

Biased Beliefs about Immigration, Economic Concerns,
and Information Provision: Extension Experiment*
Pre-Analysis Plan

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Abstract

We conduct an information provision experiment to investigate the relevance of statistical information for economic attitudes towards immigration. Our experimental design is embedded into a large-scale representative online survey. We randomize the provision of information on the share and the unemployment rate of foreigners, representing facts about immigration related to the size and economic characteristics of the immigrant population, respectively. We aim to analyze the effect of information provision on two prominent economic channels of immigration attitudes: welfare state and labor market concerns about immigration. In addition, we examine whether biases in beliefs about immigration translate into immigration policy preferences and preferences for redistribution in host societies.

JEL classification: C90, D83, F22, H20, J15.

Keywords: immigration attitudes, survey experiment, information provision, belief updating, welfare state, labor market, preferences for redistribution.

*This pre-analysis plan describes an experiment that will extend the RCT registered under ID: AEARCTR-0006819. This work is supported by the Free State of Thuringia and the European Social Fund. IRB approval was obtained at FSU Jena.

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1 Motivation

This experiment extends the RCT registered under ID: AEARCTR-0006819. The experimental design, hypotheses and analysis outlined in the original pre-analysis plan still apply to this experiment.

In the following, we hence only describe the extensions relative to the initial RCT in more detail. For the full pre-analysis plan, please refer to: www.socialscienceregistry.org/trials/6819.

2 Experimental Design

2.1 Outcome Variables

First, we extend our investigation of the redistribution channel by accounting for two additional dimensions: preferences for increases in income support programs for low-income individuals and preferences for governmental support programs conditional on nationality. For these two additional measures of preferences for redistribution, we employ the following wording based on Alesina et al. (2018):

- **Preferences for income support programs:** “Would you say that you favor or oppose an increase in income support programs for poor people? Keep in mind that, in order to finance such an increase other types of governmental spending (like spending on infrastructure and defense, for example) would have to be scaled down, government debt would have to increase or taxes would have to be raised.” Answers range from 0 for “Strongly oppose” to 10 for “Strongly favor”.
- **Preferences for governmental support programs conditional on nationality:** “Some people think that the government should only support people who have German citizenship. Others think that the government should care equally about all people in Germany, regardless of their citizenship. What do you think?”. Answers range from 0 for “Government should focus on people with German citizenship” to 10 for “Government should care equally about all people”.

2.2 Elicitation of posterior beliefs

Second, we extend our experimental design by eliciting posterior beliefs not only for the three treatment arms, but also for the control group. This allows us to directly examine potential cross-learning between different types of information about the immigrant population.

2.3 Priming experiment

Third, for the extension experiment, there will be no priming treatment related to the COVID-19 crisis.

3 Data

3.1 Main survey

We embed our extension experiment into a large-scale representative online survey of 7000 individuals in Germany. The survey is quota-representative with respect to age, gender, educational background, and residence in Eastern/Western Germany. The survey field phase starts in mid of September 2021 and is distributed to respondents by a professional survey company via an online panel.

For the extension experiment described in this pre-analysis plan, a random subset of in expectation about 4000 individuals will be employed.

3.2 Follow-up survey

In addition to the main survey round, we will conduct a follow-up survey of 50 percent of the original sample size to investigate the development of beliefs over time. With respect to the extension experiment described in this pre-analysis plan, we hence expect a follow-up sample size of about 2000 individuals. The analysis for the follow-up survey will be based on the analysis for the main survey data.

4 Analysis

4.1 Belief updating and cross-learning

To investigate whether there exists cross-learning between the different types of statistical facts about immigration, we estimate the following equation:

$$p_i = \rho_0 + \rho_1 A_i + \rho_2 B_i + \rho_3 C_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad (1)$$

where p_i represents posterior beliefs about immigration statistics, A_i , B_i and C_i are treatment indicators for the different treatment arms, and ε_i is the error term.

In addition, this evaluation of cross-learning allows us to measure belief updating of individuals between-subject.

References

Alesina, Alberto, Armando Miano, and Stefanie Stantcheva (2018). *Immigration and Redistribution*. NBER Working Paper No. 24733.