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Chapter 5 Gender and attitudes toward immigrants: exploring threat perceptions¹

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Abstract

Throughout the years, great attention has been paid to the gender gap in political attitudes. Whereas the differences reported by scholars are not large, they are not negligible either. Consequently, the literature highlights the divergent preferences of women and men regarding such issues as public welfare spending and punishment, not to mention issues that particularly affect women, such as gender quotas. Yet, there are many political topics in which there is a lack of stable trends regarding gender effects. This seems to be the case with attitudes toward immigration.

This chapter aims to enhance our understanding of the effects of gender on public attitudes toward immigrants. It provides a comprehensive literature review of the topic, complemented by a brief empirical analysis of nine countries. In line with previous studies, the tendency for women (*vis-à-vis* men) to perceive immigrants as a hindrance to the economy is corroborated. By contrast, women seem to be less concerned about immigration's impact on crime –which is a less steady output in the literature. The broadly hinted propensity of women to positively appraise immigrants' influence on their countries' culture is not confirmed, proving that the relationship between gender and attitudes toward immigrants is complex and multifaceted.

Throughout the years, great attention has been paid to the gender gap in political attitudes. Whereas the differences reported by scholars are not large, they are not negligible either. Consequently, the literature highlights the divergent preferences of women and men regarding such issues as public welfare spending and redistribution (Campbell, 2012; Howell and Day, 2000; Kamas and Preston, 2018) and crime and punishment (Applegate et al, 2002, Nellis, 2009; Toch & Maguire, 2014), not to mention issues that particularly affect women, such as gender quotas (Möhring and Teney, 2020). Similarly, women are usually reported to lean more toward the left of the political spectrum than men (Dassonneville, 2021), which has an effect on their vote choice (Abendschön &

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Steinmetz 2014; Giger 2009; Inglehart & Norris 2003). Furthermore, several studies report that women are significantly underrepresented among radical right voters (for an overview, see Coffé 2018). Yet, there are many political topics in which there is a lack of stable trends regarding gender effects.

This seems to be the case with attitudes toward immigration. As previous research concluded, gender interacts with opinions about immigrants in complex ways (Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014; Mudde 2007). In fact, there are many inconsistencies and contradictions between the several studies that consider gender as a potential explanatory factor behind attitudes toward immigration. Thus, clear divergences between and trends for women or men are not easily perceptible, as we describe in the next section. Curiously, among the pieces of research that analyse the perception of threats possibly associated with immigration, the outcomes are far more uniform. Women (*vis-à-vis* men) tend to be more concerned about the immigrants' impact on their countries' economies (economic threat) but less so about the influence they might have on the national culture. Concerning the security threat, which, comparatively, has less often been the object of research, the results are, once again, rather contradictory. In general, what stands out is an absence of studies that focus specifically on the role of gender on attitudes toward immigration.

This chapter aims to enhance our understanding of the effects of gender on public attitudes toward immigrants. It provides a comprehensive literature review of the topic, complemented by a brief empirical analysis of the perception of the three aforementioned threats – economic, cultural, and security – in the nine countries presented in Chapter 3.

Notwithstanding the recurrent employment of the “gender binary” classification, composed of women and men, in the field of political science, the concept of gender is much more complex and richer than that, notably in its relationship to sex. In an effort to undermine biological determinism, the second-wave feminists have (successfully) endeavoured to disseminate the idea that “sex” should be defined as the biological aspects of being women and men; whereas “gender” should relate to what is culturally determined, to the roles and behaviours deemed typical of each of the sexes, which are likely to vary from region to region (Bittner and Grant, 2017: 1021). Accordingly, the term “gender” is generally preferred to “sex” in the social sciences, since it demonstrates that researchers are aware that not all differences between males and females are biologically determined (Pryzgodna and Chrisler, 2000: 555).

Over time, these rather narrow conceptions of gender and sex also started to be criticized, with both the naturalness of sex and the construction of gender being put into question (see, e.g., Butler 1999; Hatemi et al. 2012) – but that is too complex and multifaceted a debate to be looked at in depth here. Meanwhile, and crucially, there is a growing awareness that neither gender nor sex are binary, and that sex and gender do not always ‘match’ in the traditional sense (Bittner and Grant, 2017: 1022). Instead, gender/sex are increasingly conceived as multidimensional, dynamic, and responsive to both biology and culture (Hyde et al, 2019: 184).

The oversimplification of these two concepts in political science – as well as in most other fields – is even more striking when the measurements used by scholars are considered, as is described very well by Bittner and Grant (2017). Among political scientists, specifically, sex and gender are almost invariably used interchangeably, especially in quantitative work, with sex being used as a proxy for gender in survey instruments. Precisely, a “sex variable” with two possible categories (male and female) is recorded, but then the outcomes refer to the respondent’s gender, as the term “gender gap” indicates. And what is more, very often, the respondent is not even directly inquired about their sex, with it instead being determined by survey interviewers (Bittner and Grant, 2017: 1020).

A new strand of publications seeks to raise awareness about the lack of accuracy and precision that the use of a binary sex variable as a proxy for gender provokes, besides denouncing its failure to include non-binary people. Alternative ways of conceptualizing and measuring gender/sex are being explored, and social and health scholars are being called on to shift towards inclusive measurement of gender in quantitative research (Bittner and Grant, 2017; Fraser et al, 2020; Hyde et al, 2019, among others). Yet, this avenue is still in its infancy, and this chapter, which draws on secondary data (CSES), relies on the traditional and, so far, predominant binary gender/sex classification.

The chapter proceeds with a revision of the main trends about the association between gender and attitudes toward immigration, followed by an outline of the main theoretical mechanisms which might explain these associations. The following section presents an empirical analysis of the association between gender and attitudes about immigrants using data from the nine countries presented in Chapter 3. Lastly, we discuss and reflect on the implications of our main findings and suggest further avenues of research.

Gender and attitudes toward immigration

Most empirical research on the individual factors influencing public perceptions of the overall development of immigration includes gender/sex in its models, though usually in a secondary position. In other words, gender is seldom the focus of the research (but see Berg, 2010; Valentova and Alieva, 2014; Ponce, 2017). Instead, it usually simply assumes the role of a *control variable*. This review will emphasize those studies which have been most prominent in debates of political science and that encompass the evaluation of gender effects, but also reference research conducted in other disciplines of social sciences.

Focusing on the factor being studied by each published piece, or on the *dependent variable*, we have identified three broad strands of research. The first, which comprises numerous studies, focuses on a general measurement of attitudes toward immigrants or on the number of foreign citizens which would be admitted in the country in general. In these studies, immigrants are typically taken as a homogenous group, without further specifications or implications. The second strand of research explores variations in the public perception of immigrants according to their endogenous characteristics, which usually refer to the immigrants' legal status (regular or irregular), to their geographic origin (rich vs. poor countries, and specific geographic areas), or to the type of immigration flow (labour, asylum, or irregular). Lastly, a more recent strand – to which this chapter relates – has aimed to disentangle the public's propensity to perceive immigrants according to specific threats, notably, economic, cultural and security. Even though, overall, the role of gender is far from steady, and although clear trends are hardly perceptible, the picture becomes somewhat more encouraging when we reach the third block of studies, as we elaborate below.

Regarding the *first strand* of analysis, research conducted in the US during the 1990s indicated that females held more favourable views than male respondents with respect to larger intakes of immigrants (Chandler and Tsai, 2001). Building upon the data provided by the 1995 International Social Survey Programme, conducted in 24 countries, O'Rourke and Sinnott (2006) sought to assess the influence of socioeconomic and sociodemographic properties (including gender) and political attitudes among public opinion with regard to immigration. The study of a possible link between attitudes toward trade and those toward immigration suggested that females

demonstrated attitudes which were less anti-immigrant than males (although the coefficient is statistically insignificant).

However, further research on public attitudes toward immigration, conducted between 1975 and 2000 in Canada, came to the opposite conclusion. Namely, Wilkes et al. (2008) suggested that men were less likely than women to aim to restrict immigration. Similarly, comparative research carried out in 1995-1997, covering 22 countries, also explored public perception of the intensity of inflows (number of immigrants). Regarding the role of gender, this investigation asserted that males were more likely than females to be more open to a greater intake of immigrants (Mayda, 2006).

Using the European context as a starting point and drawing on data extracted from the Eurobarometer, further cross-national analysis of public attitudes toward the general presence of immigrants originating in countries that were not member-states of the EU suggested that there were no gender effects (Freeman and Kessler, 2005). Also, Davidov & Meuleman (2012) addressed the willingness to allow immigrants into the country in several European countries and observed no difference between males and females.

Still within the first strand, a related field of research aims to understand the support for radical right parties. Since the position adopted with respect to immigration is a salient issue for these parties, and that public opinion regarding immigration is a major explanatory factor for party choice, we have decided to refer to some of these studies here as well. A seminal study published in the mid-2000s explored the gender gap in electoral support for radical right parties in Austria, Denmark, and France (Givens, 2004). Drawing on the results of Danish 1998 Election Survey and the French 1997 Post Election survey², the research tested the extent to which the observation of this gender gap reflected the differences in the attitudes of males and females towards immigration. The outcomes highlighted a lack of empirical support for the hypothesis that females are less anti-immigrant than males, given that the results from France and Denmark were contradictory (Givens, 2004). French female citizens were more likely than males to hold the perception that there were too many immigrants in their country, whilst the opposite trend was observed among Danish

² The immigration variable was not available in the Austrian study.

respondents. Moreover, the gender effect on attitudes toward immigrants was insignificant in Denmark (Givens, 2004).

Also, in the mid-2010s, the thesis of a gender gap regarding electoral support for radical right parties was revisited through comparative research conducted across 12 Western European countries (Immerzeel et al. 2015). Similar to the study mentioned before, this one also aimed to explore the extent to which the gender gap could be explained by the prevalence of gender-differentiated nativist attitudes. With the exception of France, the research found that men were more likely than women to vote for a radical right party. However, this trend could not be explained by the slightly higher prevalence of nativist attitudes among males, as compared to females (Immerzeel et al. 2015). Further research conducted on the French 2012 presidential elections highlighted that the Front National obtained a similar score among women and men (Mayer 2015). This investigation suggested that the observation of a gender gap regarding the electoral support of the radical right can be envisaged as contextually-dependent (Mayer 2015).

Regarding the *second strand* of research, focused on the endogenous characteristics of the foreign citizens, a study conducted in the US in the early 2000s reported that female respondents demonstrated a high level of opposition to the rights and entitlements of legal immigrants, and the difference to that of males was considered statistically significant. However, in terms of anti-illegal immigrant attitudes, gender had no significant effect (Chandler and Tsai, 2001). Yet, a much more recent piece, also conducted in the US, reveals that male citizens are more in favour of an increase in “patrolling the border against illegal immigrants” (Mangum, 2019, Table 1). It remains unclear if the disparity between both studies is due to the different wording of the questions or an effect of the passage of time.

Further comparative research covering 24 countries pointed out that females seemed to exhibit attitudes which were significantly less anti-refugee than males (O’Rourke and Sinnott, 2006). The analysis of public attitudes toward government policy on labour immigration highlighted that gender differences were not statistically significant (Mayda, 2006, 514-515). A similar investigation conducted in the European context regarding the public’s acceptance of labour immigration restated the lack of gender effects (Freeman and Kessler, 2005).

Drawing on the results of the European Social Survey that took place in 2002, a research article focusing on the effects of the geographic origin of immigrants suggested that gender was the single control variable to evidence consistent effects on public attitudes, unlike income or age. Thereby, female respondents were observed to have a greater propensity than males to oppose immigration from richer countries but were significantly more inclined to support inflows from poorer countries (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007).³ Supported by a longitudinal approach (2002-2010), research on Europe suggested that males were more likely to support admission of immigrants from poorer countries when the economic context was positive, but no overall effects were identified during periods of economic depression – if any, the statistical difference is in the opposite direction (Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014).

These conclusions were disputed by further research based on the same data and using a similar dependent variable (Gorodzeisky, 2011). This research distinguished four categories of citizens with regard to their level of agreement with the exclusion/admission of European immigrants: total exclusionists, poorer country exclusionists (who favour inclusion of immigrants from richer European countries), richer country exclusionists (who favour admission of foreigners originating in poorer European countries), and those which were pro-admission in general. This investigation indicated that the odds of being ‘total exclusionists’ tended to be higher among females than males. In parallel, males seemed more supportive of accepting immigrants from ‘richer countries’ but did not differ from females in their exclusionary attitudes toward European immigrants from poorer countries (Gorodzeisky, 2011).

One of the few studies to examine gender as the main explanatory variable explored the extent to which women have more negative attitudes toward Muslims than other immigrant groups. Drawing on the 2014 ESS (excluding Israel from the original sample), this investigation concluded that gender differences were absent from attitudes toward poor immigrants, regardless of their origins (Ponce, 2010). However, female respondents were significantly more likely to hold a negative perception of Muslims compared to males. This finding was associated with the increased salience of gender egalitarianism in Europe and the recurrent stereotyping of Muslims as gender illiberal and irreconcilable with sex equality. Remarkably, the female gender effects toward

³ The authors nevertheless highlight that these coefficients were only flirting with conventional levels of significance in some cases.

Muslim immigration remained significant after controlling for a range of individual-level and country-level variables (Ponce, 2010).

The *third strand* of empirical studies aims to disentangle survey questions which associate immigrants with specific threat perceptions, notably, economic, cultural and security threats. Pichler (2010) focused on the perception of the impact of immigration in host societies in terms of the economic and cultural dimensions. Drawing on the data from the first three rounds of the ESS (2002-2007), the research suggests that women and men followed a distinct pattern of threat perception with regards to immigration. Therefore, public perception of the threat to the economy posed by immigrants was characterized by higher levels among females than males, whereas the opposite trend was observed regarding the cultural threat. From the author's perspective, these two opposing trends help explain the lack of gender effects in public perception of an overall threat from immigration (Pichler, 2010: 9).

Supported by five rounds of the ESS (2004-2012), comparative research concluded that males exhibited a stronger negative perception than females of immigrants' contribution to the national culture and quality of life in general. By contrast, females showed higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes than males regarding the immigrants' contribution to the economy (Chasapoulous and Williams, 2019). Based on the same data, preceding research also indicated that male respondents were more likely than females to perceive immigration as advantageous to the economy. In parallel, the male respondents seemed less supportive than females of the idea that immigration was good for the culture (at least when the economic context is positive) (Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014). In short, these three studies concurred that females were more likely to perceive immigration as an economic threat than a cultural one.

Research conducted in the US explored the relationship between race/ethnicity and the public perception that immigration contributes to crime (Higgins et al. 2010). This investigation suggested that males demonstrated less inclination than females to view the relationship between immigration and crime as problematic. Thus, females held stronger perceptions of immigration as a crime threat (Higgins et al. 2010). Additional research conducted in the US evaluated public perception of immigrants' impact on job competition, immigrants' contribution to the national economy, and the perception of this social phenomenon as being a cause for the increase of crime rates. Females were more likely to disagree that immigrants take jobs from Americans but were

also less inclined to perceive immigration as advantageous to the economy (Berg, 2010). Moreover, this investigation suggested that the perception of immigration as a cause for the increase of crime rates was weaker among females than males (Berg, 2010).

Another of the few available investigations focused on gender differences explored the perception of immigration-related threats (crime, job market and welfare) in the general population, as well as among residents with a migratory background (first and second-generation immigrants), in Luxemburg in the late 2000s (Valentova and Alieva, 2014). Regarding the native population, the analysis highlighted a significant interaction between gender and the perception of a crime threat, as the general anti-immigrant attitudes of female respondents were strongly associated with the perception of crime threats. A lack of gender effects was highlighted regarding the job and welfare threats (Valentova and Alieva, 2014).

In addition, first-generation immigrant women residing in Luxemburg were found to be more concerned about the cultural threat than men, who were more worried about the threat of the out-group size. The perception of immigration as a job threat was more significant among second-generation immigrant females than among males. The first trend was associated with the immigrant women's engagement with the education of their children, whilst the second trend was associated with the low levels of education and the occupation profile of the latter group (Valentova and Alieva, 2014).

In short, the available literature suggests that women hold attitudes which are generally less anti-immigrant than men, but that gender effects toward Muslim immigrants are very significant in Europe. However, other research emphasised the lack of gender effects on attitudes toward immigrants or that males were observed to have a higher predisposition to accept a larger intake of foreign citizens. The lack of gender effects or the existence of merely minor variations thereof were also identified regarding citizens' attitudes toward immigrants according to their regular/irregular status or the type of immigration flow (labour, asylum, irregular). Remarkably, the research on Europe contained contradictory conclusions concerning the gender effects on the citizens' acceptance of immigrants according to the income level of their country of origin. Regarding the levels of threat perception, gender effects seemed to be significant, as females tended to associate immigration with economic concerns, whilst males tended to perceive it as a

cultural threat. Research in the US lead to opposite conclusions regarding gender effects over the perception of immigration as a crime threat.

Potential theoretical mechanisms behind the gender effect

The growing literature on attitudes toward immigrants and immigration suggests that these are affected by both individual-level and country-level factors (Davidov et al, 2020: 554). Concerning the former (which is the main focus of this chapter and the other chapters in Section 2), the possible causal chain of factors that potentially explain opposition to immigration is extremely complex (Heath et al, 2020: Figure 1), and comprises a varied set of factors, ranging from socio-demographic characteristics (notably, education and socio-economic position, as discussed in Chapter 7) to social distance from immigrants and perceived size of the immigrant population (see Chapter 13), perception of threats attributed to immigrants (see Chapter 14), and the weight of ideology (see Chapter 10), partisanship (see Chapter 11) and party choice (Davidov et al, 2020; Heath et al, 2020).

In an effort to organize the several explanatory models, some authors have identified two main distinct intellectual traditions as dominant in accounting for anti-immigrant sentiments (e.g. Fietkau and Hansen, 2018; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). The first theoretical foundation, which is grounded in political economy, refers to the role of economic self-interest or to the competition over resources between immigrants and natives – the so-called labour market competition hypothesis, whereas the second one, grounded in political psychology, emphasizes the role of group-related attitudes and symbols in shaping attitudes towards immigrants. Possible conflicts emerge primarily in association with cultural, ethnic, and religious differences – the so called sociotropic approaches or questions of identity (Fietkau and Hansen, 2018; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014).

The first chain of scholarship, despite being plentiful, tends to yield poorer results (for instance, Dancygier & Donnelly, 2013; Fetzer, 2000; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010; Malhotra et al., 2013 – but see Semyonov et al, 2008). Consequently, the available literature suggests that “there is little accumulated evidence that citizens primarily form attitudes about immigration based on its effects on their personal economic situation” (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014: 227). By contrast, the research outputs derived from the noneconomic strand of political analysis seem more

encouraging – although it is important to remember that this body of research is much more heterogeneous and more likely to raise the spectre of endogeneity⁴ than the first one (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Within the latter tradition, opposition to immigration is often found to be rooted in cultural concerns (e.g., Chandler & Tsai, 2001;), in negative stereotypes/prejudices about immigrants or ethnic minorities (Kessler and Freeman, 2005; Lee and Fiske, 2006; Fiske, 2012), in the role of emotions (Gadarian & Albertson, 2014; Landmann et al 2019), or in the function of values (Davidov et al, 2020).

When we turn our attention to the mechanisms that are likely to be behind the effects of gender on public attitudes toward immigration, the same two general theoretical foundations apply, namely, the self-interest and the sociotropic approaches, though not necessarily with these labels. While, as previously mentioned, there is a relative dearth of publications focusing specifically on gender and attitudes toward immigration, these two approaches are well-documented and are even employed to explain slightly different factors, like the gender gap in the support for wealth redistribution and government spending (Shorrocks and Grasso, 2020). By exploring these two large branches of theory, it appears reasonable to expect women to be both more in favour of and more opposed to immigrants (*vis-à-vis* men), as we outline in the remainder of this section.

Drawing on the economic consequences derived from immigration, the development of inflows of low-qualified male workers will increase the supply of low-skilled labour in the host society. In light of higher rates of females' exclusion from the labour market, the expansion of job competition is more likely to be perceived as a direct threat by males than by females (Immerzeel et al. 2015). Consequently, the geographic areas with higher rates of unemployment and immigration will observe stronger levels of anti-immigration attitudes among male workers (Givens, 2004).

From a different perspective, in Europe, females tend to possess, on average, lower skills than males. They have been largely excluded from the top tiers of the labour market and are more economically vulnerable. Hence, from a job competition perspective, women could be expected to support immigration from countries with higher qualification levels to prevent enhanced competition – although that is not always the case (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). Similarly, the

⁴ Endogeneity means that an explanatory variable correlates with the unobserved factors, possibly leading to inconsistent parameter estimates.

less favourable attitudes toward immigration among females in Canada is associated with self-interest, as the females' higher representation in fragile and precarious labour market positions enhanced their vulnerability to the increase in competition from newcomers (Wilkes et al., 2008).

Another line of reasoning, greatly echoed in the literature since Gilligan (1982), argues that “women are more likely than men to think of themselves within interconnected relationships rather than in isolation and thus to develop an ethics of ‘care’” (Shorrocks and Grasso, 2020: 290). This trend supposedly reflects a concern for protecting the vulnerable and for accepting inequality as a cause of other problems such as violence (Wagnsson et al, 2020: 793). In the same vein, an old strand of literature has been claiming for decades that girls and boys are socialized differently, with important consequences on adult roles and functioning (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). Notably, female socialization experiences stress connection and concern for others from early childhood, whereas boys' socialization stresses separation, independence, and autonomy (Hurwitz & Smithey, 1998). This makes women more prone to share positive feelings toward immigrants.

There is another well-established stream of studies that relate gender with perceptions of the threat of crime. This branch of scholarship emerges as relevant for this chapter, since foreigners' impact on crime rates tends to be perceived as particularly negative (Semyonov et al., 2008) – although, over the last two decades, criminologists have proven the notion that immigrants increase crime to be false (McCann & Boateng, 2020). Two main conclusions are commonly reported: the first one states that women tend to report higher levels of fear of crime than men (Nellis, 2009; Toch & Maguire, 2014); the second argues that women tend to be less supportive of aggressive/violent actions (Applegate et al, 2002; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Nellis, 2009). The explanations usually offered for the “women and peace hypothesis” are derived from the same kind of two-folded theories presented above: (1) structural differences, such as feminization of poverty or sexual aggression, which lead to women having more to lose from a war, for example, and (2) social forces and gender roles, which harkens back to the gendered social learning and socialization (Stevens et al, 2020: 48). This mix of complex issues makes it difficult to predict gender behaviour regarding the relationship between attitudes toward immigrants and a perceived threat of crime.

Gender Gap in Threat Perceptions in Nine Countries

With the trend of international migration continuing to increase, analysing public opinion on immigrants remains indispensable. It is rather common that immigrants (or foreigners) “are perceived as a threat to the social, political and economic order as well as a threat to the cultural homogeneity and the national identity of the state” (Semyonov et al, 2008: 6). Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 present gender differences regarding the economic, cultural, and security threats, respectively, as discussed in Chapter 3. For each threat, both the average and the percentages for each gender are shown in the upper corner of each country panel. Recall that the scale of possible answers ranges from 1 (lowest level of anti-immigration sentiment) to 5 (highest level of anti-immigration sentiment). Additionally, bivariate tests of women and men by country for each of the three threats were performed (data not shown).

[Figure 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 about here]

Four main comments are warranted. *First*, in line with the literature, none of the three threat perceptions portrays very pronounced gender differences, which makes it difficult to discern trends from the figures by eye. This confirms that gender is not a very strong determinant of attitudes toward immigrants, in comparison to other individual-level determinants like social class or ideology, as discussed in Chapters 7 and 10, respectively.

Second, the traceable gender differences do not follow the same shape for all threat perceptions; in fact, at times, they follow opposite patterns. Whereas women tend to share more anti-immigrant opinions concerning the economic threat (Figure 5.1), this pattern is reversed when looking at the perceived crime threat (Figure 5.3), where it is the men who reveal, on average, a more negative position toward immigrants. In other words, women are less convinced (vis-à-vis men) that immigrants are generally good for their country’s economy, but they are also less convinced that immigrants increase crime rates in the respondents’ country. As for the cultural threat (Figure 5.2), no clear trend emerges. Whereas in Australia, Germany, Switzerland and the USA, men are more convinced that immigrants damage the countries’ culture, in France, Italy and Portugal the reverse is observed. But, of all nine countries, only for Switzerland and the USA are the differences of the bivariate tests significant, while between Britain and Canada there is no gender distinction at all. The fact that we found contradictory results for the gender factor when analysing the perceived threats reveals the potential inappropriateness of constructing an index aggregating the three threats – as done in the other chapters of this section.

Third, despite the fact that the gender gap – even with respect to the economic and security threats – is not very pronounced, our results are very consistent for these two threats across countries. Concerning the economic threat, the pattern previously described (tendency for women to be more anti-immigrant) can be observed in all countries, except for Germany, where the average is precisely the same for both men and women. As for the security threat, in all countries but Portugal, women are more pro-immigrant. Furthermore, five out of the nine countries show a significant gender gap for each of the two threat perceptions in the bivariate tests. The findings regarding the economic threat are in line with the very consistent outcomes of previous investigations, concerning both the US (Berg, 2010) and Europe (Chasapopoulous and Williams, 2019; Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014; Pichler, 2010; Valentova and Alieva, 2014). There does seem to be an overall – light, yet consistent – tendency for women to be less inclined to perceive immigration as a contributing factor for the economy. By contrast, our results on the security threat are less in accordance with the literature, largely because the general outcome is much less consolidated concerning this threat. While some scholars report that women are less prone to associate immigration and crime rates (e.g Berg, 2010) – which is in line with our findings – others come to the opposite conclusion (Higgins et al. 2010; Valentova and Alieva, 2014).

Concerning the cultural threat, our findings (Figure 5.2) are less consistent than previous research suggests. In fact, there seems to be a consensus in the literature around the idea that men (more than women) believe that culture is generally harmed by immigrants (Pichler, 2010; Chasapopoulous and Williams, 2019; Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014). This uniformity is not at all visible in our data. Moreover, our findings suggest a lack of overall effects from the 2015 asylum crisis in Europe and the subsequent political mobilization of gender nationalism (Hadj Abdou, 2017) over the intensity of gender effects regarding the perception of immigration as a threat to national culture. Despite the claims made by Marine Le Pen (the leader of the *Rassemblement National* in France) in 2016, that the migratory crisis would signal the end of women's rights (Hadj Abdou, 2017), the gender gap in the perception of a cultural threat is more evident in France than in other European countries included in this study and which received the largest number of asylum applications in 2018-2019 (Germany and Italy; Eurostat, 2021).

Fourth, there is no clear gender gap variation across the nine countries. The US and Switzerland are the only countries where the gender differences are significant for each of the three threats, but they are *not* the countries where the largest differences are observed. For instance,

concerning the economic threat, Britain, France and Portugal present slightly greater (and also significant) differences. Furthermore, there is a lack of a clear pattern among settler nations (like the US, Canada, and Australia), where immigration is part of the national identity and which welcome larger intakes of immigrants in comparison to those countries where this social phenomenon is more recent (Hollifield et al. 2014). Thus, the timing of inflows seems to have a weak effect on the size of the gender gaps observed in the countries included in this study.

A final reflection is in order with respect to what might explain the stable results that we have obtained regarding the gender differences on the economic and security threat perceptions across the countries. Theoretically, the aforementioned labour market competition hypothesis, as it relates to economic self-interest, is very likely to partly justify why women are slightly more reluctant to assume that immigrants are generally good for their country's economy, not only in our data but also in most previous scholarship (e.g., Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014; Pichler, 2010). In fact, employment rates for women remain lower than those of men everywhere in the world – 12 p.p. lower in the EU in 2018; 8.1 p.p. in the USA in 2020⁵. Also, there is a generalized tendency for women to be overrepresented in precarious jobs.⁶ These two facts presumably explain why women hold greater fear than men about newcomers from an economic standpoint (Wilkes et al., 2008). However, a dive into our data (not shown) reveals that respondents' socio-economic status is not sufficient to explain the gender differences we find regarding this threat. This suggests, in the vein of Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014), that explanations of a more sociotropic nature should be pursued in future research. It is possible that economic issues go beyond the ethics of 'care' that disproportionately characterize women, so other factors ought to be analysed.

Concerning the perception of crime threat, we stated earlier that predictions were hard to draw, given the mixed possible mechanisms at play. However, our results (Figure 5.3) emerge as surprisingly stable across countries; in fact, more stable than previous scholarship would lead one to expect (Berg, 2010; Higgins et al. 2010). If women tend to have higher levels of fear of crime (Nellis, 2009; Toch & Maguire, 2014), why are they less concerned that immigrants increase crime

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20200306-1> ; <https://www.statista.com/statistics/192396/employment-rate-of-women-in-the-us-since-1990/> (accessed 21 February 2021).

⁶ file:///Users/anaespiritoso/Downloads/Study_precarious_work_EN.pdf (accessed 21 February 2021).

rates? The most obvious answer is that the ethics of ‘care’ renders women more likely to share positive feelings toward immigrants. But Stevens and his co-authors advocate two other rather interesting potential reasons. The first one is that women and men are likely to perceive threat and security differently – more self-centred in the male case, and more geared toward keeping the community in mind in the female case. The second one is that “women are more confident about government’s ability to deal with security threats in the future” (Stevens et al, 2021: 47).

Final Notes

The nature of attitudes toward or beliefs about immigrants is complex and multifaceted, and scholars are far from having an overall picture of what affects them. Hence, contradictory results between publications are rather common. One possible reason for this inconsistency is the lack of precision of the questions asked in questionnaires, implying that validity might be compromised. First, when surveyed about “immigrants”, (only) one fifth to one third of the people consider immigrants in general, as opposed to immigrants of specific ethnicities, races or origins, implying that survey respondents do not often have “comparable” groups in mind (Braun et al., 2013). Second, the dimension of life that the researcher chooses to focus on as that which might be affected by the influx of immigrants is also likely to matter. In other words, some people might think that immigrants are beneficial in some dimensions of life (e.g., cultural) but not in others. The reversed gender pattern identified in this chapter regarding the economic and security threat perceptions is indicative of that. Having said this, making sure to specify all possible variations in every question would be a Herculean task, and the results would be equally unsatisfactory, only this time due to the high level of specificity of the dependent variable.

What was said in the previous paragraph applies to all scholarship on immigration attitudes, but, when we aim to tackle the role of gender, the imprecision of results may even increase. Women are a heterogenous group, having less in common with each other than with similar groups of men (Campbell et al., 2010: 174), particularly when the issue at stake is not related to gender. Hence the reduced number of issues where some kind of gender gap is systematically encountered. And immigration is certainly not one of those. It is therefore no wonder that so few studies on immigration attitudes have gender as the central feature.

That being said, we found two light yet consistent tendencies across countries which are worth noting. First, in line with previous studies (e.g., Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014; Pichler, 2010), there is an overall tendency for women (vis-à-vis men) to perceive immigration as a hindrance to the economy. While part of this might be attributed to women's lower economic conditions, further research is necessary to properly disentangle the mechanisms behind this outcome. Second, women seem to be less concerned about immigration's impact on crime, despite their higher levels of fear of crime (Nellis, 2009; Toch & Maguire, 2014). Although Stevens and co-authors (2021) have thrown up good clues as to why that might be the case, we are far from fully comprehending this result, but the fact that it is less steady in the literature makes understanding it a lower priority.

It remains unclear why our data do not confirm the tendency of women to positively appraise immigrants' influence on their countries' culture, which has been broadly suggested before (e.g., Berg, 2010; Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014; Pichler, 2010). But this is yet another sign that the relationship between gender and attitudes toward immigrants is on shaky ground.

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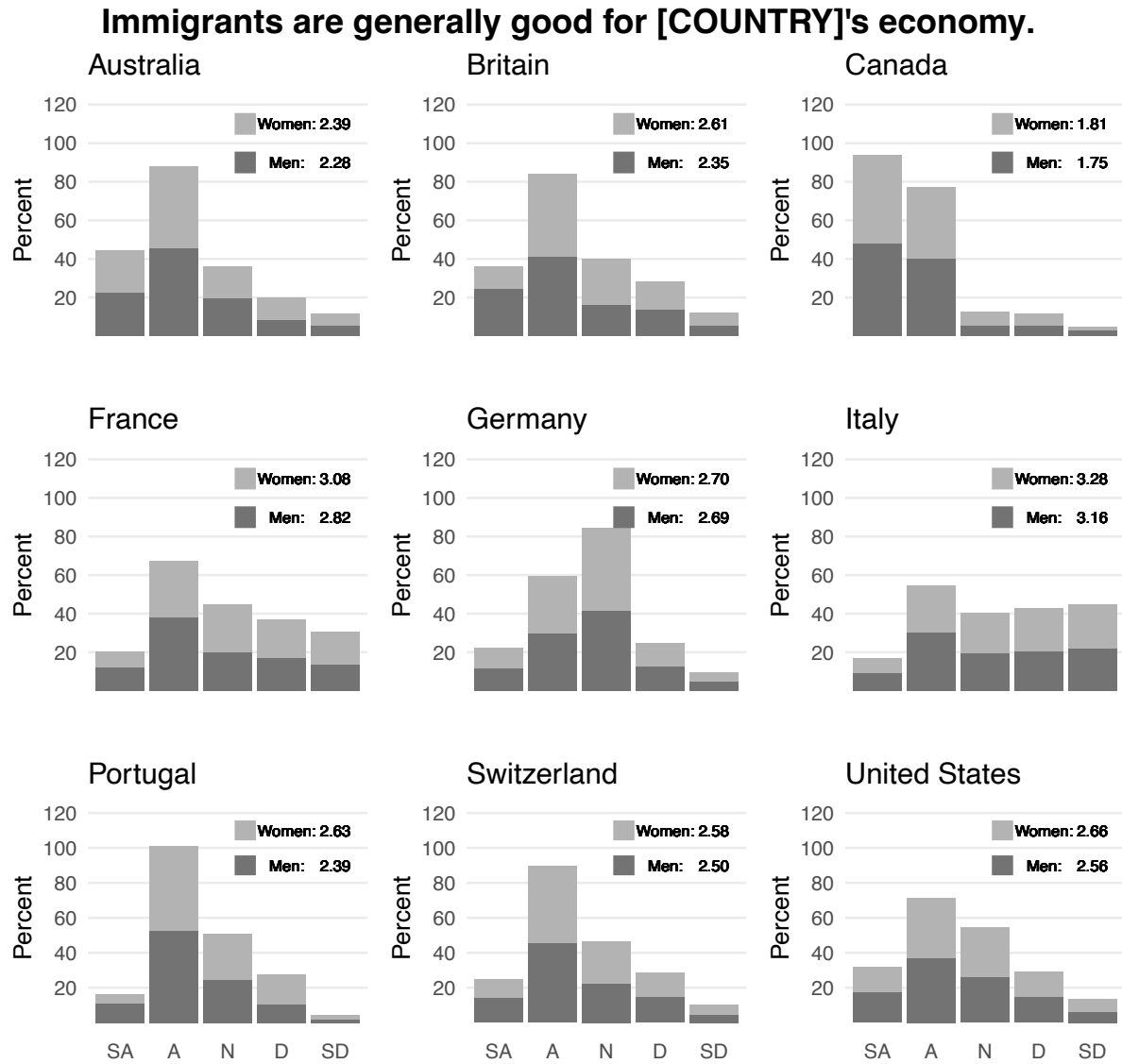
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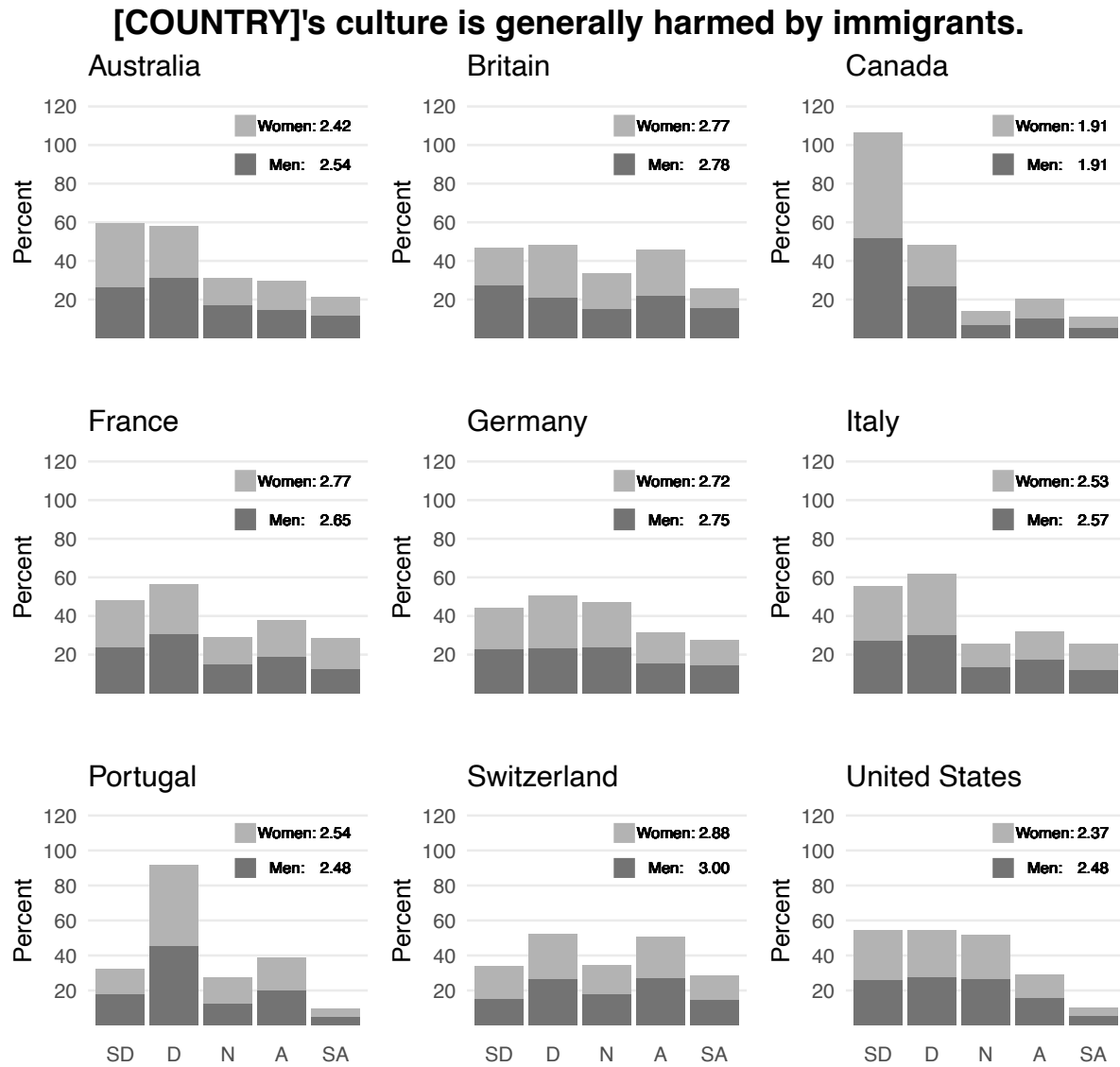
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Figure 5.1 Attitudes about how immigrants are perceived to affect one country's economy, by gender



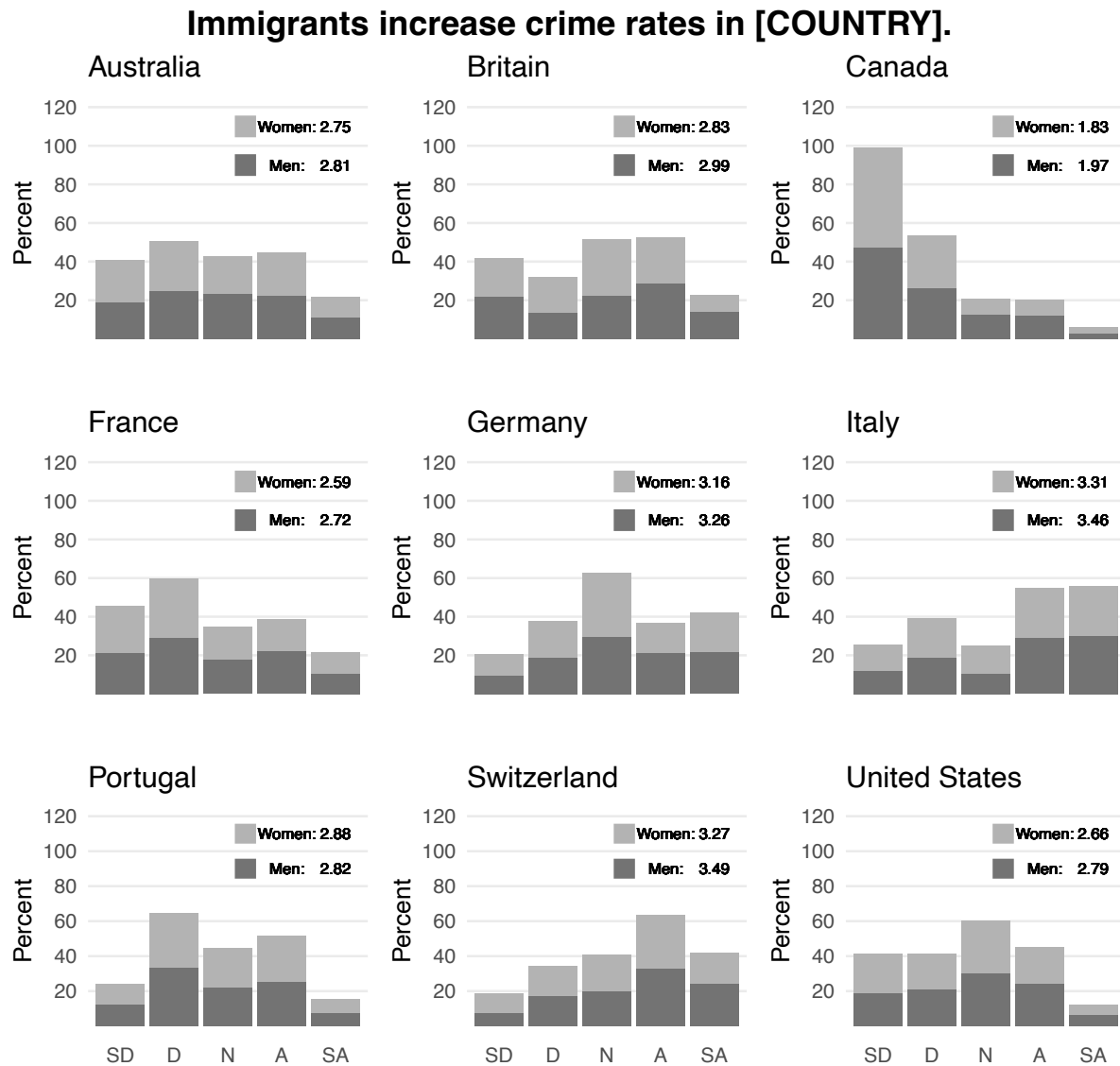
SA = Strongly agree (1); A = Agree (2); N = Neither agree nor disagree (3); D = Disagree (4); SD = Strongly disagree (5)

Figure 5.2 Attitudes about how immigrants are perceived to affect one country's culture, by gender



SD = Strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = Neither agree nor disagree (3); A = Agree (4); SA = Strongly agree (5)

Figure 5.3 Attitudes about how immigrants are perceived to affect one country's security, by gender



SD = Strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = Neither agree nor disagree (3); A = Agree (4); SA = Strongly agree (5)

