

Racial prejudice, threat perception and opposition to immigration: A comparative analysis

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the opposition to immigration, comparing the European Union as a whole and Portugal, United Kingdom, France and Germany. The first hypothesis that was examined posits that the perception of economic, security and cultural threats are significant predictors of the orientation towards immigration. The second hypothesis states that racial prejudice is an important predictor of threat perception. Results show that, globally, attitudes towards immigration in EU are more close to openness than they are to closure. As predicted, cultural, economic and security threats are significantly associated with the opposition to immigration. These results are stable across compared countries. Moreover results show that in the EU as a whole political conservatism and racial prejudice are the main predictors of the perception of threat in the economic, security and cultural domains. These same results were obtained in France, Germany and United Kingdom. Except in the case of security threat, also in Portugal prejudice is an important predictor of threat perception. These results are discussed in the context of the immigration integration policies.

Keywords

immigration
cultural threats
threat perception
integration
migration

The aim of this paper is to find out how EU citizens have been experiencing the new migratory flows. What attitudinal and behavioural orientations do the populations of the receiving countries show towards immigration? What factors underlie those orientations? Does the feeling of threat – which may result from immigration – have a significant expression? And what factors lead to the construction of immigration as a threat and not as a new resource, or even as a motive of pride for the populations of the receiving countries? These are the questions that we seek to answer in this paper, based on the data of the European Social Survey (ESS) of 2002.

We start by presenting the hypothesis that the perception of threat structures the anti-immigration orientation. More specifically, we propose that the perception of cultural threat is a fundamental dimension in the feeling of threat. If this hypothesis is confirmed, it is then important to

identify the factors that underlie the construction of the perception of threat. Our hypothesis regarding this new problem is that the perception of threat is not so much an explanatory factor of prejudice, but that it is racial prejudice itself that 'feeds' the construction of threat, and that the latter, in turn, structures the anti-immigrant and anti-immigration behavioural orientations.

Immigration and dimensions of threat perception

In terms of common sense, in the media and even in institutional thinking, immigration is usually analyzed in its economic and security dimensions. Underlying these reflections, there is often a feeling that immigrants, more than contributing to the resolution of the problems of the receiving societies, are a threat to the economic well-being and security of their citizens.

More recently, research has shown that common sense also sees immigrants, not only as an economic and security threat, but also as a symbolic one. For example, Esses, Haddock and Zanna (1993), whilst analyzing the so-called inter-ethnic social relations in Canada, show that the perception that immigrants represent a threat to the core values of Canadian society is an important structuring factor of attitudes towards immigrants. In this study, we assess the hypothesis that, also in Europe and more specifically in Portugal, the perception of threat to values and cultural identity constitutes an important factor in anti-immigration orientation. This hypothesis is formulated in the context of the theoretical framework that highlights the role that social identity plays in self-perceptions and inter-group relations (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and on the framework regarding the permanency of the 'ethnic' representation in the organization of the idea of nation.

Threat perceptions in the economic and security domains

The simple observation of everyday speeches and of the media shows that immigration is associated with concerns about employment, the level of incomes, access to public services and with the actual quality of those services. It is feared that the arrival of immigrants will limit the already scarce resources even more, and that it will also contribute towards diminishing the quality of those resources. This common sense concern with the economic dimension of social life is expressed in economic theories according to which 'economic self-interest' is one (or even 'the') key-factor of explanation behind individual behaviours, relations between groups and between nations (for a review applied to the area of immigration, see Fetzer 2000). Within the framework of this perspective, it is considered that people will support those policies that they perceive as directly benefiting them in the economic field. If this is so, if immigrants are seen as consumers of collective resources, it will not be necessary for a period of economic crisis to occur, for people, in general, to oppose immigration, in the sense that immigrants will always be seen as consumers of resources.

This perception of immigrants as a social cost is facilitated by the fact that in the media there is no information in connection with the fact that immigrants do not compete with citizens of the receiving country in the same work areas, as well as no information about their contribution towards economic growth. For instance, in Portugal, the information regarding the positive impact of immigration on the economy has not been sufficiently disseminated (Almeida 2003; Ferreira, Rato and Mortágua 2004).

The hypothesis that we have been presenting, according to which the relations between immigrants and people from receiving countries are often associated with economic concerns, was developed by social psychology, namely through the reformulations of the concept of relative deprivation (e.g., Gurr 1970; Walker and Pettigrew 1984). However, within the framework of that concept, it is not necessarily the people that are in an objective situation of economic deprivation that express greater prejudice towards immigrants, supposedly responsible for the shortages they are experiencing. On the contrary, it will be those who, regardless of their economic situation, feel subjectively more deprived and attribute their deprivation to the presence of immigrants who react more negatively against them. Relative deprivation and perception of economic threat are therefore subjective feelings.

Whether economic threat is conceptualized in a more objective or subjective way, it has been included, by some psychological theories, in a broader category of feelings of threat associated with relations between groups: the so-called 'realistic' threats, which include not only economic well-being, but also the physical and psychological security of a group. This understanding that 'realistic' factors structure inter-group relations was theorized by Sherif and Sherif (1953) and then developed by LeVine and Campbell (1972). More recently, Bobo (1988) extended this perspective to the analysis of 'racial relations' in the United States, and Esses et al. (2001) applied it to the study of reactions towards immigrants in Canada. It is also within this broader understanding of the idea of threat that Stephan and Stephan (2000) developed a theory about the relationship between the perception of 'realistic' threats and prejudice. According to these authors, the greater the feeling of threat associated with a group, the greater the prejudice against that group.

Immigration and symbolic threat

The literature on social psychology has been, since the 1980s, focusing on another dimension of threat associated with immigration: symbolic threat. Symbolic threat refers to the feeling that another group is represented as a danger to our groups' core values, attitudes and customs. Both the theory of symbolic racism of Sears and Kinder (1985), and the theory of modern racism of McConahay (1986), propose the hypothesis that the anti-negro racism in the United States is no longer based on economic issues and on the idea of inferiority of certain races, but on disputes in the symbolic field.

As we have also already mentioned, the theory of Stephan and Stephan (2000), a general theory about prejudice, attributes an important role to the perception of symbolic threat in the genesis of prejudice. In the specific domain of immigration issues, Esses et al. (2001) verified that symbolic threat is an important dimension of the perception about immigrants in Canada.

The idea that immigrants may represent a threat to the values of the receiving society, derives from the more general idea according to which the simple perception of differences regarding customs and values raises fear (Rockeach 1960), although the opposite hypothesis remains: that at an inter-group level, it is similarity that may raise fear (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

If, until recently, the perception of symbolic threat could have assumed a diffuse position, after the 11 September 2001, 11 March 2004 and 6 July 2005, immigrants, particularly those of the Islamic religion, have been openly represented as a threat, not only at a security level, but also to the values and the identity of 'western civilization'. For example, the Time magazine of 28 February 2005 dedicated an extensive dossier to the identity crisis of Europe, and presented on its cover a reproduction of Mona Lisa wearing a veil, with Islamic connotations. The assassination of Teo Van Gog, in the Netherlands, by a young Islamic man, raised a series of arguments about the existence of a collective battle between 'European tolerance' and 'Islamic fundamentalism', a battle which European tolerance was supposedly losing. It is along the same line of concern that the then cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, during an interview to *Le Figaro* (13 August 2004), expressed quite openly his opposition to the entry of Turkey into the European Union.

However, it is not only in the media that immigration has been represented as a cultural threat. This threat has also been theorized in 'cultivated' thinking. For example, Following his book on the 'clash of civilizations' (1996), Huntington has recently published a new book about 'the challenges to the American national identity'. This author questions the Latin-American immigration, particularly the Mexican, as a possible destroying force of the *American credo*. The author's question is the following: can the *American credo* (freedom, equality, democracy and meritocracy) resist in a 'multiracial and multiethnic society'? The answer is negative: 'a multicultural America will inevitably end up becoming an America of several credos, constituted by different cultural groups, each one following different political values and principles rooted in different cultures' (Huntington 2004: 333). According to Huntington, although the great enemies of the United States are Islamism and Chinese nationalism, American evil resides today in the growing influence of the Hispanic communities and in the movements that call for the United States to become bilingual and bicultural.

We thus have theoretical and empirical reasons to examine the hypothesis according to which the cultural or identity threat is part of the feeling of threat associated with immigration and may explain the opposition to the reception of immigrants.

The perception of threat as a consequence of prejudice

The literature on threat perception and inter-group conflicts has analyzed the relation between these two phenomena in two different ways. For example, in the aforementioned study of Esses et al. (1993), the feeling of threat is a predictor of inter-group conflict, in the sense that the greater the perceived threat, the greater the prejudice and the probability of the occurrence of conflicts. This is also the analytical perspective of the theories of Blumer (1958) and Bobo (1988), following Sherif and Sherif (1953). Similarly, in the theoretical framework of Stephan and Stephan (2000) about the genesis of prejudice, the perception of threat is an antecedent of prejudice. This theory considers that prejudice is structured from the perception of 'realistic threats'; 'symbolic threats'; inter-group anxiety (the feeling that the relationship with people of other groups seen as different, represents a threat to the *self*, to the extent that from that relationship may emerge a feeling of rejection, discomfort, etc.); and of negative stereotypes (to the extent that stereotypes anticipate conflicting relationships or, at least, unpleasant ones with people of groups seen as different). Consequently, in this theory, the threat is conceptualised as an antecedent of prejudice. It was also along this line of theoretical reasoning that Vala, Brito and Lopes (1999) showed that the perception of economic threat and threat to security were explanatory factors of racism.

But another alternative conceptualization is also possible. Extending the reflections made by Kinder and Sears (1981), in the theory of symbolic racism, and by McConahay (1986), in the theory of modern racism, we can propose that the feeling of threat, namely the feeling of symbolic threat, is an expression of racist prejudice. To see the 'other', an out-group, as a threat and not as an ally, a co-operant, or a resource can, in that sense, be understood as the result of prejudice. This perspective seems to us coherent with the theoretical positioning according to which the perception of threat is, in fact, a perception whose construction needs to be explained. This is the hypothesis that we test in this chapter: the feeling of threat, and specifically of symbolic threat, is not so much the cause of anti-immigrant prejudice, but it is prejudice, in its racist configuration, that structures the perception of threat. In turn, the perception of threat underlies the opposition to immigration.¹

Factors underlying the social construction of immigration as a threat

Within the framework of the theoretical model proposed above, the perception of threat is, firstly, a variable to be explained before it is, itself, an explanatory variable. The hypothesis that we formulate is that racial prejudice is an important factor in the construction of the feeling of threat. This hypothesis shifts the feeling of threat from a reflection about experience, as the theory about threat and prejudice proposed by Stephan and Stephan (2000) seems to do, and clearly associates the feeling of threat with the domain of beliefs. In addition, the hypothesis that is analyzed

1 Having defined the analytic perspective that will be followed, it is important to clarify the conceptual status of the concept of 'opposition to immigration'. In this study, we regard 'opposition to immigration' as a dependent variable. This dependent variable is more an orientation to action (intention of discrimination) than an evaluative orientation, that is an attitude.

associates the feeling of threat not to new expressions of racism or to its more emotional dimension, but to traditional racist beliefs (e.g. intellectual inferiority of those who are perceived as members of other 'races' or 'ethnic groups'; the belief that 'racial' mixture is not positive; upholding the advantages of white, Christian immigration).

Besides accentuating the importance of the role of racist beliefs in the construction of threat, our analytic model studies an eventual obstacle to the construction of that same feeling: in terms of values, we propose that the greater the adhesion to 'universalism' (Schwartz 1992), the less the perception of threat associated with immigration. Universalism, as measured in the Schwartz's scale, refers to egalitarianism, in the sense of the equal value that each human being has, meaning equality of rights and of solidarity. Previous studies have already shown a negative association between egalitarianism and racial prejudice (e.g. Vala, Lima and Lopes 2004; for a review, see Biernat and Crandall 1999). If we now consider the hypothesis that prejudice structures the perception of threat, and previously verified that egalitarianism has a negative correlation with prejudice, then it is likely that egalitarianism also has a negative correlation with the feeling of threat.

We also test the hypothesis according to which the experience of economic fragility and the subjective feeling of economic dissatisfaction facilitates the expression of the perception of threat, namely of economic threat (e.g. Fetzer 2000, in the case of the United States, France and Germany; and Vala, Brito and Lopes 1999, in the case of Portugal).

Political conservatism is also considered as a predictor of perception of threat: this perception will be more disseminated among those that identify themselves with the political right wing, than among those that identify themselves with the political left wing. This hypothesis derives from the traditional relationship between political orientation and racial and ethnic prejudice (Altmeyer 1998; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995). Finally, we test the hypothesis that the perception of threat derives from a more general feeling of interpersonal and political distrust and from the absence of social ties. The loss of social ties and the feeling of lack of protection that derives from distrust can facilitate an over-awareness of signals in the social field that are potential generators of threat, namely threat to security. In other words, we are proposing that the greater the social capital, the greater the trust and the less the feeling of threat to security, a hypothesis that, as far as we know, has not been examined in the literature on social capital (for a literature review on the concept of social capital, see Newton, 2005).

The comparative method and the selection of countries to compare

As previously mentioned, the primary aim of this study is to contribute to the comprehension of the factors that lead to the idea that immigration represents a threat, namely at the cultural level. We analyze this problem from a comparative perspective. That is, we believe that the joint observation of

the answers obtained in different national contexts may help to identify the meaning and the regularity of the factors underlying the phenomena we are studying.

Besides the interest of the comparison between Portugal and the European Community as a whole, we will focus specifically on four countries that, historically, have different immigration policies. Since we are interested in studying the genesis of perception of cultural threat, we chose countries that have different cultural policies of relations with immigrants: France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Let us look, briefly, at these countries' specificities.

Within the framework of French republicanism, nationalism is an 'integrative nationalism': in extremis, all those who wish to become citizens of the French Republic can do so. But this openness has costs: the society is a society of citizens, of free and autonomous individuals and, consequently, does not admit *particularisms* or *communitarianisms*. In this context an immigrant that becomes French manifests, it is believed, the desire to assimilate the values of French society and to become a citizen equal to other citizens (for a detailed analysis of this issue in France see, e.g., Weil 2005). No one should expect to be treated differently based on sex, country of origin, religion, and so forth. This ideology, based on tension between 'individuation' and 'assimilation', has been raising problems of cultural relations between immigrants (or ex-immigrants) and the majority of French society, and has been the subject of social and political debate (remember the debate about legislation regarding the use of the 'Islamic veil' in schools). At the policy level, the debate has also begun between those that defend 'liberal individualism', as the basis of democracy itself and citizenship, and those that propose the possibility of a 'non-fragmentary multiculturalism' (for a review see Wieviorka 1996).

If we use the typology of Bourhis et al. (1997) concerning the 'ideologies of integration', we find 'ethnic ideology' as the opposite of French anti-communitarianism. 'Ethnicism' is a social representation about the difference between peoples, according to which each people or nation have in their origin a racial or ethnic nucleus that defines the group's essence. Within the framework of the 'ethnic ideology', nationalism is an ethnic or racial nationalism, and national identity is of attributive nature. In simple terms, within the framework of this representation, a person cannot, 'by nature', become a member of any other nation. This ideology is the base, at least implicitly, of the legislation that defends the *jus sanguinis* against the *jus solis*. The typical case of 'ethnicism' was the German case, before the changes introduced in 1999 in the legislation on the acquisition of nationality. For example, successive generations of people of Turkish origin that live in Germany, that speak German and that have been educated by German institutions, continue to be Turkish, not being able to become German citizens. However, for example, a Polish citizen that proves his German ascendancy 'is a German'. This ideology favours the type of cultural relations between immigrants and the majority that we can designate as

2 It is obvious that we cannot establish any direct causal relation between the above-mentioned policies and the representations that we propose to analyze. Despite that, having these different political orientations in mind might be helpful in understanding the analysed data.

3 Official data point to the fact that immigrants constitute 5 per cent of the Portuguese population, 9 per cent of the German population, 7 per cent of the United Kingdom population and 11 per cent of the French population. According to Eurostat data, in 2000, of the 370 million people residing in the EU, 19 million were immigrants. According to ESS procedures, data was weighted by *design weight* when analyzing countries separately, and by *population design weight* when in groups.

‘separation’ or ‘exclusion’. In fact, in the context of this perspective a ‘foreigner’ can never become a ‘national’; nor can he truly adopt the core values of the country that received him.

We can situate the United Kingdom ‘model’ between those two models. Bourhis et al. (1997) designate the United Kingdom ‘model’ as ‘civic ideology’. Within this model, the receiving State demands that immigrants adopt the laws and the public values of the welcoming country, but respects their private space, their private values associated with their country of origin, without, however, feeling responsible for the maintenance of those same values, as happens in the case of active multicultural policy (whose typical example would be Canada).²

Method: construction of variables and procedures of data analysis

All the analyses presented below involved the group of fifteen European Union countries (before the expansion) and the abovementioned countries: Portugal, United Kingdom, Germany and France (Table 1).³ Analyses only included the native citizens of each country.

To describe the positions towards immigration, two categories of variables were created: threat perception and opposition to immigration. With the objective of an analysis of the underlying factors in the positions towards immigration, the following categories of predictors were considered, according to the theoretical orientations and hypothesis already mentioned: *positional variables* and economic well-being (educational level, level of income, satisfaction with income); *trust and social integration* (interpersonal trust, trust in national political institutions; trust in international political institutions, level of satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system); *political orientation* (left-right); *values of egalitarianism* (universalism vs. power orientation); *blatant racism* (non-acceptance of marriage with people from other ‘races’, non-acceptance of leadership of other ‘races’) and the importance given to ethnic-racial attributes in the selection of immigrants (to be white and Christian).

Data analysis was carried out as follows: description of the measures of threat perception and of opposition to immigration; analysis of the beliefs about threat as predictors of opposition to immigration; and analysis of the predictors of the beliefs about threat. Given the high number of respondents, we adopted, in the statistical analyses, a level of significance of $p < 0.001$ to reject the null hypothesis (i.e., relations non-different from zero; or differences non-different from zero) when analyzing the total sample (fifteen countries of the EU) and a level of significance of $p < 0.01$ when analyzing national samples. For the same reason, some analyses were carried out based on only 50 per cent of the samples, with the results between the sub-samples and the global samples being compared.

Countries	N
EU-15	28 633
Portugal	1 417
United Kingdom	1 858
France	1 337
Germany	2 638

Table 1: Samples.

Opposition to immigration

The ESS questionnaire considered the following potential categories of immigrants: people of ‘different race or ethnic group’; of ‘the same race or ethnic group’; of ‘poorer countries outside Europe’; of ‘rich countries outside Europe’; of ‘poorest countries of Europe’; of ‘rich countries of Europe’. In the analyses carried out the following indicators were considered separately: opposition to immigration of people of ‘different race or ethnic group’⁴; opposition to immigration of people of ‘the same race or ethnic group’; opposition to immigration of people of ‘different race or ethnic group’ and opposition to immigration of people from ‘poorer countries outside Europe’ (this last measure that combines two indicators presents very good reliability values – Cronbach’s Alphas – that vary between 0.81 and 0.91 across countries). A general index of opposition to immigration that combines the six indicators considered in the ESS questionnaire (alpha varying between 0.92 and 0.97, for the different countries) was also constructed.

The results presented in Table 2 should be preceded by a general comment. Contrary to the belief that opposition to immigration only manifests itself in relation to certain categories of immigrants, the results obtained show that opposition to immigration derives from a behavioural orientation of general rejection of immigration as a phenomenon, regardless of the immigrants’ origin or status. In fact, the correlations between the six indicators of the ESS questionnaire, regarding the fifteen countries of the EU, vary between 0.62 (correlation between the opposition to immigration that originates from ‘rich countries outside Europe’ and the opposition to immigration of people of ‘the same ethnic group’) and 0.89 (opposition to immigration of people from ‘poor countries outside Europe’ and immigrants from ‘poorer European countries’). These are very high correlations, within the context of extensive correlational studies with random samples, which indicates that the different types of immigrants are assessed in a very similar way. The results of a Principal Components Factor Analysis (PCFA) corroborate our findings. That analysis grouped the six indicators into one component, which explains 76 per cent of the variance, having the indicators factorial weights between 0.82 and 0.91. It is also noteworthy that the reliability of the general measure of opposition to immigration is very high: in every country the reliability index (alpha) is never inferior to 0.92, which also indicates that the respondents invoke the

⁴ In order to represent everyday language, the indicator does not distinguish between ‘race’ and ‘ethnic group’. In fact, these terms have the same meaning in common sense. The equivalence between race and ethnic group in common sense has been empirically assessed in Portugal in a study conducted by Cabecinhas (2002).

Opposition to immigration	Means	Less opposition % (1–2)	More opposition % (3–4)
Immigrants of different ethnic groups			
European Union	2.47*	53.6	46.5
Portugal	2.83*	36.9	63.1
United Kingdom	2.61*	48.5	51.5
France	2.51	53.3	46.7
Germany	2.40*	57.3	42.7
Immigrants of the same ethnic group			
European Union	2.26*	65.1	34.9
Portugal	2.71*	42.2	57.8
United Kingdom	2.34*	63.9	36.0
France	2.33*	64.1	35.5
Germany	2.11*	73.4	26.6
Immigrants of different ethnic groups and from poorer countries			
European Union	2.44*	57.7	42.2
Portugal	2.83*	38.1	61.9
United Kingdom	2.61*	53.0	47.1
France	2.54	56.9	43.1
Germany	2.39*	63.2	36.8
Total opposition to immigration			
European Union	2.40*	70.6	29.3
Portugal	2.77*	44.9	55.0
United Kingdom	2.53	66.6	33.3
France	2.48	69.3	30.6
Germany	2.30*	78.7	21.2

Values indicated with a * are significantly above or below the midpoint of the scale ($p < 0.01$, two-tailed test).

Table 2: Opposition to immigration (means and percentages).

5 The response scales vary between 1 (Allow many people to come) and 4 (Allow none).

6 $t(26699) = 13.85$, $p < 0.001$.

7 The means of 'total opposition to immigration' vary across countries, $F(3,16071) = 163.23$, $p < 0.001$ ($\text{Eta}^2 = 0.03$). *Post hoc* tests show that, with the exception of the difference between France and the United Kingdom, all of the means are statistically different (Duncan, $p < 0.001$).

same psychological principle to respond to the various targets or categories of immigrants. Therefore, opposition to immigration is, to a large extent, independent of the immigrants' origin. Having made this observation, a more specific analysis does, however, show differences in the opposition of immigration according to the target.

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that whether considering the global opposition to immigration, or each one of the three specific targets we have selected, the EU (fifteen countries) shows openness to immigration (see the mean differences tests in relation to the midpoint of the scale, 2.5)⁵. Portugal is more opposed to immigration than the EU countries,⁶ and more than Germany, the United Kingdom and France.⁷

On the other hand, the group of fifteen countries shows more openness to immigrants of 'the same ethnic group' than of a 'different ethnic group'⁸ or of 'different ethnic groups and poor countries'.⁹ The same is true for each of the other countries considered in the analysis.¹⁰ These results thus indicate that the 'ethnic representation' remains, to the extent that preference is given to 'people of the same ethnic group'. 'Ethnicism' in

Threat perception	Means	Less threat % (1–2)**	More threat % (4–5)
Cultural threat			
European Union	2.69*	47.5	26.2
Portugal	2.89	39.8	28.0
United Kingdom	2.96	40.8	34.7
France	2.89	41.6	23.2
Germany	2.37*	57.8	17.8
Economic threat			
European Union	3.19*	8.3	19.8
Portugal	3.30*	8.3	24.8
United Kingdom	3.35*	5.2	25.6
France	3.17*	11.0	21.4
Germany	3.29*	5.5	21.3
Security threat			
European Union	3.92*	9.3	67.3
Portugal	4.02*	6.2	72.1
United Kingdom	3.79*	6.8	60.5
France	3.77*	12.9	59.6
Germany	4.10*	6.4	76.1
Total threat			
European Union	3.27*	6.0	20.7
Portugal	3.40*	3.7	24.9
United Kingdom	3.37*	4.2	25.4
France	3.28*	8.8	26.2
Germany	3.26*	5.0	18.3

* Significantly above or below the midpoint of the scale ($p < 0.01$, two-tailed test).

** To facilitate reading, extreme points of the scale were aggregated.

Table 3: Threat perception (means and percentages).

Portugal is lower than in the other countries and German and United Kingdom show higher levels of ‘ethnism’ than France.¹¹

The belief in immigration as a threat: Security threat, economic threat and cultural identity threat

As mentioned in the introduction, we considered three dimensions of threat perception associated with immigration that may underlie rejection of immigration. The number of indicators by dimension depends on the measures available in the ESS questionnaire: *economic threat* (5 indicators; the alpha coefficient is high, varying across countries between 0.75 and 0.79;¹² for example ‘average wages and salaries are generally brought down by those people’); *cultural threat* (1 indicator: ‘[country] cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by those people’); *security threat* (1 indicator: ‘crime problems made worse or better by those people coming’); *total threat perception* : index composed of the three previous variables (alpha varying between 0.65 and 0.74).

As we can see in Table 3,¹³ when we consider the three threat indicators together, results show statistically significant values above the midpoint of

- 8 $t(27283) = (62.27, p < 0.001$.
- 9 $t(27118) = (57.74, p < 0.001$.
- 10 $t_{Germany} (2573) = 25.35, p < 0.001$;
 $t_{France} (1268) = 12.06, p < 0.001$;
 $t_{Portugal} (1341) = 10.43, p < 0.001$,
 $t_{United Kingdom} (1822) = 18.46, p < 0.001$.
- 11 We calculated an index of ethnism: opposition to immigration of people from a ‘different ethnic group’ minus the opposition to immigration of people from the ‘same ethnic group’. Thus, higher values indicate greater ethnism. The means of ethnism vary significantly across countries, $F(3, 16323) = 47.13, p < 0.001$, although the ‘magnitude of the effect’ is very low. *Post hoc* analyses (Duncan, $p < 0.001$) show that the level of ethnism in Portugal ($M = 0.12$; $SD = 0.41$) is lower than in any other country. Ethnism in France ($M = 0.18$; $SD = 0.53$) is higher than in Portugal, but lower than in Germany ($M = 0.29$; $SD = 0.59$) and in the United Kingdom ($M = 0.25$, $SD = 0.61$). Ethnism in Germany is higher than in any other country, except for the United Kingdom.
- 12 The fact that we have 5 indicators in connection with economic threat and only one in connection with the other dimensions reflects the weight that the authors of the questionnaire themselves attribute to the economic factors as predictors

of the attitude towards immigration.

- 13 Regarding the perception of economic threat, since some of the indicators have a 5-point rating scale and others an 11-point rating scale, statistical analyses were performed on normalized scores. For reading purposes all data was transposed onto a 5-point scale (Table 3).
- 14 The means vary according to country $F(3, 15698) = 20,05$, $p < 0,001$ (the 'magnitude of the effect' is very low). *Post hoc* comparisons (Duncan's test, $p < 0,0001$) indicate that threat perception is higher in Portugal and in the United Kingdom than in Germany and in France. The differences between Portugal and the United Kingdom and between Germany and France are not statistically significant.
- 15 There is a difference between countries regarding the perception of economic threat, $F(3, 15698) = 40,385$, $p < 0,001$ (the 'magnitude of the effect' is also low in this case). The perception of that threat is lower in France than in any other country (Duncan's tests, $p < 0,0001$). The mean differences between Portugal, Germany and the United Kingdom are not statistically significant.
- 16 The means of perception of security threat are also different

the scale.¹⁴ This means that immigration is perceived as a strong threat in the EU and in each of the four countries analyzed. This threat is expressed, namely, at the economic level¹⁵ and at the security level.¹⁶ In any of the countries,¹⁷ as well as in the group of the EU countries,¹⁸ the expression of security threat is higher than the expression of economic threat. Cultural threat reaches values below the midpoint of the scale in the EU and in Germany, where it registers the lowest value.¹⁹ In the remaining countries, the values do not differ from the midpoint of the scale.

Perception of threat as a predictor of opposition to immigration

The hypothesis that we are now going to analyze is that the opposition to immigration derives from the feeling of threat, not only in the security and economic domains, but also in the cultural domain. Despite the low level of expressed cultural threat perception, we hypothesize that anti-immigrant feelings are associated with representations about national identity, about the preservation of its values and history. In other words, although the perception of cultural threat is not very high, it may constitute an important factor in the genesis of prejudice.

If our hypothesis makes sense, then the perception of cultural threat will contribute significantly to the increment of the explained variance in a regression model that considers the three dimensions of threat. Three regression models were carried out: in the *first model*, we only introduced the threat to personal security (the one that turned out to be more important); in the *second model*, we added the perception of security threat and the perception of economic threat; finally, in the *third model*, we added the cultural threat. The fact that we have introduced the cultural threat only in the third and last regression equation is a way of testing the hypothesis that this dimension of threat has an explanatory power over the one of the remaining two threat dimensions.

The results presented in Table 4 show that in the EU the best predictor of opposition to immigration of people of 'another race or ethnic group' is economic threat, followed by the threat to security. However, as expected, the threat to cultural identity is also an important predictor of opposition to immigration, introducing a significant increase in the explained variance, whether in the EU or in each of the four countries (see Table 5). The results are the same, regardless of whether the dependent variable is represented by the general index of opposition to immigration (which involves six categories of potential immigrants) or by the opposition to immigration of 'people of the same racial or ethnic group'.

It should be noted that the perception of cultural threat is not only associated with immigrants of 'other races or ethnic groups', which would reveal an ethnic conception of society. Other analyses show that the fear of cultural contamination is also associated with the immigration of people 'of the same race or ethnic group', which can derive from a diffuse xenophobic feeling. It should also be pointed out that cultural threat associated to immigrants is the one that most structures the opposition to immigration

Predictors	Opposition to immigration			Total (%)
	Different ethnic groups (%)	Same ethnic groups (%)	Different ethnic groups and from poor countries (%)	
Model 1				
Security threat				
R ² change	10	6	11	9
Model 2				
Security threat				
Economic threat				
R ² change	17	13	18	18
Adjusted R ²	27	19	20	27
Model 3				
Security threat				
Economic threat				
Cultural threat				
R ² change	4	3	4	4
Adjusted R ²	31	22	33	31

Values are percentages of explained variance.

Minimum N from 26,700 to 27,490.

All the models present significant changes of explained variance.

Table 4: Threat perception as a predictor of opposition to immigration in the European Union (hierarchical regressions).

Predictors	Countries			
	Portugal (N = 1343) (%)	United Kingdom (N = 1833) (%)	France (N = 1283) (%)	Germany (N = 2582) (%)
Model 1				
Securityt threat	9	17	15	13
Model 2				
Security threat				
Economic threat	21	32	37	26
Model 3				
Security threat				
Economic threat				
Cultural threat	24	34	43	30

All the models present significant changes of explained variance.

Table 5: Threat perception as a predictor of opposition to immigration of 'different ethnic groups' (explained variance obtained in the hierarchical regressions)

in France, and the one that least explains this feeling in the United Kingdom (Table 5). The salience of the debate in France regarding *communitarianism*, and its threat to French republicanism, and the tradition of 'assimilation' strategies, may help to understand this result. In the same way, the 'civic ideology' of

according to country, $F(3, 15698) = 121,22, p < 0,001$ ($\text{Eta}^2 = 0,02$). In this case, that perception is higher in Germany than in any other country (Duncan's tests, $p < 0,0001$). Only in the case of France and the United Kingdom are the mean differences not statistically significant.

17 $t_{\text{Germany}} (2637) = 43,97, p < 0,001$;
 $t_{\text{France}} (1336) = 20,83, p < 0,001$;
 $t_{\text{Portugal}} (1416) = 28,51, p < 0,001$;
 $t_{\text{United Kingdom}} (1857) = 22,22, p < 0,001$.

18 $t(28632) = 118,88, p < 0,001$.

19 The measures of perception of cultural threat vary according to country, $F(3, 15698) = 239,86, p < 0,001$ ($\text{Eta}^2 =$

0,05). *Post hoc* comparisons show that that perception is lower in Germany than in any other country (Duncan's tests, $p < 0,0001$). The mean differences between Portugal, France and the United Kingdom are not statistically significant.

20 These variables are aggregations of indicators. The reliability coefficients (i.e. Cronbach's alphas) vary across countries between 0.63 and 0.73 for interpersonal trust; between 0.72 and 0.74 for trust in national political institutions; between 0.57 and 0.68 for trust in international political institutions; and between 0.73 and 0.78 for satisfaction with the democratic system.

21 For a similar procedure, see Pettigrew (1999).

22 Tucker's phi coefficients, calculated for the analysis of the equivalence of the factorial structures, vary between 0.96 and 0.99, for the factor of the positional variables; between 0.98 and 0.99, for the factor of the variables of trust and social integration; between 0.96 and 0.99 for the factor of ideological variables and racism. In addition, in the case of Portugal and the EU, we found the same factorial structure even when we extracted random sub-samples with 50 per cent of participants in each sample.

integration in the United Kingdom seems to facilitate a lower perception of cultural threat. Portugal and Germany are in an intermediate position.

Factors underlying threat perception

Once the importance that threat beliefs have on the structuring of opposition to immigration has been demonstrated, it is important to now look at the factors that underlie its construction. The hypothesis that will be tested proposes that the beliefs that immigrants constitute a threat are largely derived from prejudice and racist beliefs.

In order to analyze this hypothesis, a set of independent variables was selected and contrasted: 'social positions', that include three variables that refer to the objective and subjective economic well-being; 'political orientation', a variable that refers to the self-positioning on a left-right wing scale; 'socio-political integration', that is, variables referring to trust and satisfaction with the democratic system;²⁰ and, finally, 'egalitarian values' (universalism vs. power) and 'racist beliefs'. These variables have already been described and justified.

The analysis of the predictors of threat perceptions was carried out in two steps. The first step involved performing a PCFA of the independent variables. In the second step, the perceptions of threat were regressed on the factors extracted by the PCFA.²¹

In Table 6, we present the PCFA of the predictors of threat, for samples of the fifteen countries of the EU. As expected, the results show that the variables related to trust and social integration aggregate themselves into one Factor, which we have designated as 'Socio-political Integration'. In turn, the positional and economic deprivation variables also constitute an autonomous Factor, which we have designated as 'Social Positions'. The third Factor associates political orientation (left-right), values (universalism vs. power) and racist prejudice, resulting in a configuration of beliefs that is frequently identified (e.g. Pettigrew 1999, although with different indicators) and that these results show to be stable. We designated this Factor as 'Political Conservatism and Racist Prejudice'.

In Table 7, we present the PCFA of the same group of predictors, but now carried out for the Portuguese sample. The obtained solution presents four factors, while the solution for the EU presented three factors. Factor 1 corresponds to Factor 1 of the European solution, and the same occurs with Factor 2. However, Factor 3 on the European factorial solution appears divided into two factors on the Portuguese factorial solution. In fact, the factor that corresponds to the racist prejudice does not include, in the Portuguese solution, the political orientation (left-right wing). This dissociation between political orientation and prejudice had already been identified in Portugal by Vala, Brito and Lopes (1999).

The results of the analyses carried out in connection with the samples from France, Germany and the United Kingdom reproduce the PCFA found for the EU countries, which has already been presented in Table 6.²²

Table 8 summarizes the multiple regression analyses for the case of Portugal, and Table 9 for the EU. Tables 10, 11 and 12 present the data

Predictors	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Positional variables			
Educational level	0.042	0.662	-0.249
Household income	0.066	0.848	0.098
Satisfaction with household income	0.199	0.733	0.083
Left-right	0.161	0.113	0.572
Trust and social integration			
Interpersonal trust	0.538	0.203	-0.194
Trust in national political institutions	0.839	0.094	0.028
Trust in international political institutions	0.789	0.014	-0.024
Satisfaction with the democratic system	0.763	0.050	0.134
Universalism vs. power	0.101	-0.141	-0.596
Racism			
Blatant racism	-0.129	-0.193	0.701
Racial qualification	0.054	-0.332	0.683
<i>% of explained variance</i>	<i>24%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>13%</i>

Table 6: Predictors of threat perception in the European Union (PCFA – Varimax Rotation).

Predictors	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Positional variables				
Educational level	0.066	0.787	-0.207	-0.091
Household income	0.017	0.804	0.120	-0.041
Satisfaction with household income	0.099	0.787	0.007	0.114
Left-right	0.266	-0.008	0.054	0.841
Trust and social integration				
Interpersonal trust	0.630	0.006	0.098	-0.472
Trust in national political institutions	0.799	0.026	-0.173	0.055
Trust in international political institutions	0.727	0.113	-0.093	0.111
Satisfaction with the democratic system	0.723	0.064	0.145	0.307
Universalism vs. power	0.013	-0.170	-0.634	-0.005
Racism				
Blatant racism	-0.035	-0.057	0.757	-0.114
Racial qualification	-0.043	-0.277	0.687	0.249
<i>% of explained variance</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>9%</i>

Table 7: Predictors of threat perception in Portugal (PCFA – Varimax Rotation).

analysis from Germany, France and United Kingdom, respectively. In these regression analyses we contrast the predictive power of the factor that includes racism, with the predictive power of the remaining factors.

As we can see, in the case of Portugal (Table 8) racial prejudice introduces significant increments on the explained variance of economic and cultural threat. However, security threat is better explained by socio-political

Predictors	Threat perceptions							
	Cultural		Economic		Security		Total	
	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2
Model 1								
Social position (Factor 2)	-0.23***	-0.20***	-0.33***	-0.31***	-0.19***	-0.18***	-0.31***	-0.28***
Political orientation (Factor 4)	0.16***	0.17***	0.10**	0.12**	0.10*	0.11**	0.15***	0.17***
Socio-political integration (Factor 1)	-0.11**	-0.12**	-0.20**	-0.20***	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.24***	-0.25***
Model 2								
Values and racial prejudice (Factor 3 added)		0.30***		0.29***		0.13***		0.30***
Adjusted R ²	9%	18%	18%	27%	13%	13%	19%	28%

N minimum = 558. The multiple regression coefficients are statistically significant in all of the models.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 8: Predictors of threat perceptions in Portugal (hierarchical regressions).

Predictors	Threat perceptions							
	Cultural		Economic		Security		Total	
	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2
Model 1								
Socio-political integration (Factor 1)	-0.24***	-0.23***	-0.29***	-0.28***	-0.22***	-0.22***	-0.31***	-0.30***
Social position (Factor 2)	-0.20***	-0.22***	-0.19***	-0.21***	-0.06***	-0.08***	-0.19***	-0.21***
Model 2								
Political conservatism racial prejudice (Factor 3 added)		0.45***		0.39***		0.25***		0.45***
Adjusted R ²	10%	30%	12%	28%	5%	11%	13%	33%

N minimum = 12,698.

The multiple regression coefficients are statistically significant in all of the models.

*** $p < 0.001$.

Table 9: Predictors of threat perceptions in the European Union (hierarchical regressions).

integration (negative correlation), by political orientation (right wing people express more threat than left wing people) and by social positions (the lower the well-being, the higher the feeling of security threat). Results concerning the EU as a whole (Table 9) express significant increment of explained variance, when political conservatism and prejudice are introduced in the second regression model (complementary analysis shows that prejudice *per se* is enough to increment significantly the explained variance). Supporting our hypothesis, the same results are obtained in France, the United Kingdom and Germany; that is prejudice is an important predictor of each of the three dimensions of threat.

Predictors	Threat perceptions							
	Cultural		Economic		Security		Total	
	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2
Model 1								
Socio-political integration (Factor 1)	-0.21***	-0.22***	-0.30***	-0.31***	-0.25***	-0.25***	-0.32***	-0.32***
Social position (Factor 3)	-0.18***	-0.20***	-0.27***	-0.28***	-0.11***	-0.11***	-0.22***	-0.24***
Model 2								
Political conservatism and racial prejudice (Factor 2 added)		0.45***		0.37***		0.21***		0.42***
Adjusted R ²	8%	28%	16%	30%	7%	11%	15%	33%

N minimum = 1,622.

The multiple regression coefficients are statistically significant in all of the models.

*** $p < 0.001$.

Table 10: Predictors of threat perceptions in Germany (hierarchical regressions).

Predictors	Threat perceptions							
	Cultural		Economic		Security		Total	
	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2
Model 1								
Socio-political integration (Factor 1)	-0.17***	-0.20***	-0.22***	-0.24***	-0.14***	-0.16***	-0.21***	-0.23***
Social position (Factor 3)	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.18***	-0.19***	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.16***	-0.16***
Model 2								
Political conservatism and racial prejudice (Factor 2 added)		0.55***		0.47***		0.31***		0.53***
Adjusted R ²	5%	36%	8%	30%	2%	12%	7%	35%

N minimum = 891.

The multiple regression coefficients are statistically significant in all of the models.

* $p < 0.05$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

Table 11: Predictors of threat perceptions in France (hierarchical regressions).

Conclusions

This paper analyzed the opposition to immigration as a behavioural orientation associated with the belief that immigrants constitute a threat in terms of security, economic well-being and cultural identity. The analysis of the data compared Portugal with the group of EU countries before enlargement (fifteen countries), as well as with three countries with traditionally different policies of integration of immigrants: France, Germany and the United Kingdom. With the exception of Portugal, the group of fifteen countries and each one of the three countries studied show more

Predictors	Threat perceptions							
	Cultural		Economic		Security		Total	
	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2	βModel1	βModel2
Model 1								
Socio-political integration (Factor 1)	-0.30***	-0.29***	-0.34***	-0.33***	-0.32***	-0.32***	-0.38***	-0.37***
Social position (Factor 2)	-0.25***	-0.23***	-0.21***	-0.21***	-0.07*	-0.08**	-0.21***	-0.22***
Model 2								
Political conservatism and racial prejudice (Factor 3 added)		0.39***		0.33***		0.26***		0.39***
Adjusted R ²	15%	30%	15%	26%	11%	17%	19%	34%

N minimum = 1116.

The multiple regression coefficients are statistically significant in all of the models.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

Table 12: Predictors of threat perceptions in the United Kingdom (hierarchical regressions).

openness than closure towards immigration. In general, the expression of opposition to immigration does not distinguish between possible types of immigrants, although it occurs more strongly in relation to immigrants perceived as members of ‘other races or ethnic groups’ (or, simultaneously, belonging to ‘other races and ethnic groups’ and to ‘poorer countries outside Europe’). These results suggest that attitudes towards immigration are associated with racial ideology and with ‘ethnism’.

We found a significant feeling of economic and security threat associated with immigration, but the cultural and identity threat does not reach the expected levels of expression. Immigrants continue to be associated with the so-called ‘realistic’ threats rather than with the ‘symbolic’ ones. However, when one considers the relationship between threat perception and opposition to immigration, this picture changes. Our hypothesis that opposition to immigration is anchored in the perception of threat not only at an economic and security level, but also in the identity sphere, is confirmed. Greater investment in the analysis of the role that this last factor represents in the construction of anti-immigration social arguments is thus justified.

The results also show that threat perception derives, to a large extent, from racist beliefs and not only from situations of economic fragility, and that the salience of egalitarian values constitutes an obstacle in the construction of the feeling of threat.

Although our analysis are based on correlations, the fact that we have shown that the feeling of threat derives from racial prejudice, in its rudest expression, diminishes the importance of those models in which prejudice is a consequence and not a cause of the belief in the threat represented by immigration. Moreover, the results presented point towards the need for the elaboration of more complex theoretical models to explain the ‘routes’ from

prejudice to discrimination, in social and legal contexts in which discrimination is illegitimate. In this sense, it is worth studying the hypothesis that the relationship between racial prejudice and discrimination is mediated, in democratic societies, by legitimising factors, among which are the threat to security, to economic well-being and to cultural identity that immigrants are perceived to constitute (Pereira, Vala and Ramos 2005).

In comparative terms, what is the position of Portugal within the framework of the countries analyzed? Although the differences between the attitudes found in Portugal and in the other countries studied are often statistically significant, they are generally not very strong.²³ It should be noted, however, that Portugal is the country where we verify the highest public expression of opposition to immigration. In the other countries, they have already integrated the advantages of immigration or they manifest a conformist adhesion to the emerging norm of support for a 'regulated' immigration. Moreover, the diffuse feeling of threat is higher in Portugal than in the fifteen European countries and it is also higher than in Germany and in France, being similar to the United Kingdom. As in the remaining countries, cultural threat is also, in Portugal, an important predictor of opposition to immigration. It is also important to note that, in Portugal, as in the other countries, the feeling of threat is explained by the adhesion to racist beliefs and by the rejection of egalitarian values.

'Policies of social integration of immigrants' was the factor that determined the selection of Germany, France and the United Kingdom as countries to compare. Overall, the results presented indicate that one cannot establish a direct relationship between those policies and attitudes towards immigration. In all of these three countries, opposition to immigration is predicted by threat perceptions. Furthermore, in these countries, perception of cultural threat is a predictor of opposition to immigration, albeit less powerful than economic or security threat. In the same vein, in all of these countries, racist beliefs are main predictors of perceptions of threat. Nevertheless, other results suggest a contrast between French and German attitudes towards immigrants. As expected, 'ethnism' in the selection of immigrants is higher in Germany, but the feeling of cultural threat is lower in this country than in France. This higher feeling of cultural threat in France suggests that *anti-communitarianism* has not given rise to tolerance, but to differentiation. The degree of 'ethnism' in immigration selection in Germany suggests that the 'ethnic representation' of the nation remains higher in this country. However, only new studies can clarify these apparent different attitudes in France and in Germany.

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23 As mentioned during the presentation of the statistical analyses that were carried out, the 'magnitude of the [country] effect' is oftentimes small.

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