Interpersonal discussions and immigration attitudes

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Abstract: The antecedents of immigration attitudes have been extensively examined in academic research, in particular, with respect to media use and personal contact with immigrants. Research on the role of interpersonal discussions about the issue of immigration has been scarce, however. Results from a two-wave panel survey show that individuals holding unfavorable attitudes towards immigration engaged more often in interpersonal communication about immigration, which colored the overall effect of engaging in such discussions. The implications of these results are discussed in the concluding section.

Keywords: immigration attitudes; interpersonal communication; panel survey; disagreement

1 Introduction

Immigration is a prominent policy issue in many countries around the world, and its importance is further elevated given the refugee crisis in the Middle East that followed the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, among others, during the past decade. The prominence of immigration on the political agenda highlights the importance of researching the antecedents of immigration attitudes among the public, with a special interest in information antecedents.

There are three ways to acquire information about an issue: to be exposed to media information about this issue, to have personal experience of this issue, or to engage in discussions about this issue (see, e.g., Mutz, 1992). So far, researchers have examined the effect of exposure to news on immigration attitudes (e.g., Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina, 2013), and the effect of having personal experience of the issue of immigration, that is, living in a neighborhood with immigrants (e.g., Ha, 2010). Research on how
information obtained via interpersonal communication influences immigration attitudes has been limited so far. For example, studies have looked at the effects of interpersonal communication on different levels of political tolerance, where immigration was used as a case for individuals who identified immigrants as their “least-liked group” (Mutz, 2006). We lack a thorough examination of how interpersonal communication influences the sentiments about immigration in society, however. This paper presents first steps toward filling this gap.

An in-depth exploration of interpersonal communication effects involves the examination of several aspects of discussion patterns. Apart from the frequency of discussion about the given issue (in this case, immigration), the content of their discussions is also important. In this study, we are going to examine three important aspects of the current literature on interpersonal communication: who is more prone to discuss immigration, whether people are in the minority/majority side of the discussion, and, consequently, who changes their attitudes toward immigration. Research on interpersonal communication has previously examined whether majority arguments exert influence on minorities (de Dreu and de Vries, 1996) and whether exposure to disagreement can have beneficial effects on political tolerance (Mutz, 2006). Departing from this previous literature, we will examine how discussion affects immigration attitudes. To measure the effects of discussion on attitudes, we will employ a two-wave panel survey enabling us to examine change in immigration attitudes.

1.1 Immigration attitudes and its antecedents

We know that immigration is an issue with substantial weight for political variables such as voter choice in elections (Green and Hobolt, 2008; Odmalm, 2011) or support for EU integration (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005). Hence, the importance of studying immigration attitudes is highlighted. Several studies have looked at the factors influencing immigration attitudes. Researchers have identified factors that predict lower immigration attitudes such as right-wing political ideology, economic and labor market insecurity, cultural concerns, age (Chandler and Tsai, 2001; Mayda, 2006) and personality traits (Dinesen, Klemmensen, and Nørgaard, 2014). Researchers have also examined how information can influence immigration attitudes. When it comes to media exposure, we have seen how the frequency and the tone used towards immigrant actors in the news fueled anti-immigration sentiments among citizens (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009) and how negative and positive news about immigration influences negative and positive attitudes about immigrants, respectively (Schemer, 2012).
Other research on immigration attitudes focused on personal experience with immigrants, in this case, contact via, for example, living in the same neighborhood. This line of research typically refers to the intergroup contact hypothesis. Allport (1954) suggested that interpersonal contact between conflicting groups eases off the prejudice under some conditions such as “equal status in the situation”, “common goals”, “intergroup cooperation”, or “support of authorities”. Since then, studies in psychology and sociology have tested whether living in the same area or working with immigrants reduces prejudice. For example, Savelkoul, Scheepers, Tolsma, and Hagendoorn (2010) found that contact with colleagues from different ethnic groups reduced negative attitudes towards immigrants. In this vein, a study examining intergroup contact between high school students suggested that contact between ethnic groups reduced prejudice, but prejudice also reduced contact (Binder et al., 2009).

Research has been, so far, scarce on the role of interpersonal communication on these relationships. For example, studies have shown that interpersonal communication with immigrants influences the relationship between the contact with immigrants (as seen in the contact group hypothesis above) and attitudes. Citizens who never speak with neighbors of different ethnic and racial background show lower levels of social trust, while those who often speak with neighbors of different ethnic and racial background have similar levels of social trust (Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston, 2008). In the present study, rather than looking at discussion with immigrants, we are interested in the effects of discussion about immigration, and this brings us to the research questions of this study: Who discusses immigration, and what effect do these discussions have on immigration attitudes?

1.2 What is the role of discussion?

The two-step flow theory suggests that mass media provide information to opinion leaders, who then, in turn, provide information to their peers (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948). Since then, a large number of studies have been dedicated to measuring the impact of the processes and effects of discussing about public affairs. From this line of research, we know that political discussion has an effect on different forms of political engagement, such as political knowledge (Bennett, Flickinger, and Rhine, 2000) and that this effect does not only flow through media (Scheufele, 2002) but also directly (Eveland, 2004). We have also evidence that interpersonal communication affects political attitudes (Lazer, Rubineau, Chetkovich, Katz, and Neblo, 2010), issue-salience (Wanta and Wu, 1992) and vote choice (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995). Given the lack of studies
measuring the influence of interpersonal communication on immigration, we will measure the influence of discussion about immigration on immigration attitudes.

1.3 Majority/minority status

The Spiral of Silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) suggested that members of a group holding a minority viewpoint in a discussion will remain silent, and those who believe they are in the majority, or who hold an opinion with momentum, will speak out more. The spiral of silence theory has been very influential, and numerous studies have tried to demonstrate such an effect (see a literature review in Scheufele and Moy, 2000). Matthes (2015), in a recent panel study, showed that over time, opinion climate is related to opinion expression. Hayes (2007) investigated in an experiment how the social/political climate (whether it is friendly/hostile) plays a role when political issues are being discussed. He found that people willing to self-censor will do so when located in a hostile climate of opinion. Karjalainen and Rapeli (2015), while trying to invite citizens to a deliberation event regarding immigration attitudes, found that citizens with both pro- and anti-immigration sentiment dropped out of the event. However, what was different between these groups was that dropping out in the pro-immigration group was related to conflict avoidance.

It is the pro-immigration people who are more likely to drop out because of conflict avoidance, not those who are against immigration. A desire to avoid political confrontation with anti-immigration attitudes was therefore a cause of attrition among pro-immigration individuals. (Karjalainen and Rapeli, 2015, p. 417)

Why did conflict-avoidance play a role for pro-immigration people? In line with a spiral of silence reasoning (see Matthes, 2015), a part of the explanation is that anti-immigrant points of view had the momentum on their side. Immigration and the Finns Party had been central issues/actors in the period during which the study took place (Karjalainen and Rapeli, 2015, p. 411; Sundberg, 2012). The media played their part in the debate by emphasizing the role of the anti-immigrant movement (Horsti and Nikinen, 2013; Horsti, 2015) and the popularity of the Finns Party had increased from 4% in 2007 to 19% four years later in 2011, that is, shortly before the study by Karjalainen and Rapeli (2015) was fielded. That is, anti-immigration sentiments clearly had momentum.

A similar effect of the larger climate of opinion has also been documented by an analysis of the European Social Survey. Individuals residing in countries with more racial prejudice tend to hold even more anti-immigrant attitudes. That is, individuals in these countries are more opposed to immigrants “above and
beyond individual demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, individual prejudicial views, and above and beyond the size of the minority population residing in the country” (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2015, p. 347).

1.4 Minority implies more disagreement

The larger climate of opinion can only make a difference if it is reflected in interpersonal political discussions. While the composition of social networks surely is biased (e.g., Mutz and Mondak, 2006), the larger political environment heavily penetrates social networks (Huckfeldt and Beck, 1998). In the words of Huckfeldt and Beck (1998, p. 1008), “the externally defined microenvironment intrudes on the private, idiosyncratic patterns of social interaction that occur within the microenvironments of our respondents”. In other words, it appears safe to argue that those who hold opinions in the minority more often will experience peers who disagree, compared to those holding majority opinions. A field of research focuses on the specific effects of disagreement in political discussions, and particularity on whether they were beneficial effects for variables important for democracy. This research can help us understand the majoritarian bias in attitude change processes.

Generally speaking, we know that citizens tend to strengthen their pre-existing political preferences when they discuss politics with a politically homogeneous network, while they are more likely to change minds when they discuss with a cross-cutting network (MacKuen and Brown, 1987). Scholars have argued that heterogeneous standpoints fuel an internal interrogation of someone’s own points and, thus, democracy can profit from them (Schmitt-Beck and Lup, 2013). In addition, discussing about politics in a cross-cutting network enhances the quality of political thinking in terms of the number of rationales produced and the complexity of thoughts (Erisen and Erisen, 2012). However, Mutz (1997) argued that citizens with strong opinions, when confronted with the opinions of others, tend to think of counter-arguments to defend their initial position.

More specifically, when it comes to the effects of disagreement on political tolerance, there is conflicting evidence on whether they are beneficial. Dryzek (2000) suggested that deliberation is the best way for people to learn about values such as political equality, human integrity, reciprocity, and accountability, and by learning these they will become more tolerant and more attentive to the interest of others. Mutz (2006) enhanced this argument by showing empirical evidence pointing out that exposure to disagreement leads to higher levels of political tolerance. Her study showed that it is exposure to political disagreement and not general political discussion that enhances the awareness of rationales for oppos-
ing views. This awareness, in turn, is translated into support for civil liberties for disliked groups, that is, higher political tolerance. Pattie and Johnston (2008) also showed that higher political disagreement is associated with higher levels of tolerance for different lifestyles.

Finally, looking at discussions about race, we also find conflicting evidence. Myers and Bishop (1970) showed in an experimental setting that disagreement can polarize in a way that unprejudiced students became more unprejudiced after deliberation about racial attitudes, while prejudiced students became more prejudiced. In addition, deliberation about extremely sensitive issues like race within a group has been argued to be undesirable for discussion since they are so divisive that they could break a social group apart (Goodin, 2006). As a result, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) also suggested that deliberation can have negative effects for democracy since citizens who are reluctant to voice their opinion publicly because of their dislike for conflict are not represented in the discussion.

1.5 Hypotheses

This literature leads us to two hypotheses. The discussion on how the climate of opinion influences the willingness to discuss leads us to a first hypothesis: People holding minority views on immigration are less likely to discuss immigration (H1). This hypothesis instantly begs for another question to be answered: How does the majority/minority status influence attitude change? According to studies looking at the influence of majorities on minorities when it comes to attitude change—and not only attitude expression—we know that the behavior of a large number of people in a group affects the behavior of a small group of people as shown in classic psychological experiments (Asch, 1956). Research in psychology (Asch, 1956) has shown that majority arguments are generally stronger than minority arguments when it comes to attitude change or cognitive activity related to the issue (de Dreu and de Vries, 1996; Mackie, 1987; Nemeth, 1986). Political research on deliberation has also shown that minorities encounter more disagreement, as discussed, and they are more prone to recognizing disagreement when they encounter it, something that creates a majoritarian bias, where minority preferences are not likely to be communicated effectively (Huckfeldt and Beck, 1998; Ikeda and Huckfeldt, 2001).

Based on our discussion of the literature and the arguments above we assume that citizens in the majority of immigration attitudes will talk more about immigration and, thus, that engaging in discussion about immigration will color the effects of these discussions in their direction. As a consequence, we hypothesize that: Discussions about immigration will move attitudes in the majority direction (H2).
2 Data and methods

2.1 Panel survey

The issue of immigration is and has been for many years highly salient in the public debate in Denmark (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2015). Therefore, our analysis of change in attitudes in Denmark can be seen as a rather conservative test. The generalizability of the results is discussed later in the paper. Data were collected from a web-based panel survey\(^1\) and fielded by TNS Gallup, based on a representative sample of the Danish population\(^2\). Among other measures, the survey asked about the discussion frequency concerning different issues, levels of disagreement and attitudes towards these issues. The first and the fourth wave from a four-wave panel survey were used for the purposes of this study. The wave selection has to do with the availability of questions being asked twice. Immigration attitudes were asked only in the first and the last wave of the study. The response rate was 38.2% in wave 1, and re-contact rate was 68% in the second wave, 60% in the third wave and 82% in the fourth wave. For the rest of the paper these (first and fourth) waves are going to be renamed as the first and the second wave of this study. Results were based on the responses of 1,043 individuals. Wave 1 took place from 19 February until 4 March 2013 and wave 2 from 27 November to 9 December 2013. Important for the present purpose, during that period there were no events such as a massive influx of immigrants like the so-called European migrant crisis of late 2015 or a terrorist attack committed by an immigrant similar to the 2016 Christmas market attacks in Berlin, either in Denmark nor elsewhere in Europe. Also, while generally high on the agenda, there was no particular political event related to immigration during the period of data collection (Bille, 2014). In other words, to the best of our knowledge there were no external shocks that could have by themselves swayed public opinion in one particular direction.

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1 The study was founded by the VELUX foundation
2 An overview of the sample showed that the sample is representative in terms of education (measured on a scale, SD in the adult population was 12.8 while in the sample it was 12.04), and in terms of region (30.6% of the population lives in the capital area compared to 28.8% in the sample, while there was a representative distribution in the other regions, too). There was underrepresentation of young people in the sample (15.5% in the sample versus 35.3% in the population for ages 18–40) and an overrepresentation of older citizens (53.3% in the sample compared to 29.2% in the population for the ages above 60). Middle-aged groups (40–60) were better represented (31.8% in the sample, compared to 35.8% in the population).
2.2 Measures

The main dependent variable was measured by asking individuals a series of questions regarding their immigration attitudes. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree on a 1–5 scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree) in a series of statements about migration. Statements were: “Immigration is good for the labor market”, “Immigrants cause problems in the schools that their children attend”, “Immigrants enrich Danish culture”, “Immigrants misuse Danish social welfare”, “The religions of immigrants are a threat to our way of life”, “Immigrants from other EU-countries are expensive for the Danish society”. The scale was adapted from de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005). The internal consistency of the scale was at high levels in both waves (Cronbach’s alpha: .87 for wave 1 and .88 for wave 2). Discussion about immigration was measured by asking respondents: “How often do you discuss immigration?” on a 1–5 scale (never, once a month or less, a couple of times per month, a couple of times per week, every day or almost every day). The questions for the control measures can be found in the appendix.

2.3 Data analysis

Pearson’s correlation and OLS regressions were used to analyze the data. A lagged dependent variable was added in the regressions, that is, what we are investigating is change from one wave to another wave. Panel data has the advantage that we can draw causal inferences since they measure how much each variable influences change between waves, ceteris paribus (Markus, 1979). The control variables were drawn from wave 2.

3 Results

The first step of this analysis will investigate whether pro- or anti-immigration individuals hold the majority status in these discussions. First, we did a descriptive analysis of immigration attitudes among the sample. The results showed that there are more individuals with negative sentiment towards immigrants than people with positive sentiment towards immigrants, as seen in Figure 1.
Figure 1: Immigration attitudes in the sample in wave 1.
N = 949. (94 individuals were excluded from the panel since they had a neutral stance on immigration).

Figure 2: Distribution of immigration attitudes in the sample in wave 1.
N = 1043. Numbers are percentages. Values on the left of 13 denote generally unfavorable immigration attitudes while values on the right of 13 denote generally favorable immigration attitudes.
To examine whether the composition of those participating in discussions about immigration is similar we use a simple correlation and a regression of attitudes towards immigration by measuring frequency of discussion about immigration. Table 1 shows the results of the correlation and Table 2 the results of the OLS regressions.

Table 1: Ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable: Discussion about immigration in wave 2</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion about immigration wave1</td>
<td>.514***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.026)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration attitudes</td>
<td>-.031***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.047 (.055)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.001 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.013 (.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.000 (.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>.138*** (.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.026 (.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic evaluations</td>
<td>-.005 (.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media exposure</td>
<td>.006** (.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.567*** (.125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1043</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 2: Pearson Correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion about immigration</td>
<td>Immigration attitudes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both of these tables show that anti-immigration individuals talk more frequently about immigration (supporting H1). First, the correlations show that a negative and significant correlation exists between discussion about immigration and immigration attitudes. Second, the results of the regression also show that the more critical immigration attitudes one holds (i.e., being in the majority), the more the frequency of discussion increases over time. This finding is all the more striking when recalling that this test measures change over time.
Hypothesis H2 stated that discussions about immigration move attitudes in the majority direction, that is, toward holding more anti-immigrant attitudes. In Table 3, the results of the regression are presented. According to the results of the regressions presented in Table 3, discussion frequency about immigration has a negative direct effect on the change of immigration attitudes between the waves. That is, we find support for Hypothesis 2, too. Individuals holding the majority status of these discussions (anti-immigration individuals) talk more frequently about immigration, and discussion frequency plays a role in these attitudes.

The other significant variables in the regression was education. Higher education levels predicted more favorable immigration attitudes.

Table 3: OLS Regressions. Numbers are coefficients. Numbers in parentheses denote standard errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable: Immigration attitudes in wave 2</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration attitudes wave 1</td>
<td>.765***</td>
<td>(.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media exposure</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of discussion about immigration</td>
<td>-.390***</td>
<td>(.083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic evaluations</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>(.042)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>(.178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>(.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.095*</td>
<td>(.043)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>(.026)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>(.104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology (right-wing)</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>(.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.707***</td>
<td>(.876)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Squared</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.
Summing up, our results so far showed that those holding less favorable attitudes towards immigrants engage more often in discussions on immigration (supporting H1), and that discussing immigration tends to move interlocutors toward holding less favorable attitudes about immigration (supporting H2).

4 Discussion

Overall, our results showed, first, that individuals with anti-immigration attitudes are more prone to participate in discussions about immigration than individuals with favorable attitudes toward immigration, and discussions about immigration lead people to hold less favorable attitudes toward immigration.

It should also be noted here that the debate about immigration in the Danish media tends to focus on the anti-immigration side and on intolerance (Lindekilde, 2014; van Klingeren, Boomgaard, Vliegenthart, and de Vreese, 2015). This phenomenon is not new in Danish media. A study of the news frames of Danish newspapers during the past decade found that non-Western immigrants are framed as an existential threat to the country, and particularly Islam is framed as a “beast” (Hellström and Hervik, 2014). In addition, the anti-immigration Danish People’s Party was framed more as a mainstream party rather than a far-right-wing party (Hellström and Hervik, 2014; Rydgren, 2010). In the political domain, the Danish People’s Party has become a central political actor in the political debate (Bächler and Hopmann, 2017; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2015).

In other words, Danes holding pro-immigrant views are not only confronted with more political disagreement in their interpersonal communication, since they tend to be in the minority in such discussions, they are clearly also a minority with respect to the public debate in the media. This is another way of saying that people holding pro-immigration attitudes were more often than people holding anti-immigration attitudes confronted with the message that they were wrong. On top of that, following the spiral of silence theory, those holding anti-immigrant attitudes are motivated to speak out more often given the congeniality of the tone in the media and the public debate (cf. Matthes, 2015). In addition to direct media effects of the media coverage of immigration (Boomgaard and Vliegenthart, 2009; Igartua and Moral-Toranzo, 2011), we are likely to witness indirect media effects through motivating some to speak out more often while demotivating others. Future research could disentangle the causal links between media effects, discussion and expression of opinion.
5 Conclusion

The power of deliberation and its benefits for society have captivated intellectuals and scholars for centuries. Ancient Athenian democracy was built on the premise that public deliberation about issues would enhance the democratic system and thus, the city state. John Stuart Mill, fascinated by the idea of an open deliberative society, argued in favor of a legislative power called the “Congress of Opinions” where representatives would express every opinion that is present in society as a whole (Mill, 1861). Recent research (Mutz, 2006) also argued that exposure to disagreement can increase political tolerance. Immigration attitudes are not a typical measure of political tolerance, but it arguably is a closely related concept, and our findings support the notion that disagreement has a powerful effect on attitudes. Our explanation is that the direction of these findings is a result of some citizens abandoning the debate, primarily the ones who hold more tolerant attitudes. It seems that Goodin (2006) was right in pointing out that some issues are usually taboo and people prefer not to discuss them, but there are indications that it is a taboo mostly for tolerant individuals. Therefore, the “arena is free” for the intolerant side to dominate the immigration debate.

One may wonder whether, over time, opinions will become more negative toward immigration and will, eventually, be more or less uniformly skeptical toward immigration. Based on previous research (Johnson and Huckfeldt 2005; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague, 2004), that is not likely. First, some individuals will resist opinion change, no matter what. Second, external shocks may lead to new information triggering opinion movements in the opposite direction. For instance, at the end of 2013, a well-known Danish politician, former minister Uffe Elbæk, formed a new political party, the Alternative. What does such an external shock to the political environment mean for public opinion and interpersonal communication? On immigration, this party has a liberal stance. While virtually no-one expected the party to be viable, it did gain momentum and received 4.8% in the 2015 parliamentary election. As mentioned in the theory section, not only those who believe they are in the majority are likely to have a greater tendency to speak out, but also those who believe they hold an opinion with momentum. This is another way of saying that our results do not predict that public opinion will eventually become uniform. Instead, our results explain how interpersonal communication can push public opinion further in a specific direction. Ceteris paribus in the current Danish political climate means Denmark is becoming less positive about immigration although events such as the founding of this new party by an already known politician may, at least for some individuals for a limited period, alter their discussions and, subsequently, their attitudes.
Naturally, future research is needed to reach more robust conclusions about the effect of interpersonal communication related to immigration. Future research could override the limitations of this study, most importantly by measuring disagreement about immigration. In addition, future research should further examine the reasons behind the relative absence of individuals with pro-immigration attitudes from such discussions. Another, and related, question is the generalizability of the reported results. On some accounts, Denmark is similar to other (West) European countries. For instance, the attitudes of Danish citizens towards immigration are very close to the average for the 28 EU countries (33% of Danish citizens have positive feelings towards immigration for people from outside the EU, 34% being the EU average, according to Eurobarometer, 2015). Thus, further research could look at how citizens of countries with different levels of immigration attitude are affected by their interpersonal discussions. In addition, Denmark has relatively high levels of discussion about current affairs and political issues, similar to countries belonging to the same media system, such as the Netherlands (Nir, 2012). Denmark belongs to the Democratic Corporatist media model, associated with a high degree of news readership and a high level of political engagement (Gordon and Segura, 1997; Hallin and Mancini, 2004), something that affects the flow of interpersonal communication about politics in these countries (Nir, 2011). Hence, we could speculate that the level of the public debate about relevant political issues such as immigration could be replicated at least in similar countries that also have high levels of political engagement.

Despite the limitations and recommendations for future research, this study contributed to our understanding of the effects of public discussion about immigration. We have shown that the total effect of discussion had negative effects on immigration attitudes. The more people talked about immigration during this period, the more negative their attitudes were in wave 2. We suggest that the relative absence of individuals with positive immigration attitudes from the debate, along with the fact that those with positive attitudes faced more disagreement, are two explanations for these results. These findings contribute to literature on the effects of disagreement by highlighting the importance of studying who discusses immigration in which contexts, rather than looking at the effects of mere discussion frequency. Also, they highlight the importance and the challenge of engaging minority voices in the public debate of issues such as migration.
References


## Appendix

### Table 1A: Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Question(s)</th>
<th>Descriptive statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration attitudes wave 1</td>
<td>Users had to respond to 6 statements giving their answer on a 1–5 scale, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’: “Immigration is good for the labor market”, “Immigrants cause problems in the schools that their children attend”, “Immigrants enrich Danish culture”, “Immigrants misuse Danish social welfare”, “The religions of immigrants are a threat to our way of life”, “Immigrants from other EU-countries are expensive for the Danish society”.</td>
<td>M = 16.52, SD = 5.13 (values ranging from 6 to 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration attitudes wave 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>M = 16.31, SD = 5.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion about immigration wave 1</td>
<td>“How often do you discuss immigration?” on a 1–5 scale (1 = never, 2 = once a month or less, 3 = a couple of times per month, 4 = a couple of times per week, 5 = every day or almost every day)</td>
<td>M = 2.72, SD = 1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion about immigration wave 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>M = 2.67, SD = 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media exposure</td>
<td>“During a typical week, how many days, if any, do you watch the ___ outlet?” (Scale ranging from 0–7 days.) Outlets: DR (public broadcaster), TV2 (private broadcaster), Politiken, Jyllandsposten, Berlingske, Borsen (broadsheet newspapers), Ekstra Bladet, B.T. (tabloid newspapers) and their websites. All news media exposure measures were added.</td>
<td>M = 19.58, SD = 11.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable name</td>
<td>Question(s)</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic evaluations</td>
<td>A scale of four questions on egotropic, sociotropic, retrospective and prospective economic evaluations: “How is your family’s financial situation compared to a year ago?” “How do you think your family’s financial situation will be in about a year compared to today?” “How do you think the economic situation for Denmark is today compared to a year ago?” “How do you think the economic situation for Denmark will be in about a year compared to today?” Respondents could answer using a 1–5 scale (1= much worse, 2= somewhat worse, 3= unchanged, 4 = a little better, 5 = much better).</td>
<td>M = 12.43, SD = 2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>“How interested are you in politics?” (0–5 scale: very interested to very uninterested.)</td>
<td>M = 3.89, SD = .88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>“Within politics, people sometimes talk about ‘left’ and ‘right’. Where would you place your views on a scale from 0 to 10, where ‘0’ means the extreme left, and ‘10’ means the extreme right?”</td>
<td>M = 6.15, SD 2.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>