Pre-Analysis Plan: Control and Attitudes towards Ukrainian Refugees in Slovakia

Background

An expansive literature focuses on explaining attitudes toward migrants and refugees. Many of these explanations focus on the grievances that arise amongst dominant groups in response to societal newcomers. Grievances can be economic, symbolic/cultural, or physical (see Adida 2021 for overview); and they can be rooted in either personal or sociotropic concerns (e.g., Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). For example, an individual may oppose immigration due to worries about strains on the welfare state (Steele 2016), concerns about the rise of terrorism (Guild and Garlick 2010), or reservations about threats to cultural homogeneity (Sides and Citrin 2007). Accordingly, studies tend to explain variations in these attitudes by focusing on three types of factors : (1) individual-level characteristics of the attitude holder; (2) individual-level characteristics of the migrant or refugee; and (3) the macro-level, contextual conditions that may moderate or mediate the effects of these characteristics. Importantly, recent work has made a forceful case for differentiating between attitudes towards migrants and refugees (e.g., Abdelaaty and Steele 2022). The two categories of people on the move carry different connotations, and the labels do evoke different reactions (Findor et al. 2021).

Recent scholarship has argued that locus of control is an important determinant of migration attitudes (Harell et al. 2017). Locus of control is conceptualized along three dimensions (corresponding to the three explanation types noted above). First, locus of control can be a evaluation of how much control an individual believes that they have over their own personal situation. Second, it can also refer to attributive external evaluations (Zucker and Weiner 1993); in this case, an evaluation of the extent to which the migrant is personally responsible for their situation. Finally, locus of control can refer to the extent to which an individual believes that society or the government is capable of exerting control in a given domain. Various empirical studies have confirmed that each of these dimensions of control plays an important role in shaping attitudes towards migration and refugees (Harell et al. 2017; Lutz & Karstens 2021; Schwartz et al. 2021; Solodoch 2021). Generally, these studies, especially those focusing on government or societal control, find that increased levels of control either lead to or correlate with stronger pro-migration stances.

Yet, these studies have yet to answer an important question: what happens when governments outsource control to an external actor? Governments and states may lack the capacity to effectively control migration themselves, so they rely on non-governmental or international organizations to help them exert control. The outsourcing of control can have two potentially contradictory effects. On the one hand, individuals may still be assuaged that someone, regardless of who, is controlling the migration situation. On the other hand, delegating the management of a migration situation to an external actor inherently entails the government ceding control to that actor. Thus, external

control over migration management may actually cause sentiments of threat to arise.

This pre-analysis plan details an experiment investigating these competing predictions. The experiment leverages the unprecedented wave of Ukrainian refugees that have transited and resettled in the Central European member states of the European Union (EU). Specifically, it focuses on Slovakia, where over 500,000 Ukrainian refugees have crossed the border, and where nearly 100,000 Ukrainian refugees have chosen to settle. In order to manage this unprecedented migration, the EU has allocated over 500 million euros to Slovakia to help control the situation. Accordingly, the study examines whether EU support for Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia influences migration-related attitudes.

Research Design

To identify the effects of EU support on migration-related attitudes, I will use a between-subjects experiment with a nationally representative sample of Slovaks (N=1000). National representativeness is defined by quotas on age, education, region, size of settlement, and sex. Sample size was determined by constraints imposed by the survey company. In the experiment, respondents will be randomly assigned to one of two groups. Prior to receiving the treatment, respondents will answer three pre-treatment questions:

- In politics, we often talk about liberals and conservatives. Where would you rank on this scale? (0-10)

- Which party would you vote for if parliamentary elections were held next weekend? (nominal)

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I often feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me. (0-10)

After answering these questions, respondents are exposed to one of two randomly-assigned treatments. For each group, there is a five second timer that must expire before participants can move on to the next question. The *non-EU group* receives the following text:

- Over the past couple of months, 90,000 people who are running from Ukraine have settled in Slovakia.

The *EU group* receives the following text:

- Over the past couple of months, 90,000 people who are running from Ukraine have settled in Slovakia. The European Union has given Slovakia over 500 million euros to help manage the situation. These resources from the European Union will help Ukrainians in Slovakia with fundamental needs like housing, food, and education. Eurofonds support Ukrainians in Slovakia.

Four dependent variables follow:

- On a scale from 0 to 100, how would you express your personal relationship to people running from Ukraine to Slovakia. 0 indicates cold, negative feelings, 50 indicates neutral feelings, and 100 indicates warm, positive feelings.

- Do you think that the Ukrainians who decide to settle in Slovakia will be a burden or a benefit for Slovakia? (0-10)

- Do you think that Slovakia should accept fewer or more people running from Ukraine? 0 means significantly less, 10 means significantly more. (0-10)

- In general, what is your impression of and feeling about the European Union (EU)? 0 means very negative, 10 means very positive. (0-10)

Next, respondents answer three questions measuring potential mediators.

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 0 means you do not agree at all, 10 means you completely agree

    - The national government in Slovakia has control over the migration situation from Ukraine.
    - Key decisions in Slovakia are made by the European Union rather than the national government.
    - The European Union has control over the migration situation from Ukraine.

Finally, the survey company provides the age, education, income, region, and sex of the respondent.

Hypotheses

As noted above, EU support for managing the migration situation can lead to potentially different reactions. Respondents may feel assuaged that the situation is being handled. Alternatively, they may respond negatively given the fact that it is an external actor, and not the national government, exerting control over the migration situation. Accordingly, I do make the following predictions about average treatment effects:

> *H1:* Respondents in the *EU Group* will have more positive attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees than respondents in *non-EU Group*.
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> *H2:* Respondents in the *EU Group* will have more negative attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees than respondents in *non-EU Group*.
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> *H3:* Respondents in the *EU Group* will indicate that Ukrainian refugees are less of a burden than respondents in *non-EU Group*.
>
> *H4:* Respondents in the *EU Group* will indicate that Ukrainian refugees are more of a burden than respondents in *non-EU Group*

H5: Respondents in the *EU Group* will indicate that Slovakia should accept more Ukrainian refugees than respondents in *non-EU Group*.

H6: Respondents in the *EU Group* will indicate that Slovakia should accept less Ukrainian refugees than respondents in *non-EU Group*.

H7: Respondents in the *EU Group* will have more positive attitudes towards the EU than respondents in *non-EU Group*.

H8: Respondents in the *EU Group* will have more negative attitudes towards the EU than respondents in *non-EU Group*.

I also predict that the extent to which the respondent feels that either the national government or the EU has control over the migration situation will mediate their attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, the extent to which they consider Ukrainian refugees a burden, their stances on whether Slovakia should accept more refugees, and their attitudes towards the European Union. Accordingly, I posit the following mediation hypotheses:

H9: The extent to which a respondent feels that the national government in Slovakia has control over the migration situation will mediate the effect of the *EU Group* treatment on attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, the extent to which they think Ukrainian refugees are a burden, stances on whether Slovakia should accept more Ukrainian refugees, and attitudes towards the EU.

H10: The extent to which a respondent feels that key decisions in Slovakia are made by the EU rather than the national government will mediate the effect of the *EU Group* treatment on attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, the extent to which they think Ukrainian refugees are a burden, stances on whether Slovakia should accept more Ukrainian refugees, and attitudes towards the EU.

H11: The extent to which a respondent feels that the EU has control over the migration situation will mediate the effect of the *EU Group* treatment on attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, the extent to which they think Ukrainian refugees are a burden, stances on whether Slovakia should accept more Ukrainian refugees, and attitudes towards the EU.

Recent work indicates that respondent ideology may moderate responses to migration-related pressures and EU influence (van der Brug & Harteveld 2021). The moderating role of ideology may manifest as either a polarization effect or as a ceiling effect.
If ideological moderation manifests as a polarization effect, conservatives will deepen their anti-migration attitudes in response to EU influence over migration, while liberals will shift their attitudes in a pro-migration direction. In other words, ideologically-motivated information processing will cause conservatives to interpret the EU's role negatively and liberals to interpret it positively. If ideological moderation manifests as a ceiling effect, conservatives – who already hold entrenched anti-migration views (Kustov 2022) – will not update their preferences in response to the treatment. Conversely liberals, who do not hold entrenched anti-migration or anti-EU views, may shift their attitudes in response to the treatments. This discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

- *H12, Conservative Polarization:* Conservatives in the *EU Group* will have more negative attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, more restrictive stances on whether Slovakia should accept more Ukrainian refugees, more negative attitudes towards the EU, and will consider Ukrainian refugees more of a burden than conservatives in the *non-EU Group*.

- *H13, Liberal Polarization:* Liberals in the *EU Group* will have less negative attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, less restrictive stances on whether Slovakia should accept more Ukrainian refugees, less negative attitudes towards the EU, and will consider Ukrainian refugees less of a burden than liberals in the *non-EU Group*.

- *H14, Conservative Ceiling Effects:* Conservatives in the *EU Group* will have the same attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, the same stances on whether Slovakia should accept more Ukrainian refugees, the same attitudes towards the EU, and the same evaluation of the extent to which Ukrainian refugees are a burden as conservatives in the *non-EU Group*.

- *H15, Liberal Ceiling Effects:* Liberals in the *EU Group* will have more negative attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, more restrictive stances on whether Slovakia should accept more Ukrainian refugees, more negative attitudes towards the EU, and will consider Ukrainian refugees more of a burden than liberals in the *non-EU Group*.

Analysis

To test *H1-H8* – i.e., to identify average treatment effects – I will compare means between the two groups using unpaired two-sample t-tests, and linear regression with a binary treatment indicator variable. As a robustness check, I will also present the linear regression results with and without pre-treatment covariate adjustment.

To test *H9-H11* – i.e., to identify average causal mediation effects – I will estimate a causal mediation model using the mediation package in R (Imai et al. 2011). Each of the three listed potential mediators – national government control over the migration situation, key decisions made by EU, and EU control over the migration situation – will be set as mediators for each of the four dependent variables. This results in a total of twelve mediation models. All will be estimated with robust standard errors, and with the default option of quasi-bayesian confidence intervals based on 1000 simulations. The models will be estimated with the following pre-treatment covariates: age, education, individual locus of control, liberal/conservative ideology, size of settlement, and sex. I will conduct sensitivity analyses of the assumption of no confounding between the mediators and outcome variables by reporting the value of the ρ parameter at which the average causal mediation effect crosses 0.

To test *H12-H15* – i.e., to identify subgroup treatment effects – I will compare means across the two experimental groups for conservatives and liberals separately. For robustness – i.e., to ensure that results are not an artefact of any specific operationalization – I will use multiple operationalizations of conservative and liberals:

- liberals < 4, conservatives ≥ 4
- liberals < 5, conservatives ≥ 5
- liberals < 6, conservatives ≥ 6
- liberals below sample mean, conservatives above sample mean
- liberals one standard deviation below sample mean, conservatives one standard deviation above sample mean
- liberals ≤ 2, conservatives ≥ 9

More formally, I will interact the binary treatment indicator variable with the measure of liberal/conservative ideology. Finally, I will repeat these analyses based on stated vote choice instead of self-reported ideology. Conservatives voters will be defined as voters of the following political parties: L'SNS, Republika, Sme Rodina, Smer, and SNS; liberal voters will be defined as voters of the following party: Progressive Slovakia, SaS, and Za Ludi. For these analyses, voters of other parties will be dropped, and a binary indicator variable for nationalist versus progressive will be interacted with the binary treatment indicator.

I will assess balance across relevant covariates to ensure successful randomization and assess sample representativeness using census data. If there is sufficient reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), I will combine the three dependent variables asking directly about Ukrainian refugees (feeling thermometer, burden/benefit, accept more/less) into a single index. For inference, statistical significance will be set at $\alpha \leq 0.05$.

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