

New CReAM research on the factors that shape individual attitudes towards migration policy

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A new research paper from CReAM (Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration at UCL) investigates the factors which determine individual attitudes towards migration policy.

The researchers note that immigration affects a country in many ways, from the economic effects on public spending and on the wages of workers competing with immigrants in the job market, to the cultural effects associated with changing the composition of the population. All of these factors currently figure in popular discussion and it is important to understand which has the biggest influence on generating hostility or openness to immigration policy.

The paper - written by CReAM Fellow David Card and CReAM researchers Christian Dustmann and Ian Preston - presents a method for quantifying the relative importance of economic and cultural channels in shaping attitudes towards immigration. The authors use data from 21 countries in the 2002 European Social Survey, which included a specially-designed questionnaire with a large number of questions on attitudes to migration-related issues, including the economic and social impacts of immigration, and the desirability of increasing or reducing [immigrant](#) inflows. Their key findings are:

- Individual attitudes towards immigration policy reflect a

combination of concerns over economic impacts (in particular, on wages, taxes and public spending) and concerns over social impacts associated with changing composition (in particular, social tensions and cultural homogeneity), with substantially more weight given to the social effects.

- Concerns over sociocultural effects are between three and five times more important than concerns over wages and taxes for individuals asked to assess whether more or fewer immigrants should be permitted to enter their country.
- There is a big gap between the views of the more and less educated over immigration policy, with less educated respondents being more strongly opposed to increased immigration. However, this difference is not simply due to increased fear of labour market competition. At least two-thirds of the gap is due to less educated respondents expressing heightened concerns over the compositional effects of immigration on society.

These conclusions don't just apply to the sample as a whole, but also country by country. The researchers found that sociocultural questions are more important than economic questions in almost every country. Moreover, their research shows that the relative importance of such issues is greater when respondents are asked about [immigrants](#) who are ethnically different, or from poor rather than rich countries.

The researchers conclude: "Immigration changes the habits, culture, and religion of the receiving country's population. These issues play a more important part in shaping views about immigration policy than economic issues."

[More information:](#) The research was conducted by CReAM Fellow

David Card and CReAM researchers Christian Dustmann and Ian Preston www.econ.ucl.ac.uk/cream/. The paper is a CReAM Discussion Paper (DP 29/09) and can be viewed in full at: www.econ.ucl.ac.uk/cream/pages/CDP/CDP_29_09.pdf

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