Who deserves citizenship? Evaluating the preferences of British nationals using a choice-based conjoint experiment

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Introduction

Citizenship is the institution that delineates the boundaries of the political community. It grants rights and establishes who belongs to the national membership. Governments establish which and how many immigrants become citizens via naturalisation policies. By determining who becomes a citizen these policies embrace a clear conceptualisation of what it means to be a national and to have the same rights as native citizens. As of the early 2000s in Britain applicants need to demonstrate sufficient English proficiency, as well as knowledge of British history and values through the 'Life in the UK' test. The UK government introduced these civic integration policies as part of a wider agenda aimed at refocusing on the importance of active citizenship for all nationals for the sake of social cohesion (MacGregor and Bailey 2012). In 2002 citizenship studies became part of the national school curriculum. These policies were accompanied by an attempt to redefine British national identity around liberal values embodied by British institutions such as the National Health System (Sales 2010). The government's primary intent was to promote a uniform overarching British sense of belonging into which immigrants have to assimilate by overcoming deficiencies, such as not speaking English fluently (Travis 2001). However, these new policies also aimed to curb anxieties about immigration in the aftermath of disruptive events such as the Twin Towers terrorist attack in 2001 (Byrne 2017). The continuous rise in fees imposed on applicants is another expedient to select citizens based on their financial means (Grierson and Marsh 2018).

Scholars have questioned the legitimacy of these policies and have uncovered the discourses around British nationality they embody (Sales 2010). However, we do not know whether these policies reflect the preference of the general population. Employing an innovative experimental design, this paper gives a unique insight into what current British citizens regard as legitimate criteria for extending citizenship to immigrants and how many immigrants people are willing to give naturalisation to.

An extensive literature has identified the extent and correlates of anti- and pro-immigrant attitudes. Nonetheless, the factors that shape attitudes to immigrants may work differently from those that shape preferences for access to citizenship. Citizenship is a more demanding and definitive form of inclusion than mere entry into the country. It gives people crucial rights on par of native citizens, such as freedom of movement and the right to vote. It is also a permanent and official status that is typically irrevocable. The study of preferences over

citizenship goes beyond attitudes towards immigrants by investigating who people are willing to give equal rights to. Moreover, citizenship is a marker of national identity. People tend to conflate citizenship with nationality and use the two terms interchangeably (Simonsen 2017). By studying people's preferences over citizenship we also get insight into the popular understanding of British national identity. However, citizenship is also a less salient object of political debate compared to attitudes towards immigrants. People may view it as more of a formality than entry into the country and therefore as less consequential.

This study has important policy implications. If popular judgments over who and how many immigrants are entitled to citizenship are not in line with current policies, we have reason to interrogate the legitimacy of these policies, especially in light of the motivation behind these policies to appease people's preoccupation with immigration. If popular judgments are in line with current policies, we can use this evidence to reflect and question the discourse and conceptualisation of Britishness at the heart of policy and attitudes.

In the next section I review the literature on attitudes towards immigrants as a starting point for understanding preferences for citizenship and I discuss differences with the limited literature on views on citizenship to date. I then outline key turning points in the recent evolution of citizenship policy in the UK. In the third section, I describe the data, the experimental design and the method, I employ. I then present the findings, which I discuss in the final section of the paper.

Background

Mechanisms behind attitudes towards immigrants

Individual-level threat

There is limited evidence on native populations' preferences for granting citizenship to applicant immigrants. I therefore make use of the rich literature on attitudes towards immigrants to guide me in researching the subject in a British context, to design my study and to shape my expectations for the findings.

Research on attitudes towards immigrants has uncovered several mechanisms that account for hostile sentiments. At the individual-level, negative attitudes stem from the threat posed by economic competition if the in-group feels it is in conflict with the out-group over limited resources. According to economic competition theories, people should be unfavourably disposed toward immigrants with a similar skill set who are in a position to compete with them in the labour market and to push down their wages (Mayda 2006). The theories also contend that poorer people feel in competition with immigrants in access to public services and social assistance, which they are more likely to need compared to richer native residents, suggesting that those who are less susceptible to economic threats have more positive attitudes. Evidence for the USA and for Europe, including the UK, suggests that less skilled workers and low educated individuals prefer more restricted immigration policies than highly skilled workers and more highly educated individuals (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Harell et al. 2012; Lewis 2005; Saggar 2003a; Scheve and Slaughter 2001).

However, other studies for the USA and the UK have found evidence of a consensus over attitudes towards immigrants, independently of socio-economic status (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; McLaren and Johnson 2007). These findings question the role of self-interest and individual economic competition as a driver of negative sentiments towards immigrants.

Group level threat

Negative attitudes do not involve only native citizens who are in direct competition with immigrants and are directly threatened by them. People may perceive immigrants as threatening, even if the threat only concerns them indirectly, by affecting the group as a whole, the economy and the dominant culture. Financially, this may be the case when people perceive immigrants as an added burden on services and to aggravate the tax burden (Citrin et al. 2006; Fennelly and Federico 2008). Empirical studies for North America (Burns and Gimpel 2006; Citrin et al. 2006; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Harell et al. 2012; Ilias, Fennelly, and Federico 2008; Wilson 2012) and Europe (Scheepers, Mérove, and Coenders 2002) conclude that the effect of the perception of personal threat, motivated by self-interest, is negligible compared to that of collective burden, even across political ideologies (Neiman, Johnson, and Bowler 2006).

Perception of threat is cultural when hostility is directed towards immigrants because they are different from the majority along racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural lines. Such 'different' immigrants are perceived as threatening because their customs and values may permeate into the majority culture, or even take it over, by changing it irreversibly. It follows that the perception of threat relates to those immigrants who are deemed different in a negative way (Fennelly and Federico 2008; Gibson and Hamilton 2011). In the UK Muslim immigrants in particular are associated with a threatening set of values and customs (Field 2007; McLaren and Johnson 2007). A sense of threat may also arise from fear that immigration flows of non-white immigrants will later result in a non-white majority population. From an analysis of British Social Attitudes survey data between 1983 and 1996 Ford (2011) finds that there is an ethnic hierarchy, in which white immigrants are largely preferred to non-white ones. However, it is difficult to separate out what is perceived as cultural threat in relation to the effect of different cultures versus ethnicities or mere skin colour and to draw conclusions about what characteristic related to country of origin led to the finding. More recent data reveal that British people prefer Australians immigrants to Nigerians and French by a large margin (Blinder and Richards 2018), suggesting that differences between out-groups are not salient unless the out-group is very similar to the in-group.

The threat to cultural diversity and of erosion of national identity might also explain why people with lower levels of educational attainment are more averse to immigration than better educated. It is not obvious that the perception of economic competition is at the heart of the relationship between education and negative sentiments towards immigrants. In comparison with low educated people, better educated individuals have better economic knowledge and are not only more accepting of ethnic and racial diversity, but may even prefer it (Chandler

and Tsai 2001; Haubert and Fussell 2006). However, some have questioned whether education changes attitudes or, whether it merely teaches what is socially acceptable (Janus 2010), which other research has shown to be a key influencer of attitudes towards immigrants (Blinder, Ford, and Ivarsflaten 2013).

Deservingness

The other mechanism that explains hostility towards immigrants, beyond direct economic competition and threat, is perceptions of different levels of deservingness. People are more sympathetic towards immigrants whom they believe deserve to be in the country. Evidence that people form attitudes based on perceptions of deservingness mostly relates to welfare state support (Hasenfeld and Rafferty 1989; Raven, Achterberg, and Van Der Veen 2015). This literature is useful for our understanding of attitudes towards immigrants because it shows that people justify their preferences on grounds of fairness and deservingness, rather than self-interest alone. Deservingness is a multidimensional concept that the literature defines using five criteria: perceived level of need, degree of responsibility and control over the situation of need, a perceived common identity, compliance and reciprocity (Raven, Achterberg, and Van Der Veen 2015; Spencer 2016). Perceived common identity is a particularly relevant criterion for this study. It refers to individuals recognising immigrants as an outgroup and that driving negative sentiments towards them. If people are upset that immigrants steal jobs from the native population, that they use public services and benefit from welfare payments, they are making a judgment about immigrants not deserving the jobs and services the native population has a claim on first. Tellingly, McLaren and Johnson (2007), and Dustman and Preston (2007) find that the more strongly respondents believe immigrants steal jobs from the British-born and are dependent on state support, the stronger they feel about curbing immigration. Moreover, European, including British, and American evidence shows that when social assistance is easier to attain, inimical positions are stronger, suggesting that apprehension about entitlement to social assistance influences attitudes towards immigration (Dustmann and Preston 2007; Facchini and Mayda 2009; Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007).

Deservingness also explains the variation in levels of hostility towards different groups of immigrants. Reciprocity is the key relevant dimension of deservingness by which people make related judgments. To be reciprocal means having earned support, for example by demonstrating effort and willingness to integrate and to work (Reeskens and van der Meer 2019). For example, Hopkins's (2011) experiment on the effect of command of English on attitudes towards immigrants reveals that English fluency does not matter, but foreign accents do and positively so, perhaps because accents signal that someone for whom English is not mother-tongue made an effort to integrate. However, perception of willingness to integrate and compatibility with the dominant culture is often not based on knowledge of individual immigrants, but rather on prejudices about sub-groups (Harell et al. 2012).

Preferences for citizenship

Research has uncovered mechanisms of economic competition, threat and deservingness in relation to questions related to the number and type of immigrants people are comfortable with in their home country. Although I would expect similar mechanisms to play out in the formation of preferences for awarding citizenship, there might be differences. Differences between immigration and naturalisation might result from the tight link between citizenship and national identity; for many it is an important social identity (Heath and Roberts 2008). Citizenship is the main marker of political belonging, who belongs in the community. Moreover, citizenship implies a degree of permanence and irreversibility that the immigration related questions used to test preferred attitudes do not. Finally, citizenship provides key rights, the right to vote in general elections and of free movement. All citizens have equal rights and equal claims, independently of whether they have been citizens since birth. It follows that people may be particularly selective in their admission of outsiders not only to their territory, but also to their national group. Harell et al. (2012) for the USA and Canada compare their respondents' attitudes towards immigrants to their preferences over citizenship applications. They find that, although the same mechanisms were at work, effects were stronger with respect to people's preferences over immigrants' naturalisation applications, perhaps indicating that nationals care more about citizenship than immigration.

Variation in preferences by socio-economic status might be even bigger than in the broader immigration literature on attitudes. Research in the UK has found that in comparison to the low educated, the most highly educated people are less attached to their national British identity (Georgiadis and Manning 2013; Manning and Roy 2010; Nandi and Platt 2015). This lower level of attachment to national identity might then translate into less investment in who belongs and who does not in the country compared to individuals who are more attached to their national identity. In addition, if people associate citizenship with a claim on welfare support on a par with native citizens, people of low socio-economic status may be particularly averse to immigrants who are most likely to claim benefits and use services; as posited by direct economic competition and group threat theory. Harrell et al. (2012) find that in the USA, but not in Canada, high income respondents approved a higher number of immigrants' applications on average than low income ones.

Three existing studies on preferences over awarding citizenship report conflicting evidence on the key mechanisms and resulting characteristics that drive these preferences. Harrell et al. (2012) find for Canada and the USA that, overall, preferred naturalisation applicants were high-skilled immigrants, but ethnic characteristics did not matter greatly. In contrast, Hainmueller and Hangartner (2013) found for Switzerland that country of origin was by far the most important predictor of approvals. Local residents were less likely to grant citizenship to applicants from Turkey and ex-Yugoslavia than other countries. Using a similar experimental design, Kobayashi et al. (2015) reached similar conclusions for Japan, where, among other factors such as skill level, country of origin mattered the most in the likelihood of awarding citizenship and translated into respondents viewing Korean workers more favourably than Chinese ones. The political context might lie at the heart of these contrasting

findings. Public opinion does not form in a vacuum, but mirrors policy design and political discourse (Mau 2003).

In order to understand how the mechanisms discussed above might play out in the UK case it is worth unpicking the narratives of deservingness, threat and national identity that define British citizenship policy and political discourse.

British citizenship

The race riots in the UK towns of Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in the summer of 2001 were a symbolic moment that pushed the British government to promote citizenship and social cohesion between ethnic groups (Cantle 2001). This was also when New Labour developed a political discourse that emphasised the conditions attached to social rights. Deservingness takes form in relation to how much immigrants contribute, both financially and civically, and how well they integrate within the majority culture. As with welfare to work policies, for which benefit recipients have to demonstrate effort in looking for work, the government formulated naturalisation as a privilege that had to be earned (MacGregor and Bailey 2012). The introduction of citizenship studies in British schools in 2002 and civic integration requirements for naturalisation in 2005 heralded this shift from passive citizenship, whereby citizens are recipients, to active citizenship, whereby citizens have to engage and participate in public life (Anderson 2011). Reforms to citizenship acquisition, which culminated in the 2009 Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act, explicitly defined the idea of earned citizenship.

Deservingness and threat are also tangible in the reframing and redefining of British identity, which remains exclusionary. Both Labour and Conservative governments have explicitly promoted democratic, liberal and tolerant values, referenced by the embodiment in institutions such as the NHS and the BBC. These have come to define Britishness, implicitly in juxtaposition to the assumed non-liberal values of other cultures (Blunkett 2002) and have been required by Ofsted to be taught in schools. The rise in Islamic extremism with the September 11th attacks in 2001 and the London bombing in 2007, and more recently adherents to the Islamic State in 2014, have posed the problem of competing loyalties of second generation British citizens, with the potential to threaten both the safety and the culture of the British people (Garbaye and Latour 2016). Since 2016, Europeans have also found themselves as protagonists in tales of exclusion. The Brexit referendum decision in 2016 to leave the EU signalled both a new wave of nationalism and of anti-immigration sentiments (Prosser, Mellon, and Green 2016).

The championed value of earned citizenship and the exclusionary nature of British identity are likely to influence and/or reflect people's preference formation and opinions over who belongs and who does not. I therefore expect the mechanism of deservingness based on the value of reciprocity and the mechanism of threat in relation to cultural diversity and safety to be particularly important in the construction of people's preferences regarding citizenship criteria. I expect respondents to be especially averse to unemployed and Muslim immigrants, who are the targeted groups of this political discourse.

Data and design

I employ a choice-based conjoint analysis design that is based on that of Hainmueller et al. (2014). Respondents are shown pairs of vignettes, in this case fictitious immigrant profiles, and are asked to choose whether to grant them citizenship or not. Each vignette is characterised by attributes I believe to affect whether the applicant is granted citizenship or not, for instance 'country of origin', 'gender', 'occupation'. Each attribute has several levels, for example 'gender' has two levels, 'man' and 'woman'.

The British public opinion and data company YouGov fielded my experiment through its UK Omnibus Survey, a high quality multipurpose online panel. In addition to the experimental responses the data includes information about characteristics of respondents.

YouGov selects its sample by recruiting respondents via strategic advertising and partnerships. It then selects a sub-sample based on how representative it is of socio-demographic characteristics of the British population. Only selected respondents can answer the survey. The data are also weighted using population totals from the Census, large scale probability surveys, results of the last general election and ONS population estimates to ensure representativeness. The experiment was fielded at the end of October 2018 to a sample of 1,648 adult (18+) respondents. However, at the point of analysis I restricted the sample to British citizens, giving a total sample of 1,597 respondents. A breakdown of key characteristics of sample respondents, how they are measured and sample frequencies is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondent characteristics

Characteristic	Level	N	Percentage
Brexit vote	Leave	6,920	50.2
	Remain	6,860	49.8
Age group	Under 29	2,490	15.6
	30-49	5,240	32.8
	Over 50	8,240	51.6
Gross household income	Poorest third	5,970	37.4
	Middle third	4,700	29.4
	Richest third	5,300	33.2
Education	No formal qualification/ GCSE certificate or equivalent[1]	4,800	31.2
	A levels or equivalent[2]	5,100	33.1
	Higher qualification or equivalent[3]	5,490	35.7

[1] Such as CSE grade 1.
[2] Such as the Scottish Higher Certificate.
[3] Such as a teaching diploma.

Ethnicity	White	14,660	92.1
	Non-white	1,340	7.9
Total		15,970	100

Each respondent was presented with the following introduction:

> "The next few pages will show you 5 pairs of profiles of working age (18-65) people who were not born in the UK and could submit applications to naturalise as British citizens.
>
> On the assumption that there is a limited number of naturalisations that can be granted every year, please choose to whom you want to grant citizenship. You may choose ONE, BOTH or NEITHER in each pair."

Each respondent was then shown five pair-wise comparisons and was asked to choose whether to grant citizenship or not to each profile. Profiles were shown in pairs to aid decision-making by giving a direct comparison. Each profile vignette was characterised by 8 attributes each with several possible levels (e.g. Christian/Muslim /No religion).

An example of an individual profile vignette is the following:

> This [**woman**] has lived in the UK for [**4 years**] [and has a **British parent**]. [She] is originally from [**Somalia**] [and entered] the country as a **refugee**. [She] [is a practising **Christian**]. [She] has a [**basic**] command of spoken English and [works as a **language teacher**].[4]

The resulting dataset contains 1,597 (individuals) x 5 (choice tasks) x 2 (profile vignettes) = 15,970 observations nested in 1,597 respondents.[5]

Choice of attributes

I characterise profiles with attributes that are likely to affect the probability of being given access to citizenship (see the earlier literature review). Table 2 presents the full list of attributes, their levels and frequencies, with the restrictions applied to the randomisation.

Firstly, I want to examine whether the main legal requirements for citizenship are relevant to lay people, namely British ancestry, length of residence and language proficiency. British ancestry allows individuals to apply to register as British without fulfilling the more stringent requirements for naturalisation. Although current naturalisation policy accepts only British

[4] Words in brackets are levels of attributes that were randomised for each profile vignette.

[5] There is no missing data.

parenthood as ancestry, I also use the presence of a British grandparent. Otherwise, everyone without British parenthood applying to naturalise has to have lived in the UK for at least five years. I use four levels of length of residence. I expect ancestry and length of residence to be influential attributes if mechanisms of group-level cultural threat and deservingness based on a common identity are at work. For English proficiency, I distinguish between a 'basic', 'good' and 'excellent' command of spoken English. Language command signals the willingness and effort put into participating both in the labour market and in British culture and life.

Country of origin can speak to many potential mechanisms. Three of these are particularly important and I analyse them directly. One of these mechanisms is whether the applicant has refugee status or not. On the one hand refugees may score highly on the deservingness scale as they are supposedly more vulnerable and entitled to help than the average immigrant (O'Rourke and Sinnott 2006). On the other, if people perceive them as taking advantage of resources such as welfare to the loss of natives, people may see them as less deserving. Refugees experience a different path to citizenship.

Religion is a cultural indicator that should signal different degrees of similarity to mainstream culture and potentially invoke negative attitudes (Field 2007; McLaren and Johnson 2007). I differentiate between Muslim, Christian and no religion.

Since some minority groups cluster in occupations, at the top and at the bottom of the UK's income ladder, it is important to estimate the effect of occupation separately from country of origin. A breakdown of most common occupations immigrants are employed in in the UK is shown in Table S1 in the Supplementary Material (SM). I chose a list of occupations to reflect different income levels and status. In descending order of income and status I distinguish between corporate manager, language teacher, IT professional, farmer and cleaner. I make a further distinction between jobs that people perceive as beneficial and valuable to society such as doctors, and those more likely to need benefit support such as being unemployed or a stay at home parent in order to investigate whether they elicit different feelings of deservingness based on reciprocity.

For country of origin, I chose countries that are likely to elicit clear preferences and reactions by signalling the importance of skin colour, and other stereotypes. I therefore chose countries that differ in how represented they are in the UK, in their cultural dis/similarity with the UK and in whether they are a majority white or non-white country. At time of writing, Europeans enjoy a preferential treatment in their access to rights in the UK. However, people who voted to leave the EU in the Brexit referendum care about immigration and sovereignty (Prosser, Mellon, and Green 2016). For this reason I separately distinguish Poland (which is the main EU immigration source country), Germany (which is particularly influential in the EU) and Italy (as a less contentious European state). These are also well represented nationalities in the UK (see Table S2 in the Supplementary Material). British citizens may favour Ireland and Australia because of their cultural similarity to the UK. They may also disfavour countries from poorer parts of the world because of preferences for immigrants from high-income countries (Ford 2011). I therefore distinguish India, Pakistan and Nigeria as lower-middle income countries that have been important immigrant senders to the UK and

whose population is of non-white majority. Finally, I use Syria and Somalia as sending countries of a large number of refugees around the world (see Table S2 in the SM).

Finally, I distinguish between men and women in order to capture respondents' possible gender preferences. People may perceive women as less threatening, for example with respect to crime, and more vulnerable and therefore more deserving.

Use of respondent characteristics

I use respondent characteristics, which were supplied with respondents' experimental responses as part of the Omnibus Survey, to analyse some of the mechanisms already identified by the literature on attitudes toward immigrants. I assess whether British citizens prefer immigrants with a different skill-level from theirs (operationalised as income group and educational level) as hypothesised by economic competition theory. I also analyse whether respondents with lower income and lower education are more cautious in assigning citizenship as posited by the same theories. If more highly qualified respondents are more relaxed in awarding citizenship, it may be indication of their weaker attachment to national identity and citizenship. Finally, I expect older people and EU Leavers to be more attached to national identity and more averse to immigration, and therefore to according citizenship than younger respondents and EU Remainers.

Table 2: Balance of immigrant profile characteristics as product of randomisation

Attribute	Level	N	%	Excluded combinations
Gender	Male	8,047	50.4	-
	Female	7,923	49.6	-
Length of residence	4 years	3,973	24.9	-
	6 years	3,993	25.0	-
	10 years	4,010	25.1	-
	20 years	3,994	25.0	-
Country of origin	Germany	1,626	10.2	Refugee/not refugee
	Poland	1,512	9.5	Muslim; refugee/not refugee
	Italy	1,612	10.09	Refugee/not refugee
	India	1,546	9.7	Refugee/not refugee
	Pakistan	1,591	9.9	-
	Nigeria	1,649	10.3	-
	Ireland	1,606	10.1	Basic/good English; refugee/not refugee
	Australia	1,633	10.2	Basic/good English; refugee/not refugee
	Syria	1,570	9.8	-
	Somalia	1,625	10.2	-
Occupation	Corporate manager	1,758	11.0	-
	Doctor	1,804	11.3	-

	IT professional	1,803	11.3	-
	Language teacher	1,724	10.8	-
	Admin worker	1,826	11.4	-
	Farmer	1,737	10.9	-
	Cleaner	1,771	11.1	-
	Unemployed	1,774	11.1	-
	Stay at home parent	1,773	11.1	-
Ancestry	British parent	5,368	33.6	-
	British grandparent	5,273	33.0	-
	Neither	5,329	33.4	-
Refugee status	Not refugee	3,256	20.4	Germany/Poland/Italy/Ireland/ Australia/India
	Refugee	3,179	19.9	Germany/Poland/Italy/Ireland/ Australia/India
	NA	9,535	59.7	-
English proficiency	Basic	4,276	26.8	Ireland/Australia
	Good	4,270	26.7	Ireland/Australia
	Excellent	7,424	46.5	-
Religion	Christian	5,577	34.9	-
	Muslim	4,788	30.0	Poland
	No religion	5,605	35.1	-
Total observations		15,970	100	

Method

I chose an experimental design to reduce respondents' vulnerability to social desirability bias. That is, people do not give their true responses because they recognise that discrimination is not socially desirable, or even legal (Berinsky 1999). Crucially, social desirability bias may be higher for the more highly educated, therefore leading to misleading comparisons (An 2015). Another key advantage of this design is that I do not need to oversimplify vignettes by characterising them with only one or two attributes as many experiments do (e.g. Hellwig and Sinno [2017]), but I can instead include as many as I deem appropriate in order to reflect the multidimensionality of the decision-making process. For example, if I were to only manipulate 'country of origin' I would not know what aspect of country of origin affected the granting of citizenship. It is only be explicitly including associated attributes such as language and religion that I can infer more precisely what caused the granting of citizenship. Moreover, because the attributes are included together and affect the same outcome, I can compare the importance of each attribute for granting citizenship in relation to others.

I employ a choice-based conjoint analysis design. The researcher chooses the attributes and the levels for each attribute, but does not have any control over how the attribute levels are combined and therefore on what the resulting vignettes look like. The software used by YouGov to create the survey experiment randomises the combination of attribute levels, allowing for all possible combinations. The randomisation of the attribute levels allows the researcher to infer which attribute influenced the granting of citizenship (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). Rather than estimating the causal effect of each vignette on the probability of granting citizenship, I estimate the relative effect of each attribute, the attribute's average marginal effect (AAME), averaged over the joint distribution of all other attributes. For example, to estimate the AAME of gender I would take the difference in probability of being granted citizenship between a man and a woman with the same set of other attributes (e.g. same religion, occupation etc.). I would do the same across all possible combinations of other attributes. I would then take the average of these probabilities. Because of randomisation, every combination of attributes is possible and therefore receives equal weight in the analysis.

Analytical strategy

First, to estimate the AAME I employ a single linear regression, where the choice to approve or reject the profile is the outcome variable and the attributes are independent categorical variables. The coefficient of each attribute level estimates the effect of moving from the reference category to that level, such as the effect of the applicant being a 'woman' as opposed to a 'man', on the probability of the granting of citizenship, averaged over the joint distribution of all other attributes. See Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2014) for proof and discussion of why the linear regression estimator is an unbiased estimator of the AAME.

External validity is an important concern. Profiles had to be credible. For this reason, I imposed restrictions on the randomisation of attributes in the vignettes. I restricted the attributes 'country of origin', 'language proficiency', 'refugee status' and 'religion' to appear only in certain combinations (see Table 2). This is not a problem as long as I take into account these restricted combinations in the analysis. I extend Hainmueller et al.'s (2014) design to allow for a four-way restriction of combinations of attributes. It follows that estimation of the AAMEs need to take into account only the plausible counterfactuals that appeared in the experiment and therefore to exclude the restricted ones (e.g. being a refugee born in Germany). To do this I include a four-way interaction term, as the restrictions involve all four attributes. In order to estimate the AAMEs of these attributes I compute a *t* test of the linear combination of the appropriate coefficients in the interaction, weighted according to the probability of occurrence. For instance, because I did not allow the combination of 'Poland' as country of origin and 'Muslim' as religion, the counterfactual of the 'Poland' AAME includes all possible combinations of levels of attributes, with the exception of 'Muslim'. To reflect this 'Muslim' receives an analysis weight of 0, whereas 'no religion' and 'Christian' receive an analysis weight of ½.

Second, in order to better single out the effect of a specific attribute, the effect of which I think varies depending on another attribute, I estimate the AAME of the attribute of interest separately for groups of profiles based on the second attribute. For example, I expect low language proficiency to have a larger negative effect on the probability of the awarding of citizenship for people who have lived in the UK for four as opposed to 20 years. To investigate this possibility I estimate the AAME of language proficiency separately for profiles of immigrants who have lived in the country for four and 20 years.

Third, I estimate the proportion of applications that are granted citizenship ('average acceptance rate').

Fifth and sixth, I investigate whether AAMEs and the average acceptance rate differ across respondents, e.g. by level of qualification attained. I therefore estimate AAMEs and average acceptance rate separately for different groups of respondents.

In the regression analysis I use the design weights provided with the dataset to adjust the sample to be representative of the population as a whole and I cluster standard errors by respondent to account for the correlation between choices made within each respondent.

Findings

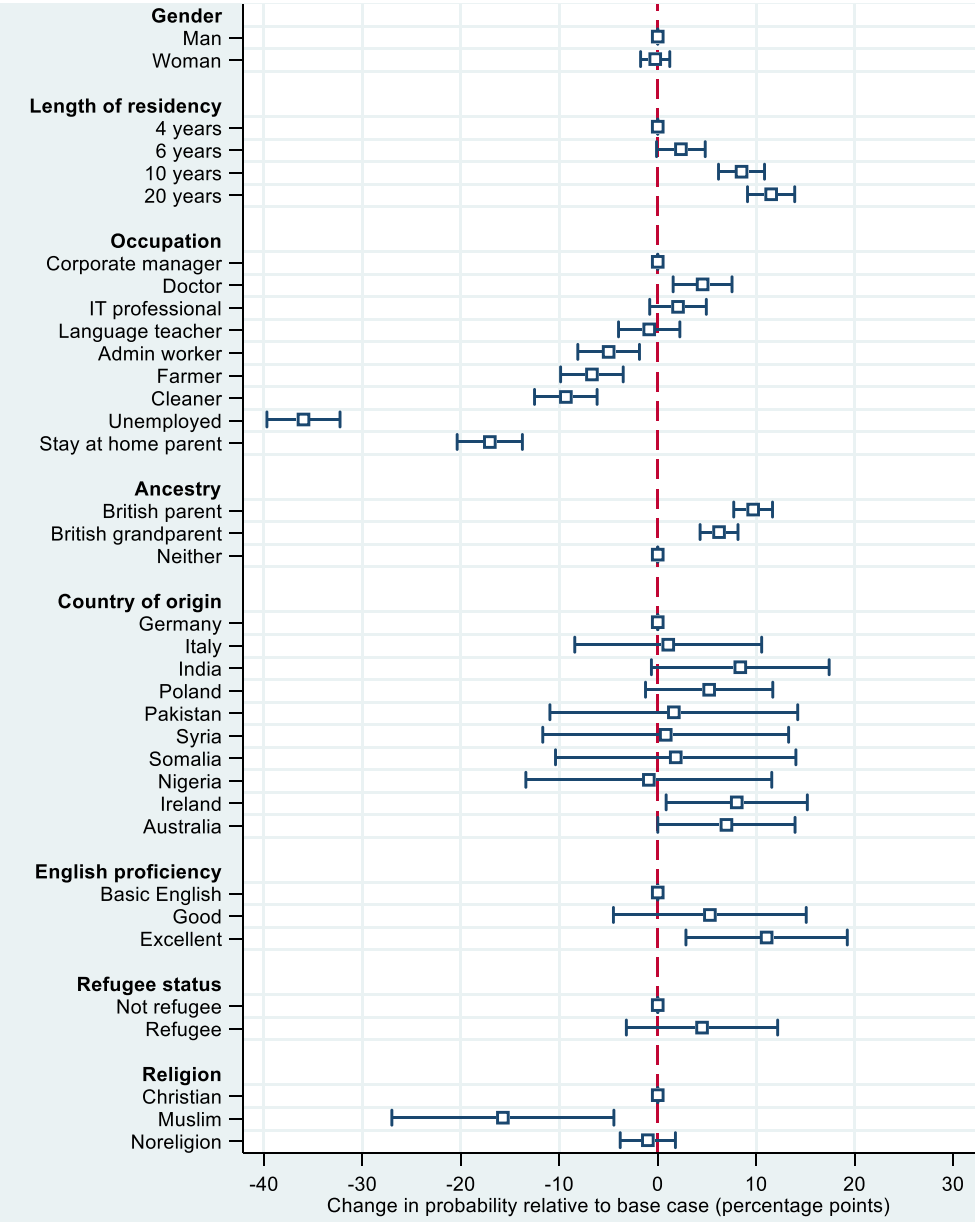
Share of approval

Respondents granted citizenship to 73% of the 15,970 profiles. This estimate reveals a certain degree of inclusiveness, especially in comparison to current research on attitudes towards immigrants, which has found that 77% of the British population would like to see immigration reduced (Blinder and Richards 2018). This high approval rate could indicate an ease with which people decide to extend their national membership due to their low degree of attachment to citizenship status and to the saliency national identity has in their overall sense of identity. If people do not value their own citizenship, they do not need to be parsimonious about making it more inclusive. Although consistent with my finding, this explanation ignores the wider political context already discussed and risks being simplistic. The popularity of the UKIP and later Brexit party, the rise of the far right, and the vote to leave the EU, are all indications not only that national identity matters in the UK, but that for many it is highly exclusionary. I think that the experimental design better explains this finding. In answering survey questions about whether immigration should be reduced, people might be thinking about specific immigrant profiles. Moreover, we know that respondents tend to be ill informed about the composition of the immigrant population (ref). By giving respondents detailed information about individual applicants, this experiment allows respondents to tailor their answer according to the profiles they like and dislike. The number of applications awarded then follows from these preferences.

Most preferred profiles

The 27% of immigrants who were not granted citizenship differ significantly from those who were: see Figure 1. The attribute that most clearly affects the probability of being granted citizenship to immigrants is occupation. Not only is having a job almost essential, but the type of occupation is also decisive for immigrants' chances of being considered worthy of citizenship. Figure 1 shows a clear gradient whereby lower-end jobs and positions of need are severely penalised compared to better paid and more highly valued jobs. Interestingly, corporate managers, IT professionals and language teachers are equally likely to be awarded citizenship. In contrast, doctors' application have a 5 percentage points higher chance of being accepted compared to corporate managers ($p < .05$), indicating that the social contribution and perceived need associated with the occupation are more important than pay. As we move down the pay scale, we observe a monotonic decrease in the probability of being accepted for citizenship. Compared to corporate managers, administrative workers, farmers and cleaners are 5, 7 and 9 percentage points respectively less likely to be considered to merit citizenship ($p < .05$). At the bottom of the scale, the effect of not having an occupation is striking. Stay at home parents and unemployed immigrants are associated with a penalty of 17 and 36 percentage points respectively compared to corporate managers ($p < .05$). This suggests the use of a deservingness scale where degree of reciprocity and responsibility are the criteria. This is not surprising given that unemployed people are often described by politicians as being benefit claimants who do not deserve welfare transfers. For example, when running for the Labour party leadership in 1994 Tony Blair expressed sympathy for taxpayers whose contributions benefited the unemployed (Mau 2003). Almost two decades later the then Conservative chancellor George Osborne told a BBC radio 4 audience that "It is unfair that when that person leaves their home early in the morning [..], they're looking at their next-door neighbour, the blinds are down and that family is living a life on benefits. That is unfair…" (Mulholland 2012).

Figure 1: Average marginal component effects on the probability of citizenship award



Note: OLS estimates of average effects of each randomised attribute of the probability of being granted British citizenship with clustered standard errors and weights. Open squares show AAME point estimates and the horizontal lines delineate 95% confidence intervals. Open squares without horizontal lines show reference categories.

Respondents severely penalised Muslims. Muslims were less likely to be granted citizenship by 16 percentage points ($p < .05$) compared to Christians. However, there is no difference between Christians and immigrants with no professed religion. This finding is again compatible with both mechanisms of deservingness and threat. If the Christian and atheist majority perceives Muslims as culturally different and with values that are not attuned to British culture, they may feel that Muslims do not deserve to become British. The political discourse around the promotion of social cohesion and British citizenship that has framed

British democratic liberal values in contrast to cultures clearly associated with the Muslim religion is consistent with this. Moreover, this difference in culture and values might also be perceived as a threat, especially when linked to crime and terrorism (Hellwig and Sinno 2017).

In contrast, country of origin does not seem to matter particularly except for Ireland and Australia. Irish and Australian immigrants are 8 and 7 percentage points respectively more likely to be chosen over Germans ($p < .05$). Of the pool of countries used in the experiment these are clearly the most similar ones to the UK in terms of ethnicity, culture, and shared heritage. Although language fluency is a separate attribute, sharing the same mother tongue could also be a relevant cultural factor. My results suggest that there is no hierarchical preference with respect to the skin colour of the country of origin's majority population, or the income group it belongs to. For instance, German applicants are not preferred to Somali ones. Being Polish is not a disadvantage compared to being German. This is despite the weight that the debate leading up to the Brexit referendum gave to European immigration and to Polish immigrants, the largest European immigrant group in the UK (see Table S2 in the SM). Although this finding is surprising, the detailed information given to respondents about immigrants' occupation and religion is likely to have limited the possibility of the stereotypes usually associated with country of origin, namely skill-level and religion, to influence respondents' decisions. My analysis shows that attitudes to 'groups' are likely to be using stereotypes that assume clusters of characteristics, but that once separated out, these group stereotypes do not hold. Burns and Gimpel (2006) show that negative attitudes in the USA towards immigrants are highly dependent on prejudiced beliefs about minority groups' work ethic and intelligence. Kobayashi's (2015) experiment also found that Japanese respondents view individual citizenship applicants more favourably than the groups applicants belong to.

People who speak excellent English are 11 percentage points more likely to be awarded citizenship compared to those who speak basic English ($p < .05$). However, there is no difference between those who have a good rather than a basic command of spoken English. The difficulty in conveying differences in English language proficiency to a majority sample of native speakers is probably at the heart of this result. 'Good' may have been more difficult to assess relative to the two other levels of English competence. English proficiency could matter because it signals higher employability, ability and willingness to integrate and be an active member of society. Respondents who speak excellent English score more highly on the deservingness scale by showing both reciprocity, compliance and higher similarity with the majority population. They are also less threatening to the dominant culture where English is the main language.

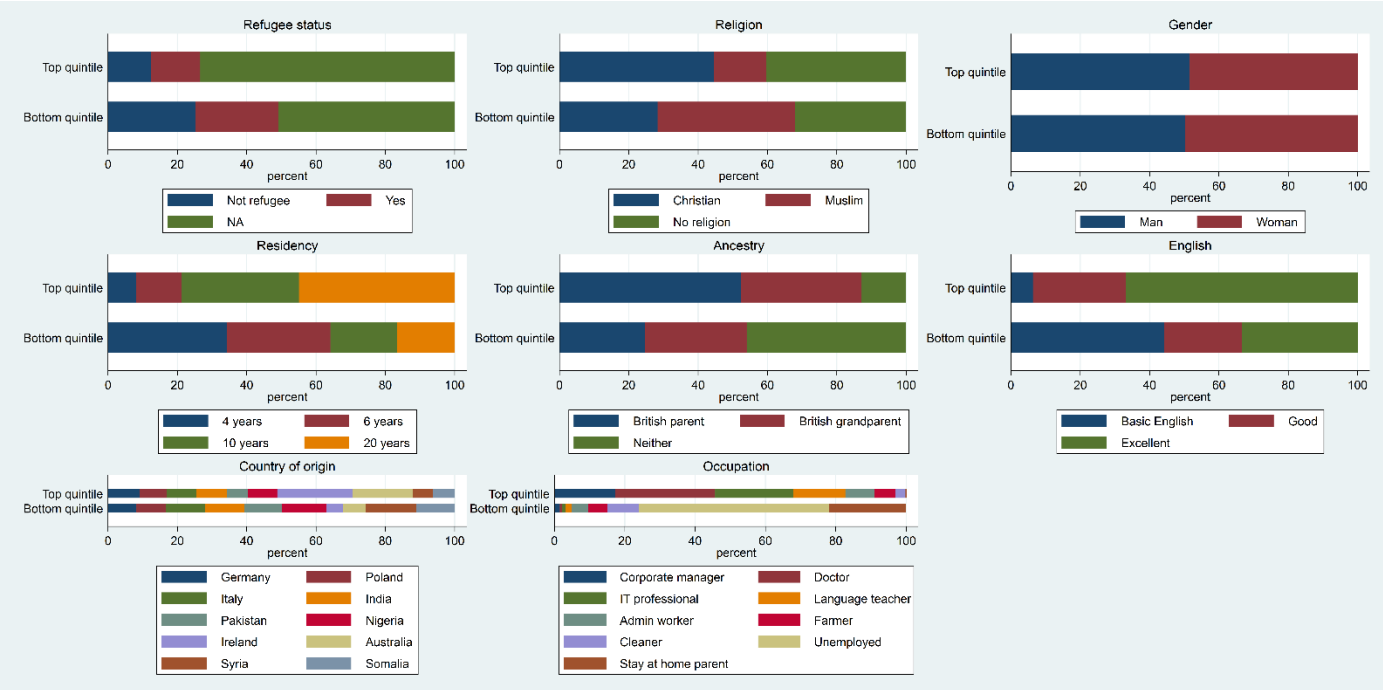
British ancestry is very relevant to British nationals in their decision to accept citizenship applications. Applicants with a British parent or grandparent are 10 and 6 percentage points more likely to be granted citizenship than immigrants with no British lineage ($p < .05$). Although in the UK grandparents' nationality has no bearing on legal entitlement to British citizenship, it appears that this is a pertinent relationship to the lay public. The effect of grandparents suggests that being British is considered to be something that is inherited. It also

indicates longstanding cultural commonality through generations and therefore the relevance of cultural similarity.

Length of residence is another clear marker of the likelihood of granting citizenship. Having lived in the UK for 10 and 20 years as opposed to 6 years increases the probability of being accepted by 9 percentage points ($p < .05$) and 12 percentage points ($p < .05$) respectively. Interestingly, there is no difference between four and six years, although the legal requirement is five years. This finding suggests that respondents might associate length of residence with attachment to the UK and, perhaps, a higher degree of integration. Gender and refugee status do not independently affect the probability of changing attributes on the probability of granting British citizenship. This suggests that neither women nor refugees are deemed more deserving because more vulnerable. Also, refugees are not penalised for being perceived as a burden on the welfare system and men for being perceived as more likely to commit criminal acts.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of profile attributes in the top quintile and bottom quintile of the predicted probability of being awarded citizenship.

Figure 2: Distribution of attributes in top and bottom quartiles of the predicted probability of accepted citizenship application



Note: the top quintile and the bottom quintile have 3,193 and 3,194 observations respectively. The predicted probability of the granting of citizenship is not bounded to be ≤ 1 because it is estimated from the OLS regression.

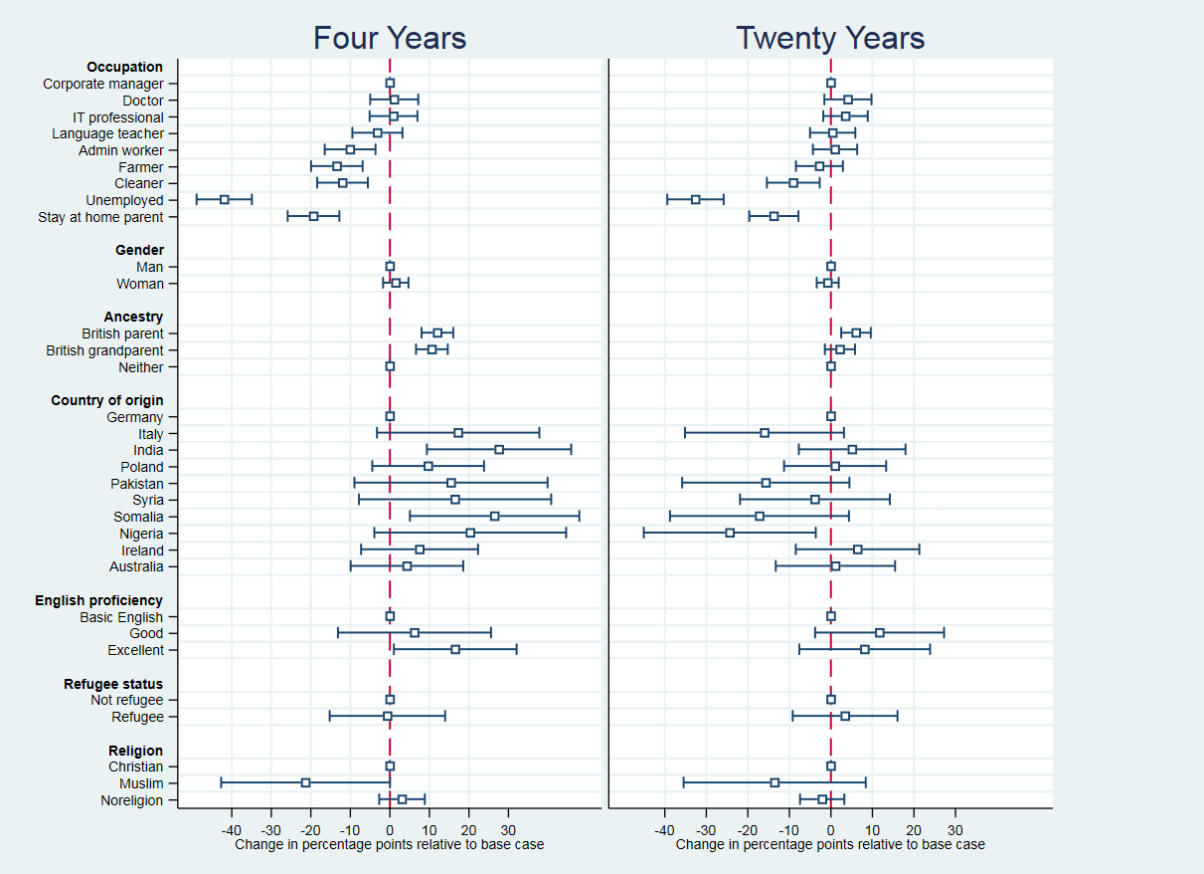
Variation of attribute effect depending on another attribute

A better command of spoken English may signal a good degree of effort to integrate, and/or better suitability for employment. To investigate which one of these mechanisms is at play I

estimate the AAME of language proficiency separately for groups of applicants depending on their length of residence and occupation. If someone who has lived in the UK for 20 years speaks poor English, they signal lower willingness to integrate than someone who has lived in the country for only 4 years. I therefore expect English proficiency to have a bigger positive effect for applicants who have lived in the country for 20 years as opposed to 4. Figure 3 shows that the AAME of language proficiency follows a similar pattern for both groups and is statistically significant only for those who have lived in the country for four years, therefore not confirming this possibility.

Moreover, if someone who speaks poor English is without a job, this may indicate their unsuitability for employment. I therefore expect English proficiency to have a bigger positive effect among applicants without a job (unemployed or stay at home parents), compared to those who have a well-paid one (doctors or managers). Figure 4 confirms that language proficiency matters more for those who are without work, who are therefore penalised more if they do not speak good enough English compared to applicants with well-paid jobs.

Figure 3: AAMEs by length of residence



Another attribute I want to investigate further is occupation. Unemployment may penalise more applicants who have lived in the country for four as opposed to 20 years. The latter may be forgiven on the assumption that they may had been employed in the past and that they are well-rooted in the UK. Figure 3 shows that the AAME of occupation is bigger for profiles of

applicants who had lived in the UK for four as opposed to 20 years, but the pattern remains the same.

Muslim applicants might be less likely to be given citizenship compared to Christians particularly at the bottom of the pay-scale. Figure 4 shows that among applicants without a job Muslims are 30 percentage points less likely to be given citizenship. There is instead no evidence of an effect among applicants who have well-paid occupations.

In light of the null effect of country of origin, it is possible that, for the same level of occupation, immigrants who come from a low-income country are penalised more than those who come from a high income setting. For instance, respondents may be more likely to grant citizenship to an unemployed German versus an unemployed Syrian, or to a German doctor versus a Syrian doctor. Figure 4 does not provide evidence of heterogeneity of AAMEs of country of origin depending on the applicant's occupation.

Figure 4: AAMEs by occupational group

Effects, broken down by respondent characteristics

In the second phase of the analysis I estimate AAMEs separately according to the respondent characteristics listed in Table 1. Leave voters accepted 64% of profiles, whereas Remain voters accepted 80%. As the level of education attained gets higher the rate of acceptance does too. It is 64% for respondents with up to a GCSE qualification, 73% for respondents

with up to an A level qualification and 77% for respondents with higher education qualifications. Finally, the shares of accepted profiles also decreases with age: 78% up to 29 years old, 73% between 30 and 49 year old and 69% above 50 years old. This variation indicates that respondent characteristics are associated with how restrictively people view citizenship. The groups we would expect to be most attached to national identity are those who were more frugal in awarding citizenships.

Moreover, the finding mirrors what has been found in much of the literature on attitudes towards immigrants that less educated and older people are more averse to immigrants than others, possibly reflecting higher levels of concern and less tolerance (e.g. Lewis 2005; Saggar 2003 in the UK). The division between Leave and Remain voters does not come as a surprise, given the large number of people who expressed anxieties about immigration as a crucial reason for leaving the EU (Prosser, Mellon, and Green 2016). The average acceptance rate varies little with gross household income group. It is 70% for respondents who belong to the lowest third of gross household income, 74% for the middle tercile group and 71% for the top tercile group. This suggests that, in contrast with economic competition theory, people of lower income were not more averse to granting citizenship. Nonetheless, it is worth noticing that, despite some variation, rates remain rather high, over 60%. This is a further indication that when people make judgments based on precise information and they do not have to resort to stereotypes and prejudices about entire groups, they have less restrictive views.

Perhaps even more interestingly, the criteria respondents used to decide whether the applicant presented to them had a rightful claim to citizenship are the same for all types of respondents. Results are consistent across gross household income group, education, age group and EU referendum vote (See Figures SF1 to SF4 in the SM for full results).[6] As found in experimental studies on attitudes towards immigrants in other contexts (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Harell et al. 2012; McLaren and Johnson 2007) there appears to be some national unanimity over who belongs as a citizen. The fact that preferences show the same relative pattern by income group and highest educational attainment indicates that direct economic competition is not a key driver of preferences. The findings also suggest that, when social desirability bias is more limited, such as in experimental designs, more educated individuals are not less vulnerable to perceptions of cultural threat as often found with survey data. If respondents had been asked directly whether religion should feature as a naturalisation criterion for example, I suspect many among them would have demurred.

[6] Small differences across groups of respondents relate to the statistical significance of religion, language proficiency and country of origin.

Robustness

Following Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015), In order to account for the dependence of profile choices within individual respondents I fit alternative specifications to the benchmark model. I employ regression model specifications that incorporate (i) respondent fixed effects and (ii) random effects. The AAMEs in the fixed effects model are net of the variation between respondents due to respondents' characteristics. They therefore estimate the average marginal effect of each attribute within the average respondent. The random effects model estimates the variation across respondents, how much choices are correlated within the average respondent. The AAME are the same as in the benchmark model, but standard errors estimates are more efficient.

The clustering of profiles within respondents may affect findings specifically if the ordering of profiles influences the effect attributes have on whether respondents choose to grant citizenship to a profile or not. As respondents are shown five pairs of profiles, arguably, they could learn with experience and make choices based on information from previous profiles. AAMEs for the fifth pair would therefore differ from AAMEs for the first pair. I estimate AAMEs separately for profiles based on their ordering. I therefore estimate five specifications, one for each pair.

All specifications yield results that are almost identical to the ones obtained with the benchmark model. Importantly, AAMEs with fixed effects or random effects specifications have narrower confidence intervals and show clear effects of the English proficiency (good and excellent versus basic command of spoken English) and religion (Muslim versus Christian) attributes. See Figures SF5 to SF8 in the SM for details.

Conclusion

This study provides a unique insight into what it entails to become British according to British nationals. Those who are considered most different are more likely to be discriminated against, Muslims in particular, and skill level is ultimately the key attribute people base their preferences on (e.g. Blinder and Richards 2018; McLaren and Johnson 2007).

It might be argued that the mechanisms identified in this study are not unique to the UK and that the reasons why people prefer some immigrants over others as citizens are universal. People prefer those who are most similar to them and that, in the West, means immigrants of Christian-based cultures. People also prefer those who bring more value to society, which primarily amounts to monetary value in capitalist economies. More research is needed in countries that have a more recent history of migration and that do not have a conceptualisation of good citizenship centred around productivity. However, the three studies to date on preferences over the award of citizenship for North America, Switzerland and Japan, reached contrasting conclusions. This suggests that cultural and political context does matter in attitude formation.

Although religion and income are not currently criteria for naturalisation, these preferences align with the evidence on attitudes towards immigrants and with the political discourse around citizenship and Britishness over the last 20 years. Immigrants who are recognised as productive members of society and whose values are perceived as compatible with liberal British values deserve the rights and benefits associated with citizenship, and to be included into British national identity. This shared notion of citizenship and therefore of belonging and national identity is concerning. It does not reflect the diversity in the country. For example, based on the 2011 census, the Muslim Council of Britain (Ali 2015) reports that the Muslim population in England and Wales grew from 1.8 to 2.7 million between 2001 and 2011. Of these 73 per cent consider their only national identity to be British. However, these people who think of themselves as British are not recognised as British by the majority, according to my experiment. Moreover, although political parties have publicly committed themselves to a degree of diversity that represent the makeup of the population (Cleverly 2019; The Labour Party 2019), the number of Members of Parliament of Muslim religion or from working class background remains low (Audickas and Cracknell 2018).[7] This may signal that the widely accepted exclusionary nature of Britishness has negative implications not only for those who are excluded, but also for the representativeness of British democracy.

Nonetheless, across different political preferences, socio-economic status and age, respondents accepted over 60% of applications on average. This is in sharp contrast with British people's desire to restrict immigration (Blinder and Richards 2018). This evidence suggests that restricting the number of naturalisations by putting barriers to naturalisation, such as civic integration tests and high fees, in order to curb immigration related anxieties may not only be detrimental to the immigrants it affects, but is also unfounded/unasked-for.

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[7] Based on my calculations, 2.3% of MPs are Muslim versus 4.2% of the total population.

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