show that when a German expresses the aforementioned concerns other Germans perceive this person as less cosmopolitan and more prone to voting for the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany. This suggests that publicly acknowledging own intergroup anxiety may indeed be associated with costs for people who do not want to be associated openly with this part of the political spectrum.

Our empathetic treatment does not affect the stated willingness to actually interact personally (talk to, meet with a coffee, invite home), though. Instead, we find that having non-German friends or relatives, being more sociable, and low levels of risk aversion are relevant. For more intensive contact low risk aversion is more important than self-reporting as sociable.

Summing up, our experiments suggest that acknowledging existing concerns and creating an atmosphere of (mutual) understanding – including openness for the concerns of the

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<sup>4</sup>The German term “Überfremdung”, used in the questionnaire, is literally translated as over-foreignization here to ensure that its meaning is preserved. The word captures fears about cultural heterogeneity introduced by immigrants and has a negative connotation.

<sup>5</sup>Since the large majority of Syrian refugees at the time of the experiment were male and these were seen with much more skepticism in the German population, we do not evaluate attitudes to a female refugee.

host population – helps to provide a better starting point for later interactions and, hence, increase the chances of successful integration. The next two sections report the experimental design and the empirical results. In the last section, we discuss the results in a more formal theoretical framework and point out their relevance for policy makers and practitioners.

## 2 Design and Procedures

### Design

The study consists of two standard vignette questionnaires. Both are described below.

*Part 1 (primary study):* The first questionnaire shows a picture of a person who appears to be Arabic accompanied with six different sets of information which claim to refer to the person. In all cases, the person is described as being 34 years old, currently living in Hannover<sup>6</sup> (Germany), being married with two children, seeking a job and having worked as a taxi driver.<sup>7</sup> In addition, we randomly varied the religion and name between Muslim (Dawud) and Christian (Raphael) while always describing the person as religious.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, we varied whether the person has made a statement showing openness towards concerns in the German host population regarding “*over-foreignization*”<sup>4</sup>, increasing violence and arising costs. For comparative purposes, we also added a questionnaire describing the person as a devout German Muslim/Christian. A summary is provided in Figure 1. A translation can be found in Appendix A.

Following this information, the participants of our study were asked to answer the following questions on a 6-point Likert-scale:

1. How much do you like Dawud/Raphael?

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<sup>6</sup>The study was conducted in Kiel and Rostock and we wanted a neutral reference.

<sup>7</sup>The country of origin, gender and relatively young age were designed to reflect typical characteristics of refugees from the recent wave. The age was chosen to be somewhat higher than that of the modal migrant who arrived in Germany in 2015 to make the story credible.

<sup>8</sup>As previous research from France shows that a Muslim background is associated with lower integration (cf. Adida et al., 2010 and 2016), we also varied religion (and name) of the refugee between Muslim and Christian.

<i>Nationality</i>		<i>Syrian</i>		<i>German</i>
		<i>No detail</i>	<i>Is Open</i>	<i>No detail</i>
<i>Religion</i>	Muslim	x	x	x
	Christian	x	x	x

Note: Titles in italics indicate the three dimensions that have been varied.

**Figure 1: Overview of treatments.**

2. How well can you put yourself into Dawud/Raphael's shoes?
3. How fast is Dawud/Raphael going to integrate into the German society? (Only for Dawud/Raphael described as Syrian.)
4. Generally, would you trust Dawud/Raphael?
5. Can you imagine talking to a person like Dawud/Raphael about his experiences?<sup>9</sup>
6. Can you imagine meeting a person like Dawud/Raphael for coffee or tea?<sup>9</sup>
7. Can you imagine inviting a person like Dawud/Raphael home?<sup>9</sup>

The questionnaire concludes with some general questions about the subject's age, gender, nationality, close non-German friends or relatives, income, and self-perception as sociable (6-points) and willingness to take risks (10 point scale following the GSOEP).<sup>10</sup>

*Part 2:* In the second experiment, we presented a male German citizen – Stefan K., aged 35 and living in Hamburg with his wife and two children. He was described as expressing opinions on three current political topics: equal opportunities for women in leading positions (positive), strong punishment of tax evasion (positive), the situation of refugees from Syria (empathetic).<sup>11</sup> The only experimental variation is whether or not he also expresses

<sup>9</sup>Note that we only asked about interacting with someone *similar* to the reference person in order to avoid triggering expectations to actually be presented to the person on the spot – a belief we would have been unable to control for.

<sup>10</sup>We controlled for risk aversion using a question from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) which has been found to be a rather stable measure of risk attitudes that correlates as predicted by Lauriola and Levine (2001) with Big Five Personality traits (cf. Lönnqvist et al., 2015).

<sup>11</sup>Three topics are chosen to split the focus.



concerns regarding “*over-foreignization*”, costs, and violence associated with the refugee inflow.

Following this information, subjects had to indicate how cosmopolitan and how EU friendly they would judge Stefan K. to be (6-point Likert scale) and which political party they would assume him to vote for based on the information provided. At the end, we also asked about the subject’s age, gender, nationality, close non-German friends, willingness to take risks (10 point scale following the GSOEP) and degree of worries in 7 different domains (including crime, immigration, and xenophobia).

## **Procedures**

*Part 1:* The data for our primary study were collected in December 2015 and early in January 2016 in Kiel and Rostock.<sup>12</sup> In both cities, we approached people in the streets asking whether they would be willing to support our research by answering a short questionnaire. In order to sample in comparable settings, we focused on similar locations (city centers where people were shopping for Christmas and a quieter location close to the sea); these data were gathered in December 2015. In addition, we invited students from different lectures at the University of Rostock to participate in the study; some of these data were gathered in early January 2016. In total, 662 people responded to our questionnaire.

Note that in all cases the questionnaire versions were distributed randomly. Thus, while the sample is certainly not representative for any part of Germany, randomization implies that we have no reason to expect any systematic underlying biases across treatments which might explain our results. Yet, the sample is, of course, affected by self-selection just as any laboratory experiment.<sup>13</sup> Our research design is aimed at the underlying mechanism, not a nationally representative point estimate of its impact.

*Part 2:* The data of the supplementary study were collected among students of the Univer-

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<sup>12</sup>Kiel and Rostock are old Hanse cities in the north of Germany located at the Baltic coast – Kiel being in West Germany and Rostock in East Germany.

<sup>13</sup>Participation rates were around 20% (city), between 30 and 60% (sea) and close to 100% (lecture).

sity of Rostock at the end of a lecture on April 27, 2016. Again, the two different versions of the questionnaire were distributed randomly. In total 118 people responded to this questionnaire.

### 3 Empirical Results

Below, we report the empirical results of our study. An interpretation and a model that can generate the most important stylized facts are provided in Section 4.

#### Part 1

##### Summary Statistics

Summary statistics for Part 1 of our study are provided in Table 1. About half the sample (48%) was collected on the streets in Rostock / Kiel and the other half (52%) in lectures at the University of Rostock. All in all, the person in the vignette who makes the empathetic statement (i.e. appearing as "open") was in 34% of cases. He was described as Christian for 53% of the sample and as German for 31% of the sample. Covariates are balanced across treatments (see Table A1 in Appendix B).

**Table 1: Summary statistics Part 1.**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
<i>Outcome variables</i>					
Liking	4.25	0.99	1	6	654
Empathy	3.85	1.45	1	6	661
Would trust	3.99	1.12	1	6	657
Would talk to	5.12	1.17	1	6	661
Would meet for coffee/tea	4.47	1.44	1	6	661
Would invite home	3.77	1.59	1	6	620
Expect fast integration	3.65	1.16	1	6	447
<i>Individual characteristics of respondents</i>					
Female	0.5	0.5	0	1	642
Age	32.62	17.56	10	87	639
Close relationship to foreigner	0.6	0.49	0	1	642
Sociable	4.57	1.06	1	7	640
Willingness to take risks/General risk attitude	5.79	1.98	1	10	640

*Notes:* Summary statistics reported in this table refer to all observations. All scales are 6-point except the risk scale which is 10-point. The question about fast integration was not included for in the "is German" treatment. Unequal sample size due to answers such as "Don't know" or failure to answer

## General Treatment Differences

For our main analysis, we use an ordered logit model for estimation.<sup>14</sup> The baseline for all estimations is a Syrian who is a religious Muslim and gives no further indication of openness to concerns of the host population.

A first analysis without controlling for personal characteristics shows that the “openness” treatment, i.e. describing the refugee as being aware of and open to the anxieties of the host population, makes him significantly more likable (Table 2). Furthermore, participants in the “openness” treatment show significantly higher levels of reported ability to put themselves into the reference person’s position and also expect the refugee to integrate significantly faster. However, there is no effect on trust or the reported willingness to interact with the refugee through talking, meeting or inviting him due to his signaling “openness.” Thus, while making the reference person more likable and subjectively easier to empathize with, the openness treatment does not affect the reported willingness to interact.

Moreover, random assignment of the religion has no statistically significant effect on most outcome variables. Only being Christian affects the reported trust in a statistically significant way. This increases the log odds of reporting a higher value on the trust item by 0.25. This seems plausible given the importance of a shared frame of reference for mutual understanding and the fact that the number of Muslims in both Kiel and Rostock is comparably small.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, describing the reference person as German Muslim or German Christian has no statistically significant effect on attitude scores. Yet, reported willingness to talk to or meet with him is lower. This may, for example, be due to a generally higher interest in the refugees and more openness towards recent arrivals than towards a German person with

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<sup>14</sup>All model specifications are tested for the proportional odds assumption (sometimes also called the test of parallel lines). None of these tests reject the assumption.

<sup>15</sup>Due to Germany’s past persecution of citizens based on their faith, official data do not include religion of citizens. Official estimates based on the 2011 census state that Kiel had a share of foreign population of 7.8 percent, Rostock of 3.7 percent (destatis, 2014). Further tests show that the effect of religion is strongest among university students in Rostock, the group with the lowest likelihood of personal experience; this is compatible with the idea that experience is relevant for intergroup anxiety (cf. Stephan, 2014).

**Table 2: Treatment effects for Syrian refugee including the “German” treatment.**

	(1) likable	(2) empathy	(3) would trust	(4) would talk to	(5) would meet for coffee	(6) would in- vite home	(7) expect fast integra- tion
<i>Treatments</i>							
Is Open	0.363** (0.172)	0.355** (0.169)	-0.017 (0.173)	0.011 (0.181)	0.025 (0.173)	-0.205 (0.176)	0.326* (0.172)
Is Christian	0.082 (0.144)	0.019 (0.138)	0.254* (0.141)	0.019 (0.148)	-0.174 (0.141)	-0.008 (0.142)	0.216 (0.171)
Is German	0.148 (0.177)	0.004 (0.172)	-0.248 (0.174)	-0.358** (0.177)	-0.355** (0.167)	-0.202 (0.177)	
Observations	654	661	657	661	661	620	447

*Notes:* Estimates from an ordered logit model with the reported regressors. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . The baseline vignette is a Muslim refugee from Syria who does not provide the statement about openness to German concerns. The question about fast integration was not included for in the “is German” treatment. The sample size in column 6 is smaller due to a printing issue on the first day of field work. This is not driving any results. Differences in observations result from some subjects not answering all questions.

migrant background.

### **Influence of Respondent’s Characteristics**

Once we have accounted for individual characteristics, context dummies, and have added an interaction term between openness and risk aversion, we are able to say more about treatment effect heterogeneity, see Table 3.<sup>16</sup> Regression results without the interaction term are reported in Appendix B.

Most importantly, we find that the positive effect of describing the reference person as open towards the concerns of the changes in the German population remains highly significant. Yet, it strongly interacts with individual risk aversion. In particular, the reported liking, as well as the stated willingness to trust, are strongly positively correlated with describing the reference person as open to concerns in the host population. As can be seen from the interaction term between risk and openness, the effect is particularly strong for risk averse individuals (recall that risk aversion is measured on a 1 to 10 scale with high numbers indicating a high willingness to take risks).<sup>17</sup> Also, higher levels of risk tolerance

<sup>16</sup>Adding an interaction term of sociable and open does not have any effect, which is why we do not report these results separately.

<sup>17</sup>Tests for non-linear interaction terms in ordered outcome models indicate robustness of our interaction

**Table 3: Treatment effects for Syrian refugee including the “German” treatment as well as an interaction of risk attitude and openness of the refugee.**

	(1) likable	(2) empathy	(3) would trust	(4) would talk to	(5) would meet for coffee	(6) would in- vite home	(7) expect fast integra- tion
<i>Treatments</i>							
Is Open	1.748*** (0.585)	0.776 (0.614)	1.377** (0.541)	-0.141 (0.548)	0.384 (0.523)	0.294 (0.520)	0.340 (0.568)
Is Open × risk	-0.249*** (0.096)	-0.074 (0.096)	-0.239*** (0.086)	0.018 (0.089)	-0.063 (0.086)	-0.091 (0.083)	-0.004 (0.097)
Is Christian	0.088 (0.148)	0.046 (0.142)	0.263* (0.147)	0.097 (0.157)	-0.146 (0.146)	-0.038 (0.153)	0.198 (0.177)
Is German	0.196 (0.182)	0.036 (0.177)	-0.154 (0.183)	-0.359* (0.188)	-0.253 (0.174)	-0.112 (0.183)	
<i>Individual Char.</i>							
Female	0.010 (0.156)	0.297** (0.146)	-0.335** (0.151)	-0.054 (0.160)	-0.265* (0.153)	-0.340** (0.151)	-0.215 (0.184)
Age	-0.043 (0.031)	0.048* (0.027)	-0.013 (0.030)	0.057** (0.027)	0.116*** (0.029)	0.090*** (0.031)	0.031 (0.037)
Age squared	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Close to foreigner	0.254 (0.156)	0.147 (0.148)	0.289* (0.154)	0.519*** (0.163)	0.425*** (0.153)	0.552*** (0.158)	-0.000 (0.182)
Sociable	0.197** (0.078)	0.255*** (0.082)	0.101 (0.083)	0.398*** (0.087)	0.222*** (0.080)	0.097 (0.076)	0.145 (0.092)
Risk attitude	0.186*** (0.052)	0.110** (0.055)	0.223*** (0.050)	0.056 (0.048)	0.126*** (0.045)	0.178*** (0.050)	0.038 (0.061)
<i>Context</i>							
Data from Kiel	0.163 (0.243)	-0.192 (0.218)	0.717*** (0.223)	0.290 (0.229)	0.207 (0.217)	0.362 (0.253)	0.309 (0.262)
Data from Uni (Rostock)	-0.542** (0.256)	-0.308 (0.237)	-0.136 (0.260)	0.007 (0.266)	-0.048 (0.241)	-0.134 (0.257)	-0.105 (0.319)
Observations	628	633	630	633	633	593	429

*Notes:* Estimates from an ordered logit model with the reported regressors. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. Please note that the question about fast integration was not included for in the "is German" treatment. The base outcome for context is data gathered on the street in Rostock. Differences in observations result from some subjects not answering all questions.

have a highly significant positive effect on all attitude variables in their own right.

More generally, having a self-perception as being sociable is strongly positively associated with likability and empathy in columns 1 and 2, women are more empathetic but less trusting, and pre-existing close relations to a foreigner have a (weakly significant) positive effect on trust. Note that the latter observation is consistent with our interpretation of the positive effect of the Christian-Treatment on trust, as it again indicates the positive impact of a shared frame of reference on trust. Moreover, older people report higher levels of empathy. Location also seems to play a role, as respondents in Kiel reported to be more trusting than those in Rostock - both on the streets and in a university setting. This is in line with the many studies finding persistent differences between West and East Germany, for example summarized in Brosig-Koch et al. (2011).

Regarding the different variables measuring a willingness to interact, self-reporting as more sociable is strongly positively correlated with willingness to interact with the reference person. However, the effect is far smaller when it comes to the question of inviting him home. By contrast, the respective coefficients for respondent's risk attitude – columns 4 to 6 – increase towards the right of the table and reach higher levels of statistical significance the closer the contact referred to in the question becomes. Thus, the data suggest that more sociable people are more willing to have some contact with a person such as a refugee. However, if a sociable person is also risk averse, they would not be more likely to invite the person to meet-up. The reported willingness to establish such close contact is systematically more strongly linked to risk aversion than to sociability.

Moreover, respondents who have close relationships with foreigners through friends or family are far more willing to get into contact with someone similar to the reference person. In fact, the respective outcome variables, which seek to measure the willingness to actively integrate, have particularly large point estimates.

A further point that deserves a brief mention is that none of the variables shows a sta-

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effects.

tistically significant correlation with the expected speed of integration. The reason for this might simply be a lack of experience on the side of the respondents.

Finally, despite reporting higher empathy, women are significantly less willing to meet or invite the reference person over. The documented pattern of women being just as likely to meet, while reporting a markedly lower willingness to invite them home, is in line with perceived barriers to get into close contact with the opposite gender as well as with avoiding the higher risks faced in such a one-to-one situation with a stranger. Furthermore, while reported empathy increases with age<sup>18</sup>, our evidence suggests that the willingness to be closely involved with the refugee has an inverse u-shape in age.

## **Part 2: Summary Statistics and Treatment Differences**

For the second questionnaire, we obtained 118 responses (45.8% women; mean age 21.26 years); see Table A4 in Appendix B for detailed summary statistics.

Most importantly for the present discussion, describing Stefan K. as expressing the same concerns as the refugee decreases participants' assessment of him being cosmopolitan from 4.64 to 4.23 on a 6-point scale ( $p \leq .01$ ; Wilcoxon rank sum test). Moreover, regarding the expected vote of Stefan K at the next election, expressing concerns significantly increases the perception of him being a supporter of the AfD, Germany's new anti-immigrant right-wing party that managed to finish third in the 2017 federal election (see Tables 4 and 5).

## **4 Discussion and Conclusion**

The results from the previous section seem to show an inconsistency: When a German is described as expressing concerns regarding immigrants he appears more right-wing and less cosmopolitan (both arguably rather undesirable attributes for most of the population given their party preferences). However, when these same concerns are ascribed to the German population by an assumed Syrian refugee he is perceived as more likeable and

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<sup>18</sup>As 30 and 40% of Schleswig-Holstein - the province of which Kiel is the capital - were themselves refugees in 1949, many elderly respondents supposedly have personal experience of becoming displaced.

**Table 4: Party association. Absolute numbers by treatment.**

	Treatment	
	T(no concerns)	T(concerns)
Center left (SPD)	21 (34.4)	16 (28.1)
Center right (CDU)	15 (24.6)	15 (26.3)
Left wing (Linke)	14 (23.0)	4 (7.0)
Right wing (AfD)	2 (3.3)	14 (24.6)
Greens (Grüne)	5 (8.2)	4 (7.0)
Liberals (FDP)	1 (1.6)	2 (3.5)
Others	0 (0.0)	2 (3.5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>57</b>

*Notes: Assesses association with political parties; absolute numbers (percentages in parentheses).*

**Table 5: Change in assessed party association through treatment.**

Outcome	CDU	Linke	AfD	Grüne	FDP
Treatment (concerns)	0.272 (0.493)	-1.175* (0.647)	2.219*** (0.826)	0.049 (0.748)	0.965 (1.279)

*Notes: Estimates from multinomial logit with different outcomes reported vertically in the order of frequency. Base outcome of the dependent variable SPD (most common option). No mentioning of other parties. The base outcome of the independent variable is the treatment in which no concerns are uttered.*

trustworthy by respondents. Why is it that attributing rather undesirable characteristics to the respondent increases stated levels of sympathy?

Assume a very simple model of identity<sup>19</sup> where only two layers of identity matter: an open or cosmopolitan identity and a separate one related to intergroup anxiety. Furthermore, assume that the cosmopolitan identity goes with generally positive attitudes towards any unknown person, including foreigners. Acting in accordance with one's own identity creates positive utility for the individual. If two aspects of identity matter, the optimal behavior is expressing attitudes that balance both aspects. More formally, let  $s \in [0, 1]$  denote the degree of sympathy expressed by a certain response and let  $u(I_c)(s)$ ,  $u(I_a)(s)$  and  $u(I_c, I_a)(s)$  denote the agent's utility expressing a degree of sympathy  $s$  with respect to

<sup>19</sup>See Akerlof and Kranton (2000, 2005) for ways in which identity can be modelled quantitatively to create links to formal economic models.



his cosmopolitan, anxious and overall identity, respectively.<sup>20</sup> Then, assuming diminishing marginal effects, we have

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial u(I_c)(s)}{\partial s} &> 0, & \frac{\partial^2 u(I_c)(s)}{\partial^2 s} &< 0 \\ \frac{\partial u(I_a)(s)}{\partial s} &< 0, & \frac{\partial^2 u(I_a)(s)}{\partial^2 s} &> 0 \end{aligned}$$

and the optimal response  $s^*$  would be characterized by

$$\frac{\partial u(I_c, I_a)(s^*)}{\partial s} = 0.$$

Expressed in this way, the average effect of the treatment describing the reference person as acknowledging anxieties in the host population can be stated as

$$s^* < s_t^*,$$

where  $s_t^*$  denotes the optimal response in case of the treatment.

In terms of our simple model, the reason for the observed treatment effect could be either that the treatment improves the positive effect of expressing sympathy for the cosmopolitan identity or that it dampens the (negative) effect of doing so for the anxious identity (or a combination of both).

In our view, the cosmopolitan part of identity is a rather unlikely source of the effect, though. “Cosmopolitan” or “open” usually refers to wider experience with different cultures, i.e. a weaker attachment to local ideas or prejudices. Thus, a cosmopolitan identity can generate identity-utility when expressing sympathy for someone who is different. The empathetic statement of the reference person, however, arguably reduces differences between the refugee and the German experimental participant. Hence, the statement should rather decrease the marginal benefits from expressing a certain degree of sympathy regard-

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<sup>20</sup>Restricting identity to two aspects of cause is done for expositional purposes only.

ing the cosmopolitan self.

Things change if we focus on the anxious part of identity, though. As the second experiment demonstrates, expressing concerns about immigration as German experimental participant conflicts with being perceived as cosmopolitan. This is highlighted by the German person's increased association with the new right-wing AfD party, which is anti-immigrant and repeatedly refers to the downside risks of hosting refugees. However, the empathetic treatment changes the context in a way that any related concerns a respondent may have already been acknowledged and do not need to be accounted for by a more cautious stance towards the presented refugee. Also, more generally, acknowledging anxieties relieves their influence (e.g. Barlow et al., 2004). Therefore, there is reason to believe that the marginal benefit from reducing the expressed degree of sympathy as derived from the anxious part of the identity is smaller in the treatment. Simply arguing that expressing empathy is likable by itself would, by contrast, not offer an alternative mechanism.

From a policy perspective, our analysis suggests that if we want to improve general attitudes towards incoming refugees and other immigrants in order to facilitate their successful integration, it is important to take seriously the concerns of the host population. Expressed in terms of the above argument: the more anxious traits in the population related to the current inflow of refugees are acknowledged in the general discussion, the more room exists for cosmopolitan traits to prevail in individual behavior. This does not imply in that one has to *give in* to the concerns being expressed if they are not in line with the facts, though. What is important, according to our study, is creating a climate where concerns can be expressed and can be met with a general willingness to listen.

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## Appendix A

### Part 1: Description of Refugee (Translation): Muslim, open, Syrian

The photo shows Dawud M. (34, native Syrian). Until recently he lived with his wife and his two children in Syria and worked as a taxi driver. Because Dawud M. repeatedly criticized the current regime in Syria he had to flee despite his strong bond to his homeland (*literally: "Heimat"*).

Dawud M. describes himself as a devout Muslim, for whom family is very important. Currently, Dawud M. and his family are housed in Hannover, where he hopes to find work again soon.

Regarding the situation in Germany, Dawud remarked understanding for anxiety on the German side, for example with respects to “over-foreignization”, arising costs or increasing violence. Acknowledging these (*i.e. the anxiety/concerns*) was (*indirect speech*) important for mutual respect and a good community spirit (*literally: "Miteinander"*).

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*Notes: The translation is literal to ensure that as much of subtle connotations as possible are preserved.*

### Part 2: Description of German (Translation): Mentioning worries

Stefan K. (35) is married and lives with his wife and two children in Hamburg. He works as a bank clerk at the savings bank. In his free-time he spends a lot of time with his family and likes to travel to foreign countries.

When asked about several current political debates, Michael K. underscored the importance of equal opportunities for women in leadership positions. Furthermore, he supports tough punishment for tax evasion and containment policy against tax havens. Regarding the inflow of refugees, he reported his worries about the situation of people in Syria. However, he also mentioned substantial worries of “over-foreignization” due to the large immigration of refugees (*literally "Zuwanderung von Flüchtlingen"*) to Germany, the associated cost and increasing crime.

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*Notes: This vignette did not feature a photo.*

## Appendix B: Further Statistical Analyses

**Table A1: Balance of covariates across treatments (p-values).**

	Treatment		
	T(is Christian)	T(is open)	T(is German)
<i>Covariate</i>			
Female	0.47	0.22	0.69
Age	0.49	0.88	0.51
Close relationship to foreigner	0.60	0.98	0.82
Sociable	0.73	0.45	0.75
General risk attitude	0.26	0.86	0.31

*Notes:* Sample comparisons are conducted using a two-sided t-test with H0 of no difference in means. The reported numbers are p-values. There are thus no statistically significant differences in covariates across treatments.

**Table A2: Treatment effects for Syrian refugee excluding the “German” treatment.**

	(1) likable	(2) empathy	(3) would trust	(4) would talk to	(5) would meet for coffee	(6) would invite home	(7) expect fast integration
Treatment(is open)	0.365** (0.173)	0.351** (0.167)	-0.017 (0.169)	0.012 (0.178)	0.022 (0.168)	-0.202 (0.174)	0.326* (0.172)
Treatment(is Christian)	0.182 (0.173)	0.010 (0.166)	0.263 (0.170)	0.113 (0.179)	-0.089 (0.168)	0.073 (0.173)	0.216 (0.171)
Observations	450	456	454	457	456	417	447

*Notes:* Estimates from an ordered logit model with the reported regressors. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. Please note that the question about fast integration was not included for in the "is German" treatment.

**Table A3: Treatment effects for Syrian refugee including the “German” treatment with covariates.**

	(1) likable	(2) empathy	(3) would trust	(4) would talk to	(5) would meet for coffee	(6) would invite home	(7) expect fast integration
<i>Treatments</i>							
Is Open	0.302* (0.175)	0.339* (0.173)	-0.019 (0.180)	-0.040 (0.191)	0.022 (0.181)	-0.236 (0.183)	0.314* (0.178)
Is Christian	0.084 (0.147)	0.045 (0.142)	0.260* (0.147)	0.097 (0.157)	-0.145 (0.147)	-0.046 (0.152)	0.198 (0.177)
Is German	0.173 (0.182)	0.027 (0.176)	-0.174 (0.182)	-0.357* (0.189)	-0.257 (0.174)	-0.121 (0.183)	
<i>Individual Char.</i>							
Risk Attitude	0.101** (0.044)	0.085* (0.047)	0.140*** (0.042)	0.062 (0.041)	0.105*** (0.039)	0.146*** (0.041)	0.036 (0.048)
Sociable	0.219*** (0.077)	0.261*** (0.081)	0.124 (0.083)	0.396*** (0.086)	0.226*** (0.080)	0.106 (0.076)	0.146 (0.091)
Close to foreigner	0.263* (0.156)	0.156 (0.148)	0.302* (0.155)	0.518*** (0.163)	0.430*** (0.154)	0.558*** (0.158)	0.145 (0.182)
Female	-0.020 (0.155)	0.292** (0.146)	-0.356** (0.153)	-0.051 (0.160)	-0.275* (0.153)	-0.356** (0.150)	-0.215 (0.184)
Age	-0.040 (0.031)	0.049* (0.027)	-0.012 (0.030)	0.057** (0.027)	0.116*** (0.029)	0.091*** (0.030)	0.031 (0.037)
Age squared	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
<i>Context</i>							
Data from Kiel	0.146 (0.242)	-0.207 (0.216)	0.684*** (0.223)	0.293 (0.228)	0.204 (0.217)	0.364 (0.254)	0.307 (0.260)
Data at Uni	-0.527** (0.254)	-0.310 (0.236)	-0.140 (0.260)	0.007 (0.266)	-0.048 (0.241)	-0.130 (0.257)	-0.106 (0.318)
Observations	628	633	630	633	633	593	429

Notes: Estimates from an ordered logit model with the reported regressors. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. Please note that the question about fast integration was not included for in the "is German" treatment. The base outcome for context is data gathered on the street in Rostock.

**Table A4: Summary statistics for Part 2.**

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Treatment	118	0.483	0.502	0	1
Openness	118	4.441	0.948	1	6
EU	118	3.085	0.902	2	5
Age	118	21.263	2.772	18	32
Female	118	0.458	0.500	0	1
German	118	0.983	0.130	0	1
Close foreigner	118	0.610	0.490	0	1
Risk attitude	117	6.000	1.805	2	9
Worries: econ	118	2.195	0.559	1	3
Worries: self	118	2.034	0.640	1	3
Worries: climate	118	1.720	0.738	1	3
Worries: crime	118	2.110	0.760	1	3
Worries: cohesion	118	1.805	0.731	1	3
Worries: immigration	118	2.110	0.701	1	3
Worries: xenophobia	118	1.466	0.595	1	3

## Appendix C: Summary of results

**Result 1 (General Treatment Effects)** *Results from an ordered logit model show that, without adding controls, treatments have the following average effects on reported answers relative to the reference person being described as faithful Syrian Muslim:*

- *The reference person being open to concerns has a significant positive effect on reported levels of liking, empathy (both  $p < .05$ ) and expectation of fast integration ( $p < .1$ ).*
- *The reference person being Christian has a significant positive effect on the reported level of trust ( $p < .1$ ).*
- *The reference person being German, has a significant negative effect on reported willingness to talk to or meet him (both  $p < .05$ ).*

**Result 2 (Effects on Attitudes)** *Regarding expressed attitudes, we find:*

- *The reference person being open has a robust positive effect on reported levels of liking ( $p < .01$ ) and willingness to trust ( $p < .05$ ). Both effects are stronger for more risk averse people, though ( $p < .01$ ).*
- *Women are more empathetic and less trusting (both  $p < .05$ ).*
- *Self-perception as sociable has a positive impact on reported levels of liking ( $p < .05$ ) and empathy ( $p < .01$ ).*
- *All attitudes show a positive correlation with stated willingness to take risks.*

**Result 3 (Determinants of Willingness to Interact)** *Regarding reported willingness to talk to, meet or invite someone similar to the reference person, we find:*

- *Having close relations to a foreigner has a strong positive impact on all three categories of interaction (all  $p < .01$ ).*
- *Being more sociable has a positive effect on willingness to talk to or meet ( $p < .01$ ). There is no effect for invite home, though.*
- *Being more willing to take risks has a positive effect on willingness to meet and invite home (both  $p < .01$ ).*

**Result 4 (Gender and Age Effects)** *Regarding personal characteristics, we find:*

- *Women are more empathetic ( $p < .05$ ), but less trusting ( $p < .05$ ), and less willing to meet ( $p < .1$ ) or extend an invitation to ( $p < .05$ ) someone similar to the reference person.*
- *Older people are more trusting ( $p < .1$ ) and more willing to interact with someone similar to the reference person ( $p < .01$  for meet and invite;  $p < .05$  for talk to).*

**Result 5 (Effect of Actually Expressing Concerns)** *In the second experiment, we find:*

- *Expressing concerns regarding immigrants decreases perceived levels of being cosmopolitan and increases associations with right-wing parties.*