



## RE M I N D E R

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS  
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

# D10.5: Perceptions of EU Immigrants' Welfare Impacts: The Role of Political Sophistication and Predispositions

WORKING PAPER

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REMINDER

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## **Deliverable 10.5: Perceptions of EU Immigrants' Welfare Impacts: The Role of Political Sophistication and Predispositions**

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## **Abstract**

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Existing evidence suggests that perceptions of immigrants' welfare impacts vary widely between Europeans in ways that do not reflect the realities of those impacts for their country. Are misperceptions more widespread among people with lower levels of knowledge of EU institutions and immigration-related facts, or do people knowingly express misperceptions to signal their ideological position on the issue of immigration? We draw on survey data across seven EU countries to explore to what extent political knowledge or ideological predispositions are more defining for people's evaluations of the welfare impacts of EU immigrants. We find that higher levels of political sophistication — when measured using a scale of correct answers to a set of knowledge questions — works differently for people across the left-right ideological spectrum. Rather than converging towards the most accurate or moderate opinions, those with higher levels of political sophistication exhibit more entrenched views that lean further towards the extreme sides of impact evaluation, especially among those identifying as ideologically far-left. Those who positioned themselves on the far-right side of the ideological scale exhibited no differences in preferences based on knowledge levels and remained the most likely to express the view that EU immigrants receive much more than natives in welfare and benefits.

## Introduction

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Consequences can be severe for the future of the European Union, when large portions of a member state's population perceive intra-EU mobility as harmful to the economy or welfare state. Work Package 10 offers an in-depth analysis of the various factors that determine these perceptions. In previous project deliverables, we showed that most people do not differentiate significantly between EU and non-EU or European and non-European inflows (Blinder and Markaki 2018; 2019) and their impacts (Markaki and Blinder 2019b). We also found evidence that citizens' evaluations of the welfare effects of immigration do not reflect the realities of these impacts on national welfare states as much as expected (Markaki and Blinder 2019a). Perceptions of immigrants as net burdens more closely reflect differences in the demographic size of welfare recipients who are foreign born, rather than differences in their actual welfare costs or contributions in taxes.

In this article we proceed to explore how perceptions and misperceptions of welfare impacts of EU immigrants vary between individuals with different levels of political knowledge, interest in politics, and ideological leanings. We rely on survey data collected in 2017-18 across seven EU member countries; Germany, Spain, Great Britain, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Sweden (Meltzer et al. 2019). The survey includes a set of tailored, specially-designed questions to capture political attitudes, evaluations of EU welfare impacts, and level of general knowledge of facts related to national politics, migration, and EU institutions.

## Literature Review

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When European publics are asked to evaluate facts about immigrants' receipt in social support and overall welfare impacts, perceptions vary widely from person to person in ways that poorly reflect the realities of those impacts. What is behind this variation and who is most likely to express misperceptions? Long-standing literature on the political psychology of opinion formation has elaborated on several hypotheses.

Early schools of thought argued that people process facts and attitudes via separate cognitive processes. According to this approach, people sample their memory for relevant information in order to retrieve the correct answer to a factual question, while they express specific preferences by reaching into already established and fairly stable sets of broader attitudes (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000; Allport 1954; Cacioppo and Petty 1984). Those who are most knowledgeable and informed would theoretically be more competent in their political participation and consistent in their opinions. Famous critics of this approach, however, demonstrated that people lack basic knowledge of actors and institutions, do not think very hard when making up their mind about politics, and express opinions that vary randomly over time and depending on question framing (Downs 1957; Campbell et al. 1960; Butler and Stokes 1971; Converse 1964; Converse and Pierce 1986).

In an effort to reconcile these findings, theorists argued that respondents may lack knowledge of specific facts or clearly defined preferences, but rely on cognitive shortcuts — or heuristics — that allow them to very quickly and efficiently construct the most suitable or likely relevant answer (Dalton 1996; Popkin 1994; Mondak 1993; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). A simple example is asking a respondent to identify a politician's position on a policy issue. The respondent may not possess this specific information but can draw on their knowledge of the politician's affiliation and the broader ideological leanings of their Party to infer their likely position. Another example is vote choice based on limited information. Citizens may not have the desire, expertise, or time to pay close attention to all and every policy matter, or candidates' performance and campaign messages (Downs 1957). But they can rely on broader knowledge of the Party, views expressed within their social networks, Party affiliation, and past messages to make the right choice.

What defines the right choice, however, is not necessarily accuracy. At best, heuristics can help citizens choose politicians and Parties that most closely reflect their own values and views. At worst, people may seek out information that confirms their preexisting ideological leanings and beliefs, and alter or adjust new information to suit those prejudices. Judd, Kenny, and Krosnick (1983) find that perceptions of candidates' positions were biased in the direction of the respondents' preferences; those who liked the candidate assumed they shared their position. Zaller's (1992) classic model identifies this as resistance to process a persuasive message that contradicts the respondents' predispositions.

Ideology and other forms of political predispositions have been shown to act as key heuristic devices, although which specific shortcut is mobilized at a given time differs depending on the person's political sophistication and cognitive framework (Glynn et al. 2004; Carpini and Williams 1994). Political sophistication and engagement are seen as key components in this process due to their role in facilitating the availability and competent retrieval of the necessary subset of information.

But growing evidence shows that higher levels of political knowledge do not necessarily make people more accurate or 'better' citizens. When studies attempt to match people's vote choice with perceptions of senators' policy positions, they find that the most attentive of respondents who vote against their senator are most likely to incorrectly identify senators' positions (Dancey and Sheagley 2013). Carpini and Keeter (1996) also show that the voting choices of knowledgeable respondents were powerfully predicted by their ideology and issue positions, whereas for the least knowledgeable respondents, issue positions had limited predictive power. This implies that the least informed rely less on ideology as a heuristic device to determine their positions.

Miller, Saunders, and Farhart (2016, p827) stress that *"knowledge is not the panacea that normative democratic theorists hold it up to be. Knowledge exacerbates all sorts of instantiations of motivated reasoning and heuristic processing more generally (Bartels 2008; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lodge and Taber 2013). For example, Taber and Lodge's (2006) experiment demonstrated that when given the same number of pro and con arguments*

*about an issue, non-sophisticates chose to look at a balanced number of pro and con arguments, whereas sophisticates chose to look at a higher proportion of attitude-consistent than attitude-inconsistent arguments. As a result of their biased exposure, political sophisticates' attitudes polarized in the direction of their predispositions."*

This motivated reasoning mechanism can refer to prejudices and predispositions, but also to feelings of anxiety. Experimental evidence suggests that anxiety about immigration is linked to citizens who are more likely to seek out information and especially of a threatening content (Gadarian and Albertson 2014). Subjects made anxious about the costs of immigration were also more likely to request immigration information from anti-immigration groups (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008). What is difficult to determine outside an experimental framework, however, is the substantive difference between being negatively predisposed towards (opposition) versus feeling anxious about (anxiety) immigration.

J. M. Miller, Saunders, and Farhart (2016) showed that moderators of belief in conspiracy theories are strikingly different for conservatives and liberals. Persons both highly knowledgeable about politics and lacking in trust were the most susceptible to ideologically motivated conspiracy endorsement. B. F. Schaffner and Luks (2018) also demonstrate that more politically-engaged partisans exhibited higher levels of expressive responding; the act of knowingly reporting misperceptions as a way to signal partisan support. The issue of welfare receipts among EU immigrants bares some similarity to the controversy about Trump's inauguration crowd size analysed in their study. In both cases respondents are asked to evaluate facts about the size of a specific population. In both cases there is popular disagreement over their acceptance as legitimate facts that polarizes the public along partisan/ideological lines. It is worth noting that some research counters these findings with evidence that expressive responding is very limited (Berinsky 2018).

The expressive responding explanatory framework would suggest that the most knowledgeable partisans will intentionally exaggerate the perceived number of EU welfare recipients to signal belonging to a respective side of the immigration debate. Heuristics, on the other hand, assumes respondents do not know the real welfare impacts of EU

immigrants but rely on general sophistication and exposure to various messages to infer the levels of welfare receipt among EU populations. Some respondents are just more resistant than others to messages that challenge their predispositions about the welfare receipt of EU immigrants, and therefore they will be more likely to express misperceptions. Notably, both explanations lead to the same predictions for our purposes.

We expect that higher levels of political interest in politics and political sophistication — here measured using a set of knowledge questions — will interact with broader ideological predispositions to exacerbate biases, rather than encourage moderate views or discourage misperceptions. We identify higher political sophistication as a person's capacity to successfully recall fairly stable facts about politics and prominent recent events related to immigration. For example, identifying the Party membership of the head of state, whether a country is part of Schengen, and whether Free Movement is a fundamental right in the EU. While a few of the knowledge items refer to national politics, most are about international affairs and EU institutions. If people are indeed more informed about local than national affairs (Shaker 2012), we might be underestimating sophistication levels as a result. However, immigration is an international issue and the EU determines many avenues for national policies on immigration. Therefore, considering the role of knowledge at international, and especially EU level, is on balance preferable and appropriate in our case. Moreover, Karp, Banducci, and Bowler (2003) show that those with higher levels of knowledge about the EU were more likely to have EU rather than national institutions in mind when evaluating democracy in the Union.

For countries included in our analysis, recent evidence suggests that EU immigrants receive either about the same or much less in welfare benefits compared to natives (Nyman and Ahlskog 2018; Markaki and Blinder 2019b). Thereby, we classify those who think that EU immigrants receive much more than natives as expressing a misperception. If higher political knowledge and interest in politics leads to more informed evaluations and better citizens, then those with a higher number of correct answers to knowledge questions and/or higher levels of political interest will be less likely to opt for this perceived welfare impact option. On the other hand, if people look for facts and form evaluations that justify their predispositions, knowledge of national and EU institutions would exacerbate bias and



polarization for those with a stronger ideological compass, rather than shield the public from misinformation. This is perhaps because ideological considerations are more accessible among those most attentive and engaged (Zaller 1996). Political knowledge acquired over time is likely to play a role in the very development of a person's belief system and predispositions. Since we cannot observe this process, our analysis effectively compares people who already exhibit combinations of these characteristics.

## Data

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To analyse these relationships, we use individual-level data from a survey fielded online between 2017 and 2019 to adult residents (18+) in seven EU countries, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Sweden. The sampling frame included quotas for gender, age, and region to ensure responses are representative of national populations. While the survey is designed as a panel and involves three consecutive waves almost a year apart, the questions we take into account were asked only once. Therefore, our comparisons do not focus on longitudinal or dynamic effects. The sample is limited to respondents with valid responses in both waves 1 and 2, and who are citizens of the residence country. Table 1 shows the breakdown of observations in the final estimation sample by country (10,554 respondents in total).

Table 1 Number of respondents by country sample

Country	Observations in estimation sample	Percentage of total estimation sample
Germany	1,756	16.64
Spain	1,665	15.78
Sweden	1,455	13.79
UK	1,569	14.87
Hungary	1,350	12.79
Poland	1,497	14.18
Romania	1,262	11.96
Total	10,554	100

Notes: breakdown of unweighted estimation sample (model 1&2)

### ***Measuring perceived EU welfare impacts (dependent variable)***

We measure perceived EU welfare impacts with a survey question asking “On average, do you think that people who come to live and work in [country] from other countries that are part of the European Union take out more or less in services and welfare benefits compared to people who were born in [country]?” Available responses include much less/a little less/about the same/a little more/much more. Table 2 shows the distribution of responses across the categories.

The survey question intends to identify people’s evaluations of already-experienced impacts on welfare, rather than attitudes towards the extent or conditions of access to entitlements

and rights. Furthermore, the question does not reference the word ‘impacts’ or ‘effects’, but instead asks for an assessment of how much immigrants receive on average in welfare and benefits.

Table 2 Survey responses on perceived EU welfare impacts (dependent)

Survey response options	Observations in estimation sample	Percentage of total estimation sample
Much less than people born here	739	7.00
A little less than people born here	1,117	10.58
About the same	5,174	49.02
A little more than people born here	2,010	19.04
Much more than people born here	1,514	14.35
Total	10,554	100

Notes: breakdown of unweighted estimation sample (model 2)

The question also mentions people born in other EU member states, instead of other geographic groupings that are less likely to prompt respondents to the specific issue of EU mobility. The distinction between EU and non-EU immigrants is more than a social grouping of ethnocultural identities. It serves as an institutional threshold associated with access to distinct rights within EU countries, and especially in the case of welfare and benefits (Ruhs 2017).

A large part of political narratives (i.e. media representations, Blinder (2015)) as well as economic analyses (i.e. welfare magnet hypothesis, Razin and Wahba (2015)) about immigrants’ impacts on welfare touch upon the issue of self-selection – in other words, how likely immigrants are to be unskilled, low-income, or in economic hardship, and therefore proportionally in higher need of some form of public assistance. Either explicitly or implicitly, any evaluation of the broader public finance impacts of immigrants involves a presumption/calculation about how much they receive (and contribute). Our study therefore benefits from using perceived level of welfare receipt as the starting point to better understand broader evaluations of welfare burdens. By mentioning welfare only, we also bypass complications arising from evaluating total net fiscal impacts and taking account of tax contributions and many other factors.

### ***Measuring political sophistication***

We employ two alternative proxy measures of political sophistication; political knowledge and interest in politics. For political knowledge we rely on a series of seven questions on knowledge of facts. Respondents are presented with the following: “The next questions are a kind of a short quiz. If you don’t know an answer, just click on ‘Don’t know’ and skip to the next one. Please answer to the best of your knowledge without trying to find the answer through other means.” Some questions are on general knowledge of national politics, such as matching the head of government to the correct Party. Others are about knowledge of international politics and EU institutions, such as whether Switzerland is a member of the EU, Greece a member of Schengen, or whether all EU member states have the same number of representatives in the EU Parliament. Table 3 presents the full list of knowledge items and a breakdown of responses (correct, wrong, don’t know).

Table 3

Questions on general and migration related political knowledge	Correct answer	Percent correct answers	Percent wrong answers	Percent don't know
Switzerland is a member of the EU.	False	67.72	15.43	16.86
Every country in the EU elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament.	False	50.44	15.59	33.98
(NAME OF THE HEAD OF GOVERNMENT) belongs to (NAME OF CORRECT PARTY)	True	84.02	6.41	9.58
The free movement of persons is a fundamental right guaranteed by the EU to its citizens.	True	74.38	7.07	18.55
Greece is part of the Schengen Area.	True	46.80	16.43	36.77
In 2015, Afghans have been the largest group of people that applied for asylum in the EU.	False	26.06	22.02	51.92
In 2015, asylum in the EU was more frequently granted to Syrians than to any other nationality.	True	45.34	11.11	43.55

Notes: unweighted estimation sample 10,554 (model 2)

Recommendations about the role and treatment of don’t know (DK) responses differ.

People who opted for “don’t know” in a political knowledge survey question fared no better than statistical chance when asked to provide a best guess (Sturgis, Allum, and Smith 2008).

Tourangeau, Maitland, and Yan (2016) show that discouraging DKs improved the measurement of knowledge only when it increased educated guesses more than it

increased blind guesses. Other researchers disagree and argue that including DK options underestimates knowledge because certain people are more likely to venture a guess when unsure (Mondak and Davis 2001; Mondak and Anderson 2004; M. K. Miller and Orr 2008).

As shown in Table 3, the distribution of responses between the three options differs substantially depending on the question. Matching the head of government with the correct Party had the highest proportion of correct responses at 84% (6.4 %wrong, 9.6% don't know), followed by whether free movement is a fundamental right of the EU (74.38% correct, 7% wrong, 18.56% don't know). The questions with the highest proportion of don't know were about the largest group of people that applied for asylum in the EU in 2015 at 51.9%, and whether Syrians were more frequently granted asylum than other nationalities (43.52%).

Also visible in the distribution of responses, the level of knowledge required to provide the correct answer varies widely between the seven questions. Providing the correct answer to easier questions is less helpful in differentiating between more or less knowledgeable people, whereas giving the wrong answer in a very demanding question would put the threshold too high for being knowledgeable. For these reasons, we follow common practice and construct an additive scale using these factual knowledge items (Levendusky 2011; Kleinberg and Lau 2019).

Table 4 Scale of political knowledge

Count of correct answers 0-7	Observations in estimation sample	Percentage of total estimation sample
0	423	04.01
1	653	06.19
2	1,106	10.48
3	1,789	16.95
4	2,238	21.21
5	2,288	21.68
6	1,362	12.91
7	695	6.59
Total	10,554	100

Our political knowledge scale counts the number of correct responses (0 to 7). We expect that a higher total of correct answers denotes higher levels of knowledge. We also expect that people who gave zero correct answers (4%) are meaningfully different in their level of political knowledge compared to those who gave all seven correct answers (6.6%), and that difference is proportional to how many correct answers a person has given. The most common total number of correct answers was five at 21.66%, and four at 21.24% (Table 4).

To contrast and complement the knowledge scale with another, more general, measure of political engagement, we also use interest in politics. It identifies those not at all interested in politics (6.6%), those hardly interested (22.88%), quite interested (48.27%), and very interested (22.21%).

### ***Measuring political and ideological leanings***

We measure ideological leanings with the unidimensional left-right scale from 0 for most left leaning to 10 for most right leaning. The left-right scale has been used in political behaviour analyses as a comparison tool of political orientations for several decades (Downs 1957). Not without limitations, this measure remains most useful in the analysis of European politics (Mair 2007). The question is phrased as follows: *‘In politics people often talk about “left” and “right”. Where would you place yourself on the following scale?’*. There is notable concentration of respondents in the middle of the scale (5) with 33% of the sample. There is also concentration of respondents on 3 (mid-left, 10%) and 7 (mid-right, 10%). About 6.4% positioned themselves on the extreme left (0/1) and another 7.6% on the extreme right (9/10).

### ***Other demographic controls***

Following common practice, we include a series of individual level demographic controls in the regressions, to account for other observable differences between respondents. Basic controls include gender (male, female), education level in International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 0-2 low education, 3-4 medium education, 5-8 high education). Age is entered in the form of five groups; 18-24, 25-39, 40-54, 55-64, and 65 and over. Since the sample includes respondents who are citizens of the country of residence,

we also include a control for those born abroad. For urban/rural residence we include a variable that differentiates between those living in a big city, suburbs of big city, in towns or small cities, and those living in country villages. For economic status we include a variable on perceived difficulty coping on present income which differentiates between those who never or almost never struggle, those who struggle from time to time, and those who report struggling most of the time.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for individual level controls

Predictors	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Living in a big city</i>				
Living in suburbs of big city	0.13	0.33	0	1
Living in a town or small city	0.37	0.48	0	1
Living in a country village	0.16	0.36	0	1
<i>Male</i>				
Female	0.48	0.50	0	1
<i>Education completed / ISCED 0-2</i>				
Education completed / ISCED 3-4	0.41	0.49	0	1
Education completed / ISCED 5-8	0.45	0.50	0	1
<i>Age 18-24yo</i>				
Age 25-39yo	0.24	0.43	0	1
Age 40-54yo	0.30	0.46	0	1
Age 55-64yo	0.20	0.40	0	1
Age 65yo and over	0.21	0.41	0	1
<i>Struggling on income almost never\never</i>				
Struggling on income from time to time	0.29	0.45	0	1
Struggling on income most of the time	0.08	0.27	0	1
<i>Born in [country]</i>				
Born abroad	0.05	0.22	0	1

Notes: estimation sample 10,554; italics denote the reference category in discrete variables

## Modelling strategy

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The dependent variable includes five discrete and ranked categories as follows: (1) EU immigrants receive much less than people born here, (2) EU immigrants receive a little less than people born here, (3) EU immigrants receive about the same as people born here, (4) EU immigrants receive a little more than people born here, (5) EU immigrants receive much more than people born here. Effectively, it represents perceptions of the welfare impacts of EU immigrants from most positive to most negative. To reflect this structure, we estimate ordered logit regressions fitted using maximum likelihood, where the probability of opting for each of the five categories of the dependent variable is modeled as a function of individual characteristics, political knowledge, political and ideological attitudes, and country differences. We control for country differences with fixed effects.

To demonstrate the estimated effects of coefficients, we use postestimation average marginal effects (AME), which show the expected change in the probability of expressing each dependent variable outcome (one of the five categories), associated with a change in the values of the explanatory variable. For discrete predictors, the AME shows the expected discrete change compared to the base category (education level, political interest). For continuous predictors, such as the knowledge scale (0-7) and the left-right scale (0-10), the average marginal effect represents the estimated change in the dependent variable associated with each unit increase in the predictor (i.e. each step towards right end of scale). We average individual-level predictions across the values of the respective explanatory variable while holding all other variables constant at their observed values in the estimation sample. Therefore, we estimate the average impact among actual respondents in the sample, rather than for a hypothetical person with average characteristics (Hanmer and Kalkan 2013).

We specify four models with otherwise identical individual level demographic controls and country effects. The first specification (model 1) introduces the political knowledge scale (0-7). In model 2, an interaction effect is estimated between the political knowledge scale and the scale on left-right ideological position (0-10). In model 3, we introduce the alternative measure, interest in politics. In model 4 we introduce interaction effects between political



interest and position on the left-right scale. The estimation of interaction effects allows us to identify to what extent the effect of political knowledge and political engagement varies substantially between people with different ideological leanings.

## **Empirical analysis**

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Our findings suggest that respondents with higher levels of general political sophistication are more likely to view EU immigrants' welfare receipts in a positive light. We also find evidence that higher political sophistication works differently for people across the left-right ideological spectrum. Rather than converging towards the most accurate or moderate opinions, those with higher levels of political sophistication exhibit more entrenched views that lean further towards the extreme sides of impact evaluation, especially among those identifying as ideologically far-left.

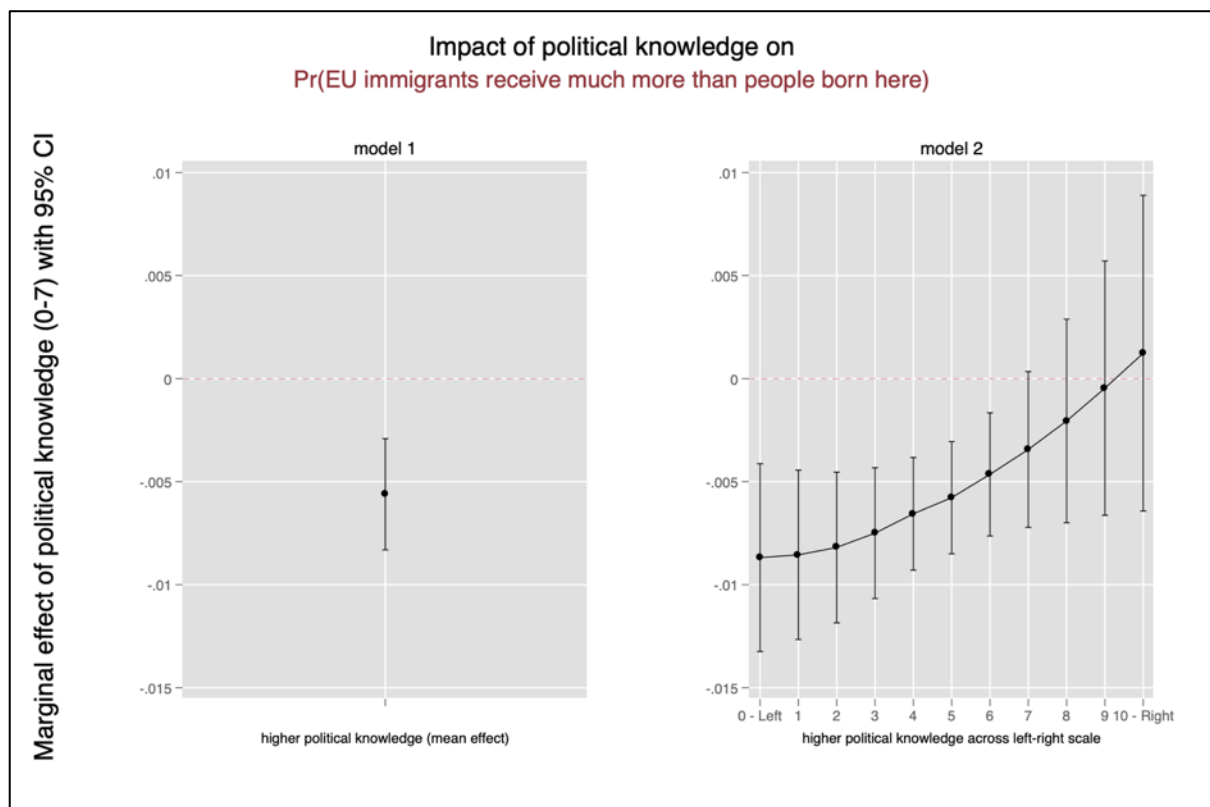
The average effect of higher political sophistication holds for both alternative measures, i.e. the knowledge scale versus political interest, although the effect is less robust when it comes to political interest. Moreover, the interaction between ideology and sophistication does not hold for political interest, suggesting that its differentiating ability is fairly limited compared to a more nuanced measure of sophistication. The empirical analysis section is divided in two; first we review results for the knowledge scale (see Figures 1-3), followed by results for the measure of political interest (see Figures 4 and 5). For complete regression results see appendix tables A1 and A2.

### ***Political knowledge and ideology***

Figure 1 shows the estimated discrete change in the probability of expressing the most negative evaluation option — EU immigrants receive much more than people born here — for every unit increase in the political knowledge scale (0-7 correct answers). The left panel plots results from model 1 (average effect of higher knowledge level). The right panel plots results from model 2, where we formalize our expectation that sophistication and ideology have an intersecting dynamic.

Estimates from model 1 show that the probability of thinking that EU immigrants receive much more in welfare benefits than natives is estimated lower for every additional correct answer on the knowledge scale. The most knowledgeable respondents – those with all correct responses – are on average 4.5 percentage points less likely to say that EU immigrants receive much more than natives, compared to those with no correct responses. We also find that for every step from the left towards the right side of the ideological scale, respondents are more likely to say that EU immigrants receive much more than natives. Those most right-wing on the ideological scale (10) are about 10 percentage points more likely to think that EU immigrants receive much more than natives, compared to the most left-wing on the scale (0). As these results illustrate, when sophistication and ideology are tested separately, we find ideology to be more defining than knowledge for EU welfare impact perceptions.

**Figure 1**

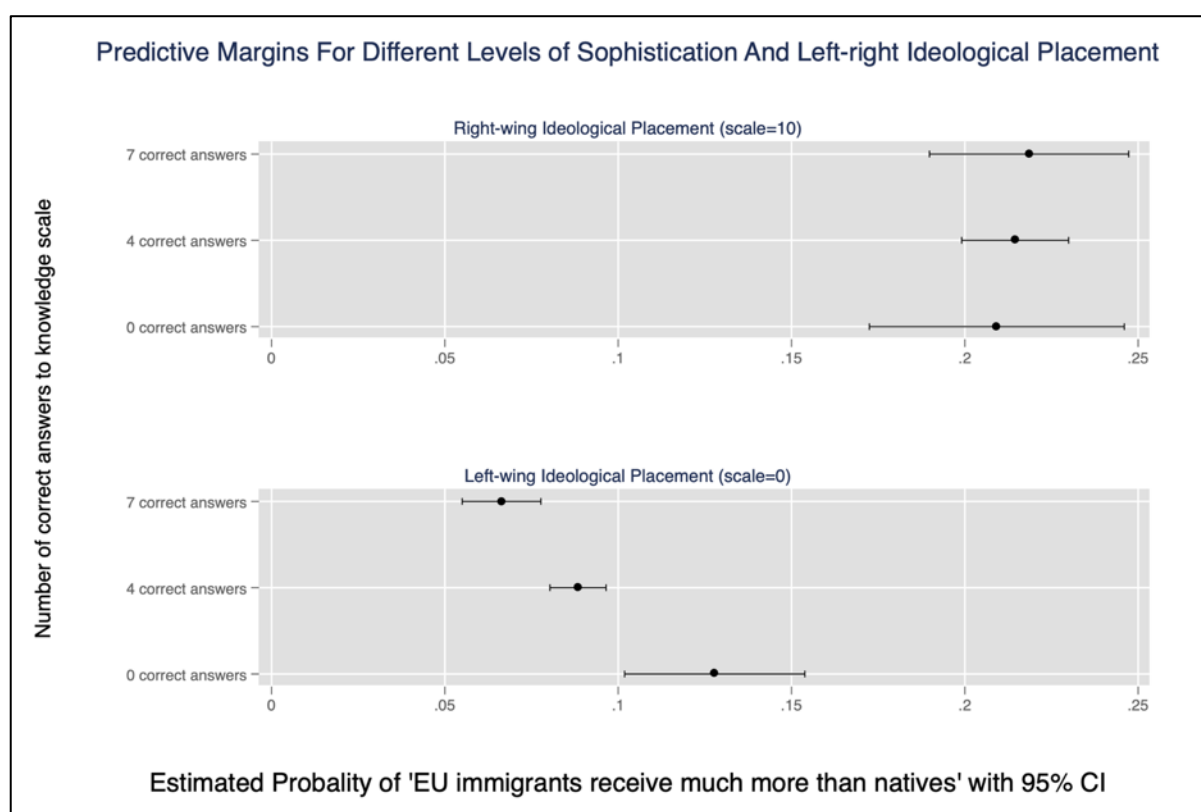


Notes: average marginal effect with 95% confidence interval represents the estimated discrete change in the Pr(EU immigrants receive much more than people born here) for every unit increase in the political knowledge scale (0-7 correct answers). Specifications include the full set of individual level controls and country fixed effects. Model 2 estimates interaction effect between the knowledge scale and position in the left-right ideological scale.

However, the second specification indicates a more complex relationship between sophistication and ideology. Higher levels of political knowledge make a difference for perceptions among those who place themselves on the left and the centre of the ideological spectrum, but not so much among those on the right.

In Figure 2 we contrast the overall estimated probability of expressing the most negative evaluation option among people with different levels of political sophistication and ideological placement. The likelihood of saying that EU immigrants receive much more than natives stands at about 20 percent for those furthest right in the ideological scale (Figure 2, top panel). Moreover, that probability does not differ between people of different levels of sophistication.

**Figure 2**



Notes: predictive margins with 95% confidence interval represent the expected probability of saying that EU immigrants receive much more than people born here, across different levels of sophistication (knowledge scale) and left-right ideological placement. Specifications include the full set of individual level controls and country fixed effects. Model 2 estimates interaction effect between the knowledge scale and position in the left-right ideological scale.

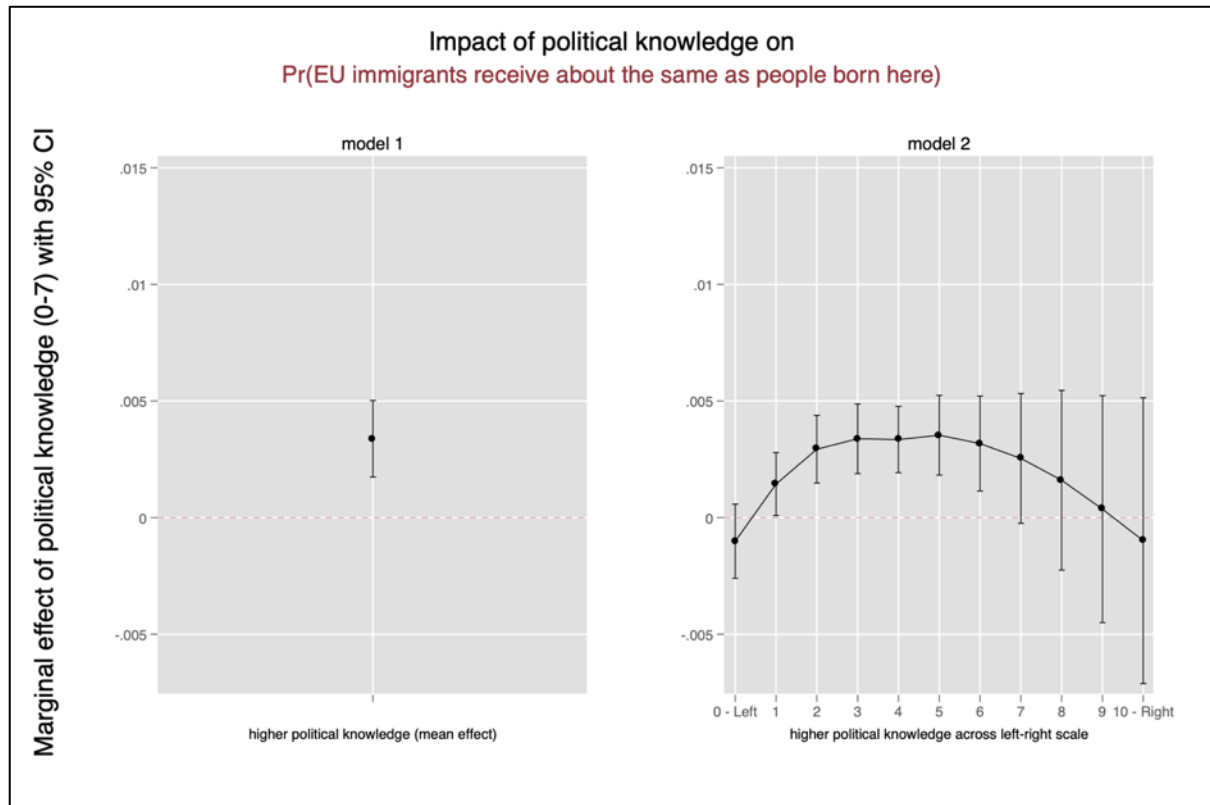
On the contrary, among those placed furthest to the left on the ideological scale, the probability of saying that EU migrants receive much more than natives is statistically different depending on knowledge levels (Figure 2, bottom panel). Left-wing respondents with low levels of knowledge (0 correct answers) have almost double the chances of expressing the most extreme negative opinion about EU immigrants' welfare receipts at around 13 percent, compared to those with high levels of sophistication (6 percent).

In Figure 3 we plot the estimated discrete effect of higher sophistication on the probability of choosing the middle category of impact evaluation, aka that EU immigrants receive in benefits about the same as natives. On average, respondents with a higher number of correct answers were more likely to opt for the middle category of impact evaluation (Figure 3, left panel). However, when the impact of political sophistication is estimated separately across the left-right scale (Figure 3, right panel), we find that the effect is primarily isolated among moderates, those on the centre-left, and to a lesser extent among those on the centre-right (between 2 and 6 in ideological scale). Additional correct answers in the knowledge scale are linked to an increase in the probability of opting for the moderate impacts option only among ideological centrists. On the left and the right extremes of the ideological scale, the effect of knowledge converges to zero for the probability of choosing the moderate impacts option. This is a rather intuitive result, since respondents who identify as centrists are most likely to also express moderate opinions about EU welfare recipients. This could be supportive of the expressive responding hypothesis, if sophisticated centrists knowingly opt for the middle option to signal their moderate positioning.

Those on the left switch to the positive impacts options, with those most knowledgeable expressing the most extreme positive perceptions of EU welfare impacts (EU receive much less than natives). Those on the right end of the ideological scale remain just as likely to opt for the negative impacts option regardless of knowledge levels (EU receive a little/much more than natives). While higher levels of political knowledge are associated with a reduction in the most extreme negative beliefs about EU welfare impacts, this is not the case among those positioned furthest to the right. For respondents who identify as extreme

right-wing, higher levels of knowledge had no effect in the probability of expressing negative evaluations of EU welfare impacts.

**Figure 3**



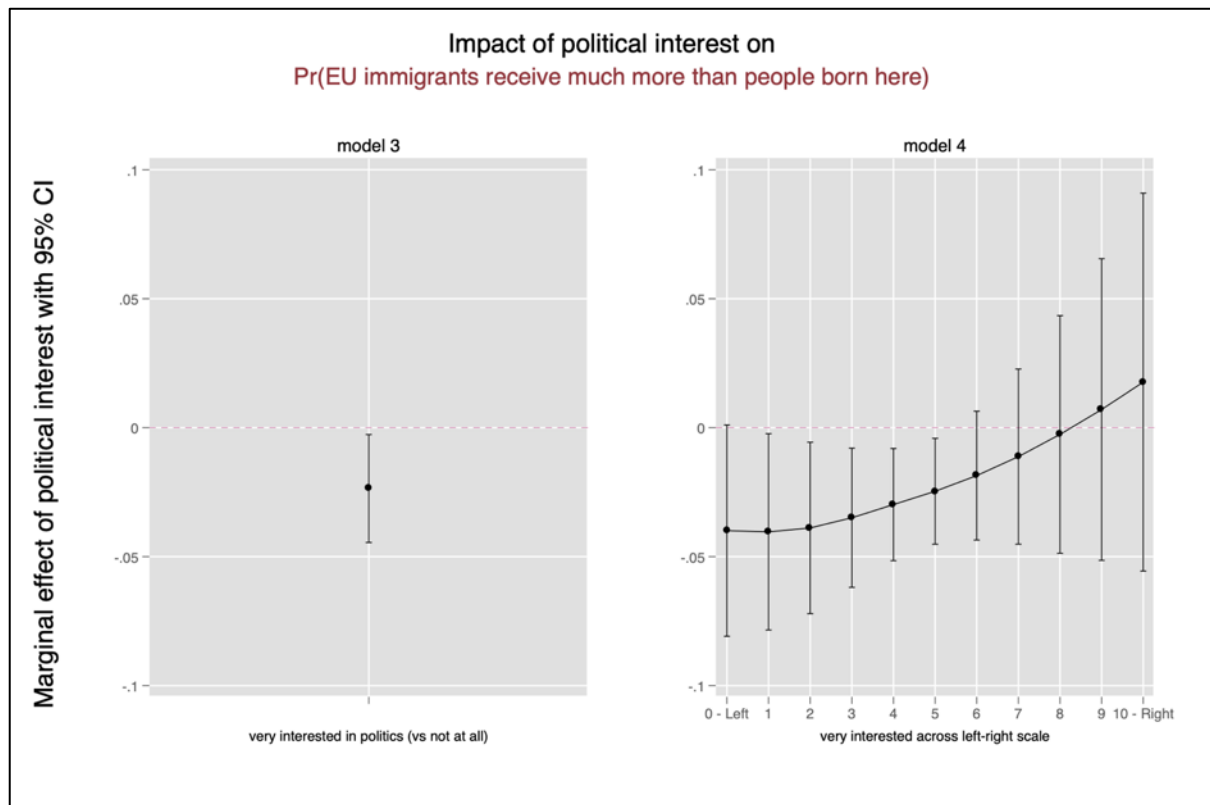
Notes: average marginal effect with 95% confidence interval represents the estimated discrete change in the Pr(EU immigrants receive about the same as people born here) for every unit increase in the political knowledge scale (0-7 correct answers). Specifications include the full set of individual level controls and country fixed effects. Model 2 estimates interaction effect between the knowledge scale and position in the left-right ideological scale.

### ***Political interest and ideology***

The third and fourth specifications introduce the alternative sophistication measure, political interest. Results show a similar, albeit less robust, effect on EU welfare impact perceptions. Respondents who report higher levels of interest in politics are on average less likely to express negative views of EU welfare recipients. Those very interested in politics are 0.024 ( $p > 0.001$ ) percentage points less likely to say that EU immigrants receive much more than natives in welfare and benefits, compared to those who are not at all interested

in politics. However, this difference barely holds between those with the least and most interest. When comparing people who are not at all interested with those hardly or quite interested in politics, the difference does not retain statistical significance.

**Figure 4**

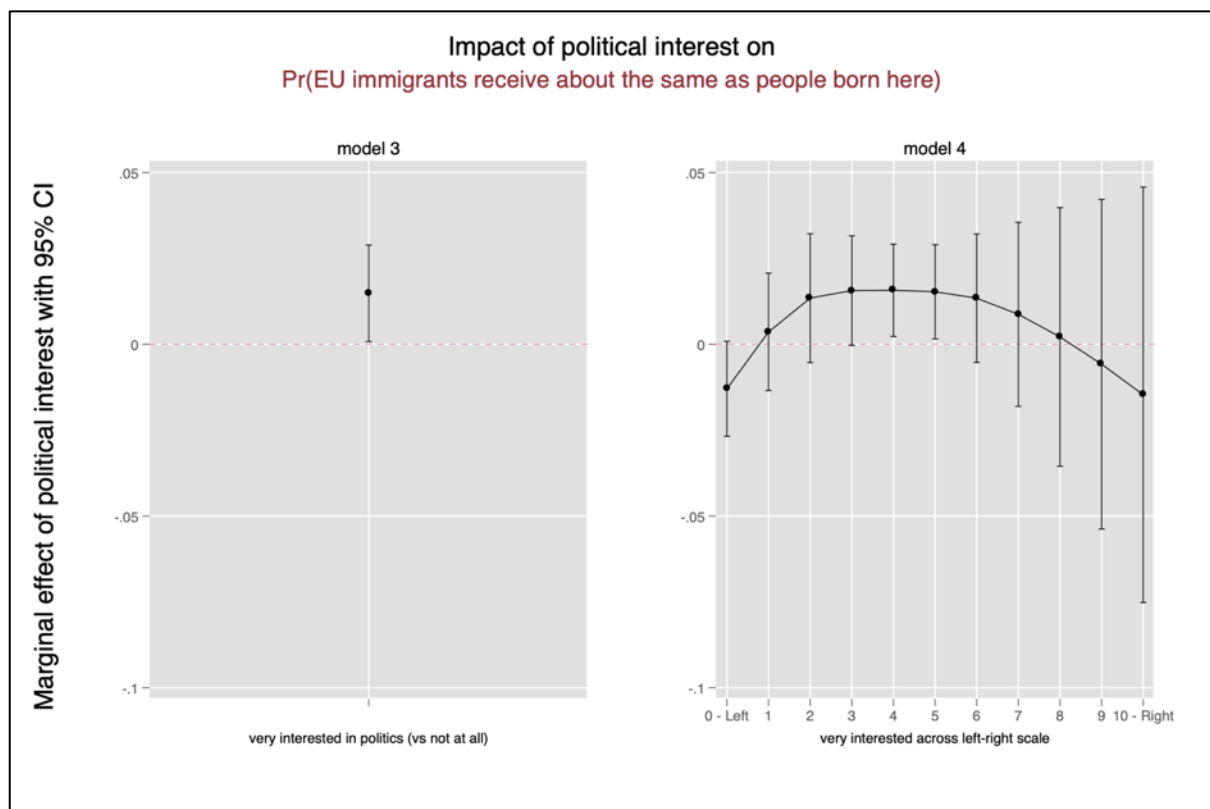


Notes: average marginal effect with 95% confidence interval represents the estimated discrete change in the Pr(EU immigrants receive much more than people born here) for those very interested in politics versus those not at all interested. Specifications include the full set of individual level controls and country fixed effects. Model 4 estimates interaction effect between the knowledge scale and position in the left-right ideological scale.

The probability of opting for the most extreme negative option was no different between people across the ideological scale with more or less interest in politics. In other words, the interaction effect estimated in model 4 does not show a statistically significant effect on perceptions of EU welfare impacts. These results suggest that a simple grouping of political interest does not do a good job as the political knowledge scale at differentiating between varying levels of political sophistication. It is reasonable to expect that interest in politics

could be perceived as high among individuals who lack specific factual knowledge of political figures, events, and institutions.

**Figure 5**



Notes: average marginal effect with 95% confidence interval represents the estimated discrete change in the Pr(EU immigrants receive about the same as people born here) for those very interested in politics versus those not at all interested. Specifications include the full set of individual level controls and country fixed effects. Model 4 estimates interaction effect between the knowledge scale and position in the left-right ideological scale.

## Conclusions

In this study we explore individual-level determinants of public views about the welfare impacts of EU immigrants across seven EU countries. We are interested in the role of political sophistication, engagement with politics, and ideological predispositions as individual correlates of perceptions and misperceptions. We identify EU welfare impact

evaluations among citizens with a survey question asking to what extent respondents think that immigrants born in other EU countries receive much/a little less, about the same, or a little/much more in welfare and benefits than natives (those born in respective country).

We use discrete choice regression models that estimate how the probability of opting for each category of perceived EU welfare receipts varies for people with different levels of knowledge of national, EU, and migration related politics and events, different levels of interest in politics, and across the left-right ideological spectrum.

Our findings are in line with existing research that higher levels of sophistication operate differently for different people depending on their predispositions. Rather than expressing more moderate or accurate perceptions, sophisticates are more likely to make directional ‘mistakes’ that match and reinforce their views. For ideological centrists, higher levels of knowledge are found to be linked to higher chances of opting for the middle ground, i.e. that EU immigrants receive about the same as natives. Ideological leftists who positioned themselves at the tail-end of the scale had a higher probability of opting for the most extreme positive option if they had higher levels of knowledge (EU immigrants receive much less). The probability of choosing the most extreme negative perception option (EU immigrants receive much more), is highest among right-wingers who placed themselves on the tail-end of the scale. Notably, lower or higher knowledge levels made no difference for that particular group of respondents.

Our findings could suggest that higher political sophistication does not lead to shifts in attitudes for those furthest right because they are the most resistant to this specific persuasive message (Zaller 1996), or they are knowingly reporting misperceptions to signal their broader position on immigration (B. F. Schaffner and Luks 2018). The expressive responding framework can also provide a reasonable explanation behind what we find for sophisticates furthest to the left of the ideological scale.



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## Appendix

**Table A1 Complete results for specifications 1 and 2**

Predictor	Model 1			Model 2		
	Odds ratio	SE	P> z	Odds ratio	SE	P> z
Political knowledge scale (0-7)	0.954	0.011	0.000	0.901	0.024	0.000
Left-right scale (0-10)	1.113	0.009	0.000	1.062	0.023	0.005
Knowledge scale # Left-right scale				1.011	0.005	0.017
<i>Living in a big city</i>						
Living in suburbs of big city	1.056	0.065	0.374	1.054	0.065	0.391
Living in a town or small city	1.049	0.046	0.283	1.046	0.046	0.305
Living in a country village	0.996	0.057	0.948	0.994	0.057	0.921
<i>Male</i>						
Female	1.135	0.043	0.001	1.137	0.043	0.001
<i>Education completed / ISCED 0-2</i>						
Education completed / ISCED 3-4	0.850	0.050	0.006	0.850	0.050	0.006
Education completed / ISCED 5-8	0.716	0.044	0.000	0.716	0.044	0.000
<i>Age 18-24yo</i>						
Age 25-39yo	1.073	0.092	0.411	1.076	0.092	0.391
Age 40-54yo	1.292	0.108	0.002	1.297	0.109	0.002
Age 55-64yo	1.468	0.128	0.000	1.475	0.129	0.000
Age 65yo and over	1.438	0.127	0.000	1.445	0.127	0.000
<i>Struggling on income almost never\never</i>						
Struggling on income from time to time	1.023	0.043	0.594	1.023	0.043	0.583
Struggling on income most of the time	1.444	0.103	0.000	1.446	0.103	0.000
<i>Born in [country]</i>						
Born abroad	0.587	0.049	0.000	0.588	0.049	0.000
<i>Germany</i>						
Spain	1.317	0.087	0.000	1.315	0.087	0.000
Sweden	1.164	0.077	0.022	1.158	0.077	0.027
UK	0.963	0.064	0.568	0.961	0.064	0.553

Hungary	1.009	0.070	0.903	1.005	0.070	0.945
Poland	0.577	0.040	0.000	0.576	0.040	0.000
Romania	0.485	0.037	0.000	0.486	0.037	0.000
<i>EU receive much less/cut0</i>						
EU receive a little less/cut1	2.299	0.125		-2.538	0.160	
EU receive about the same/cut2	1.234	0.122		-1.472	0.158	
EU receive a little more/cut3	1.100	0.122		0.863	0.157	
EU receive much more/cut4	2.238	0.123		2.001	0.158	
Observations	10,554			10,554		
LR chi2	632.16			637.84		
Prob > chi2	0.000			0.000		
Pseudo R2	0.022			0.022		

**Table A2 Complete results for specifications 3 and 4**

Predictor	Model 3			Model 4		
	Odds ratio	SE	P> z	Odds ratio	SE	P> z
Not at all interested in politics						
Hardly interested	0.985	0.080	0.851	1.126	0.271	0.622
Quite interested	0.847	0.066	0.033	0.875	0.197	0.553
Very interested	0.825	0.069	0.022	0.594	0.138	0.025
Left-right scale (0-10)	1.113	0.009	0.000	1.099	0.045	0.021
Not at all interested in pol # Left-right scale						
Hardly interested				0.974	0.044	0.562
Quite interested				0.994	0.042	0.882
Very interested				1.065	0.046	0.149
<i>Living in a big city</i>						
Living in suburbs of big city	1.056	0.065	0.376	1.053	0.065	0.398
Living in a town or small city	1.052	0.047	0.256	1.050	0.047	0.273
Living in a country village	0.994	0.057	0.915	0.992	0.057	0.894
<i>Male</i>						
Female	1.146	0.043	0.000	1.143	0.043	0.000
<i>Education completed / ISCED 0-2</i>						
	0.847	0.050	0.005			

Education completed / ISCED 3-4	0.708	0.043	0.000	0.847	0.050	0.005
Education completed / ISCED 5-8				0.710	0.043	0.000
<i>Age 18-24yo</i>						
Age 25-39yo	1.058	0.090	0.508	1.058	0.090	0.507
Age 40-54yo	1.257	0.105	0.006	1.261	0.106	0.006
Age 55-64yo	1.424	0.123	0.000	1.432	0.124	0.000
Age 65yo and over	1.396	0.122	0.000	1.410	0.123	0.000
<i>Struggling on income almost never\never</i>						
Struggling on income from time to time	1.033	0.043	0.441	1.033	0.043	0.439
Struggling on income most of the time	1.460	0.104	0.000	1.459	0.104	0.000
<i>Born in [country]</i>						
Born abroad	0.582	0.049	0.000	0.582	0.049	0.000
<i>Germany</i>						
Spain	1.329	0.087	0.000	1.323	0.087	0.000
Sweden	1.163	0.077	0.024	1.158	0.077	0.028
UK	0.990	0.065	0.877	0.992	0.066	0.904
Hungary	0.992	0.070	0.909	0.995	0.070	0.938
Poland	0.594	0.041	0.000	0.590	0.040	0.000
Romania	0.504	0.038	0.000	0.504	0.038	0.000
<i>EU receive much less/cut0</i>						
EU receive a little less/cut1	-2.247	0.135		-2.315	0.239	
EU receive about the same/cut2	-1.183	0.132		-1.249	0.237	
EU receive a little more/cut3	1.151	0.132		1.088	0.237	
EU receive much more/cut4	2.288	0.133		2.226	0.238	
Observations	10548			10548		
LR chi2	631.15			650.26		
Prob > chi2	0.000			0.000		
Pseudo R2	0.022			0.023		



# REMINDER

## ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

The REMINDER project is exploring the economic, social, institutional and policy factors that have shaped the impacts of free movement in the EU and public debates about it.

The project is coordinated from COMPAS and includes participation from 14 consortium partners in 9 countries across Europe



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research & innovation programme under grant agreement no 727072

