

WHAT DRIVES THE PUBLIC OPINION ON ASYLUM POLICY IN THE NETHERLANDS?

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ABSTRACT

Among the citizens of Western Europe, Dutch residents appear to be the least supportive of a generous judgement of asylum applications. In line with the perceived ethnic threat theory, people with a higher level of education advocate a more generous judgement of asylum applications than people with a low level of education. Surprisingly, income has the opposite effect. The effect of the (perceived) presence of out-groups members on the attitudes towards asylum seekers appears to vary between different scale levels. The higher people estimate the size of the immigrant groups at the national level, the less support they express for a generous judgement of asylum applications. At the neighbourhood level, more interethnic exposure leads to more support for a generous judgement of asylum applications. This may indicate that the ethnic competition theory works at a macro level, while at the neighbourhood level the contact hypothesis applies.

Key words: asylum policy, contact hypothesis, ethnic threat, the Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Europe received 1.26 million new asylum claims. Although the numbers are slightly lower in 2016 (1.20 million) it is not to be expected that European's largest refugee crisis since the Second World War will soon be over (Bansak *et al.* 2016). European countries struggle with finding policy solutions in a context where extreme right wing parties seem to profit from concerns about asylum issues and where a vote for Brexit can largely be attributed to rising anti-immigrant sentiments (Hobolt, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial for both researchers and politicians to understand why some citizens are welcoming asylum seekers and why others oppose them. In this paper, we compare the views on asylum policy in the Netherlands to other

European countries. Our main aim is to give insight into the drivers of support (or the lack thereof) for a generous judgement of asylum applications in the Netherlands.

On the basis of the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), it can be expected that those who live among members of minority ethnic groups are more likely to have a welcoming attitude towards asylum seekers as contact with members of others groups is believed to reduce ethnocentrism. Allport (1954) stresses that interethnic contacts only lead to more positive attitudes towards out-groups when four essential conditions are met: equal status, common goals, intergroup co-operation and the support of authorities, law or custom. Pettigrew (2008) added a fifth condition that the contact situation must provide the participants with the opportunity to become friends.

Living in the same neighbourhood with out-group members can provide such a contact situation, as it enables repetitive contacts. Establishing affective ties with a member of an outgroup may not only lead to more positive attitudes towards that specific outgroup, but also towards other outgroups. Pettigrew (2008) argues that interethnic contact leads to the reappraisal of the in-group and a reduction of ethnocentrism. Therefore, it may be hypothesised that contacts with members of minority ethnic groups may also have a positive effect on the acceptance of asylum seekers, although these may belong to ethnic groups that are not (strongly) represented in the neighbourhood.

However, on the basis of qualitative fieldwork in the UK, Valentine (2008) concludes that proximity to others does not automatically lead to 'meaningful contact'. There is often a considerable gap between values and practices when people encounter each other. People who exchange civilities in public, may still hold prejudicial views towards the outgroup and vice versa people who hold cosmopolitan values do not always practice what they preach (Valentine, 2008). Next to that, she finds that even if a positive encounter leads to a change of view about the other person, that does not necessarily change someone's opinion about a group as a whole.

On the other hand, there also many research findings that confirm the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew *et al.* 2011). For instance, Oliver and Wong (2003) analysed data from multiple American cities and found lower levels of out-group prejudice in neighbourhoods that were characterised by interethnic propinquity. The finding that people who live in the vicinity of an asylum seeker centre are less likely to have objections to a new centre also seems to confirm the contact hypothesis (Lubbers *et al.* 2006). In a cross-national study in 21 European countries, Semyonov and Glikman (2009) found that residence in neighbourhoods with a higher proportion of ethnic minorities increases opportunities for positive interethnic contacts and also that positive interethnic contact decreases anti-minority attitudes.

On the basis of the contact theory, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1a: Sharing a neighbourhood with members of minority ethnic groups leads to more support for a generous judgement of asylum applications (direct effect).

H1b: A higher frequency of contacts with members of minority ethnic groups leads to more support for a generous judgement of asylum applications.

H1c: A higher frequency of contacts (partly) mediates the effect of sharing a neighbourhood with members of minority ethnic groups on the support for a generous judgement of asylum applications (indirect effect).

Sharing the neighbourhood with outgroup members may not only lead to positive interethnic contacts, it may also lead to feelings of ethnic threat. According to conflict theory (Coser 1956), people who either actually compete or who perceive competition with immigrants over scarce resources are most likely to have a negative attitude towards immigrants. A pan-European analysis indeed confirms that sense of competition is likely to increase anti-immigrant attitudes (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov 2015). This (perceived) competition is expected to be strongest for people whose socio-economic position is most similar to those of the immigrants (Blalock 1967). Research has indeed shown that negative attitudes and feelings towards immigrants decreases as an individual is more educated, and increases when an individual's income is lower or insufficient or when someone is unemployed (Scheepers *et al.* 2002; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov 2015).

Perceived ethnic threat is assumed to be a crucial mediating factor between one's social position and aspects of ethnic exclusionism (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov 2015). Scheepers *et al.* (2002) confirm in their pan-European research the mediating effect of perceptions of ethnic threat on the relationship between individual socio-economic status and the opposition to civil rights for legal migrants. Perceptions of ethnic threat have also been found to be very decisive for objections to asylum seekers centres in the Netherlands and to (partly) mediate the effects of education and occupational position (Lubbers *et al.* 2006). It seems reasonable to expect that

the size of the immigrant population will lead to a higher sense of ethnic threat. However, Semyonov *et al.* (2004) found that the actual minority size (at the regional level) did not have an impact on perceived threat in Germany. They found instead that the perceived size of the out-group population – a psychological construct – invokes the sense of threat, which prompts, in turn, anti-minority attitudes. In other words, ethnic threat fully mediates the relation between perceived size of the foreign population and anti-foreigners sentiments.

On the basis of the threat theory, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H2a: A higher socio-economic status (in terms of income and level of education) leads to more support for a generous judgement of asylum applications (direct effect).

H2b: A higher perceived size of the immigrant population in the Netherlands leads to less support for a generous judgement of asylum applications (direct effect).

H2c: A higher perceived ethnic threat leads to less support for a generous judgement of asylum applications.

H2d: Perceived ethnic threat (partly) mediates the effects of socio-economic status and perceived size of the immigrant population on the support for a generous judgement of asylum applications (indirect effects).

DATA AND MEASUREMENTS

Data from rounds 7 and 8 of the European Social Survey (ESS) were used to make a comparison between European countries with respect to the public opinion on whether or not the government should be generous in judging people's applications for refugee status. The ESS is an academically-driven multi-country survey which aims to monitor and interpret changing public attitudes and values within Europe and to investigate how they interact with Europe's changing institutions, to advance and consolidate improved methods of cross-national survey measurement in Europe and beyond, and third – to develop a series of European social indicators, including attitudinal

indicators (European Social Survey 2015). In total, 36 countries¹ have taken part in at least one round of the ESS since the first round in 2002. In round 8 (fieldwork between September 2016 and April 2017), 18 countries participated. The Netherlands has participated in each round of the ESS. The ESS is led by the City University of London in cooperation with six partner institutes, including The Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP. Additionally, national co-ordinators are appointed for each country. These national co-ordinators are responsible for ensuring that the appointed survey agencies conduct fieldwork to the rigorous standard specified. In the Netherlands, the Radboud University acts as national co-ordinator, while the fieldwork is executed by TNS/NIPO and Veldkamp (rounds 7 and 8). All countries need to follow strict guidelines with respect to the survey. For instance, samples must be representative of all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private households in each country. Individuals are selected by strict random probability methods and substitution of non-responding households or individuals is not permitted at any stage. Countries have the choice in whether they use sampling frames of individuals, households or addresses. In the Netherlands, a sampling frame of addresses is used. If there are more persons above 15 living at the same address, the selection is made on the basis of the most recent birthday. All countries must aim for a minimum sample size of 1,500 (or 800 in countries with populations of less than 2 million).²

In the first empirical section we make comparisons between countries. To estimate population descriptive statistics we used weight factors to adjust for different sample selection probabilities. The second empirical section is based on the survey of the Dutch population in round 7 as several crucial independent variables were not available in round 8. Interviews (1,919) were held between September 2014 and January 2015 using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). The sample is representative for all people above 15 living in independent households. The response rate was 59 per

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics (N = 1678)*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Dependent variable</i>				
Governments should be generous in judging people's applications for refugee status	1	5	2.82	1.11
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Income	1	10	5.94	2.60
Having a job and/or attending school	0	1	0.67	0.47
Education				
Medium level of education	0	1	0.32	0.47
High level of education	0	1	0.34	0.47
Male	0	1	0.46	0.50
Age	14	92	50.29	17.65
Member of minority ethnic group	0	1	0.06	0.23
Some/many members of minority ethnic groups are perceived to live in current neighbourhood	0	1	0.51	0.50
Of every 100 people in country how many born outside country	0	95	23.68	16.53
<i>Mediating variables</i>				
Frequency of contact with members of minority ethnic groups when out and about				
once a week to once a month	0	1	0.31	0.46
more than once a week	0	1	0.53	0.50
Perception of ethnic threat	-3.16	3.52	0.00	1.00

Source: ESS Round 7: European Social Survey Round 7 Data (2014). Data file edition 2.1. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

cent. Some categories (like people under 25 and persons in the highest income deciles) are slightly underrepresented. As the purpose of this section is to estimate causal effects, weighting is not warranted.³

To analyse the determinants of the opinion on asylum policy, we apply a multiple regression analysis with the following statement as dependent variable: 'The government should be generous in judging people's applications for refugee status'. The answers range from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The mean score in 2014 was 2.82 (Table 1). 32 per cent of the Dutch respondents agreed with this statement, while 47 per cent disagreed.

Several indicators of social status are included in the multiple regression analysis. Respondents are categorised into income deciles on the basis of their self-reported weekly, monthly or yearly income. The mean income decile in the dataset is 5.94 (see Table 1). For level of education a distinction is made between three levels on the basis of

the respondent's highest completed level of education. The lowest level (which is the reference category in the multiple regression analysis) comprises primary education and lower vocational training, the middle level secondary education/high school and middle vocational training, and the high level higher vocational training and university. The respondents are roughly equally distributed across the three educational levels. A final indicator of social status is professional status. We distinguished between those who have a job or attend school and those who are, for varying reasons, not active in the labour market (e.g. unemployed, disabled, housewives, and pensioners). Two-thirds of the respondents belong to the first category, one third to the second category.

Furthermore, we added gender, age and being a member of a minority ethnic group as control variables to the regression equation. Finally, we included measurements for the perceived presence of immigrants and minority ethnic groups at two different scale

Table 2. Factor loadings of items measuring perceived ethnic threats

Immigration bad or good for country's economy	0.802
Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants	0.744
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	0.773
Immigrants take jobs away in country or create new jobs	0.690
Taxes and services: immigrants take out more than they put in or less	0.721

Note: Extraction method: principal component analysis.

Source: ESS Round 7: European Social Survey Round 7 Data (2014). Data file edition 2.1. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

levels. Respondents are asked to characterise their neighbourhood by making a choice between three options. They have to indicate whether they live in a neighbourhood in which almost no one (1), some people (2) or many people (3) belong(s) to a minority ethnic group. Slightly more than half of the respondents think that some or many members of a minority ethnic groups are living in their neighbourhood

At the level of the Netherlands as a whole, respondents have been asked to estimate how many people are born outside the country out of every 100 people. The mean estimated percentage is 23.7 per cent, which is more than twice as much as the actual number of 11.0 per cent (1 January 2015).⁴

We also added two mediating variables to the regression equation: contact with members of minority ethnic groups and perceived ethnic threat. The contact variable is based on seven answer categories ranging from 'never' to 'every day' on the question: How often do you have any contact with people who belong to a non-Dutch ethnic group when you are out and about? We reduced this to three categories. Eighty-four per cent of the respondent have contact at least once a month with a minority ethnic group member and 53 per cent even more than once a week.⁵

To measure *perceived ethnic threat* a factor analysis is executed on the basis of five statements (see Table 2). Respondents could give their opinions on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (positive) to 10 (negative). All items have a high score on the extracted factor and the Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.805 indicates that the factor is reliable; all items

measure the same phenomenon. By definition, the mean score is 0 with a standard deviation of 1 (Table 1). The higher the score, the more ethnic threat a respondent perceives.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

Out of the 18 countries in round 8 of the ESS survey, there is in the Czech Republic least support for a generous judgement of asylum applications (Table 3). Only 11.8 per cent of the Czech population agrees with the statement while 69.4 disagrees. The difference in these two percentages is used to order the countries by support for a generous judgement (ranging from least to most support). Most support can be found in Ireland and Northern European countries (Iceland, Norway, Sweden). Three out of the top four countries with least support are Eastern European countries. Out of the Western European countries, there is least support for a generous judgement in the Netherlands (number 3 on the list).

The last column of Table 3 shows the trend in support between 2014 (round 7 of ESS) and 2016. A positive figure indicates a trend towards more support, a negative figure a trend towards less support. For two countries (Iceland and Russian Federation) there are no data available for 2014. In three countries (United Kingdom, Ireland and Switzerland) there is a (minor) trend towards more support for a generous judgement of asylum applications, while 13 countries witness a negative trend. Support has shrunk most drastically in the Netherlands. Also in Austria, Germany and the four post-socialist

Table 3. *Support for statement that the government should be generous in judging people's applications for refugee status by ESS-country (Countries ranked from least support to most support)*

	Agree 2016	Neither agree nor disagree 2016	Disagree 2016	Difference agree-disagree 2016	Difference agree-disagree 2014	Trend 2014-2016
Czech Republic	11.8	18.8	69.4	-57.6	-23.6	-34.0
Estonia	12.9	19.0	68.1	-55.2	-21.1	-34.1
Netherlands	16.7	16.0	67.3	-50.6	-15.2	-35.4
Russian Federation	15.7	31.7	52.6	-36.9	N.A.	N.A.
Israel	21.3	29.2	49.5	-28.2	-24.0	-4.2
Austria	27.3	23.1	49.6	-22.3	4.9	-27.2
Germany	27.2	23.8	49.0	-21.8	5.8	-27.6
Belgium	30.5	19.5	50.0	-19.5	-14.3	-5.2
Slovenia	27.2	28.9	43.8	-16.6	15.6	-32.2
Switzerland	36.4	28.7	35.0	1.4	0.5	0.9
Finland	38.1	32.1	29.8	8.3	27.5	-19.2
Poland	46.9	32.4	20.7	26.2	54.7	-28.5
France	54.3	18.8	27.0	27.3	40.6	-13.3
United Kingdom	50.9	25.8	23.3	27.6	19.5	8.1
Sweden	48.2	34.8	17.0	31.2	49.1	-17.9
Norway	55.5	24.5	20.0	35.5	39.1	-3.6
Ireland	60.3	18.8	20.8	39.5	35.9	3.6
Iceland	57.2	26.4	16.3	40.9	N.A.	N.A.

Sources: ESS Round 8: European Social Survey Round 8 Data (2016). Data file edition 1.0. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC. Design weights (DWEIGHT) are used for the calculations of the percentages to adjust for different sample selection probabilities. ESS Round 7: European Social Survey Round 7 Data (2014). Data file edition 2.1. NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC. For the calculations of the percentages per country post-stratification weights (PSPWGHT) are used to reduce both sampling error and potential non-response bias. (PSPWGHT is not available for Round 8 yet).

countries in the sample (Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovenia, Poland) there is a substantial drop in the support for a generous judgement.

The overall negative trend is undoubtedly related to the rise in the number of asylum applications in 2015 and 2016. That does not mean that the trend is most negative in countries that receive most asylum applicants. The correlation between the trend variable and the relative number of asylum applicants (the number of applicants per 1,000 inhabitants) is negligible (-0.05) and there is even a small positive correlation (+0.16) between support for generosity and the number of applicants (Table 4). Czech Republic, Estonia, Russia and Israel combine a low support for a generous judgement of asylum applications with a very limited inflow

of refugees. Also the Netherlands has a limited inflow compared to countries like Austria, Sweden and Germany. Although there is also a negative trend in the latter countries, there is substantially more support for a generous judgement of asylum applications than in the Netherlands.

There is hardly any association between the percentage of foreign born and the generosity variable (Table 5, column 2). A higher percentage of immigrants does not lead to a higher or lower support for generosity in the judgement of asylum applications. At the same time, there is a strong positive association between the proportion of foreign born residents in a country and the trend variable (+0.53). That means that the support for a generous judgement of asylum applications has dropped less

dramatically in countries with a high percentage of immigrants. This may be in line with the contact hypothesis, but with the present data it is not possible to establish the causality of this statistical association.

There are high correlations between the opinions on asylum policy and the views on other forms of immigration (Table 4). In countries where support for a generous judgement of asylum applications is lowest, many people tend to think that there should be a total ban on the immigration of unskilled labourers from poor countries ($r=-0.64$), people of different race or ethnic group ($r=-0.57$), and no Muslims from other countries ($r=-0.51$). In the top five of the countries with least support for a generous judgement of asylum applications, the Netherlands stands out as an anomaly, as the support for these total bans is very low. In the Netherlands, there are also not many people who think that some races or ethnic groups are born less intelligent, while this racist opinion is much more prevalent in other countries where the support for a generous judgement of asylum applications is low ($r=-0.61$).

DETERMINANTS OF SUPPORT FOR A GENEROUS JUDGEMENT OF ASYLUM APPLICATIONS

In the first model of the multiple regression analysis, individual characteristics of the respondents are included as determinants of the support for a generous judgement of asylum applications (Table 5). Citizens with higher education levels have a more positive attitude towards the admission and reception of refugees compared with lower-educated citizens. This finding is consistent with previous research (Scheepers *et al.* 2002; Semyonov *et al.* 2004; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2005) and confirms hypothesis 2a. There are no differences in this respect between those with a medium level of education and those with a low level of education. We also did not find an impact of professional status. Those who have a job or attend school are not more or less supportive of a generous judgement of asylum

applications than people who are not part of the workforce. The data do not allow a finer distinction of professional status, but future research could differentiate between people working in different sectors as it can be expected that the fear of competition by immigrants is dependent on someone's position on the labour market. In contrast to an expected positive impact based on previous research (Scheepers *et al.* 2002; Semyonov *et al.* 2004; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov 2015), higher income citizens have a more negative attitude towards the admission and reception of refugees.

Model 1 (Table 5) also includes the control variables gender, age and being a member of a minority ethnic group. While gender does not affect the support for a generous asylum policy, there is a positive effect of age. Older people are more supportive of a generous judgement of asylum applications than younger people. Next to that, members of minority ethnic groups advocate a more generous judgement than native Dutch.

Model 1 also includes two variables measuring the perceived presence of minorities. In line with the contact theory (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 2008) and earlier findings (Oliver & Wong 2003; Lubbers *et al.* 2006), citizens who share their neighbourhood with some or many members of minority ethnic groups have a more positive attitude towards the admission and reception of refugees than those who indicate that (almost) no one in their neighbourhood belongs to a minority ethnic group (hypothesis 1a). The perceived presence of immigrants in the country as a whole has an opposite effect, which confirms hypothesis 2b. The higher people estimate the presence of immigrants, the lower their support for a generous asylum policy.

In model 2, frequency of contact with members of minority ethnic groups is added to the model. In line with the contact hypothesis, more contacts lead to a higher tendency to support a generous judgement of asylum applications (hypothesis 1b). The effect of the presence of minority ethnic group members in the neighbourhood is

Table 4. Attitudes towards immigration, percentage foreign born and asylum applicants by ESS-country

	Asylum applicants 2015 + 2016 per 1000 inhabitants	Percentage foreign born	Percentage that thinks no unskilled labourers from poor countries should be allowed to come and live here	Percentage that thinks no people of different race or ethnic group should be allowed to come and live here	Percentage that thinks no Muslims from other countries should be allowed to come and live here ^a	Percentage that thinks some races or ethnic groups are born less intelligent ^a
Czech Republic	0.3	4.1	30.6	35.3	55.5	40.8
Estonia	0.3	14.7	26.9	19.2	40.4	33.5
Netherlands	3.9	12.1	8.0	4.3	12.6	6.3
Russian Federation	0.2	7.7	37.8	24.5	N.A.	N.A.
Israel	1.6	22.5	37.6	32.9	59.6	26.9
Austria	15.0	18.2	20.1	17.1	19.9	11.7
Germany	14.9	13.3	5.5	3.6	7.6	9.8
Belgium	5.6	16.3	9.2	9.0	19.7	18.0
Slovenia	0.8	11.7	13.6	11.9	20.1	23.2
Switzerland	8.0	27.9	7.0	5.5	12.2	14.7
Finland	6.9	6.0	7.5	6.1	17.1	12.7
Poland	0.6	1.6	14.1	18.5	33.7	11.4
France	2.4	11.8	13	10.5	14.1	11.8
United Kingdom	1.2	13.2	9.4	6.8	16.6	17.6
Sweden	19.4	17.0	2.2	0.8	3.7	2.4
Norway	6.6	14.8	2.3	1.7	8.4	3.0
Ireland	1.2	16.9	10.9	11.1	22.2	15.7
Iceland	4.4	12.6	1.7	2.4	N.A.	N.A.
<i>Correlations with support for generosity in judging asylum applications</i>						
Support 2016	+0.16	+0.06	-0.64	-0.57	-0.51	-0.61
Trend 2014-2016	-0.05	+0.53	-0.24	-0.25	-0.18	-0.21

Notes: ^a These percentages were taken from the 2014 survey, as these questions were not part of the 2016 questionnaire.

Sources: ESS Round 8; European Social Survey Round 8 Data (2016). Data file edition 1.0. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC. ESS Round 7; European Social Survey Round 7 Data (2014). Data file edition 2.1. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC. For the calculations of the percentages per country post-stratification weights (PSPWGHT) are used to reduce both sampling error and potential non-response bias. (PSPWGHT is not available for Round 8 yet); Eurostat, OECD (International Migration Outlook), UN.

Table 5. Multiple regression on generous treatment of asylum requests.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Beta
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	
(Constant)	2.790	0.154***	2.624	0.165***	2.836	0.162***	
Income	-0.024	0.011*	-0.026	0.011*	-0.031	0.011**	-0.074
Having a job and/or attending school	-0.056	0.068	-0.072	0.068	-0.056	0.067	-0.024
Medium level of education	-0.018	0.065	-0.037	0.065	-0.101	0.063	-0.042
High level of education	0.183	0.067**	0.155	0.068*	-0.083	0.067	-0.035
Male	-0.062	0.053	-0.06	0.053	-0.068	0.051	-0.031
Age	0.005	0.002**	0.006	0.002**	0.005	0.002**	0.077
Member of minority ethnic group	0.486	0.111***	0.46	0.111***	0.122	0.112	0.025
Some/many people of minority ethnic groups in current living area	0.203	0.053***	0.157	0.055**	0.170	0.053**	0.076
Of every 100 people in country how many born outside country	-0.009	0.002***	-0.009	0.002***	-0.005	0.002**	-0.070
Frequency of contact with members of minority ethnic groups							
once a week-once a month			0.174	0.08*	0.056	0.078	0.023
more than once per week			0.253	0.08**	0.100	0.078	0.045
Perception of ethnic threat					-0.450	0.027***	-0.400
R-square	0.050		0.055		0.196		

Note: * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$.

Source: ESS Round 7: European Social Survey Round 7 Data (2014). Data file edition 2.1. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC

slightly reduced due to the inclusion of contact frequency. Apparently, contact frequency partly mediates the effect of the presence of minority group members, which confirms hypothesis 1c. People who live in the neighbourhood with some or many minority members are more likely to have frequent contacts with minority members (see Table 6), and as a consequence, also more likely to support a generous judgement.

When perceived ethnic threat is included in the regression equation (model 3), the effect of perceived proportion of immigrants is substantially reduced (the B is lowered from 0.009 to 0.005). Ethnic threat partly mediates the effect of this variable, which confirms hypothesis 2d. The higher people estimate the proportion of immigrants, the more ethnic threat they perceive ($r = +0.22$; $p = 0.000$). Level of education and being a member of a minority ethnic group do not

have a significant effect on the support for a generous judgement in model 3. That means that ethnic threat fully mediates the effect of these two factors. Highly educated people and members of minority ethnic groups perceive less ethnic threat than their counterparts, and therefore are more supportive of a generous judgement asylum applications.

Also the effect of contact frequency is fully mediated by perceived ethnic threat. An ANOVA test shows that there is a significant association between ethnic threat and contact frequency ($F = 19.7$; $p = 0.000$; $\text{Eta} = 0.149$). Lower contact frequencies lead to a higher perceived ethnic threat, and consequently, to lower support for a generous judgement to a generous judgement of asylum applications. The inclusion of perceived ethnic threat does not have an impact on the effect of the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood. An Independent t-test shows

Table 6. Frequency of contact with members of minority ethnic groups by perceived ethnic composition of the neighbourhood

Frequency of contact with members of minority ethnic groups when out and about	How many people members of minority ethnic groups are living in your current neighbourhood?	
	Almost none	Some or many people
Less than once a month-never	24.8	7.5
Once a week – once a month	36.8	25.0
More than once a week	38.4	67.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>913</i>	<i>1001</i>

Note: Chi-square = 187.6; df = 2; p = 0.000; Kendall's tau-c = +0.324

Source: ESS Round 7: European Social Survey Round 7 Data (2014). Data file edition 2.1. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

that living in a neighbourhood with some or many minority ethnic groups members does not lead to a higher or lower level of perceived ethnic threat ($t = -1.48$; $p = 0.14$).

As can be concluded from the standardised Betas in model 3, perceived ethnic threat (hypothesis 2c) is by far the strongest predictor of support for a generous judgement of asylum applications (Beta = 0.400). The effects of the other predictors are reduced or even nullified once this mediating variable is included in the model. Income is the only exception to this rule. The effect of income is even slightly higher once perceived ethnic threat is included in the model. The negative effect of income is not mediated as higher income citizens perceive less ethnic threat than low income citizens (there is a small, but significant, negative correlation of -0.10 between income and perceived ethnic threat). This finding corresponds to the study of Lubbers *et al.* (2006) who found that people with higher incomes had more reservations towards the foundation of an asylum seeker centre in their neighbourhood than lower incomes. They did not find 'perceptions of individual economic threat' as an explanatory mechanism, but showed instead that the desire of people to maintain existing social status and power relations was driving the objections to an asylum seeker centre. It may be hypothesised that a (perceived) mismatch between their status and those of asylum seekers may

lead to the fear of decreasing social and cultural resources and possibly also the fear of declining housing values, despite the fact that there is no evidence of actual decline in housing value after the placement of an asylum seeker centre.⁶

CONCLUSION

The effect of the (perceived) presence of out-groups members on the attitudes towards asylum policy appears to vary between different scale levels. At the national level, the presence of immigrants is overestimated. The higher people estimate the size of the immigrant groups in the Netherlands, the less support they express for a generous asylum policy. At the neighbourhood level, more interethnic exposure leads to more support for a generous policy. This may indicate that the ethnic competition theory works at a macro level, while at the neighbourhood level the contact hypothesis applies. Contacts with (or at least exposure to) out-group members works as a counterforce to the negative sentiments towards immigrants (see also Oliver and Wong 2003). Unfortunately, the dataset did not include data on the actual neighbourhood of residents. Future research could delve deeper in these issues by looking at the relation between actual group sizes and perceived group sizes.

Next to that, it would be instructive to differentiate between more scale levels to resolve the apparent contradiction of contact and threat theories. In their research on support for anti-immigration political parties in the UK, Biggs and Knauss (2012) hypothesised that contact involves frequent interactions predominantly occurring over shorter distances, whereas threat can be perceived over greater distances. In line with the contact hypothesis, they found a negative effect of minority size on voting for anti-immigration political parties in the UK at the neighbourhood level. In line with the threat hypothesis, they found the opposite effect at the city level. Additionally, the regional scale is probably relevant in predicting where people perceive most economic competition from migrants. Both in the US and Europe, anti-immigration attitudes appear to be most prevalent in areas that suffered most from automation, globalisation, and economic restructuring (Alba & Foner, 2017). More systematic research is needed to examine whether the strength of the regional economy is a better predictor of anti-immigration attitudes than the size of the immigrant population.

Notes

1. Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom
2. See: http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology/ess_methodology/survey_specifications.html for all survey specifications
3. A multiple regression on the basis of weighted data gives basically the same results as the unweighted version that is shown in this paper.
4. The percentage of immigrants plus the children of immigrants is 21.7. See: <http://statline.cbs.nl> (Statistics Netherlands)
5. Respondents who identified themselves as a member of a non-Dutch minority had the same questionnaire as the other respondents. Obviously, there is a significant association between the variables 'member of a minority ethnic group or not' and the contact variable (Chi-square = 50.6; df = 2; p = 0.000). This does not lead to overspecification of the model as the association is not very strong (Cramer's V = 0.16).
6. See: <https://www.nu.nl/binnenland/4165865/komst-azc-heeft-weinig-invloed-woningmarkt.html>

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