NET OPPOSITION TO IMMIGRANTS OF DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES CORRELATES STRONGLY WITH THEIR ARREST RATES IN THE UK

by

Noah Carl[a],*

[a] Nuffield College, New Road, Oxford, OX11NF, United Kingdom.
* Correspondence should be sent to: Noah Carl, Nuffield College, New Road, Oxford, OX11NF, +447791259551, noah.carl@nuffield.ox.ac.uk.

Abstract

Public beliefs about immigrants and immigration are widely regarded as erroneous. For example, members of the public typically overestimate the immigrant fraction of the population by ~10–15 percentage points. On the other hand, consensual stereotypes about the respective characteristics of different groups (e.g., sexes, races, nationalities) are generally found to be quite accurate. The present study shows that, in the UK, net opposition to immigrants of different nationalities ($n = 23$) correlates strongly with the log of immigrant arrests rates ($r = .77$; $p = 0.00002$; 95% CI = [.52, .90]) and with the log of their arrest rates for violent crime ($r = .77$; $p = 0.00001$; 95% CI = [.52, .90]). This is particularly noteworthy given that Britons reportedly think that an immigrant's criminal history should be one of the most important characteristics when considering whether he or she should be allowed into the country. In bivariate models, the associations are not wholly accounted for by a general opposition to non-Whites, non-Westerners, foreigners who do not speak English, Muslims, or those from countries with low average IQ. While circumstantial in nature, the study's findings suggest that public beliefs about the relative positions of different immigrant groups may be reasonably accurate.

Key words

Immigrants; attitudes; stereotypes; arrest rates; crime

1. Introduction

Public beliefs about immigrants and immigration are widely regarded as erroneous (Caplan, 2007; Nardelli & Arnett, 2014; Sohoni & Sohoni, 2014). Members of the public typically overestimate the immigrant fraction of the population by ~10–15 percentage points (Ipsos MORI, 2013; Nardelli & Arnett, 2014; Sides & Citrin, 2007). In European countries, they consistently overestimate the Muslim share of the population (Nardelli & Arnett, 2014), and in the United States, they consistently overestimate the black and Hispanic shares of the population (Sides & Citrin, 2007). On the other hand, Sides and Citrin (2007) found that, although estimates of the foreign-born fraction of the population are consistently too high, there is a strong positive correlation between the actual and estimated values across countries ($r = .84$; see their Figure 1). Indeed, according to a large body of literature in social psychology, popular stereotypes about the respective characteristics of different groups (e.g., sexes, races, nationalities) are generally quite accurate (Jussim et al., 2015). Whereas only 5% of effect sizes in social psychology exceed $r = .50$, this threshold is exceeded by 43% of consensual-stereotype[1] accuracy correlations pertaining to nationalities, 94% of those pertaining to sexes, and 95% of those pertaining to races (Jussim et al., 2015).

The present study focuses on immigration to the UK, and—specifically—on how opposition to immigrants from different nationalities relates to their involvement in crime. Recent aggregate-level analyses of immigration and crime in the UK have produced mixed results. Bell et al. (2013) found that the late-1990s wave of immigration (comprising mainly asylum seekers) led to a moderate rise in property crime but no change in violent crime, and that the post-2004 wave of immigration (comprising mainly Eastern European labour migrants) led to a small reduction in property crime with no change in violent crime. Bell and Machin (2013) observed higher average crime rates in areas with larger immigrant populations, but found that immigrant enclaves (areas with >30% immigrants) actually had lower crime rates after controlling for characteristics such as population density and deprivation. Jaitman & Machin (2013) documented no evidence of a causal relationship between immigration and crime. A limitation of all of these studies is that they were unable to disaggregate immigrants into their different nationalities or countries of birth. Disaggregation is important because immigrants from different nationalities may have very different criminal propensities within their host countries. In Europe, immigrants from the West and East Asia tend to have lower crime rates, while those from the Middle East, Africa and South Asia tend to have higher crime rates (Kirkegaard, 2014; Kirkegaard, 2015). Note that this disparity is probably due to a combination of factors: relatively stable country-of-origin characteristics, the selectivity of immigrants with respect to their countries-of-origin, and differences in the treatment of immigrant groups upon arrival.

To the author's knowledge, the only previous study on Britons' attitudes to immigrants in which immigrants have been disaggregated into more than just two or three different groups is Ford (2011). He utilized a collection of items from the 1983-1996 waves of the British Social Attitudes survey that asked respondents to say whether immigration levels from each of seven different world regions were too high, about right, or too low. The seven regions, given in rank order of respondents' opposition to immigration, were: South Asia, West

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[1] Consensual stereotypes are those shared by members of a particular sample, and are usually calculated from sample means. They may be distinguished from personal stereotypes, which refer to the beliefs of particular individuals (Jussim et al., 2015).

Indies, Africa, Eastern Europe, Hong Kong, Western Europe, Australia. While Ford (2011) did speculate on possible reasons for this ranking (see pp. 1026-8), he did not attempt to relate respondents' opposition to any characteristics of the immigrant groups themselves.

2. Method and Results

A recent poll by the organisation YouGov asked a random sample of British adults (n = 1,668) a number of questions about immigrants and immigration (Smith, 2016). One question in the poll asked respondents to say how important each of 14 characteristics should be when considering whether or not an economic migrant should be allowed into the UK. The 14 characteristics, given in rank order of the percentage saying "very important" were: criminal record (major/violent); criminal record (minor/non-violent); skills in short supply (blue collar); English proficiency; skills in short supply (white collar); whether they want to bring family; their education level; whether they already have a job; skills not in short supply (blue collar); skills not in short supply (white collar); their existing wealth; their age; their IQ; their religion. Although there may well have been some social desirability bias in the responses, it is noteworthy that the two characteristics pertaining to an immigrant's criminal history came in first and second place, with 83% and 62% of respondents, respectively, saying "very important".

Critically, the poll also asked respondents to say to what extent people from each of 23 different nationalities should be allowed to come and live in the UK (see Smith, 2016). For each nationality, respondents were asked to say whether: more should be allowed, the same numbers should be allowed, less should be allowed, or none should be allowed. I define net opposition to immigrants from a particular nationality as the total percentage saying "less" or "none" minus the total percentage saying "more" or "the same". Net opposition is greatest to immigrants from Turkey, Romania and Nigeria, and is lowest to immigrants from Australia, Ireland and Canada (see the map in Smith, 2016). It should be noted be that, depending on the country, 23-29% of respondents answered "don't know". Nonetheless, the paper's main results are not sensitive to alternative specifications of the dependent variable (see discussion thread in the OpenPsych forum).

Immigrant arrest rates were calculated using data from two sources. First, numbers of arrests of foreign nationals were taken from a document published online, which constitutes a response to a Freedom Of Information request (Metropolitan Police, 2013). This document provides tallies of arrests for different categories of crime in each year from 2008 to 2012, broken down by nationality. (Note that these figures correspond to foreign nationals, rather than to individuals born in the corresponding countries-of-origin.) For each of the 23 nationalities referred to in the YouGov poll, I recorded the total number of arrests across all categories, as well as the total number of arrests in the category "All other offences". Since this category comprises all non-violent offences, subtracting it from the total number of arrests across all categories yields the total number of arrests for violent offences. Second, UK population sizes for each of the 23 nationalities in the year 2012 were taken from the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2012). I computed the arrest rate of immigrants from each nationality as the total number of arrests of immigrants from that nationality divided by the UK population size of that nationality. Arrest rates for violent crime were calculated in the same way. Both rates were log-transformed in order to reduce skewness.

The left-hand panel of Figure 1 displays a scatterplot of the relationship between net opposition and log of immigrant arrest rates. The Pearson correlation is strong and positive, namely $r = .77$ ($p = 0.00002$; 95% CI = [.52, .90]). Britons are more opposed to immigrants from nationalities with higher arrest rates in the UK. Note that the correlation when using non-logged arrest rates is $r = .63$ ($p = 0.001$; 95% CI = [.29, .83]). The right-hand panel of Figure 1 displays a scatterplot of the relationship between net opposition and log of immigrant arrest rates for violent crime. The Pearson correlation is strong and positive, namely $r = .77$ ($p = 0.00001$; 95% CI = [.52, .90]). Once again, Britons are more opposed to immigrants from nationalities with higher arrest rates for violent crime. The correlation when using non-logged arrest rates is $r = .69$ ($p = 0.0003$; 95% CI = [.39, .86]).

Figure 1. Scatterplots of the relationship of net opposition (YouGov, 2016) with log of immigrant arrest rates and log of immigrant arrest rates for violent crime (Metropolitan Police, 2013). In both cases, $r = .77$ ($p < 0.001$).
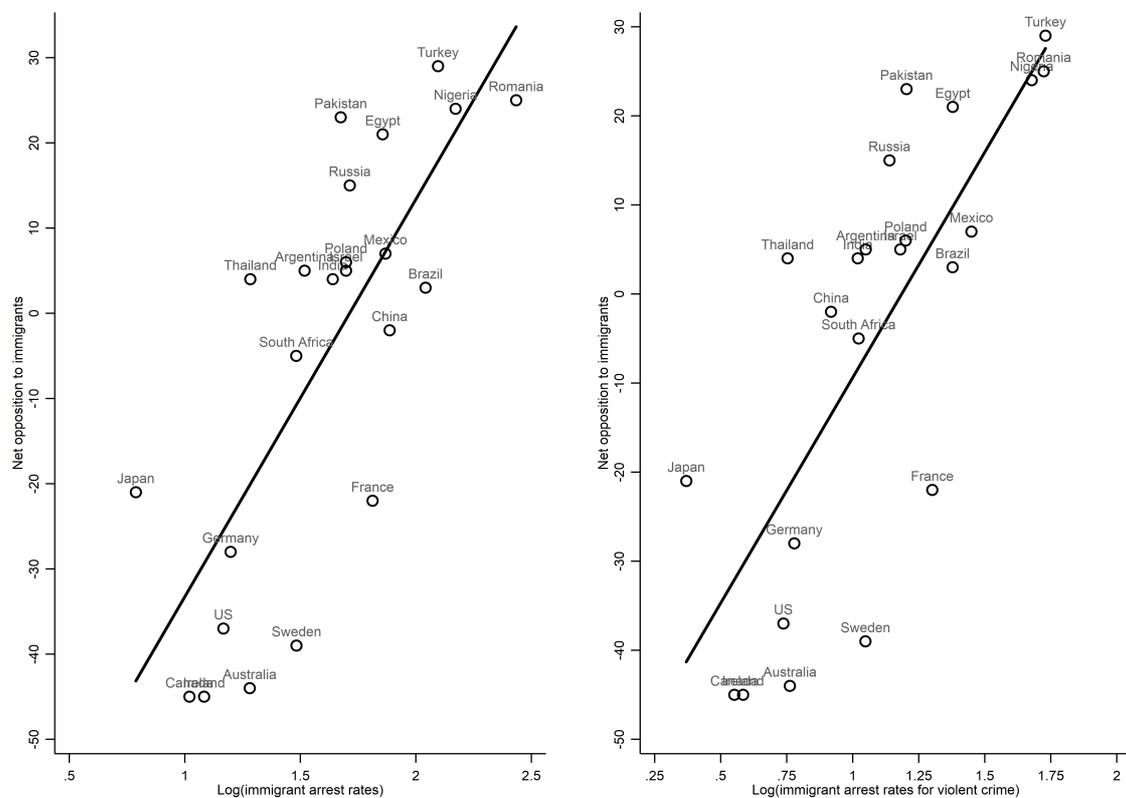
Table 1 and Table 2 displays estimates from linear regression models of net opposition in which five potential confounding factors are controlled for, respectively: the percentage of the country's population that is white (taken from Wikipedia and the CIA World Factbook); whether the country is located in the West (as defined by Huntingdon, 1996)[2]; the percentage of the country's population that speaks English (taken from Wikipedia), the percentage of the country's population that is Muslim (taken from Pew Research, 2011), and the country's average IQ (taken from Lynn & Vanhanen, 2012 and Malloy, 2016). Both log of immigrant arrest rates (Table 1) and log of immigrant arrest rates for violent crime (Table 2) remain strongly correlated with net

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[2] Western countries within the sample comprise: Canada, Ireland, Australia, Sweden, US, Germany, France, and Poland.

opposition when conditioning on these variables. The biggest drop in effect size occurs when conditioning on Western country (~28% of a standard deviation); the smallest occurs when conditioning on percentage white (7% of a standard deviation). A correlation matrix comprising all variables is given in Appendix A.

Table 1. Standardised effects of log of immigrant arrest rates on net opposition.

	Net opposition	Net opposition	Net opposition	Net opposition	Net opposition	Net opposition
Log(immigrant arrest rates)	0.70[***]	0.49[***]	0.59[***]	0.65[***]	0.65[***]	0.32[*]
Percentage white	−0.37[**]					0.20
Western country		−0.57[***]				−0.46[**]
Percentage English speakers			−0.40[**]			−0.24
Percentage Muslim				0.33[*]		0.32[**]
National IQ					−0.25	−0.09
n	23	23	23	23	23	23
R^2	0.72	0.83	0.72	0.68	0.64	0.90

Notes: Entries are standardised coefficients from OLS regression models. Significance levels: [*]5%, [**]1%, [***]0.1%. See text for data sources.

Table 2. Standardised effects of log of immigrant arrest rates for violent crime on net opposition.

	Net opposition	Net opposition	Net opposition	Net opposition	Net opposition	Net opposition
Log(immigrant arrest rates for violent crime)	0.70[***]	0.52[***]	0.61[***]	0.65[***]	0.67[***]	0.36[**]
Percentage white	−0.37[**]					0.15
Western country		−0.58[***]				−0.49[**]
Percentage English speakers			−0.45[**]			−0.23
Percentage Muslim				0.25		0.26[*]
National IQ					−0.18	−0.03
n	23	23	23	23	23	23
R^2	0.72	0.87	0.76	0.64	0.61	0.91

Notes: Entries are standardised coefficients from OLS regression models. Significance levels: [*]5%, [**]1%, [***]0.1%. See text for data sources.

3. Conclusion

Public beliefs about immigrants and immigration are widely regarded as erroneous. Yet consensual stereotypes about the respective characteristics of different groups are generally found to be quite accurate. The present study has shown that, in the UK, net opposition to immigrants of different nationalities correlates strongly with the log of immigrant arrests rates and the log of their arrest rates for violent crime. This is particularly noteworthy given that Britons reportedly think that an immigrant's criminal history should be one of

the most important characteristics when considering whether he or she should be allowed into the country. In bivariate models, the correlations are not wholly accounted for by a general opposition to non-Whites, non-Westerners, foreigners who do not speak English, Muslims, or those from countries with low average IQ. While circumstantial in nature, the study's findings suggest that public beliefs about the relative positions of different immigrants may be reasonably accurate. Indeed, they are consistent with a model of immigration preferences in which individuals' expressed support or opposition to immigrants from different nationalities is informed by rational beliefs about the respective characteristics of those immigrant groups. The main limitation of this study is the lack of data on other characteristics of immigrant groups living in the UK, such as education, income or welfare usage (see Kirkegaard, 2014; Kirkegaard, 2015).

Supporting Information

Review thread at OpenPsych forum: https://openpsych.net/forum/showthread.php?tid=292
Data, along with Stata code and R code for replication: https://osf.io/mpq5n/

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Appendix A

Table A.1. Correlation matrix for all variables used in the study.

	Net opposition	Log(immigrant arrest rates)	Log(immigrant arrest rates for violent crime)	Percentage white	Western country	Percentage English speakers	Percentage Muslim	National IQ
Net opposition	1							
Log(immigrant arrest rates)	.77	1						
Log(immigrant arrest rates for violent crime)	.77	.95	1					
Percentage white	−.49	−.18	−.17	1				
Western country	−.81	−.48	−.43	.68	1			
Percentage English speakers	−.66	−.44	−.36	.47	.72	1		
Percentage Muslim	.56	.36	.47	−.50	−.35	−.09	1	
National IQ	−.55	−.46	−.55	.47	.48	.19	−.43	1