FRAMING IMMIGRANTS AS SEEKERS OF SOCIAL BENEFITS: THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT RECESSION AT THE FAMILY-LEVEL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTI-IMMIGRANTS ANXIETIES

CARACTERIZACIÓN DE LAS PERSONAS INMIGRANTES COMO BUSCADORAS DE BENEFICIOS SOCIALES: EL IMPACTO DE LA GRAN RECESIÓN EN LAS FAMILIAS Y EN EL DESARROLLO DE SENTIMIENTOS ANTIINMIGRANTES

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Abstract

Substantial research has addressed the association between economic factors (e.g., employment rate) and perception of immigrants among the general public in the host societies. This study used the *Transatlantic Trends Survey* 2014 to examine whether the characterization of immigrants as social benefits seekers is related to one´s family financial situation being greatly affected by the Great Recession. We conducted a series of ordinal logistic regressions to compare three different geopolitical contexts, namely the United States, the Southern Europe region, and the triad France-Germany-United Kingdom. Our results confirmed that framing immigrants as social benefits seekers is indeed related to one´s family being greatly impacted by the Great Recession. Significantly, the direction of such association varies among contexts, as those greatly impacted by the crisis in Southern Europe showed lower odds of framing immigrants as social benefits seekers, while the opposite happening in both the United States and the triad France-Germany-United Kingdom. Recommendations for practice and research are discussed.

Resumen

Numerosos estudios han analizado la asociación entre los factores económicos (por ejemplo, la tasa de empleo) y las actitudes hacia las personas inmigrantes. El presente estudio ha utilizado la Encuesta de Tendencias Transatlántica de 2014 para examinar si la caracterización de las personas inmigrantes como buscadoras de beneficios sociales está relacionada con el impacto de la Gran Recesión en la situación económica familiar. Realizamos una serie de regresiones logísticas ordinales para comparar tres contextos geopolíticos diferentes, a saber, Estados Unidos, la región del sur de Europa y la tríada Francia-Alemania-Reino Unido. Nuestros resultados confirmaron que percibir a las personas inmigrantes como buscadoras de beneficios sociales se relaciona con el impacto de la Gran Recesión en la economía de la propia familia. Significativamente, la dirección de dicha asociación varía según los contextos, pues los que se vieron muy afectados por la crisis en el sur de Europa mostraron menores probabilidades de enmarcar a los inmigrantes como buscadores de beneficios sociales, mientras que sucedió lo contrario tanto en los Estados Unidos como en la tríada Francia-Alemania-Reino Unido. Se presentan recomendaciones para la práctica y la investigación.

Introduction

Migrants make up around 3 percent of the world population, a figure that has remained constant for the last few decades (International Organization for Migration, 2017). However, the interaction of several factors, in particular, the geopolitical Post-Cold War architecture, a series of humanitarian and environmental crises, and the increasing mobility of people, goods, and information, have shaped current migration as a global phenomenon (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2013). Hence, Nation-states (whether having a migratory standing as sending, transit or destination) and other actors of global governance have raised migration as a critical priority for policy agendas, as the recent adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (United Nations, 2018) perfectly illustrates.

One salient aspect of the present times is the multiplicity of migration flows, whether between the Global South and the Global North or among specific regions at a local scale, driving many societies to experience both emigration and immigration dynamics simultaneously (International Organization for Migration, 2017). The recent history of Europe and the United States (US) was indeed built on intensive migratory processes associated with decolonization, conflicts, ethnic and political persecution, and economic factors (Castles at al., 2013). Hence, today´s European Union and the United States are complex societies where approximately 4 and 13 percent of their respective populations are immigrants from very diverse backgrounds (notice that the figure for the European Union accounts only for immigrants from non-member states, and there is significant variability among European countries; Eurostat, 2018; López, Bialik & Radford, 2017).

Aside its magnitude, the many dimensions of immigration (e.g., cultural, social, ethical, and economic) have fostered increasing debates among scholars, activists, policymakers, media, and the general public, such as the discussions on homogeneity versus diversity, assimilation versus multiculturalism, or nation-based versus global human rights (Betts, 2013; Faist, 2009; Feldmann & Olea, 2004). The intersection between immigration and global rights seems indeed critical for current social workers, as it turns back the classic debate on welfare deservingness as well as the broad discussion about the nature and scope of the profession (Cates, 2016; Katz, 2013).

The current study focuses on the characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits among the general public in host societies of Europe and the United States, and whether such framing may be related with the impact of the Great Recession at the family level. By using a multinational survey, this paper aims to identify global patterns on the intersection

between family hardship and attitudes regarding immigration, as well as contribute to the development of transnational studies in the field of social work. Then, implications for practice and research will be discussed.

1.   Background

1.1. Framing immigrants as seekers of social benefits

A great deal of research has analyzed how immigrants, whether newcomers or following generations, are framed by host societies (Haynes, Merolla & Ramakrishnan, 2016; Helbling, 2014). In particular, the perceptions of immigrants, as a social construction, are significantly determined by the sociocultural and economic contexts. Hence, the degree of diversity-homogeneity of a given society, and its specifics on education, employment, and social mobility are critical factors for shaping attitudes towards immigration (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Dustmann & Preston, 2007). People´s perception can also be affected by the political context, which may include a wide variety of policies and discourses across a *welcoming-hostile* spectrum concerning how immigrants are framed and the type of policies that are implemented (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Castles et al., 2013).

Immigrants can be characterized in many different ways, whether based on the cause of their movement (e.g., economic versus forced migrants), their qualifications (e.g., highly-skilled versus low-skilled workers), or their legal status (e.g., undocumented versus documented immigrants; Castles et al., 2013; Feldmann & Olea, 2004). Moreover, some frames may grant special protection or additional rights, such as the category refugee, while others, like seasonal workers, would likely show more restricted or limited entitlements (Betts, 2013; Fiddian-Qasmiye, Loescher, Long & Sigona, 2014). The literature has also points out that immigrants can be targeted as people taking jobs away or abusing social welfare, upon the assumption that origin and citizenship should determine the entitlement of economic and social rights (Bommes & Geddes, 2003; Esses, Dovidio, Jackson & Armstrong, 2001; Van Der Waal, De Koster & Van Oorschot, 2013; Zimmermann, Bauer & Lofstrom, 2000). Hence, the concept *characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits* will allow us to explore the intersection suggested by previous studies between the competition for scarce resources and the development of exclusionist attitudes, as well as its significant association with the socio-economic contexts (Fiddian-Qasmiye at al., 2014; Filindra & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2013; Fix et al., 2009).

1.2.   The effect of the Great Recession in the financial situation at the family-level

The Great Recession during the late 2000s had a significant effect on the global economy and affected in many ways the standards of living among the population of Europe and the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012; Ybarra, Sánchez & Sánchez, 2016). In particular, the combination of three phenomena namely increasing unemployment, decreasing wages, and a generalized adjustment of social programs, illustrates the intensity and severity of the crisis, and explains its broad impact among families from very different backgrounds (Hurd & Rohwedder, 2010a; Jenkins, Brandolini, Micklewright & Nolan, 2012; McKee, Karanikolos, Belcher & Stuckler, 2012). The downturn has also altered the characteristics of the national labor markets, including the distribution of the economic sectors, and the number of its establishments and employees (Elsby, Hobijn & Sahin, 2010; D'Amuri & Peri, 2014).

In specific industries, workers experienced significant cuts in their payments and benefits upon the assumption that that was the condition for jobs maintenance. In some sectors and regions, though, the rate of unemployment rocketed to a very high level (Elsby et al., 2010). The recession also had an impact on the senior population as retirement benefits were in many cases frozen or reduced (Hurd & Rohwedder, 2010b; Munnell & Rutledge, 2013). Goldstein and Peters (2014) suggested that being personally affected by the economic crisis was associated with increased anxiety against immigrants among the general public in the United States. Hence, the concept *family greatly affected by the Great Recession* will allow us to explore whether a particular dimension of such association (i.e., framing immigrants as seekers of social benefits) is a constant among the regions assessed by the present transnational study.

1.3.   Theoretical framework

The insights from three different theories (i.e., the *welfare-chauvinism theory*, the *social construction of target populations*, and the *realistic group conflict theory)* have been applied for both framing this study and interpreting its results. First, the *welfare-chauvinism theory* explains that natives of a given country are likely to support restricted access to welfare policies for foreigners upon the assumption that nationality, rather than needs, should determine the entitlement to social benefits (Castles & Schierup, 2012; Reeskens & Van Oorschot, 2012). Welfare-chauvinism may also explain why social programs associated with

racialized groups foster significantly less support than universal policies (Castles & Schierup, 2012).

Secondly, the *social construction of target populations* explains that targeted populations are socially constructed based on two dimensions, namely their political power (strong vs. weak) and their assigned social value (positive vs. negative; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Schneider and Ingram distinguish four types of target populations, as 1) advantaged (people holding strong power and positive construction; e.g., entrepreneurs); 2) contenders (people showing strong power but negative construction; e.g., economic elites); 3) dependents (people holding weak power but positive construction; e.g., people with functional diversity); and 4) deviants (people having weak power and negative construction; e.g., people with criminal records). A critical characteristic of the process of social construction of target populations is that it shapes and legitimates not only attitudes but policies and behaviors alike. Hence, this is an appealing approach for assessing attitudes towards immigrants and welfare recipients.

Finally, the *realistic group conflict theory* underlines that group competition for resources, whether actual or perceived, predicts intergroup attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Jackson, 1993). Esses, Jackson, and Armstrong (1998) applied the theory to assess attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, finding that economic downturn and unemployment were significantly associated with negative sentiments. Esses and colleagues also noticed that media over-representation of immigrants as seekers of scarce resources could exacerbate the effect of economic on anti-immigrant attitudes.

2.   Methods

The purpose of the current study was to examine factors related with framing immigrants as social benefits seekers, by addressing the following research question: Is the characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits associated with the perception that one's family financial situation was greatly affected by the Great Recession?

Based on that question, the following hypotheses were tested: Individuals whose family's financial situation was greatly impacted by the Great Recession are more likely to characterize immigrants as seekers of social benefits, compared with those who were not greatly impacted by the Great Recession, among the general public of the United States (hypothesis H_1), the Southern Europe region (hypothesis H_2), and the triad France-Germany-United Kingdom [UK] (hypothesis H_3).

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2.1. Source of data

This study used data from the Transatlantic Trends Survey 2014, which is a multinational cross-sectional project sponsored by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and the foundation Compagnia di San Paolo of Italy (Stelzenmueller, Isernia, & Eichenberg, 2014). The survey analyzed the attitudes of the general public (aged 18 years and over) in Europe, Russia, Turkey, and the United States towards a series of domestic and foreign policy issues. The interviews for the survey (N=13,510) were conducted in June of 2014 among 10 member states of the European Union (i.e., France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom [1,000 interviews each]), as well as Russia (1,500 interviews), Turkey (1,007 interviews), and the United States (1,003 interviews; Stelzenmueller et al., 2014).

The sampling design of the Transatlantic survey applied a multi-stage random probability for each state. Data collection methodology was face-to-face interviews in Poland, Russia, and Turkey, while telephone interviews for the remaining national samples. Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) was used for the telephone-based data collection. The response rates (calculated as valid interviews divided by the addition of valid interviews and refusals) were in the range of 40 to 50 percent among the three countries where face-to-face methodology was used, and in the range of 4 to 27 percent for those states were telephone interviews were conducted (see table 1). In all cases, the method used to select a respondent among the members of a household chosen was the closest birthday rule (Stelzenmueller et al., 2014).

Table 1. Response rates among the telephone-based national samples.

	Valid (a)	Refusal (b)	Response rate [a/ (a+b)]
France	1,000	21,891	0.04
Germany	1,000	5,091	0.16
Greece	1,000	13,440	0.07
Italy	1,000	10,264	0.09
Netherlands	1,000	23,701	0,04
Portugal	1,000	3,367	0.23
Spain	1,000	6,893	0.13
Sweden	1,000	19,542	0.05
United Kingdom	1,000	23,558	0,04
United States	1,003	2,756	0.27

Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey 2014 (Stelzenmueller et al., 2014)

The current study focused on analyzing eight samples from the thirteen included in the Transatlantic Trends Survey 2014. For a confidence level of 95%, the maximum margin of error of each national sample attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus three percentage points (German Marshall Fund, 2014). In particular, we used the national sample of the United States as an autonomous entity of analysis. Secondly, we created a group called Southern Europe region, which included the samples from Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Thirdly, we grouped the national samples of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom to create the triad France-Germany-UK. We framed such groupings based on economic and social similarities, as well as on some homogeneity with regards the effects of the Great Recession, among the countries included in each group (Petmesidou & Guillén, 2017). It must be noticed that the national samples from the United States, the Southern Europe countries, and France were approached using the same strategy, namely dual-frame methodology (i.e., combining both landline and mobile telephones). In contrast, the national samples from Germany and the United Kingdom were approached through exclusively landline telephone (Stelzenmueller et al., 2014). Hence, several weights were constructed to control for the different selection probability among respondents.

Firstly, *only landline* responses were weighted as the inverse of the number of eligible individuals in the household. Secondly, *only cell phone* responses were weighted based on the number of mobile numbers of the respondent. Thirdly, *dual* users were treated in the same way as *only landline* or *only cell phone* responses if they reported receiving their calls mostly on a fixed phone or mostly on a mobile phone respectively. Finally, *dual* respondents that did not report using the fixed phone over the mobile phone or vice versa were weighted in a combined way as the number of cell phone numbers multiplied by the inverse of eligible individuals in the household (Stelzenmueller et al., 2014). In addition to selection probability, a second stage of weights (applied only to the national samples where both landline and cell phones were used) corrected the distribution of only landline, only cell phone, and multiple lines responses in the raw data for its distribution in the universe. Using weights to control for different modes of data collection can minimize survey errors of representation and, in particular, reducing coverage error, which is the type of error that may occur when the sampling frame does not accurately represent the population of interest (Groves et al., 2011). A final stage of weighting corrected the data for socio-demographic characteristics, including age, gender, region, and education in all samples, as well as race in the case of the United States (Stelzenmueller et al., 2014). Using weights to adjust the data upon a series of socio-demographic population parameters contributed to make each national

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sample more representative of the country´s adult population, which ultimately would increase the validity of this study.

2.2. Variables and Measures

2.2.1. Characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits

We conceived the variable characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits based on a categorical survey question formulated as "In your opinion, what do you think is the most common reason for immigrants [from other countries] to come to [country name]?"

Respondents were offered five different choices namely 1=to be united with family members, 2=to seek asylum, 3=to seek social benefits, 4=to work, and 5=to study. Additionally, the survey included three specific categories to place spontaneous responses like none of the above, don't know and refusal. We re-coded such survey question to create the dichotomous variable characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits, which was measured as 1=respondent meets the condition of expressing that the most common reason for immigrants to come was to seek social benefits versus 0=respondent does not meet the condition (i.e., all the categories but to seek social benefits, including none of the above, and don´t know). The current study used *characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits* as the dependent variable to assess the association between framing immigrants and the personal impact of the Great Recession. Descriptive statistics is provided in table 2.

2.2.2. Family greatly affected by the Great Recession

The Transatlantic Trends Survey 2014 included a question formulated as "Regarding to the extent to which of you or your family has been personally affected by the current economic crisis, would you say that tour family´s financial situation has been…".

Respondents were asked to select one category among four choices, coded as 1=greatly affected, 2=somewhat affected, 3=not really affected, and 4=not affected at all. Two additional codes included those respondents that spontaneously indicated don´t know or that refused to answer the question. We used such survey question to create the variable family greatly affected, measured dichotomously as 1 being the condition (i.e., the family financial situation has been greatly affected by the Great Recession) versus 0 as the addition of responses that did not met the condition as well as those indicating don´t know. *Family greatly affected* was used as independent variable among our models.

2.2.3. Occupation

Survey respondents were asked the following question on their current occupation: "Would you say you are self-employed, an employee, or a manual worker, or would you say that you are without a professional activity?"

The survey provided a series of choices to fit responses into each category. Based on such item, we created the variable occupation, measured as 1=self-employed (which included farmer, forester, fisherman; owner of a shop, craftsman; self-employed professional; manager of a company; and other self-employed); 2=employee (which included employed professional; general or middle management; civil servant; office clerk; supervisor; other employee as salesperson or nurse); 3=manual worker (which included manual worker; unskilled manual worker; and other manual worker); 4=unemployed (which included respondent seeking a job); and 5=without a paid occupation (which included respondent looking after the home; full-time student; retired; and other situations without a professional activity). The current study used *occupation* as a control variable for its statistical models.

2.2.4. Ideology

The variable ideology was measured based on a single survey question asking respondents for self-placement on a seven-choice scale, from extremely liberal/extreme left to extremely conservative/extreme right. The survey options were re-coded into five categories, namely 1=extreme left (including those who choose the option extremely liberal/extreme left), 2=left/center-left (which included those who defined themselves either as liberal/left or slightly liberal/center-left), 3=center (including those who reported being moderate/middle of the road/center), and 4=right/center-right (including respondents self-defined as conservative/right or slightly conservative/center-right), and 5=extreme right (with those who reported extremely conservative/extreme right ideology). We have used *ideology* as a control variable in our models.

2.2.5. Foreign-born parent

A categorical survey item inquired where the respondent's parents were born, offering three choices as 1=both mother and father were born in the country of the survey, 2=one parent was born in the country of the survey and the other was born in another country, and 3=both mother and father were born in a country other than the country of survey. A fourth category

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included those respondents who indicated don´t know as their spontaneous answer. We re-coded such survey item to create the variable foreign-born parent, which was dichotomously measured as 1=meeting the condition of having at least one parent born in another country versus 0=respondent does not meet the condition (which included the category both parents born in the country of the survey). The present study used *foreign-born parent* as a control variable.

2.2.6. Perception of the number of immigrants

A survey item inquired respondent´s opinion on the number of emigrants in the country, as "according to official estimations, around [XX]% of the [country] population was born in another country. In your opinion, is this too many, a lot but not too many, or not many".

This survey item was a split one, meaning that only half of the population from each national sample was exposed to the question (Stelzenmueller et al., 2014). We used such questions to create the variable perception of the number of immigrants, coded as 1=there are too many; 2=there are a lot but not too many; and 3=there are not many. In the current study, the variable *perception of the number of immigrants* was included as an independent control variable among the models.

2.2.7. Number of adults in the family

Based on a survey item asking how many people aged 18 years and above were living in the household, we created the variable adults in the family. We used *adults in the family* (measured continuously as the number of adults in the household) as a control variable in our models.

2.2.8. Race and ethnicity

The questionnaire applied to the national sample of the United States included an item on respondents' race (i.e., Are you White, Black, Asian, or some other race?). Based on that, we considered creating a categorical variable race coded as 1=White, 2=Black, 3=Asian, and 4=another race. However, the limited number of frequencies for the categories 3 (Asian) and 4 (another race) impeded the construction of an accurate statistical model. As a result, we re-coded race as a dummy variable, being 1 the condition of respondent reporting to be

White. Similarly, a dichotomous question on whether the respondent had Hispanic origin or background was applied to the United States sample. We used such question to create the variable Hispanic ethnicity, a dummy variable as 1=meeting the conditions of having Hispanic origin or background. Both *race* and *Hispanic ethnicity* were included as control variables in our statistical model for the United States.

2.2.9. Age, gender, education and locality

We included age as a continuous variable measured in years based on self-reported information, as well as gender, measured dichotomously as 1=male or 2=female. Moreover, we used a three-option item to create the variable education measured as respondent having 1=primary education, 2=secondary education, or 3=post-secondary education. Finally, as the Transatlantic Trends Survey 2014 accounted for respondents´ residence, we created the variable locality of residence coded as 1=metropolitan zone, 2=town/urban center, or 3=rural zone. The present study used *age*, *gender*, *education*, and *locality of residence* as control variables.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Dependent and outcome variables by country		Characterization of immigrants as social benefits seekers		Family greatly affected by the Great Recession	
	N	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
France	933	396	42.44	164	17.58
Germany	923	229	24.81	48	4.98
Greece	911	61	6.70	669	73.44
Italy	959	122	12.72	233	24.30
Portugal	911	175	19.21	434	47.64
Spain	942	211	22.40	372	39.49
UK	894	359	40.16	151	16.89
USA	944	299	31.67	256	27.12

Control variables by cluster	United States		Southern Europe		France-Germany-UK	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Occupation						
Employee	319	53.7	1,178	41.57	1,158	59.02
Self-employed	116	19.53	415	14.64	260	13.25
Manual worker	22	3.7	217	7.66	164	8.36
Job seeker	36	6.06	453	15.98	110	5.61
Without a paid occupation	101	17	571	20.15	270	13.76

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Control variables by cluster	United States		Southern Europe		France-Germany-UK	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Ideology						
Extreme left	42	4.79	186	5.44	95	3.53
Left-center left	181	20.66	1,089	31.83	872	32.37
Center	249	28.42	1,166	34.08	979	36.34
Right-center right	314	35.84	823	24.06	652	24.2
Extreme right	90	10.27	157	4.59	96	3.56
Having foreign-born parent(s)	110	11.68	231	5.91	419	14.52
Perception of number of immigrants						
Too many	100	22.78	493	27.13	312	22.56
A lot but not too many	146	33.26	712	39.19	597	43.17
Not many	193	43.96	612	33.68	474	34.27
Race (only in the USA; N=932) White	794	85.19	---	---	---	---
Ethnicity (only in the USA; N=944) Hispanic	65	6.89	---	---	---	---
Gender						
Male	429	45.44	1,837	46.97	1,358	46.92
Female	515	54.56	2,074	53.03	1,536	53.08
Education						
Primary education	54	5.87	1,240	32.21	976	35.44
Secondary education	301	32.72	1,364	35.43	620	22.51
Post-secondary education	565	61.41	1,246	32.36	1,158	42.05
Locality of residence						
Metropolitan	271	28.71	755	19.3	714	24.67
Town, urban center	345	36.55	1,901	48.61	1,274	44.02
Rural	328	34.75	1,255	32.09	906	31.31
	Mean		Mean		Mean	
Adults in the household	1.94		2.39		1.89	
Age	61.52		50.55		52.15	

Source: Author´s estimation

2.3. Analysis

Three ordinal logistic regressions were estimated to assess the association between one´s family financial situation being greatly affected by the Great Recession and the characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits (see table 3). We analyzed three different geopolitical contexts namely the United States (model 1), the Southern Europe region (model 2), and the triad France-Germany-UK (model 3). Each model included the *characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits* as the dependent variable. The variable *family greatly affected* was treated as the main independent variable in the three models, based on the assumption that there is an association between being personally affected by the crisis and perception of immigrants (Filindra & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2013). Similarly, each model was estimated controlling for *occupation* and *ideology*, since previous studies have found that both occupation and ideology were significantly related with the construction of attitudes towards immigration (Chandler & Tsai, 2001).

We also included having at least one *foreign-born parent* and *perception of the number of immigrants* as control variables. Including these variables were consistent with the literature evaluating factors of immigrants' adaptation and multiculturalism (Castles et al., 2013; Binder, Polinard & Wrinkle, 1997). Specifically, previous studies have suggested a relationship between the volume of immigration (whether actual or perceived) and the development of anti-immigrant anxieties among European societies (Semyonov, Raijman & Gorodzeisky, 2006). Lastly, our models followed the example of previous studies on immigration by controlling for a series of socio-political and demographic factors, including number of *adults in the family*, *age*, *gender*, *education*, and *locality of residence* (Chandler & Tsai, 2001). Model 1, focused on the United States sample, also included the variables *race* and *ethnicity*.

In each case, listwise deletion was employed to address missing data. As a result, our final analytic samples consisted of 228 individuals for model 1 (out of the 467 observations in the dataset), 1,072 individuals for model 2 (out of the 1,861 observations in the dataset), and 814 individuals for model 3 (out of the 1,444 observations in the dataset). Moreover, the size of our analytic samples has been determined by the fact that, as explained in the section *Variables and Measures*, we included a split survey question about perception of the number of immigrants. To assess the specific effect of adding such split-half variable, we have conducted a robustness check (results not shown) by replicating the three models but excluding perception of the number of immigrants as a control variable.

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Table 3. Ordinal Logistic Regression

Immigrants as social benefits seekers	United States N=228		Southern Europe N=1,072		France-Germany-UK N=814	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Family greatly affected by the Great Recession	2.69	[1.14-6.37] *	0.58	[0.38-0.87] **	2.21	[1.29-3.79] **
Occupation (reference Employee)						
Self-employed	0.29	[0.07-1.17]	1.15	[0.63-2.10]	0.86	[0.46-1.58]
Manual worker	0.89	[0.08-10.20]	1.25	[0.62-2.55]	1.49	[0.66-3.37]
Job seeker	0.29	[0.04-2.29]	0.69	[0.35-1.34]	0.97	[0.41-2.30]
Without a paid occupation	0.55	[0.12-2.48]	0.97	[0.55-1.72]	0.76	[0.43-1.36]
Ideology (reference center)						
Extreme left	1.40	[0.12-15.69]	0.49	[0.16-1.54]	0.16	[0.03-0.79] *
Left-center left	0.56	[0.15-2.12]	0.91	[0.56-1.48]	0.58	[0.36-0-94] *
Right-center right	0.84	[0.26-2.75]	0.84	[0.48-1.46]	1.89	[1.12-3.19] *
Extreme right	0.41	[0.96-1.75]	0.82	[0.32-2-10]	1.17	[0.30-4.50]
Having foreign-born parent(s)	0.39	[0.12-1.26]	0.60	[0.20-1.75]	0.81	[0.46-1.45]
Perception of number of immigrants (reference too many)						
A lot but not too many	0.20	[0.06-0.62] **	0.53	[0.33-0.84] **	0.24	[0.14-0.43] ***
Not many	0.16	[0.05-0.57] **	0.24	[0.14-0.41] ***	0.14	[0.08-0.26] ***
Adults in the household	1.32	[0.96-1.82]	0.85	[0.69-1-04]	0.82	[0.65-1.03]
Race (only in un the USA)						
White race	0.91	[0.30-2.80]				
Ethnicity (only in the USA)						
Hispanic ethnicity	0.13	[0.03-0.61] *				
Age	1.00	[0.97-1.03]	0.98	[0.97-1.00]	0.99	[0.97-1.00]
Gender (reference male)						
Female	0.65	[0.28-1.50]	1.05	[0.69-1.59]	0.97	[0.64-1.48]
Education (reference secondary education)						
Primary education	0.15	[0.01-1.66]	1.44	[0.86-2.39]	0.89	[0.51-1.57]
Post-secondary education	0.96	[0.38-2.42]	0.81	[0.48-1.36]	0.61	[0.37-1.00] *
Locality of residence (reference metropolitan zone)						
Town, urban center	0.46	[0.14-1.55]	1.38	[0.80-2.40]	1.27	[0.75-2.13]
Rural zone	1.02	[0.36-2.87]	1.51	[0.82-2.81]	1.74	[1.01-2.97] *

Note. OR= odds ratio; CI= confidence interval.

*** p ≤.001, ** p ≤.01, * p ≤.05.

Source: Author´s estimation

3. Results

These analyses showed that one´s family financial situation being greatly affected by the Great Recession was related to the characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits in both the United States (model 1) and the triad France-Germany-UK (model 3), which provided support for the hypotheses H_1 and H_3. The US respondents who reported to be significantly impacted by the recession at the family-level had odds of expressing a higher characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits that were about 2.69 times the odds for the respondents who did not report being greatly affected by the crisis (p<.05). Similarly, we found a positive association between being significantly impacted by the crisis and consider immigrants as seekers of social benefits among France-Germany-UK respondents (OR=2.21, p<.01). Surprisingly though, our findings suggested that such association shows an opposite direction for Southern Europe (model 2). Contrary to our hypothesis H_2, being greatly affected by the Great Recession decreased the odds of framing immigrants as social benefits seekers among respondents from the Southern Europe region (OR=0.58, p<.01).

Moreover, our findings suggested an attitudinal pattern across the models regarding the perception of the number of immigrants. Those who reported that there were a lot but not many immigrants in the country, compared with those expressing that they were too many, were less likely to frame immigrants as social benefits seekers in the United States (OR=0.20, p<.01), South Europe (OR=0.53, p<.01), and France-Germany-UK (OR=0.24, p<.001). Indeed, those expressing that the number of immigrants were not many showed the lowest odds of characterizing immigrants as seekers of social benefits, as OR=0.16 among US respondents (p<.01), OR=0.25 among respondents from Southern Europe (p<.001), and OR=0.14 for those from the triad France-Germany-UK (p<.001).

Additional findings showed that Hispanic ethnicity was associated with decreased odds of characterizing immigrants as social benefits seekers among US respondents (OR=0.13, p<.05). Moreover, ideology was found to be a significant predictor in our France-Germany-UK model, as those respondents who selected the right-center/right category had odds of framing immigrants as social benefits seekers that were about 1.89 times the odds for the respondents who chose the category center (p<.05). On the contrary, though, respondents who reported the left-center/left or the extreme left categories were less likely to consider immigrants as social benefits seekers than those in the center of the spectrum (OR=0.58 and OR=0.16 respectively; p<.01). Model 3 provided us with two extra findings regarding the

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France-Germany-UK sample as 1) that having post-secondary education versus only secondary education was associated with decreased odds of portraying immigrants as social benefits seekers (OR=0.61; p<.01), and 2) that rural respondents had odds of characterizing immigrants as social benefits seekers that were about 1.74 times the odds of the respondents from a metropolitan zone (p<.01).

The robustness check assessing the specific effect of the split-half variable perception of the number of immigrants has validated the results of our main models. The association between perceiving immigrants as benefits-seekers and self-reported hardships during the recession remained significant when we compared the models excluding the variable perception of the number of immigrants with the main models presented in the current study. The robustness check has also indicated that the direction of such association was consistent in all the cases under comparative examination.

4. Discussion

This study confirmed that the perception of immigrants among the general public is significantly related with the economic context, which is consistent with the principles of the realistic group conflict theory as well as with previous studies on immigration and attitudes (Filindra & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2013; Fix et al., 2009; Goldstein & Peters, 2014). We found that those who were greatly impacted at the family-level by the Great Recession, both in the United States and in the triad France-Germany-UK, were more likely to frame immigrants as seekers of social benefits that those who were not significantly affected by the downturn. Notably, this study also showed that the opposite effect happened among people from the Sothern Europe region, as those greatly impacted by the economic crisis were indeed less inclined to considering immigrants as seekers of social benefits.

Further research is needed to assess factors explaining such contradictory outcomes. In that regard, we speculate that the singularities on social policies among the regions, in particular, the more universal or limited scope of their welfare systems, may shape diverse perspectives about the entitlement to social benefits. We also hypothesize that different traditions on migration (from immigration-based societies such as the United States to mixed migratory regions such as the Mediterranean area) may also define mainstream attitudes towards either assimilation or multiculturalism, as well as different notions of migrants´ rights and duties. Additionally, some cultural attributes, such as the more individualistic or

communitarian orientation of a given society, can also determine public stands on diversity, distributive justice, and the common good, as well as different patterns concerning welfare-chauvinism.

Moreover, our findings were consistent with previous studies that pointed out the relationship between the number of immigrants (whether actual or perceived) and the attitudes among the host societies (Alba, Rumbaut & Marotz, 2005). Hence, we found a prevalent pattern in the three models tested, as the more a person feels that immigrants are numerous, the more such person characterizes immigrants as seekers of social benefits. Such a pattern may be related to the competition for scarce resources between different social groups, for instance, the workers versus the unemployed, or immigrants versus citizens (D'Amuri & Peri, 2014; Goldstein & Peters, 2014). Since social competition increases during periods of recession, the impact of the economic downturn at the personal-level may justify the rise of anti-immigrant anxieties, which can be measured, among other indicators, by the general public perceiving the number of immigrants as a threat to their socioeconomic status (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010).

Altogether, this paper underlines the pertinence of social practice beyond the mere allocation of scarce resources, towards developing conditions to allow individuals, families, and communities to flourish. In that regard, a global-rights framework replacing the nation-based criterion of deservedness seems critical to inform comprehensive social interventions in complex and diverse contexts like those evaluated by the current study. The many implications of the processes of globalization and transnational migration (e.g., the development of the notion of fluid citizenship; Faist, Faust, & Reisenauer, 2013) call for advancing a global social work practice and research to promote universal policies and to overcome the methodological nationalism described by Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2002). Additionally, the existence of regional factors moderating the negative impact of family hardship in the development of anti-immigrant anxieties (such as Hispanic ethnicity in the United States, or liberal ideology and post-secondary education for the triad France-Germany-UK) do also emphasize the need for integrating local attributes when shaping global policy, practice, and research.

Indeed, the Transatlantic Trends Survey 2014 included national samples from very different contexts regarding culture, demography, or economy. On the one hand, such diversity supported a comparative analysis that enhanced the conclusions drawn from previous studies. On the other hand, though, the heterogeneity of the populations included in this study may have yielded some conceptual issues that limited the comparability between

models. In particular, we wonder if the notion "social benefits" does mean the same for US respondents than for the European public, since their welfare systems show significant divergences. Some technical features of the Transatlantic Trends Survey 2014, such as the use of different sampling strategies (e.g., dual frame in the US; only landline in Germany) and the significant variability of the response rates among nations (e.g., 0.04 in France versus 0.23 in Portugal), also determine the comparability between the samples included in the present study. Similarly, the fact that the survey included the variables race and ethnicity exclusively for the US sample has restricted the fully transnational dimension of our analysis.

Finally, it must be noticed that the current study used a single survey question (i.e., what is the most common reason for immigrants to come) to create the dependent variable characterization of immigrants as seekers of social benefits. The fact that the survey provided non-exclusive options (i.e., to be united with family members; to seek asylum; to seek social benefits; to work, and to study) may have led to misrepresenting respondents' perception. Finally, although the survey did inquire about the number of adults in each household, it did not account for the number of children in the houses, so we could not use in our analysis an actual figure of household size.

Conclusions

By using the Transatlantic Trends Survey 2014, this study developed a comparative-transnational approach which enhanced the conclusions drawn from previous investigations. This study confirmed that framing immigrants as seekers of social benefits were positively associated with one´s family being significantly impacted by the Great Recession among the general public in the United States as well as in the triad France-Germany-UK. Such findings aligned with previous literature suggesting that the perception of immigrants was significantly related to the economic context. Notably, we showed that the effect had an opposite direction in the Southern Europe region, where those greatly impacted by the crisis were less likely to frame immigrants as seekers of social benefits. Moreover, our study pointed out some additional factors shaping the characterization of immigrants as social benefits seekers namely anxiety about the number of immigrants among the general public in the United States, Southern Europe, and France-Germany-UK; Hispanic ethnicity for the US case; and ideology and education among the population from the triad France-Germany-UK.

Our findings that a different pattern operates between the US and the triad France-Germany-UK on one side, and the Southern Europe region, on the other hand, highlighted the need for further examination of factors explaining regional divergences. In particular, it would be worthwhile to analyze the extent to which the specifics of each national welfare system (e.g., services, accessibility, or funding) determine the attitudes about immigrants and immigration policies among the general public. Similarly, further evaluation is needed to assess how different traditions on migration as well as regional cultural characteristics may shape the general public attitudes about social rights and the deservingness criteria. Given these points, this study endorses the development of a global social work practice and research upon a global-rights framework to overcome both restrictive nationally-based social policies and methodological nationalism.

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