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Who can become a full member of the club?—Results from a conjoint survey experiment on public attitudes about the naturalisation of non-EU migrants in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark

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Abstract

In this article, we study attitudes towards the naturalisation of non-European (EU) migrants in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark. This is done using a conjoint experiment. Respondents are presented with profiles of non-EU-migrants, whose attributes are varied over labour market status, education, language skills, time lived in the destination country, family relations, religious background and gender. We find a preference for granting citizenship to non-EU migrants with education and labour market experience, thus supporting theories of economic reasoning. We also find a preference for granting citizenship to non-EU migrants with non-Muslim backgrounds, family attachment to natives and language skills, thus supporting theories of preferences for cultural similarity. We find these patterns to be stable across the four countries despite differences in citizenship rules and discourses. The patterns are even stable when comparing the respondents' age, gender, education, migrant status, voting patterns and general views about migration. The natives' selection of new citizens is explained by a novel theoretical argument of citizenship being a club-good.

INTRODUCTION

This article analyses what kind of migrants to whom the public in four Northern European countries are willing and unwilling to grant citizenship. Naturalisation can be seen as a destination state's ultimate acceptance of a given migrant, as citizenship gives the full set of formal rights and duties of natives and makes it difficult to strip away those rights again. For native residents, it can be seen as the

acceptance of turning 'them' into the imagined community of a common national 'us'. In contrast, to the inflow of immigrants, which is difficult to control, naturalisation can be controlled by destination states. Thus, many countries have a high share of nonnaturalised residents; in the covered, the share was 13.5% in Germany, 9.2% in Denmark, 9.0% in Sweden and 6.8% in the Netherlands according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The rules for the naturalisation of immigrants and their children have been argued to reflect historically rooted concepts of nationhood (Brubaker, 1992; Favell, 2016; Mouritsen, 2013) and a (potential) Western European convergence around liberal values and civic integration policies in the 2000s (Joppke, 2005, 2017). The rules have turned into a salient political issue (Miller, 2000), somewhat overlooked in the broad literature on public attitudes to migrants and immigration, which might come with a particular logic. The article argues that residents are likely to adhere to a club-good logic, which empirically is shown to cut across countries with different naturalisation rules/immigration discourses and cut across groups with different self-interests, perceptions of threats and voting intentions. More formally, our research question is: 'What attributes of migrants make residents in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark more or less likely to grant a non-European (EU)-migrant citizenship?' We focus on non-EU migrants as EU migrants rarely apply for citizenship as they are given extensive rights in other EU member states.

Public opinions on who should be accepted and who should be rejected for citizenship are important as they through democratic procedures might transcend into rules for naturalisation. Although many rights (and obligations) are given to permanent residents without citizenship, the event of naturalisation has been found to have real effects on migrants' assimilation (Ersanilli, 2010), wages (Helgertz et al., 2014) and political participation (Hainmueller et al., 2015), which feedback to societal development. Finally, public opinions on the naturalisation of migrants might tell a larger story of how residents define the symbolic boundaries of modern states embedded in a globalised world.

This article is divided into seven sections. In the next section, we present the current literature on public attitudes towards granting migrants citizenship. In the third section, we establish our theory on attitudes to naturalisation, based on the club-good argument. In the fourth section, we introduce the four country cases. In the fifth section, we describe our conjoint survey experiment. In the sixth section, we present our findings. The seventh section discusses our results, including limitations.

STATE OF THE ART

The inflow of immigrants, in particular humanitarian non-EU migrants, has through decades triggered widespread public and political debates in European countries. A large bulk of research has shown how public attitudes to migration

and immigrants are polarised between winners and losers of economic globalisation (focused on economic threats), the multi- and monocultural sentiments (focused on cultural threats) and left- and right-wing voters (focused on framing, media coverage, etc.). For an overview, see Dinesen and Hjorth (2020).

Recent literature on public attitudes has, however, shifted focus towards what *kind* of immigrants to grant residency finds more consensus. The seminal article by Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) finds bipartisan consensus on allowing highly educated migrants with language skills, job experience and job plans into the United States, using a conjoint design. The consensus of admission to highly skilled workers has been confirmed in a European setting (Ford & Mellon, 2020), using a split-sample design. In the next section, it is theorised how the same consensus could apply to the issue of granting citizenship.

Previous research on public attitudes towards the naturalisation of migrants is limited. One strand of literature has focused on a potential correlation between historically inherited citizenship regimes and public attitudes to principles for naturalisation. Using indicators of whether citizenship should be given by *jus soli* (law of soil), *jus sanguinis* (law of blood) or *jus domicile* (law of residence), Levanon and Lewin-Epstein (2010) found a correlation but also noticeable differences, which they explained with recent changes in rules (see below) and perceived economic and cultural threats from the inflow of migrants. In a focused comparison between Germany and Israel (representing *jus sanguinis* countries), the United States (representing *jus soli* country) and France (representing *jus domicile* country), using the same ISSP 2003 data, Raijman et al. conclude that '… contrary to our expectations, and despite their marked differences in migration policies and conceptions of nationhood, no significant differences were found in attitudes towards the allocation of citizenship rights to immigrants in the countries under review' (Raijman et al., 2008, p. 211). We suggest that these results, running against expectations, might be caused by the fact that first-generation migrants, per definition, cannot fulfil *jus soil* (being born in the destination country) and rarely fulfil *jus sanguines* (having ethnic ancestors in the destination country). Thus, the more relevant question is how *jus domicile* (law of residence) should work.

A second strand of the literature has focused on attitudes towards who more specifically should be given citizenship, among the foreign-born (legally) residing in the destination country. Using regular surveys in Germany (ALLBUS, 1996, 2006), Diehl and Tucci (2011) report public attitudes towards preconditions for naturalisation. They find that being born in Germany, being of German descent or being a member of a church is generally perceived to be of low importance, while mastering the German language, adaption to the culture, the ability to earn a living and not having committed a crime is of high importance. These patterns are similar in both years, although more distinct in 2006 than in 1996. Based on this, Diehl and Tucci (2011) conclude that the criteria related to what they labelled 'civil-cultural factors' seem to be of greater

importance than 'ethnic factors'. This is remarkable as Germany historically has been the prime example of the *jus sanguinis* rules (law of blood). Our study contributes to this strand of literature by applying an original conjoint experiment covering Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.

A third strand of the literature has studied actual referendums of the naturalisation of individuals. Hainmueller and Hangartner (2013) provide results from the local ballot box voting procedure in practice in Switzerland until 2003. Analysing 2400 recorded naturalisation referendums across 45 municipalities, they found little effect from the provided information on gender, marital status, age or migration history, some effect from skills (high skilled less rejected) and unemployment (more rejected), and a large effect from the country of origin (former Yugoslavia and Turkey more rejected). Thus, in these real-world referendums, ethnic origin seems more important than economic credentials for naturalisation. A follow-up study (Hainmueller et al., 2015) showed that this real-world behaviour of Swiss voters could be replicated in Swiss conjoint experiments, especially in the paired conjoint variety used in this article.

The existing literature is dominated by the attempt to empirically find correlations between citizenship regimes and public attitudes (although Hainmueller and Hangartner (2013) can be said to be an exception). These studies of the relationship between policies and attitudes are implicitly or explicitly institutionalist at their core, as they study whether policies feedback into attitudes. The argument that historical, inherited rules shape public preferences through a feedback loop is indeed a standard institutional argument. This is typically argued to happen through a combination of self-interest and policy learning (Hedegaard, 2015; Svallfors, 2012). However, as most natives are given automatic citizenship through a mix of *jus soly* and *jus sanguinis,* the groups with self-interests and actual experiences with *jus domicile* are small. Furthermore, their political strength is reduced by the fact that they often lack citizenship, which gives these groups access to vote in national elections. Therefore, the most relevant feedback mechanism is that existing rules might shape natives' perceptions about which rules are considered appropriate. In our point of view, naturalisation policies thereby resemble what Soss and Schram (2007) labelled as highly visible, but distant policies. Such policies 'have the potential to elicit rapt attention and powerful emotion, but their design features and material effects slip easily from public view because they lack concrete presence in most people's lives' (p. 122). Therefore, there is a need to retheorise public attitudes to naturalisation.

A THEORY OF RELEVANT MIGRANT TRAITS FOR NATURALISATION

Imagine the nation-state as a club. This club already has a large number of members holding lifelong membership. The full members of the club are to decide when prospects should be granted the same status. Framed this way, the

question becomes what kinds of traits are important when prospects are assessed for full membership. The essence of a club is that it provides several club goods to its members. As Carens argues, 'Citizenship in Western liberal democracies is the modern equivalent of feudal privilege—an inherited status that greatly enhances one's life chances' (Carens, 1987, p. 252). The four countries we study are indeed privileged clubs, where members benefit from state-organised civil, political and social rights. True, many of the club goods of the nation-states can be consumed without the lifelong membership status. This goes for law and order and infrastructure, but also goods such as schooling and healthcare. However, the added value of citizenship is (1) to gain lifelong security for members and their offspring without the threat of deportation to other nation-states (with some exceptions in the case of dual citizenship), (2) to have a say through voting in national elections, (3) better possibility for including new members through marriage and (4) better mobility across state boundaries due to stronger passports.

Our first proposition is that full members will base their assessment on whether the prospect is an economic gain or drain for the club. In the same way, the so-called sociotropic voters think more about the economic well-being of the country than their own pocketbook (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981), we expect the full members to think more about what is good for 'their club' than about their own preferences for, or against, different types of migrants. The initial formulation of the 'club good' theory was based on a situation, where the substractabilty of use (or rivalry) is low and where the difficulty of excluding potential beneficiaries is low (Ostrom, 1990). In the initial formulation, Buchanan (1965) used the example of a club created to establish and run a swimming pool in a middle- and low-income community. With a limited number of members, the use of the swimming pool by one member does not lower the possibility of another. Thus, the subtractability of use is low. Buchanan (1965) predicted that in such a situation, it will be rational to increase the number of members as the cost per member thereby decreases. As the number of members increases, the rivalry of finding a space in the pool increases, that is, the level of subtractability is low, but not zero. Therefore, the cost per member and the consumption possibilities per member need to be balanced somehow (in a rational framework to the marginal utility of lowering the cost equals the marginal decline in utility caused by crowding). In the northern European context, some migrants are a net economic drain, especially low-educated humanitarian migrants, while others are a net economic gain, especially high-educated work migrants. Therefore, one would expect higher public acceptance of migrants who are imagined to be a net economic gain, that is, those prospects who put more into the club than they take out (Hedegaard & Larsen, 2019). This is indeed what is found in experimental studies of giving residence (see above) and we expect the same pattern for decisions on who to turn into full lifetime members. On the contribution side, this comes down to human capital, labour market

participation and tax payment. In our experimental setup (see below), we will test the effect of education and labour market position.

Our second proposition is that full members will prefer prospects culturally 'similar' to themselves. From a sociological perspective, a club is much more than a way to provide club goods. The club also provides identities to its members. A large research tradition has uncovered how the nation club is filled with symbols of belonging, such as the flag, and how residents of states indeed identify themselves as being Swedes, Danes, Germans or Dutch (Anderson, 1991; Larsen, 2017; Smith, 1991). Thus, when full members are to assess whether prospects should be given full membership status, a likely criterion is whether they share identity with those already holding full membership. This line of reasoning fits well with theories on in-group and out-group preferences and the existence of ethnic hierarchies (Hagendoorn, 1995; Hedegaard & Bekhuis, 2019; Verkuyten et al., 1996). This type of theory argues that members of the out-groups are viewed and ranked more favourably if they are more similar to the in-group (Hagendoorn & Hraba, 1989; Hagendoorn & Pepels, 2017). There are several potential theoretical explanations for why culturally similar prospects are likely to be selected. The preference for cultural 'similarity' might reflect a deep human preference for building social relations with similar others, which consistently has been found in studies of marriage and friendships (McPherson et al., 2001). Following the group threat theory (Blumer, 1958), the preference for culturally similar prospects could also be a matter of the in-group defending the advantages attached to being a majority. This might, for example, be the advance of the club communicating in the language of the majority. Finally, following the utility-maximising arguments within economics, it could be a matter of full members believing that culturally homogeneous groups work better than culturally heterogeneous groups. One line of reasoning behind the latter mechanism is larger (perceived) agreement on what type of club goods to establish and easier coordination among members, especially in terms of language. Another line of reasoning is that the threat of exclusion from a group is only effective for those belonging to the group (Coleman, 1990). Having nonassimilated members in a group means lowered sanction capacity. At the same time, naturalisation is about the club losing the possibility to expel members from the club, which, everything else equal, increases the importance of cultural similarity. The experimental studies of giving residence provide mixed evidence for the cultural similarity argument (e.g., mattered country of origin little in the US case; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015), but we expect a clearer pattern for giving citizenship. In our experimental setup, we will test the effect of length of club membership (time lived in the country), family attachments to full club members, language skills and religious background.

THE VALIDITY ACROSS COUNTRY CASES

For the conjoint experiment, we selected four (rather) similar countries with different naturalisation rules and different elite discourses on the migration issue. From an institutional perspective, differences in rules should lead to different attitudes. From a mass media perspective, differences in elite discourse should do the same. For visible distinct policies, Soss and Schram (2007), for example, argued that 'Mass publics are highly dependent on mediated constructions of such policies and, accordingly, elite and media frames are more likely to structure and condition mass feedback effects' (p. 122). In contrast, our club-good argument assumes a fair amount of rational reasoning (which would cut across current rules and elite discourses) among the residents. Thus, the country selection has the aim to increase the external validity of our test of the club-good argument.

The countries vary in terms of naturalisation policies. Two indexes based on the requirements for migrants applying for citizenship have been created to measure the level of strictness. In the civic integration policy index covering 15 European countries around 2009, Goodman (2010) calculates a score of 6.0 for Germany (the most restrictive of all countries in the sample), a score of 0.0 for Sweden (the least restrictive) and a score of 5.0 for Denmark, and 4.5 for the Netherlands. Goodman also found that this reflected a tightening of rules from 1997 to 2009 for Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, while Sweden maintained permissive policies. The Citizenship Law indicators (CITLAW) provide a more fine-grained index going from 0 (most restrictive) to 1 (least restrictive), which was calculated in 2011 and 2016. For the so-called ordinary naturalisation, the index is built on the coding of requirements for time of residence, renunciation, language, civic knowledge/cultural assimilation, clean criminal record and economic resources. The German score was 0.45 in both years, the Swedish score was 0.87 in both years, the Danish was 0.25 in 2011 and 0.45 in 2016 and the Dutch were 0.72 in both years (GLOBALCIT, 2017).

Thus, in both indexed Sweden stands out as the country with the consistently most lenient rules. The Netherlands is the second most lenient country, but with a tightening of rules from 1997 to 2009. Germany and Denmark are more strict countries and they tightened rules from 1997 to 2009, followed by a softening of rules in Denmark from 2011 to 2016 (primarily caused by the possibility of holding dual citizenship). Updating the CITLAW to 2021, Jensen (2022) finds a retightening of rules in Denmark, turning them stricter than the rules found in Germany. Thus, by 2022 Denmark is the most strict of the four countries.

Variations in political discourses about migration and naturalisation are difficult to quantify. As a point of departure, all four countries have mainstream political elites that adhere to liberal democratic values and a public dominated by low-intensity civic nationalism, in a broader comparative perspective

(Larsen, 2017). However, Sweden and the Netherlands are known for promoting multicultural elite discourses in the 1980s and 1990s, while Germany and Denmark consistently rejected the multicultural discourse (Borevi, 2017; Koopmans, 2005). The elite discourses have been challenged and changed during the last two decades. The challenge to mainstream elite discourse has primarily come from new far-right parties (Eger & Valdez, 2015; Kitschelt & McGann, 1997). These parties entered the Danish parliament in 1973 (Fremskridtspartiet), the Dutch in 2004 (the Freedom Party), the Swedish in 2010 (Sverigesdemokraterne) and the German in 2017 (Alternative für Deutschland). These new far-right parties promoted discourses (1) about economic and cultural threats from migration, especially from Muslim countries and (2) about a culturally coherent Christian 'people' and a distant multicultural 'elite'. In terms of policies, they asked for a halt in migration, larger obligations for assimilation and a tightening of naturalisation rules. Thus, in all four countries, the political discourse was polarising. In Denmark and Germany, the mainstream elite discursively retreated from a nonexistent previous multicultural policy (Meer et al., 2015). The Dutch mainstream elites also famously retreated from the multicultural policies of the 1980s and 1990s, while mainstream Swedish discourse remained largely unaffected (Borevi, 2017; Meer et al., 2015).

DATA AND METHOD

The survey experiment was conducted in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. The survey experiment was collected using YouGov's online panels. In total, 8073 respondents were included in the study, almost equally split between Germany ($n = 2033$), the Netherlands ($n = 2014$), Sweden ($n = 2013$) and Denmark ($n = 2013$). As we are sampling from YouGov's panels, the respondents are not fully representative of the population and therefore national weights on age, gender, the region of the country, education and vote in the last election are used to balance the samples. The conjoint design follows previous recent studies within social science (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015; Reeskens & van der Meer, 2019; Weiss & Tulin, 2019). To frame our survey and provide definitions, the respondents are given the following introduction: 'Thank you for participating in our survey. There is debate about how the rules for granting citizenship to migrants from outside the EU should be in the future. Citizenship gives migrants the same rights and obligations as the rest of the population'. Thereafter, the respondent is exposed to three screens, each including two fictitious migrants: Migrant 1 and Migrant 2. For each screen, the respondent is asked to indicate whether Migrant 1 and Migrant 2 should be granted citizenship in [Germany/the Netherlands/Sweden/Denmark]. We will use this as our dependent variable, meaning we get six answers per respondent.

Each migrant profile has one of the potential levels across the seven attributes shown in Table 1. In each country, receiving country ([RC]) was substituted with the relevant country. We use 'labour market experience in [RC]' and 'education' to measure the importance of economic traits. The cultural similarity is measured by 'time lived in [RC]', 'family in [RC]', 'language skills' and 'religious background'. Gender is included without any clear expectations as to whether the public was willing to give citizenship to males or females.

For each migrant profile, the seven attributes are shown with randomisation of the levels. The rank order of the attributes was also randomised. For instance, all the fictitious migrants will have the overall attribute of religious background, but it is randomised whether the migrant is described as having a Christian, Muslim or Hindu background (levels) and where this information is given in the vignette. None of the options is mutually exclusive. Thus, two profiles can have the same levels, which means that there can be overlaps. For instance, when it comes to gender, there are only two options in our survey, which means that 50% of profiles will be either both male or female.

There are a total of 3240 possible variations of the profiles. We arrive at this number by multiplying the number of levels shown in Table 1 with each other ($4 \times 3 \times 3 \times 5 \times 3 \times 3 \times 2$). Even though we have 8073 respondents, split evenly among the four countries, who are presented with six profiles each, the 48,348 answers (6×8073) would not be nearly enough if we were to compare directly between the profiles. Therefore, we use the average marginal component effect from an ordinary least squares regression. This is the average marginal effect of one level in a given profile averaged over all the possibilities. For instance, we compare the effect of males versus females and assume that all the categories they are presented along with are an average of all the possible levels. Given enough variations, we can then estimate the relative utility or preference for each level in each attribute (Hainmueller et al., 2015).

We will show the effects of each attribute and associated levels using graphs. For each level, there is a reference, which the marginal effect is measured against. Standard errors are clustered on the level of individuals, to control for the fact that six responses are given by the same individual. Leeper et al. (2020) have shown that such subgroup comparisons can be affected by the choice of the reference level. Therefore, we have also run the analysis without reference levels, as marginal means and with other reference levels. Nevertheless, we find consistent results (for the marginal means see Supporting Information: Figure A6).

Based on previous research and our theoretical argument, we expect that the experimental effects are similar across the four countries, despite the country variations described in the previous section. We will also test the validity of our two propositions by analysing the effects across various groups of residents. At the individual level, we explore results across gender of the respondent, age,

TABLE 1 The overall attributes, associated levels and expected effect of them on attitudes towards granting a non-EU-migrant citizenship

Attributes	Varying levels
Labour market experience in [RC]	Has primarily been working for the last 5 years (ref.)
	Has primarily been a student for the last 5 years
	Has primarily been a pensioner for the last 5 years
	Has primarily been unemployed for the last 5 years
Education	No vocational education (ref.)
	Vocational education
	University degree
Religious background	Christian background (ref.)
	Hindu background
	Muslim background
Family in [RC]	Has no family in [RC] (ref.)
	Has a spouse with a migrant background
	Has a spouse with a migrant background and children. Has a spouse from [RC]
	Has a spouse from [RC] and children
Time lived in [RC]	Has lived in [RC] for 5 years (ref.)
	Has lived in [RC] for 11 years
	Has lived in [RC] for 17 years
[RC] language skills	Speaks [RC]'s language fluently (ref.)
	Speaks [RC]'s language fairly well
	Speaks [RC]'s language poorly
	Does not speak [RC]'s language at all
Gender	Male (ref.)
	Female

Note: [RC], receiving country. Substituted with Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden or Denmark.

education, migration status (being a non-EU migrant, being an EU migrant and being a native) and political orientation (intending to vote for a far left-wing party, a mainstream left-wing party, a right-wing party or a far right-wing party; see Supporting Information: Tables A2 and A3 for classification).

Finally, we explore the effect across a standard measure of perception of economic and cultural impact from migration, with reference to the dominant place economic and cultural threat explanations have had in the literature on migration and immigrants (Dinesen & Hjorth, 2020; Saris & Sniderman, 2004). For economic impact, we use an item borrowed from the European Social Survey (ESS) with the following wording: 'Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?' This question uses an 11-point scale from 0 ('bad for the economy') to 10 ('good for the economy'), which we coded into 'good for the economy' (8–10), 'bad for the economy' (0–2) and 'balanced' (3–7). Bad for the economy was answered by 19%, good for the economy by 21% and balanced by 53%. Seven% answered, 'don't know'. The central question is whether the naturalisation acceptance based on economic gain only holds true for those believing that the economy is threatened. For cultural impact, we use the ESS item with the following wording: 'Do you think that [countries] cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?' Again an 11-point scale from 0 ('cultural life undermined') to 10 ('cultural life enriched'), which we coded into undermined (0–2), neither (3–7) or enriched (8–10). Undermined was answered by 21%, neither was answered by 49% and enriched was answered by 25%. Five percent answered, 'don't know'. The central question is whether the naturalisation acceptance based on cultural similarity only holds true for those believing that the culture is threatened.

FINDINGS

Validity across countries

We find that 44% of the fictitious migrants were 'given' citizenship by Danish respondents. The share was 50% in Germany, 54% in the Netherlands and 54% in Sweden (see Supporting Information: Table A1 for distributions across the six rounds). Thus, we do find lower acceptance rates in the most restrictive countries, Germany and Denmark. In Sweden, the country with the least restrictive policies, we find 10 percentage points higher acceptance rates than in the otherwise very similar Denmark, which by 2021 had the most restrictive policies. However, the variation in acceptance rate across countries is modest. Despite more permissive policies in Sweden than in the Netherlands, the acceptance rate is the same. Furthermore, the relative importance of the traits of migrants for attitudes towards granting citizenship is close to similar across the four countries. Figure 1 shows the average marginal effect of the different attributes in the four countries.

As for the economic rationales for giving or rejecting citizenship, the patterns are close to similar. In all four countries, we find that a student, a

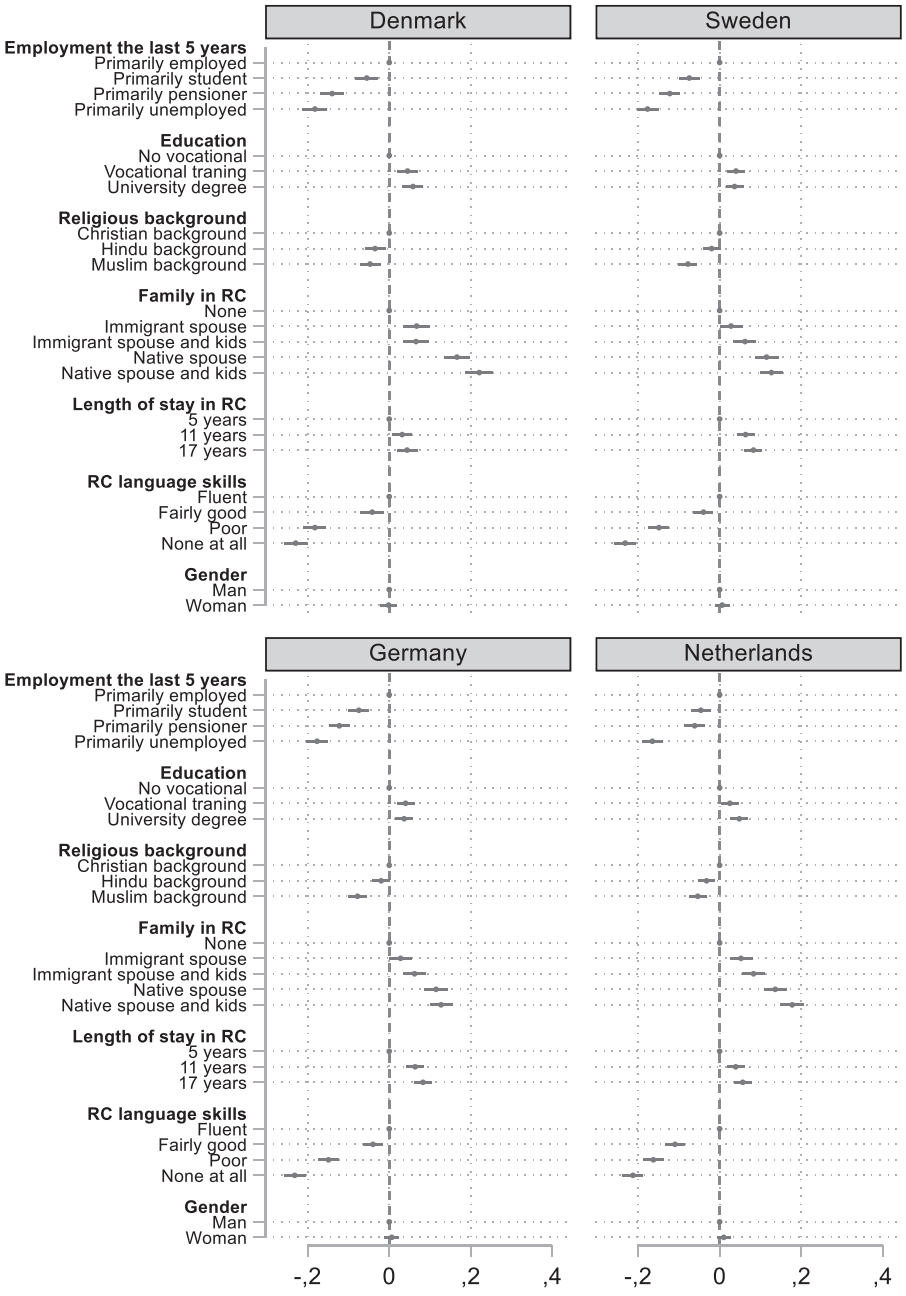

FIGURE 1 (See caption on next page)

pensioner and an unemployed are less likely to be given citizenship than a migrant that has been employed for the last 5 years. Unemployed are around 18 percentage points less likely to be granted citizenship by the respondents than are employed. The effect of the education of the migrant is not as strong. However, in all four countries, the fictitious migrants with 'vocational training' and 'university degree' are more likely to be given citizenship than are those with 'no vocational education'. Those with a university degree are four to six percentage points more likely to be given citizenship than those with no vocational training. We find no clear difference between having vocational training and a university degree. Thus, it is primarily a matter of not having an education. Nevertheless, our interpretation is that there is a sociotropic rational economic reasoning behind decisions to give prospects full membership or not. These effects from labour market status and education are present after controlling for the other levels.

As for the preference for culturally 'similar' prospects, we also find close to similar patterns across the four countries. The strongest marginal effects are found in language skills. Those who do 'not at all' speak the language of the old club members are 21–23 percentage points less likely to be granted citizenship than are those who speak the destination country's language fluently. Those who have language skills that are 'poor' or 'fairly poor' fall in-between. Thus, in all four countries, there is a clear premium for speaking the language. Family attachments to the club also matter. Those migrants with a native spouse and (mixed) kids are between 13 and 22 percentage points more likely to be granted citizenship than are those with no family attachments. The effect is somewhat larger in Denmark (22 percentage points) and the Netherlands (18 percentage points) than in Germany and Sweden (13 percentage points). In between these two levels is a migrant with a native spouse (without children), a migrant spouse with children and a migrant spouse. In the Danish case, there is no distinction between the latter two levels.

A little surprising to us is that the independent effect from time lived in the country is modest in all four countries. A migrant who has lived 17 years in the destination countries is only four to six percentage points more likely to be granted citizenship than a migrant who has lived 5 years in the countries. Thus, time itself is not a strong argument for giving citizenship. In fact, we find that having lived a long time in the country, in combination with low language skills, can lower acceptance rates (not shown). Thus, the fictitious migrant who does

FIGURE 1 The average marginal component effect on the probability of granting non-European Union-migrant citizenship across countries on attitudes to naturalisation. Sample sizes (*n*) included Denmark: 12,078; Sweden: 12,078; Germany: 12,198; Netherlands: 12,084, presented with 95% confidence intervals.

not 'at all' speak the language of the old club members *and* who has been 17 years in the countries is less likely to be accepted than migrants who have been in the country for a shorter time. Thus, a low level of assimilation in regards to language and having stayed in the country for a long time is punished.

We also find a Muslim penalty in all four countries. A migrant with a Muslim background is 5%–8% less likely to be accepted for citizenship than a migrant with a Christian background. A migrant presented with a Hindu background falls in-between. Thus, despite control for labour market status, education, language skills, family attachment and years in the country, the public in all four countries is more likely to 'give' full membership to a migrant presented with a Christian compared to a Muslim background. Finally, we find no significant effect in any of the four countries of the presented migrant being female and or male.

Validity across background characteristics

In line with previous research on attitudes to permanent residence, we find little variation in the relative importance of traits across various groups within countries. Respondents of different gender (Supporting Information: Figure A1), ages (Appendix Supporting Information: Figure A2) and education (Supporting Information: Figure A3) respond very similarly to the experiment. Thus, the preference for selecting non-EU migrants with economic gain and cultural proximity is found to be (equally) relevant across these different background characteristics of the survey respondents. Unfortunately, the data material does not allow identification of those with and without citizenship, but a distinction can be made between natives (born in destination countries), EU migrants (born in an EU country or at least one parent born in an EU country) and non-EU migrants (born in a non-EU country or at least one parent born in a non-EU country). The acceptance rate was 49 for natives, 54 for EU migrants and 64 for non-EU migrants. These patterns are very similar across the four countries (not shown). Thus, those less distant from the actual effects of naturalisation rules are more willing to accept naturalisation than the other groups. However, in terms of relative importance for the levels, we find little variation (see Supporting Information: Figure A4). The finding is that the natives (both parents born in the destination countries) and EU migrants react similarly to the experiment, while the non-EU migrants respond somewhat differently. For the latter group, the educational background of the presented migrant did not affect the likelihood of being granted naturalisation in the experiment. Neither did this group distinguish between having a Muslim and Hindu background. However, the most remarkable finding is that even non-EU migrants found employment status, language skills and Christian background to be of importance for granting citizenship to other non-EU migrants.

Validity across perceptions of cultural and economic threat

The respondents who think migration is bad for the national economy are less likely to grant citizenship to the presented migrants, as one would expect. The acceptance rate is down at 26%. For those who think migration is good for the national economy, the acceptance rate is 72%. For those indicating balanced impact (3–7 on the 11-point scale), the acceptance rate is 52%. This is again similar across the four countries (not shown). Thus, there is clearly a correlation between the assessment of the economic impact of migration and the acceptance rate. The more interesting finding, however, is the similar importance of attributes across these groups (see Figure 2). The employment history and education attributed are important both for those thinking that migration is good and bad for the economy. The importance of language skills and length of stay in the destination countries is also similar. Only in terms of religious background and family attachment do we find differences. Those thinking migration is good for the economy emphasise these attributes a little less than do those thinking that migration is bad for the national economy. Thus, we do *not* find that the economic reasoning only applies to those respondents thinking the current type of migration is an economic threat to the country.

We found the results to be similar across the perception of economic and cultural threats from migration. For those thinking that the culture was undermined by migration, the acceptance rate for naturalisation was 27%. For those answering cultural enrichment, the rate was 74%. For those in-between (3–7 on the 11-point scale), the rate was 52%. However, as seen in Supporting Information: Figure A5, the finding is that the relative importance of the attributes does not vary much. As was the case for economic assessment, religious background matters more for those indicating a cultural threat. Thus, we *do* find that the religious background of the non-EU-migrant matters more for those believing immigration is a cultural threat, while it is insignificant for those indicating a low cultural threat. Thus, the religious similarity proposition is not verified for those indicating that immigration culturally enriches the country. However, it should be noted that it is notoriously difficult to distinguish between the assessment of economic and cultural threats (to the extent that we cannot distinguish between the two segments in the data) and between threat assessments and general dislike for immigrants (Saris & Sniderman, 2004).

Validity across voting intentions

Finally, we explore the effects of the experimental treatment across the voting intention. The acceptance rate for naturalisation is 33% for far right-wing voters, 48% for mainstream right-wing voters, 59% for mainstream left-wing voters and 66% for far left-wing voters. These patterns are largely similar between the four

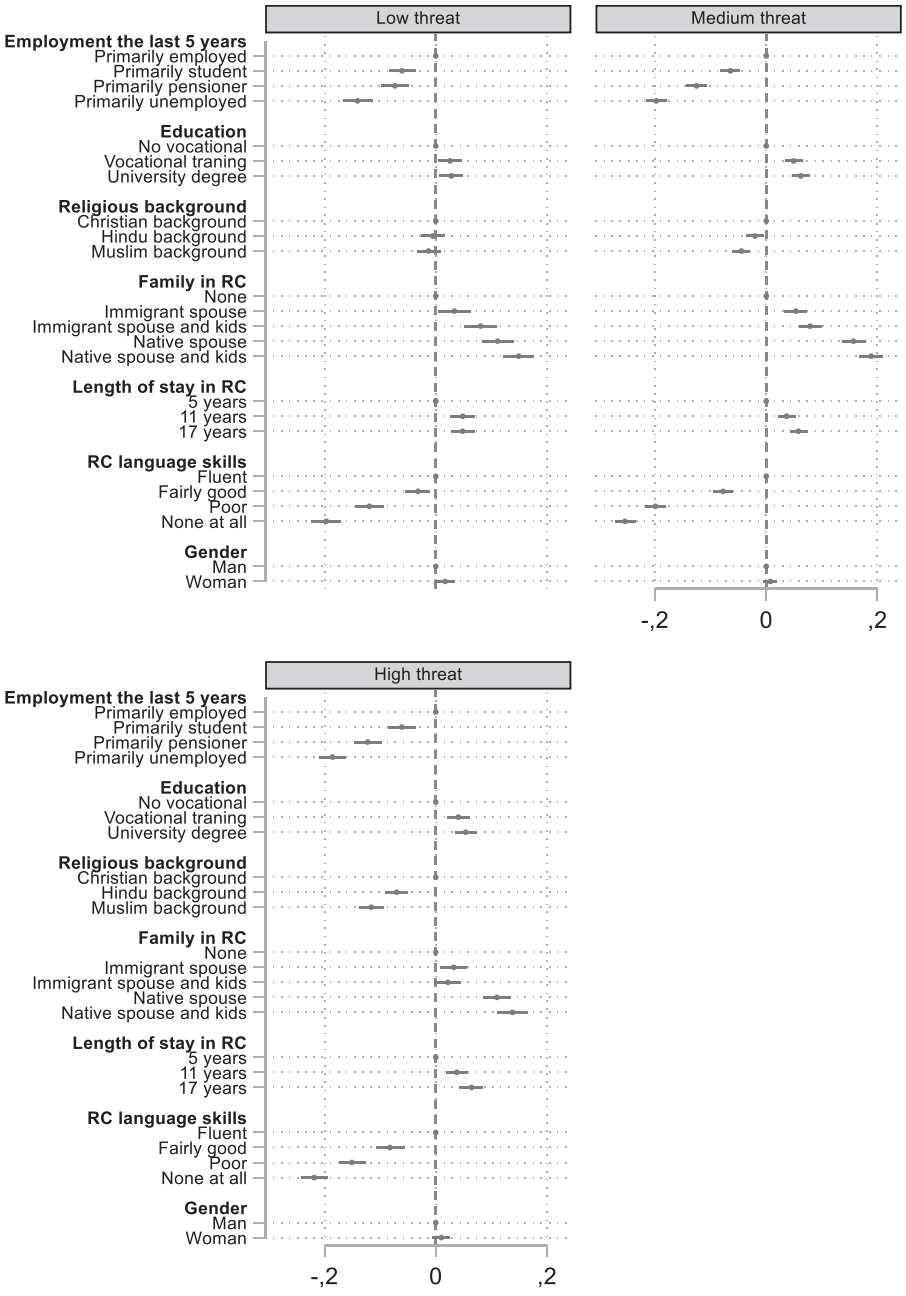

FIGURE 2 (See caption on next page)

countries, although the Swedish left-wing parties and the Dutch far-right parties have significantly higher acceptance rates than their counterparts in the other countries (not shown). Despite differences, the relative importance of the attributes is very similar across segments (see Figure 3). The employment status of the presented fictitious migrant generally has the same overall effect, although voters of far-left parties do seem to place a little less emphasis on it than other voters. The impact of the education of the migrant is small and largely similar across groups, but the voters of far-left parties place a little less emphasis on it. For the religious background, we see that not being of a Christian background carries a small penalty among all voters, but also that the effect is larger for Muslims than for Hindus among far-right and mainstream left parties. For mainstream right and far-left parties, there is no difference between the non-EU migrant having Hindu and Muslim backgrounds. The impact of family in the [RC] is very similar between the party groups, although voters of mainstream right and far-right parties do seem to be a little less willing to grant citizenship to migrants with a migrant spouse. Language skills of the [RC] are viewed as important by voters of all the party groups. A lack of language skills is being severely punished in all political segments. Finally, gender neither matters across political segments.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this article, we argue that when it comes to attitudes about citizenship, people think in terms of a club good. We found strong and significant effects from employment and education, which we believe show that people consider the potential economic gain/drain when asked about giving non-EU migrants full lifetime membership. We also documented that proficiency in the destination-country language, family attachments to natives, time lived in the country and religious background is important traits. We interpret this as an assessment of cultural proximity. We believe that combined, our results show that both assessments of economic gain and cultural proximity are important when residents within northern European nation-states are asked to decide which non-EU migrants should be given citizenship. The advantage of the conjoint design is that we can conclude that all these traits have independent direct effects, as the other attributes and levels are constant.

FIGURE 2 The average marginal component effect of migrant attributes on the probability of granting non-EU-migrant citizenship in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden or Denmark across the assessment of the economic impact of migration. Sample sizes (*n*) included low, 8982; medium, 25,770; high, 10,290, presented with 95% confidence intervals.

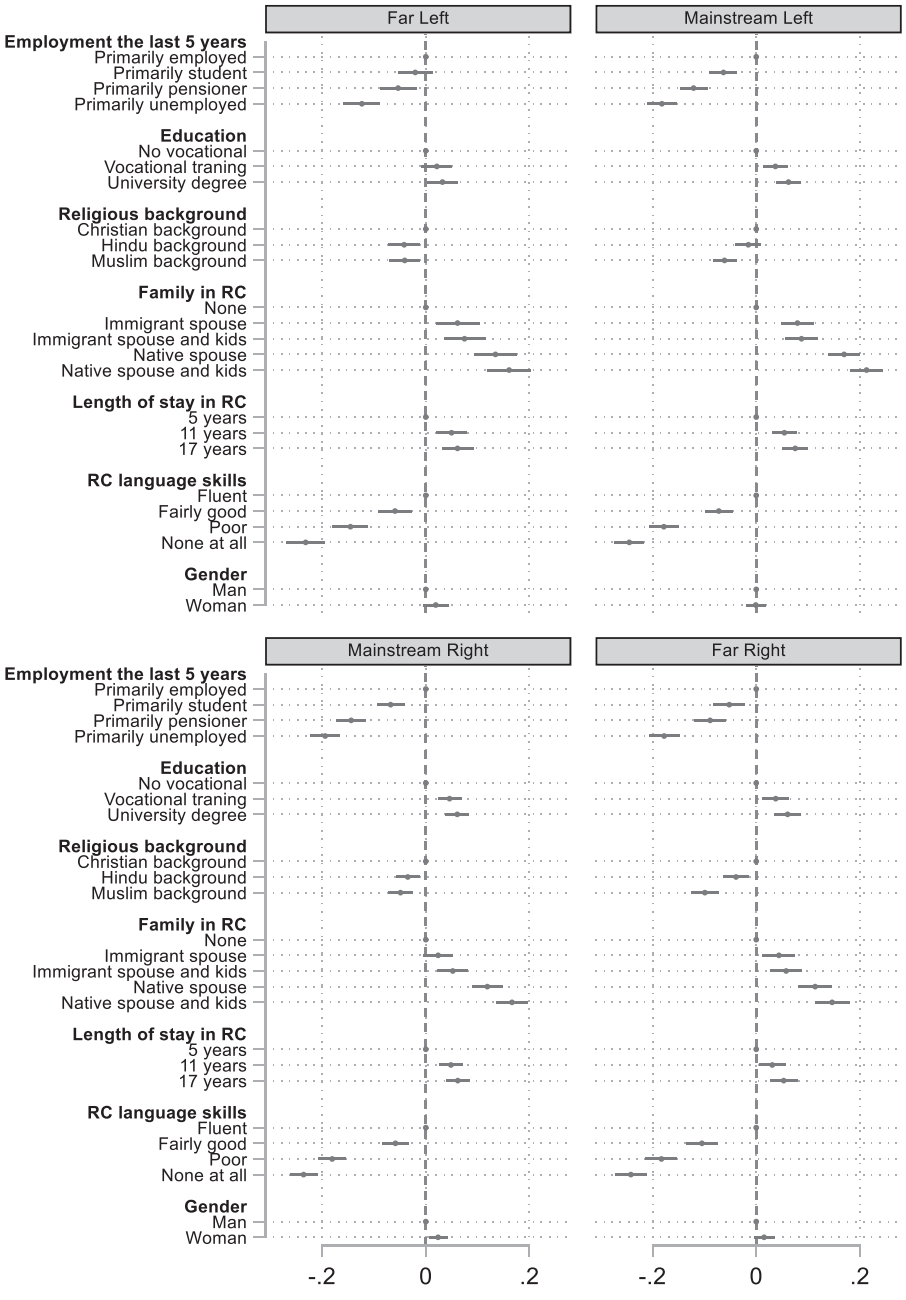

FIGURE 3 (See caption on next page)

The study found these preferences to be similar across the four countries, despite differences in citizenship rules and elite discourses. That public preferences do not match actual naturalisation policies confirms previous findings in the field. Our interpretation is that naturalisation is a visible but distant policy; the naturalisation issue carries highly symbolic elements, but the actual rules are little known to the broad majority, not themselves dependent on these policies. More surprising is the finding that public preferences also seem little affected by differences in elite discourses on the migration issue across countries. This might be given different interpretations. One is that elite discourses might have changed over time. From multicultural and ethnic rhetoric to convergence on civic rhetoric about the importance of integration/assimilation within the context of a liberal state. Another is that shared discourses about the migration experiences, across the four countries, supersede more theoretical elite discussions for or against multiculturalism. The discourse of failed integration of migrants in a previously integrated society might be what shapes public preferences for excluding those with a Muslim background and including those signalling willingness to assimilate through proficiency in the destination country's language. This interpretation is supported by the finding that length of time lived in the country had surprisingly little effect on acceptance rates (and even turned negative, when interacting with little language proficiency), while perceptions of economic and cultural threats significantly lowered acceptance rates.

The study found that acceptance rates of naturalisation did vary across segments of natives, while there was largely a consensus on the relative importance of the traits of migrants. In our point of view, one of the most remarkable findings is that even far right-wing voters assign importance to employment status and education, while even far left-wing voters assign importance to the religious background, family relations to natives and destination country language skills. Thus, despite public polarisation on the migration issue, there is an underlying consensus on relevant traits of importance for gaining citizenship. A similar public consensus has been found for the selection for residency, especially for welcoming high-skilled workers, but we do not think it is (completely) the same phenomenon. For granting citizenship, we also find strong and consistent effects from the cultural similarity attributes, which we interpret as higher selectivism for citizenship than for residency. We leave it to future research to properly test this interpretation.

FIGURE 3 The average marginal component effect of migrant attributes on the probability of granting non-EU-migrant citizenship in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden or Denmark across voting intention. Sample sizes (*n*) included far-left, 5.862; mainstream left, 10,506; mainstream right, 11,154; far right: 8592, presented with 95% confidence intervals.

While public attitudes among natives seem unaffected by actual policies, it is also an open question how these attitudes feedback on policies. Our interpretation is that these public attitudes constitute an opportunity structure for the political elites. The likely result is that policymakers, in all four countries, will be tempted to ignore the integrative effect of naturalisation and install policies that favour the cultural proximate migrants, the most assimilated and the migrants of economic benefit for the national club. In doing so, policies need to be balanced against the liberal principles of equal treatment by states. Denmark is an example of how apparently neutral rules about placement in language courses within the introduction programmes (based on education in the country of origin) and neutral requirements for Danish skills for naturalisation, largely hinder unskilled migrants from gaining Danish citizenship (Jensen et al., 2021).

The study naturally comes with some limitations. The most obvious is that we have only covered four northern European countries. The similarity across these countries seems to suggest stability across contexts; however, we cannot know for sure. For the Swiss case of real referendums up until 2003, the cultural proximity seems to matter more than the economic reasoning. One could expect the same findings in countries, where the understanding of nationality is more ethnic—for example, Hungary or Poland —than what is found in Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany. Another limitation is whether results are shaped by the conjoint design. In our point of view, the conjoint experimental design is well-equipped to reveal public preferences and better so than ordinary survey methodology. However, it should be kept in mind that the design forces the respondents into a choice situation. The respondents could reject or accept all the presented fictitious migrants, as natives could in the Swiss local referendums on naturalisation in place until 2003, but still, the setup initiated a fictitious selection process. Finally, we acknowledge that it is difficult to separate cultural and economic reasoning behind the selection process for naturalisation despite the advantages of the conjoint design.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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