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The role of misperceptions in attitudes to immigration

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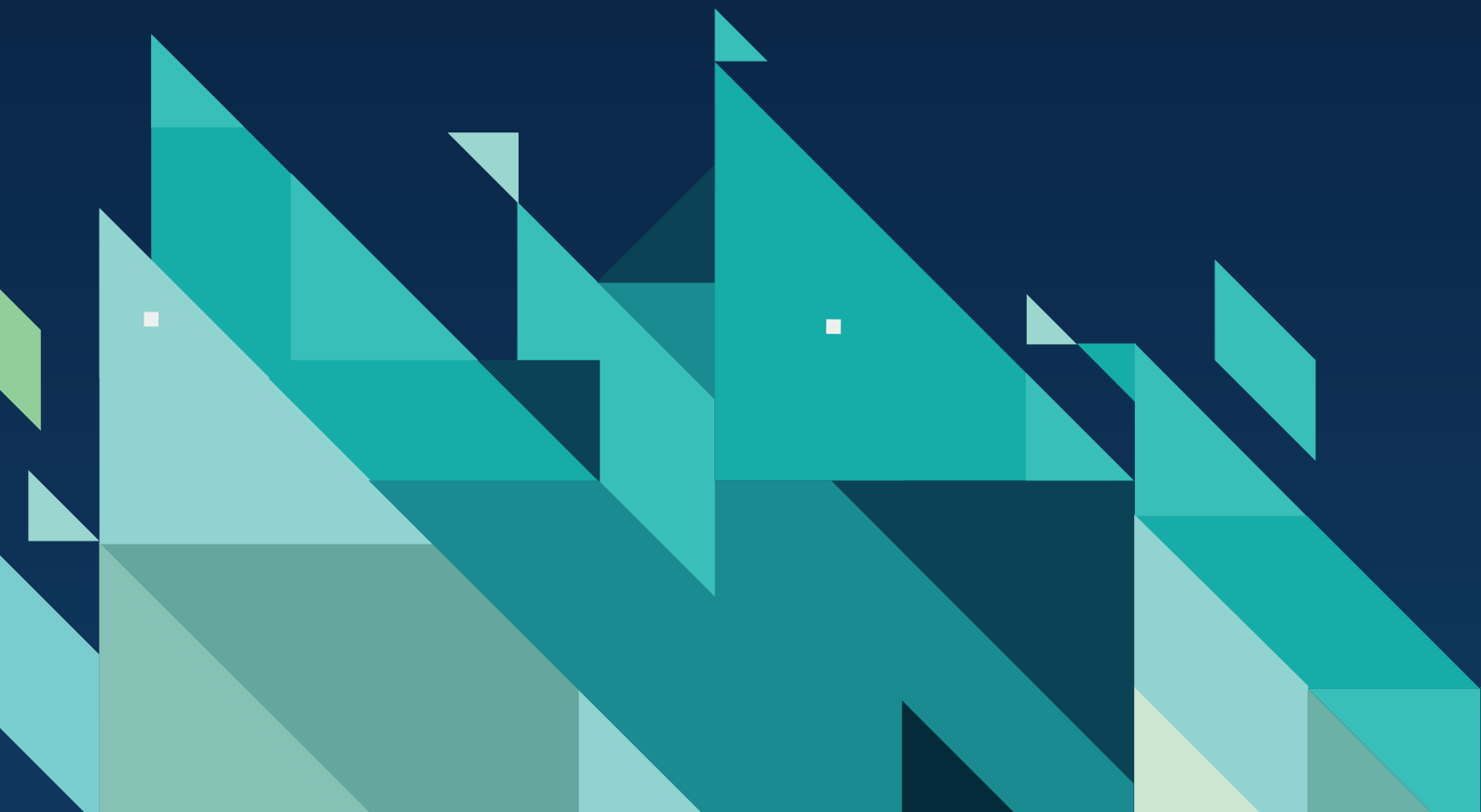

THE ROLE OF MISPERCEPTIONS IN ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines public perceptions of immigration in Ireland and their relationship to immigration attitudes. It was conducted against a backdrop of heightened salience of immigration in public discourse, marked by violent protests at buildings earmarked for asylum seekers, increases in racially motivated hate crimes and the spread of online misinformation. While the majority of the Irish public has maintained comparatively positive attitudes toward immigration, these events and related discourse underscore the importance of understanding the drivers of attitudes to immigration.

Before presenting the findings, three contextual considerations are important to highlight. First, we did not expect individuals to know precise immigration statistics. Misperceptions of social and economic facts are common across many domains. What matters is not necessarily the accuracy of beliefs, but in how inaccuracies might relate to broader attitudes and, potentially, behaviours. Second, while we examine the relationship between misperceptions and attitudes, we do not assume that misperceptions *cause* attitudes. Though a causal relationship is plausible, identifying causality would require controlled experimental variation of perceptions, which is beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, establishing correlational relationships is a valuable step toward assessing whether causal links may exist and whether efforts to correct misperceptions may be worthwhile. Third, the purpose of this study is not to advocate for changing attitudes toward immigration for their own sake. Rather our aim was to identify systematic misperceptions that can distort democratic debate, increase vulnerability to misinformation and exacerbate social tensions.

With these considerations in mind, we focused on two primary questions: (1) How accurate are public intuitions about immigration facts, such as population size, reasons for migration and migrant characteristics? (2) Are these perceptions linked to attitudes, even when accounting for other known predictors?

THE SURVEY

The study involved an online survey of 1,200 adults in Ireland, recruited to be nationally representative by age, gender, region and socio-economic status. Participants estimated key facts about immigration, including the proportion of the population born abroad and outside the European Union (EU)/United Kingdom (UK)/North America; the gender breakdown of migrants; and the reasons for recent residence applications (e.g. work or education, family reunification, international protection). Subsets of participants also estimated migrant employment rates, education levels, social housing uptake and share of the prison population.

We measured attitudes in two ways. First, participants rated how they feel about immigration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) using a seven-point rating scale. On this question, they were randomly assigned to consider immigration for work, education or family reasons or for international protection. The second way was an open text question about the main issues facing Ireland, asked at the beginning of the survey before the focus on immigration was apparent.

The survey employed multiple efforts to minimise survey biases, including varying the focus of questions (e.g. to estimate those born *outside* the EU/UK/North America or those born *within* these regions), incentivising accurate responses and designing estimation tasks using evidence from the psychology of how people think about numbers.

MAIN RESULTS

Misperceptions about immigration are widespread and systematically biased. Table A shows a comparison between average participant guesses of key statistics compared to the best available official figures.

TABLE A PARTICIPANT GUESSES OF IMMIGRATION STATISTICS COMPARED TO OFFICIAL ESTIMATES

	Official Estimate %	Participant Guess %
Share of Overall Population Born Abroad	18.8-21.7	27.8
Share of Overall Population Born Outside EU, UK and North America	7.0-9.2	13.5
Share of Overall Population Who Are Men Born Abroad	10.0	15.3
Share of Recent Migrants Born Outside EU, UK and North America	72.3	55.8
Share of Residence Applications: Ukraine	28.1	29.3
Share of Residence Applications: Other International Protection	11.5	18.3
Share of Residence Applications: Work/Education	46.0	19.2
Share of Residence Applications: Family	3.2	15.1
Employment Rate – Born in Ireland	72.7	67.5
Employment Rate – Born Outside Ireland	76.8	51.5
Tertiary Education – Born in Ireland	42.2	43.6
Tertiary Education – Born Outside Ireland	58.5	34.4
Social Housing Uptake – Born in Ireland	9.2	36.7
Social Housing Uptake – Born Outside Ireland	6.1	43.8
Prison Population – Irish	79.3	66.7
Prison Population – Non-Irish	20.7	28.2
Prison Population – Non-EU, UK or North American	7.7	18.5

Source: Authors' analysis. For details on sources for the official estimates, see Appendix II.
Notes: All comparisons are statistically significant. Participant guess statistics exclude those in the highest 5 per cent of estimates for each statistic.

Most participants overestimated the size of the migrant population, guessing an average of 28 per cent of the population to have been born abroad compared to official estimates of 19-22 per cent. Over half overestimated the share of migrants born outside the EU/UK/North America and the proportion of the population who are men born abroad. Participants also underestimated migrant employment rates and tertiary education levels, but were reasonably accurate when asked to estimate the same rates among the Irish-born population. They overestimated social housing uptake among both the Irish-born and migrant population but incorrectly estimated the uptake rate to be higher among migrants.[1]

Participants underestimated recent immigration from outside of the EEA and misperceived the reasons for recent migration. In particular, they overestimated the share of international protection applications (excluding Ukraine, which was reasonably accurately estimated) and strongly underestimated immigration for work and education.

The focus of questions influenced perceptions. For example, participants gave higher estimates for the proportion of people born outside the EU, UK or North America when this group was explicitly highlighted in the question. In contrast, when the question focused on those born *within* these regions, participants' implied estimates of those born outside were significantly lower.

Attitudes were more positive toward immigration for work, education or family reasons than for international protection (average 3.9 out of 7 compared to 3.4, where 1 is strongly negative and 7 is strongly positive). About one-in-five participants reported feeling very negative about immigration for international protection reasons. One-quarter (27 per cent) cited immigration as a main issue facing Ireland in an open-text question, though housing (cited by 83 per cent), cost-of-living (44 per cent) and the health system (41 per cent) were cited by significantly more respondents. Anti-immigrant sentiment also emerged as an issue of concern, which was cited by one-in-eight participants.

Misperceptions predicted more negative attitudes to immigration. Overestimating the share of recent migrants seeking international protection and underestimating the share of recent migrants coming for work and education had the strongest links with negative attitudes. Importantly, our analysis suggests that participants with the most accurate beliefs about these statistics were more positive on average. For example, a summary analysis across seven questions showed that 14 per cent of

[1] The degree of overestimation for both groups is very large; we provide possible explanations for this in the report.

those who held two misperceptions reported feeling 'very negatively' about immigration compared to 22 per cent of those who held four misperceptions (a relative increase of 57 per cent). Similarly, 23 per cent of those with two misperceptions cited immigration as a national issue, compared to 35 per cent of those who held four (a relative increase of 52 per cent). The relationship between perceptions and attitudes held even when accounting for financial status, trust in others, political views and social contact with migrants.

Results also point to other predictors of immigration attitudes. Regarding financial status, there was no association between income and attitudes but experiencing material deprivation, feeling less well-off compared to others and having less optimism for the future were associated with more negative attitudes. Believing others to be trustworthy and that one's voice counts politically emerged as particularly strong predictors of attitudes. In line with international evidence, having a close personal connection with a migrant (e.g. friend or family member) was associated with more positive attitudes. The effect of frequency of contact with migrants depended on personal connections, whereby those with very frequent contact but no close personal connection reported more negative attitudes.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings show that misperceptions of immigration are not random but are instead systematically biased toward negative assumptions. Though we cannot be certain of causality, these biases are strongly linked to attitudes, particularly people's tendency to overestimate the share of migrants seeking international protection and underestimate migration for work and education.

The Role of Public Discourse

Participants' estimates were influenced by which groups were highlighted in the question wording, and pilot data[2] indicated that media coverage of immigration is often assumed to relate to migrants from outside the EU, UK and North America and asylum seekers. One extension of these findings is that the amount of attention given in public discourse to subgroups of migrants, such as those seeking asylum, may lead the public to believe that such subgroups are more representative of the migrant population than they are in reality. This evidence is consistent with salience-based psychological mechanisms rather than purely motivated reasoning (the idea that perceptions are distorted by prior motives). It implies a need to consider more carefully how immigration is represented in both traditional and online media platforms. Selective amplification of exceptional or politically charged cases, without providing appropriate context, may mislead the

2 See Appendix I for details.

public and contribute to misperceptions. This evidence further supports efforts for greater accountability of online platforms that fail to counter disinformation.

Though immigration attitudes are probably influenced by more than facts (e.g. values, political ideology), these insights highlight factual inaccuracies that may distort democratic debate, increase vulnerability to misinformation and exacerbate social tensions. Public figures and authorities who wish to foster informed and balanced debate on migration can seek and avail of opportunities to highlight under-recognised facts, such as migrants' high employment and education rates and the predominance of work and education as reasons for migration, to help rebalance public understanding of immigration in Ireland.

However, identifying causality is not straightforward. While more accurate beliefs are associated with more positive attitudes, these findings do not establish that correcting misperceptions will definitely improve attitudes. Experimental research is needed to test the effectiveness and durability of such interventions.

Other Social Factors

The findings also show that broader social factors matter. Material deprivation, feeling that one's voice does not count politically and possessing low levels of trust in others were linked to more negative views. These relationships, while correlational, suggest that social policies aimed at reducing deprivation and fostering political empowerment may have indirect benefits for social cohesion. Additional analyses show that social contact with migrants is associated with more positive attitudes only when individuals have close personal connections with migrants. Local integration initiatives that build meaningful connections may therefore help to ensure that contact with migrants builds rather than threatens social cohesion.

REPORT STRUCTURE

Chapter 1 introduces the study, presents a brief literature review and outlines the research questions. Chapter 2 outlines the survey design, including the challenges of accurately measuring public perceptions and the steps taken to mitigate bias. Chapter 3 describes the study sample. Chapter 4 presents descriptive statistics on recorded perceptions and regression models that test their relationship with attitudes. Chapter 5 discusses the results and their implications for policy, public discourse and future research.

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

Ireland's demographic profile has changed dramatically over the past two decades (McGinnity et al., 2025). Historically a country of emigration, Ireland saw a steep rise in immigration, mostly from Eastern Europe, in the early 2000s. This trend reversed during the global financial crisis, resulting in net emigration, before immigration increased again from around 2015. Today, approximately one-in-five people living in Ireland were born abroad. The largest groups originate from the United Kingdom (UK), including Northern Ireland, and Eastern Europe.

Similar to other countries, people migrate to Ireland for many reasons. Labour migration is one of the most common, with immigrants playing a vital role in addressing labour shortages in multiple sectors, including construction, health, technology, and hospitality (e.g. Creaton et al., 2025; Conroy and Timoney, 2024). Education-related migration is particularly prominent in Ireland compared to other European countries, accounting for around half of new residence permits issues to non-European Economic Area (EEA) nationals annually (Potter et al., 2025). Family reunification accounts for a smaller share of inward migration, due to restrictive policies (Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2025), though family is a common reason for people to stay, with around a quarter of non-EEA citizens on family-related permits (Potter et al., 2025).

In recent years, forced migration has also increased, particularly from Ukraine. By June 2025, over 110,000 Ukrainians had arrived, with around 80,000 still residing in the country (Central Statistics Office, 2025).[3] This is more than the total number of asylum seekers between 2000 and 2022. At the same time, applications for international protection increased sharply, putting significant pressure on accommodation systems and government capacity to manage the claims. This led to extensive street homelessness among new arrivals and widespread media coverage.

These developments occurred alongside a cost-of-living crisis and long-standing infrastructure deficits, particularly in housing. Previous research

[3] Under the EU Temporary Protection Directive, since 4 March 2022 Ukrainian nationals fleeing the conflict in Ukraine are not treated as asylum seekers or refugees and have been entitled to immediate access to the labour market, along with access to social protection and other State supports. For more information, visit https://www.irishimmigration.ie/information-on-temporary-protection-for-people-fleeing-the-conflict-in-ukraine/.

shows that financial insecurity, a sense that life was better in the past, and living in disadvantaged communities are linked to more negative attitudes towards immigration (Laurence et al., 2024; 2025). Media salience and political narratives also play significant roles in shaping public opinion and their perceptions of immigration (Hopkins et al., 2014; Laurence et al., 2024).

Migration itself presents real pressures and challenges. While the construction sector requires migrant labour to expand supply, population growth linked to immigration contributes to increased demand, further straining the housing system (Bergin and Egan, 2024). Without adequate public services to support a growing population and strong integration policies, immigration can generate challenges to social cohesion.

This study is conducted against a backdrop of heightened salience of these challenges. While isolated protests and arson attacks targeting buildings designated for asylum-seeker accommodation began in 2018, such incidents have become more frequent and violent since late 2022. Reported hate crimes based on race, nationality, ethnicity or colour have increased by over 70 per cent[4] since 2021 (An Garda Síochána, 2024). During the same period, online mis- and disinformation has surged, with post-pandemic narratives increasingly targeting immigrants and other vulnerable minorities (Gallagher et al., 2023).

In this context, measuring and understanding public attitudes is crucial. Negative attitudes, whether based on fact or shaped by misperceptions, can fuel social tension, discrimination and the rise of extreme political movements. In this study, our aim was to build on recent research into public attitudes to immigration (e.g. Laurence et al., 2024; 2025) by measuring the public's intuitions about relevant immigration facts – such as the number of immigrants and their reasons for moving to Ireland – and testing the relationship between these intuitions and their attitudes. It is important to note that we did not expect attitudes to be determined solely by perceptions of facts, particularly among those with deep-seated values. However, understanding these perceptions is likely to provide important context for informing debate and policy.

Before presenting our method and findings, this chapter begins by summarising relevant immigration statistics, reviewing evidence on predictors of immigration attitudes and outlining the rationale for measuring the

[4] From a base of 340 incidents in 2021, the first year for which such data are available. We note that such crimes are likely underreported.

accuracy of immigration perceptions. As this report focuses on the relationship between perceptions and attitudes, we refer readers to Laurence et al. (2024) for comprehensive insights into trends in public attitudes in Ireland.

1.1 IMMIGRATION IN IRELAND

The most recent *Monitoring Report on Integration* details integration outcomes of individuals born outside the State (McGinnity et al., 2025). While migrants in Ireland constitute a diverse and a heterogeneous group, aggregate data show that foreign-born residents tend to exhibit higher employment rates and are more likely to hold third-level qualifications than Irish-born residents. Despite these economic contributions, migrants face notable disadvantages. On average, they earn less, are more likely to be at risk of poverty and are more likely to experience enforced deprivation. These vulnerabilities are closely linked to housing precarity. Migrant-headed households are more reliant on the private rental market, with over one-third of migrant-headed households spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing.

The *Monitoring Report on Integration* also shows that immigration in 2024 approached its previous 2007 peak.[5] However, the demographic profile of migrants has changed considerably since the 2000s. During the economic boom between the late 1990s and mid 2000s, most immigrants arrived from within the recently-expanded EU. In contrast, recent increases have been driven primarily by people from outside the EU and UK (a group that has more than doubled since 2019). Many of these newcomers are Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BoTPs) who arrived in Ireland from Ukraine following the Russian invasion in 2022.

Citizens of countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and the UK must obtain residence permission to live in Ireland. Excluding BoTPs, the reasons for residence permission have remained remarkably stable in recent years, despite the overall rise in immigration (McGinnity et al., 2025). The majority (two-thirds) of permit-required migrants reside in Ireland for employment, education or to join family members living here. Just 3 per cent have been granted refugee or subsidiary protection status.

Although international protection accounts for a relatively small share of total immigration, the number of applications for asylum has risen sharply in a short

[5] Though high levels of emigration of both citizens and non-nationals mean the net figure remains substantially lower.

period. Following almost two decades of comparatively low application levels, the number of applications almost tripled between 2019 (4,781 applications) and 2022 (13,651), rising further to above 18,000 in 2024 (McGinnity et al., 2025). This increase has placed substantial pressure on processing systems and drawn increased political attention (Potter et al., 2025).

1.2 ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION

Irish people tend to hold positive attitudes towards immigration. Findings from the 2023 Equality Attitudes Survey show that two-in-three respondents report feeling fairly or very positive about immigration from outside of the EU and over 80 per cent agree that Ireland should help those seeking protection (Laurence et al., 2024). Immigration from within the EU is more positive still. Analysis of trends in Eurobarometer and European Social Survey (ESS) data reveals that, although positivity declined slightly in 2023, attitudes up to April 2024 remained more favourable than in the previous decade and were substantially more positive than in most other EU countries (Laurence et al., 2024).

Despite this broadly positive picture, recent declines in positivity have coincided with increases in reports of race-motivated hate crimes and a period of heightened salience of immigration. The Russian invasion of Ukraine led to a steep increase in immigration for temporary protection, which was initially met with strong public support. Though most disagree with protests against the housing of asylum seekers (Laurence et al., 2024), such protests have occurred across the country where buildings are rumoured to be earmarked for international protection applicants (e.g. O' Kelly, 2024; White and McGreevy, 2025). Several high-profile incidents, including arson attacks on hotels housing asylum seekers, the November 2023 riot in Dublin city centre and serious assaults on migrants have been linked, in part, to mobilisation by far-right groups in Ireland. By late 2022, immigration had become the dominant focus of Ireland's mis- and disinformation online ecosystem (Gallagher et al., 2023).

During this same period, immigration also attracted substantial attention from traditional media. In late 2023 and throughout much of 2024, immigration competed with housing as the topic most noticed by the public regarding the Government's performance,[6] with three-quarters of those who cited immigration doing so negatively (e.g. Bray, 2024). This heightened salience of

[6] The question posed to respondents is 'What have you come across in what the Government has said or done recently, that has made you think the country is going in the right or wrong direction?'

immigration may signal a change in public attitude, though attitudes have seldom been directly measured during this period.

1.2.1 Predictors of attitudes

Much of the research on the drivers of negative attitudes toward immigration is grounded in group 'position' or 'threat' theory, which proposes that hostility towards out-groups arises from perceived threat (Blumer, 1958; Bobo and Hutchings, 1996). These threats can be material (e.g. increased competition over jobs or access to limited public resources) or symbolic (e.g. to cultural identity and values). Indeed, consistent global predictors of immigration attitudes include the size, religion and skill level of immigrants and the strength of the economy of the receiving country (Migration Data Portal, 2023).

One implication of group threat theory is that individuals who face greater financial insecurity are more likely to hold negative views of immigration. Laurence et al. (2024) provide a detailed overview of the socio-demographic, psychological, political and economic predictors of immigration attitudes in Ireland, which broadly support this theory. Two consistent socio-demographic predictors are educational attainment and perceived financial strain. Individuals with lower educational attainment report more negative attitudes.[7] Similarly, those who report difficulty making ends meet, identify cost-of-living as a major national issue, feel their quality of life was better in the past or lack optimism for the future typically report more negative views of immigration (Laurence et al., 2024). Notably, these subjective indicators of financial strain more consistently predict attitudes than more 'objective' measures, such as employment status and housing tenure.

Other individual-level predictors of attitudes include generalised social trust, political views and contact with migrant groups. Generalised social trust (i.e. the belief that others in society are, in general, trustworthy) strongly correlates with more positive attitudes to immigration, both within and between countries (Herreros and Criado, 2009; Mitchell, 2021). This relationship is independent of economic indicators, such as education and income.

Turning to political views, higher political efficacy (i.e. belief that one's voice counts) predicts more positive attitudes to immigration (McGinnity et al., 2023). The relationship between political ideology and immigration attitudes

[7] Though those with higher educational attainment may simply be more likely to mask negative attitudes in surveys (McGinnity et al., 2020; Timmons et al., 2023).

is less clear. Although international evidence shows that those who identify as more left-wing tend to hold more positive attitudes (e.g. Indelicato et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2021), Irish data show little consistent association between political orientation and attitudes, at least prior to 2020 (McGinnity et al., 2018; McGinnity and Kingston, 2017). However, more recent research may indicate an emerging left-right split on the issue (Laurence et al., 2024; Müller and Regan, 2021).

The role of intergroup contact has received considerable attention in recent years. According to Intergroup Contact Theory, increased interaction with out-groups reduces prejudice, particularly when contact occurs under conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation and institutional support (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). While some evidence suggests that even superficial contact reduces negative attitudes (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006), there is growing consensus that the nature of contact matters. For example, close contact with migrants (e.g. such as friendships or family relationships) is strongly associated with more positive attitudes (McGinnity et al., 2023). However, frequent interactions perceived as negative can have the opposite effect, potentially reinforcing prejudice (McGinnity et al., 2018).

Beyond individual-level factors, public attitudes toward immigration are shaped by both national and community-level dynamics. At the national level, the overall size of the migrant population and, in particular, sudden increases in immigration, can trigger negative reactions (Coenders and Scheepers, 1998; Semyonov et al., 2006). These effects are often moderated by factors such as the country's economic conditions, the characteristics of migrant groups and the nature of the country's welfare system (e.g. Mårtensson et al., 2023; Negash, 2022). For example, despite sharp increases in immigration to Ireland following the 2004 EU expansion, attitudes remained relatively liberal, possibly due to the initial strength of the economy and the predominance of White European migrants (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017). In contrast, the 2008 recession saw a marked increase in anti-immigrant sentiment despite significant drops in immigration, although attitudes improved as the economy recovered (McGinnity et al., 2018; Hatton, 2016).

At the community level, recent increases in the share of migrants living in an area are associated with more negative immigration attitudes, albeit primarily in economically disadvantaged communities (Laurence et al., 2025). Living in disadvantaged or residentially segregated areas is linked to more negative attitudes, even after accounting for individual characteristics (Laurence et al., 2025). These findings suggest that different social groups may perceive and experience migration in different ways.

Importantly, perceptions of the size of immigrant groups may be more influential than actual numbers. Misperceptions, which are often shaped by media coverage and political discourse, can amplify perceived threat and drive negative attitudes, even when immigration levels are stable or modest (Lutz and Bitschnau, 2023).

1.2.2 Perceptions of migrants

Group threat theory proposes that attitudes toward out-groups are shaped not only by actual threat but also by perceived threat (Stephan et al., 2015). In this framework, perceptions of group size and characteristics, regardless of their accuracy, can heighten feelings of competition and cultural anxiety. For example, perceiving the migrant population as larger than it is may intensify concerns about resource allocation, even when such perceptions are not supported by data.

People often hold inaccurate beliefs about social and economic facts. For example, individuals in multiple countries underestimate inequality, misperceive their own wealth compared to others and overestimate social mobility (e.g. Hauser and Norton, 2017). Similarly, phenomena such as pluralistic ignorance (i.e. the tendency to misperceive the attitudes of others) and false consensus bias (i.e. the tendency to overestimate how widespread one's own opinion is) across multiple policy areas demonstrate that misperceptions are a common feature of public opinion, often arising from cognitive shortcuts and selective exposure to information (Krueger and Clement, 1994; Prentice and Miller, 1996). These misperceptions can shape political preferences, influence support for policy and reinforce polarisation.

There is international evidence demonstrating widespread misperceptions of immigration. In a meta-analysis of 55 studies, Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes (2017) show that perceived migrant group size has a larger and more consistent effect on prejudice than actual group size. Similarly, analysis of ESS 2014 data shows that misperceptions of migrant group size are a better predictor of opposition to immigration than the actual proportion of immigrants in a country (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2020).

Evidence from Ireland also points to misperceptions. In 2014, the public marginally overestimated the size of the migrant-born population, estimating it at 19 per cent compared to the actual figure of 14 per cent (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2020). More strikingly, Eurobarometer data from 2017 revealed that the non-EU-born population was perceived to constitute 17 per cent of the total population, while the actual figure was just 4 per cent. These 2017

figures remain the most recent estimates of perceived migrant group size in Ireland.

Public misperceptions can extend beyond group size to the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants (Lutz and Bitschnau, 2023). These include beliefs about gender composition (e.g. overestimating the number of single males), employment rates, educational attainment, welfare dependency, crime involvement, and motivations for migration, such as the proportion seeking international protection versus employment. When traits that are viewed negatively, like unemployment or criminality, are exaggerated, perceived threat increases, often leading to hardened opposition to immigration and greater political polarisation.

Indeed, international evidence shows that perceptions of migrant characteristics can be even more influential than perceptions of group size. Individuals who incorrectly believe that migrants are more likely to be unemployed, less educated, or more reliant on welfare tend to hold significantly more negative attitudes (Alesina et al., 2023). These misperceptions are frequently encouraged and exploited by anti-immigration narratives, by presenting migrants – and in particular those seeking international protection – as a threat (Gallagher et al., 2023). Such narratives often portray migrants as threats to safety and social order, sometimes through false claims about criminal behaviour. These tactics have been linked to real-world violence, including serious assaults on migrants in Ireland (e.g. Pollak and Gallagher, 2025).

The direction and causes of these relationships are not straightforward. Misperceptions may fuel hostility, but individuals with pre-existing negative attitudes may also adopt beliefs that migrants are an economic or social burden as a way of justifying those attitudes (a psychological concept known as ‘motivated reasoning’) (Kunda, 1990; Lutz and Bitschnau, 2023). Similarly, misperceptions may be generated or amplified by anti-immigration rhetoric or disproportionate media coverage, but may also reflect selective exposure, with individuals more likely to attend to information that confirms their prior views – known as confirmation bias (Eberl et al., 2018).

Because these dynamics are reciprocal and reinforcing, establishing causality is challenging. Documenting the scale and nature of public misperceptions is an important first step for identifying their origins and consequences, and may therefore provide tools for not only understanding the roots of anti-immigrant sentiment but potentially for designing effective interventions to counter misinformation and encourage balanced evaluation of immigration policy.

1.3 STUDY AIMS

Our aim was to generate evidence on how the public perceive the size of the migrant population in Ireland – defined here as those born outside the island of Ireland – and their characteristics, including their region of origin, their gender breakdown and their reason for moving to Ireland.

We also aimed to test whether these perceptions are associated with attitudes to immigration. We pre-registered[8] a series of specific hypotheses, grounded in existing international literature on misperceptions and attitudes to immigration:

H1) Individuals who overestimate the size of the migrant population will report more negative immigration attitudes;

H2) Individuals who overestimate the proportion of migrants seeking international protection will report more negative attitudes;

H3) Whether other perceptions of migrant characteristics – including (a) employment rates, (b) education levels, (c) uptake of social housing, (d) the share of the prison population that is non-Irish and (e) emigration levels – are similarly associated with negative attitudes. We included emigration levels to check for an association between recognition that many migrants move to Ireland temporarily before moving elsewhere and attitudes;

H4) We hypothesised that these relationships would hold even when controlling for other factors with known predictors of immigration attitudes, including objective and subjective financial status, social trust, political views and social contact with migrants.

Importantly, the purpose of this research was not to advocate for changing attitudes toward immigration, but to understand and address systematic misperceptions that can have harmful consequences for social cohesion, public discourse and evidence-based policymaking.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the survey design, including the challenges of accurately measuring public perceptions and the steps taken to mitigate bias. Chapter 3 describes the study sample. Chapter 4 presents descriptive statistics on recorded perceptions and regression models that test their relationship with attitudes. Chapter 5 discusses the results and their implications for policy, public discourse and future research.

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8 Pre-registration is the scientific practice of documenting study plans before analysing data, to increase transparency particularly with respect to confirmatory and exploratory analyses. Pre-registration helps prevent researchers from selecting reporting results or changing analyses to fit data after the fact, which can inflate spurious findings. We pre-registered our hypotheses on the Open Science Framework. https://osf.io/b6nqz/?view_only=38dc94c8d152489ea0386fdefff3b9c8.

CHAPTER 2
Survey Design

The study involved primary data collection using an online experimental survey hosted on Gorilla Experiment Builder (Anwyl-Irvine et al., 2020). This chapter describes the survey mode, materials and the steps taken to mitigate potential sources of bias in survey responses.

2.1 SURVEY MODE AND DESCRIPTION

Survey responses are sometimes susceptible to social desirability bias, in which participants provide answers they believe are more socially acceptable than their true opinion. Social desirability bias is more likely to affect surveys of sensitive topics, such as health behaviours, but can also affect surveys of political views including immigration (Carmines and Nassar, 2021; Creighton et al., 2022; Laurence et al., 2024).

One way to reduce social desirability bias is through survey mode. The more removed the respondent is from an interviewer, the lower the likelihood of biased responses. For example, reported comfort with living near migrants tends to be lower in telephone surveys than in in-person interviews (Laurence et al., 2024). To minimise this bias, our study was administered online and anonymously, using Computer-Assisted Self Interviewing (CASI). Participants were recruited from existing panels maintained by leading market research and polling agencies. This approach ensured that no interviewer was involved in the data collection process, thereby reducing the risk of social desirability bias (Larson, 2019).

Surveys are also susceptible to selection bias, where individuals who choose to participate differ systematically from those who do not. In the context of immigration, this could mean that people with strong positive or negative views are more likely to opt in, while those with moderate views may be underrepresented, potentially skewing results toward more polarised opinions. To mitigate selection bias, the invitation email included only neutral information: the estimated survey length and compensation. It made no reference to immigration. Once participants entered the survey, the information sheet described the study as being about their general views on society. The specific focus on immigration was not revealed until later in the survey, allowing us to precisely monitor dropout rates and assess whether participants were disengaging due to the topic itself.

Concealing the study's focus also helped reduce focalism, where heightened salience of a topic influences responses. For example, perceptions of environmental risk are amplified when the specific hazard is explicitly named as the study focus, compared to when the study is framed more broadly (Timmons et al., 2024b). To further mitigate focalism, the main attitudinal question was asked before immigration was revealed as the survey topic. This item was embedded in a list of unrelated topics (e.g. on emissions reductions targets, use of AI and rent controls) to reduce priming effects and ensure more accurate measurement of baseline attitudes.

2.2 SURVEY STRUCTURE

Effective survey design requires careful consideration of potential order effects, where earlier questions can influence responses to subsequent ones (Rasinski et al., 2012). These effects are particularly pronounced in subjective and attitudinal items, as participants may interpret questions in light of prior content or be primed to think about specific topics (McClendon and O' Brien, 1988). For example, the correlation between self-rated health and life satisfaction is stronger when self-rated health is asked first compared to when life satisfaction is asked first, likely due to increased salience of health-related concerns (Lee et al., 2016).

Given our aim to measure perceptions of immigration and relevant attitudes, alongside other known predictors of attitudes, we structured the survey into distinct modules and arranged them deliberately to minimise priming and order effects. The relevant modules[9] for this report are: Issues facing Ireland; Household finances; Psychological and political characteristics; Policy support, including to immigration; Perceptions of immigration; and Socio-demographic characteristics. We detail the content of these modules below.

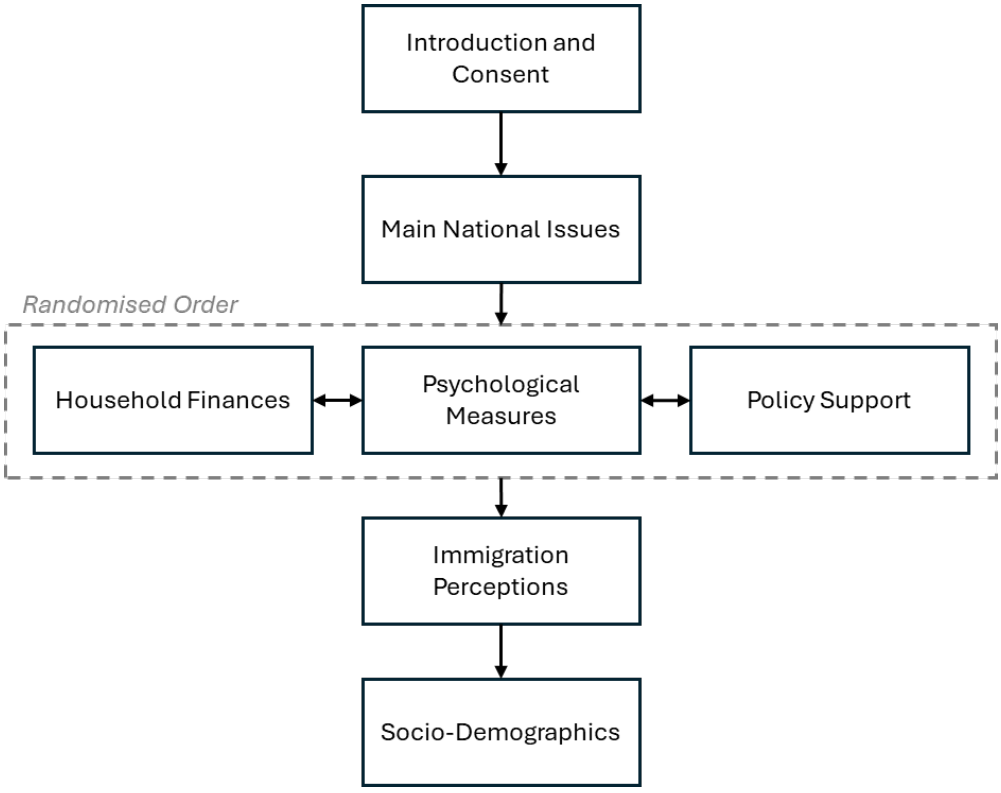
To reduce bias, the study was programmed so that open text questions about the most important issues facing Ireland were always presented first. This ensured that later modules did not prime participants to focus on specific concerns (e.g. questions on household finances could draw attention to cost-of-living or the economy as important national issues). Modules on household finances, psychological characteristics and policy support were presented next, in randomised order and before the study focus on immigration was revealed. The module on perceptions of immigration followed, allowing us to measure perceptions without influencing earlier responses.

[9] Other modules included one on media diet, presented at a random stage but always before the immigration estimates; and one on knowledge and perceptions of immigrant employment and welfare rights which was always presented after the immigration estimates. Both of these modules form separate publications.

Importantly, the main attitudinal question about immigration was asked before the immigration module and was embedded within a list of unrelated policy items (e.g. emissions reduction targets, artificial intelligence, and rent controls). This design ensured that participants were not primed to think about immigration when reporting their attitudes, minimising the likelihood that observed relationships between perceptions and attitudes are artefacts of survey structure.

Finally, socio-demographic questions were placed at the end of the survey. These factual items are unlikely to be influenced by prior content and are standard in survey design. Figure 2.1 shows the overall survey structure.

FIGURE 2.1 SURVEY STRUCTURE



Source: Authors.

2.3 MODULE CONTENT

This section describes the content of each survey module and highlights additional design considerations relevant to the study's aims. Full survey materials are available on the study's Open Science Framework page (https://osf.io/b6nqz/?view_only=38dc94c8d152489ea0386fdefff3b9c8).

2.3.1 Main issues

As noted above, the first question presented to all participants asked them to identify the most important issues facing Ireland. Participants were asked to list up to three issues, with three text boxes provided. Participants then completed modules on household finances, other psychological measures and policy support, in randomised order.

2.3.2 Household finances

The household finances module captured both objective and subjective financial indicators. As objective measures, participants reported on their after-tax household income band (per week, month or year, whichever they found easiest), as well as how many adults and children are in their household. These responses enabled approximation of the household's equivalised income. Our second objective measure was deprivation, defined as an inability to afford goods and services that are considered the norm for non-marginalised groups, such as clothing, meals and heating. We measured deprivation using the 11-item scale from the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

Subjective measures were 7-point rating scales for difficulty in making ends meet (adapted from the Equality Attitudes Survey), subjective social status (adapted from the Macarthur scale; Adler et al., 2000; Moss et al., 2023), life satisfaction (World Values Survey) and whether life was better or worse in the past (Equality Attitudes Survey).

2.3.3 Other measures

Other psychological and political measures were recorded in a module labelled as being about the participant's 'general outlook'. These measures covered optimism for the future and trust in others (both adapted from Equality Attitudes Survey). The next page referred to politics and covered political efficacy (i.e. the extent to which the participant feels their voice counts; Eurobarometer, 2018) and the participant's left-right placement using the standard political orientation question (European Social Survey). All were asked on 7-point rating scales, except for political orientation which ranged from 0 to 10.

2.3.4 Policy support

The module on policy support contained our primary immigration attitude measure. Participants saw a list of policy issues and indicated how they feel about them, from 1 (very negatively) to 7 (very positively). Policies covered a range of topics: emissions reductions targets, artificial intelligence, facial recognition, rent controls, taxation and trade tariffs.

Our interest was in an immigration item, which had two versions: 'Immigration of people from outside of the EU/EEA for work, education or family reasons' or '…for international protection reasons (i.e. seeking asylum)'. Participants were selected at random to see one version. The logic for asking two versions was to allow for tests of whether the link between perceptions and attitudes depends on the type of immigration. We opted to present participants with one rather than both versions to reduce the risk that the focus of the study would become apparent at this stage.

2.3.5 Perceptions of Immigration

The module on perceptions of immigration elicited participants' intuitive estimates of the size and characteristics of the migrant population in Ireland. Specifically, participants were asked to estimate:

- The proportion of the population born abroad;
- The proportion born outside of the EU, UK and North America;
- The gender breakdown of migrants;
- The reasons for residence permit applications among recent non-EEA migrants;
- Migrant employment rates, educational attainment, and other socio-demographic characteristics.

These questions are difficult and we did not expect participants to know the correct answers; instead, our interest was in their intuitive beliefs and how these intuitions relate to immigration attitudes. To encourage engagement and effort, participants were informed that accuracy was not expected but that they should give their best guess. Accuracy was incentivised: all participants were entered into a draw for one of two €100 Mastercard vouchers, with additional entries awarded for each accurate answer.

To reduce cognitive load and statistical noise, we informed the question design using evidence on numerical cognition. Rather than asking for percentage estimates, which many people find abstract and difficult to interpret, we elicited natural frequencies (e.g. out of every 100 people living in Ireland, what is your best guess for how many were born abroad?). Natural frequencies are easier to understand and more accurately processed, especially by individuals with lower numeracy (e.g. Hoffrage and Gigerenzer, 1998; Hoffrage et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2006; Zipkin et al., 2014). They also improve the validity of subjective probability estimates (e.g. of life expectancy) (Comerford, 2019). This format aligns with the European Social Survey (2014).

To further enhance comprehension, we elicited responses of natural frequency using pictographs developed by Robertson (2023). These interactive visual arrays display 100 person icons, allowing participants to select a number visually rather than numerically. Such visual formats improve understanding of probabilistic information, especially when anthropomorphic icons are used (e.g. Bancilhon et al., 2023; McCaffery et al., 2012; Zikmund-Fisher et al., 2014).

Each question followed the format 'Out of every 100 X, how many…' with participants selecting icons to indicate their estimate. Figure 2.2 shows an example pictograph with X icons highlighted, signifying 23 out of 100. For subset questions (e.g. the proportion of male migrants), the previous response remained visible on screen to maintain context (Figure 2.2, bottom). All participants first completed practice trials about pet ownership, as in Robertson et al. (2023), to familiarise themselves with the format.

All participants answered core questions on the total number of immigrants, region of birth, gender and reasons for residence permit applications since 2022. Subsets were randomised to additional questions about emigration, employment, educational attainment, take-up of social housing, and prison population estimates. To ensure data quality, this module included an attention check question, in which participants were instructed to select 37 icons. Failure on this question terminated the survey, meaning responses from these participants were not included.

Due to space constraints, the question on birth region focused only on those born outside of the EU, UK and North America. This grouping reflects visa requirements, as individuals from the EU and UK do not require visas, and was further informed by a pilot question asked in a prior study. The pilot question, which is reported in Appendix I, asked 1,500 participants what countries of origin come to mind when they think about media coverage of 'immigration.' Seven of the ten[10] most commonly cited countries were in Africa, the Middle East and Asia (Nigeria, Syria, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Palestine and Somalia), with Brazil also featuring prominently (Figure A.1). This question also informed our decision to define immigrants as those 'born outside the island of Ireland,' although official statistics often count those born in Northern Ireland as migrants.

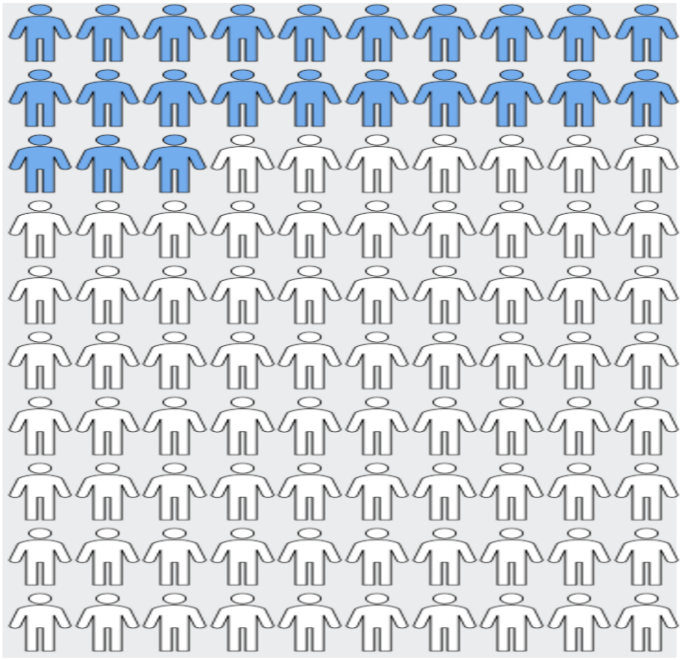
[10] The three other countries in the top ten were Ukraine, Romania and Poland. We thank Blessing Kasseem for her assistance with analysing these data.

FIGURE 2.2 EXAMPLE PICTOGRAPHS

The picture below shows 100 adults. Imagine this represents all of the adults in Ireland.

Out of every 100 adults living in Ireland, what is your best guess for how many were **born abroad** (i.e. outside of the island of Ireland)? We don't expect you to know the exact answer - just give your best guess.

When you have made your final choice, press the confirm button.

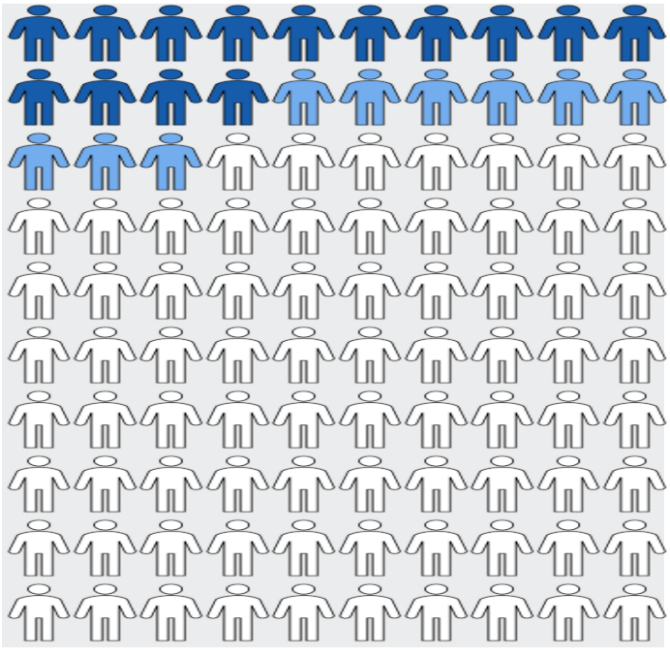


You selected: 23

You have said **23** in every 100 adults in Ireland were born outside of Ireland.

What is your best guess for how many of these are **men?** Remember, we don't expect you to know the exact answer - just give your best guess.

When you have made your final choice, press the confirm button.



You selected: 14

Source: Authors.

Although we were interested in estimates of migrants born outside of the EU, UK and North America, we were conscious of potential 'framing effects', where highlighting one attribute in a survey question can bias responses (Bruin de Bruin, 2011; Levin et al., 1998). Although logically equivalent, evidence from attribute framing research suggests that participants may produce different estimates depending on whether the question focuses their attention on those born in these regions or outside these regions. As such, participants were randomly assigned to see 'outside' or 'inside' frames, and similarly for estimates of migrant gender were randomised to see 'men' or 'women' frames. As well as controlling for potential biases in estimates, this manipulation allowed us to explore differences associated with these frames, with potential implications for the language used when discussing immigration.

2.4 PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited from panels held by two leading market research and polling agencies[11] to be nationally representative by age, gender, region and social grade.[12] Recruitment into these panels uses a combination of online and offline advertising, as well as invitations extended to participants from other surveys that employ probabilistic sampling methods.

This recruitment strategy offers several advantages. It enables access to groups that are often underrepresented in door-to-door surveys, such as individuals living in apartment blocks, institutions or without a fixed address, and in telephone surveys, where response rates have declined due to reluctance to answer unknown numbers. However, some groups remain underrepresented, including those with no internet access and low levels of digital literacy. Those in the lowest income brackets are also overrepresented, though survey participation is not a reliable source of income for lower-income groups as panellists complete an average of two to three surveys per month. Additionally, individuals with unmet English language needs are often underrepresented across all survey modes, which may limit the representativeness of views from some migrant groups. For more detailed discussion on how recruitment from these panels compare to other sampling frames, see Timmons et al. (2020).

11 https://www.redclive.ie/ and https://www.ipsosbanda.ie/acumen-panel/.

12 Social grade is a characteristic used in market research to proxy socio-economic status and is based on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household.

2.4.1 Sample

Data collection took place between 28 May 2025 to 24 June 2025.[13] A total of 1,489 participant started the survey. Of these, 212 (14.2 per cent) did not complete it and a further 77 (5.2 per cent) failed a quality control question, leaving a final analytic sample of 1,200 adults.[14] This attrition rate is slightly lower than recent studies using the same sampling frame (Timmons et al., 2024a). Importantly, just 9 (<0.1 per cent) exited the study once the focus on immigration was revealed, implying negligible selection effects based on the topic. Participants were paid €4 for completing the study, which took 20 minutes on average, and were also entered into a raffle for one of two €100 Mastercard vouchers.

Table 2.1 presents basic socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. Descriptive analyses reported in the next chapter are weighted by age, gender, educational attainment and living in an urban or rural area, using population benchmarks from the 2022 Census. We applied iterative proportional fitting ('raking'), with weights restricted between 0.5 and 2 to avoid overcorrection. Weighting had greater impact on educational attainment and living area as these were not used in the original quota sampling. Statistical models are unweighted but include these characteristics as controls.

As the study involved primary data collection with non-vulnerable adults on topics other than health, the requirement for approval by the ESRI Research Ethics Committee was waived.

13 90 participants completed the study on 28 and 29 May 2025 following which data were checked for issues (i.e. the study was 'soft launched' on these days). Most participants (1,092) completed between 10 and 19 June, a period which coincided with news coverage of riots and racially-motivated hate crimes in Ballymena (Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland). As most participants completed the study during this period, there is insufficient variation for testing whether this coverage influenced attitudinal responses.

14 A further 401 participants attempted to enter the survey but were outside of quotas.

TABLE 2.1 PARTICIPANT SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

		Unweighted Sample	Weighted Sample	CSO Estimate
Gender	Men	49.1	49.0	49.0
	Women	50.9	51.0	51.0
Age	18 to 39 years	38.3	36.9	36.8
	40 to 59 years	37.7	36.5	36.5
	60+ years	24.1	26.7	26.7
Education	Leaving Certificate or below	49.1	45.3	43.9
	Any Tertiary Education	50.9	54.7	56.1
Living Area	Urban	62.9	68.6	68.6
	Rural	37.1	31.4	31.4
Region	Leinster	53.9	55.9	55.7
	Munster	27.6	27.9	26.6
	Connacht-Ulster	18.5	16.2	17.6

Source: Authors' analysis.

CHAPTER 3
Results

This chapter presents descriptive statistics on participants' intuitions of immigration-related facts and their attitudes toward immigration. We begin by summarising estimates of the size and characteristics of the migrant population, followed by estimates of other relevant indicators (e.g. economic participation). We then present descriptive statistics on immigration attitudes and test the relationship between estimates and attitudes. Finally, we assess whether these relationships persist when controlling for other known predictors of immigration attitudes.

When presenting participant estimates of migrant group population size and characteristics, we compare their guesses to the best available official statistic. We use 'one sample t-tests' to identify if these guesses are significantly different from official figures. Most of these official numbers come from the *Monitoring Report on Integration 2024* (McGinnity et al., 2025) and data from the 2022 Census and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) (see Appendix II for more details).

It is important to note questions were designed to prioritise participant comprehension, meaning that the participant estimates are not all directly comparable to official figures. For example, we defined 'immigrants' to participants as those born outside the island of Ireland, whereas official sources typically count those born outside of the State, meaning that individuals born in Northern Ireland but resident in Ireland are counted as immigrants. Doing so may produce minor discrepancies between some of the figures, but any such discrepancies would be small relative to the scale of misperceptions we report. We further note that any errors in official statistics (e.g. migrants unaccounted for in the Census and Labour Force Survey) are also not of sufficient scale to account for the scale of misperceptions recorded.

We then present responses to the attitude rating scale, as well as whether participants mentioned immigration as one of the main issues facing Ireland in the open text question. We use regression models to test if there is a link between intuitions and attitudes, focusing primarily on the attitude rating scale. These models also allow us to estimate attitudes to immigration when people's guesses are close to the official figures.

In the final section, we expand our analysis to test how the association between attitudes and misperceptions compares to the association between attitudes and

other factors, including objective and financial indicators, general trust in others, political views and social contact with migrants.

3.1 ESTIMATES OF MIGRANT GROUP SIZE AND CHARACTERISTICS

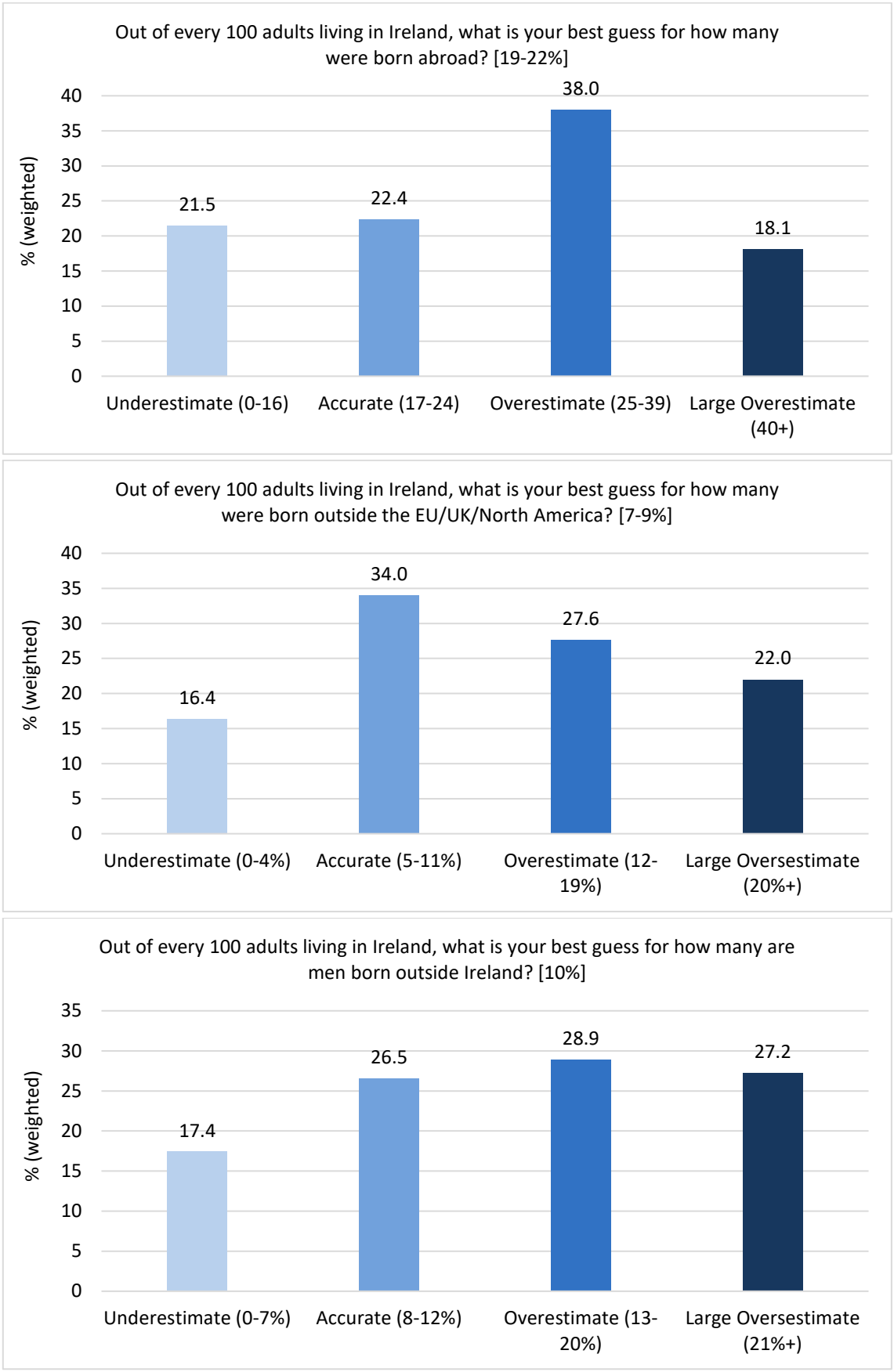
3.1.1 Overall population, region and gender

Figure 3.1 shows participant guesses for the proportion of Ireland's population born outside the island of Ireland (full distributions are available in Figure A.2 in Appendix III). Most participants (81.9 per cent) guessed below 40 per cent. The average guess[15] was 27.8 per cent, which is approximately one-third greater than the official estimate of between 19 and 22 per cent (Table 3.1). Over one-in-five participants (22.4 per cent) guessed within 2 percentage points of official estimates (i.e. between 17 per cent to 24 per cent), while a similar proportion (21.5 per cent) underestimated the size of the migrant population and the majority (56.1 per cent) overestimated it.

Almost half of participants also overestimated the proportion of the population born outside the EU, UK and North America (Figure 3.1). The mean estimate of 13.5 per cent is two-thirds larger than official statistics and double the Census figure (Table 3.1). Turning to gender, participants estimated that 15.3 per cent of the population are men who were born abroad, significantly higher than the official estimate of approximately 10 per cent. Over half of participants (56.1 per cent) guessed more than 2 percentage points above the official estimates.

[15] We report means throughout with the highest 5 per cent of guesses excluded. Very similar results are observed when comparing medians.

FIGURE 3.1 PARTICIPANT GUESSES FOR MIGRANT POPULATION, REGION AND GENDER



Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Official estimates are reported in square brackets in each chart title. For more details, see Appendix II.

An alternative way of analysing region and gender estimates is to calculate the proportion of the migrant population participants believe to have the relevant characteristic (e.g. to divide their guess for those born outside the EU, UK or North America by their guess for how many migrants there are overall). Official data suggest that between 37 per cent and 42 per cent of migrants were born outside the EU, UK or North America, but participants guessed significantly higher, at an average of 47.5 per cent (Table 3.1). Similarly, by instead calculating the proportion of migrants assumed to be men, the average guess (54.6 per cent) was significantly higher than the correct proportion (47.9 per cent). Almost 60 per cent of participants overestimated the share of migrants who are male. Those who estimated a higher proportion of the migrant population to have been born outside the EU, UK or North America were also gave higher estimates of the proportion of the migrant population who are men.[16]

TABLE 3.1 ONE SAMPLE T-TESTS COMPARING PARTICIPANT ESTIMATES OF MIGRANT POPULATION SIZE, BIRTH REGION AND GENDER TO OFFICIAL FIGURES

	Official Estimate	Participant Guess (SD)	t-statistic
Share of Overall Population Born Abroad	18.8-21.7%[17]	27.8% (14.3)	17.84***
Share of Overall Population Born Outside EU, UK and North America	7.0-9.2%	13.5% (9.3)	19.56***
Share of Migrants Born Outside EU, UK and North America	37-42%	47.5% (21.5)	9.98***
Share of Overall Population Who Are Men Born Abroad	10%	15.3% (9.0)	19.58***
Share of Migrants Who Are Men	47.9%	54.6% (15.8)	14.04***

Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Standard deviations in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Tests exclude the highest 5 per cent of estimates.

Table A.5 in Appendix IV shows results from a regression model predicting under- and overestimation of the share of the overall population born abroad and born outside the EU, UK and North America using socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, educational attainment, urban residence, region and place of birth) as explanatory variables. The results show that men, those aged over 60 and those educated to at least degree level were significantly less likely to overestimate both statistics. However, these differences are small; overall socio-demographic characteristics explain little of the variation in estimates. Living area (urban location or region) had no consistent effect on accuracy.

16 $r = .13$, $p < .001$.

17 There is some variation in official estimates, with the 2022 Census estimating 18.8 per cent of the population as having been born outside of Ireland and Q1 of the 2024 Labour Force Survey estimating 21.7 per cent, although it counts those born in Northern Ireland as foreign-born. We take the midpoint of these estimates (20.3 per cent) for significance testing. There are similar issues with some of the other official estimates in this section. For further details, see Appendix II.

3.1.2 Recent migration: regions and reasons

The average guess for the percentage of recent migrants (since 2022) born outside the EU, UK and North America was 55.8 per cent, which is significantly below the official estimate (Table 3.2). Here, the majority (79.6 per cent) underestimated the share of recent migrants from outside of the UK, EU and North America, with just 4.2 per cent guessing within 2 percentage points of the official statistic (see Appendix II for details).

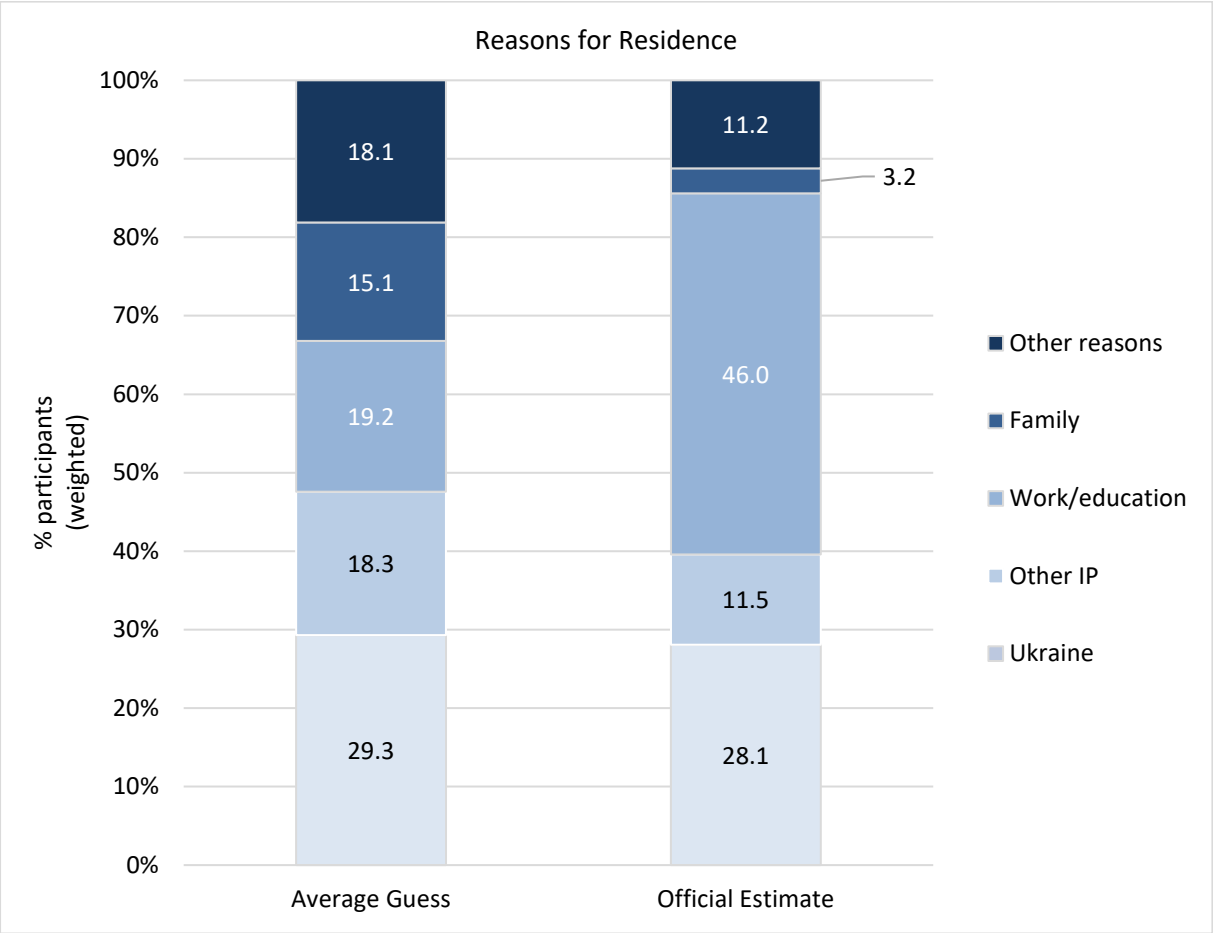
TABLE 3.2 ONE SAMPLE T-TESTS COMPARING PARTICIPANT ESTIMATES OF RECENT MIGRATION ESTIMATES

	Official Estimate	Participant Guess	t-statistic
Share of Recent Migrants Born Outside EU, UK and North America	72.3%	55.8% (25.3)	21.63***
Share of Residence Applications: Ukraine	28.1%	29.3% (17.0)	2.31**
Share of Residence Applications: Other International Protection	11.5%	18.3% (12.7)	18.18***
Share of Residence Applications: Work/Education	46.0%	19.2% (16.0)	56.39***
Share of Residence Applications: Family	3.2%	15.1% (13.3)	30.40***

Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Standard deviations in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Details for official estimates are available in Appendix II. Tests exclude the highest 5 per cent of estimates.

Turning to the reasons for immigration, participants were asked to estimate the distribution of four groups among those who applied for residence permission since 2022: (1) people from Ukraine, (2) international protection applicants from other countries, (3) applications from those who have found work or education in Ireland and (4) applications to join family members living in Ireland. Figure 3.2 shows the average guess compared to official estimates. Participants' guesses for applications from Ukraine were relatively accurate, with a mean within 2 percentage points of the official statistic (though the difference remained statistically significant, Table 3.2). However, participants significantly overestimated the share of other international protection applicants, with average estimates 59 per cent higher than the official proportion. Applications for work and education were significantly underestimated, with participant guesses less than half of the official estimate. Although applications for family reunification were just 3.2 per cent of residence applications since 2022, participants' guess was over five times higher at 15.1 per cent.

FIGURE 3.2 RECENT MIGRATION: ESTIMATES FOR RESIDENCE APPLICATIONS



Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Details for official estimates are available in Appendix II. IP refers to international protection.

3.1.3 Other characteristics

Subsets of participants were randomly selected to provide further estimates on emigration (*n* = 401), employment (*n* = 400), education (*n* = 403), social housing uptake (*n* = 403) and the prison population (*n* = 393). For emigration and the prison population, they were asked to estimate the Ireland-born and foreign-born breakdown. For employment, education and social housing uptake, they estimated the rate within Ireland-born and foreign-born groups as relevant. Figure 3.3 shows mean guesses for each characteristic, compared to the best available estimate from official sources and Table 3.3 presents the t-test statistics.

Taking emigration first, on average participants slightly overestimated the share of recent emigrants who were born in Ireland (51.3 per cent) compared to the official estimate (48.7 per cent). Conversely, they underestimated the share of recent emigrants who were born outside of the EU, UK and North America (19.5 per cent vs. the official estimate of 26.8 per cent).

On employment, participants slightly underestimated the employment rate among the working age population who were born in Ireland (67.5 per cent) compared to the official estimate (72.7 per cent). However, the underestimation for those born outside of Ireland was much more pronounced (51.5 per cent vs. the official estimate of 76.8 per cent). Notably, although migrants have a higher employment rate, participants guessed the opposite, with a higher rate assumed among the Irish-born population.[18]

Similarly, although participants only slightly overestimated the share of the Ireland-born population who hold a college degree (43.6 per cent) compared to the official statistic (42.2 per cent), they strongly underestimated the same figure for those born outside of Ireland (34.4 per cent vs. the official figure of 58.5 per cent). Again, despite higher tertiary attainment among migrants, participants estimated the opposite, with significantly higher rates for Ireland-born individuals.[19]

Estimates of social housing uptake were substantially inflated for both groups. Participants guessed 36.7 per cent for Irish-headed households whereas the official estimate is 9.2 per cent. For households headed by migrants, they estimated 43.8 per cent, while the official estimate is 6.1 per cent. Although social housing uptake is lower among migrant-headed households, participants estimated the reverse.[20]

The degree of overestimation of social housing uptake for both groups has different possible causes. It may simply imply a substantial misperception of welfare uptake compared to reality, consistent with international literature. Alternatively, participants may have misinterpreted the question as referring to the share of social housing currently assigned to households headed by individuals who are Irish-born versus foreign-born. Note that to the extent that participants misinterpreted the question in this fashion, misperception is still strongly implied, since Irish-born households account for the large majority of uptake (86.9 per cent vs. 13.1 per cent for foreign-born households) (McGinnity et al., 2025). Similarly, participants may also have attempted to integrate all forms of government housing assistance in their estimates (e.g. Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Approved Housing Body accommodation, IPAS accommodation). In this case, the misperception remains, as combined local authority, AHB and HAP accommodation accounts for just 14.3 per cent of households in the State[21] and

18 $t = 13.23$, $p < .001$.

19 $t = 9.41$, $p < .001$.

20 $t = 4.56$, $p < .001$.

21 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp2/censusofpopulation2022profile2-housinginireland/homeownershipandrent/.

IPAS accommodation accounts for a very small proportion of migrant-headed households.[22]

Turning finally to prison population estimates, which are recorded by nationality rather than place of birth, participants guessed that 66.7 per cent of the prison population is Irish, underestimating the official figure (79.3 per cent). Consequently, they overestimated the share of the prison population who are not Irish (28.2 per cent vs. the official estimate of 20.7 per cent). They also overestimated the share of the prison population who are citizens of countries outside the EU, UK and North America (18.5 per cent vs. the official estimate of 7.7 per cent).[23]

TABLE 3.3 ONE SAMPLE T-TESTS COMPARING PARTICIPANT ESTIMATES OF OTHER MIGRATION CHARACTERISTICS

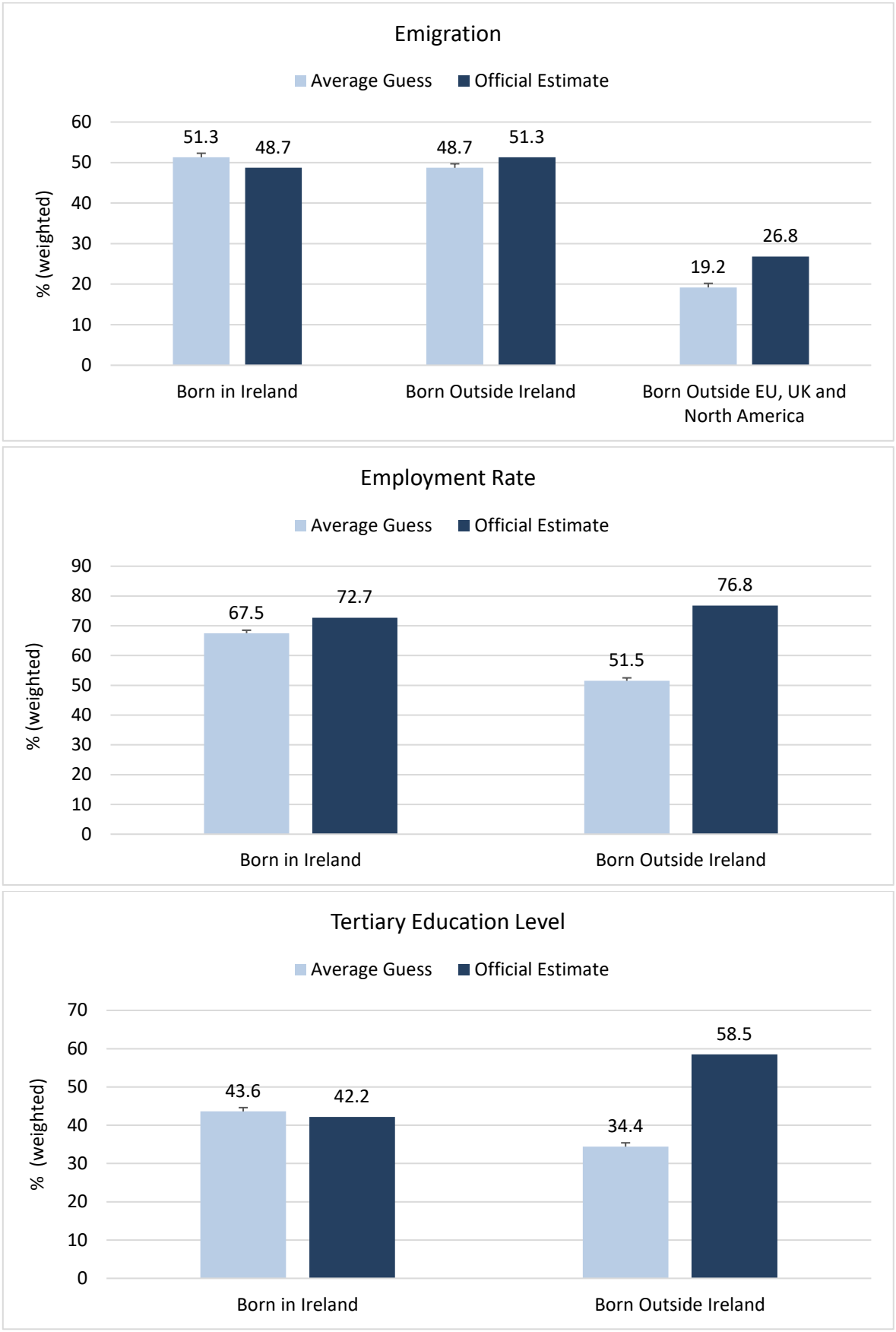
	Official Estimate	Participant Guess (SD)	t-statistic
Share of Emigrants – Born in Ireland	48.7%	51.3% (24.1)	2.03**
Share of Emigrants – Born Outside the EU, UK and North America	26.8%	19.5% (15.1)	9.35***
Employment Rate – Born in Ireland	72.7%	67.5% (18.9)	5.34***
Employment Rate – Born Outside Ireland	76.8%	51.5% (20.9)	23.47***
Tertiary Education – Born in Ireland	42.2%	43.6% (16.1)	1.73*
Tertiary Education – Born Outside Ireland	58.5%	34.4% (17.7)	26.56***
Social Housing Uptake – Born in Ireland	9.2%	36.7% (17.1)	31.51***
Social Housing Uptake – Born Outside Ireland	6.1%	43.8% (23.1)	32.39***
Prison Population – Irish	79.3%	66.7% (19.4)	12.20***
Prison Population – Non-Irish	20.7%	28.2% (15.7)	8.81***
Prison Population – Non-EU, UK or North American	7.7%	18.5% (14.6)	14.36***

Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Standard deviations in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Education level refers to estimates of those with a third-level degree. Details for official estimates are available in Appendix II. Tests exclude the highest 5 per cent of estimates.

[22] An exact proportion is difficult to estimate. As of October 2025, 33,000 people were living in IPAS accommodation (https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-10-08/261/#pq_261) with under 3,000 awaiting accommodation. As a share of migrants recorded in the 2022 Census, this would constitute 5.2 per cent of migrants resident in the State recorded in the 2022 Census (which underestimates the size of the current migrant population). As this assumes all individuals resident in IPAS accommodation are one-person households, the share of migrant-headed households living in IPAS accommodation would thus be smaller still.

[23] Using the alternative approach of dividing participants' guesses for the non-Western prison population as a proportion of the total migrant population, the difference between guesses and the official estimate is also statistically significant (55.5 per cent vs. the official figure of 37.3 per cent), $t = 14.23$, $p < .001$.

FIGURE 3.3 ESTIMATES FOR OTHER MIGRANT CHARACTERISTICS



Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Error bars are the standard error of the mean. For details on the official estimate calculations, see Appendix II.

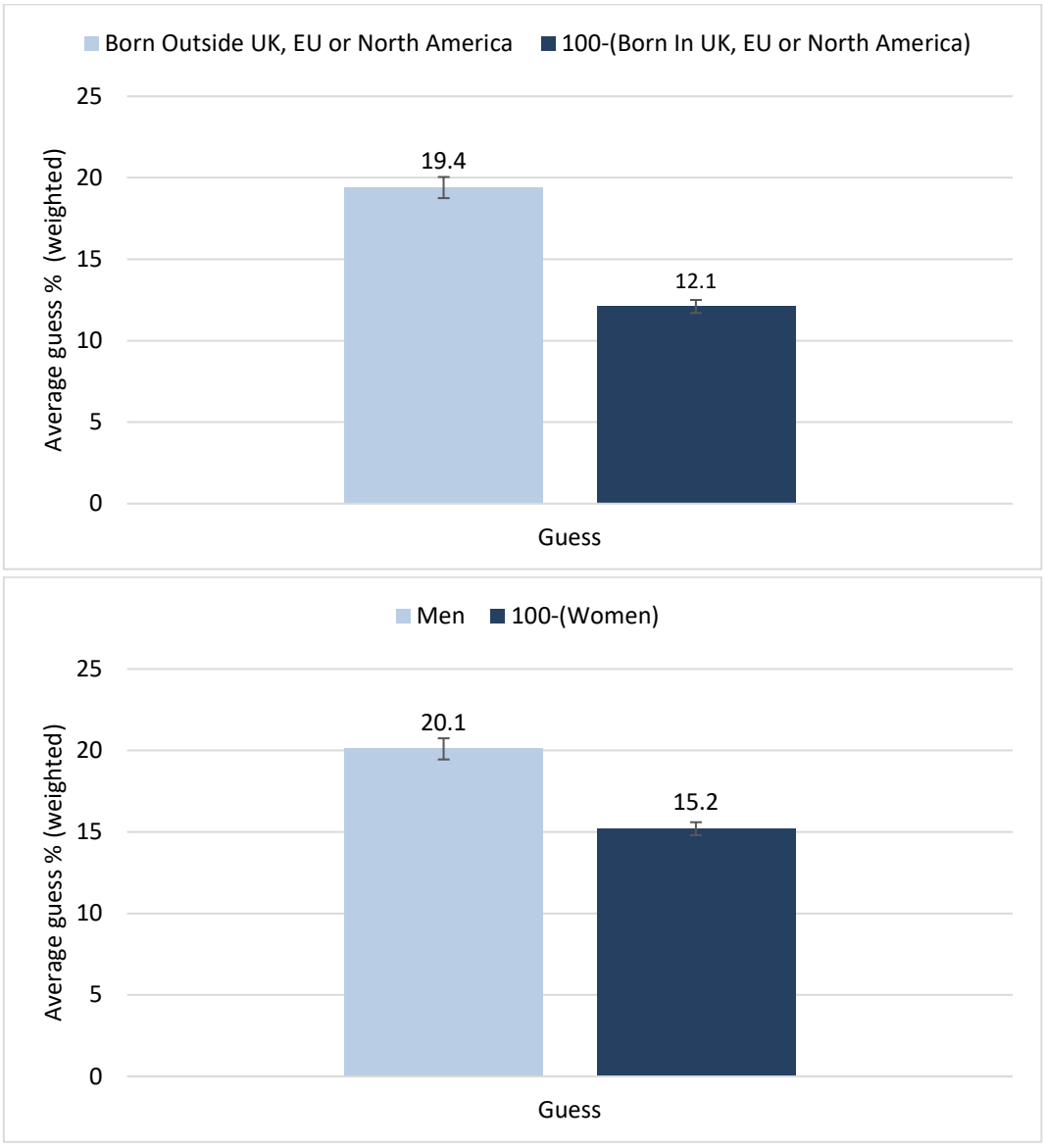
3.1.4 Framing effects

As outlined in Chapter 2, participants were randomised to see alternative question frames for selected items (e.g. some were asked to estimate those born *outside* of the EU, UK and North America while others were asked to estimate those born *within* these regions). The way the question was framed had a strong effect on estimates. Participants randomised to see the 'outside' frame produced significantly higher estimates of migrants from non-EU/UK/North American countries than those randomised to see the 'inside' frame (Figure 3.4).[24] Similarly, those randomised to see the 'men' frame produced higher estimates of male migrant numbers than those randomised to see the 'women' frame (Figure 3.4).[25]

[24] $t = 9.54$, $p < .001$.
[25] $t = 6.10$, $p < .001$.

Importantly, both sets of estimates exceeded the official figures. This suggests that focusing attention to specific groups of migrants can exacerbate biased perceptions of these groups, leading to greater overestimation of their group size. This finding has important implications for how public discourse about subgroups of migrants might unintentionally reinforce inaccurate beliefs. We return to this point in Chapter 4.

FIGURE 3.4 QUESTION FRAMING EFFECTS



Source: Authors' analysis. Details for official estimates are available in Appendix II.

3.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

We pre-registered interest in the relationship between attitudes and perceptions of (1) the total migrant population, (2) immigration for international protection reasons and (3) other characteristics of immigrants. We include additional tests in this section for completeness.

Our primary attitude measure is negativity or positivity to immigration from outside of the EU/EEA. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two versions of this question, which asked how positively or negatively they feel about immigration from outside of the EU/EEA for either (1) work, education or family reasons or (2) for international protection (i.e. asylum). Figure 3.5 shows the distribution for both versions. Participants expressed significantly more positive attitudes towards immigration for work, education or family reasons, giving an average of 3.9 out of 7, compared to 3.4 out of 7 for immigration related to international protection.[26] However, the most commonly selected response to both questions was the midpoint of the scale (4), implying that many held neutral views. Despite this, almost half (49.1 per cent) of participants reported feeling at least somewhat negative about immigration for international protection, compared to 36.4 per cent for immigration for work, education or family reasons.

To understand the relationship between perceptions of migrant group size and attitudes toward immigration, we use OLS regression models (Table 3.4).[27] Each model tests whether a participant's attitude can be predicted based on their guesses of migrant group size and characteristics, while taking account of the participant's individual characteristics (their gender, age, education level and where they live) and which version of the immigration attitude question they saw.[28]

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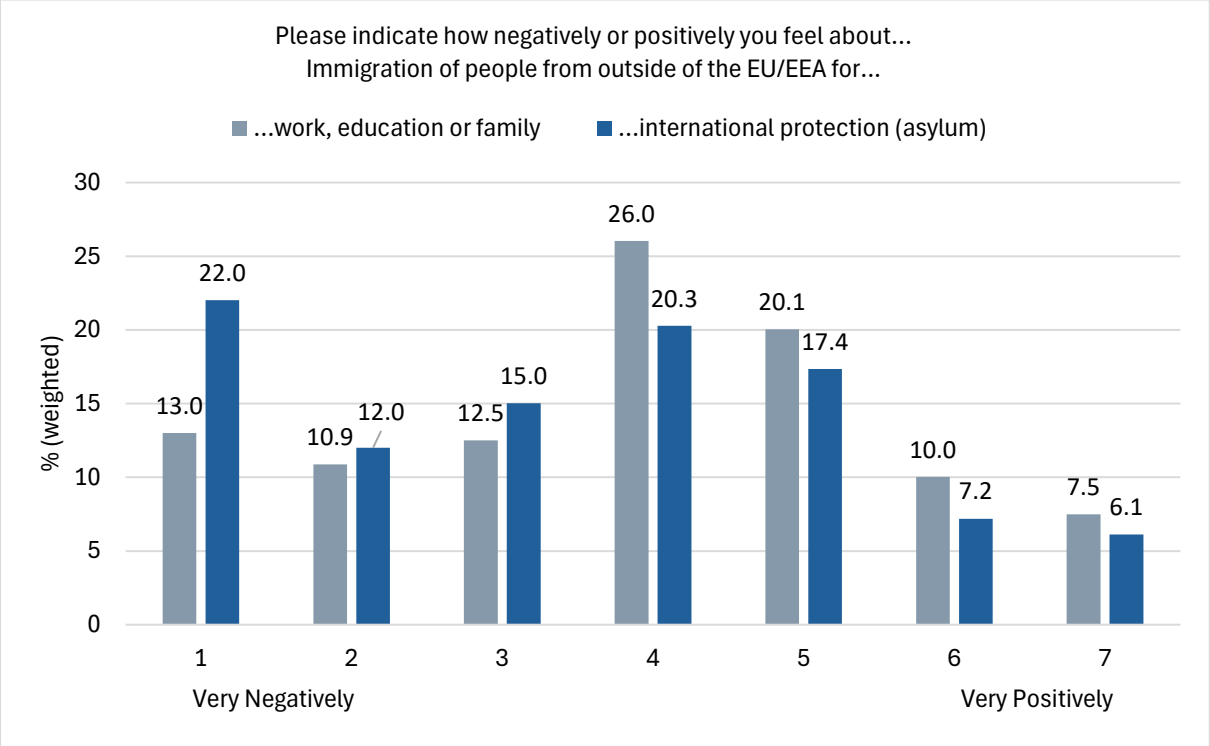
26 $t = 5.17$, $p < .001$.

27 For these models, we excluded the top 5 per cent of perception estimates, which were considered indicative of misunderstanding, inattention, or deliberate facetiousness (e.g. guessing that more than two-thirds of the population were born abroad). Additional checks show that excluding these responses has minimal impact on findings. Including them primarily introduced non-linearity, where the relationship between perceptions and attitudes changed at the very high guesses (see the Online Supplementary Materials (OSM) available at https://osf.io/b6nqz/files/j6zsq. We opted to use OLS models for interpretability, but additional robustness checks using different statistical methods (e.g. ordinal regression models and using categorical accuracy groupings) produce consistent results (see OSM).

28 All participants are combined into one model with a control for question type because there was no interaction between question type or frame and migrant perceptions on attitudes (see the Online Supplementary Materials on the Open Science Framework page). In other words, the effects are the same if separate models are run on sub-groups who saw the alternative question content.

FIGURE 3.5 RESPONSE DISTRIBUTIONS TO IMMIGRATION ATTITUDE QUESTIONS



Source: Authors' analysis.

3.2.1 Migrant group size, region and gender

People who guessed that the migrant population is larger tended to report more negative attitudes toward immigration (Model 1 in Table 3.4). Specifically, for every 10 percentage point increase in someone's estimate of the migrant population size, their attitude score drops by 0.2 point on the 1 to 7 scale.[29] This effect is similar to the difference in attitude between urban and rural residents (3.8 and 3.6 out of 7, on average, respectively). The model further shows no difference in attitudes between men and women. However, the middle-age group (40 to 59 years) reported significantly more negative attitudes (average of 3.4) than both younger adults (aged 18 to 39) and older adults (aged 60+) (both averaging 3.9, respectively). Education also matters: those with tertiary-level education reported significantly more positive attitudes (average of 4.0) compared to those without (average of 3.5).

[29] Calculated by multiplying the unstandardised beta coefficient (-0.02) by 10.

TABLE 3.4 OLS REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING IMMIGRATION ATTITUDE (HIGHER SCORE INDICATES MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDES) FROM GROUP SIZE PERCEPTIONS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Relevant Statistic	**Total population born abroad**	**Population born outside EU, UK and North America**	**Men born abroad**
Participant Estimate	-0.02***	-0.03***	-0.03***
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Question Version	0.54***	0.49***	0.55***
(*ref: asylum*)	(0.103)	(0.104)	(0.103)
Man	-0.08	-0.07	-0.07
(*ref: woman*)	(0.107)	(0.106)	(0.106)
Age (*ref: 18 to 39 years*)			
40 to 59 years	-0.51***	-0.55***	-0.51***
	(0.124)	(0.125)	(0.124)
60+ years	-0.05	-0.02	-0.10
	(0.143)	(0.143)	(0.144)
Degree or above	0.44***	0.47***	0.42***
(*ref: below degree*)	(0.114)	(0.115)	(0.114)
Urban	0.23**	0.18	0.19*
(ref: Rural)	(0.113)	(0.115)	(0.114)
Region (*ref*: Dublin)			
Rest of Leinster	0.09	0.15	0.11
	(0.167)	(0.166)	(0.166)
Munster	0.32*	0.36**	0.36**
	(0.176)	(0.176)	(0.174)
Connacht-Ulster	-0.09	0.00	-0.12
	(0.192)	(0.192)	(0.191)
Constant	3.79***	3.73***	3.81***
	(0.242)	(0.228)	(0.231)
Obs.	1,141	1,110	1,125
R^2	0.094	0.100	0.101

Source: Authors' analysis.

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. The dependent variable is the participant's response to the seven-point rating scale on their attitude to immigration. Participant estimate refers to the participant's response to the question highlighted in the 'Relevant Statistic' row and is included as a continuous variable. Question version refers to a control for the version of the attitude question presented to the participant (i.e. immigration for international protection or for work, education and family reasons, with the latter generating more positive attitudes). Models include controls for the question frame where relevant.

Model 2 looks at guesses for the size of the migrant population born outside the EU, UK and North America. The results show a similar pattern: the larger people think this group size is, the more negative are their attitudes toward immigration.[30] In fact, the effect is slightly stronger than in Model 1. For every 10 percentage point increase in someone's estimate of this group's size, their attitude score drops by

[30] Alternative model specifications, such as using the proportion of migrants estimated to be from outside the EU, UK or North America or controlling for their estimate of the total migrant population size, produce similar effects (see the Supplementary Material).

0.3 points on the 7-point attitude scale. This suggests that people's views of migration from countries outside of the EU, UK and North America may be particularly important in shaping their attitudes towards immigration.

Model 3 shows a similar effect for perceptions of the size of the male migrant population.

3.2.2 Reasons for residence from recent migration

Table 3.5 presents a second set of models, which look at how people's estimates of why recent migrants have applied to live in Ireland relate to their attitudes toward immigration. These models include the same background factors as before (age, gender, education, living area), accounting also for the version of the attitude question they saw and the order in which they answered questions about residence reasons. These additional factors are omitted from the table for brevity but produce the same effects as reported in earlier models.

Model 1 tests whether estimates of recent BoTPs from Ukraine are associated with immigration attitudes. The results show no significant relationship: believing that Ukrainian migrants make up a larger proportion of recent migrants is not associated with more positive or negative attitudes. Model 2 shows that people who think a larger number of migrants from countries other than Ukraine are seeking international protection tend to have more negative attitudes. Model 3 shows that believing many migrants are coming for work or education is associated with more positive attitudes to immigration. Model 4 finds no significant relationship between attitudes and estimates of migrants applying for family reunification.

TABLE 3.5 OLS REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING IMMIGRATION ATTITUDE FROM PERCEPTIONS OF RECENT RESIDENCE APPLICATIONS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Relevant Statistic	**From Ukraine**	**Other International Protection**	**Work/ Education**	**Family**
Participant Estimate	-0.00	-0.02***	0.03***	-0.00
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Question Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Socio-Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	3.37***	3.88***	2.21***	3.24***
	(0.247)	(0.235)	(0.242)	(0.262)
Obs.	1,156	1,145	1,127	1,140
R^2	0.078	0.096	0.112	0.073

Source: Authors' analysis.

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. The dependent variable is the participant's response to the seven-point rating scale on their attitude to immigration. Participant estimate refers to the participant's response to the question highlighted in the 'Relevant Statistic' row and is included as a continuous variable. Question controls refer to the version of the attitude question and the order in order reasons were presented. Socio-demographic controls include age, gender, educational attainment, urban/rural residence and region.

3.2.3 Perceptions of migrant characteristics

We next examined the relationship between immigration attitudes and perceptions of migrant characteristics (Table 3.6). These models account for the same socio-demographic and question factors as previous models. They also include each participant's estimate of the relevant statistic for Ireland-born individuals, allowing us to isolate the effect of perceptions about migrants specifically. Sample sizes for these models are smaller as questions were asked to randomly selected subsets of participants.

TABLE 3.6 OLS REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING IMMIGRATION ATTITUDE FROM PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRANT CHARACTERISTICS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Relevant Statistic	**Proportion of emigrants born outside EU, UK and North America**	**Proportion of those born abroad in employment**	**Proportion of those born abroad with tertiary-level education**	**Proportion of those born abroad living in social housing**	**Proportion of prison population who are non-EU/UK/North American**
Participant Estimate	0.01	0.02***	0.02***	-0.02***	-0.02**
	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.008)
Question Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Socio-Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Irish-Born Estimate	-0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.02***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Constant	3.11***	2.12***	1.89***	4.05***	2.35***
	(0.497)	(0.451)	(0.429)	(0.400)	(0.592)
Obs.	372	374	382	392	376
R^2	0.112	0.134	0.136	0.176	0.168

Source: Authors' analysis.

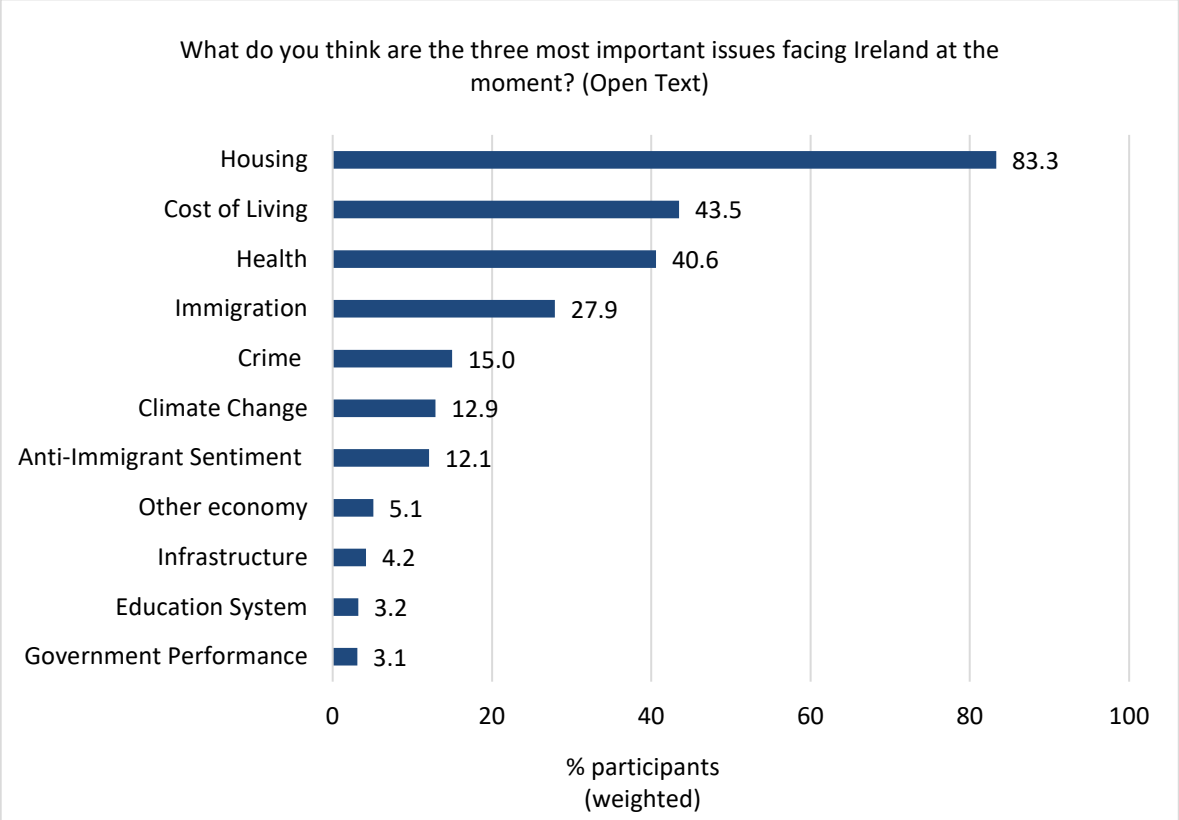
Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. The dependent variable is the participant's response to the seven-point rating scale on their attitude to immigration. Participant estimate refers to the participant's response to the question highlighted in the 'Relevant Statistic' row and is included as a continuous variable. Question controls refer to the version of the attitude question and the order in order reasons were presented. Socio-demographic controls include age, gender, educational attainment, urban/rural residence and region. The positive relationship between estimates of the Irish prisoners and attitudes to immigration is likely artificial, because all non-migrant prisoners are calculated as Irish.

Model 1 shows that believing more or fewer migrants emigrated from Ireland is not associated with attitudes to immigration. However, Models 2 and 3 show that participants who estimated higher employment rates and tertiary-level education rates among migrants, respectively, expressed more positive attitudes toward immigration. Conversely, Models 4 and 5 show that participants who estimated higher rates of social housing uptake and of migrants from outside the UK, EU and North America as a proportion of the prison population expressed more negative attitudes.

3.2.4 Immigration as a national issue

In addition to the attitude rating scale, we measured immigration sentiment through an open-text question at the beginning of the survey, asking participants to list the most important issues facing Ireland. Responses coded as 'immigration' included references to immigrants/immigration, refugees, asylum seekers and spelling variants. As some entries cited 'hate towards immigrants' and similar ideas, we coded generic entries to immigration as indicating negative sentiment if the participant also responded below the midpoint of the later attitude scale. Other issues raised include housing, cost-of-living, other economic issues (e.g. trade), climate change, the health system, crime, infrastructure, the education system and government performance (Figure 3.6). Less frequently mentioned issues, cited by less than 3 per cent of the sample, include misinformation, technology (e.g. AI and social media), welfare fraud and gender issues.

FIGURE 3.6 RESPONSES TO OPEN TEXT QUESTION ON MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING IRELAND



Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Themes reported by less than 3 per cent of the sample are excluded: international geopolitics, unemployment, gender issues (including LGBT), military neutrality, emigration, technology (e.g. AI, social media), misinformation, welfare fraud and population ageing.

As shown in Figure 3.6, housing was the most commonly cited issue and the only one mentioned by the majority. Cost-of-living and the health system rank second and third, respectively, at just over 40 per cent each. Immigration (as a negative) was cited by just over one-quarter of the sample, while all other issues (including anti-immigrant sentiment) were cited by 15 per cent or fewer. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time anti-immigrant sentiment has emerged in an open-text survey on issues facing Ireland.[31]

Table A.7 in Appendix VII shows the correlation matrix between issues. Because the question had limited response options, most correlations are negative; by mentioning any one issue, the likelihood of mentioning any other specific issues is lower, simply because there are fewer slots left to write more answers.

[31] We used the same question in a 2021 survey and less than 5 per cent mentioned immigration as an issue, with no references to anti-immigrant sentiment (Timmons and Lunn, 2022). *The Irish Times* 'voter attention' poll has referred to immigration but not anti-immigrant sentiment in reporting (e.g. Leahy, 2024).

However, there is a small positive correlation between citing immigration as an issue and citing government performance (r = .06), meaning those who wrote immigration (as a negative) were also slightly more likely to write that the government in general is one of the main issues. Unsurprisingly, immigration correlates most negatively with citing anti-immigrant sentiment (r = -.23), but also with housing (r = -.11), cost-of-living (r = -.11) and climate change (r = -.13). This means that those who cited immigration as an issue were less likely to mention the housing, cost-of-living or climate as the main issues facing Ireland. There is also a strong negative correlation between cost-of-living and health (r = -.24), meaning that those who cited cost-of-living as an issue were less likely to mention the health system as an issue.

Table 3.7 presents logistic regression models that test whether perceptions predict citing immigration as a negative issue facing Ireland, accounting for the participant's background characteristics. For brevity, we report here only the perceptions shown to significantly predict ratings on the attitude scale in previous sections and only questions asked to the full sample. The results replicate earlier findings: higher estimates of (Model 1) the size of the migrant population, (Model 2) the size of the population born outside the EU, UK and North America and (Model 3) the share of international protection applications among recent migrants predict greater likelihood of citing immigration as an issue. In contrast, higher estimates of the share of work and education visas among recent migrants predicts reduced likelihood of citing immigration as a negative issue (Model 4).

TABLE 3.7 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING IMMIGRATION AS AN ISSUE

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Relevant Statistic	**Total population born abroad**	**Population born outside EU, UK and North America**	**Share of recent residence applications for international protection (excl. Ukraine)**	**Share of recent residence applications for work/education**
Participant Estimate	0.01**	0.03***	0.04***	-0.03***
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Man	0.36**	0.35**	0.33**	0.32**
(*ref: woman*)	(0.141)	(0.142)	(0.142)	(0.139)
Age (*ref: 18 to 39 years)*				
40 to 59 years	0.81***	0.87***	0.76***	0.76***
	(0.165)	(0.169)	(0.169)	(0.167)
60+ years	0.38*	0.35*	0.26	0.33*
	(0.194)	(0.195)	(0.195)	(0.191)
Degree or above	-0.25*	-0.24	-0.31**	-0.20
(*ref: below degree*)	(0.152)	(0.154)	(0.154)	(0.153)
Urban	-0.10	-0.10	-0.13	-0.03
(ref: Rural)	(0.148)	(0.152)	(0.152)	(0.149)
Region (*ref*: Dublin)				
Rest of Leinster	-0.27	-0.33	-0.13	-0.19
	(0.214)	(0.215)	(0.221)	(0.215)
Munster	-0.63***	-0.63***	-0.55**	-0.50**
	(0.231)	(0.233)	(0.238)	(0.232)
Connacht-Ulster	-0.20	-0.40	-0.16	-0.31
	(0.245)	(0.250)	(0.253)	(0.248)
Constant	-1.42***	-1.50***	-2.18***	0.02
	(0.309)	(0.292)	(0.318)	(0.313)
Obs.	1,141	1,110	1,145	1,127
Pseudo-R^2	0.039	0.050	0.067	0.063

Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. The dependent variable whether the participant negatively cited immigration as a major national issue and is a binary variable. Participant estimate refers to the participant's response to the question highlighted in the 'Relevant Statistic' row and is included as a continuous variable.

While many socio-demographic patterns mirror those found in the attitude rating models, some differences emerged. Using predicted probabilities from Model 1, which estimate how likely different groups are to mention immigration as an issue, middle-aged participants were most likely to do so (36.1 per cent), compared to younger adults (20.3 per cent) and the oldest age group (27.0 per cent).[32] The oldest group were also more likely to cite it than the youngest group.

Unlike the previous models, gender differences emerged in citing immigration as an issue: men were more likely to spontaneously mention immigration than women (31.4 per cent vs. 24.6 per cent). Education effects were consistent with

[32] Test of coefficients $\chi^2 = 6.27$, $p = .012$.

previous findings: those educated to tertiary-level education were less likely to mention immigration (24.9 per cent) compared to those educated below degree level (29.7 per cent), though differences are smaller than those for age and gender.

3.2.5 Comparing accurate and inaccurate perceptions

Across all models presented in Tables 3.4-3.6, the following pattern emerges. People tend to have more negative attitudes toward immigration if they believe that migrants constitute a larger share of the population, that a greater proportion of recent migrants are seeking international protection, that migrants are more likely to live in social housing and that they represent a larger share of the prison population. On the other hand, more positive attitudes are linked to perceptions that a greater share of recent migrants come for work and education, that migrants have higher employment rates and that migrants have higher tertiary education rates. While these models identify the direction of effects, Figure A.3 in Appendix V shows that the relationships are broadly linear. This means the models can be used to estimate immigration attitudes when people's perceptions of migrants are reasonably accurate.

Figure 3.7 (top panel) shows the predicted attitude rating from each model when the relevant perception is hypothetically set to the official estimate (e.g. what attitude rating is associated with accurately guessing the total migrant population to be 20.3 per cent?). In other words, the figure shows estimates of attitudes under a scenario of accurate perceptions. The dashed line shows the actual average attitude of the sample (i.e. the average score on the main attitude variable, combining both the international protection and 'work, education and family' as reasons; we retain their combination because question version did not show interactions with perceptions). The figure illustrates that, for most characteristics, more accurate perceptions are linked with more positive average attitudes toward immigration. Crucially, there is no instance where accurate perceptions are linked to more negative attitudes.

The strongest increase in positivity is associated with accurate perceptions of migrant economic activity, including reasons for residence applications (work and education), tertiary-level education rates and employment rates. Although social housing uptake also demonstrates a very strong effect, we interpret this effect with caution. Participants substantially overestimated social housing rates for both Ireland-born and foreign-born populations. In contrast, their estimates of employment and education were relatively accurate for the Ireland-born group.

To further compare attitudes between those with more accurate and less accurate perceptions of migration statistics, we generated a misperception score. This score sums seven indicators of inaccurate beliefs: overestimating the share of the

population born abroad; overestimating the share of migrants born outside the UK, EU and North America; overestimating the share of migrants who are men; overestimating recent migration from outside the UK, EU and North America; overestimating the share of recent residence applications from Ukrainians; overestimating the share of recent residence applications for other international protection reasons; and underestimating the share of recent applications for work or education.[33]

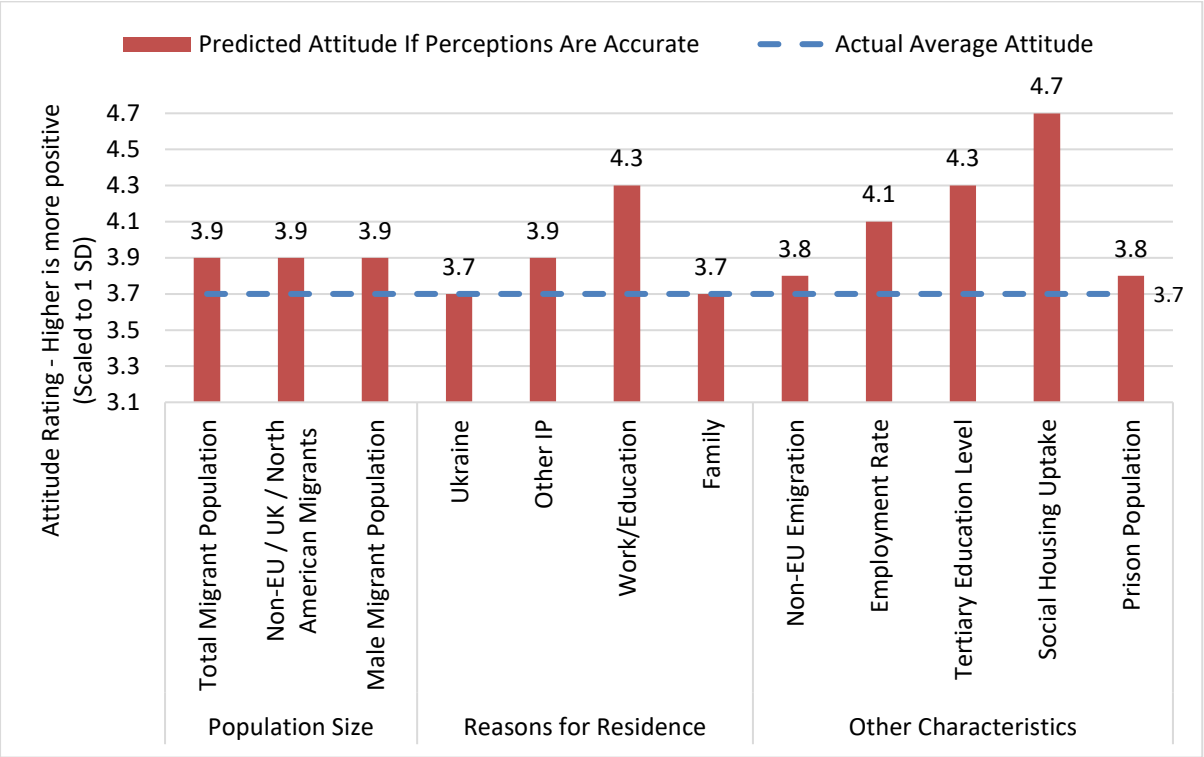
On average, participants recorded three misperceptions out of a possible seven, with most participants (78 per cent) scoring between 2 and 4. Table A.5 in Appendix IV presents a regression model of socio-demographic predictors of this score. Men and those educated to degree level or above have lower misperception scores, with no significant association between score and age, living area, region or being born in Ireland.

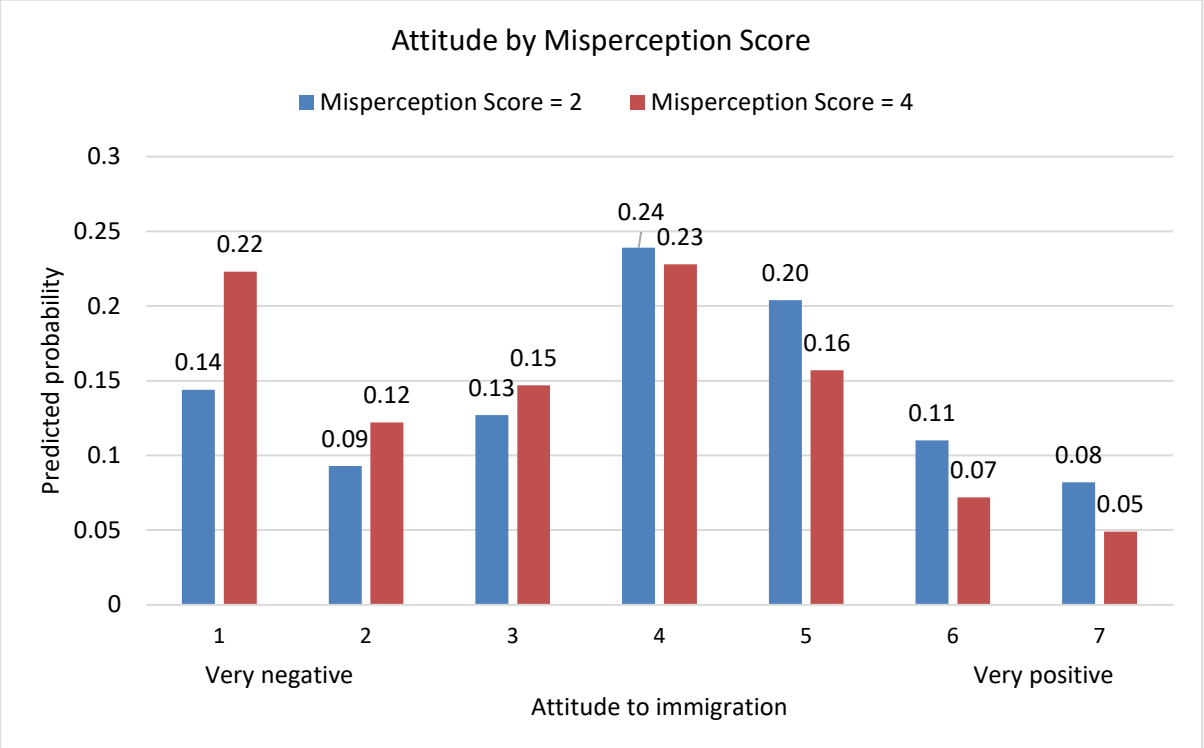
Table 3.8 presents regression models predicting attitudes to immigration and whether the participant listed immigration as a national issue, with controls for socio-demographic characteristics. Both models show that those with higher misperception scores report significantly more negative attitudes and are significantly more likely to cite immigration as a national issue. To illustrate the size of the effect, Figure 3.7 (middle panel) shows that 14 per cent of those who hold two misperceptions reported feeling 'very negatively' about immigration compared to 22 per cent of those who hold four misperceptions (a relative increase of 57 per cent).[34] Similarly, Figure 3.7 (bottom panel) 23 per cent of those with two misperceptions cited immigration as a national issue, compared to 35 per cent of those who hold four (a relative increase of 52 per cent).

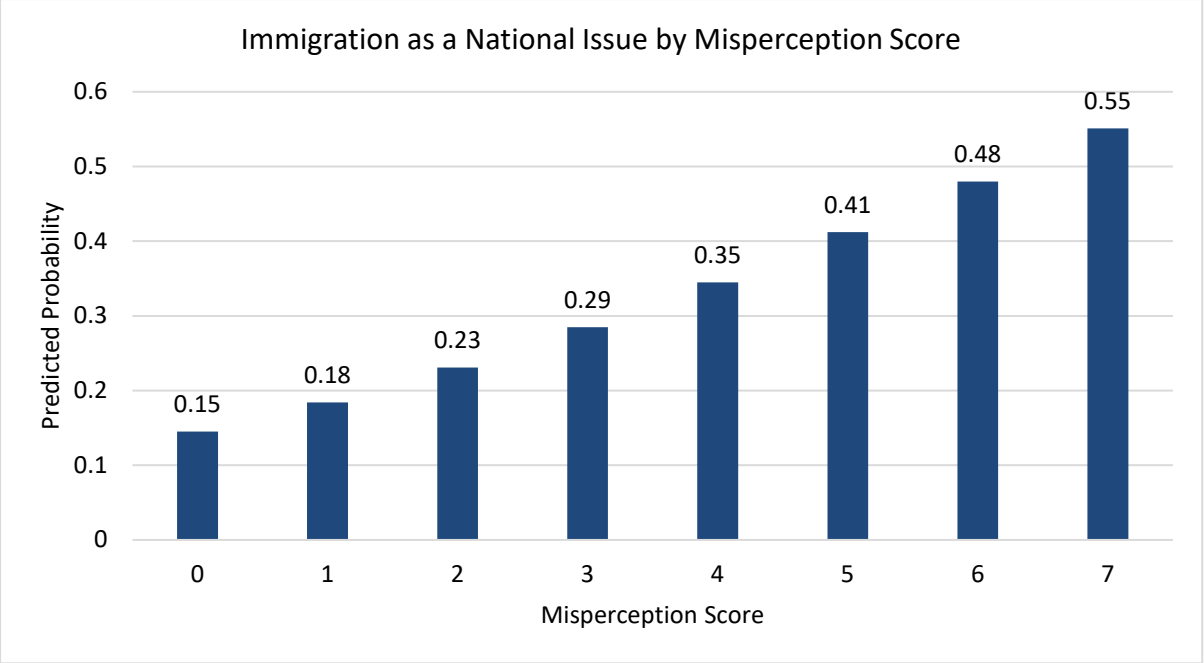
[33] The list of questions included in this score excludes questions shown to subsets of the sample (on emigration rates, education and employment rates, social housing uptake and prison population) and excludes family reunification question because it is constrained by responses to the other residence application reasons. We also use the proportion of migrants estimated as born outside the UK, EU and North America and the proportion of migrants estimated to be men to control for overestimates of the migrant population as a whole leading to inflated estimates of these statistics.

[34] We select scores of two and four for illustration as these scores represent the interquartile range. Effects are more pronounced at other cuts; for example, among those with a score of 1, 11 per cent reported feeling very negative and 18 per cent cited immigration as an issue, compared to 27 per cent (a 145 per cent increase) and 41 per cent (a 127 per cent increase) of those with a score of 5, respectively.

FIGURE 3.7 COMPARING ATTITUDES BETWEEN ACCURATE AND INACCURATE PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRANTS







Source: Authors' analysis.

Notes: The misperception score is a sum of the following responses: overestimated the share of the population born abroad; overestimated the share of migrants born outside the UK, EU and North America; overestimated the share of migrants who are men; overestimated recent migration from outside the UK, EU and North America; overestimated the share of recent residence applications from Ukrainians; overestimated the share of recent residence applications for other international protection reasons; and underestimated the share of recent applications for work or education.

TABLE 3.8 REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES FROM MISPERCEPTION SCORE

	Model 1 Attitude	Model 2 Immigration Cited
Misperception Score	-0.28***	0.30***
	(0.042)	(0.057)
Socio-Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes
Cut 1 / Constant	-1.92	-1.64***
	(0.256)	(0.371)
Cut 2	-1.28	
	(0.252)	
Cut 3	-0.64	
	(0.250)	
Cut 4	0.39	
	(0.249)	
Cut 5	1.45	
	(0.253)	
Cut 6	2.49	
	(0.270)	
Obs.	1,141	1,110
Pseudo-R^2	0.03	0.07

Source: Authors' analysis.

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Model 1 is an ordinal logistic regression and the dependent variable is the participant's immigration attitude rating. We switched to an ordinal model for this analysis to generate effect size estimates in Figure 3.6 (middle panel). Model 2 is a logistic regression and the dependent variable is whether the participant cited immigration as a major national issue. Participants who gave the highest 5 per cent of estimates for the size of the migrant population are excluded.

3.3 HOW DO PERCEPTIONS COMPARE AGAINST OTHER PREDICTORS OF ATTITUDES?

Our final pre-registered aim was to test whether misperceptions predict attitudes to immigration when controlling for other individual characteristics with known associations with attitudes: objective and subjective household finances, future optimism, trust in others, political efficacy, political orientation and contact with immigrants. This section briefly describes these predictors before presenting the overall model.

As a reminder, objective household finances were measured using equivalised household income[35] and indicators of basic deprivation. Subjective household finances were measured using reported difficulty in making ends meet, perceived standing in society (through an adapted Macarthur scale; Moss et al., 2023), whether the participant judges their quality of life to have been worse or better in the past and how satisfied they are with their life. Other psychological and political measures (optimism, trust, political efficacy and political orientation) were measured using single item rating scales. Social contact with migrants was measured using frequency of contact and relationships (i.e. whether the participant has migrant friends or family members).

[35] Equivalised household income is defined by the CSO as a household's total disposable income divided by its equivalised size.

TABLE 3.9 OLS REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING IMMIGRATION ATTITUDE FROM GROUP SIZE ESTIMATES WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTROLS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Relevant Statistic	**Total population born abroad**	**Population born outside EU, UK and North America**	**Share of recent residence applications for international protection (excl. Ukraine)**	**Share of recent residence applications for work/education**
Participant Estimate	-0.01***	-0.02***	-0.02***	0.02***
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Income Quintile (*ref:* 1st (Lowest))				
2nd	-0.11	-0.08	-0.05	-0.03
	(0.140)	(0.141)	(0.137)	(0.140)
3rd	-0.31**	-0.27*	-0.19	-0.14
	(0.154)	(0.156)	(0.151)	(0.155)
4th	-0.21	-0.20	-0.09	-0.18
	(0.193)	(0.194)	(0.188)	(0.202)
5th (Highest)	-0.03	-0.00	0.03	0.12
	(0.230)	(0.234)	(0.230)	(0.239)
Deprivation	-0.08***	-0.07**	-0.05**	-0.06**
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.027)
Difficulty Making Ends Meet	0.03	0.03	-0.00	0.01
	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.045)
Feels More Well Off	0.11**	0.12**	0.09*	0.09*
	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.051)	(0.053)
Life Better in the Past	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04
	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Dissatisfied with Life	-0.04	-0.04	-0.02	0.01
	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.049)	(0.050)
Optimistic for Future	0.09**	0.09*	0.08*	0.11**
	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.044)	(0.045)
Other People Trustworthy	0.15***	0.15***	0.16***	0.14***
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.043)	(0.043)
Voice Counts Politically	0.19***	0.18***	0.19***	0.17***
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.037)
Political Ideology (ref: Left wing)				
Centrist	-0.53***	-0.54***	-0.51***	-0.44***
	(0.118)	(0.120)	(0.117)	(0.123)
Right wing	-0.79***	-0.79***	-0.80***	-0.69***
	(0.135)	(0.137)	(0.132)	(0.137)

Contd.

TABLE 3.9 CONTD.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Relevant Statistic	**Total population born abroad**	**Population born outside EU, UK and North America**	**Share of recent residence applications for international protection (excl. Ukraine)**	**Share of recent residence applications for work/education**
Contact with Migrants (ref: Less than monthly)				
Monthly	-0.16	-0.21	-0.21	-0.27
	(0.190)	(0.193)	(0.187)	(0.191)
Weekly	-0.30*	-0.31*	-0.27	-0.34**
	(0.168)	(0.172)	(0.168)	(0.170)
Daily	-0.37**	-0.42**	-0.34*	-0.43**
	(0.180)	(0.183)	(0.178)	(0.182)
Migrant Friends/Family	0.48***	0.49***	0.45***	0.50***
	(0.110)	(0.111)	(0.109)	(0.113)
Born Abroad	0.03	0.05	0.10	0.16
	(0.132)	(0.133)	(0.131)	(0.136)
Other Socio-Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Question Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	2.40***	2.38***	2.66***	1.00*
	(0.531)	(0.522)	(0.503)	(0.541)
Obs.	1,013	990	1,018	950
R^2	0.259	0.259	0.261	0.273
VIF	1.70	1.70	1.69	1.70

Source: Authors' analysis.

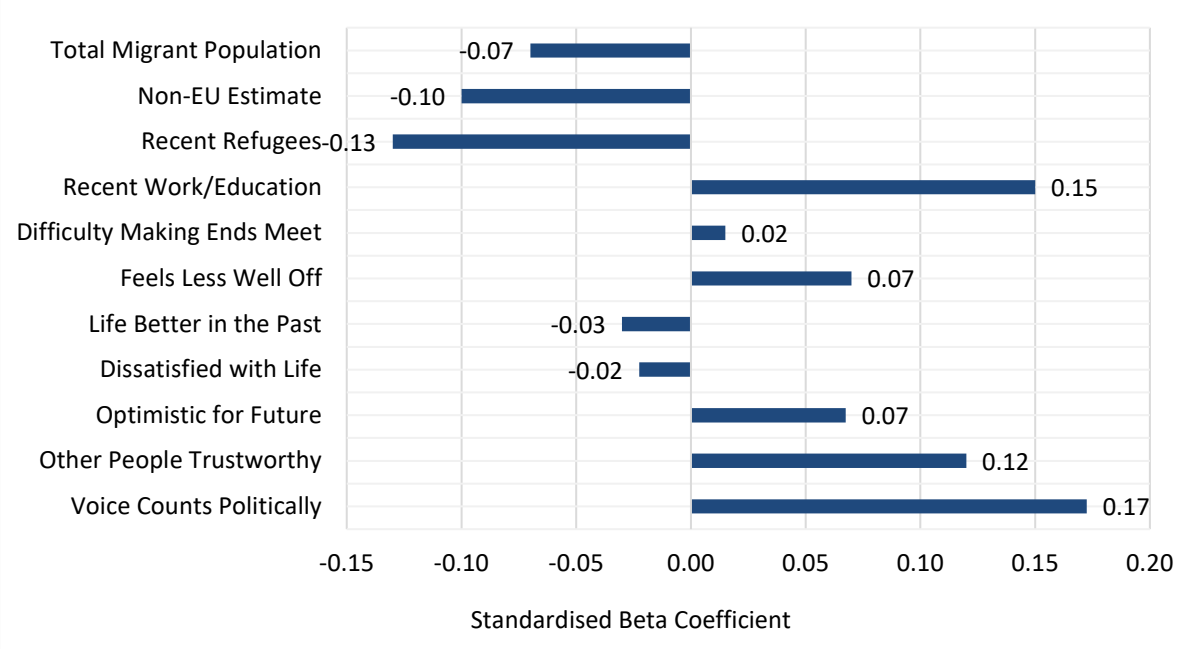
Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. The dependent variable whether the participant cited immigration as a major national issue and is a binary variable. Participant estimate refers to the participant's response to the question highlighted in the 'Relevant Statistic' row and is included as a continuous variable. Table A.8 in the Appendix shows the correlation matrix between predictors. As expected, the financial indicators are correlated (up to r = .59, p < .001), though all remain below conventional multicollinearity thresholds (VIF < 2), allowing their inclusion in the models. 'Other socio-demographic characteristics' refers to controls for gender, age, education, urban/rural residence and region.

The models (Table 3.9) show that the relationship between attitudes and all tested perceptions remains statistically significant, over and above other individual-level factors associated with immigration attitudes. In other words, the link between believing migrant group size to be larger and holding more negative attitudes to immigration is not fully explained by factors like financial wellbeing, trust in others or political ideology.

The models also provide insight on these other psychological factors. While there is no consistent effect of household income on attitudes, experiencing deprivation is associated with more negative attitudes. For example, marginal effects from Model 1 show that people with no experience of material deprivation in the past year were more likely to have positive views on immigration (averaging 3.9 out of 7) than those who have experienced material deprivation (averaging 3.7). Similarly, those who feel reasonably well-off compared to others (scoring 5 out of 7 on the

subjective financial situation scale) reported more positive attitudes (an average of 3.8) than those who feel less well-off (3 out of 7 on the subjective finances scale), who had an average immigration attitude of 3.6.

FIGURE 3.8 STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND OTHER INDIVIDUAL FACTORS



Source: Authors' analysis.
Notes: Misperception estimates are taken from Models 1 to 4 in Table 3.9, respectively, whereas coefficients from other predictors are averaged across the four models.

Participants' outlook on life and others in general is associated with more positive attitudes to immigration. To show how strong these effects are, we compare those who responded slightly below the midpoint (i.e. 3 out of 7) to those who responded slightly above the midpoint (5 out of 7) on three different scales. Those more optimistic about the future had slightly more positive views on immigration (average rating of 3.8 vs. 3.7). People who have more trust in others were noticeably more positive about immigration (3.9 vs. 3.6). And those who more strongly feel their voice counts politically also had more positive attitudes (4.1 vs. 3.7).

Figure 3.8 converts the effects from the statistical models onto the same scale ('standardised beta coefficients'),[36] to allow comparisons of how strongly the different factors are linked to immigration attitudes. The figure shows that the strongest perception-based effects come from beliefs about why recent non-EEA migrants are coming to Ireland. People who believe a higher share of these

[36] The standardised beta coefficient is calculated by multiplying the unstandardised coefficient by the ratio of the variable's standard deviation to the standard deviation of the outcome variable.

migrants are arriving for work or education tend to have much more positive attitudes. In contrast, those who think more migrants are applying for international protection tend to have much more negative attitudes.

Figure 3.8 further shows that, among the other psychological factors, the strongest link is with feeling that one's voice counts politically. Those who feel more politically empowered tend to view immigration more positively. Trust in others is a further strong predictor of attitude. Perceptions of reasons for recent migration and these psychological characteristics are more strongly linked to immigration attitudes than how people feel about their personal finances (noting that objective finances are accounted for in the models).

Returning to Table 3.9, political orientation also emerges as a strong predictor of attitudes, with left-wing participants reporting significantly more positive attitudes (an average rating of 4.1) compared to those with centrist views (3.6) and right-wing views (mean = 3.3).

People who report greater frequency of contact with migrants tend to have more negative attitudes toward immigration (Table 3.9). For example, those who report interacting with migrants less than once a month report more positive attitudes (4.0 on average) than those who report daily contact (3.6). However, this effect excludes whether someone has a close personal connection, like a migrant friend or family member, which is linked to much more positive attitudes (4.0 vs. 3.5).[37] It is important to note that these effects are correlational, meaning they show a link but do not prove cause and effect. The results are consistent with two possibilities. First, that frequent impersonal contact with migrants may lead to more negative attitudes. Second, that those with more negative views fail to form close relationships with migrants even if they interact with them often, whereas those with more positive views might form those connections.

[37] As an additional exploratory analysis, we repeated the models and included an interaction term between contact frequency and having a close personal connection with a migrant. The interaction was significant, suggesting that increased frequency is associated with more positive attitudes among those with a close personal connection but more negative attitudes among those without a close personal connection.

CHAPTER 4
Discussion

This study was conducted in the context of heightened salience of immigration and rising anti-immigrant hate crimes in Ireland. Our aim was to measure the public's intuitions about relevant immigration facts and to better understand the relationship between these intuitions and attitudes. The rationale for doing so is that misperceptions of immigration facts may contribute to perceived threat, polarisation and demand for alternative immigration policies or resistance to integration policies, as well as behaviour towards migrants living in Ireland. In this chapter, we summarise the findings on biased misperceptions, attitudes to immigration and general predictors of attitudes. We then discuss their implications for policy and public discourse.

4.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

4.1.1 Biased misperceptions

The findings show that, even in a country with comparatively positive attitudes towards immigration (Laurence et al., 2024), misperceptions about immigration facts are widespread and systematically biased. The majority of respondents overestimated the size of the migrant population. The degree of overestimation is large, with people perceiving the migrant population to be 37 per cent larger than it is. The degree of overestimation is consistent with 2014 survey data for Ireland, despite the increase in the size of the migrant population since then (Gorodzeisky and Semyenov, 2020). Most also overestimated the share of migrants from non-EU/UK/North American countries and this bias was even larger, at 67 per cent.[38] When asked to estimate a range of characteristics of the migrant population, most participants produced guesses that were inaccurate and skewed towards higher perceived levels of criminality and competition for public resources. People overestimated the proportion of migrants who are male, and they underestimated employment and tertiary education rates while overestimating social housing uptake and criminal activity. Though recent immigration from outside the EU was underestimated, people strongly overestimated the share of recent migrants arriving for international protection from countries other than Ukraine, by 59 per cent, while underestimating the share arriving for work or education, with an average guess less than half the official estimate.[39]

[38] This estimate includes both the 'born inside' and 'born outside' frames of the question. The 'born outside' version is the one employed by Eurobarometer in surveys and demonstrates an even larger misperception, at over 100 per cent greater than reality.

[39] These misperceptions can be considered conservative estimates, as we excluded those who produced the highest 5 per cent of estimates from analyses.

The degree of misperception we observe appears to challenge the well-established concept of the 'wisdom of crowds', that collective estimates tend to be accurate as individual errors cancel each other out (e.g. Budescu et al., 2024). In this case, however, aggregated public perceptions are not only inaccurate but systematically biased. This suggests that, rather than random error, the bias in public intuitions about immigration is directional and strong.

Taken together, these misperceptions suggest that the degree to which migrants are in competition with the Irish-born population for public resources is overestimated. There are fewer migrants than people perceive and far more arrive on work and education visas than people expect. Indeed, these misperceptions are robustly associated with more negative attitudes to immigration, in line with international evidence and supporting our first three pre-registered hypotheses (Alesina et al., 2023). The strongest associations are with beliefs about the reasons migrants come to Ireland. Participants who believed that a larger share of migrants arrived seeking international protection were significantly more negative about immigration, while those who correctly believed that more recent migrants came for work or education were substantially more positive. Notably, we find no association between attitudes and beliefs about the share of recent migrants from Ukraine, which were reasonably accurate, supporting recent evidence that attitudes towards helping Ukrainian refugees are more positive than for helping asylum seekers (Laurence et al., 2024). We further show that holding more misperceptions is linked with more negative attitudes; those who hold more misperceptions are over 50 per cent more likely to hold the most negative attitudes on both of our attitude measures.

Importantly, these relationships cannot be attributed to general innumeracy or difficulty in answering statistical survey questions.[40] Participants produced reasonably accurate estimates for employment and education rates among the Irish-born population. Comparing estimates of the Irish-born and foreign-born populations, participants estimated the Irish-born to have higher employment rates, higher levels of tertiary education attainment and lower levels of social housing uptake than migrants, whereas the opposite is true. Moreover, the survey design minimised priming effects and cognitive demand. Participants were not primed to think about their perceptions of immigration when recording attitudes and the questions were grounded in evidence on how people best engage in numerical cognition.

[40] The exception here is with social housing uptake, which was strongly overestimated for both the foreign-born and Irish-born populations. This may reflect a general misperception of welfare uptake or a misinterpretation of the question as noted in Section 3.1.3.

4.1.2 Other predictors of attitudes

The predictive nature of misperceptions holds even when controlling for other known predictors of immigration attitudes, supporting Hypothesis 4. These statistical models provide further evidence on the psychological correlates of anti-immigrant sentiment. Consistent with Laurence et al. (2024), we find that typical indicators of objective financial status do not predict attitudes. In our case, models show no association between income and attitudes. However, material deprivation, defined as having to forego basics due to financial constraints, is associated with more negative attitudes to immigration. This finding supports recent work that deprivation may be a more meaningful indicator of vulnerability than other objective indicators (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2025; see also Environmental Protection Agency, 2025).

Beyond financial factors, several other variables are strongly associated with immigration attitudes. Replicating Laurence et al. (2025), we find that optimism for the future is associated with more positive attitudes to immigration. Generalised social trust and belief that one's voice is heard politically also emerge as particularly strong predictors (McGinnity et al., 2023). These findings suggest that individuals who feel more secure in society and more empowered politically, independent of their perceptions of immigration and financial status, are more open to immigration.

We also find that political orientation is associated with immigration attitudes. Participants who identified as left-wing reported significantly more positive views of immigration than those who identified with centrist or right-wing views. Though previous work in Ireland had not found such a link (e.g. McGinnity et al., 2018), recent work suggests that one has emerged (Laurence et al., 2024). This finding adds to evidence that Irish voters may be becoming more ideologically responsive (Müller and Regan, 2021).

Consistent with international literature, our findings suggest that the relationship between social contact and immigration attitudes is more complex than simple exposure. While very frequent contact with migrants is sometimes associated with more negative attitudes, this appears to depend on the nature of contact. Participants who reported close relationships with migrants (e.g. friends or family members) expressed significantly more positive views. This pattern aligns with intergroup contact theory, which emphasises the importance of meaningful, cooperative interactions in reducing prejudice. Our exploratory analysis further supports this, showing that frequent contact is only associated with more positive attitudes among those with a close personal connection to a migrant. This suggests that impersonal or superficial contact may reinforce negative views, though further causal evidence is necessary.

With respect to other socio-demographic predictors, we replicate the well-established link between higher educational attainment and more positive reported attitudes to immigration (Laurence et al., 2024). Previous evidence on age is largely inconclusive, with some studies finding older people to be more positive and others finding no link (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2018; 2023). We find that the oldest age group (over 60s) and the youngest age group (under 40s) are more positive about immigration than the middle-age group (40 to 59 years) and that this group is also most likely to cite immigration as a national issue. We also replicate recent evidence for similar attitudes between men and women on our main attitude question once other factors are accounted for (e.g. McGinnity et al., 2023), though men are more likely to cite immigration as a national issue spontaneously.

4.1.3 Attitudes to immigration

Although we did not aim to directly compare attitudes in 2025 to those recorded in late 2023, some contextual observations are possible. The attitude question used here differs in format and sampling frame from the Equality Attitude Survey (2023), but we replicate previous findings that negative attitudes to immigration are reported by a minority of the public. However, a sizeable group (approximately one-in-five) report feeling very negatively about immigration for international protection reasons in particular. A similar though slightly larger proportion (27 per cent) spontaneously cite immigration as one of the main issues facing Ireland, in line with findings that the salience of immigration has significantly increased in recent years (Laurence et al., 2024). Although most of the public do not hold anti-immigration sentiments, it is difficult to conclude from these figures that strong negative sentiment is the preserve of only a fringe minority.

With that said, the public's concern about immigration is dwarfed by concerns about housing, cost-of-living and the health system. We also find no evidence that individuals concerned about immigration are particularly concerned about other national issues, such as access to housing, or indeed to most of the issues cited most often. The only issue to correlate with immigration is a broad category of 'government performance', though this was cited by just 4 per cent of the sample. Notably, we also detect concern about the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment for the first time in open-text responses, suggesting that public awareness of polarisation on this issue may be increasing (e.g. Leahy, 2024; Timmons and Lunn, 2022). These data were collected after media coverage of attacks on centres for asylum seekers but before racially-motivated attacks on members of the Indian community featured in headlines (e.g. Pollak and Gallagher, 2025).

4.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The finding that misperceptions are not random but systematically biased toward negative sentiment has important implications for public discourse and policy communication. Psychological research suggests that people sometimes integrate new information in ways that reinforce existing beliefs, particularly if those beliefs are emotionally charged (e.g. Kunda, 1990). If people perceive that migrants are likely to be an economic burden or a threat to social cohesion, they may be more susceptible to misinformation that confirms these beliefs, or more easily exploited by those seeking to spread disinformation, than if they hold accurate beliefs about the economic activity of the migrant population.

4.2.1 Possible causes of misperceptions

We cannot be certain of the cause of these misperceptions. One possibility is that they reflect a form of motivated reasoning, whereby those with more negative attitudes justify these attitudes by exaggerating the economic burden and cultural threats posed by immigrants. However, while there is a link between misperceptions and attitudes, misperceptions are not confined to those with negative attitudes; many people in the study with positive attitudes to immigration nevertheless held similar misperceptions. Another possibility is that people rely on what they observe in their daily lives, which can bias their views (Hauser and Norton, 2017). Given that the migrant population is relatively young and economically active, especially in service occupations, migrants may (on average) be somewhat more visible than the rest of the population. However, this daily experience explanation cannot account for beliefs that migrants occupy more social housing than Irish-born residents or that the share of the migrant population in prison is higher than it actually is.

Evidence generated in this study is consistent with an alternative mechanism. First, the framing effects we observed on estimates show that drawing attention to specific groups, such as non-EU/UK/North American migrants or male migrants, amplifies misperceptions about the size of those groups. Second, the pilot study run to inform our survey design shows that, when people think about media coverage of immigrants, they primarily think about those from non-EU/UK/North American countries and especially countries associated with those seeking asylum (Appendix I). Consequently, one possibility is that the amount of media attention given to certain migrant groups, or even to immigration in general, may lead the public to perceive these groups as more representative of migrants overall than they are in reality, and to believe that immigration is happening on a larger scale than is the case (e.g. Eberl et al., 2018). For example, although international protection applicants constitute a small share of the overall migrant population, the recent rise in applications, the failure to accommodate all applicants, and subsequent media coverage may underlie the large overestimation observed in this study. Such a causal mechanism would be consistent with well-established

research in cognitive psychology and information science showing that people often make judgements using heuristics (mental rules-of-thumb) based on limited or salient information (e.g. Kahneman and Tversky, 1972; Lerman et al., 2016).

4.2.2 Implications for communications

One straightforward implication is to develop communications that highlight under-recognised facts, such as the high proportion of migrants who are employed or hold third-level qualifications. Indeed, our statistical models show that where perceptions of relevant immigrant statistics are accurate, particularly with respect to employment and education rates, attitudes tend to be more positive. The potential effect of attitude correction is large: those who hold just two misconceptions of immigration are half as likely to hold the most negative attitudes towards immigration compared to those who hold four misconceptions. However, designing and delivering such interventions requires careful consideration. Experimental evidence suggests that information on accurate statistics alone may be ineffective (Hopkins et al., 2019; Jørgensen and Osmundsen, 2022). This is perhaps unsurprising if the source of misperceptions is through heuristic processing of media content, as we suggest above. Corrections may be more effective if they include narrative examples that counteract misleading stereotypes, such as representative cases of highly educated migrants who have come to Ireland to work.

Public figures and leaders are also likely to play a critical role in shaping these narratives. Political discourse that focuses heavily on international protection applications or issues like deportations, while neglecting migrants' economic contributions, is likely to reinforce misperceptions. Public figures who wish to foster informed debates on migration may need to seek and avail of opportunities to correct misperceptions. Emphasising facts about employment, education and migrant contribution to society may help to counter harmful narratives and rebalance perceptions. Such debate may be further helpfully informed by updating estimates of the economic contribution of migration to the State (e.g. Boffi et al., 2024).

The potential for these misperceptions to be generated and exacerbated by selective or misleading media coverage has further implications. For traditional media, while it is inevitable that news stories focus on the policy problems that variable migration flows can generate, our findings underscore the importance of reminding viewers, listeners and readers of underlying facts and trends. Most obviously, this relates to the fact that the large majority of immigrants to Ireland are not seeking international protection. Our findings can also inform the debate about the regulation of systems that enable misinformation to rapidly spread. Given the limited efficacy of media literacy campaigns and other individual-level interventions against misinformation (e.g. Roozenbeek et al., 2024), decisions by

social media platforms to roll-back content moderation is a particular concern (Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2025). Greater accountability for platforms that permit the spread of false information, as presented in the Digital Services Act (European Union, 2022), may be more effective.

4.2.3 Racism

Several findings are also consistent with racialised perceptions in attitudes towards immigration. First, pilot results indicate that when people think about immigration, they primarily associate it with countries that are predominantly non-White (Appendix I). Second, perceptions of the non-White migrant population (measured through questions about migrants born outside the EU, UK and North America) are more biased than perceptions of the migrant population as a whole. Third, participants assumed that migrants who require permission to remain in the State (a group largely from non-White countries) are equally likely to apply for international protection as for work, despite the reality that work-related applications outnumber international protection applications by a factor of four.

In addition, the emergence of concern about rising anti-immigrant sentiment in open-text responses, alongside the documented increase in racially-motivated hate crimes in Ireland, underscores the need for systematic monitoring of these trends. Many hate crimes are likely to go unreported, particularly among migrant communities who may face barriers to reporting such as fear, mistrust, or lack of awareness of support systems (e.g. Pezzella et al., 2019). To fully understand the scope and impact of anti-immigrant hostility, research understanding the attitudes of the general population should be supplemented with research on affected migrant populations.

4.2.4 Other implications

The findings on contact also have important policy implications. It is clear that not all contact creates positive attitudes. Our exploratory analysis suggests that frequent impersonal contact with migrants is associated with more negative attitudes. Assuming that – in line with intergroup contact theory – the relationship is at least partly causal, supporting local-level integration initiatives may help improve social cohesion. Structures and projects like local authority integration teams, community integration forums and the connecting communities project administered by Local Development Companies have the potential to improve attitudes, where they can foster personal connections between the local community and migrants (see Potter et al., 2025).

Finally, the finding that material deprivation, independent of income, predicts negative attitudes to immigration has implications for integration policy. Though our evidence is correlational, this finding is consistent with economic vulnerability

fostering feelings of insecurity and competition, in line with group threat theory (e.g. Esses et al., 1998). We further find that feeling one's voice is represented politically predicts more positive immigration attitudes. Broader social policies that reduce deprivation and promote economic and political inclusion may thus have further benefits for integration. Ensuring equitable access to housing, healthcare and public services, not only for migrants but for all residents, may help prevent perceptions of zero-sum competition. In this way, integration could be considered not just as a migrant issue, but as part of a wider strategy to build a fairer and more cohesive society. Policy interventions with these aims are further supported by the evidence generated here that social trust and political empowerment are strongly associated with more positive attitudes to immigration.

4.3 CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer two primary questions: (1) How accurate are public intuitions about immigration facts in Ireland? and (2) Are these perceptions linked to attitudes, even when accounting for other known predictors? Our findings provide robust evidence that public perceptions of immigration in Ireland are often inaccurate and that these misperceptions are systematically linked to attitudes. On average, the public wrongly assume that immigrants in Ireland are less likely to be employed, less likely to hold tertiary qualifications, more likely to live in social housing, more likely to form part of the prison population, and more likely to come to Ireland seeking international protection than they really are. Importantly, those with more accurate perceptions tend to hold more positive views of immigration. These findings suggest that improving public comprehension of immigration facts may foster a more informed and cohesive society, though methods for achieving better understanding require further evidence.

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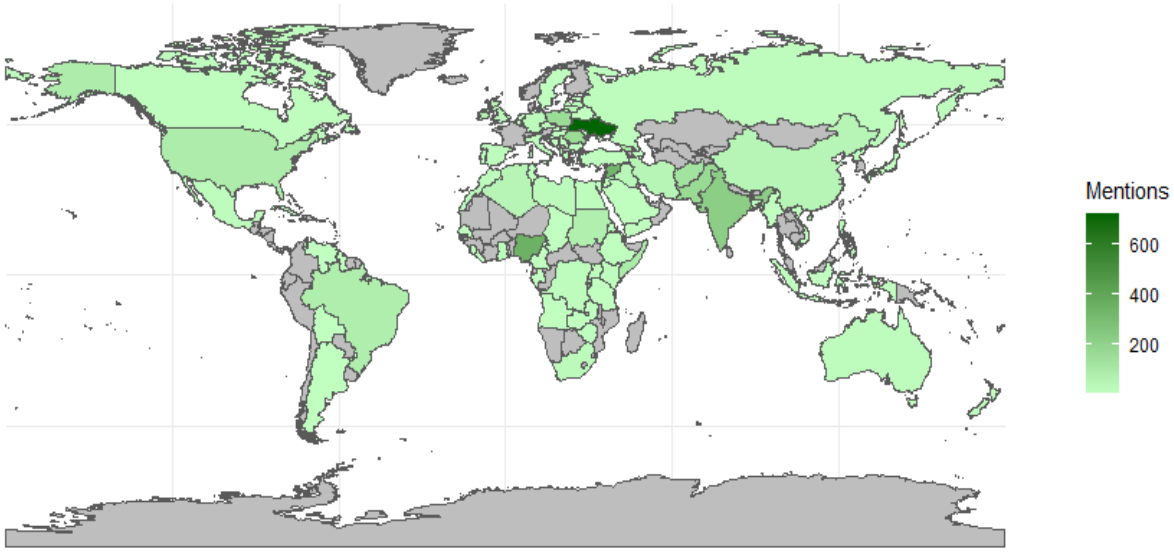
APPENDIX I

Pilot question results

To inform our survey design, we ran a pilot question in a separate study of 1,500 adults about interactions in shared road spaces (Fox et al., forthcoming). At the end of the study, participants were asked 'when you think about media coverage of 'immigrants' or 'immigration', what countries of origin come to mind first?' and were presented with open text boxes to respond. Responses were analysed in R and Figure A.1 presents a frequency map of the countries mentioned.

FIGURE A.1 FREQUENCY MAP OF COUNTRIES ASSOCIATED WITH MEDIA COVERAGE OF 'IMMIGRATION'



Source: Authors' analysis.

Participants listed 91 countries, with the most common being Ukraine (*n* = 727), Nigeria (*n* = 353), Syria (*n* = 328), India (*n* = 219), Pakistan (*n* = 167), Romania (*n* = 163), Poland (*n* = 158), Afghanistan (*n* = 123), Palestine (*n* = 101) and Somalia (*n* = 93).

APPENDIX II

Accurate statistics

While designing the survey, the study team ensured that questions were straightforward and easy to understand for respondents. However, the available statistics on migration are generally either from the Census (which last took place in 2022, and so is several years out of date), or are from survey or administrative data, which provide relevant information but only for specific cohorts or with technical caveats. This means that for many of the statistics which were estimated by respondents there is no precisely corresponding official statistic. To assess the accuracy of respondents' beliefs, we instead use a combination of Census, administrative, and survey data to create a range of reasonably accurate values.

Additionally, where possible, we estimate the magnitude to which the official statistics might differ from the actual answer to the question posed to respondents. These estimations are summarised and interpreted in the Notes at the end of this section and are referenced throughout the tables where relevant.

TABLE A.1 PROPORTIONS BY PLACE OF BIRTH

Question	Accurate statistics	Reasonable range
Out of every 100 adults living in Ireland, what is your best guess for how many were **born abroad** (i.e. outside of the island of Ireland)?	**Census 2022 (Table F5084):** 19 (18.79%) **LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 1.2)** Born outside the Republic (i.e. includes NI-born): 22 (21.7%) Estimate excluding NI-born (see Note 1): 21 (20.68%)	16.8-23.7
What is your best guess for how many were born **inside the United Kingdom (UK), European Union (EU) or North America?**	**Census 2022 (Table F5084):** Proportion born in England, Scotland, Wales, EU27 excluding Ireland, USA, Canada: 12 (11.81%) **LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 1.2)** Proportion born in UK (including NI), EU27 excluding Ireland, 'North America, Australia and Oceania':[41] 13 (12.54%) Estimate excluding likely proportion of NI-born (see Note 1): 12 (11.52%)	9.8-14.5
What is your best guess for how many were born **outside the United Kingdom (UK), European Union (EU) or North America?**	**Census 2022 (Table F5084)** 7 (6.92%) **LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 1.2, Table 1.2)** Proportion born in Other Europe, Africa, Asia, Rest of World: [42] **9 (9.15%)**	4.9-11.2
You said X in every 100 people in Ireland were born outside of Ireland. What is your best guess for how many are **men?**	**LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 1.2, Table 1.4)** 48 (47.9%)	45.9-49.9
You said X in every 100 people in Ireland were born outside of Ireland. What is your best guess for how many are **women?**	**LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 1.2, Table 1.4)** 52 (52.1%)	50.1-54.1
Out of every 100 immigrants since 2022, what is your best guess for how many were **born in the UK, EU or North America?**	**CSO Population and Migration Estimates (Table PEA24)** Immigrants from 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2024 with citizenship in UK or EU (excluding immigration of Irish citizens) (see Note 2): 27 (27.38%)	25.4-29.4
Out of every 100 immigrants **since 2022,** what is your best guess for how many were **born in the UK, EU or North America?**	**CSO Population and Migration Estimates (Table PEA24)** Immigrants from 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2024 with citizenship in UK or EU (excluding emigration of Irish citizens): 73 (72.26%)	71.3-75.3

Source: Indicated by cell.

41 Includes: Australia, Bermuda, Canada, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna.

42 The LFS does not survey anyone living in communal accommodation, such as Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection. However, this should be accounted for in estimates of population proportions because the CSO weight the LFS to agree with total population estimates (that include communal accommodation) broken down by demographic factors including nationality. For further information, please see Appendix II, McGinnity et al. (2025).

A set of questions in the survey focus on the proportion of migrants who arrived in Ireland for specific reasons in the period 2022 to early 2025. The questions focused on easy-to-understand categories (from Ukraine; as a refugee/asylum seeker; to join family members; for work or education) which do not precisely correspond to statistical or administrative categories. Also, these categories were not treated as exhaustive: respondents did not have to ensure their estimates for each category added up to 100 people in total, instead the remainder were assumed to be their estimate for an 'Other' category.

To create accurate estimates for this section, we start with the Eurostat 'migr_resfirst' dataset, which provides information on first residence permits for the period 2022 to 2024. This provides most of the information for our estimates, such as the absolute number who arrived for employment, family and education reasons.

The Other Reasons category includes asylum seekers who got various forms of recognition (including refugee, subsidiary protection, or humanitarian status), but not asylum seekers who were not recognised or who left before being recognised. As the question refers to both refugees and asylum seekers, we instead draw on administrative data from the Department of Justice on the number of international protection applicants across the period 2022-2024. To avoid counting individuals twice (once as international protection applicants and again as recipients of a permit in the 'Other reasons' category), we subtract the number of people with refugee, subsidiary protection, and humanitarian status from the 'Other reasons' category, using Eurostat's 'migr_resother' table. This also leaves us with an estimate for the absolute number of individuals who arrived for 'Other reasons'.

Finally, the 'migr_resfirst' and 'migr_resother' datasets do not include Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (migrants from Ukraine after the Russian invasion in 2022). We use administrative data on the number of PPSNs allocated to Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection over the period (CSO Table UA07) to get an estimate for the absolute number of Ukrainians who arrived in the period.

Finally, we sum all the figures for each category and use this figure as the denominator for the statistics in this section.

TABLE A.2 MOTIVATION FOR MIGRATION

	Family	Education and Employment	Other (excl. asylum)	Refugee or asylum	BoTPs
Source	Eurostat, migr_resfirst	Eurostat, migr_resfirst	Eurostat, migr_resfirst and Figure 1.6 – McGinnity et al. (2025)	Figure 1.6 – McGinnity et al. (2025)	CSO Table UA07
Number	12,652	182,267	44,402	45,489	111,170
Proportion	3.2%	46.0%	11.2%	11.5%	28.1%
Reasonable range	1.2-5.2	44-48	9.2-13.2	9.5-13.5	26.1-30.1

Source: Indicated by cell.

Official estimates for questions on emigration, employment, education, and housing are drawn from the CSO Population and Migration Estimates, analysis of the LFS by McGinnity et al. (2025).

TABLE A.3 EMIGRATION, EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND HOUSING

Question	Accurate statistics	Reasonable range
Emigration		
Out of every 100 people who left Ireland to live somewhere else, how many do you think are **Irish (and born on the island of Ireland)**?	**CSO Population and Migration Estimates (Table PEA23)** Emigrants from 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2024 with Irish citizenship (see Note 2): 49 (48.7%)	**46.7-50.7**
Now, of the remaining X people who emigrated, how many do you think were born in the **UK, EU or North America**?	**CSO Population and Migration Estimates (Table PEA23)** Emigrants from 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2024 with citizenship in the EU/UK (see Note 2): 25 (24.5%)	22.5-26.5
Now, of the remaining X people who emigrated, how many do you think were born outside the **UK, EU or North America**?	**CSO Population and Migration Estimates (Table PEA23)** Emigrants from 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2024 with non-EU/UK citizenship (see Note 2): 26 (26.8%)	24.8-28.8
Employment		
Out of every 100 working-age people born in Ireland, what is your best guess for how many are currently employed?	**LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 2.1)** Proportion of those aged 15-64 and born in the Republic of Ireland who are employed (see Note 1): 73 (72.7%)	70.7-74.7
Out of every 100 working-age people born **outside of Ireland** and living in Ireland, what is your best guess for how many are **currently employed**?	**LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 2.1)** Proportion of those aged 15-64 and born outside the Republic of Ireland who are employed (see Note 1): 77 (76.8%)	74.8-78.8
		Contd.

TABLE A.3 CONTD.

Question	Accurate statistics	Reasonable range
Education		
Out of every 100 working-age people born **in Ireland**, what is your best guess for how many have a **college/university degree**?	**LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 3.1)** Proportion of those aged 15-64 and born in the Republic of Ireland who have third-level education: 42 (42.2%)	40.2-44.2
	Proportion of those aged 15-64 and born outside the Republic of Ireland who have third-level education (see Note 1): 59 (58.5%)	56.5-60.5
Housing		
Out of every 100 households where the head of the household was **born outside Ireland**, and living in Ireland, what is your best guess for how many are in **local authority housing** (i.e. council/social housing)?	**LFS 2024 Q1 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 4.4)** Proportion of those born in the Republic of Ireland who live in social housing (see Note 1): 6 (6.1%)	4.1-8.1
	Proportion of those born in the Republic of Ireland who live in social housing (see Note 1): 9 (9.2%)	7.2-11.2

Source: Indicated by cell.

Prison statistics

The following statistics are from the Irish Prison Services yearly statistics.[43] The latest information available is from 2023 and provides committals to prison by citizenship group.

TABLE A.4 PRISONER STATUS BY NATIONALITY

Question	Accurate statistics	Reasonable range
Out of every 100 prisoners in Ireland, what is your best guess for how many are **not Irish**?	**Irish Prison Service Yearly Statistics, 2023** Proportion of prisoners committed with non-Irish citizenship: 21 (20.7%)	18.7-22.7
What is your best guess for how many are from **outside of the UK, EU and North America**?	**Irish Prison Service Yearly Statistics, 2023** Proportion of prisoners committed with citizenship outside the UK, EU, and North America: 8 (7.7%)	5.7-9.7
Out of every 100 prisoners in Ireland, what is your best guess for how many are **Irish**?	**Irish Prison Service Yearly Statistics, 2023** Proportion of prisoners committed with Irish citizenship: 79 (79.3%)	77.3-81.3
What is your best guess for how many **non-Irish prisoners** are from **outside of the UK, EU or North America**?	**Irish Prison Service Yearly Statistics 2023** Proportion of prisoners with non-Irish citizenship who have citizenship outside the UK, EU, or North America: 37 (37.3%)	35.3-39.3

Source: Indicated by cell.

[43] These statistics can be accessed here: https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/yearly-statistics/.

Note 1:

Several questions ask respondents to estimate how many people in Ireland are born or are not born on the island of Ireland. However, the most up-to-date statistics on this topic are from the Labour Force Survey, which categorises all those born in Northern Ireland as 'UK-born', along with those born in Great Britain. To assess the degree to which the exclusion of Northern Irish-born from the Irish-born may influence our estimation of the reasonable range of estimates, we turn to Census data. In Census 2022, 21.36 per cent of the UK-born population was born in Northern Ireland. According to the LFS, in Q1 2024 around 4.75 per cent of the population was born in the UK. If we assume the ratio of NI-born to GB-born residents remains roughly similar, then we can estimate that around 1.01 per cent of residents were Irish born in Q1 2024. A difference of a single percentage point is well within the range we consider to be an accurate estimate, meaning that its exclusion from the official estimate is irrelevant to an analysis of respondent estimation accuracy.

Note 2:

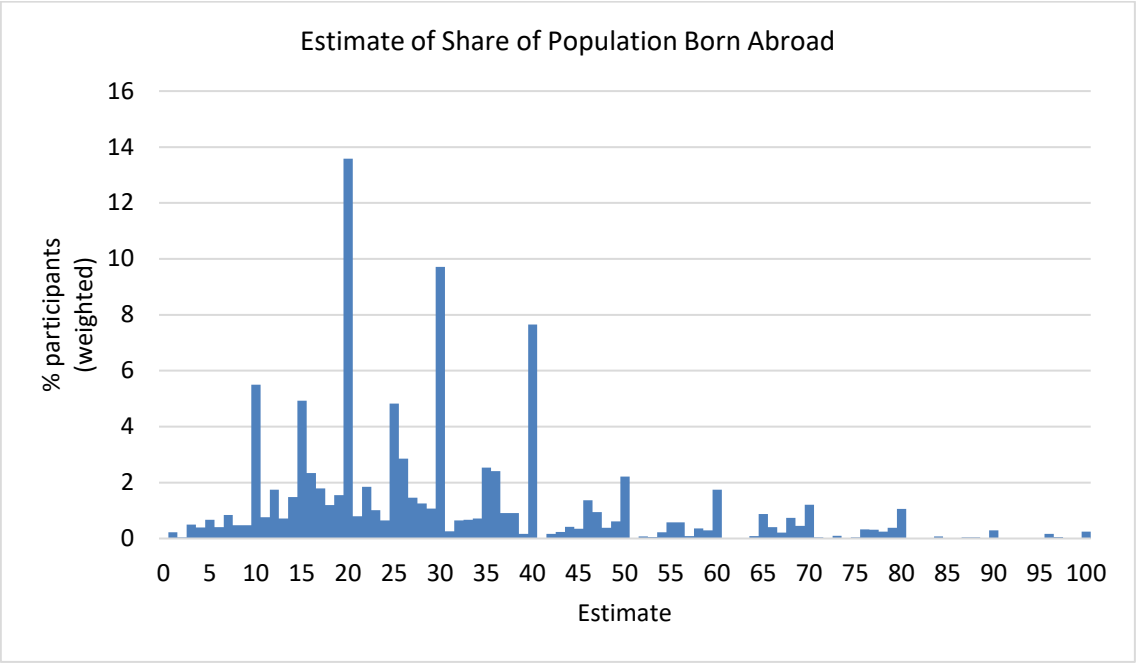
There are two caveats for the official estimates for these questions First, the CSO does not publish tables on place of birth in the relevant series, instead providing data on citizenship. However, we can assume the difference between place of birth and citizenship estimates is very small considering that the questions and estimates refer to migrants since 2022. Second, these tables also do not distinguish North America, meaning for questions relating to migrants from the UK, EU, and North America, we rely on the estimate of those from the UK and EU alone. However, the North American population is quite small in Ireland. Statistics on those born in North America, Australia, and Oceania show that they represent 1.11 per cent of all those born abroad, a proportion which has not changed substantially across 2022-24 (McGinnity et al., 2025, Table 1.2).

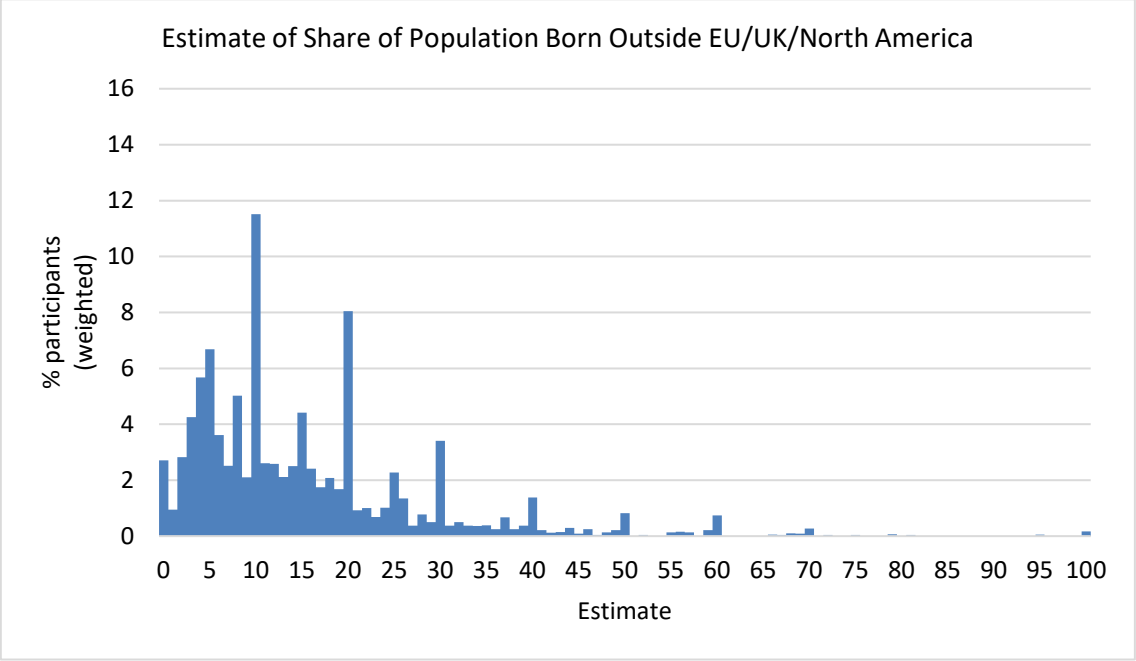
APPENDIX III

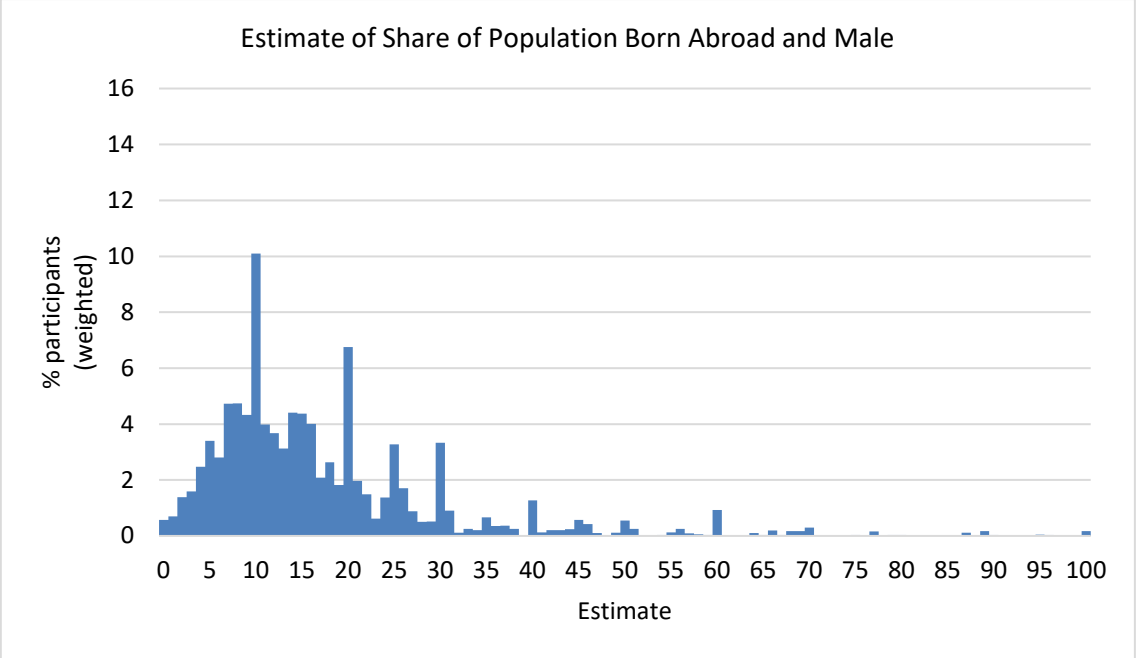
Distributions of participant guesses

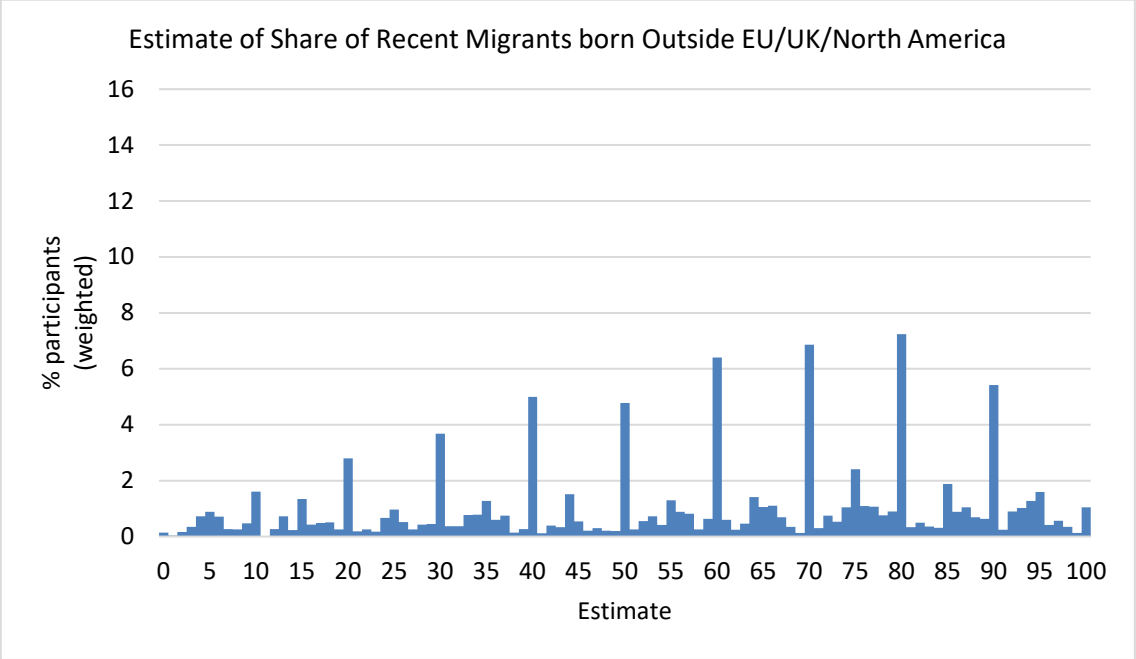
Figure A.2 presents the distribution of participant guesses to question on the size of the migrant population, their region of origin, gender and the region of origin of recent migrants.

FIGURE A.2 DISTRIBUTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS GUESSES: MIGRANT POPULATION SIZE, REGION, GENDER AND RECENT MIGRATION









Source: Authors' analysis.

APPENDIX IV

Socio-demographic predictors of accuracy

Table A.5 presents multinomial logistic regression models predicting underestimation and overestimation of the size of the migrant population and the population born outside the EU, UK and North America, with 'accurate' as the base outcome, and a Poisson regression predicting misperception scores.

TABLE A.5 REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING MISPERCEPTIONS

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3
Relevant Statistic	**Total population born abroad**			**Total population born outside EU, UK and North America**			**Misperception Score**
Outcome (vs. Accurate)	**Under-estimate**	**Over-estimate**	**Large Over-estimate**	**Under-estimate**	**Over-estimate**	**Large Over-estimate**	**n/a**
Man	0.30*	-0.34**	-1.13***	0.08	-0.35*	-0.46**	-0.11**
(*ref: woman*)	(0.182)	(0.157)	(0.217)	(0.183)	(0.154)	(0.177)	(0.035)
Age (*ref: 18 to 39 years)*							
40 to 59 years	0.37*	-0.25	-0.34	0.28	-0.25	-0.23	0.01
	(0.215)	(0.189)	(0.240)	(0.213)	(0.185)	(0.211)	(0.042)
60+ years	0.20	-0.33	-0.93**	-0.48*	-0.46**	-0.44*	0.02
	(0.25)	(0.212)	(0.293)	(0.263)	(0.206)	(0.234)	(0.047)
Degree or above	0.01	-0.55**	-1.19***	-0.09	-0.45**	-0.93***	-0.09**
(*ref: below degree*)	(0.190)	(0.169)	(0.237)	(0.193)	(0.166)	(0.199)	(0.038)
Urban	-0.10	-0.03	0.12	0.10	0.21	0.17	-0.01
(ref: Rural)	(0.194)	(0.171)	(0.222)	(0.199)	(0.168)	(0.192)	(0.038)
Region (*ref*: Dublin)							
Rest of Leinster	0.13	0.44*	0.57*	-0.07	0.52*	0.25	0.05
	(0.275)	(0.245)	(0.339)	(0.284)	(0.249)	(0.270)	(0.056)
Munster	0.04	0.34	0.42	0.06	0.36	-0.14	0.02
	(0.287)	(0.256)	(0.359)	(0.292)	(0.262)	(0.295)	(0.059)
Connacht-Ulster	-0.02	0.15	0.78*	-0.10	0.19	0.20	0.07
	(0.319)	(0.284)	(0.373)	(0.326)	(0.290)	(0.309)	(0.06)
Born in Ireland	0.42*	-0.10	-0.39	0.31	0.12	-0.13	-0.02
(ref: Born Abroad)	(0.250)	(0.203)	(0.254)	(0.247)	(0.201)	(0.218)	(0.044)
Constant	-0.81	0.88**	0.46	-1.11**	-0.12	-0.13	1.10***
	(0.419)	(0.354)	(0.461)	(0.414)	(0.201)	(0.218)	(0.077)
Obs.		1,141			1,110		1,200
R^2		0.04			0.02		0.01

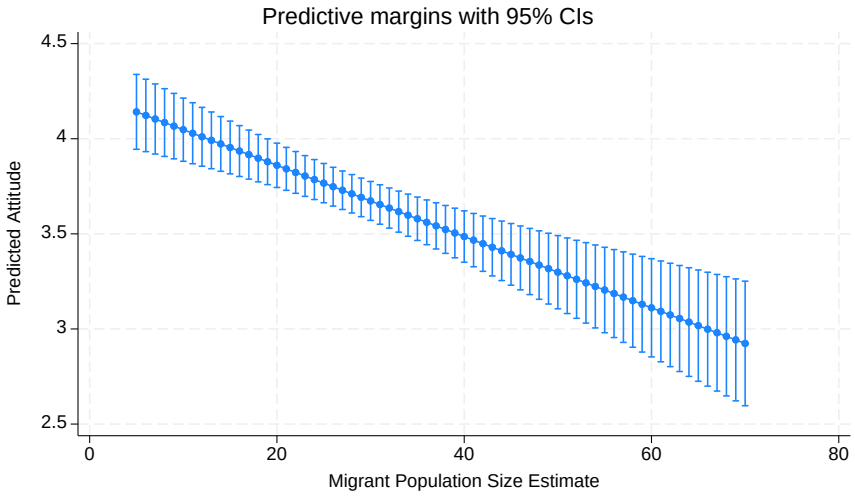
Source: Authors' analysis.

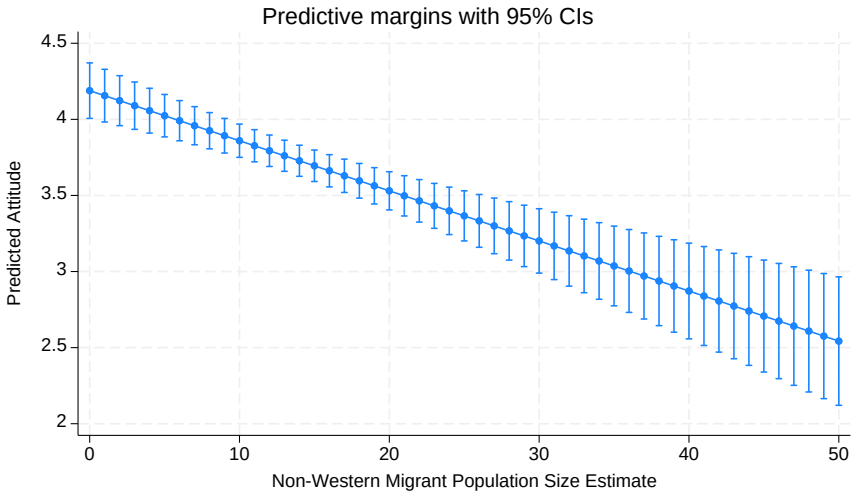
Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Models 1 and 2 are multinomial regressions and the dependent variable for both is a categorical variable for underestimation, accuracy, overestimation or large overestimation, with accuracy as the base outcome. The highest 5 per cent of estimates are excluded from both models. Model 3 is a Poisson regression model of the misperception score and retains the full sample.

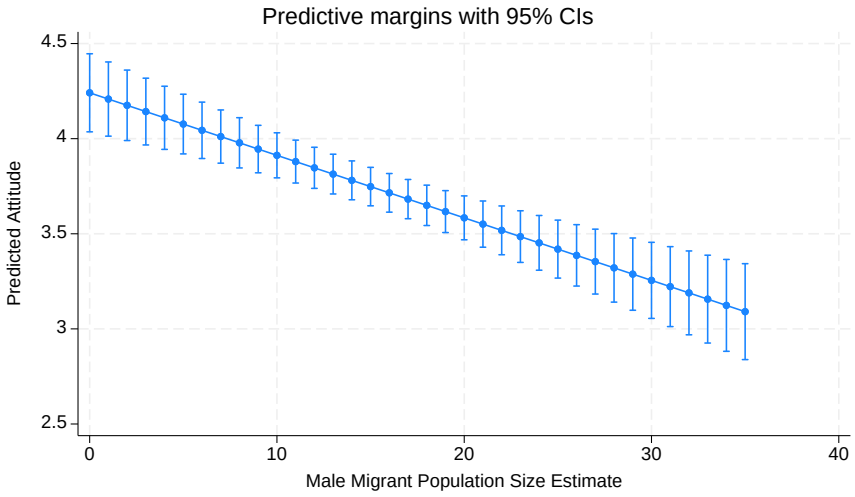
APPENDIX V

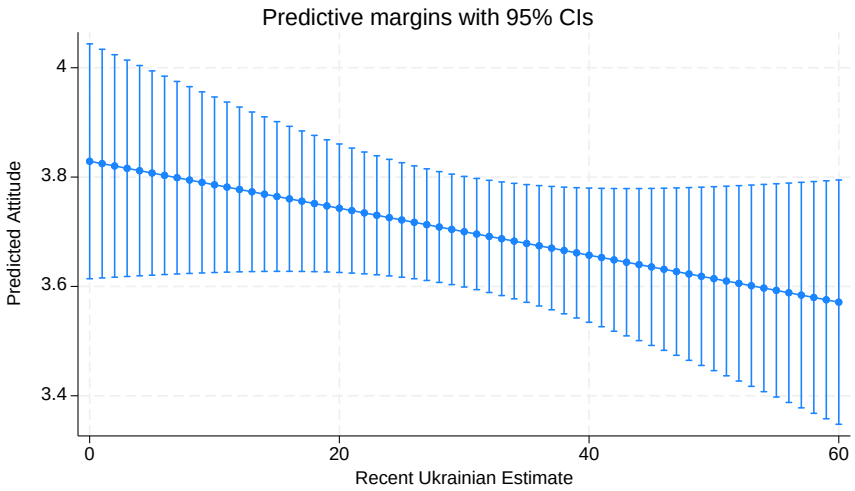
Model predicted margins

FIGURE A.3 PREDICTED MARGINS FROM REGRESSION MODELS IN TABLES 3.2-3.8








Predictive margins with 95% CIs
Predicted Attitude
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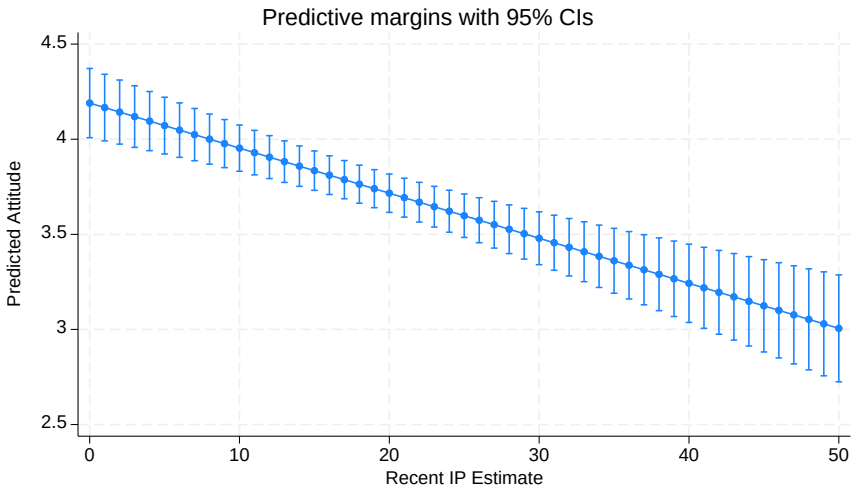
3.8
3.6
3.4
0
20
40
60
Recent Ukrainian Estimate


Predictive margins with 95% CIs
Predicted Attitude
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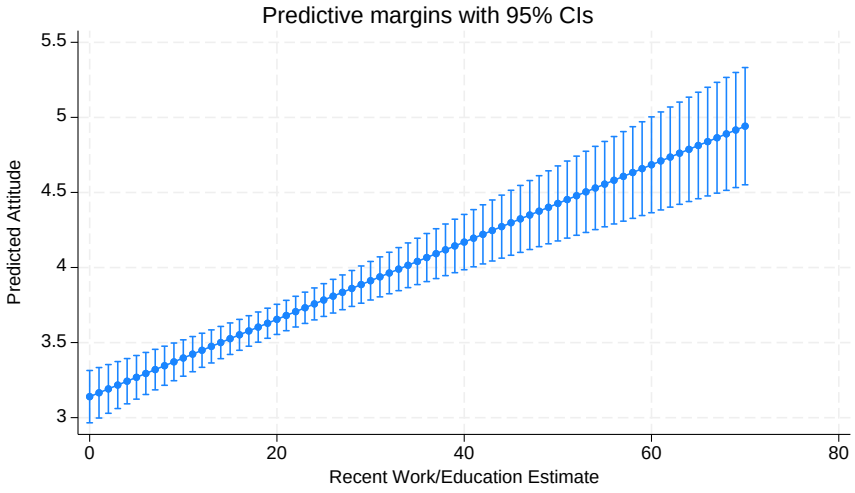
4
3.5
3
2.5
0
10
20
30
40
50
Recent IP Estimate


Predictive margins with 95% CIs
Predicted Attitude
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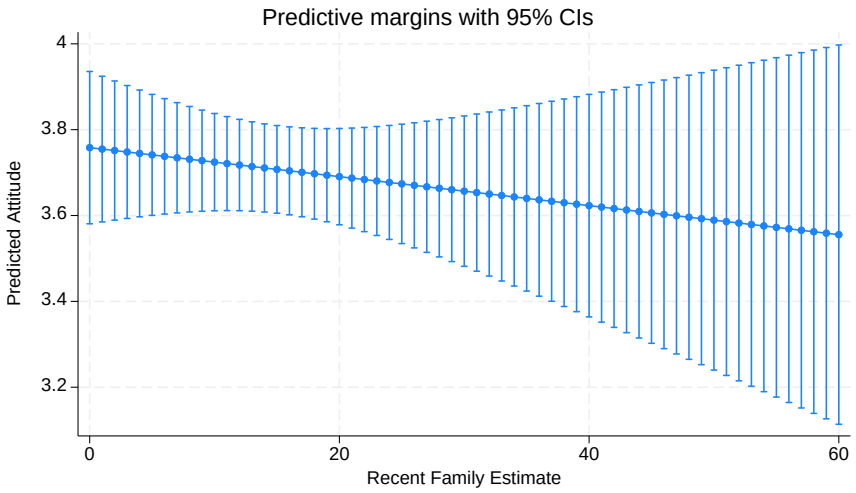
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
0
20
40
60
80
Recent Work/Education Estimate


Predictive margins with 95% CIs
Predicted Attitude
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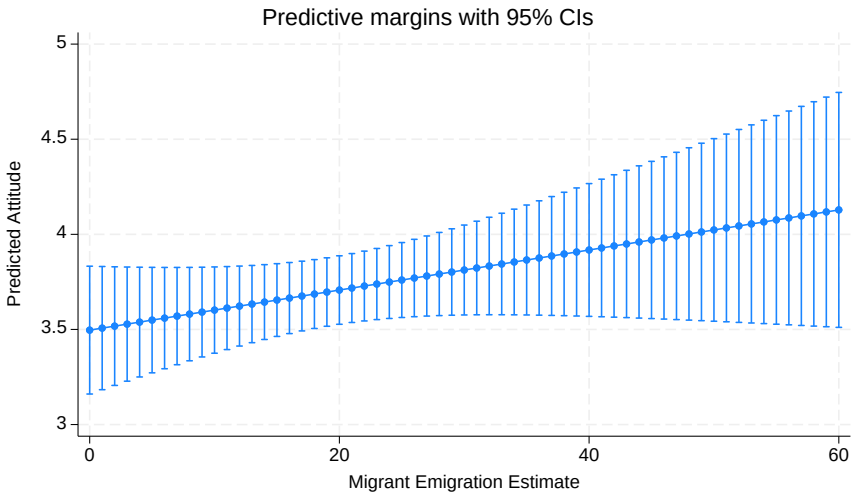
3.6
3.4
3.2
0
20
40
60
Recent Family Estimate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Predicted Attitude
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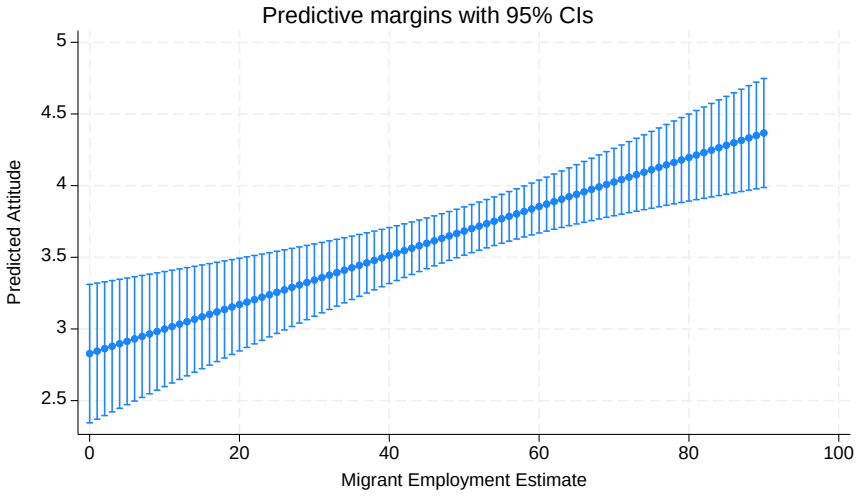
4.5
4
3.5
3
0
20
40
60
Migrant Emigration Estimate


Predictive margins with 95% CIs
Predicted Attitude
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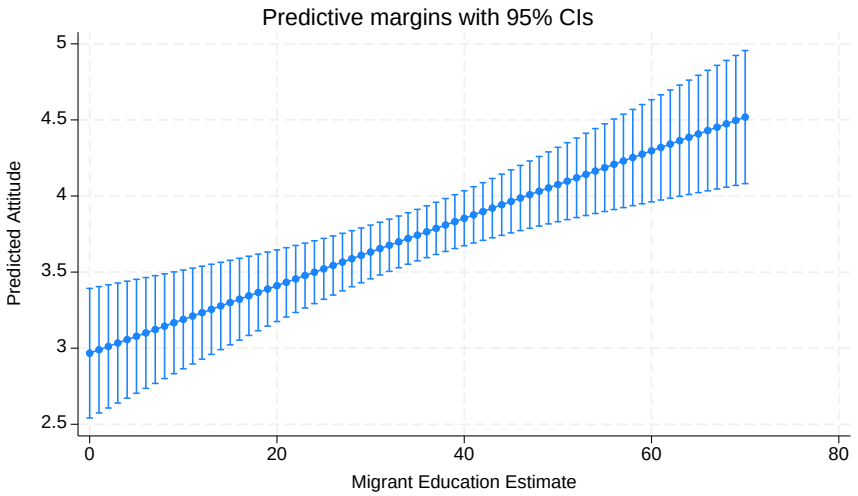
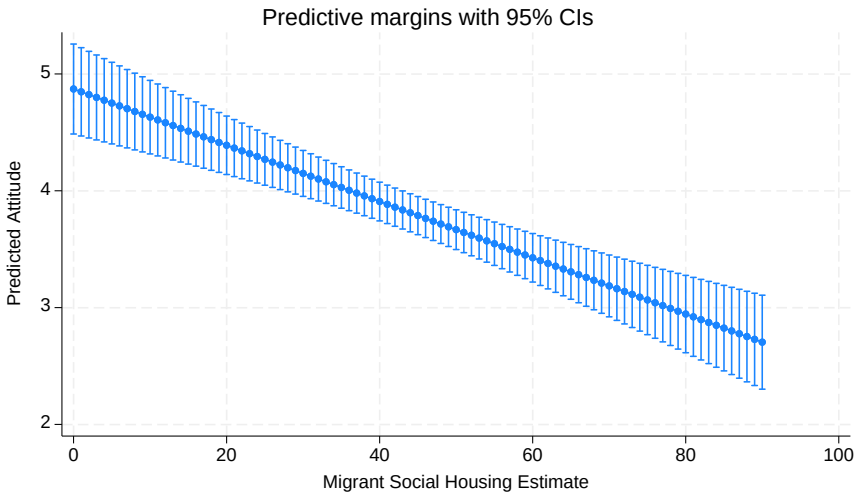
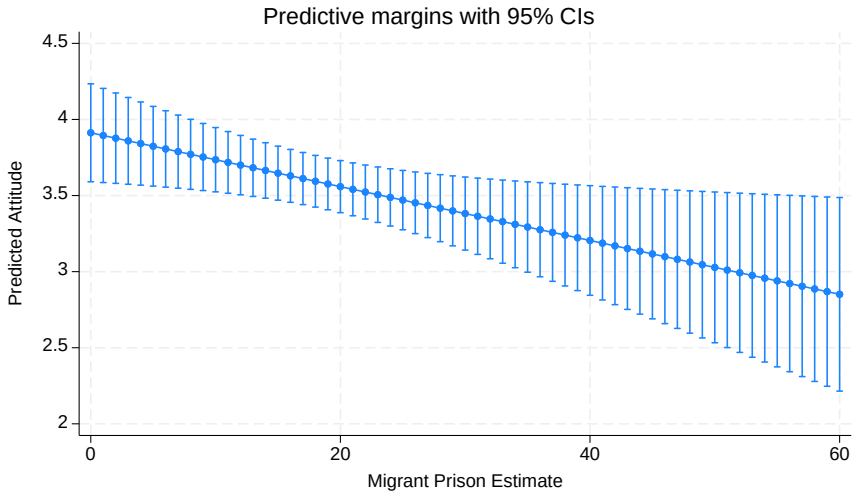
3.5
3
2.5
0
20
40
60
80
100
Migrant Employment Estimate







Source: Authors' analysis.
Note: IP refers to international protection.

APPENDIX VI

Ordinal logistic regression models

TABLE A.6 ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING IMMIGRATION ATTITUDE FROM PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRANT CHARACTERISTICS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Relevant Statistic	**Proportion of population born outside EU, UK and North America**	**Share of recent residence applications for international protection**	**Share of recent residence applications for work/education**
Participant Estimate	-0.04	-0.02***	0.02***
	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Question Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Socio-Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cut 1	-1.55	-1.83	-0.83
	(0.214)	(0.248)	(0.227)
Cut 2	-0.90	-1.16	-0.17
	(0.238)	(0.244)	(0.225)
Cut 3	-0.25	-0.51	0.48
	(0.236)	(0.241)	(0.226)
Cut 4	0.78	0.50	1.47
	(0.237)	(0.241)	(0.229)
Cut 5	1.82	1.58	2.54
	(0.243)	(0.247)	(0.238)
Cut 6	2.81	2.57	3.58
	(0.260)	(0.260)	(0.256)
Obs.	1,110	1,145	1,127
R^2	0.03	0.03	0.03

Source: Authors' analysis.

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. The dependent variable is the participant's response to the seven-point rating scale on their attitude to immigration. Participant estimate refers to the participant's response to the question highlighted in the 'Relevant Statistic' row and is included as a continuous variable. Socio-demographic controls include age, gender, educational attainment, urban/rural residence and region.

APPENDIX VII

Correlation matrices

Table A.7 presents the correlation matrix between predictor variables used in Section 3.2.

TABLE A.7 CORRELATION MATRIX FOR FULL MODEL PREDICTORS

	(1) Income	(2) Deprivation	(3) Difficulty Making Ends Meet	(4) Feels Less Well-off	(5) Life was Better in Past	(6) Satisfied with Life	(7) Future Optimism	(8) Trusts Others	(9) Right Wing	(10) Political Efficacy	(11) Contact Frequency
(1)	1										
(2)	-.35***	1									
(3)	-.36***	.588***	1								
(4)	-.383***	.475***	.502***	1							
(5)	-.041	.12***	.149***	.109***	1						
(6)	-.27***	.584***	.554***	.493***	.113***	1					
(7)	.151***	-.376***	-.397***	-.414***	-.092**	-.573***	1				
(8)	.096**	-.265***	-.252***	-.252***	-.028	-.392***	.461***	1			
(9)	-.025	-.047	-.024	-.048*	.096**	-.072**	.146***	-.025	1		
(10)	.159***	-.307***	-.302***	-.327***	-.09**	-.382***	.477***	.408***	.046	1	
(11)	.191***	-.084**	-.064**	-.049*	.007	-.04	.013	.058**	-.066**	.049**	1

Source: Authors' analysis.
Note: *$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$.

Table A.8 presents the correlation matrix between issues cited in the open text question.

TABLE A.8 CORRELATION MATRIX BETWEEN MAIN NATIONAL ISSUES

	(1) Immigration	(2) Anti-Immigrant Sentiment	(3) Housing	(4) Cost-of-Living	(5) Other Economy	(6) Health	(7) Crime	(8) Climate	(9) Government	(10) Infrastructure	(11) Education
(1)	1										
(2)	-.23***	1.00									
(3)	-.13***	-.01	1.00								
(4)	-.11***	-.06**	-.08**	1.00							
(5)	-.05*	.04	-.03	-.07**	1.00						
(6)	-.09**	-.12***	.00	-.24***	-.08**	1.00					
(7)	.01	-.08**	-.13***	-.14***	-.06**	-.10**	1.00				
(8)	-.13***	-.04	-.05*	-.12***	-.01	-.08**	-.08**	1.00			
(9)	.06**	.01	-.12***	-.08**	.02	-.11***	-.02	-.06**	1.00		
(10)	-.09**	-.04	-.01	-.04	-.01	-.06**	-.06**	.01	-.02	1.00	
(11)	-.06**	.02	-.06*	-.06**	-.04	-.01	-.03	-.03	-.01	.03	1.00

Source: Authors' analysis.
Note: *$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$.

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