The Politics of Immigration in Scotland

Aubrey L. Westfall

This welcome book is the first to provide a comprehensive analysis of the historical origins, political dynamics, party positioning and public attitudes on migration in Scotland. It should be essential reading for scholars and policy-makers working on migration politics and multi-level politics, and will also be a compelling and accessible read for non-experts with an interest in this hugely important topic.

Christina Boswell, University of Edinburgh

How nationalism can be leveraged to promote modern democratic and pro-diversity values

While most nationalists worldwide fear immigration will dilute their national culture, pro-immigrant advocacy has become a critical element of nationalism and nation-building in Scotland. Elite-level endorsement of immigration and diversity serves Scotland’s moral and strategic interests and is a symbol of Scotland’s distinction from England, which justifies arguments for further devolution or, ultimately, independence.

This book examines the central features of Scotland’s social and political environment that provide an opportunity for the development of pro-immigration policy preferences. It evaluates how well those preferences are communicated with quantitative and qualitative analysis of primary and secondary data. The book also analyses the elite and mass divergence in understandings of Scottish identity and the desirability of immigration, which threatens the implementation of the government’s multicultural policies. It illustrates the extent of the divergence and presents recommendations for how Scottish leaders can bridge the gap.

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EDINBURGH
University Press
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reflect on the years spent working on this project, I am overwhelmed by the number of people who have supported and helped me along the way. The seed of this project was planted during a casual conversation with my friend James Bream, who told me about the campaign to reinstate the post-study work visa. I thought I might write a paper on the visa campaign, and James helpfully provided some introductions and contacts. As the project grew in scope and required many trips to Scotland, James was always available to talk about ideas. I like to think about this project as being the product of friendship. I owe a great debt to the many people who consented to be interviewed and were so generous with their time. Each interview helped me gain a deeper understanding of the situation in Scotland. The interviews greatly enriched this text and my experience writing it. I also had many valuable conversations with my Scottish colleagues, including Ross Bond, Christina Boswell, Katherine Botterill, Eve Hepburn, Peter Hopkins, David McCollum, David McCrone, and Nasar Meer. Nasar also generously sponsored me as an academic visitor at the University of Edinburgh, making the time I spent in Scotland much more productive. I am grateful to Wheaton College and the Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation, who funded travel to Scotland and made the interviews and conversations possible. Thanks to Steven Clark for permission to reproduce ‘Coming Home’.

I am very fortunate to be surrounded by helpful and supportive friends and colleagues who contribute to my writing process in different ways. Writing
group members Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, Katherine Eskine, Kathleen Morgan, and Srijana Shrestha read many parts of this book over the last few years and read the full manuscript during their holidays. They are an endless source of encouragement to me. Karen McCormack also offered to read the manuscript and she provided very helpful feedback, even to the point of talking me through research problems while we were hitting the trails on our mountain bikes. Gerry Huiskamp and Nick Dorzweiler gave formative advice at the very beginning of the project and helped shape the prospectus. Dana Polanichka and John Partridge are my loyal co-writing companions in Write Now, Right Now. Their company makes writing fun. I can always count on Bozena Welborne to provide valuable feedback and help me ‘sexify’ my writing. Few people are as lucky in their friends as I am.

The process of research can be a teaching tool, but I often learn as much from my student research assistants as they do from me. I thank the students who have helped with this project, including Jeanne Bedard, Tyler Butler, Zuzka Czerw, Will Entwisle, Joshua Kelly, and Kaitlyn Megathlin. I am especially indebted to Jeanne, Zuzka, and Kaitlyn who worked with me in the final stages of the project. The worst part about working with students is that they graduate. I miss working with them all.

I was privileged to work with Ersev Ersoy and Gillian Leslie at Edinburgh University Press. Their support gave me confidence in this project and I appreciate the way they valued my ideas and opinions. I owe a great debt to the anonymous readers who read the book prospectus, sample chapters, and full draft manuscript. They all provided thoughtful and useful feedback that greatly improved the manuscript.

Everyone says that their projects couldn’t have happened without the support of their families, but that is especially true in this case. My spouse, Simon, is Scottish, and his interest and investment in the future of his country means that he is always sending me links to interesting stories, podcasts, and videos about Scotland. James, who set the ball rolling on this project, is Simon’s best friend. My in-laws, Alan and Marian McPherson, hosted me or visited with me every time I was in Scotland, as did Alison and Alistair Clark, Simon’s aunt and uncle. Marian, my mother-in-law, read the draft manuscript to make sure I didn’t come off sounding like too much of a Yank. I am grateful for the love and support of my Scottish family. It was fun to work on something that bridges private and professional life so conveniently. The love of my own parents and siblings has made me who I am and I owe them everything.
Between 2001 and 2016, the British public identified immigration as one of the most important issues facing the UK, and in the run-up to the EU referendum in 2015 and 2016, immigration became the most important issue for a majority of poll respondents (Blinder and Richards 2020). The salience of immigration reflected its placement at the centre of the Brexit debate, when EU membership was equated with open borders and uncontrolled migration. Attitudes changed after the Brexit referendum, when people reported being more concerned about the EU and the NHS than immigration. Furthermore, while over 70% of respondents in surveys in 2012 and 2013 suggested that immigration should either be reduced a little or reduced a lot, in 2019 that number dropped to 44% (Blinder and Richards 2020). Those who oppose immigration are generally equally concerned about EU and non-EU migration, and often do not distinguish between the two, or between immigration and refugee flows. Anti-immigrant sentiment tends to be directed towards immigrants as a group without differentiating between types of immigrants, purpose of immigration, or the legal regime allowing the migration.

Public sentiment determines which immigration policies are politically viable. The Conservative government in the UK has been sensitive to anti-immigrant public sentiment and has aligned its public policy with public tone. The Conservative Party agenda under David Cameron and Theresa May to reduce net migration to 100,000 without regard for condition of entry mimics the public’s insensitivity to differences between groups of immigrants and their
reason for entry. Meanwhile, elite rhetoric in Scotland reflects the political consensus that Scotland ‘needs’ immigration and ‘welcomes’ immigrants. The implicit assumption of Scottish elites is that the Scottish public is more tolerant of immigration than elsewhere in the UK. One Conservative MSP called this assumption into question:

I don’t buy it. It’s one of the things [the SNP] says. I don’t actually think public attitudes towards immigration are all that different in Scotland than how they are in England . . . But, the political debate about immigration in Scotland has not been anything like as toxic or unpleasant as aspects of the political debate have been in England. I think that’s interesting. (Personal interview 26 March 2019)

So, do the views of Scottish elites reflect those of the Scottish public in demonstrating more openness to immigration? How are Scottish public attitudes different from English attitudes? This chapter addresses these questions using survey data to explore Scottish attitudes towards immigrants in order to test elite claims of Scottish exceptionalism in openness to migration.

Scottish Attitudes Towards Migrants

In 2015, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS) included a module focusing on feelings towards migrants and openness to diversity. The first question asks whether the survey respondent believes people coming to Scotland from outside Great Britain make Scotland a better place. Figure 8.1 illustrates the responses to this question. The mode response suggests that Scots are neutral about the positive impact of immigrants, and there is a positive skew (the average response is 0.2 on a scale from -2 to 2 with zero representing neutrality). Forty-one per cent of those surveyed neither agree nor disagree with the statement that migrants make Scotland a better place, though nearly twice as many people agree (39%) compared with those who disagree (20%).

The 2015 SSAS also includes dichotomous questions measuring general appreciation of diversity and tolerance. The first question asks ‘would you rather live in an area with different kinds of people or where most people are similar to you?’ Forty-three per cent of respondents prefer diverse neighbours, 36% prefer to live with others like themselves, and 21% couldn’t decide between the two options. The second question asks whether people agree more with the notion that Scotland should do everything it can to get rid of all kinds of prejudice, or with the idea that sometimes there is a good reason for people to be prejudiced against other people. The strong consensus is that Scotland should make a concerted effort to combat prejudice, with 76% of respondents replying in the affirmative. While it may seem hypocritical for someone who believes Scotland should ‘do everything it can to reduce prejudice’ to also report a prejudicial preference for a homogenous neighbourhood,
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22% of the total sample holds both opinions.\(^5\) Perhaps people are willing to commit ‘Scotland’ to something they aren’t prepared to do individually. This possibility is reminiscent of Kiely et al.’s (2005) interview with a man who ‘deep down’ does not believe people from other countries will ever become Scottish, even though he acknowledges that he would never admit to this sentiment to those people. Public versus private commitments to diversity can be disassociated from one another. Further complicating the issue, the 2015 SSAS questions about migrant impact and diversity refer to migrants and minorities very broadly and leave it up to the respondent to determine what a ‘better place’ might mean. Are Scots thinking about a ‘better place’ with reference to the economy, or do they understand the question culturally?

**Cultural Threat from Migrants**

The perception of cultural threat from migrants comes out of a fear of the immigrant ‘other’, or worries that their presence will dilute the national culture (Fetzer 2000). Threat is most pronounced where the migrant group is noticeably different, such as when they speak another language (Liu et al. 2014), or are racially or culturally distinct (Ford 2011). In their review of the literature
on public attitudes towards immigration in North America and Western Europe, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) found concerns about group culture were the main drivers of anti-immigrant sentiment. In the UK, perceived threat to British values strongly determined anti-immigration attitudes, and especially attitudes about Muslim immigrants (McLaren and Johnson 2007). Do cultural concerns predict attitudes towards immigration in Scotland?

The 2015 SSAS measures the cultural perception of threat with three questions asking whether the respondent believes increased migration from various immigrant groups (Muslims, East Europeans, Black and Asian people) would pose a threat to Scottish identity. As discussed in Chapter 3, Scottish identity means different things to different people. It can signify membership through ethnic ties, it can be defined by attachment to the nation through residency and civic participation, or it can mean some combination of ethnic and civic ideas. Muslims, East Europeans, and Black and Asian people represent different types of potential cultural threat to these different visions of identity. Muslims may represent a threat to Scottish Presbyterian identity, and potentially to civic values, if people confuse Islamic religiosity with fundamentalism. East Europeans, as the largest group of migrants, could present a threat based on sheer numbers. Black and Asian people represent the possibility of racial threat for those who might adhere to ethnic ideas of Scottishness. These groups should provoke varied perceptions of cultural threat, and based on previous research about Islamophobia in Scotland, Scots might perceive Muslims to be more worrisome than other groups defined by skin colour or nationality (Virdee et al. 2006). As illustrated in Figure 8.2, these expectations are partially confirmed. Forty-three per cent of respondents agree or agree strongly that Muslims pose a threat to Scottish identity. However, an almost equal number are concerned about an identity threat from East Europeans (39%) and Black and Asian people (37%). On a scale from -2 to 2, where zero represents neutrality and the positive numbers represent agreement that there is a threat, the average score of the Muslim variable is 0.12, for the East European variable it is 0.02, and for the Black and Asian racial variable it is -0.03.

The most notable feature of Figure 8.2 is how similar the distribution of responses is: the vast majority of respondents (around 80%) identify threat at the same level across all three groups, meaning that they selected the same answer for all three responses. There are stronger bi-modal tendencies (people are more likely to indicate that they agree or disagree with the statement than to select the neutral response) when compared with the more generic question about migrants making Scotland a ‘better place’, which suggests that Scottish people, like others in the UK, hold more intense opinions about specific racial or cultural groups (McLaren and Johnson 2007).
Economic Threat from Migrants

Perceptions of economic threat centre on two concerns: whether immigration will alter one’s personal financial well-being, and whether immigration impacts the national economy as a whole (Citrin et al. 1997; Mayda 2006). Personal economic concerns involve fears that migrants will create competition for jobs, lower wages, or raise taxes due to increased demand for social services. National economic concerns relate to fears that migrants will create a fiscal burden on public services or otherwise harm the economy. Ample research in the US and Europe reveals that concerns about the national economy are more relevant than individual self-interest in determining attitudes about immigration (Citrin et al. 1997; Dancygier and Donnelly 2013; O’Rourke and Sinnott 2006; McLaren and Johnson 2007). Data from the UK confirm these findings (McLaren and Johnson 2007).

The 2015 SSAS measures the perception of group economic threat with two questions asking whether ethnic minorities or East European migrants take jobs from Scottish people. As with the questions on threats to Scottish identity, these questions should theoretically differentiate between economic threats from different groups, but as illustrated in Figure 8.3, Scots do not distinguish
much between the subgroups of immigrants with respect to their potential economic threat. Opinions about migrant impact on jobs are less negative than the opinions about cultural impact depicted in Figure 8.2.

The mean score for the question as to whether ethnic minorities take jobs is -0.28 on a scale from -2 to 2, with 2 representing strong agreement. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that minorities take jobs. The mean for whether East European migrants take jobs is -0.21 on a scale from -2 to 2, with 32% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that migrants take jobs. Scots are more likely to perceive an economic threat from East European immigrants, likely because EU free movement permits the unregulated migration of Europeans, leading their migration to be framed as a form of unregulated economic migration. But, as with perceived threat to identity, the most noticeable aspect of Figure 8.3 is the similar distribution in responses, and approximately 80% identified threat at equal levels across both ‘non-Scottish’ groups.

Scots evaluate migrants more negatively with reference to cultural threat. The stronger reaction could be a product of the groups mentioned in the cultural question (Muslims, East Europeans, Black and Asian people), compared

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**Figure 8.3** ‘Ethnic minority/East European migrants take jobs from Scottish people.’

*Source: 2015 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (ScotCen Social Research 2017)*
with the more generic reference to ethnic minorities and East European migrants in the economic questions. These differences aside, the identity and economic threat indicators are highly correlated with each other (see Appendix E). These correlations hint at an underlying commonality of responses which suggest that Scots think about hypothetical groups of immigrants in a similar way.

Factor analysis can help researchers understand how similar assessments of economic and cultural threats are. Factor analysis reveals the extent to which groups of variables cling together, based on how similar they are across units of analysis. If the values of a group of variables correspond with one other, the variables should load on a single factor; if the values of variables create two clusters of similarity, there will be two factors, and so on. The researcher can then deduce the underlying commonality between the variables that are clinging together. If people assess immigrant threat to culture and economy in the same way, there would be only one factor. If they differentiate between cultural and economic threat, there would be two factors. If they respond differently based on whether the question refers to immigrants generally, specific groups of immigrants, or racial minorities, there could be three factors.

The factor analysis generated two distinct factors (see Appendix F). The variables loading on the two factors reflect underlying identity and economic dimensions, with some overlap between the two. The indicator of identity threat from East Europe loads on the identity factor and the economic factor, which may reflect the perception that East Europeans are the group representing the greatest number of migrants, thereby posing the largest identity threat, and are also the group with the greatest range of entitlements, rights, and access to many segments of the labour market due to their unregulated ability to migrate. More generic indicators of believing immigrants make Scotland a better place, that Scotland should work to eliminate prejudice, and that it is preferable to live in diverse areas do not strongly load on either of the factors associated with economic or identity threat. These results affirm the correlations shown in Appendix E, which demonstrate that the indicators of economic and cultural threat correlate more highly with each other than they do with the more general indicator capturing the sentiment that immigrants make Scotland a better place. While the factor analysis presents two types of attitudes relating to identity and the economy, the analysis and correlations suggest a slight disassociation of the theoretical consideration of immigration with reference to a generic unlabelled immigrant population from attitudes towards specific groups of people (i.e. Muslims, East Europeans). They could also reflect a desire on the part of survey respondents to respond to general/generic questions in a socially desirable way, while the questions targeting specific issues associated with identity and the economy evoke greater candour.
Modelling Opinions about Immigrants

Aggregate patterns in Scottish public opinion paint a picture of attitudes towards immigrants with broad strokes, but they cannot reveal what would make an individual Scot feel more or less positive about immigrants. International research suggests that attitudes will depend both on a person’s position in the economy and on the economic profile of the prospective immigrant. One cross-national study demonstrated that higher-skilled citizens are less opposed to immigration than their lower-skilled and more economically vulnerable counterparts (Mayda 2006). However, there is ample evidence suggesting that cultural attitudes drive anti-immigrant opinion more than economic threat. Using data from across Europe, Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) found those with higher levels of education and more advanced civic skills are more likely to favour immigration regardless of immigrant skill level. They attribute the relationship to differences in cultural values and beliefs across education levels, where more educated individuals are more likely to value diversity and less likely to hold discriminatory views. Other European research found that symbolic economic and cultural threat (symbolic threats are anxieties about something that is unlikely to negatively affect a person directly or fear of the unknown) drives attitudes about immigration more than individual self-interest (Card et al. 2012; Hooghe and Marks 2005). Research in the United States and Europe suggests that communities have a general unspoken consensus about who should be admitted into the country, and the consensus is rooted in community-level, norms-based considerations, rather than individual economic status (Bansak et al. 2016; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). Comparative research demonstrates the primacy of perceived cultural threat in determining attitudes about immigration, but economic vulnerability and the skills of the prospective immigrant also matter. Do Scots conform with these trends?

Multivariate models test the relative strength of individual attributes on three attitudes about migration: the belief that migrants make Scotland a better place, the perception of a threat to Scottish identity from immigrants, and the perception of a threat to Scottish jobs from immigrants. The results are presented in Appendix G. Based on prior research, the model tests the relative strength of national identities (Hussain and Miller 2006; McCollum et al. 2014), cosmopolitan values (Kentmen-Cin and Erisen 2017; McLaren 2002), political interests and identities (Hepburn 2009), and group and individual economic conditions (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; McLaren and Johnson 2007) for predicting attitudes towards immigrants. Summary statistics of all variables included in the models are available in Appendix H.

The results of the models reveal that attitudes towards migrants in Scotland are predicted by a Scot’s socio-political values, levels of political information,
and economic status: those who endorse progressive values, are highly educated, are knowledgeable about politics, and feel economically secure are most likely to see benefits and reduced threats from immigrants. The results are unpacked in the following sections, which review the ideological and political, the economic, and the sociological determinants of attitudes towards migrants in Scotland.

**Ideological and political determinants of attitudes towards migrants**

The most consistently significant group of variables in the model predicting attitudes towards migrants are those that capture personal cosmopolitanism, a concept derived from the Greek word *kosmopolitês* (citizen of the world), referring to the idea that all human beings are equal citizens in a global community rather than deriving limited rights from a single state or polity. These ideals transcend parochial attachments to a nation and advocate more for a rights-based, or civic, system of governance. In the Scottish models (see Appendix G), these values are captured with the preferences that Scotland should remain in the EU, that Scotland should fully commit itself to getting rid of prejudice, that institutions should not insist on the removal of religious or cultural articles of clothing, and for living in an area with diverse kinds of people. Most of these variables relate to acceptance of diversity, which is necessary for a fully cosmopolitan perspective. Cosmopolitanism is associated with the EU because it prioritises open borders, multicultural values, diversity, and an outward-looking inclusive society, all values institutionalised within the mission and treaties of the EU.

Figure 8.4 illustrates the percentage of respondents that perceive immigrants and members of minoritised groups more negatively but who also hold cosmopolitan values, and across the board, they demonstrate lower than average levels of negativity. Those with a preference for living in a diverse neighbourhood are the least negative about the impact of migrant and minoritised populations in Scotland. In the multivariate models, all of these indicators predict a lower likelihood that a Scottish person will perceive either a cultural or economic threat from migrants, and most of them increase the probability that a Scot believes migrants make Scotland a better place (the one exception is the preference for remaining in the EU, which loses statistical significance in the model predicting the belief that migrants make Scotland a better place).

General political dispositions also predict perceptions of migrants. Scots who are interested in politics are less likely to perceive a cultural threat from migrants and are more likely to believe migrants make Scotland a better place. Perhaps those who are interested in politics are more receptive to the messages sent by the political elite. However, following news media does not register as significant in any of the models, despite expectations that exposure to the
inclusive elite messaging covered in the media might make Scots more open to immigration (Pillai et al. 2007).

Political party identification is regularly used as a proxy for political ideology, political interest, and exposure to political information. Given the politicisation of immigration in UK elections, Scottish attitudes might correspond with party preferences. However, party rhetoric around immigration is less divisive and less politicised in Scotland – the main political parties share the message that increased immigration to Scotland would be beneficial – so party identity may not be one of the most relevant determinants of attitudes towards migration. Figure 8.5 illustrates the percentage of 2015 SSAS respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with more negative assessments of migrants, broken down by Scottish political party identification and placed on an ideological spectrum from left to right.

**Figure 8.4** Percentage of SSAS respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with negative attitudes about immigrants by cosmopolitan indicators.

*Source: 2015 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (ScotCen Social Research 2017)*
Conservative Party members are the most likely to express more negative attitudes, but the only substantial differences are in the responses to the questions about identity. This pattern could indicate the resonance of ethno-nationalist messages among Scottish Conservatives. The responses of Conservative Party members do not deviate from the responses of SNP or Labour Party members in the questions about migrant/minority impact on jobs, or in the general assessment of whether migrants make Scotland a better place. Liberal Democrat and especially Green Party members demonstrate significantly less negative attitudes, though the sample of party members is small. These patterns suggest that political party identification could be a salient predictor of attitudes towards immigration, but these differences are not borne out by the results of the statistical models that control for other individual characteristics. The only statistically significant party variable is Green Party support, which is associated with more positive attitudes. This finding echoes the work of Hussain and Miller (2006), who find SNP voting and Scottish identity do not predict any phobias other than Anglophobia. However, when cosmopolitan variables are removed from the model (see Appendix I), identifying with the Labour Party reduces the probability that a Scot will perceive an identity or economic threat from immigrants, and identifying with the SNP reduces the likelihood of believing that immigrants present a threat to Scottish workers.

**Figure 8.5** Percentage of SSAS respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with negative attitudes about immigrants by political party. *Source: 2015 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (ScotCen Social Research 2017)*
Figure 8.6 illustrates the frequency of negative perceptions of immigrants broken down by whether a respondent identifies as more Scottish or British. Scottish residents who identify as British generally hold less negative opinions of migrants. Difference of means tests reveal statistically significant differences in disbelieving immigrants make Scotland a better place, and in perceptions that increased migration of Black and Asian people will constitute a threat to Scottish identity. There are also significant differences in the belief that migrants and minorities take jobs from Scottish people. However, in the multivariate models none of these variables retain significance until cosmopolitan variables are removed from the model (see Appendix I). Figure 8.6 also reveals that those who prefer Scottish constitutional independence do not appear to have much less negative attitudes than those who do not want independence, though difference in means tests reveal statistically significant differences across the two groups for perceiving a threat to Scottish identity from Muslims, where those who do not support independence perceive threat more frequently. However, once other variables are controlled for in the multivariate models, a preference for constitutional independence is not a significant predictor of attitudes about immigration until indicators of cosmopolitan values are removed from the model.

![Figure 8.6](image)
The findings from the multivariate models contradict those of McCollum et al. (2014), who found that those who identify as Scottish rather than British are more likely to agree that ethnic minorities threaten Scottish identity and take jobs away from Scottish people. This difference between the previous findings and the results of the models in Appendix G is attributable to the different specification of the models which contain a number of indicators capturing cosmopolitanism. When cosmopolitan indicators are removed from the model (see Appendix I), Scottish identity predicts a lower probability that a respondent believes immigrants make Scotland a better place and a higher probability that a respondent believes that migrants and minorities present a threat to Scotland’s identity. A preference for independence increases the probability that a respondent believes that immigrants will make Scotland a better place and reduces the likelihood of perceiving a threat to Scottish identity from migrants and minorities. After controlling for all of the other variables in a model, the effect of cosmopolitanism overwhelms the effect of national identity and political nationalism in driving attitudes towards migrants and minorities.20

Economic determinants of attitudes towards migrants

The only other group of indicators registering consistently significant relationships in the multivariate models predicting attitudes towards migrants relate to individual economic status (see Appendix G). A higher income is associated with the perception that migrants make Scotland a better place, but not with either of the threat indices, potentially reflecting the protected status of those with higher incomes from economic competition with migrants. Figure 8.7 demonstrates that those in routine employment are far more likely to perceive a threat from immigrants than those in any other employment classification. The comparison between high- and low-skilled employment (the two largest groups of workers in Scotland) reveal strong differences in opinions, suggesting that there is an association between economic vulnerability and attitudes towards migration.21 East European migrants are perceived to present a greater threat than ethnic minorities across all of the employment classifications, likely because of different regimes governing EU and non-EU migration and political arguments about free movement. While the points-based immigration system for non-EU migration is designed to tailor migration flows to the economic needs of the UK, EU migration is not subject to any similar considerations. Theoretically, East Europeans could compete with native workers in sectors with no skills shortages, though this does not typically happen (Manacorda et al. 2012).

When occupational status is included in the multivariate model, those in lower supervisory or technical occupations (involving lower-level service positions, or contract workers like tool makers or mechanics) are less likely to see
a general benefit to Scotland from migration when compared with those in
high-level managerial or professional jobs (the excluded category). If income
is removed from the model, members of all three of the lower occupational
classes are less likely to believe migrants make Scotland a better place, and
those in routine occupations are more likely to believe that migrants and
minorities take jobs from Scottish workers. When cosmopolitan values are
removed from the model, small owners and those in lower supervisory and
routine occupations are more likely to hold negative perceptions of immi-
grants (see Appendix I). These findings suggest that economic status influ-
ences general perceptions about the positive impact of migrants. Relationships
between the lower occupational statuses and less positive assessments of immi-
grants indicate that economic vulnerability plays into a perception of threat,
affirming previous research findings that high-skilled citizens are less opposed
to immigration than their more economically threatened lower-skilled coun-
terparts (Mayda 2006; O’Rourke and Sinnott 2006). Meanwhile, no measures
of larger group economic threat, such as perceived status of the economy or
the standard of living in Scotland, register as significant in any of the models
until the cosmopolitan indicators are removed from the model, at which point
positive perceptions of the economy are negatively associated with the percep-
tion of economic and cultural threat. These findings contradict literature sug-
gest that national economic assessments are stronger predictors of attitudes

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### Figure 8.7 Percentage of SSAS respondents agreeing with the notion that migrants/minorities take jobs from Scottish people by socio-economic classification.

**Source:** 2015 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (ScotCen Social Research 2017)
the politics of immigration in scotland

A number of social conditions provide key explanations for attitudes towards immigration. Education, and especially higher education, reduces parochialism and is associated with cosmopolitan values. In their multiple regression analysis, Hussain and Miller (2006) find that education has the biggest impact on Islamophobic and Anglophobic prejudice in Scotland, and higher levels of education correspond with lower levels of prejudice. Lewis (2006) similarly found that people in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Dundee with lower levels of education expressed the most hostile attitudes towards asylum seekers. These findings are replicated in the models in Appendix G, which demonstrate a positive association between education and believing immigrants make Scotland a better place, and a lower probability that those with higher levels of education believe immigrants threaten Scottish identity or jobs.

Age is negatively associated with positive perceptions about immigration. Age gaps are generally attributed to generational differences, where younger people tend to be more accepting. Ford (2012) finds that the age divide on attitudes about immigration is much stronger in Britain than in other European and North American countries. The multivariate models in Appendix G reveal inconsistent relationships between age and perceptions of migration, where older people in Scotland have a greater probability of believing that immigrants make Scotland a better place, but also a higher probability of believing that immigrants and members of a minoritised group threaten Scotland’s identity and take jobs away from Scottish workers. This inconsistency could be attributable to older people’s anxieties about future trends, even as they acknowledge past and current contributions of migrants. Alternatively, while older people may be prepared to acknowledge immigration’s positive effects on Scotland as a generic phenomenon, they may have more anxieties associated with particular groups of migrants.

Diverse social networks are critical for developing community cohesion in contexts of racial and ethnic diversity. Hussain and Miller (2006) find that having a Muslim friend reduces Islamophobia, having an English friend reduces Anglophobia, and having a friend of either minoritised group reduces phobias towards both groups. In the 2015 SSAS data, 56% of those who have a close Muslim friend say that immigration makes Scotland a better place, compared with 36% of those who do not have a Muslim friend, and 27% of those with a Muslim friend believe that an influx of more Muslims would threaten Scotland’s identity, compared with 46% of those without a Muslim friend, amounting to a 20% difference between the groups. The difference between those who have a close friend of a different ethnic background
is around 13%. However, in full the multivariate models, the indicator of diverse friend networks is not a statistically significant predictor of attitudes towards migrants. When the indicators of cosmopolitanism are removed from the model (see Appendix I), having diverse friend networks increases the probability that a respondent believes immigrants make Scotland a better place and reduces the probability that they believe immigrants and ethnic minorities take jobs from Scottish people.

Urban areas are the most ethnically diverse areas of the UK, and in Scotland, the vast majority of immigrants live in the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Urban dwellers may be more likely to interact with and form friendships with diverse people and have a greater opportunity to recognise the benefits that come from migration. Urban dwellers also tend to be younger, more educated, and employed in jobs with higher occupational status, all characteristics associated with greater acceptance of diversity. Appendix J breaks down attitudes by urban/rural classification and suggests that within Scotland, the rural population may be the most acceptant, followed by the urban population. Appendix K lists the Scottish administrative areas, the population density of each area, and the percentage of 2015 SSAS respondents expressing pro-immigrant opinions. There is no discernible pattern. In the multivariate models, living in a small town or rural area does not significantly predict attitudes towards migrants.

The three models in Appendix G suggest individual attitudes towards immigration in Scotland are political but not politicised, in that values and ideology seem to matter but partisan identities do not. Individual economic precarity matters for generic and economic assessments of migrants, but for not the perception of cultural threat. These results confirm the Europe-wide research finding that cultural values and beliefs are the primary drivers of attitudes towards all forms of immigration (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007). However, comparative work evaluates the relative strength of different economic or identity attributes on a single metric of attitudes about immigration. The models with the 2015 SSAS data are more informative because the different questions about economic and identity threat allow for the assessment of whether there are distinct determinants for different types of feelings about migrants. The results demonstrate that in the Scottish case, the impact of economic vulnerability is limited to assessments of the general and economic impact of immigrants, and does not necessarily extend to a perception of cultural threat. Cosmopolitan values determine attitudes towards immigration more broadly.

Given what is already known about attitudes towards immigrants in the UK and Europe, none of these results are unexpected, though they do offer some interesting and unique insights about how Scottish people differentiate between the types of threats presented by immigrants. This is good news
for Scottish political elites, because messaging and policy can be targeted to mitigate anxieties. It is hard to assess the potential uniqueness of the Scottish public without direct comparison with other contexts. Given the political dynamics of Scottish nationalism and the regular comparisons made between Scotland and England in the media, a comparison of public attitudes in Scottish and English populations will be most instructive for determining whether the Scottish public presents a special political opportunity for the development of pro-immigrant policy preferences.

**Scottish and English Opinions Compared**

A small but important body of research examines Scottish immigration preferences in comparison with other nations within the UK, and the general consensus is that Scottish respondents are more open to and accepting of immigrants than their English counterparts. McCollum et al. (2014) found that with the exception of residents in London, Scots expressed less hostile attitudes towards migration than people in any other UK region. Hussain and Miller (2006) found lower levels of hostility towards Muslims in Scotland relative to England. In logistic regression analysis of the likelihood that someone would regard immigration as one of the two most important problems facing the UK, Ford (2012) found that residency in Scotland was negatively associated with concerns over immigration, compared with the other nations. Qualitative research affirms the prevalence of positive attitudes towards immigrants among Scots. In focus group interviews, Lewis (2006) found relatively high levels of public tolerance for asylum seekers in Scotland. Pillai et al.’s study of migrant reception across ten locations in the UK (two of them in Scotland) leads them to conclude that Scotland ‘seems to possess several characteristics that facilitate the reception and integration of new migrants that differ to those observed in England’, including elite-level messaging, less sensationalistic newspaper coverage, and socio-demographic features that correlate with openness to migration (2007: 7).

The extant literature suggests that Scots are less pessimistic about immigration and immigrants compared with other national groups in the UK. Data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS), an annual national survey of about 3,000 participants across England, Wales, and Scotland, provides an opportunity to test the continuity of this trend. The 2015 BSAS contains two general questions about migrants to Britain. The first asks, ‘would you say it is generally bad or good for Britain’s economy that migrants come to Britain from other countries?’ The second asks, ‘would you say that Britain’s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by migrants coming to live here from other countries?’ Both questions require respondents to rank their response on a ten-point scale, where -5 represents the most negative and 5 the most positive opinion. Frequencies of the responses are illustrated in Figure 8.8.
Scottish respondents are slightly more optimistic (mean score of 0.42 for the economic question and -0.01 for the cultural question) than English respondents (mean score of -0.17 for the economic question and -0.25 for the cultural question) on average, though the mode response for both English and Scottish respondents is zero. Difference of means tests reveal that there is not a statistically significant difference between the English and Scottish populations when it comes to their assessment about how migrants influence the cultural life of Britain. Both English and Scottish respondents are more likely to express slightly more optimistic opinions about immigrant impact on the economy than on culture, and there is a statistically significant difference in the Scottish

Figure 8.8 Frequency of responses about migrant impact. 
Source: 2015 British Social Attitudes Survey (NatCen Social Research 2017)
versus English perceptions of the economic contributions of migrants, with Scots having more favourable impressions about migrant contributions to the economy.

The BSAS indicators can each be broken down into two variables ranking from zero to 5, with one variable measuring the strength of positive opinions and the other measuring the strength of negative opinions, and the neutral position coded as zero. Difference of means tests between the Scottish and English samples reveal that within the economy metrics, Scottish respondents are not more likely than the English respondents to say that the migrants are good for the economy, but they are significantly less likely to say they are bad for the economy (p<0.05). They are not more likely than the English respondents to say that migrants undermine or enrich the culture. Most of the difference between the UK and Scotland is occurring in the neutral and negative sides of the spectrum. These findings suggest that in the aggregate, Scots are inclined to feel less negatively, though not necessarily more positively, about economic immigration compared with those living in England. It may be more correct to say that in the aggregate, the Scottish population is more ambivalent about economic immigration than the English.

Why is there a difference (no matter how slight) in English and Scottish attitudes towards migration? A multivariate model using the BSAS data tests whether the difference is attributable to a national group effect (see Appendix L). The BSAS model includes Scottish, English, and Welsh respondents, and contains a variable controlling for whether a survey participant lives in Scotland or Wales, with English residency as the category of reference. If the English–Scottish difference in attitudes towards immigration were a national characteristic, the variable for Scotland should be a significant predictor of attitudes after controlling for national identity, and political, economic, and sociological factors. However, it is not a significant predictor of impressions about migrant impact on the national culture or on the economy, suggesting that after controlling for the other individual indicators, there is no significant difference in the opinions of individuals in Scotland versus those in other parts of Britain. In other words, the empirical difference observed between Scotland and England in the comparison of means tests is not a group effect. Rather, the difference must be attributable to the construction of attitudes at the individual level.

Multivariate models of English and Scottish attitudes towards immigrants are presented in Appendix M. The near-identical measurement of variables and the ability to nearly match model specification allows for some comparison of English and Scottish attitudes of migration with the 2015 BSAS and SSAS survey responses.26 The most important difference between the BSAS and SSAS models is in the measurement of attitudes towards immigrants or minoritised groups. The BSAS asks about the positive impact of immigrants on the culture and the economy, while the SSAS asks about the perception of threat
from different migrant groups to Scottish identity and jobs. The BSAS data also unfortunately do not include many measures of cosmopolitan values, which are some of the most important determinants of attitudes towards immigration in the SSAS model. Most other indicators in the models are identical. 27

Comparing the attitudes represented in the English and Scottish samples reveals more similarities than differences. Across both BSAS and SSAS samples, approval of the UK’s place in the EU, level of education, and political interest share significant positive relationships with positive perceptions of immigrants, affirming the link described previously between indicators of cosmopolitan values and openness to immigration. There are a few noticeable differences, however. Prioritising one’s national identity (English or Scottish) is associated with a more negative assessment of the cultural impact of immigrants in England but in Scotland there is no impact of national identity on a perceived threat to Scotland’s identity. Prioritising Scottish national identity is associated with the likelihood of perceiving an economic threat from immigrants, but there is not a significant relationship between strong English identity and a perceived economic impact of migration. The relationship between Englishness and cultural threat confirms the conceptualisation of Englishness as a more ethnically derived identity that aligns with perceptions that immigration is a threat to a racially defined English culture. Scottishness is defined civically rather than ethnically, which could explain the non-relationship between Scottishness and identity threat. Those who emphasise an exclusively Scottish national identity may be more likely to be concerned with Scotland’s relative economic status and the feasibility of a self-sufficient nation, or to feel loyalty to other Scots over migrants.

Political party identification is predictive of attitudes about immigration in England, where support for the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, or Green Party is associated with more positive perceptions of immigrants. By contrast, in the Scottish sample, only the Green Party is associated with the reduced probability of seeing immigrants as an economic threat. Immigration is more highly politicised in England, and it plays a central role in distinguishing between the parties on the left and right sides of the ideological spectrum, while there is political consensus in Scotland about the general desirability of migration. These elite-level discourses are reflected in the models. Among the sociological determinants, education is associated with more positive perceptions of immigrants across all the models in Scotland and the UK. Older people perceive higher degrees of cultural and economic threat coming from immigration in Scotland, while age is insignificant in the English models. 28

Scots are quite similar to the English in the way their attitudes towards immigrants work. The opinions of both Scottish and English people average out to be quite neutral, though Scots are slightly less negative about the effect of
immigration on the economy. They are not distinctive as a group when controlling for relevant individual-level factors, and many individual ideological characteristics work the same way in both England and Scotland: cosmopolitanism (measured with attitudes about the EU and level of education) and political interest are significant determinants of more favourable attitudes about immigrants in both England and Scotland. However, differences between the two states in the politicisation of the immigrant issue are reflected in individual-level data in the different associations between nationalism and party identification and attitudes towards migrants. This suggests that perhaps the Scottish elites have been successful in their efforts to depoliticise the issue.

Conclusion

In the aggregate, Scots are ambivalent about migrants, but the multivariate models in Scotland reveal some unique results that could present a political opportunity to the Scottish elites. Unlike in other contexts, where people conflate different types of migrants and associate threat with any and all migrants, Scots appear to distinguish between the economic and cultural impact of migrants. Conditions of economic vulnerability link only to a perception of economic threat coming from migrants, and do not extend to a perception of cultural threat. Cosmopolitan values determine attitudes towards immigration more broadly. This should allow elites to target policy and rhetoric to alleviate the perception of threat and advance their pro-immigration agenda more easily than elsewhere.

The comparison of Scottish and English attitudes dampens some of this optimism. Compared with the English, Scots hold slightly less negative impressions about migrant impact on the economy, but analysing the determinants of attitudes towards migration reveals there is no statistically significant group-level difference between Scottish and English opinions after controlling for individual-level drivers of immigration opinions. Education, an interest in politics, and pro-EU attitudes drive more positive attitudes in both Scotland and England. The main difference between the two populations is in the nature and degree of politicisation of immigration in England, signalled by how party identification relates to attitudes. There is no such relationship between party identification and attitudes towards immigration in Scotland.

The largely ambivalent public opinion about immigration in Scotland suggests that public attitudes in Scotland are not yet aligned with the pro-immigrant elite discourse. However, immigration has not been politicised in Scotland, which suggests that elites have been successful at demonstrating partisan consensus on the issue. Continued refusal to politicise immigration is critical for those Scottish elites who are promoting an inclusive vision for Scotland. Public ambivalence provides a narrow window of opportunity for advancing a more inclusive agenda, but the tepid feelings Scots have
towards migrants should be treated with caution. Recent history in countries like Sweden and Poland demonstrates how a single crisis can quickly turn public opinion against migrants and minorities if multicultural values are not entrenched in the public consciousness. A similar crisis or controversy in Scotland could eliminate Scottish distinctiveness in attitudes towards migrants. For visions of a diverse Scotland to be realised, Scottish elites cannot take public support for granted. They must focus their attention on strengthening the public celebration of (rather than mere acceptance of) diversity within the political culture.

NOTES

1. In the 2015 and 2016 Ipsos MORI data, immigration was ranked as more important than the NHS, the EU, the economy, housing, and defence/terrorism.
2. Opposition to immigration has been a consistent feature of British public opinion. Surveys dating back to 1964 also indicate a strong belief that there were too many immigrants in the UK (Blinder and Allen 2016).
3. McLaren and Johnson (2007) highlighted evidence from a Eurobarometer poll in 2000 that suggested Europeans favour identical treatment for labour migrants and asylum seekers. Blinder (2013) found that public perceptions of immigration focus on asylum seekers and permanent arrivals, and that imagining ‘immigrants’ as asylum seekers or permanent arrivals is associated with a preference for reduced migration.
4. The 2015 survey measured attitudes towards immigration with general questions and cannot address specific issues like preferences for an autonomous immigration policy or attitudes towards particular types of immigrants like foreign students or refugees. The 2015 survey provides the most recent survey data available that includes several questions on migrants.
5. The prejudice question is a forced choice between two options, one of which is a more socially desirable response (that Scotland should get rid of prejudice), leading to social desirability bias. One way to mitigate this bias is through more indirect self-reporting measures, where participants can express prejudicial attitudes, but can justify them with reference to other factors that do not necessarily link to prejudice. The question about living in a diverse area is one such measure, because respondents could justify their answer with reference to social institutions or the economy. However, Axt (2017) finds that direct measures are better predictors of implicit racial attitudes and yield greater differences between racially different populations, which suggests that the best way to know about individual prejudice is to ask about it directly.
6. The differences in means are statistically significant at p<0.01.
7. Sequential questions of a similar nature with identical Likert scale responses are vulnerable to response bias in which the respondent defaults to the same response to all of the questions due to expediency or indecision. This is most common with online surveys or scantron surveys where the respondent fills in a circle corresponding with their answer. The SSAS is a face-to-face oral survey, which should reduce this form of bias, but could increase social desirability bias.
8. The difference in means is statistically significant at p<0.01.
9. The individual responses of each survey respondent are not perfectly consistent across the dimensions of identity threat and economic threat. Only about 40% of respondents select identical levels of threat across assessments of identity and economic threat.
10. In this instance, our unit of analysis is individuals, and variables are the numeric representations of individual answers to survey questions.

11. Ordered profit models offer the best fit for dependent variables with a natural ordering but where the metric has no linear numeric meaning, such as with variables measuring responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The measures of threat perceptions are indices. An index is a compound measure that aggregates multiple indicators into a single variable. Three indicators measuring whether a respondent believes the presence of Muslims, East Europeans, or Black and Asian people presents a threat to Scottish identity are combined into an identity threat index. The index score ranges from 0 to 12. The economic threat index combines the two variables measuring whether a survey respondent believes ethnic minorities or East European migrants take jobs from Scottish people. The resulting index ranges from 0 to 8. Higher scores on the index indicate higher perception of threat.

12. Education levels often correlate with cosmopolitan values, though formal education should not be automatically equated with cosmopolitanism because some types of formal education are disciplinarily narrow and technical.

13. The inclusion of an indicator of respecting religious expression would be considered controversial by cosmopolitan theorists. Some would advocate for an understanding of cosmopolitanism that celebrates diversity, while others would push for a vision of a cosmopolitan ideal that transcends diversity. Both visions of cosmopolitanism push against exclusive individual attachments to a particular culture, and religious garments are often understood to represent cultural, as well as religious, prioritisation and attachment.

14. Support for the EU could also indicate support for free trade, which may or may not link into cosmopolitan values. The variable indicating support for the EU is less correlated with the other indicators of cosmopolitanism.

15. Pillai et al. (2007) note the role of positive media messaging in Scotland in creating an environment more conducive to the development of more inclusive communities. In England, they identify the media as a source of misinformation and fearmongering.

16. See Chapter 7 for a discussion of the party platforms.

17. Difference of means tests confirm there are no statistically significant differences between Conservative Party members and non-Conservative Party members on the indicator of whether a respondent believes immigrants make Scotland a better place, nor on the index measuring economic threat. There is, however, a significant difference between Conservatives and non-Conservatives on the index measuring a threat to Scottish identity.

18. Hussain and Miller (2006) found that if the degree of Scottish identity is removed from their multiple regression models, SNP voting became a significant predictor of Anglophobia, but not Islamophobia. Removing the national identity variables from the models in Appendix G did not change the significance of any of the indicators of political party identification.

19. This significant relationship between Green Party support and positive perceptions of immigration is unsurprising considering the positioning of the Green Party as the most leftist party in Scotland, and the strong and explicit Green Party endorsement of non-discrimination, free movement, and migrant rights (Logan 2017). It would be a mistake to attribute too much to this finding due to the small number of Green Party members in the sample (26).

20. Scottish identity is very weakly correlated with all of the indicators of cosmopolitanism. The correlation coefficients between prioritising Scottish identity over British and indicators of cosmopolitanism is -0.06 with the preference for staying within the EU, 0.08 with the preference for living in diverse communities, 0.08
with believing Scotland should combat prejudice, and 0.05 with the religious tolerance index. Multicollinearity is not driving the result.

21. Thirty-six per cent of Scots in the survey sample are employers, high-level managers, and professionals, and 25% work in semi-routine or routine occupations. Routine or low-skilled occupations include waiters and waitresses, machinists, sorters, packers, railway station staff, road construction workers, building labourers, dockers, couriers, refuse collectors, car park attendants, and cleaners. Twelve per cent of Scots are in lower supervisory technical occupations, 10% are in intermediate occupations, and 8% are small employers or own account workers.

22. Removing income from the models predicting perceptions of identity and economic threat does not change the significance of the occupational status variables.

23. McCollum et al. (2014) also found that those who identify as Scottish rather than British are more likely to agree that ethnic minorities threaten Scottish identity and take jobs away from Scottish people, and that a preference for independence rather than further devolution is associated with the perception that ethnic minorities present threats to Scottish workers.

24. Pillai et al. (2007) note that positivity towards immigrants is not uniform across Scotland, and that hostility towards immigrants in Scotland varies with the immigrant’s race.

25. The 2015 BSAS includes 1,868 English respondents and 170 Scottish respondents.

26. Previous work demonstrating that Scots are comparatively open to immigration generally derived their findings from comparisons of aggregate data and simple descriptive statistics (e.g. McCollum et al. 2014). Where statistical models are used to describe attitudes towards immigration in the existing research, the analysis is often built around an exploration about how individual-level demographic characteristics determine immigration attitudes in either the UK or Scotland, without considering comparative data.

27. The differences between the BSAS and SSAS models in Appendix M and the SSAS models in Appendix G are the measurement of the dependent variables, the exclusion of many of the cosmopolitan variables in the BSAS (especially questions about whether the government should work to eliminate prejudice, the question about whether it is preferable to live in diverse areas, and questions about religious tolerance), the exclusion of questions about constitutional preference, the exclusion of large group economic assessments about relative economic threat and quality of life, the exclusion of an indicator of whether the respondent is friends with Muslims or people with a different ethnicity, and the inclusion of an additional question about TV news consumption. The two surveys yield roughly comparable numbers in the models, with 615 English respondents and 660 Scottish respondents. There is also a Scottish sample in the BSAS, which would allow for more direct comparisons with identical specifications. Once all the variables are included in the model, the Scottish sample in the BSAS drops to only 57 from a total sample of 335. As Scotland has only 8% of the UK’s population, the proportion of Scots to English in the BSAS is representatively appropriate. However, for comparing the power of individual determinants, it is much more useful to compare the roughly equal samples of the BSAS and the SSAS.

28. The age effect disappears in the extended Scottish models in Appendix G when more expansive indicators of cosmopolitan values and constitutional preference are included in the models.