

Securitizing Immigration in Europe

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The unexpected arrival of more than one million migrants – most fleeing war and conditions of rampant violence in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq – at the height of the 2015-2016 asylum crisis in Europe and the grant of protected status to 538,000 asylum seekers by the region's governments in 2017 have fueled a two-pronged narrative that conflates immigration with insecurity. The first prong of this narrative posits that individual states and the European Union as a whole have lost control of their territorial borders. According to the adherents of this viewpoint, the irresistible forces of globalization have broadly conspired to thwart the ability of governments to deny the entry of numerous “unwanted” immigrants into their respective societies. A second, related prong of this narrative is that the recent influx of an unprecedented number of asylum seekers from predominantly Muslim countries further compromises the security of a region whose current population of approximately 26 million Muslims is projected to grow, according to a 2017 Pew Research Center study, to between 7.4 and 14 percent of Europe's total population by 2050, depending upon future migration patterns. The headline concern, of course, is the specter of terrorist-inspired acts that might be perpetrated by immigrants and their descendants who are alienated from their host society. Also implicated are immigrants whose non-terrorist, criminal acts potentially threaten public order and/or private property.

Do immigrants pose an objective security threat to European societies? If so, is the nature of this threat sufficiently great and urgent that responsible governments are justified in primarily focusing their anti-terrorism and anti-crime policies on a subset of their immigrant populations (i.e. Muslims)? In a post-September 11th world even the wooliest of minds must concede that a minority, however small, of immigrants *do* pose a significant risk to the physical safety and emotional well-being of the citizens of the immigration-receiving societies. To assume otherwise, in the face of the worrying and abundant evidence to the contrary, would be irresponsible.

This said, how much of a physical safety threat does mass immigration/immigrant settlement pose as compared with other physical safety threats, most of which are of relatively little concern to either academics or policy makers? The bare facts speak for themselves. A July, 2017 *USA Today* article that was informed by evidence collected by the University of Maryland's Global

Terrorism Database reported that Western Europe experienced 604 terrorist-related events in 2015 and 2016. Collectively, these events resulted in 383 fatalities. According to an analysis of the data by the Igarapé Institute, the probability of a European being killed by an act of terrorism is significantly less than that of fatalities resulting from suicides, traffic accidents, heatwaves, sporting accidents, and faulty or misused consumer products. More specifically, the incidence of death caused by acts of terrorism in Europe in 2016 was estimated to be 0.027 per 100,000 persons.

Framing the casualties resulting from terrorist acts within this comparative context does not, of course, diminish the argument that the immigration-receiving countries in Europe are currently at risk as a result of their inadequately integrated immigrants. To the contrary, something more/better *obviously* needs to be done. Nevertheless, as scores of scholarly studies have demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt, most immigrants in Europe, including Muslims, are fairly well integrated within their host society if integration is measured by the degree to which they have adopted the dominant social behavior/mores and civic values of these societies. This fact should not surprise. If contemporary immigrants ultimately wish to succeed in their adopted home – and most unambiguously aspire to do so – it could hardly be otherwise.

Against this backdrop one might reasonably wonder what the state of immigrant integration, and particularly Muslim integration, would be in contemporary Europe if the United States and its European allies had not propped up authoritarian regimes in the Middle East for most of the twentieth century and, most fatefully, invaded Iraq in 2003. To illustrate the point: In 1989, the seminal year in which the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran issued a fatwa ordering Muslims to kill Salman Rushdie, I authored a book on the politics of post-WWII immigration titled *Race and Party Competition in Britain*. Nowhere in its lengthy index does the word “Muslim” appear, despite the fact that tens of thousands of migrants to the UK during the 1960s and 1970s were devout practitioners of this religious faith. I point this out by way of suggesting that just as it once was more appropriate for scholars of immigration and European policy makers to select on skin color, and *not* religion, as the most salient cleavage dividing “insiders” and “outsiders” within their respective societies, so it might happen again at some future point in time.

On this front it would be unwise for scholars and policy makers to place their faith in the effectiveness of official, government-mandated immigrant “integration” regimes and policies, although these can and do play a constructive role. Instead, greater confidence should be invested in the impersonal economic and social forces that are daily and relentlessly bearing down on immigrants. As the grandson of Sicilian immigrants who settled in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, I know from personal experience that many, if not most, immigrants reflexively tend to resist these impersonal forces – my maternal grandmother lived in the US for a half century years without needing/bothering to learn English – but, in the end, they and/or descendants eventually succumb. And so it is likely to occur with contemporary immigrants and their descendants in Europe, although perhaps not as smoothly or quickly as was the case in the American past.

To be sure, Europe is a long way off from a future in which the religious identity and heritage of its immigrants matter little for domestic tranquility and/or the physical safety and emotional well-being of its citizenry. In the interim, the major challenge for scholars and policy makers is

to gain insights about the causes feeding popular unease about immigrants and immigration without overestimating their importance or misrepresenting the larger, objective realities within which they are embedded. Unfortunately, in my view, far too many are guilty of this transgression. Rather, much of what happens from this point forward will have less to do with the continuance or possible escalation of terrorist sponsored or inspired violence than “official” reactions to it. As numerous scholars have already discovered, it will not be so much the *objective* threats associated with the mass settlement of immigrants that will determine the prospects for the latter’s successful integration but, rather, how these threats are ultimately framed by Europe’s mainstream politicians, political parties, and mass media.