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Article

Perception Towards Immigration in Romania and Bulgaria

Abstract: Migration is an extensively researched global phenomenon. However, most studies have focused on Western countries with strong economies while migration to less economically developed countries remain largely undocumented. Former communist countries from Europe, which have experienced a population exodus in the last decades, only recently became places of interest for migrants. With migration to less developed countries being a relatively newer phenomenon, the available data predominantly consists of raw figures which focus on counting the number of immigrants. There is a lack of qualitative research focusing on aspects such as the impact on the receiving countries and the livelihood of the immigrants in these receiving countries. Important issues, such as the impact on the receiving countries, have not been studied. Thus, the main issue with this subject is the lack of data and literature.

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This research, which analyses the immigration phenomenon from Romanians' and Bulgarians' perspectives, provides valuable insights into the aforementioned domain by presenting not only citizens' attitudes toward immigration but also predictors of negative and positive attitudes toward this phenomenon. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of factors influencing attitudes toward migrants. The research method utilized is secondary data analysis. For this research, I used the Eurobarometer 98.2 for which the data was collected between January and February 2023. Firstly, I presented the general attitudes toward migration by employing frequencies and crosstabs. Afterward, by using regression and factorial analyses, I identified the attitude predictors toward immigration. Romanians and Bulgarians have mixed feelings about migration. Age, gender and education are strong predictors of attitudes toward migrants. The findings are interesting because, partially, they reject the idea that Romanians and Bulgarians discriminate against migrants. The insights from this study not only address a gap in the existing literature but also have the potential to inform the development of public policies aimed at facilitating migrant integration.

Keywords: attitude; Bulgarians; immigration; predictors; Romanians

1. Introduction

Migration is a global issue. Last year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued a report which presented the depths of the population displacement, that has reached yet another record, registering “one of the largest forced displacement crises since World War II” (UNHCR, n.d.).

Due to the fact that the global situation of both refugees and migrants is complex, this paper focuses only on those who migrated to Europe for economic considerations, which are known as economic migrants, referred to as immigrants. This paper is distinct because it aims to unveil factors contributing to the development of negative attitudes toward immigration. It also assesses the negative attitude toward the impact of migration on two distinct levels, national and European.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Liquid Modernity*

Zygmund Bauman, who coined the term “liquid modernity”, had a unique perspective on immigration. The expression is a metaphor through which Bauman wants to present the fluid condition of modern societies, characterized by “mobility and inconstancy” (2000, p.2). Mattiazzi and Vila-Petroff consider that Bauman’s metaphor of liquid modernity describes “constant mobility and change he sees in relationships, identities, and global economics” (2021, p.1). When he mentioned mobility, Bauman was referring to all the aspects of social life, including immigration. Bauman identifies two categories of immigrants. On one hand, there are the ones who can move freely and migrate due to their own will. On the other hand, there are those who are pushed out of their own country by external factors, such as the economic or social situation, and even by wars. Starting from Bauman’s distinction, Çelik (2023, p.1) studies how migrants and refugees settle within a new community, starting from “Bauman’s conceptual distinction between tourists and vagabonds”. Even though his study focused only on foreigners who settled in Istanbul, some of his findings are relevant for papers covering different destinations. Firstly, he managed to identify what kind of connections immigrants who “possess cosmopolitan and diverse networks” and refugees who “hold ethnically and religiously homogenous networks” use; moreover, he discovered that immigrants remain in a certain spot “because of the city’s diversity” while, in contrast with immigrants, refugees remain due to “sociocultural similarities” (Çelik, 2023, p.15). Starting from his findings, it can be assumed that most immigrants prefer to settle in big urban areas, not only due to diversity considerations but also due to job opportunities.

2.2 *Attitudes Toward Migrants*

Berg identifies two separate definitions of attitudes. On one hand, attitudes can be “narrow, reflecting favourable or unfavourable evaluations of an object”. On the other hand, attitudes can also be “broad, by including beliefs that are evaluative in nature” (Berg, 2009, p.10.) In one of his later works, Berg (2015, p.24) concludes that many people “often hold pro- and anti-immigrant opinions simultaneously”. Out of the two categories of attitudes identified by Berg, I concentrate on the *narrow* attitudes, due to methodical limitations. The question from the

database of the Eurobarometer 98.2, which evaluates people's opinion regarding immigrants only surveys their attitudes towards immigration, without directly linking it with any justification for the chosen answer. For this study, I decided against limiting the observed attitudes to simple phrases that present antagonistic negative or positive opinions.

Horst (1935, p.173) believes that "attitudes are complex things composed of a number of different factors". Thus, based on the variables considered, the attitudes might differ dramatically for the same person.

2.3 Social Distance

Aside from variables, another influent element is the distance between the respondent and the person or object toward which he has an opinion. The term *distance* shows the physical separation between two subjects in a given space. However, in social sciences, the term social distance is used to observe "measurable terms the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally" (Park, 1924, p.339). This perception toward distance in social sciences was first used by George Simmel when he discussed "the stranger". Based on Simmel's definition, the "stranger" embodied "the union of newness and remoteness as he moves out of one social circle and strives for acceptance in another" (Williams, 2007, p.1). The first person who managed to accurately measure the social distance between people from different cultures was Emory Bogardus. His creation, the Bogardus Scale, has been defined by Chelcea as "a scale which measures attitudes towards ethnic, professional and religious groups" (2007, p.690). Wark and Galliher extend the subjects which can be studied through the Bogardus Scale to multiple categories, such as "mentally ill, religious groups, ethnic groups, racial groups, disabled people, people with specific diseases, homosexuals, nationality groups and occupational groups" (Wark and Galliher, 2007, p.392). The aim of the Bogardus Scale is to measure the "feeling reactions of persons toward other persons and toward groups of people" (Bogardus, 1947, p.306). The measurement undertaken by the scale indicates "how a person would express himself toward his fellow" (Bogardus, 1947, p. 307). The test measures peoples' reactions toward a variety of relationships within their lives, such as "economic, political, religious, [...] racial and cultural" (Bogardus, 1947, p. 306). The Bogardus scale verifies the accepted social distance between the subject and the *foreigner* by observing the proximity in which the respondent is willing to accept the latter. The acceptance levels are equivalent to seven different *proximity circles*, with the respondent in the middle. For Williams, the lowest of the seven levels measures the willingness of the respondents to have foreign "persons [...] excluded from their country" and goes up to the point of accepting foreigners as "close kinship by marriage" (Williams, 2007, p.1). Based on the principles of the Bogardus scale, in this paper I will measure the attitudes of Romanians and Bulgarians towards the immigration issue, starting from the most distant level up to the closest level.

Wark and Galliher believe that the stranger "may not even be concerned with obtaining membership" (2007, p. 90). I believe that this statement is available only in the case of short-term migrants, such as seasonal workers, who move to a foreign country for a short period of time. According to the International Organization for Migration, they are defined as "workers who have employment that is seasonal in nature" (IOM, 2020). Migrants with long-term stays in foreign countries want to form connections with local populations for intrinsic reasons, in order to have a close group of people near them, and for extrinsic reasons, which are mostly financially motivated. Muckenhuber, Rehm and Schnetzer (2022, p.163) concluded that "sec-

ond-generation migrants are much more similar to natives in terms of wealth and socio-economic characteristics than first-generation migrants”. Based on their findings, Muckenhuber, Rehm and Schnetzer prove that second-generation migrants are more integrated into the community than their parents. Thus, supporting Wark and Galliher perspective, according to which, the stranger is concerned with obtaining membership only when he is interested in staying for longer period of time. Thus, the findings of Muckenhuber, Rehm and Schnetzer support Wark and Galliher perspective, according to which, the stranger is concerned with obtaining membership only when he is interested in staying for longer period of time. Both papers support the idea that the second-generation migrants are more integrated than their parents in the local community/with the locals and the more integrated a migrant is, the stronger social and economic connections he/she has by comparison with his/her predecessors.

American psychologist Gordon Allport (1954, p.281) developed a revolutionary theory which evaluates the way people interact. According to his perspective of contact theory, prejudice “may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals”. In this situation, equal status contact occurs when “the chances of the contact being defined as favourable and of prejudice being reduced appear greater” (Robinson and Preston, 1976, p.912).

2.4 *Habitus*

Peterie and Neil (2019, p.4) believe that negative attitudes towards immigrants are a direct result of the “Capitalist globalization” model based on which our lives are being structured. They believe social differences play a major part in the construction of negative attitudes toward foreigners. Malicious actions against immigrants, influenced by a negative attitude toward foreigners, are a “function of structural inequalities” (Peterie and Neil, 2019, p.30). I tend to embrace Bourdieu’s opinion here, that these social inequalities are being perpetuated through social reproduction. Bourdieu (1990, p.11) defined this process as “the reproduction of the structure of the relations of force between the classes”. Due to the process of social reproduction, social inequalities are being passed down from one generation to another, and along them negative attitudes toward immigrants. According to Bourdieu (1990, p.52) the mechanism behind the process of social reproduction is based upon “habitus and educational institutes”.

Bourdieu (1977, p.72) defines habitus as something which “refers to the durable and transposable dispositions of individuals”. He believes that factors such as habitus, social capital and level of education define the *social region* in which an individual is positioned. In Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu and Wacquant. 1992, p.97) opinion, the social region/field is the “network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions”. Peterie and Neil agreed that negative perception of immigrants is a direct “result of deliberate political strategies to maintain public support for capitalism despite the harms that it inflicts” (Peterie and Neil, 2019, p.30). This argument highlights the core idea previously presented, that globalization could be a key factor in building negative attitudes toward immigrants.

However, I would like to emphasize the fact that, in my opinion, the discussion should concentrate on the economic part of capitalism.

Starting from Bourdieu’s theory, Roy Nash (1990, p.434) identifies three types of habitus. First, collective habitus, which is defined as “the unifying cultural code”. This habitus refers to the general opinion of a population and is comprised of values and opinions which are shared by all the members, or at least by the majority, regardless of their social status. The second

type of habitus is the *dispositional habitus*, which refers to “the internalized cultural code”; lastly, there is the *manifest habitus*, which is reflected in “the practice of a characteristic style” (Nash, 1990, p.434). Between the three types of Habitus, there is at least a certain level of connectivity, if not direct association, which should be observed using a *zooming-in* approach. The collective habitus encompasses all the values, principles, and ideas generally accepted in a society. All members of society don’t need to share the same principles, but rather, the majority of them do it. Within the confines of the law, personal freedoms allow us to choose the principles with which we agree. It’s then up to us to behave by the principles we have chosen to follow. This relationship, based on the three types of habitus, is the cornerstone of how beliefs are converted into concrete actions and can be applied to studying human behaviour in relation to any subject, including attitudes toward the immigration phenomenon. For example, let us assume that the general attitude toward immigration is positive and that most people are supportive of immigrants who want to come and settle in their country. However, there will always be a minority group which presents an opinion opposite to the one supported by the majority. For a clear understanding of the immigration phenomenon and people’s attitudes toward foreigners, we should not limit ourselves to identifying the general perception toward immigrants. We should also identify the factors, independent variables, which are significant determinants of peoples’ attitudes towards the subject of immigration.

2.5 Globalization and Immigration

Anthony Giddens (2010:58) identifies three different attitudes toward globalization, “hiper-globalizators, sceptics and transformationists”. I believe that Giddens’s classification of perspectives regarding globalization can be reflected in attitudes toward immigrants.

The *sceptics* believe that “globalization is over-estimated” because, at its core, it is not a new, unprecedented phenomenon. On the other hand, however, supporters of this paradigm believe that nowadays, this phenomenon is manifesting in new ways and some of the old characteristics are more prominent, such as the “contacts between countries are more numerous than in previous times” (Giddens, 2010, p.58). Based on the fact that *sceptics* are somewhat familiar with certain aspects of globalization, such as immigration, I believe that they accept immigrants and have somewhat of a positive attitude toward them.

Contrary to the *sceptics*’ perception, the second category, *hiperglobalizators*, structure their perspective on the main idea that “globalization is a real phenomenon, whose consequences could be felt almost everywhere”; they view globalization as a “process without national borders” which generates “a new global order through the powerful influxes of trade and production” (Giddens, 2010, p.59). For Cohen and Kennedy, workforce immigration is an integral factor of globalization, because “international migration undeniably plays a hugely significant role in shaping globalization”. Nowadays, international immigration is “creating a more interdependent world” (Cohen and Kennedy, 2013, p.22). *Hiperglobalizators* view globalization as a completely new phenomenon which is radically shifting the world and which might not be familiar with the phenomenon of immigration. This is why they might express reluctant or even negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Transformationalists adopt a rather “neutral stance” toward globalization. They perceive this phenomenon as a “central force” able to produce changes that can “configure modern societies”. One might perceive *transformationalists* as a mixture between *sceptics* and *hiperglobalizators*, because, according to them, “the global order has modified, but many of the old

models are still standing” (Giddens, 2010, p.59). Their core belief is that “countries are restructuring as an answer towards the new forms of economic and social organization” (Giddens, 2010, p.60). I conclude that *transformationists* are neither for nor against immigration but perceive it as a consequence of international factors. Moreover, they are willing to view immigration as a possible solution for some of the problems their country is facing. Romania and Bulgaria have been struggling with depopulation, due to aging, low birthrates and high levels of emigration. Thus, an influx of workers would be beneficial, at least from an economic perspective.

2.6 Factors that Actively Influence Peoples' Attitudes Toward Immigrants

As previously mentioned, attitudes and opinions directly reflect certain cultural beliefs, which differ greatly based on the countries' geographical position. Dimitri Sotiropoulos (2018, p.881) grouped European Union (EU) member states based on their geographical position. According to him, “North and South European governments have been subjected to similar external stimuli, such as globalization and Europeanization”. Starting from his ideas, I believe that also the Western and Eastern regions have been exposed to the same stimuli. Western countries, such as Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands “founded the European Coal and Steel Community, and later, in 1957, the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community” (European Commission, 2023). The three organizations were the precursors of the modern-day EU. On the other hand, the former Eastern-European communist countries are required to meet a series of criteria such as “increased trade via access to the single market, increased funding and investment higher social and consumer standards” (European Union, n.d.) which enabled them to be subjected to the same influencing factors as the other EU Member States. Sotiropoulos groups the countries as follows: the Southern group is comprised of “Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain”; the northern group (Scandinavian model), consists of “Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway”; Germany, Netherlands, UK, Ireland, France form, the “Western model” (Sotiropoulos, 2018, p.882). After Brexit, when “the withdrawal agreement entered into force upon the UK's exit from the EU” (European Council, 2023), UK is no longer a member of the EU. Thus, I propose the replacement of the UK with Austria in the Western European group of countries. Finally, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic form the Eastern model. Sotiropoulos believes that these groups of countries, or geographical models, register significant differences generated by factors such as “patterns of behaviour and culture”. These determinants do not function on their own. They are the direct result of the mirror effect, which is “reflecting political party, region or family-based social interaction” (Sotiropoulos, 2018, p.882).

Markaki and Longhi identify two factors which influence people's attitudes toward immigrants. Firstly, there are the micro-level “individual personal circumstances, such as labour market status, gender, age and income”. Secondly, there are the macro-level indicators, which “include more general and sociotropic evaluations of interest resulting from a broader sense of community”, generating a more comprehensive view. To better understand anti-immigration attitudes, Markaki and Longhi recommend taking into consideration theories of “realistic conflict, deprivation and labour market competition” (Markaki and Longhi, 2012, p.7).

For Lundy and Darkwah, realistic conflict theory is a paradigm which “helps to explain incidents of intergroup hostility and associated feelings of prejudice and discrimination toward an outgroup”. These negative feelings are generated by two distinct factors. First, from an intrinsic perspective, negative feelings manifest when different groups of people want to accomplish “conflicting goals”. Second, from an extrinsic point of view, these feelings manifest when people compete with each other in order to gain “limited resources”. The second factor is more complex than the first one. While, on one hand, the goal of each person or group is clear, the resource shortages for which people fight might be “real or perceived” (Lundy and Darkwah, 2018, p.4). In a situation when the shortage is only perceived, people have no real motivation to exclude their competitors. In this research, this competition arises between nationals and immigrants. In the second situation, the scarcity of resources may be artificially amplified by populist politicians, who want to earn votes by transforming immigrants into the source of all their country’s problems.

The feeling of deprivation may appear when people are not able to secure the resources they desired. There are two separate forms of *deprivation*. Firstly, *absolute deprivation*, has been characterized by international organizations as “severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information” (United Nations, 2015). Secondly, *relative deprivation*, defined by Samuel Stouffer as “the perception by an individual that the amount of a desired resource (e.g. money, social status) they have is less than some comparison standard” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.). It is important to emphasize that if people do not apply the comparison standard, mostly imposed by society, their overall life quality is not affected the same as those who suffer from absolute deprivation. For Craig Webber (2007, p.114) “relative deprivation is about how we perceive the world”. Peer pressure influences our consumption behaviour. If we don’t achieve socially imposed goals, we feel unaccomplished, even if what we want is not essential for our existence.

Naturally, some perceive foreigners as culpable for their shortcomings. It would be more difficult, if not impossible, to deem immigrants guilty of being the source of absolute deprivation, but it is easy for populist parties and politicians to blame foreigners for relative deprivation.

Lastly, there is the theory regarding *labour market competition* which embodies principles from both *conflict* and *deprivation* theories. Scheve and Slaughter (2001, p.144) found out that “less skilled people prefer more restrictive immigration policy”. Low skilled nationals are afraid that they will lose their job, because “employed foreign citizens are more likely than nationals to be over-qualified for their job” (Eurostat, 2021). Thus, the problem is not that immigrants want to take the low-paying jobs from struggling people but that national inclusion policies are not able to generate programs which allow foreigners to find workplaces according to their skill level. The aforementioned theories can, in fact, be reduced to a simple phrase. People are afraid that they will lose money because of immigrants and populist parties are using this perception to gain votes. Populist parties, defined by their belief that they “embody a morally pure version of the people” (González-Bertomeu and Saffon, 2017, p.1232) promote the idea according to which society is “separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: the pure people and the corrupt elite”. (Mudde, 2021, p.578).

3. Methodology

This paper significantly contributes to the research on the attitudes of citizens from Bulgaria and Romania, toward the immigration phenomenon, by presenting the general attitude toward foreigners and by identifying the factors contributing to the development of negative perceptions towards immigration.

3.1 Purpose

The purpose of the study is to identify the general attitudes toward immigrants and what are the factors behind them.

The general objective is to identify the attitudes toward immigrants of Romanians and Bulgarians.

The specific objectives are to identify the social and demographic variables which influence the attitudes toward immigrants and to establish a framework which includes all the significant, influential aspects.

3.2 Concept Operationalization

Operationalized concept: immigration

Levels on which immigration is perceived as an issue: individual, general, supranational

– *Immigration is an issue on an individual level:* immigration is an issue that I am confronting on a personal level

– *Immigration is an issue on a general level:* immigration is an issue with which my country is confronting at a national level,

– *Immigration is an issue on a supranational level:* immigration is an issue that the EU is confronting

Demographic data: gender, age, education

Data about the social environment: residence, difficulties in paying bills

Operationalized concept: attitude toward immigration

Indicator of the negative attitude: perceiving immigration as an issue

3.3 Main Hypothesis/Specific (Hs)

Eastern Europeans, namely Romanians and Bulgarians, tend to perceive immigration more as a European issue, than as one that concerns them directly.

3.4 Secondary Hypothesis

People with a higher income tend to perceive the immigration phenomenon in a more positive way.

Based on the objectives and hypotheses, I defined the variables.

Independent variables:

– Financial possibilities (income)

– The distance between citizen and immigrant

Dependent variable:

- attitude toward immigration.

3.5 Research Method

This research is *quantitative, correlational* (between multiple categories of data) and *explicative* (explaining the factors that generated negative attitudes toward immigration).

This research can be perceived as a *secondary analysis* because it fits all three criteria mentioned by Chelcea (2007, p.544):

- the data included in this research originate from a set of data which have been previously collected

- the theme of this research is solely concentrated on observing the attitudes of Romanians and Bulgarians toward the phenomenon of immigration, while the Eurobarometer database which has been used for this research is a direct result of the polling of the EU population in regard to a series of different factors and themes, which include the ones which are specific for this research

- for the database used, the primary analysis was already performed and completed prior to this research.

The Eurobarometer is an instrument which measures public opinion, coordinated by the European Commission.

The research method used in this paper is the *secondary analysis of data* that were retrieved from Eurobarometer databases.

I chose to use the *Eurobarometer 98.2 (ZA7953)* database because when I started working on this paper, it was the most recent database from the Eurobarometer which fulfilled all necessary criteria to qualify for the secondary analysis method.

Eurobarometer databases are constituted of sociological inquiry based on a survey, applied yearly, with the purpose of identifying citizens' attitudes regarding socio-economic events. The survey used by the Eurobarometer is an omnibus which covers multiple relevant issues including social, economic and political.

3.6 Collecting and Processing Data

The sampling process was faithful to the demographic quota (sex and age) according to their distribution within the two countries' populations.

Type of sampling: national, probabilistic with a statistical step.

The samples consisted of respondents who were at least 15 years old when the interview took place.

In the *SPSS* statistical program, I have applied the following statistical processes.

Preparing the database, by defining variables and non-responses and re-coding variables for the correlations.

Using the most suitable variable to correctly weight the database.

I performed statistical applications such as frequencies, crosstabs, Pearson Correlation, Binary Logistic Regressions and Factor Analysis.

I retrieved the database from the *GESIS* data archive on 14th September 2023. The data source is "official data archive for multiple international surveys such as Eurobarometer and

the European Social Survey. It is responsible for the preservation, integration and harmonization of the datasets” (GESIS, 2024)

Statistical analysis, examination of the graphic representations, hypotheses validation 18th September – 16th October 2023.

4. Database Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Results Generation Frequencies

Firstly, I presented the results of frequencies and crosstabs followed by inferential statistical procedures, regressions and factorial analysis.

As a step in preparing the data, I have reduced the four answers for the variable “*How would you judge the current situation in each of the following?*” into two distinct categories which reflect positive and negative attitudes.

Romanians have a more positive attitude among than Bulgarians toward certain aspects of their lives. Almost a third of Romanians believe that the country’s general situation (28%) and economic situation (33%) are heading in a good direction, while only 15% of Bulgarians are satisfied with the country’s general and economic situation.

Secondly, Bulgarians have a more positive attitude toward their financial situation, more than half of them perceive their personal job (63%) and financial situation (53%) positively. Almost half of Romanians perceive their personal job (53%) and financial situation (44%) positively. Interestingly, these data are in opposition to the Bulgarians’ discontent with the country’s general and economic situation.

Thirdly, there are questions in which Romanians and Bulgarians registered similar attitudes. Half of them regard the “EU economic situation” as positive. They share the same negative attitude regarding country employment; only 29% of them view it positively and a third of them are satisfied with public services. These results are not surprising, because they are generally influenced by international events such as the war in Ukraine, Covid or regional factors such as bureaucracy, digitalization, corruption etc.

In general, Bulgarians (61%) and Romanians (58%) are satisfied with their lives. However, when they assess their day-to-day lives, the difference in positive perception between them widens, with Bulgarians (63%) showing a more positive perception than Romanians (54%). These results illustrate that Bulgarians and Romanians are not only referring to money when they are talking about happiness.

The implication in political discussions regarding national and European organizations directly indicates a person’s interest in the political situation in his/her country and the EU. In general, Romanians and Bulgarians have similar levels of interest in politics. Both focus on national political issues more often than on European ones. However, Bulgarians tend to speak more frequently than Romanians about both national and European political issues. This could support the finding that Bulgarians might be more interested in immigration at a European level than Romanians.

For both Romanians (53%) and Bulgarians (63%) the biggest national issue is inflation. Around 15% of Romanians and Bulgarians are concerned with issues like health, energy supplies and the international situation. All the other subjects, including immigration, are perceived as national-level issues for less than 10% of respondents.

On a personal level, the issues are mostly perceived in the same way. The most pressing ones are of a financial nature and include *inflation* for both Bulgarians (62%) and Romanians (51%) and *the country's economic situation* for 17% of the people in both countries. Besides that, all the other subjects, including immigration, do not raise concerns among respondents.

Lastly, questions assessing attitudes regarding the issues on a European level have generated two types of results. First, the concerns regarding the economic aspects are maintained. 20% of Romanians and Bulgarians are concerned with the economic situation, while almost a third of Romanians (30%) and less than a quarter of Bulgarians (22%) are concerned with inflation. Secondly, these answers manage to offer new insights regarding people's perceptions of international issues. Almost a third of Romanians (28%) and more than a third of Bulgarians (37%) are concerned with the international situation, which includes economic and social crises, wars, famine and immigration. Another relevant finding is that while only 11% of Romanians perceive the immigration phenomenon as a concern, a third of Bulgarians, are concerned with the effect of this phenomenon at a European level. Respondents didn't perceive immigration as a problem on an individual or a national level. Not all Bulgarians were exposed to immigrants during the immigration crisis. According to a BBC article, immigrants entered Bulgaria through the south, from Turkey, and exited through the "northwestern corner of Bulgaria" (Thorpe, 2016). Because they crossed only a relatively small part of the country, they were not observed by the majority of the population. Thus, their anti-immigration attitude might stem from ideological concerns. They could have been influenced by the negative portrayal of immigrants in Western media.

The majority of Bulgarians (75%) and half of Romanians (51%) feel very attached to their country, while only around 15% of Romanians and Bulgarians feel attached to the EU. A higher level of attachment towards their country and the lack of attachment towards the EU might be associated with a high level of nationalism, indicating an intolerance toward foreigners.

4.2 Results Generated Through the Crosstabs Function in SPSS

Education has a high impact only on peoples' attitudes toward immigration on a European level. Interestingly, there is a positive association between time spent in school and perceiving immigration as an issue. It is somewhat of a paradox, because, generally, people with lower levels of education tend to view immigrants as a threat, because "a number of studies find a positive association between education and liberal views of immigration and immigrants" (Finseraas, Skorge and Strøm, 2018, p.3). Moreover, it is generally acknowledged that "education is considered an important element to foster openness to diversity and ensure that individuals do not perceive migration phenomena as a threat" (Borgonovi and Pokropek, 2019, p.13). Out of the people who are still studying, many Bulgarians (44%) and 20% of Romanians share their concerns regarding immigration.

Age provides us with interesting findings. Firstly, both in Romania and Bulgaria, the highest rates of negative attitudes toward immigrants on a national level, can be observed among the younger people, and it decreases with age. However, the intensity is low. For the category of people aged 15-24, 16% percent of Bulgarians and 9% of Romanians believe that immigration is a national issue. Secondly, around a third of Bulgarians and only 10% of Romanians, regardless of age, believe that immigration is an issue in the EU. Moreover, young people (15-24) represent the only category of Bulgarians (7%) who believe that immigrants have a nega-

tive impact on their personal lives. The same percentage of Romanians aged 15-24 and 25-39 believe that immigration has a negative impact on their lives.

Romanian men have a slightly more negative attitude toward immigration than women. Around 10% of them see immigration as an issue on a European level. Less than 10% of Romanian and Bulgarian men and women believe immigration is an issue on a personal and national level. However, around a third of Bulgarians (29% men and 34% women) consider immigration an issue for the EU.

4.3 Binary Logistic Regression

Additionally, I applied Binary Logistic Regression. Broadly speaking, logistic regression is used when the researcher wants to “classify or predict a discrete, categorical variable from among continuous and/or discrete predictors” (Maroof, 2012, p.67). Binary logistic regression is applied when “we are trying to predict a dependent variable with only two outcomes” (Fritz and Berger, 2015, p.271). These dependent variables usually illustrate if the respondent can be included in a certain category, for example, if he or she believes that immigration represents an issue on a national or European level. In my research, I generated multiple binary logistic regression models.

The two dependent variables which I included in different models are *immigration as an important issue on a national* and *immigration as an important issue on EU level*.

Originally, both variables were nominal, with two distinct answers, *mentioned* and *not mentioned*. However, in order to properly include them in the binary logistic regression model, I transformed these variables into *dummy variables*, and I included in the models only the ones which reflected the respondent’s negative attitude towards immigration. In the binary regression model, I also included seven covariates, which were dummy variables generated based on pre-existent or recoded socio-demographic variables.

1. Age (Age recoded four categories)¹
 - Not Old (15-24/25-39/40-54)=0
 - Old (55-98)=1
2. Gender
 - Male=0
 - Female=1
3. Social class
 - Other classes=0 (lower middle class/middle class/upper middle class/higher class)
 - The working class=1
4. Size of community
 - Other community size (Small/middle town/Large town)=0
 - Rural area or village=1
5. Education (highest level of education attained)
 - Higher education (high school diploma or more)=0
 - Primary education (Less than high school diploma)=1
6. Political orientation
 - Left and center political orientation(1-6)=0
 - Right political orientation (7-10)=1

7. Difficulties paying bills

- Not often (Never/Almost Never/From time to time)=0
- Often (Most of the time)=1

The binary regression model included age (old age: 55-98), gender (female), social class (working class), size of community (small community), education (primary education), political orientation (right orientation), and difficulties paying bills (often).

4.4 Data Interpretation

For the binary logistic regression models, besides the seven covariates previously mentioned, I also included the two other dummy variables, Romania and Bulgaria, to see how they compare to the general attitudes of Europeans. Separately, I made two other logistic regressions including only respondents from Romania and Bulgaria.

In the case of the binary logistic regression model, which included the variable *immigration as a national issue*, the majority of the covariates are significantly statistic, with a SIG smaller than 0.05. The two exceptions were represented by *Difficulties paying bills* (.280) and *Bulgarians* (.213). Only women (-.160) and people from lower social classes (-.130) tend to have positive attitudes toward immigrants; however, their influence is smaller than the influence of the other covariates. The biggest predictor of negative attitudes towards immigration is political orientation (.516). The preference for a right-wing political party or candidate has a chance of almost two times higher (1.6) to present negative attitudes towards immigration on a national level. In general, Romanians and Bulgarians tend to carry somewhat positive attitudes towards immigration on a national level. However, as I have previously mentioned, the SIG value registered by the variable *nationality: Bulgarian* is not statistically significant because it is higher than SIG 0.05. Therefore, I will not include Bulgaria in this analysis.

To have a better image of Romanians' and Bulgarians' attitudes towards immigration on a national level, I have generated two more regression models, in which I included only respondents from those two countries. The regression model in which I have included only Romanian respondents, had only three variables which were statistically significant, Age (0.27), Gender (0.27) and Political Orientation (.031). The other variables were not statistically significant because they registered a SIG greater than 0.05. In this regression model, the interesting fact is that political orientation influences people's attitudes in a positive way.

However, the impact is almost unobservable, thus we can say it makes no difference. The same is available for Age and Gender, which, even though they are statistically significant, they have a low impact. In the regression model in which I have included Bulgarians, there are no variables with statistical significance.

The next linear regression model which I present includes the same seven covariates, but, in this case, the dependent variable is *Immigration is an issue on a European level*. In this case, the only variable without statistical significance, whose SIG. value is bigger than 0.05, is education (.058). All other variables have a SIG lower than 0.05 and are statistically significant. The only variable which predicts a positive attitude towards immigration is *Difficulty paying bills*. The literature indicates that "wealth may insulate respondents from the economic pressure of a low-skilled, immigrant labour flow" (Burns and Gimpel, 2000, p.205). Thus, people with financial difficulties harbour negative attitudes towards immigration on a national level, where their jobs are at stake. However, immigration on a European level is not per-

ceived as a threat, because it does not affect their jobs directly. Political orientation has a lower impact toward negative attitudes regarding immigration.

In general, compared to Romanians, Bulgarian nationals tend to hold more negative attitudes towards immigration on a European level. In this regression model, both nationalities had SIG lower than 0.05, making them statistically significant. However, the unstandardized beta (B) for Romanians (-.562) was negative and for Bulgarians was positive (.783). Bulgarians tend to perceive immigration as a threat toward the EU, while Romanians do not. In addition, a Bulgarian national has a 2.1 times higher chance to harbour negative attitudes towards immigration on a European level.

For the binary regression model in which I included only Romanians, the two variables which have statistical significance are community size (.015) and social class (0.05). Those from a smaller community do not perceive immigration as a threat to the EU, because many Romanian immigrants originate from small, rural areas “the percentage of families which have at least a member working abroad is bigger in rural areas than in urban areas” (Stoicovici, 2012, p.436). Social class is determined by socio-economic status, which consists of multiple factors “educational attainment, occupation, and income” (Vo et al., 2023, p.3). Most people with a lower level of education are engaged in low-paying jobs. For them, immigration tends to be an issue on a European level rather than a national one because they might be working abroad, to obtain a better salary than in their home country. Thus, immigration is an issue on a European level, because immigrants might represent competitors on the European labour market.

For the binary regression model in which I included only Bulgarians, all the variables had the SIG. greater than 0.05, thus they were not statistically significant.

Next, I checked the Nagelkerke R Square indicator, which “is an adjusted version of the Cox & Snell R-square that adjusts the scale of the statistic to cover the full range from 0 to 1” (IBM, 2023) and measures the explanation capabilities of the regression model. For the first Binary Logistic Regression model, analysing immigration as a national issue, the Nagelkerke R Square indicator was 0.22; for the second model, concerned with immigration as an EU issue, it was 0.11. For the first model, in which I included only Romanians, the Nagelkerke R Square indicator was 0.62; for the second model, it was 0.39. Interestingly, for the first regression model in which I included Bulgarians, the value of the Nagelkerke R Square indicator was 0.17 and for the second model was 0.37. In all the models, I applied the same covariates. However, the variables were able to give a better prediction regarding Europeans’ and Romanians’ attitudes toward immigration on a national level than on a European level. Another interesting aspect is that in the regression models in which I included only Bulgarians, the covariates had a bigger level of prediction for attitudes towards immigration as a European issue than a national issue. Thus, even though it is the same phenomenon, it is clearly perceived differently on a national level than on a European level.

I used Factorial Analysis to identify the items from the national and European agenda perceived as issues by the respondents who view migration negatively. This procedure is a “test conducted to examine the strength of the partial correlation (how the factors explain each other) between the variables” (Analysis INN, 2020). In order to be relevant, its value has to be bigger than 0.5 “correlation matrices with $KMO < 0.5$ are entirely inappropriate” (Budaev, 2010, p.475). Thus, our result was invalid, because the KMO was less than 0.40. for both Romanians and Bulgarians.

5. Conclusions

This paper is relevant for the migration study field because it opens the conversation for additional research regarding how Easterners, namely Romanians and Bulgarians, perceive immigration on a national and European level. The most important finding is that they perceive this phenomenon differently on a national and supranational level. Another important finding is that there are significant differences between the perception toward immigrants in the two countries, even though they have cultural similarities and are part of the same geographic model, the Eastern one. One difference is that Bulgarians tend to have a more negative image toward immigration than Romanians on both national and European levels. Another interesting finding is that the sociodemographic variables which I have included in the regression model generate different levels of predictions for the two countries, regardless of the cultural similarities between them. One might say that Romanians' perception toward immigrants is somewhat more similar to Europeans' perception than that of their Bulgarian neighbours.

Based on these findings and on the literature on this subject, which is continuously developing, in the future, I want to reproduce this research with an expanded geographical perspective. Sotiropoulos believes that “diverging trajectories, separating South from North European administration” (Sotiropoulos, 2018, p.881) which stem from “mutual distrust and suspicion, affecting citizen–administration relations” (Sotiropoulos, 2018, p.890). I plan to generate a comparison, starting from Sotiropoulos's perspective, presented in his book *Public Administration in North and South: Enduring Differences and New Cleavages?* between how eastern-Europeans and western-Europeans perceive immigration, based on the level of trust towards national and supranational organisations.

Note

1. For this research, I have originally used two separate age variables. This one and another one in which age was not grouped. However, due to lack of space, I decided to present the results of only one model.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the author

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