

Loved and feared: Citizens' ambivalence towards free movement in the European Union

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Abstract

The right of citizens to live and work in any member state is a foundational pillar of the European Union. The views of EU citizens' views on free movement are characterised by a puzzle: the border-free Europe is seen as the most important achievement of European integration but also appears as a main driver of Euroscepticism. In this article, I argue that this is because of a tension between citizens' own mobility rights and the mobility rights of citizens from other EU countries. This idea of ambivalence towards free movement is tested with observational data and a survey experiment across 28 EU countries. The results suggest that many citizens hold ambivalent views towards free movement due to a tension between the value of one's own mobility and the fear of immigration. Their effective support depends on the relative salience of inward and outward mobility. This finding has important implications for the public support of international integration more generally.

Keywords: European Union, free movement, immigration, ambivalence, reciprocity

Word count: 8092

Introduction

This article addresses the puzzling observations that European citizens view the ‘free movement’ of persons as the most important achievement of European integration while at the same time the free movement has become an important driver of Euroscepticism. The right to live and work anywhere in the European Union is not only a fundamental element of European integration, but citizens also consider it to be the greatest achievement of European integration (Geddes and Scholten 2016: 150). According to the Eurobarometer survey, the support for free movement is high all across Europe and shows no signs of decline: Around 81 % of EU citizens are in favour of free movement and 57% perceive it as the most positive outcome of the EU.¹ Nevertheless, free movement has become increasingly contested across Europe and is held responsible for social dumping on the labour market as well as benefit tourism creating a fiscal burden (Heindlmaier and Blauburger 2017; Schmidt et al. 2018). Politicians question unconditional labour mobility and the accompanying rights to social benefits (Baute et al. 2018; Ferrera and Pellegata 2018; Kramer et al. 2018; Recchi 2015; Ruhs 2017). The British vote to leave the EU in 2016 was strongly motivated by the opposition against the free movement of EU citizens (Hobolt 2016; Vasilopoulou 2016). In Switzerland, a non-member state that is part of the free movement area, voters approved in 2014 a popular initiative to restrict EU immigration (Armingeon and Lutz 2019; Sciarini et al. 2015). These observations show that the free movement has increasingly come under political pressure and has mobilized opposition against a further deepening of the EU. We observe a political backlash against free movement despite a strong and stable majoritarian support for free movement. What drives this ambivalent pattern of public support of free mobility within Europe?

The literature on public attitudes towards European integration and migration does hardly pay

¹ European Commission, Brussels (2017): Eurobarometer 87.3 (2017). TNS opinion, Brussels. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6863, [doi:10.4232/1.12847](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12847)

any attention to the free movement of EU citizens (see Vasilopoulou and Talvig 2018). Studies suggest, however, a close association between citizens' attitudes towards the EU and migration (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kentmen-Cin and Erisen 2017). National identity and anti-immigration sentiments are key predictors of Eurosceptic attitudes (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Lubbers and Jaspers 2011; McLaren 2007; Van Der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). Scholars theorise that citizens draw a connection between the EU membership and undesired immigration (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Garry and Tilley 2009: 364). Others suggest that European integration and migration are part of the same political cleavage between international integration and national demarcation (Hooghe and Marks 2018; Kriesi et al. 2008). These competing explanations leave it open how we should understand the association between immigration and European integration in the minds of citizens. The free movement of persons is where European integration and migration come together. It is an important dimension of negative integration and is at the same time a liberalisation of migration between member states. Free movement is therefore an ideal issue to study how European integration and migration are linked in the view of citizens.

In this article, I analyse public attitudes towards free movement to shed light on the ambivalent pattern of public support. I conceptualise free movement attitudes to be a distinct phenomenon that links European integration and migration. I develop two claims in this regard. First, the reciprocity of free movement between EU member states creates two different perspectives in the views of citizens. A movement between two countries is both an inward mobility as well as outward mobility. The free movement principle relates to one's own citizenship rights as well as to the citizenship rights of citizens from other EU member states. Second, I argue that the support for free movement of persons depends on the relative salience of these two perspectives and that ambivalence is the result of diverging preferences regarding inward and outward mobility.

Citizens' attitudes towards free movement

There is little scholarship on free movement attitudes, but we find an extensive attitudinal literature on the closely related concepts of European integration and immigration. These concepts allow for two different perspectives on free movement. In the integration perspective, free movement is part of the negative integration process to remove barriers between EU member states. Free movement completes the European single market and expands the rights of national citizens beyond their nation state. In the immigration perspective, free movement means conceding their discretionary power of immigrant admission to the labour markets. Free movement is the reciprocal liberalisation of immigration policy between European countries. In the following, I situate free movement attitudes within the broader attitudinal literature by discussing how attitudes on European integration and immigration relate to the principle of free movement.

The first strand of literature explains the support and opposition towards European integration and the European Union. Various contributions study the role of free movement in influencing citizens' support of the EU. Toshkov and Kortenska (2015) find that increasing immigration from Eastern Europe undermines support for European integration in Western Europe. They conclude that free movement undermines integration by driving Eurosceptic attitudes in immigrant receiving countries. Others suggest that free movement has the potential to strengthen citizens' support for the EU. They argue that transnational experiences of free movement bolster support for European integration and European identity (Ferrera and Pellegata 2018; Kuhn 2015). While the mobility of citizens from other EU countries appears to undermine the support for European integration, one's own mobility experiences seem to strengthen the support. Bauböck (2018) suggests that there is a new divide between the mobile that see free movement as opportunity and the non-mobile that see free movement as a threat. Free movement seems therefore to play an ambiguous role regarding citizens' view of the European Union. This resonates with the finding that most European citizens hold strongly

ambivalent opinions towards European integration by simultaneously associating both positive and negative opinions with the European Union (Stoeckel 2013). De Vries (2013) shows that ambivalence varies substantially across individuals and countries. However, what remains unclear is which substantive elements of European integration cause this ambivalence. The following analysis of free movement attitudes helps to disentangle the competing accounts of how citizens relate the EU to migration and sheds light on the role of free movement for ambivalence towards European integration.

A second strand of literature is concerned with immigration attitudes using realistic group threat and social identity as main explanatory approaches (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). In both approaches, negative attitudes towards immigration result from a perceived threat by immigrants as an out-group. The free movement within Europe refers to a specific group only: European citizens as bearers of transnational mobility rights. Various contributions in the immigration literature address the question of whether European citizens differentiate between immigrants from within the EU and immigrants from outside the EU. McLaren (2001) suggests that Europeans view European immigration and non-European immigration largely as identical. Meltzer et al. (2018) find that EU-citizens do not distinguish so much between EU and non-EU immigration but rather between immigrants from wealthy Western countries and the rest of the world. Blinder and Markaki (2018) reveal that only 10% of Europeans prefer European immigrants over non-European immigrants. Other scholars suggest that attitudes towards European and non-European immigrants are only weakly correlated (Vasilopoulou and Talvig 2018). The literature on immigration attitudes provides no decisive answer on whether and how citizens make a difference between EU free movers and immigration from non-EU countries. The analysis of free movement attitudes allows us to assess whether or not free movement attitudes are distinct from more general immigration attitudes.

Studies on the free movement of persons are still rare despite the issue's political importance (Ruhs 2017). Vasilopoulou and Talvig (2018) conducted a comprehensive analysis testing

utilitarian and affective explanations for citizens' support of free movement. They argue that cross-country differences in support can be explained by economic asymmetries that influence how citizens benefit from free movement. Richer countries attract more immigrants and make immigration a more salient issue that leads to lower support for free movement. Citizens of poor countries can improve their lot by moving to richer countries and therefore express higher support for free movement. Meltzer et al. (2018) demonstrate that support for free movement is associated with positive views of the EU and of immigration. They further find utilitarian and affective determinants of free movement attitudes, but with large unexplained geographical variation. In contrast, Blinder and Markaki (2018) find in their study little evidence for utilitarian and affective factors in determining the preference for EU immigrants over non-EU immigrants. These pioneering studies provide mixed evidence on the determinants of free movement attitudes. Moreover, by estimating the relative explanatory power of self-interest and identity they do not capture contrasting considerations behind citizens' attitudes towards free movement. In the next section, I outline a novel argument to explain ambivalent public opinion towards free movement.

The double nature of free movement

I build upon the attitudinal literature on the EU and immigration, and go beyond it by arguing that attitudes towards free movement are a distinct phenomenon. I argue that citizens' support for free movement is shaped by the double nature of free movement resulting from the reciprocal nature of mobility rights between European countries. It simultaneously enhances one's own mobility rights and those of fellow citizens in addition to those of citizens from other EU countries. On the one hand, free movement is a transnational extension of mobility rights of national citizens. On the other hand, free movement provides non-citizens the right to live and work in one's country on the principle of non-discrimination. This significant liberalisation of immigration outlaws discretionary admission policies. In other words, due to

its feature of reciprocity, free movement ensures both a citizen's right to outward mobility and a non-citizen's right to inward mobility. This distinction becomes relevant in particular when citizens draw boundaries between their fellow citizens of the nation state and their fellow EU citizens from other member states. Scholars have shown that European citizens identify themselves first and foremost with their nation state (e.g. Risse 2010). Citizens of other EU member states are therefore typically viewed as members of an out-group whose mobility presents a potential threat to national identity. For this reason, I expect outward mobility rights and inward mobility rights to be perceived differently by citizens and to be the main source of citizens' ambivalence towards free movement. Ambivalence is the simultaneous liking and disliking of an attitude object. Citizens are ambivalent when different considerations about a phenomenon lead to contrasting evaluative implications (Zaller and Feldmann 1992).² We therefore need to go beyond the central tendency in analysing citizens' attitudes. Both the inward and outward perspective are constitutive for the principle of free movement, and are likely to shape the attitudes of European citizens.

The first perspective on free movement regards one's own mobility rights. These rights expand the realm of freedom for citizens and expands their life choices by providing access to opportunities in other countries, in particular their labour market. The fact that European citizens can imagine a future that transcends national borders expands their freedoms and rights independent of their actual use (Koikkalainen and Kyle 2016). A recent opinion survey reveals that 84% of respondents are aware of their mobility rights as European citizens.³ In the

² Ambivalence does not imply contradiction or irrationality since different considerations that result in opposing evaluations can be fully rational views independent from each other. It only implies that citizens hold opposing evaluations towards the same object.

³ European Commission, Brussels (2016): Flash Eurobarometer 430 (European Union Citizenship). TNS Political & Social. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6652, [doi:10.4232/1.12562](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12562)

in-group perspective of outward mobility, free movement attitudes are based on whether citizens perceive it as a valuable opportunity based on a utilitarian evaluation of its benefits. We would expect that citizens generally support the expansion of their freedoms and opportunities even when they do not personally make use of them. This assumption that the in-group perspective bolsters the support for international openness is also supported by the literature on perspective-taking. Dinas and Fouka (2018) show that support for a liberal admission of refugees is substantially higher when citizens are confronted with a treatment highlighting their own refugee experience in the past. In a similar vein, I argue that when free movement rights are perceived from the perspective of one's own mobility rights, citizens are less likely to think of free movement as a problem or threat. One's own mobility rights and those of fellow citizens are perceived primarily as a potential benefit.

The second perspective on the free movement principle concerns the rights of citizens of other EU member states. Despite the existence of a European identity, most EU citizens identify themselves first and foremost with their nation states. Citizens from other EU member states are therefore likely to be perceived as an out-group and not as fellow citizens. The modal reaction to immigration is a feeling of threat to the national community (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Sides and Citrin 2007). Negative views of EU immigration should translate into the perception of free movement as a threat. It is plausible that negative views of EU immigrants render citizens more critical of the mobility rights of other EU citizens that appear as a potential threat.

I argue that citizens' support for free movement is determined by these two outlined perspectives. If free movement is perceived from the perspective of citizens' own mobility rights and outward mobility, they are more likely to hold positive views since it expands their realm of freedom. If free movement is perceived from the perspective of the rights of others and inward mobility, citizens are more likely to hold negative views resulting from threat perceptions. These considerations result in the following first hypothesis:

Hypothesis H1: Citizens hold ambivalent views towards free movement of persons based on conflicting evaluations of their own outward mobility and the inward mobility of other EU citizens.

The argument on the double nature of free movement bears several implications for the observable pattern of attitudes. I have argued that free movement support is higher in the outward perspective than in the inward perspective. This expectation provides an explanation for the ambivalent public opinion. The same individual might be more positive about free movement in regards to his or her own mobility rights and more negative about free movement as it concerns the mobility rights of citizens from other EU countries. The two perspectives can simultaneously create positive and negative views on the principle of free movement. If this argument holds, we should observe ambivalence primarily among those citizens who do not share a common identity with citizens from other EU countries and who hold negative views of EU immigrants. The mechanism, therefore, runs through identity and out-group attitudes. Only those citizens that perceive citizens from other EU countries as an out-group are likely to perceive their mobility rights as a potential threat. Citizens should only differ in their support for free movement between the two perspectives if they have negative views of EU immigrants.

If free movement attitudes are characterised by ambivalence based on the reciprocity of mobility rights, we can derive implications for the attitudinal patterns we should observe under different circumstances. Previous research has shown that attitudes characterised by ambivalence are more vulnerable to persuasion than one-sided views (Bassili 1996) and they are more likely to be driven by whatever considerations are momentarily salient, so that context and cues become more relevant (Lavine et al. 1998; Tourangeau et al. 1989). When people hold ambivalent attitudes, then the salience of the two perspectives should affect their

preference formation (Lavine et al. 2013). Regarding free movement attitudes, this means that the relative salience of the two perspectives should influence citizens' support. Which perspective is more salient in the mind of citizens is likely to depend on the national context. Countries that are primarily receiving countries experiencing high-levels of inward mobility are more likely to view free movement from an inward perspective. On the individual level, support should vary based on individual issue salience. Citizens are more likely to perceive free movement from an inward perspective when immigration is a salient issue for them. The relative salience of these two perspectives should therefore explain variation in free movement support between individuals as well as within individuals expressed as attitudinal ambivalence. Whether the (negative) views of EU immigrants translate into (lower) support for free movement should depend on the relative salience of inward and outward mobility. These considerations result in the following second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The relative salience of the inward or outward perspective moderates the association between immigration attitudes and free movement attitudes.

Data and method

To test my hypotheses and their observable implications, I rely on two different empirical strategies using observational data as well as an original survey experiment. Both survey databases use representative samples of citizens across the 28 EU member states. The analysis of observational data uses the Eurobarometer survey (EB 85.2)⁴ from spring 2016 that has the advantage of providing nationally representative opinion data with specific questions on attitudes towards free movement of persons. The sample contains

⁴ European Commission (2016) Standard Eurobarometer 85.2. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6694.

N=27'048 respondents from all 28 EU countries.⁵

The dependent variable of support for free movement is measured with four different variables (see Appendix for the exact wording of survey questions and descriptive statistics). A dummy variable measures whether respondents support or oppose free movement [*support dummy, Q1*]. Then I operationalize general support for free movement [*support in general*] and the support for free movement in the own country [*support own country*] on a five-item scale from zero to one. These variables aggregate two items on respondents' view on the right to live and the right to work in another EU country in the perspective of general support for free movement (Q2/Q3) and in the perspective of support for inward free movement (Q4/Q5). The response categories of the four items are 'a good thing', 'neither a good nor a bad thing' and 'a bad thing'.⁶ By adding up the two items, the resulting variables can take five different values with higher values represent stronger support for free movement. The question on free movement in one's own country refers to the out-group perspective of inward mobility, while the general question asks about the reciprocal principle without priming a specific perspective. The fourth dependent variable is ambivalence towards free movement measured by a dummy that takes the value of one for inconsistent valence considerations where general support is qualitatively more positive than support in one's own country [*ambivalence, Q2/Q3/Q4/Q5*]. A person is counted as ambivalent if she or he opposes

⁵ For each country approx. N=1000 respondents were randomly selected, with the exception of Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta where the sample size is about N=500. The Eurobarometer separates Northern Ireland and East Germany. I combine this data with Great Britain and West Germany to obtain only one sample for the United Kingdom and Germany. Non-citizens are excluded reducing the sample by 770 observations.

⁶ The two survey items are closely interrelated, thus justifying the index-building not only theoretically but also empirically. The correlation is 0.71 for free movement in general and 0.8 for free movement in one's own country. The aggregate support levels are almost identical between the two survey items.

free movement in the own country but not in general or supports free movement in general, but not in her or his own country.⁷ These different operationalisations corroborate the robustness of the empirical estimates and allow for the exploitation of the variations in the question wording.

As independent variables, I use a measurement of immigration attitudes and two variables for the salience of inward mobility.⁸ Immigration attitudes are measured on a four-item scale with a question asking respondents whether EU immigration evokes positive or negative feelings in them.⁹ The salience of inward mobility is measured on the contextual as well as on the individual level. On the contextual level, I measure the share of EU immigrants in the population to measure the salience of inward-mobility.¹⁰ The more EU immigrants in a country, the more I expect citizens think of free movement in terms of inward mobility. On the individual level, a variable measures whether respondents consider immigration an important problem for their country.¹¹ The more important immigration is for citizens, the more I expect them to think of free movement in terms of inward mobility.

A series of control variables are included such as age, sex and education (low, middle, high). I also include a measure of the employment status (self-employed, employed, not

⁷ Ambivalence is measured based on the variables ‘general support’ and ‘support own country’ where values below 0.5 are classified as opposition and values above 0.5 are classified as support for free movement. Thereby, I measure ambivalence as a difference in nature and not a difference in degree.

⁸ The analysis relies on immigration attitudes and their relative salience because it is where citizens show relevant variation, whereas regarding utilitarian benefits almost all citizens favour more rights over fewer rights.

⁹ I use attitudes towards non-EU immigrants as a robustness check.

¹⁰ Due to the skewed distribution and to facilitate interpretation, I log-transform and normalise the variable to a range from zero to one.

¹¹ The salience for the country represents citizens’ socio-tropic evaluations that are considered to be more important for individuals’ views on immigration than ego-tropic evaluations (Sides and Citrin 2007). Replacing it with personal salience yields a larger interaction term in the model without changing the substantive findings.

working). Previous studies have found support for free movement to be highest with youth, women, and highly educated and employed individuals (see Vasilopoulou and Talvig 2018). A dummy on exclusive national identity and the left-right orientation (scale from one to ten) adjust for more general political views.¹² On the contextual level, I include the GDP per capita, the immigrant stock (in % of population) and the vote share of radical-right parties as controls to account for different country characteristics.¹³

I estimate the determinants of free movement support with a series of multi-level regression models with random intercepts.¹⁴ This modelling choice does account for the hierarchical structure of the data with respondents nested in countries and allows estimating the effect of contextual factors including cross-level interactions.¹⁵ I run linear models except for the binary outcome variables where logistic models are estimated. First, I assess the influence of immigration attitudes on free movement support (Hypothesis H1). Two models compare the estimated effect across different wording of the dependent variable (reciprocal rights vs. inward mobility). This allows me to compare the association of free movement support with anti-immigration views between these two perspectives. I then estimate a model using the ambivalence dummy as a dependent variable to test the influence of immigration attitudes on citizens' ambivalence towards free movement. Second, to assess the influence of perspective-taking (Hypothesis H2), I run models with an interaction terms between immigration attitudes and the salience of

¹² Dropping the left-right orientation for potential endogeneity concerns, does not alter the results in a meaningful way.

¹³ Since the Eurobarometer was fielded in early 2016, I use values from the year 2015.

¹⁴ All models using Eurobarometer data are based on population-weighted data using the post-stratification weights (w23) provided for all 28 EU countries.

¹⁵ The intra-class correlation (ICC) is 0.057 for the general support, 0.055 for the support in the own country, 0.056 for the support-dummy and 0.017 for ambivalence. The contextual variation is rather low and in particular, ambivalence does not vary substantially across countries.

inward mobility. If my argument holds, we should observe that the salience moderates the association between immigration attitudes and free movement support.

The second empirical strategy to test the argument is an original survey experiment among EU citizens. The use of randomised survey experiments has become a common practice in the study of immigration attitudes and helps to address endogeneity concerns (e.g. Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). Observational data are likely to underestimate ambivalence since people are inclined towards consistency in their attitudes (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). The experimental design provides controlled conditions that facilitate the drawing of causal inference. The survey was fielded by online questionnaire in March 2018.¹⁶ The sample covers the working-age population in 28 EU member states with N=10'146 observations weighted to population structures and census statistics to ensure representativeness.¹⁷ Respondents are asked about their support for free movement based on their own free movement rights (outward treatment) and the free movement rights of citizens from other EU countries (inward treatment). The wording of the two treatments is as follows:

Outward treatment: 'You as a citizen of [COUNTRY] should have the right to live and work in other EU countries.'

Inward treatment: 'Other EU citizens should have the right to live and work in [COUNTRY].'

The response categories are based on the following Likert-scale: 'fully agree', 'rather

¹⁶ The survey was part of the EuroPulse omnibus survey <https://daliaresearch.com/europulse/>.

¹⁷ Non-citizens are excluded and therefore the sample includes only citizens.

agree', 'rather disagree', 'fully disagree', and 'don't know'.¹⁸ Respondents were randomly assigned to the two treatment groups. Due to this between-subject design of the experiment with respondents either responding to the inward perspective or the outward perspective, it is impossible to guess the goal of the study and to adjust answers to norms of reciprocity or consistency. To measure citizens' evaluation of EU immigration, I aggregate two items, one asking about the economic impact and the other one about the cultural impact of free movement for their country. Unlike in the observational study that uses the 'feeling towards EU immigrants', I measure the socio-tropic impact evaluation in two dimensions that are expected to drive negative views of immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014).¹⁹ In addition, the survey also includes age, sex, area of residence, education level, employment status and left-right orientation as individual predictors.²⁰

The experimental design allows calculating the average treatment effect ($ATE = E[y_{i1} - y_{i0}]$) as the difference between the two treatment outcomes, the support for one's own mobility rights and the support for the mobility rights of other EU citizens. The treatment effect is an estimate for citizens' ambivalence towards free movement. My argument further suggests that not all citizens respond with the same propensity to the treatment, but primarily those that have negative views on inward mobility. This prediction is tested with an analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects (Imai and Ratkovic 2013). For that purpose, I interact the treatment variable with respondents' subjective evaluations of EU immigration to calculate conditional average treatment effects ($CATE = E[y_{i1} - y_{i0} | x_i]$).

Combining the two empirical strategies enables the exploitation of their relative advantages. The Eurobarometer offers representative samples for each country and

¹⁸ The answers 'don't know' are coded as missing (N=611).

¹⁹ The two items are highly correlated.

²⁰ See Appendix for the detailed operationalization of these variables.

therefore allows assessing the effect of contextual factors and the geographical pattern of support. The survey experiment has the main advantage to offer controlled conditions to test the argument. The observational data provides a comparison of general support with support for inward mobility only while the experimental data provides a direct comparison of the two dimensions of inward and outward mobility. This allows me to directly measure within-individual ambivalence (observational data) as well as to estimate the true degree of ambivalence under controlled conditions of a between-subject comparison (experimental data). Using these two different survey designs strengthens the identification of the true structure of attitudes and allows for more robust evidence on the theoretical claims.

Observational analysis

The analysis of Eurobarometer data serves to test the observable implications of the argument with observational data. I first test hypothesis H1 postulating that citizens are ambivalent towards free movement due to a tension between outward and inward mobility. The survey data allows distinguishing between the support for free movement in general and the support for free movement in one's own country. Following the ambivalence argument, we would expect higher general support than support for inward mobility. And indeed, the comparison between the two variables shows that the general support is three to five percentage points higher than the support for free movement in one's own country and 14.4% of respondents favour more strongly free movement in general than free movement in the own country.

To further test the argument, I run a series of multi-level models of the determinants of free movement support and citizens' ambivalence (see Table 1). I compare the

determinants of free movement support in general (model 1) and in one's own country (model 2). In both models, negative views on EU immigrants are associated with lower support for free movement. In line with the theoretical expectation, the association is stronger when respondents are asked about free movement in their own country (inward mobility). Model (3) estimates the determinants of ambivalence towards the principle of free movement. As expected, individual attitudes towards EU immigration are an important predictor. Ambivalent attitudes towards free movement appear among those citizens that have negative views on EU immigrants. The predicted probabilities displayed in Figure 2 show that the share of ambivalent individuals increases four-fold moving from the least to the most negative views on EU immigration. These results confirm hypothesis H1 that citizens are ambivalent towards free movement as a result of diverging evaluations of outward and inward mobility.

Table 1: Determinants of free movement attitudes (Eurobarometer)

	Support in general (1)	Support own country (2)	Ambivalence (dummy) (3)	Support dummy (4)	Support dummy (5)
<i>Independent variables:</i>					
Anti-immigration	−0.393*** (0.008)	−0.455*** (0.008)	1.588*** (0.094)	−1.706*** (0.410)	−3.019*** (0.106)
Immigrant share (log)				1.238 (0.838)	
Anti-immigration*Immigrant share				−1.993** (0.771)	
Individual salience					−0.332** (0.114)
Anti-immigration*Individual salience					0.191 (0.172)
<i>Controls:</i>					
National identity	−0.093*** (0.004)	−0.107*** (0.005)	0.408*** (0.055)	−0.774*** (0.047)	−0.783*** (0.047)
Right-wing orientation	−0.005*** (0.001)	−0.006*** (0.001)	0.024* (0.012)	−0.059*** (0.010)	−0.058*** (0.010)
Woman	0.003 (0.004)	−0.004 (0.004)	0.131** (0.050)	−0.037 (0.044)	−0.032 (0.044)
Age	0.00002 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)	−0.005*** (0.002)	−0.004** (0.001)	−0.004** (0.001)
Low education	−0.046*** (0.006)	−0.056*** (0.007)	0.272** (0.083)	−0.102 (0.072)	−0.121 (0.072)
Middle education	−0.015*** (0.004)	−0.027*** (0.005)	0.277*** (0.059)	−0.065 (0.052)	−0.082 (0.051)
Employed	−0.016* (0.008)	−0.018* (0.008)	0.133 (0.102)	−0.150 (0.086)	−0.139 (0.086)
Not working	−0.002 (0.008)	−0.002 (0.008)	0.077 (0.102)	0.061 (0.087)	0.078 (0.087)
GDP per capita	−0.00000 (0.00000)	−0.00000 (0.00000)	−0.00002** (0.00001)	−0.00004*** (0.00001)	−0.00003*** (0.00001)
Immigrant stock	0.0003 (0.002)	−0.002 (0.003)	0.032 (0.017)	0.020 (0.023)	0.022 (0.021)
Radical-right vote share	−0.001 (0.001)	−0.003 (0.002)	0.029*** (0.009)	−0.012 (0.012)	−0.009 (0.012)
Constant	1.154*** (0.028)	1.163*** (0.029)	−3.466*** (0.214)	4.377*** (0.341)	5.160*** (0.257)
Observations (countries)	20,155 (28)	20,092 (28)	19,968 (28)	19,806 (28)	19,806 (28)
Conditional R2	0.22	0.24	0.13	0.26	0.29
Akaike Inf. Crit.	18,657.460	22,070.880	10,058.050	12,163.740	12,204.000
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	18,776.130	22,189.500	10,168.670	12,305.830	12,330.300

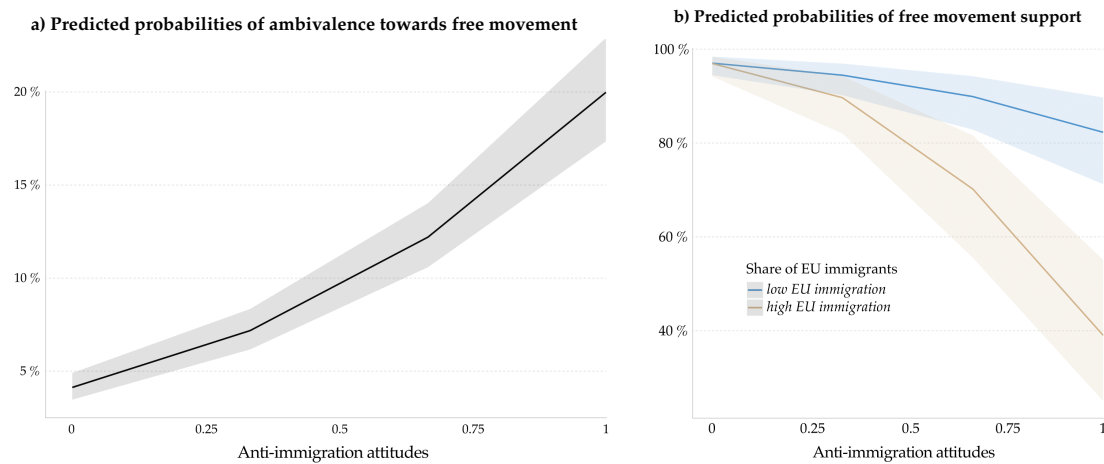
*Note: The table displays the output of multi-level models (individuals nested in countries). Model (1) and (2) are linear models, whereas model (3) to (5) are logistic models. Model (4) with the cross-level interaction is a random slope model, while all other models are random intercept models. For all models, the conditional R2 is reported. Level of statistical significance: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.*

In a next step, I test hypothesis H2 that postulates that the relative salience of the inward perspective moderates the association between immigration attitudes and free movement support. Model (4) and (5) show the estimates of this expected moderation using interaction terms. The contextual salience exerts a strong moderating effect on the association between immigration attitudes and free movement attitudes. Immigration attitudes are associated with the support for free movement primarily in those countries that receive many EU immigrants. Citizens without negative views of EU immigration

are almost certain to support free movement, suggesting that citizens are in favour of their mobility rights as long as they do not perceive an out-group threat attached to them. The predicted probabilities in Figure 2 show that when citizens hold negative views of EU immigration, support is still at 82% in countries with low levels of immigration. It falls, however, below 40% in countries with high levels of EU immigration. This moderation effect is statistically significant and of substantive size. This contextual effect remains highly significant also when including a dummy for Eastern Europe and is robust regarding the inclusion of other contextual controls such as a country's wealth, immigrant population or radical-right support. The individual salience of immigration also reduces overall support for free movement, but has no significant influence on the association between immigration attitudes and free movement support. It appears that the perception of immigration as an important issue is linked to negative views on immigration.²¹ Also, individual salience is more likely to capture the importance of immigration relative to other policy issues, whereas contextual salience is more likely to capture the importance of immigration relative to emigration. The moderating role of immigration salience (Hypothesis H2) is therefore confirmed on the contextual but not on the individual level.

²¹ Correlation between immigration attitudes and individual immigration salience is $r = 0.08$.

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of free movement support



Note: The two figures represent the predicted probabilities of ambivalence (left) and free movement support (right) based on logistic multi-level models with Eurobarometer data.

Several control variables are important predictors of free movement support. In particular, exclusive national identity and right-wing orientation significantly reduces support and increases ambivalence. The socio-demographic factors of sex and age do not yield consistent effects. Lower levels of education and employment are associated with lower levels of support and higher levels of ambivalence but are not significant in all models. The contextual controls have limited explanatory power. Support and ambivalence is lower in wealthier countries and higher in countries with large numbers of immigrants.

These cumulative findings provide tentative evidence for the argument that ambivalent attitudes result from the reciprocity of free movement with both inward and outward mobility rights. I conduct robustness tests using alternative operationalisations. Using general support and support in one's own country as dependent variables for the interaction models does yield substantially similar results. The contextual salience of inward mobility strongly increases the negative effect of anti-immigration attitudes on free movement support. The individual salience of inward mobility exerts only a small moderation effect. This suggests that the relative importance of inward/outward mobility from the country context is more important for citizens' perspective on free movement

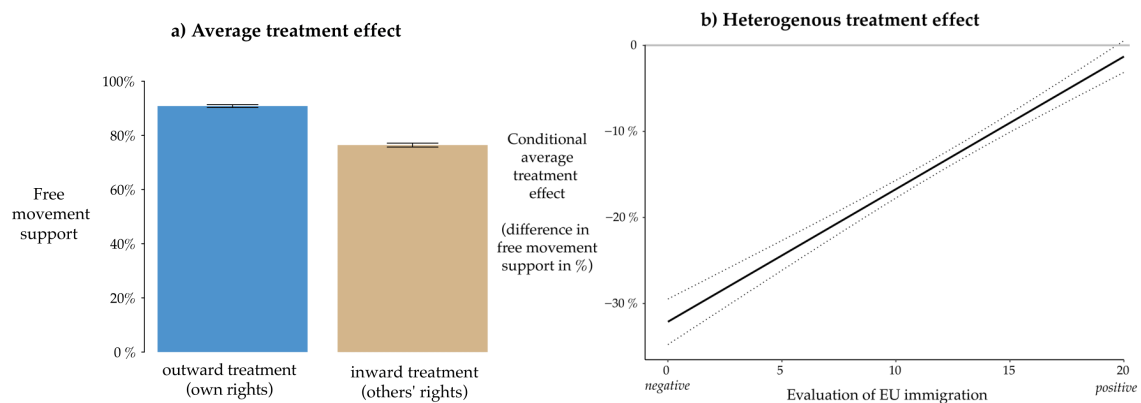
than the individual variation in the importance that citizens assign to immigration. Finally, I estimate the models replacing EU immigration by non-EU immigration, both for the individual immigration attitude as well as the contextual salience (see Appendix for model output). The main effects are substantially lower than in the models with EU migration suggesting that it is primarily European migration driving the results.

Experimental analysis

The analysis of Eurobarometer data reveals some meaningful patterns of public opinion, but does not provide controlled conditions to assess citizens' attitudinal ambivalence based on the inward and outward perspective. For that purpose, I report in the following the results of an original survey experiment among citizens of the 28 EU member states. Figure 2 shows the average treatment effect as a comparison between the inward-treatment and the outward-treatment. There is a difference of 14.4% in support between the two treatment groups (see Appendix for the detailed model output). While in the group receiving the outward mobility treatment, the support is around 91%, the support drops to around 76% in the group receiving the inward mobility treatment. This difference is both substantial and significant. As expected, the difference is substantially larger than the three to five percentage points in the Eurobarometer analysis. This confirms the theoretical expectation that the support for one's own mobility rights. If my argument holds we would expect heterogeneous treatment effects based on how much the evaluation of one's own mobility and the mobility of others diverge. We have learned that outward mobility rights enjoy near full support. Therefore, we can assess these effects by interacting the evaluation of EU immigration with the treatment dummy. Figure 2 presents this estimate as marginal effects. There is no treatment effect for those citizens with a positive evaluation of EU immigration for their country. The treatment effect

increases with a more negative evaluation of EU immigration . The treatment effect of perspective-taking is therefore highly conditional on individual socio-tropic evaluation of immigration. For citizens with negative views of EU immigration, ambivalence increases to a 30% difference in free movement support between the two perspectives. This heterogeneous treatment effect confirms the reasoning that ambivalence is determined by citizens' evaluation of inward mobility.

Figure 2: Average treatment effect of perspective-taking



Note: The plot on the left shows the estimated free movement support by treatment group (error bars represent 95%- confidence interval). The plot on the right is a marginal effect plot of the interaction between the treatment dummy and the evaluation of EU immigration.

Some additional tests corroborate the main findings. Modelling the treatment effect on the binary outcome or on the four-item variable yields largely similar effects. The inclusion of sociodemographic factors into the models does not alter the treatment effect but provides additional explanatory power. Men, citizens with higher education and city dwellers show higher levels of support for free movement (see Appendix for detailed model output). The observational analysis suggested that the country context plays an important role in shaping free movement attitudes. Does the treatment effect vary across geographical differences? One might argue that the conflict between the two perspectives is lower in Eastern Europe, a region that does not receive substantial EU immigration. I compare the conditional treatment effect based on a West-East-dummy. The effect is even

slightly larger in Eastern Europe. This suggests that the ambivalence between the inward- and outward-perspective exists independent of the country-context.

Finally, I test for an alternative causal pathway. One could argue that ambivalence does not result from the self-other perspective but from the tension between economic interests and socio-cultural values. Citizens might see free movement as economically beneficial but culturally threatening (or vice versa). While cultural evaluations are associated with inward mobility, economic evaluations are more likely to be associated with outward mobility. Ambivalence could therefore be the result of competing evaluations based on utility and affection instead of the inward and outward perspective. To test this argument, I separate economic and cultural evaluations of EU immigration. The survey data shows that the two evaluations are highly correlated ($r=0.65$). Calculating heterogeneous treatment effects separately for the two evaluations results in similar patterns of treatment heterogeneity. Those with a more negative evaluation of EU immigration show a larger treatment effect in both dimensions. These findings confirm that the ambivalence stems indeed from the reciprocity of free movement rights between the member states.

Conclusion

In this article, I propose a novel conceptualization of how European citizens view the free movement of persons that provides them with the right to live and work in any EU member state. Free movement consists of reciprocal mobility rights between states and for this reason has a double nature. It expands one's own mobility rights and those of citizens from other EU states. I argue that this evokes two different perspectives among citizens: an in-group perspective of outward mobility and an out-group perspective of inward mobility. While one's own mobility rights relate to the enhancement of opportunities, the mobility rights of other EU citizens relate to the threat of undesired

immigration. With the analysis of observational and experimental data, I demonstrate that the support of citizens for free movement within Europe strongly depends on these two perspectives. While there is overall a very high level of support for free movement, the support drops significantly once perspective-taking triggers fears from undesired immigration. In countries with high levels of immigration, the inward perspective is more salient and reduces citizens' support for free movement. The migration context of a country determines whether the inward or outward perspective is more dominant in the minds of citizens. Furthermore, citizens themselves are ambivalent towards the principle of free movement. They are systematically more in favour of their own mobility rights than granting reciprocal rights to citizens of other states. The double nature of free movement is responsible for variation in support between citizens that explains the geographical pattern of support as well as within citizens that explains their attitudinal ambivalence.

The findings presented in this study shed new light on existing research on immigration attitudes and support for the EU. Attitudes towards free movement are distinct from citizens' attitudes towards immigration. Citizens express more support for the principle of free movement than for immigration because only free movement is linked to citizens' own mobility rights but not immigration. While confirming the finding of a higher support in Eastern Europe by Vasilopoulou and Talvig (2018) on a higher free movement support in Eastern Europe, this article demonstrates that the geographical pattern is explained better by the contextual salience of inward mobility than by varying economic interests of citizens. Previous scholarship has suggested that citizens' attitudes towards European integration are more ambivalent in the West than in the East and that national identity determines ambivalence primarily in Western Europe (De Vries 2013). This study

suggests that this is the case because the inward perspective that triggers a threat to national identity is more salient in Western Europe. We may therefore also assume that the free movement principle plays an important role for citizens' support for the EU and contributes to ambivalent EU attitudes discussed in previous research. These attitudes are unlike often implicitly assumed not fixed but rather variable and dependent on the salience of different aspects. We should therefore be cautious when asking survey questions on free movement and related dimensions of European integration in order to minimize the risk of response instability resulting from competing considerations in the minds of citizens.

The findings also bear broader implications for international integration of states in times of globalization. In an interconnected world with high-levels of transnational mobility, the support for liberal migration policies not only depends on the attitudes towards immigration, but also on the enhanced mobility rights of the citizens themselves. The international cooperation of states that is commonly based on the principle of reciprocity is not only likely to lead to opinion polarisation but also attitudinal ambivalence between self-centred benefits and others-centred threats. Ambivalence appears as a by-product of the opening of nation states that is likely to increase the number of cross-pressured citizens between integration benefits and sovereignty concerns (cf. Emmenegger et al. 2018). Future research should therefore go beyond the question whether citizens perceive international openness as opportunity or threat and pay more attention to the ambivalent character of their attitudes and how citizens manoeuvre the accompanying trade-offs from international integration.

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