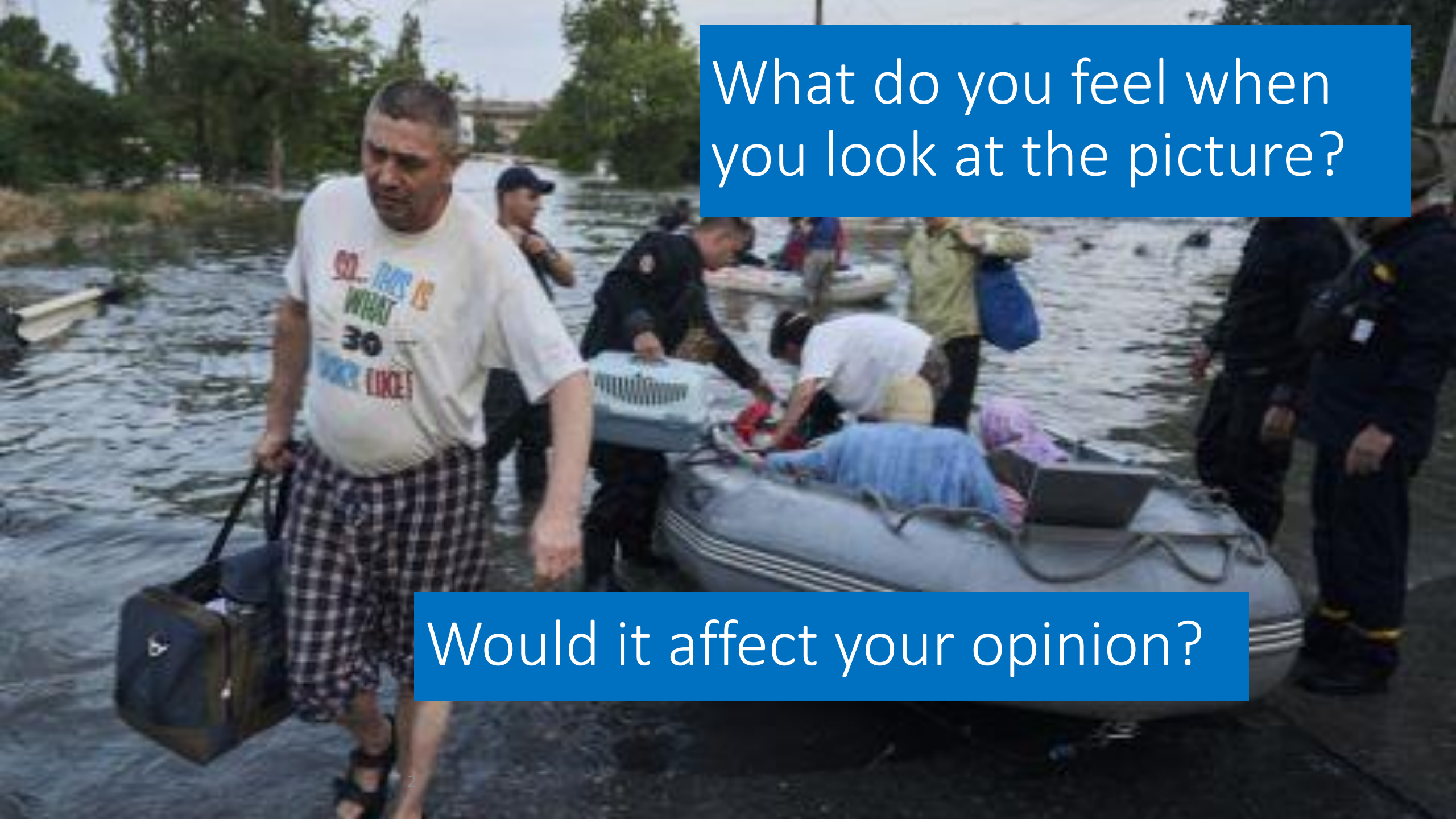


A large crowd of people, including men, women, and children, is walking across the deck of a ship. The ship's superstructure, including a radar mast and various antennas, is visible in the background. The scene is set outdoors on a bright day.

**Does a tragic event affect different aspects
of attitudes toward immigration?
Odelia Heizler and Osnat Israeli**

Israel Economic Association Conference, 22.06.23



What do you feel when you look at the picture?

Would it affect your opinion?

The European migrant crisis

- Since 2015, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people reaching Europe.
- At least 1,257 people have died or gone missing while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa in 2015.



Refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean to Europe

Overview of arrival trends as of 28 September 2015

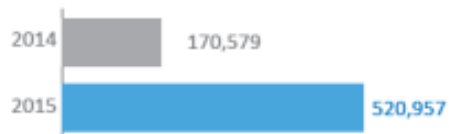
2015 arrivals as of 28 September 2015

520,957 arrivals by sea
2,980 dead/missing

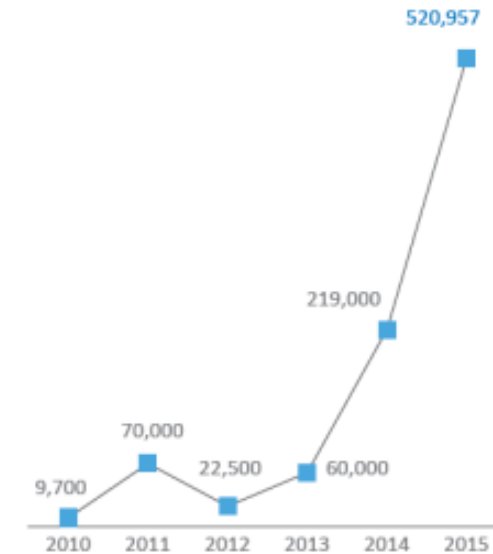
2014

219,000 arrivals by sea
3,500 dead/missing

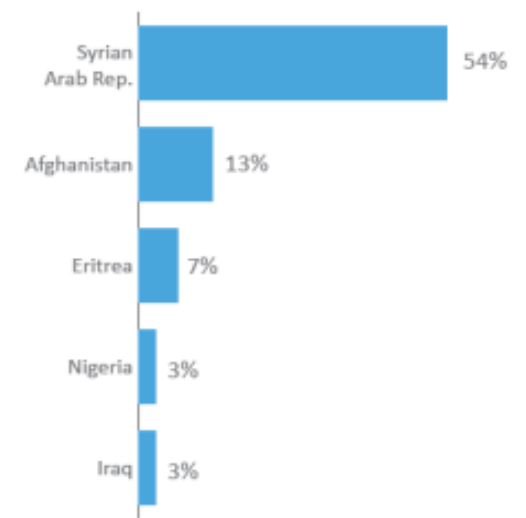
Comparison 2014 - 2015 (Jan-Sep)
Arrivals by sea



Evolution of sea arrivals to Europe



Top 5 nationalities for the period Jan - Sep 2015



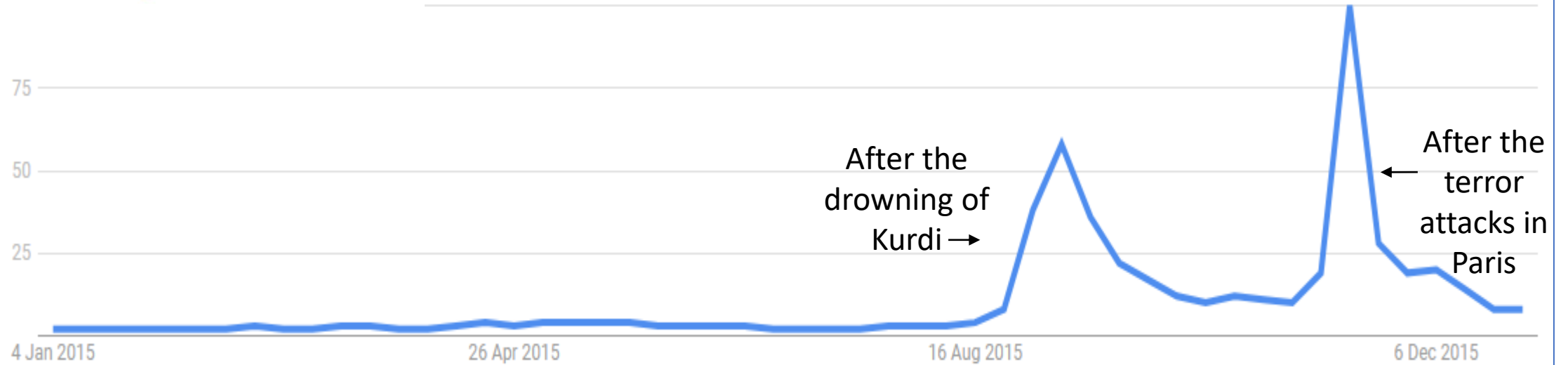
Alan Kurdi's drowning

- On September 2nd 2015, 3-year-old Alan Kurdi and his family, along with 12 other immigrants, boarded a small boat in Bodrum, Turkey, in an attempt to reach Greece.
- About 5 minutes after leaving Bodrum, their boat capsized. Alan Kurdi, his mother, brother, and another two immigrants perished in the accident.
- The photograph of Alan Kurdi's body, lying on the shore, became an iconic image.

Google Trends



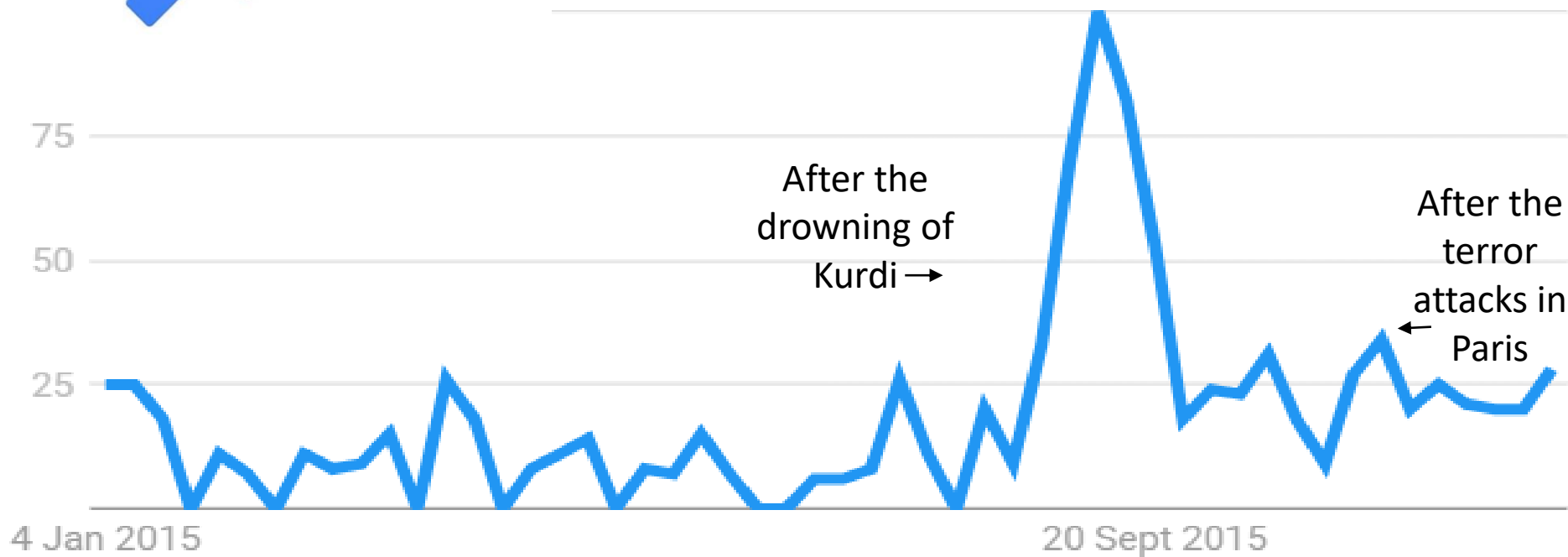
● refugees
Search term



Google Trends



פליטים
מונח חיפוש



The research question:

- Does a tragic event such as the death of Alan Kurdi affect different aspects of attitudes?
- Four different aspects of attitudes toward immigration are examined:
 - **opposition to immigrants' admission**
 - **realistic and symbolic threat**
 - **criteria for immigrants' admission**
 - **social distance**

Natural experiment

- A natural experiment is an empirical study in which individuals are exposed to the experimental or control conditions that are determined by nature or by other factors outside the control of the investigators.
- Only a limited number of studies have analyzed the effect of major events using a natural experiment framework, because it is difficult to accurately measure attitudes before and after unpredictable incidents (Smiley et al. 2017).



Natural experiment

- Previous research has addressed the impact of terror attacks on attitudes toward immigration: the 9/11 attacks (Hopkins, 2010), the terror attack in Bali in October 2002 and the 2004 Madrid bombing (Legewie, 2013), the terror attacks in Paris in November 2015 (Ferrín et al. 2020).
- The drowning of Alan Kurdi coincided with the interview period of the 7th round of the ESS in Portugal.



Previous research

- Sohlberg et al. (2019) performed a survey experiment in which, shortly after the publication of Kurdi's photograph, they drew a sample of respondents, some of whom were shown the photograph, while the others were used as a control group. Both groups were asked whether fewer refugees should be accepted in Sweden.
- They found that in September, the image evoked support for a more liberal refugee acceptance policy. However, in October, people viewed the photograph through their left–right ideological orientation.

Previous research-cont.

- Heizler and Israeli (2021) compared the effect of the death of about 1,200 immigrants in April to that of Alan Kurdi.
- In accordance with the identifiable victim theory, we found that opposition to immigrants' admission reduced significantly after September 2nd, but no such effect was found in April.
- Other (qualitative) research: Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017), Slovic et al. (2017), Lenette and Miskovic (2018), Adler-Nissen et al. (2020) showed a dramatic change in media narrative and increased donation behavior.

Data



- We used the seventh round (2014/2015) of the ESS dataset.
- The ESS is a biennial cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe since 2002.
- The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behavioral patterns of diverse populations in more than 30 nations.

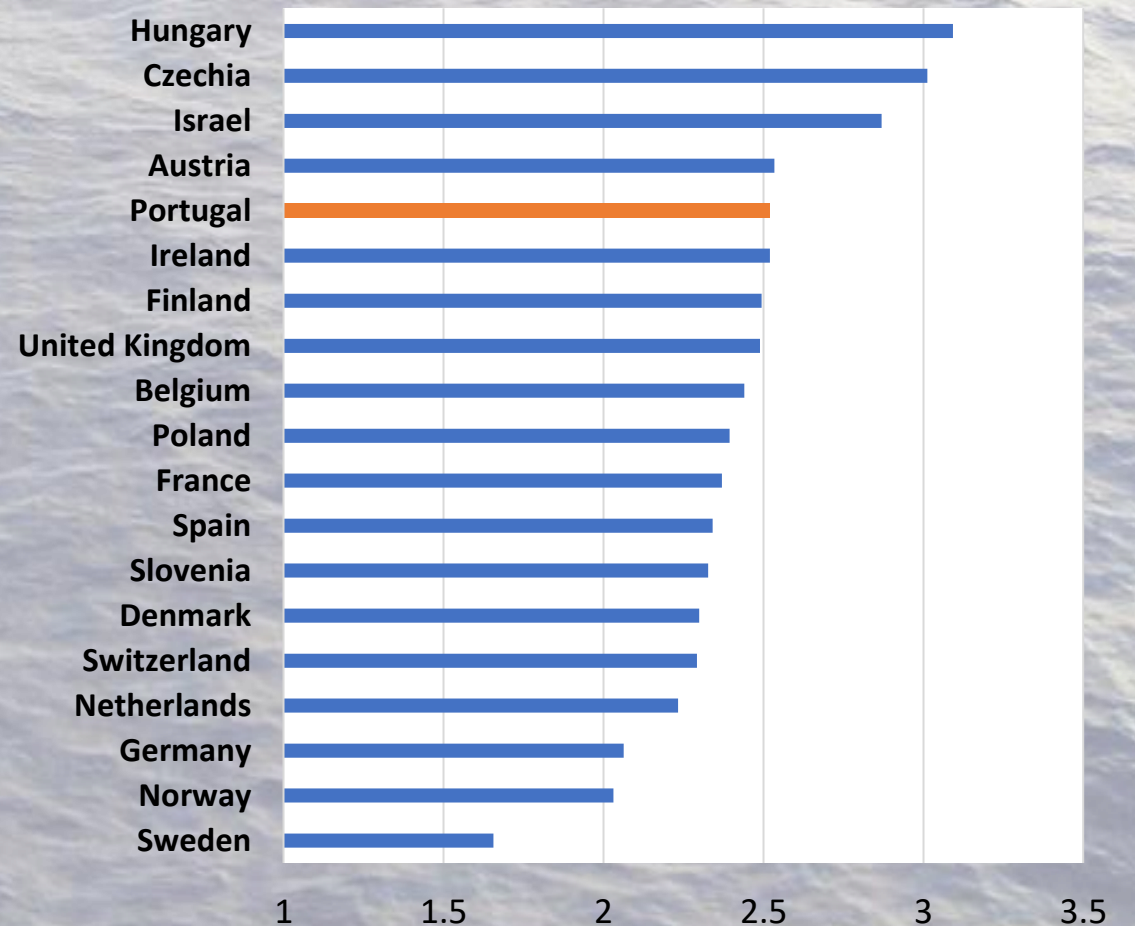
Data – countries:

- The drowning of Alan Kurdi fell within the interview period of two countries: Portugal and Israel.
- However, in Israel, there is an explicit distinction between public attitudes toward Jewish immigrants and those toward refugees.
- One item in the questionnaire examines attitudes toward Jewish people from other countries, but there is almost no variation in the answers.
- The research was done only for Portugal.

Opposition to immigrants' admission

- Seven items asking the extent to which respondents think that Portugal should allow people from other countries to come and live in Portugal. The questions referred to seven groups.
- The answers to the questions were averaged and then standardized for comparison reasons.
- A higher value of the aspect means the individual is more anti-immigration.

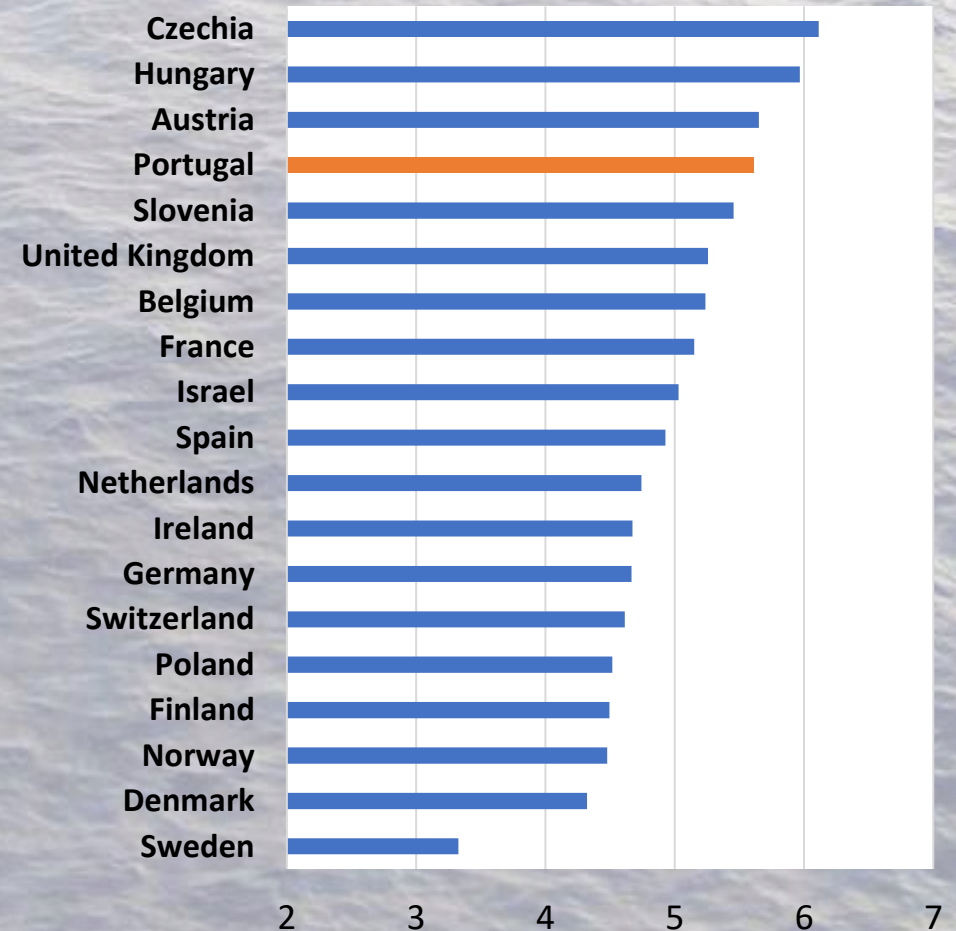
Allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority



Realistic and symbolic threat

- Six items asking about the anticipation of negative consequences resulting from immigration, regarding its effect on the economy, crime, cultural life or in general- whether immigration makes Portugal a worse place to live in.

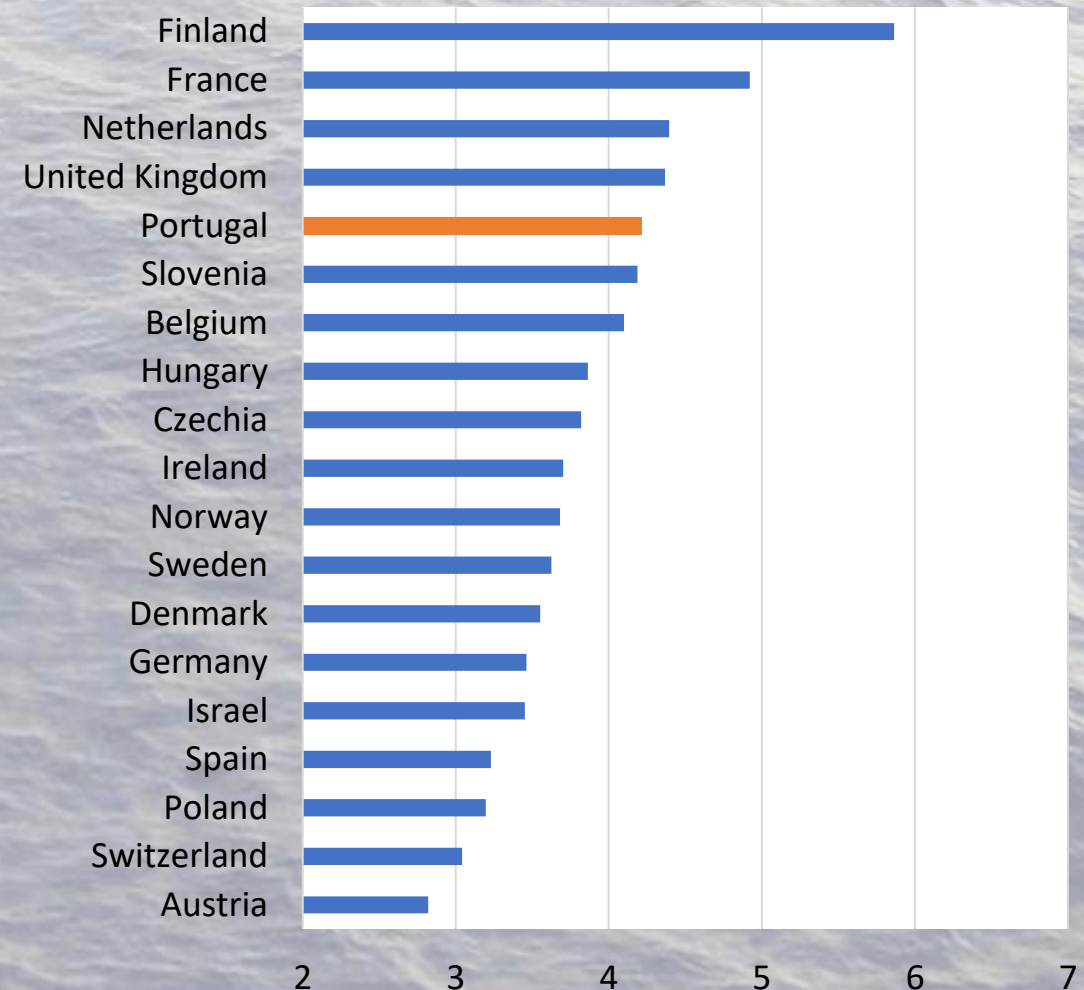
immigration bad or good for country's economy



Criteria for immigrants' admission

- Qualification criteria for immigrants entering the country.
- Four questions, asking about the importance of different traits in deciding whether immigrants should come and live in Portugal: having good educational qualifications, being able to speak the country's official language, having work skills that the country needs, and being committed to the country's way of life.

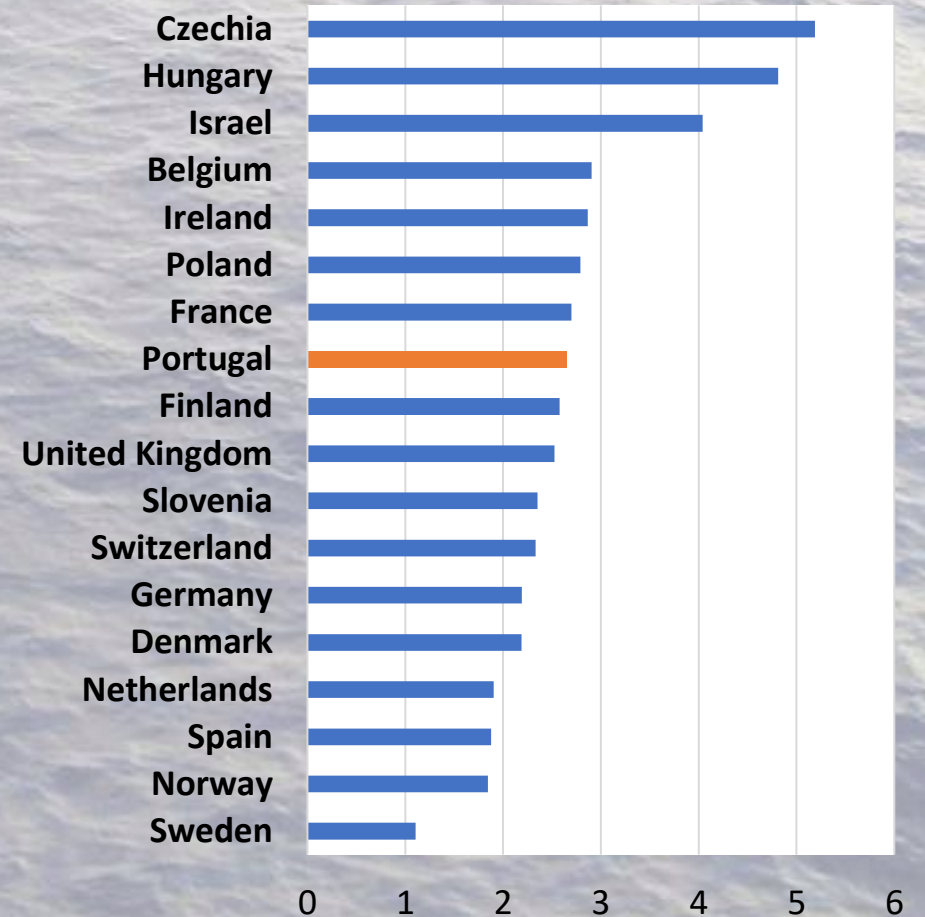
Qualification for immigration: good educational qualifications



Social distance

- How much would you mind if a close family member marries an immigrant of a different race or ethnicity, or if you have an immigrant of a different race or ethnicity as a boss.
- This aspect was recoded into a binary variable, with the value 0 given to those who answered that they would not mind at all in both questions, and a value of 1 otherwise.

Immigrant different race/ethnic group majority: your boss



The effect of Compassion

- The image of Alan Kurdi evoked empathy and compassion that neuroscience and psychological research associate with a motivation to help.
- Empathy is generally described as the capacity to share the feelings of others (Klimecki, 2019).
- Compassion is a complementary social emotion linked to the motivation to help and to pro-social behavior (Klimecki, 2014; Preckel et al. 2018).
- The first and last aspects are more closely linked to pro-social behavior than the others.



Methodology

$$Y_{ij} = X_i' \beta + \gamma T_i + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

- T is the treatment variable, receiving a value of 1 if the individual was interviewed after the incident (treatment group), and 0 if the individual was interviewed before the incident (control group).
- Control group: 231 respondents who were interviewed from June 10th throughout July and August.
- Treatment group: respondents who were interviewed after September 3rd till October 5th, including 251 observations.

Balancing test

Variable	Mean control	Mean treatment	t
Age	53.231 (1.263)	50.846 (1.240)	1.346
Gender	0.38 (0.032)	0.449 (0.032)	-1.537
Education	8.364 (0.320)	8.829 (0.33)	-1.008
Immigrant	0.061 (0.016)	0.069 (0.019)	-0.339
Roman Catholic	0.764 (0.028)	0.713 (0.029)	1.279
Economic status 1	0.106 (0.020)	0.133 (0.021)	-0.931
Economic status 2	0.288 (0.020)	0.267 (0.025)	0.511

Results:



Opposition to immigrants' admission significantly decreased after the event. This aspect inspects the willingness to allow more immigrants into the country and may relate to a greater motivation to help.

The size of the effect was quite substantial, equivalent to the effect of about seven years of education.



A smaller and statistically insignificant effect was found regarding the perception of immigrants as a threat or on criteria for immigrants' admission.



The drowning also significantly reduced the reluctance to associate with immigrants through marriage and as a boss.

Results

Variable	Opposition to immigrants' admission (1)	Realistic and symbolic threat (2)	Criteria for immigrants' admission (3)	Social distance (Logit) (4)
Treatment	-0.239** (0.095)	0.123 (0.087)	-0.088 (0.082)	-0.427** (0.21)
Age	0.004 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.004 (0.006)
Gender	-0.105 (0.097)	-0.226*** (0.087)	0.106 (0.084)	-0.043 (0.212)
Education	-0.034*** (0.011)	-0.021** (0.01)	-0.024** (0.01)	-0.042* (0.024)
Immigrant	-0.532*** (0.193)	-0.884*** (0.171)	0.359** (0.165)	-0.184 (0.405)
Roman Catholic	0.439*** (0.113)	0.241** (0.101)	0.115 (0.096)	1.083*** (0.232)
Very difficult Economic status	0.329** (0.151)	0.332** (0.14)	0.245* (0.132)	-0.809** (0.321)
Difficult economic status	0.069 (0.11)	0.171* (0.101)	0.162* (0.095)	-0.361 (0.244)

Robustness checks - Changing the time duration

1. Expanding the time interval to include individuals who were interviewed throughout October. Consequently, the treatment group included 160 additional respondents who were interviewed from October 6th to October 30th.
2. Shortening the time range.
 - The effects on the first and last aspects were significant until the beginning of October.

Robustness checks - a “placebo” question

A “placebo” question- we used a question that should not be affected by Alan Kurdi’s death (De Poli et al., 2017): the respondent’s opinion on whether gays and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wished.

➤ The treatment variable was not significant.

Robustness checks- a “placebo” event

- A “placebo” event – we used a random date as a fictitious event following Legewie (2013) and Heizler and Israeli (2021), to consider the possibility that an unobserved temporal variation in the data affected the results.
- The treatment effect was not significant, for all four aspects.

Conclusions and discussion:

- The results suggest that tragic events that evoke empathy and compassion for the victim influence attitudes regarding helping behavior toward immigrants and probably increase identification with the victim, thereby ameliorating the social distance aspect.
- However, empathy did not seem to affect aspects that are less related to emotions and pro-social behavior and presumably involve more cognitive thinking.
- The impact seemed to be short-termed and to last for about a month.

Conclusions and discussion-cont.

- Other implementation- the Russia-Ukraine war. If the main target is to raise donations for the refugees, an article presenting an identified victim should help.
- But it probably won't affect the individuals' opinion regarding the war. For example, is the war justified? should the European Union be more involved ?

A large crowd of people, including men, women, and children, is disembarking from a white ship named "DADA". The ship is docked at a pier, and the people are walking across the deck towards the shore. The ship has a complex superstructure with various antennas and equipment. The water is blue, and the sky is clear. A large blue banner with the text "Thank you!" is overlaid on the image.

Thank you!