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Immigration Attitudes in the Wake of the 2015 Migration  
Crisis in the Visegrád Group Countries: Comparative  
insights of ESS7 and ESS8

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### Abstract<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2015 the tensions over managing external immigration into the European Union morphed into a full-blown crisis. Political and social reactions towards the Balkan Route emergency exposed major divisions between EU member states. Notably, the Visegrád Group (V4) countries, i.e. Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, stood out as a block united by governmental opposition to immigration. This political unity of countries should not be interpreted, however, as certain proof for an underlying convergence of social attitudes to migration. This paper examines the impact of the crisis on the V4 public opinion on the basis of cross-country surveys, with special attention afforded to a comparative analysis of European Social Survey waves 7 (2014) and 8 (2016). General Linear Modelling is used to test two hypotheses concerning the linkage between opposition to immigration and normative orientations in Czechia, Hungary and Poland (with Slovakia missing from ESS7 and ESS8). We demonstrate that adherence to the values of Universalism correlates with lower levels of opposition to immigration, which had been the case prior to the 2015 crisis and has mostly remained true thereafter. When it comes to respondents expressing value-based concerns with Security, they are more likely to voice more negative opinions about immigration after the crisis, although no such association held in 2014 measurements. We postulate that this public opinion shift should be interpreted as an effect of the strong securitisation of the immigration debate in the V4 countries.

*Keywords:* migration crisis, opposition to immigration, human values, Visegrád Group, European Social Survey.

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## *1. Introduction*

The European migration crisis of 2015 constituted a politically transformative moment in an otherwise already turbulent period. While social and political tensions had long been brewing over increasing number of migrants from failing or failed states of Northern Africa and the Greater Middle East, the situation became recognised as a major crisis over the summer of 2015 (Luft, 2017). Although on-going European Union (EU) efforts to disrupt major Mediterranean immigration trails had garnered some prior media attention, it was the unsustainable clogging of the Balkan Route over the spring and summer of 2015 that introduced the spectrum of panic to the European public spheres (Bauman, 2017). The crisis exacerbated political tensions among new and old member states of the EU (Agh, 2016), and put extra strain on institutions implementing migration policies at the European level. One of the explicit fault-lines developed between Germany, striving to hold the liberal line, and the V4 countries, whose immigration policies grew staunchly illiberal. Things came to a head in August of 2015, when growing concerns over deteriorating conditions along the Balkan Route precipitated the dramatic decision of Angela Merkel's government to temporarily lift existing EU restrictions on immigrant registration and mobility. This attempt at providing short-term relief grew politically contentious – even though it constituted an important gesture of solidarity with entry-point peripheral countries. The opening promptly led to a massive influx of migrants into Germany, which precipitated internal political tensions over the means, ends and limits of the liberal immigration policy that pushed the country towards actively developing new policies and practices aimed at curtailing immigration (Crage, 2016). Crucially, the German unilateral opening was only meant as an ad hoc emergency intervention – regular border-enforcement was in fact reinstated already in late September. Furthermore, Berlin swiftly started pushing for continent-wide sharing of responsibilities, which, in turn, elevated immigration policies to the forefront of EU politics (Park, 2015). Although supposedly mandatory migrant relocation quotas were formally adopted by the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council (September 14th, 2015), the Council Decision 'establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece' was adopted in spite of objections raised by many Central and Eastern European countries. Most notably, Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia voted against the measure in line with the anti-resettlement September 4th Joint Statement of the Visegrád Group (V4). Even though Poland buckled under pressure at the time, this was inconsequential as only a few weeks later, following a game-changing election cycle; a new right-leaning government in Warsaw would decisively embrace the V4 anti-resettlement consensus.

Since the fall of 2015, the V4 governments stood united in opposition to liberal immigration policies as well as to German leadership on migration questions. However, while it would be an exaggeration to claim that governmental opposition to immigration is their sole unifying characteristic, on the other hand, looking at them through the prism of migration-attitudes makes them seem excessively alike (Pakulski, 2016). It should be noted that even though the Visegrád Group has been an active platform of regional cooperation since 1991, it has in fact constituted a rather politically loose club of socio-economically divergent units (Niš, 2016). Therefore, close coordination and unity of purpose in relation to immigration issues proved an

exception rather than the norm of V4 relations. Furthermore, although Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia possess strong commonalities of historical experience, e.g. the passage from Soviet domination towards EU accession or experience of externally mandated border adjustments, these countries also exhibit strong economic, social and cultural differences. Crucially, such persistent differences have also been in relation to the social attitudes towards migration (Każmierkiewicz, 2015).

Sociological questions concerning the degree of crisis-driven convergence in terms of the attitudes towards immigration in the V4 societies appear much more intriguing than the study of official positions of V4 governments. Although some opinion surveys indicate that the 2015 crisis precipitated convergent shifts in V4 attitudes towards immigration, other studies, and most notably the European Social Survey, point to much lower levels of attitudinal change and convergence in terms of social attitudes to immigration occurring in the V4 between 2014 and 2016. From the point of view provided by the ESS, the Polish case seems particularly interesting; Poland used to have a well-established baseline of significantly lower levels of anti-immigrant sentiments than the other V4 prior to 2015 (Bachman, 2016), and in spite of notable increases in the registered opposition to immigration Polish attitudes remain less negative than those established by ESS surveys in Hungary and Czechia.

This paper does not aim at establishing equivalence between the results of different surveys, nor is it concerned with investigating the relative merits of the various ways of formulating questions about immigration-related issues. The main thrust of our analysis is indeed going to be solely based on the ESS waves 7 (2014) and 8 (2016). Furthermore, our chief concern is not with the cross-country comparisons of the degrees of opposition to various kinds of immigration – what our analysis attempts is to identify the normative factors underlying those attitudes in V4 societies. Specifically, we investigate the dynamics of opposition to immigration in the context of normative orientations as represented by the ESS scale of basic human values (Schwartz, 2007a; Schwartz, 2007b). Out of the ten component dimensions of the scale, our analysis makes use of two, i.e. orientations towards Universalism and Security.

Within the ESS, the normative orientation towards Universalism is understood to entail ‘Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature’, while Security denotes orientations towards ‘Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self’ (Schwartz, 2003b). While they need not be incompatible in principle, within the context of the migration crisis these normative preferences do seem to fall into two opposing discursive camps. In fact, this value based juxtaposition directly relates to the struggle between the two competing narratives of responsibility which played out in the media discourse throughout the crisis: ‘ethical responsibility towards refugees’ versus ‘responsibility to protect own people’ (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017). In turn, using terms popularised by Haidt (2016), these opposing viewpoints could be seen as an aspect of the larger normative conflict between the globalists (cosmopolitans) and the nationalists (particularists). From this point of view, the migration crisis triggered a discursive divide between normative camps whose viewpoints are mutually exclusive and often abhorrent. A core belief of the globalist worldview is that all forms of tribal loyalty are morally suspect because they ascribe primacy to arbitrary birthright attributes (Cichocki, 2017). On the other hand, accentuating such cosmopolitan views leads to a

greater sense of urgency on the part of the nationalists whose security concerns push them towards thinking about migration in terms of existential threats.

Our first line of inquiry concerns bridging public opinion and the public sphere. Just as at the level of public discourse, where a messaging focus on the universal human rights and responsibility was typically associated with higher propensity for expressing sympathy with immigrants; a normative orientation towards universal human values should correlate with lower levels of opposition to immigration among survey respondents. On the other hand, ESS participants that express value-based concerns with security should be more likely to voice stronger opposition to immigration – mirroring the discourse level fact that framing the crisis as a struggle against an external threat would typically underwrite desensitisation to the immigrant plight. Our second analytic avenue involves the diachronic effect of the 2015 crisis on the V4 social attitudes. Comparing the pre- and post-crisis ESS waves, we examine whether the surveys registered an effect of the imposition of outspoken securitisation on questions of immigration that proved a common dynamic of the V4 public spheres. Given the V4 proclivity for framing immigration in the context of the government's responsibility to protect its own people against an external threat that EU institutions are supposedly unwilling to act against due to a cosmopolitan bias (Bauerová, 2018), normative orientations towards Security should be significantly and strongly associated with opposition to immigration after the 2015 crisis, but not necessarily before it played out.

## *2. Visegrád Group and the crisis: unity in diversity?*

Over the summer of 2015, V4 countries were exposed to a sudden, strong and synchronous stimulus, which brought their governments together politically, in spite of pre-existing differences when it comes to the social attitudes towards migration as well as the differential exposure to the crisis itself. Of course, under close inspection some country-specific differences might be noted regarding the actual application of this stimulus. For instance, Hungarian media crisis-coverage has been amplified by the government's own publicity campaign against refugees, which seems to have given an extra boost to the rising anti-immigration sentiments (Bernáth and Messing, 2016) and Slovakian public sphere mobilisation over challenges of immigration from Muslim-majority societies arose already in the spring of 2015 (Walter, 2019). However, in spite of local variations, the topicalization and timing of public mobilisation brought about by the migration-crisis was largely uniform across the V4. One of the ready ways of demonstrating this uniform spike of public apprehension comes in the form of Google Trends archival search data. Thus, Figure 1 provides information on weekly search frequencies for the term *refugee* in V4 countries. Notably, highly similar distributions would result from analysing search results for *immigrant*, as these two queries were highly correlated, e.g. in Poland searches for the two terms had a correlation coefficient of 0.95.

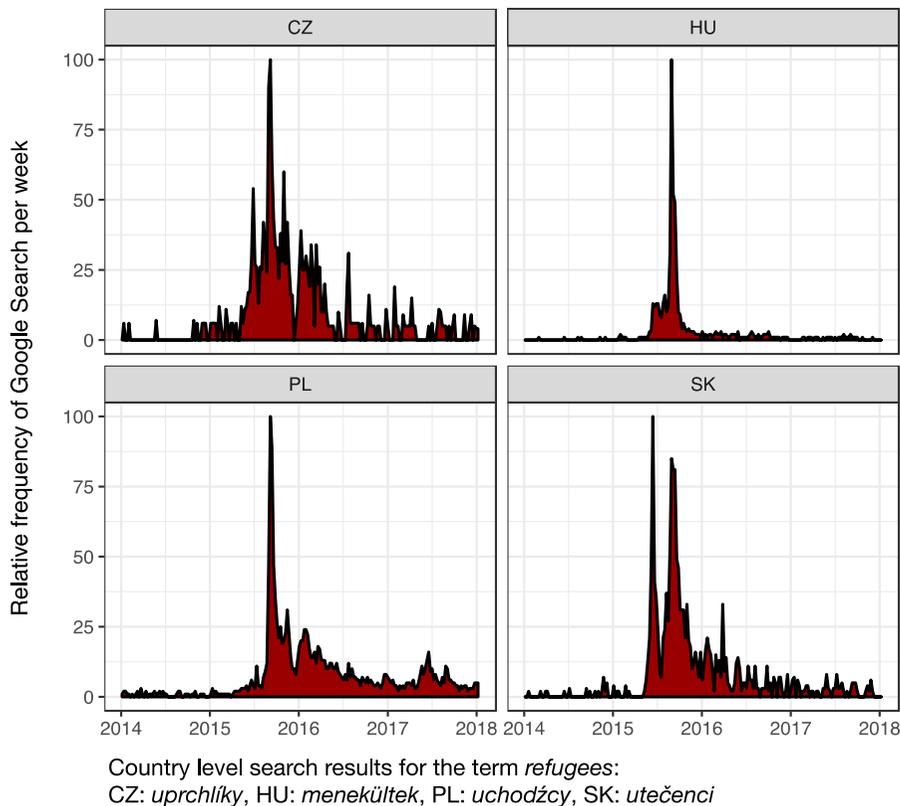


Figure 1 Google searches for the refugee term in CZ, HU, PL and SK.

Source: Google Trends data: 2014–2017

While the distributions exhibit some minor differences, there is a discernible pattern in all four countries: the weekly data uniformly registered a precipitous jump in early September 2015, with a slow build-up of interest since May 2015 and a long tail going forward. The common peak of queries occurred in the week starting on September 6, accompanying the main debate over the mandatory relocation quotas formally agreed upon at the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on September 14, 2015. When it comes to Slovakia, it should be noted that the preceding spike in interest came in the week starting with a day of major street-fights in Bratislava between right-wing anti-immigrant demonstrators and their detractors on June 20, 2015. Local diversities notwithstanding, the search-data seem to provide a ready illustration of V4 opinion convergence following the anti-resettlement September 4 Joint Statement of the Visegrád Group, which in turn seems to have constituted an exception to the long-lasting rule that the Group members hardly ever commit themselves to common political resolutions.

Even though the timing of concerns was similar across V4, one must point out that there have been notable differences between Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia in terms of the actual 2015 crisis-experience. It was only Hungary that found itself on the north-western extension of the Balkan Route (Pachocka, 2016). Hence, in spite of Hungary not being the desired destination for most migrants (Juhász, Hunyadi

and Zgut, 2015), it hosted large numbers of people in transit, as well as those forced to remain and register at the first country of contact (so long as the Dublin-2 rules were being adhered to). While V4 asylum registrations peaked in 2015, in line with the overall EU trend, Hungary was where the bulk of applications were filed (Czechia, Poland and Slovakia's trend-lines remained low and flat). The gravity of this contrast proves even more striking when population sizes are taken into account, e.g. in 2015, Hungary actually had the highest asylum-application rate per capita in the entire EU28 (the other three Visegrád Group members lingered at the low end of the spectrum). Naturally, 2015 proved to be an extreme outlier, and following the decision to temporarily lift the Dublin-2 requirements on the part of the German government the majority of those previously forced to register for asylum in Hungary did not actually stay in the country (Bauerová, 2018). Hence, in the following years Hungarian numbers went down steeply.

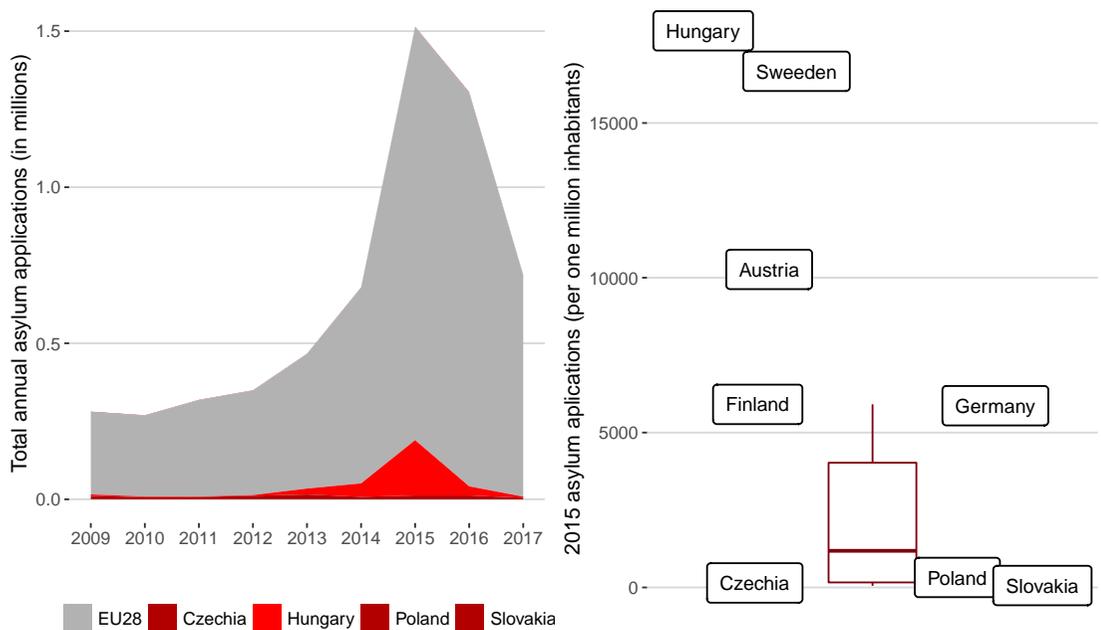


Figure 2 Asylum applications in V4 relative to EU28 countries.  
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: migr\_asyapp, t\_demo\_pop)

From the point of view of the public opinion shock-value of migrant visibility this momentary per-capita value of asylum registration should not be underestimated. Especially in view of the growing concentration of migrants stranded at Budapest train stations towards the end of August, which provided a vivid media representation of things getting out of hand (Kasperek, 2016). Yet, the impact of those events was not restricted to Hungary. In spite of the fact that the other V4 states had not been exposed to any spike of migration flows at all, the images from Hungary and other areas of tension along the Balkan Route dominated the media discourse in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia in September of 2015. Immigration was the dominant topic, and the immigration question was being framed in terms of a generalised threat against

social stability of Europe in general (Sedláková, 2017). Therefore, events in Hungary were easy to present in the media as occurring in the immediate neighbourhood, so it would no longer matter that comparable events were not happening to the other V4 countries. Thus, in spite of considerable differences on the ground, the media-driven experience of the 2015 migration crisis was highly similar across the V4 public spheres.

This similarity of discourse need not have translated into a uniform public reaction, given the well-established lack of uniformity when it comes to pre-crisis attitudes towards migration across the V4. The principal contrast would typically be drawn between Poland, where attitudes to immigration had been considered much less negative than those of Hungary or Czechia. This pre-existing juxtaposition could be attested to on the basis of multiple independent data sources. Most notably, however, an authoritative examination of the results of the European Social Survey by Meuleman, Davidov and Billiet (2009) clearly identified Poland as one of the countries where a very pronounced evolution in immigration attitudes has taken place since 2002, i.e. from one of the most restrictive countries in ESS round 1, to more and more open in later rounds. On the other hand, Hungary has consistently belonged to the least immigration-friendly countries in Europe, although Hungarian attitudes toward immigrants of the same ethnic group tended to be less restrictive than when it came to those belonging to a different racial or ethnic group. In line with this pre-crisis consensus, Hungary should have been much more open to anti-immigrant than Poland – especially since the latter experienced the 2015 crisis from afar. This would indicate that the politically coherent opposition to immigration embraced by V4 governments was somehow superimposed on persistently diverse attitudinal patterns of V4 societies.

Whether any lasting convergence of V4 immigration attitudes has in fact happened remains open to discussion and interpretation. An inconclusive yet not inconsequential body of evidence exists in favour of a V4 convergence thesis in the form of both national and cross-country surveys. Firstly, negative opinion shifts were attested to in tracking surveys conducted in individual V4 countries. For instance, when the main Polish public opinion omnibus (CBOS) introduced a question concerned with accepting refugees from war-torn countries in Poland, the fraction declaring opposition jumped from 21 per cent in May 2015 to 61 per cent in April 2016 and has since consistently remained above 50 per cent (CBOS, 2017). Comparable shifts have been attested to in Hungary and Czechia (Szeidl and Simonovits, 2019), as well as in the case of Slovakia (Bolečeková and Androvičová, 2015). Secondly, some internationally comparative surveys pointed to Poland no longer being much more accepting of strangers than the other V4 countries. For instance, PEW Research report ‘Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs’ made use of an index of exclusiveness of national identity based on four-question items asking respondents to judge the importance of the following characteristics for truly belonging to the national community: place of birth, knowledge of language, adherence to Christianity, and compliance with customs and traditions. While Czechia and Slovakia were not covered by PEW, Poland and Hungary prominently featured on the restrictive side of the spectrum of this index (Wike, Stokes and Simmons, 2016). Similar conclusions about the positioning of Poland and Hungary in the European context came out of the 2016 Chatham House

survey (conducted in ten European states), which found that although an overall European majority of respondents agreed that ‘all further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped’, it was in Poland and Hungary that this statement enjoyed particularly strong support (Goodwin, Raines and Cutts, 2017). Some indications of a growing convergence of V4 immigration attitudes can also be seen in the results of Eurobarometer surveys, especially when it comes to opinions about external immigration, with Poland becoming increasingly as negative as the other V4 countries (European Commission, 2017).

Such piecemeal evidence in favour of post-crisis convergence of social attitudes towards immigration in the V4 does not provide any definitive proof for the convergence thesis, however, due to the obvious comparative constraints of judging the equivalence or accuracy of very different surveys. Even if one were to set aside differences of measurement methodology (sampling, fieldwork quality), it is impossible to ignore the fact that the questions they contain are idiosyncratic and therefore produce results incomparable across surveys. In many cases they are also one-off affairs, with questionnaires designed to provide input on current affairs. This brief review of studies supporting the thesis of post-crisis V4 convergence in terms of migration attitudes is meant to provide context and contrast for our ESS-based analysis of opposition to immigration in Czechia, Hungary and Poland. It must be noted that analyses based on the post-crisis wave 8 of the ESS do not support a strong convergence thesis, i.e. in spite of becoming more negative with respect to immigration the Poles seem still closer to the European average than to the pronounced negativity of Hungarian attitudes. For instance, on a basis of comparison of the 1st and 8th round of the ESS project, Heath and Richard (2019) found considerable stability over time in the relative position of the different countries on scales of immigration attitudes. Their analysis shows that although Poland has been consistently more positive about immigration than Hungary or Czechia, it has noticeably moved down the list relative to other European countries so as to become more similar to other Central East European countries. Our own analysis, based on one of the measures of opposition to immigration available in the ESS core-module questionnaire, indicates that some degree of convergence between Poland and the cases of Hungary and Czechia has taken place (albeit not a strong one). Crucially, however, our focus is not on the changes of the mean values of scales or indicators, which we only discuss in a descriptive fashion. What concerns us is a different kind of convergence – not of the mean scores on the scale of opposition to immigration, but of their association with the normative orientations towards Universalism or Security.

### ***3. Measures***

#### *3.1 Dependent variable (measurement model of opposition to immigration)*

The ESS features stable and well-designed measurement scales relating to multiple dimensions of migration attitudes (cf. Messing and Ságvári, 2018). These include measures of 1) opposition to immigration, 2) perception of immigrants as economic, symbolic and ethnic threats, and 3) opposition to refugees. At first glance, it is the last among them that would hold most promise for studying the impact of the 2015 crisis. Unfortunately, however, two out of three of the opposition to refugees’ scales are

missing in the ESS data for Hungary due to an inadvertent fieldwork execution error. Indicators relating to the different types of perceived threats have typically been used on their own rather than as components of a scale (Davidov et al., 2018; Green et al., 2018), and thus remain of lesser interest from our perspective. Therefore, our V4 analysis is based on the set of core-module questions targeted at probing the degree of social opposition to immigration. The ESS core-module scale of opposition to immigration is based on the following three questions: ‘To what extent do you think [country] should allow people: (1) of the same race or ethnic group as most [country]’s people to come and live here?’ [variable: *imsmetn*], ‘(2) of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people to come and live here?’ [variable: *imdfetn*], (3) ‘from poorer countries outside Europe to come and live here?’ [variable: *impcntr*], with the response options of 1 (‘Allow many to come and live here’), 2 (‘Allow some’), 3 (‘Allow a few’), and 4 (‘Allow none’). Note that ESS variables *imsmetn*, *imdfetn* and *impcntr* constitute an intuitively plausible descriptive index of opposition to immigration, however, there is a long-standing practice of treating it as a measurement scale valid for cross-country comparisons (cf. Davidov et al., 2015; ESS, 2015; Meuleman, Davidov and Billiet, 2009; Schneider, 2008). Previous research has also demonstrated that these variables point to one factor of opposition to immigration, i.e. the rejection of further immigration in general (Meuleman, Davidov and Billiet, 2009).

For the purposes of this V4-focused analysis, a Multi-Group Structural Equation Modelling (MG SEM) approach was employed (Byrne, 2016; Jöreskog, 1971), in order to evaluate the quality of such a scale of immigration attitudes. This procedure bestows major advantages over the straightforward univariate approaches – not only does it allow for construct multidimensionality but is also equipped with unparalleled tools for equivalence-testing, i.e. finding out whether construct-based cross-country comparisons are legitimate in the first place. The final measurements models of opposition to immigration for ESS7-2014 and ESS8-2016 (presented on Figure 3) both assume cross-country configural as well as metric equivalence restrictions. Configural equivalence means that the factor structure is the same in all three countries, while metric equivalence adds a further assumption that factor loadings are equal (which translates into direct comparability of regression coefficients). On top of that, scalar equivalence would further postulate equal intercepts (which would translate into direct comparability of item averages, had it been ascertained).

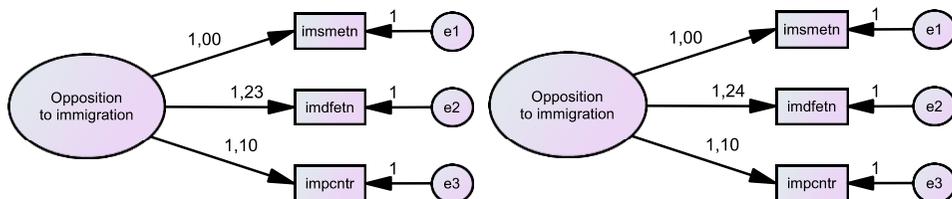


Figure 3. Cross-country (CZ, HU, PL) metric equivalence model for ESS7-2014 and ESS8-2016 anti-immigration attitudes.

*Source: Own calculation based on ESS7 and ESS8 datasets.*

Notes: Results of a multiple group structural equation model with metric invariance restrictions.

Fit indices for ESS7: CMIN=74.0; df=4; RMSEA=0.057; NFI=0.989. Reliability and validity measures: Czechia (CR=0.821; AVE=0.624); Hungary (CR=0.725; AVE=0.502); Poland (CR=0.810; AVE=0.715).

Fit indices for ESS8: CMIN=65.9; df=4; RMSEA=0.039; NFI=0.995. Reliability and validity measures: Czechia (CR=0.850; AVE=0.656); Hungary (CR=0.755; AVE=0.516); Poland (CR=0.892; AVE=0.734).

The MG SEM analyses confirmed cross-country configural and metric equivalence for the V4 data of ESS7 and ESS8 with respect to the scale of opposition to immigration (ESS7 fit indices: CMIN=74.0; df=4; RMSEA=0.057; NFI=0.989; ESS8 fit indices: CMIN=65.9; df=4; RMSEA=0.039; NFI=0.995). In each country and in both ESS rounds, the scale has also passed the test of reliability and validity (for details see notes on Figure 3). However, given that the measurement model under consideration turned out not to comply with the strictures of scalar equivalence, it only allows for comparing the factor loadings and regression coefficients in Czechia, Hungary and Poland.

### *3.2 Covariates (Universalism and Security in terms of Schwartz's Basic Human Values)*

A modified 21-item version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) was used in the ESS to measure basic human values (Schwartz, 2003b). Each item consists of a short two-sentence, gender-matched description of a person. Respondents then indicate on a 6-point scale from 1 (very much like me) to 6 (not like me at all) how similar this person is to themselves. Schwartz's (2003a) syntax was used to transform the items into 10 values by taking the means of the items and subtracting their mean rating. The higher scores signify that the particular value is more important for the individual. Note that in our analysis we only included two dimensions of basic human values: Universalism and Security.

### *3.3 Demographic control variables*

Apart from both independent variables, i.e. Universalism and Security, the following socio-demographic control factors were also included in our analysis: **Gender** (*Male; Female* [ref. cat.]), **Age** (*15-24; 25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64; 65+* [ref. cat.]), **Highest level of education** (*Lower secondary or less (ISCED I&II); Lower tier upper secondary (ISCED IIIb); Upper tier upper secondary (ISCED IIIa); Advanced vocational (ISCED IV); BA or MA level (ISCED VI&V2)* [ref. cat.]), **Main activity during last 7 days** (*Paid work; Education; Unemployed; Housework; Retired* [ref. cat.]) and **Household's total net income** (*Refusal; 1st and 2nd decile; 3rd and 4th decile; 5th and 6th decile; 7th and 8th decile; 9th and 10th decile* [ref. cat.])

#### 4. Results

In order to provide a descriptive overview of the distributions of the component indicators of the scale of opposition to immigration over time, Figure 4 presents V4 country-profiles with respect to the average scores for all three variables over time. Note that missing measurements in Slovakia (due to temporary non-participation) hinder visual comparing of cross-country trend-lines (the subsequent General Linear Model analysis of ESS7 and ESS8 data would actually only cover Czechia, Hungary and Poland).

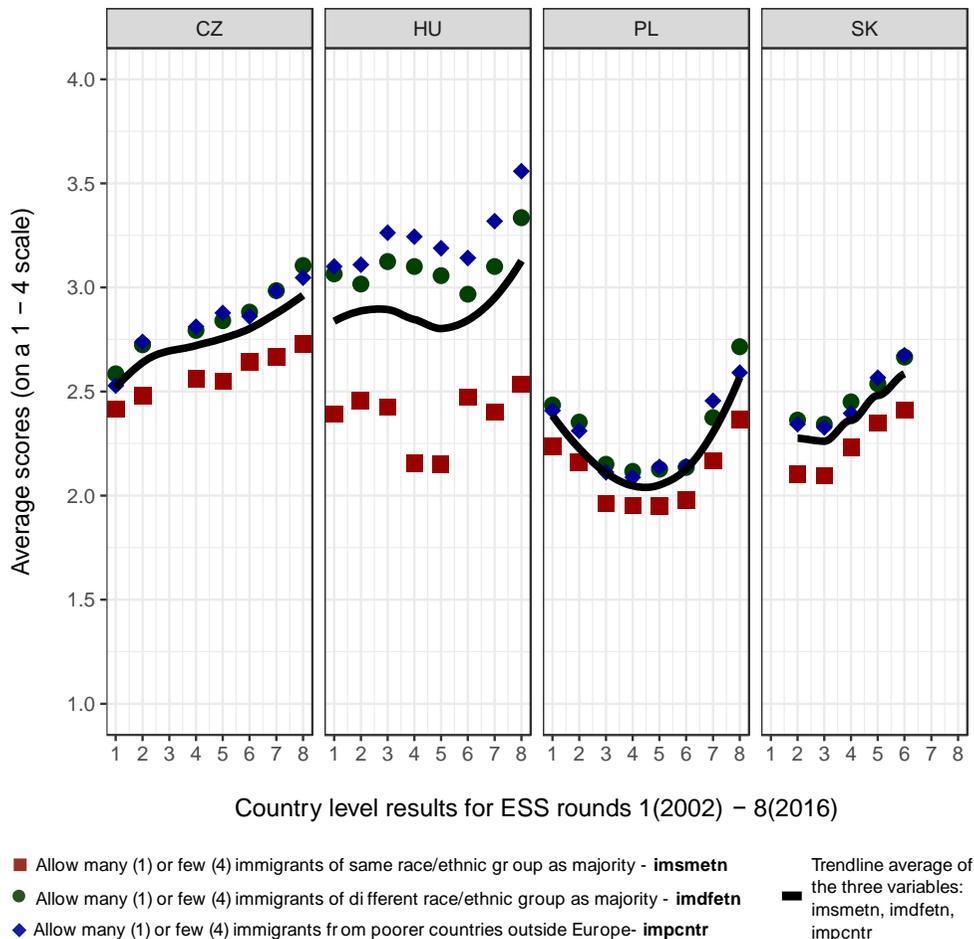


Figure 4. Opposition to allowing entry of various immigrant-types: CZ, HU, PL, SK. *Source: ESS waves 1–8, variables: imsmetrn, imdfetrn, impcetr*

Looking at individual variables, in all V4 countries, there is a notably higher propensity to accept immigrants that are ethnically/racially similar to the majority, and the contrast is especially pronounced in Hungary. This Hungarian characteristic has usually been interpreted by reference to the fact that it is the only V4 country that has

a sizable ethnic diaspora in neighbouring lands (Kovács, 2019). However, in spite of this downward pull of a single indicator, the overall average values of the opposition to immigration in Czechia are almost as high as in Hungary, which are both in fact among the top-ranking among all ESS-participating countries. On the other hand, Poland and Slovakia used to rank much lower on all the dimensions of opposition to immigration, although in Slovakia they have been consistently rising. Poland, however, bucked the V4 rising trend: it registered declining levels of opposition to immigration in waves 2-5, only followed by a marked increase in waves 7 and 8. As demonstrated by the literature review, the ESS-based indication of a post-2015 increase in opposition to immigration in Czechia, Hungary and Poland is consistent with the results of other cross-country surveys. Yet, the ESS-results suggest a lower degree of convergence between Poland and the scores of Hungary and Czechia.

However, our analysis aims not at determining the level of V4 convergence with respect to mean scores or opposition to immigration, but rather at probing for normative as well as socio-demographic factors associated with opposition to immigration between 2014 and 2015. Therefore, we specify the following General Linear Model, i.e. Univariate Analysis of Covariance (Rutherford, 2011), for testing the impact of the normative orientations towards Universalism and Security on the opposition to immigration held by the citizens of Czechia, Hungary and Poland: *Opposition to immigration = Intercept + Universalism + Security + Gender + Age + Highest level of education (ISCED standards) + Main activity + Household's total net income*.

In all three countries for both rounds, the same linear model was tested in order to establish the impact of covariates and control variables on opposition to immigration. Tables 1 and 2 present the following GLM summary characteristics: (1) *F*-ratios demonstrating the significance of covariates and demographic control variables, (2) estimates of  $\beta$  parameters explaining the impact of covariates and control variables on opposition to immigration. Note that  $\beta$  coefficients are interpreted along the lines of simple multiple regression, i.e. a one-unit increase in the level of any covariates translates into a corresponding change in the level of the dependent variable. When it comes to control factors, it is important to bear in mind that the  $\beta$  coefficient for a particular level of the variable is always interpreted in relation to the coefficient of the reference-category. Note as well, that the comparisons of  $\beta$  coefficients between the models estimated for Czechia, Hungary and Poland are warranted by prior establishment of metric equivalence of the underlying latent constructs.

Table 1 F-ratio statistics of between-subject effects on anti-immigration attitudes

Covariates & Control factors	ESS7			ESS8		
	CZ	HU	PL	CZ	HU	PL
Universalism	28.86 <sup>*</sup>	20.26 <sup>*</sup>	50.63 <sup>*</sup>	36.22 <sup>*</sup>	1.61	43.66 <sup>*</sup>
Security	2.86	1.96	1.59	16.31 <sup>*</sup>	12.02 <sup>*</sup>	8.71 <sup>*</sup>
Gender	0.35	0.15	0.71	0.01	1.24	0.81
Age	1.24	4.79 <sup>*</sup>	4.35 <sup>*</sup>	1.43	1.16	4.64 <sup>*</sup>
Highest level of education (ISCED standards)	7.98 <sup>*</sup>	18.14 <sup>*</sup>	4.65 <sup>*</sup>	16.75 <sup>*</sup>	8.62 <sup>*</sup>	10.88 <sup>*</sup>
Main activity	0.91	1.47	1.73	3.45 <sup>*</sup>	1.88	8.11 <sup>*</sup>
Household's total net income	3.54 <sup>*</sup>	2.32	1.63	2.73 <sup>*</sup>	1.44	4.67 <sup>*</sup>

Source: Own calculation based on ESS7 and ESS8 dataset. Note: <sup>\*</sup> p-value<0.01

Table 2 Estimates of  $\beta$  parameters in GLM Univariate ANCOVA explaining covariates and control variables impact on anti-immigration attitudes

Covariates & Control variables	ESS7			ESS8		
	CZ	HU	PL	CZ	HU	PL
Universalism	-0.110 <sup>*</sup>	-0.098 <sup>*</sup>	-0.190 <sup>*</sup>	-0.106 <sup>*</sup>	-0.028	-0.167 <sup>*</sup>
Security	0.031	0.028	0.033	0.066 <sup>*</sup>	0.079 <sup>*</sup>	0.074 <sup>*</sup>
Gender (male = 1)	-0.020	0.014	-0.036	-0.004	-0.041	-0.034
Age						
15 - 24	-0.130	-0.442 <sup>*</sup>	-0.212 <sup>**</sup>	-0.159	-0.053	-0.313 <sup>*</sup>
25 - 34	-0.050	-0.067	-0.246 <sup>**</sup>	-0.089	0.017	-0.117
35 - 44	-0.050	0.003	-0.307 <sup>*</sup>	0.003	0.080	-0.285 <sup>*</sup>
45 - 54	-0.042	-0.059	-0.254 <sup>**</sup>	0.001	-0.036	-0.188 <sup>**</sup>
55 - 64	-0.134	-0.056	-0.147 <sup>**</sup>	0.002	-0.041	-0.237 <sup>*</sup>
65 and over - <i>ref.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Highest level of education (ISCED standards)						
Lower secondary or less (ISCED I&II)	0.234 <sup>*</sup>	0.409 <sup>*</sup>	0.244 <sup>*</sup>	0.303 <sup>*</sup>	0.216 <sup>*</sup>	0.320 <sup>*</sup>
Lower tier upper secondary (ISCED IIIb)	0.294 <sup>*</sup>	0.307 <sup>*</sup>	0.186 <sup>**</sup>	0.285 <sup>*</sup>	0.266 <sup>*</sup>	0.252 <sup>*</sup>
Upper tier upper secondary (ISCED IIIa)	0.150 <sup>*</sup>	0.183 <sup>*</sup>	0.134 <sup>**</sup>	0.113	0.252 <sup>*</sup>	0.201
Advanced vocational (ISCED IV)	0.132	-0.132	0.031	-0.019	0.013	0.058
BA or MA level (ISCED V1&V2) - <i>ref.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Main activity						
Paid work	0.074	0.149	0.060	-0.013	0.026	0.038
Education	0.023	0.069	-0.154	-0.250 <sup>**</sup>	-0.044	0.242 <sup>**</sup>
Unemployed	0.033	0.058	0.029	0.150	-0.263	0.070
Housework	0.186	0.119	0.161	-0.183	-0.125	-0.121
Retired - <i>ref.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-

Covariates & Control variables	ESS7			ESS8		
	CZ	HU	PL	CZ	HU	PL
Household's total net income						
Refusal	0.150 <sup>**</sup>	-0.100	0.103	0.108 <sup>**</sup>	0.029	0.308 <sup>*</sup>
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> decile	-0.038	0.261 <sup>**</sup>	0.115	0.185 <sup>*</sup>	0.074	0.292 <sup>*</sup>
3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> decile	-0.035	0.138 <sup>**</sup>	-0.039	0.126 <sup>**</sup>	-0.050	0.285 <sup>*</sup>
5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> decile	0.029	0.072	0.008	0.088	-0.063	0.188 <sup>*</sup>
7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> decile	-0.024	0.108	0.005	0.089	-0.045	0.154 <sup>**</sup>
9 <sup>th</sup> and 10 <sup>th</sup> decile - <i>ref.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Source: Own calculation based on ESS7 and ESS8 dataset.*

*Notes: <sup>\*</sup> p-value < 0.01; <sup>\*\*</sup> p-value < 0.05*

The examination of the 2014 and 2016 ESS data allows for attesting to the changing patterns of association between normative orientations towards Universalism and Security and the levels of opposition to immigration in the context of the 2015 migration crisis. The GLM analysis confirmed that normative orientations towards Universalism are significantly associated with lower opposition to immigration – this finding holds for both ESS7 and ESS8 (with the exception of Hungary in 2016). On the other hand, normative orientations towards Security had not been associated with opposition to migration at all in 2014, while in 2016 this association became significant and positive in all three countries, i.e. respondents concerned with the values of Security would express consistently higher levels of opposition to immigration. With respect to the control variables, in both survey-waves there is a significant contrast between respondents with academic degrees and those with lower levels of education. The other socio-demographic control variables demonstrated no meaningful association patterns with opposition to immigration.

The fact that values of Security had not been a factor influencing immigration attitudes in ESS7 and became one in ESS8 seems important in that it constitutes a public opinion correlate of the securitisation of the debate about immigration in Czechia, Hungary and Poland (while no data for Slovakia was available there are no reasons to believe that it would register a different trend). This securitisation, stemming both from bottom-up expression of citizen anxieties, as well as top-down pressures of government policy and publicity, involved an explicit opposition to the tenets of liberal immigration policy associated with the human-rights-based stance of the European Union. Forceful framing of the immigration debate in terms of security has been well documented in Czechia (Bauerová, 2018; Sedláková, 2017), Hungary (Juhász, Hunyadi and Zgut, 2015) as well as Poland (Pasamonik, 2017). While securitisation of immigration discourses did occur in many other European countries (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017; Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017), in the V4 it became the officially endorsed doctrine used by the respective governments for political communication purposes (Bernáth and Messing, 2016; Brozova, Jureckova and Pacovska, 2018; Łaciak and Frelak, 2018). Thus, what our analysis of ESS data seems to indicate is that this securitisation of public debate has been followed up by a major change in the structure of public opinion (as measured by surveys). While causality cannot be established in this respect, the public opinion shift seems

reasonably likely to have been driven by the securitising discourse rather than the other way around.

When it comes to normative orientations towards Universalism, the negative association with exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants is exactly what one would expect, given that cosmopolitan universalism underpins the moral claim of liberal immigration policies, i.e. the belief that Europe must not subscribe to the chauvinism of affluence and remain open to needy immigrants and asylum seekers regardless of cultural or religious differences (Habermas, 1992). Furthermore, it is important to note that this association proved significant prior to the 2015 crisis and remained significant in Czechia and Poland thereafter in spite of strong discursive challenges to the Universalist cosmopolitan approach. What happened in Hungary, on the other hand, seems like a case of Universalist values being overwhelmed by concerns with Security. Obviously, for reasons explained above, our model does not and cannot aim at claiming anything about scalar-comparisons between countries and across time, i.e. there is no meaningful way in which to address the question whether Universalism or Security had more proponents in Hungary or Poland. Our claim is merely correlational – Universalism ceased to be associated with opposition to immigration in Hungary in 2016, while it remained a significantly associated factor in Czechia and Poland.

### *5. Conclusions: V4 sentiments in the European context*

Our analysis demonstrates that the securitisation of the immigration question in public discourse seems to have had a strong impact on the structure of immigration attitudes in Czechia, Hungary and Poland. While normative preferences for security were not associated with stronger opposition to immigration before the 2015 crisis, they have since become a significant factor. This is likely influenced by the fact that in the V4 countries the narrative of responsibility to protect the group against perceived threats got the upper hand in public discourse. The public mood, as well as official government policies, have come down decisively on the side of scepticism towards immigration. Although the shift of opinion was readily apparent in most cross-country tracking surveys covering the V4, we demonstrate that this change of public opinion went beyond a short-term spike of anxieties. On the contrary, an association of the normative preference for Security with opposition to immigration has the potential for shaping attitudes in the long term. In terms of shaping public debate about immigration, this constitutes a strong indication that simple reiterations of Universalist arguments might not affect social attitudes towards immigrants. Instead of preaching to the converted about human rights and cosmopolitan obligations, proponents of liberal immigration policies should rather address the concerns of those who are focused on Security values.

Security is not the only public concern at issue, of course. Apart from emphasising security challenges such as the alleged links between immigration and the incidence of terrorism, the distinctive V4 approach also entailed aversion to immigration based on arguments invoking supposed cultural and religious incompatibility of newcomers with host societies (Jasiecki, 2016). Furthermore, it cannot be emphasised enough that it was only in Hungary that there was any actual presence of migrants throughout the crisis, and even that turned out to be a relatively

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short-lived phenomenon. Thus, in terms of group threat theory (Blalock, 1967), the negative V4 outgroup-attitudes made apparent in the course of the migration crisis seem not to have been a function of competition over material resources, such as access to jobs or housing. What came into play were less tangible issues such as cultural and religious anxieties as well as perceived threats to public safety. Arguing whether such hazards actually existed is beside the point, what matters from the public opinion standpoint is that they were socially construed as real, i.e. constitute 'subjectively appreciated threats and challenges to group status' (Bobo, 1983; Sears and Kinder, 1985). Even though mere perceptions may prove more potent than 'objective' reality when it comes to moving public sentiments in times of crisis, and that primacy seems especially pronounced when it comes to abstract challenges to group culture and status rather than strictly material interests. Therefore, when attempting to address such concerns it would not suffice to produce statistical evidence or some other official documents reassuring the public that their concerns are misplaced or exaggerated.

When it comes to the V4 countries, there is no doubt that in spite of opinion divergences at the outset, and clear differences in the summer-of-2015 experience, the migration crisis brought Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia much closer together as political actors. Some post-2015 convergence of the V4 over migration questions has been attested to in multiple studies, even if the degree of resulting similarity remains contested. Higher V4 opposition to immigration is likely to prevail as long as immigration remains an issue of pressing public concern, which the foreseeable near future seems likely to deliver. In a more general sense, the illiberal turn of the V4, partially but not exclusively facilitated by immigration concerns, might actually turn out to be a leading indicator of a more comprehensive challenge to the western system of liberal democracies. While alternative challenger-parties threatening the mainstream have been a lasting feature of the European political scene since the onset of the post-2008 economic crises (Hobolt and Tilley, 2016), migration anxieties resulted in further voter-flight from the centre, which could easily be framed as tainted by adherence to increasingly unpopular liberal immigration policies (Hepburn and Odmalm, 2017; Liang, 2016). The debate is quite open on the actual importance of the role played by the migration crisis of 2015 in bringing about the recent massive wave of anti-establishmentarian populism that swept across western democracies (Campani, 2018; Judis, 2016). Quite obviously, the present challenge of populism is also not a thing of the past, yet, its future is also quite uncertain. The focus on the V4 experience demonstrates the potential for mobilising public opinion by way of skilful and assertive securitisation of discourse, i.e. how liberal universalism can decisively lose on immigration.

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