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Strategic Communication for Migration Policymakers:

Lessons from the State of the Science

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Index

Executive Summary:

- The need for strategic communication in migration policymaking is increasingly widely recognised.
- Whereas until recently there was relatively little academic evidence on what forms of migration communication are effective, the past few years have seen a large amount of new experimental evidence of various migration communication strategies.
- This report overviews 68 recent experimental studies on how communication interventions affect attitudes to immigration, the vast majority published since 2015 and a large proportion since 2020. It categorises their findings into nine strategies.
- In doing so, it follows the previous ICMPD report "Immigration narratives in the Euro-Mediterranean: what people believe and why" (Dennison, 2021)
- Consistently effective strategies are shown to include: appealing to common interest rather than self-interest, appealing to conformity rather than diversity, emphasising common ground, and eliciting empathy.
- Fact-checking on the effects of migration and eliciting emotions are mostly shown to be effective, though there is some contrary evidence, as is appealing to identity, although this is not always applicable.
- By contrast, emphasising diversity is consistently shown to be ineffective, while correcting information about migrant flows and appeals to self-interest in migration are mostly shown to be ineffective.
- These findings—as well as more specific findings regarding when such effects may take place or be more powerful, how they mediate other effects and so on—are summarised overleaf in Table 1.
- The effects of certain types of messengers and eliciting empathy have been relatively understudied, despite the emphasis placed upon them outside of academia. Other strategies emphasised outside of academia that remain relatively under-tested include: focussing on values; focusing on hope, positivity, and solutions; avoiding repeating opposing ideas; and the use of storytelling (though some studies listed above have tangentially looked into this). Future research should robustly test these theories as well as consider how such effects vary by type of media, such as social media.

Table 1. Overview of experimental findings on migration communication strategies

Strategy	Evidence on effectiveness	Contingencies, mediations, and specificities
1a. Correcting information on stocks/flows	often ineffective (4/8 studies show statistically significant effects)	• More effective when exposure was longer. • Information on flows shown to lead to greater negativity than stocks.
1b. Fact checking on effects of migration	mostly effective (9/11)	• More effective when exposure to information was longer.
2. Eliciting emotions	mostly effective (4/5)	• More effective when exposure was longer. • Correcting information works less when emotions have been elicited • Shown to be more powerful than information • Anxiety amplifies effects of negative news stories • Emotive language shown to have effects
3a. Appealing to self-interest	mostly ineffective (3/7)	• "Self-interest" economic concerns are primarily via concerns on tax burdens, rather than job competition, and can also be conceived as a common interest concern. • Some evidence of depolarisation instead of uniform effects
3b. Appealing to common interest	effective (4/4)	•Both economic and otherwise are shown to be effective, if framed as good for country / fellow citizens
4. Emphasise conformity or diversity (respectively for positive or negative effects)	effective (7/7)	• Migrants shown to be attempting to integrate more powerful than already integrated migrants. • Social integration, language and food shown to matter
5. Types of migrants	effective (11/12)	• Attributes matter less than adherence to rules (regularity) or sense of fairness
6. Emphasising common ground	effective (2/2)	• Bridging shown to be more effective than appeal to political values or information
7. Eliciting empathy	effective (4/4)	• Humanitarian messages shown to elicit empathy • Communication based on individuals shown to be more effective than groups or statistics
8. Messenger effects	mostly ineffective (1/3)	
9. Appealing to identity	Mostly effective (4/5)	• Contingent on (1) assumptions behind the identity and (2) migrants holding that identity

Introduction

Policymakers and social scientists alike increasingly recognise the need to understand what makes effective strategic communication on migration issues. For policymakers, such communication may have multiple goals, such as to inform, to publicise, to gather information, and so on. However, one major contemporary imperative for numerous international organisations, governments, NGOs, etc. is to use strategic communication to reduce the spread and belief in polarising, misinforming, and inflammatory narratives that have the potential to threaten legal- and rights-based migratory governing orders and thus undermine the potential benefits and amplify the potential costs of migration, broadly defined. Strategic communication on migration to these ends is thus increasingly pursued by numerous organisations (OHCHR, 2020; UNHCR, 2020: 1; Dennison, 2020; Sharif, 2019; Bamberg, 2019; Ahad and Banulescu-Bogdan, 2018). As such, understanding what forms of strategic communication are effective is important for improving migration integration into host communities, reaping the potential economic benefits of migration, upholding the safety and rights of migrants as defined in domestic law and international treaties, reducing misleading misinformation, and contributing to the eponymous objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). Understanding what communication works can also guide the design of future interventions, making it substantively important from a value-for-money perspective.

Scientifically, understanding what strategic communication works for changing opinions, perceptions, and the popularity of narratives on migration immediately elicits questions of causality and lends support to or undermines various and, at times, competing social scientific theories of how attitudes are formed and, more broadly, why humans vary in what they think and believe. However, until recently, most studies of attitudes to immigration had focussed on correlates, with impressively consistent results on the socio-demographic, psychological, contextual determinants of attitudes to immigration (see Berg, 2015; Dennison and Dražanová, 2018; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014), with experimental tests of the effects of communication strategies, interventions, etc. remaining a small minority. In recent years, this has changed rapidly, with a vast number of new studies since 2019, offering theoretical insights into how attitudes are formed and changed and greater certainty that observed correlations reflect causality.

Given the importance of understanding what strategic communication is likely to work for migration policymakers, this report overviews 68 recent, experimental social scientific studies that test the effects of different communication interventions on various forms of public attitudes to immigration. In doing so, it follows the previous ICMPD report "Immigration narratives in the Euro-Mediterranean: what people believe and why" (Dennison, 2021). It produces several recommendations based on the effectiveness of the nine identified strategies.

Methodology

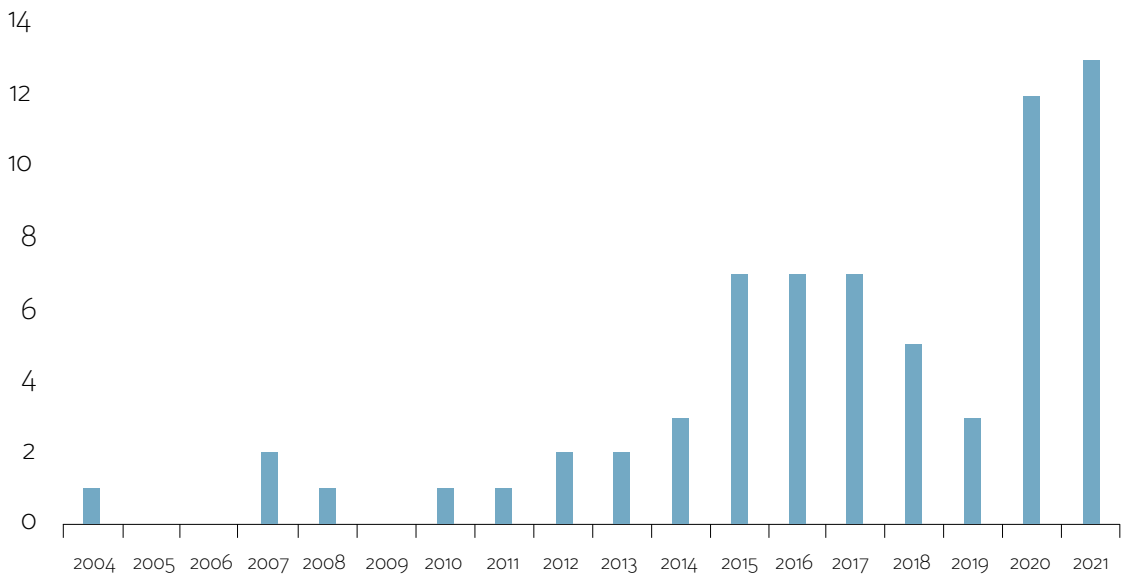
Effectiveness is defined as having observable effects on attitudes to immigration, be they policy preferences, perceptions of the effects of immigration, belief in narratives, or prejudices. Such effectiveness is measured in each study according to one of several *experimental* methods, meaning that in every case the communications strategy constitutes a "treatment" that a randomly allocated part of a representative sample of the target population is exposed to. Meanwhile, the other randomly selected section of the sample—the control group—does not receive the treatment but is equal in all other respects. This random allocation means that observed differences in of attitudes to immigration between the treatment and control groups after exposure to the communications strategy can be attributed to the effects of the communications strategy. An effective strategy is therefore one that produces an observable difference in the, otherwise equal, treatment and control groups whereas an ineffective one does not produce such a difference.

Given the potentially vast nature of such an exercise, it is worth noting some parameters. First, this report only considers experiments that are relevant for migration communicators; as such, important experimental work on attitudes to immigration that is likely to be less directly useful for communicators (for example, the effects of proximity, contact, economic trends or exposure as tested using natural experiments) are not included in the report and do not form part of the recommendations[1] Second, the report takes a narrow view of strategic communications, only considering *external* rather than *internal* communications and, more relevantly, *transmission* forms of communication (in which one actor seeks to influence another) rather than alternative, collective forms less that are less interested in a singular end-state (sometimes called *sensemaking* or *ritual* communication) (Falkheimer and Heide, 2018). Third, this report only considers strategic communication aimed at affecting public attitudes, opinions, and perceptions regarding immigration, rather than emigration. Finally, it should be noted that, even within these constraints, this report does not claim to provide an exhaustive list of experimental studies on the effect of communication interventions on attitudes to migration, instead offering a representative overview.

Within these theoretical constraints, this review aims to provide a comprehensive list of experimental studies on the effect of communication interventions on attitudes to immigration. The methodology by which the articles were selected, acting as a further set of constraints, was that the article must have been found within the first 150 article results from one of three Google Scholar searches for, respectively, "attitudes to immigration experiment" or "public opinion immigration experiment" "policy preferences immigration experiment". Naturally, there was a very large amount of overlap between these three searches and all three included a large number of results that did not meet the criteria of being either (1) an experiment; (2) aiming to change attitudes to immigration (rather than, for example, broader attitudes such as to outgroups generally or tests of social desirability bias); or (3) endogenous to the capabilities of communicators (i.e. not dealing with macroeconomics, terrorist attacks, or migration flows, etc., nor testing the effects of deliberation or citizens' forums, etc.) All those studies listed in the references section below constitute the 68 experimental studies, except those indicated with an "†" symbol. This results in a set of articles with the descriptive elements—in terms of year of publication, method, country, journal, and type of immigration attitude—described in Appendix 1, below. Methodologically, the studies are overwhelmingly survey experiments (broadly defined), but also include some relevant conjoint, lab, natural, and quasi-natural experiments. Nearly half of the studies are based in the USA, with most of the rest in Europe and a few in Australia, Canada, Japan, Israel, or South Korea. In terms of journals, we see greater variation, with most relating to three respective disciplines: political science, migration studies, and communication science. In terms of type of attitudes, a slight majority tested what affect policy preferences (either amount of immigration or to a lesser extent who can enter) and a large minority studied perceptions (overwhelmingly the effect of immigration, though occasionally the scale), while two studied personal prejudice against immigrants. The theories being tested varied substantially and were often multiple at the same time or were too idiosyncratic to be easily categorised. However, they roughly fit into the nine sections below

for our purposes and even within each of those often concentrate on "economic competition" and/or "cultural threat" (see Dennison and Geddes, 2021, for review).

Figure 1. Year of publication of experimental studies on the effect of communication interventions on attitudes to immigration



The report proceeds as follows. The experimental literature is divided into nine sections, each of which broadly constitute a strategy for communicating on migration and, indeed, many of which have already been cited by NGOs when describing how to communicate on migration (see Dennison, 2020, for overview). These are: (1) providing information, correcting misperceptions and "myth-busting"; (2) appealing to emotions rather than facts; (3) appealing to self-interest rather than common interest; (4) appealing to diversity rather than conformity; (5) focussing on various types of migrants; (6) appealing to common ground; (7) appealing to empathy; (8) using certain messengers; (9) appealing to identity. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are offered. The overall findings are summarised in Table 1.

1. Providing information, correcting misperceptions and "myth-busting"

The most common forms of strategic communication used both by migration policymakers and tested by academics are those that seek to change various forms of attitudes to immigration by providing new information, typically either explicitly or implicitly attempting to correct "misperceptions", either about migration numbers or its effects.

Correcting/providing information on migrant stocks and flows

Citizens have been repeatedly shown to overestimate the proportion of immigrants in their countries, cultural and religious differences and migrants' economic weakness (Alesina et al, 2021). Although such misperceptions are by no means unique to the field of migration—with citizens also likely to misperceive rates of inequality (e.g. Hauser and Norton, 2017)—they have been shown to correlate with anti-immigration views (Sides and Citrin, 2007a; Nadeau et al, 1993). Studies from the USA document how corrections about the size of minority populations or by priming the annual level of immigration fail to change citizens' immigration-related opinions (Lawrence and Sides, 2014; Hopkins et al, 2019; Sides and Citrin, 2007a). In Denmark, Jørgensen and Osmundsen (2020) show that giving correct information about welfare usage, crime rates, and the proportion of the population that are migrants has no effect on policy preferences, even though individuals update their factual beliefs after considering the correct information.

Similarly, one experiment using information in narrative form—a short video about a hardworking immigrant woman described in prosaic text[2]—also failed to change immigration attitudes (Alesina et al, 2021). These findings suggest that individuals discard counter-attitudinal information and reinterpret new information in selective ways to uphold their pre-existing views of the world and applicable narratives, for example, by normatively concluding that the actual immigration rate is "still too high". This is 'especially troublesome for democracy: if people can interpret information as they wish, they can always distort the causal chain from factual reality to political judgments' (Jørgensen and Osmundsen, 2020: 2). Furthermore, this suggests that, as Hopkins et al (2019) explain: "Misperceptions of the size of minority groups may be a consequence, rather than cause, of attitudes toward those groups."

However, Grigorieff et al (2016) use an experiment in the US to show that providing individuals with information about the number of immigrants in their country makes them less likely to argue that there are too many of them. They also show that providing individuals with comprehensive information[3] about immigration improves attitudes to existing immigrants and convinces conservatives to favour increasing legal immigration but does not change immigration policy preferences regarding legalisation and deportation. The effects were shown to still be present four weeks later. Furthermore, Bareinz and Uebelmesser (2020) show that a bundle of information on both the share and the unemployment rate of foreigners robustly decreases welfare state concerns about immigration in Germany, and that the quantity of information has a positive impact on its effect whereas the provision of information only on the share of foreigners has no effect. Conversely, Wiig (2017) also showed that information about the employment rate of immigrants in Norway (60 percent) causes individuals to rate their preferences for immigration policy more strictly.

Florio (2020) carried out an experiment in schools in Rome (aged 13-17) in which half of the classes were exposed to information—an expert informing the students about statistics on immigration numbers in Italy and in the world, as well as key origin and destination countries and expenditures and revenues generated in Italy over the course of two-hours—and the other half were exposed to contact—meeting a Mauritanian refugee in their class over two hours and reading a book about his journey three weeks beforehand. This is part of the broader *Sophia Cooperative* has implemented the *Confini* project aimed at educating children about migration.[4] Overall, the information treatment

was shown to increase positivity to a greater extent than the contact treatment, in terms of policy preferences and perceived numbers, though neither affected attitudes to immigrants.

Conversely, Blinder and Schaffner (2020) show that providing individuals with information about immigration flows—"Approximately 1.2 million legal immigrants came to the US in 2016"—make preferences for legal immigration more negative, particularly for Democrat voters, while information about Donald Trump policy proposals—"President Trump has endorsed a plan that would set levels of legal immigration to 540,000 per year"—make preferences for legal immigration more negative, particularly for Republican voters.

Notably, Margalit and Solodoch (2021) show that presenting immigration information in terms of stocks rather than flows results in more positive immigration policy preferences, which they argue is the result of the sense of moral obligation elicited towards those already in one's country.

Fact checking on the effects of migration

In terms of vote choice, alarmingly, Barrera et al (2020) show that exposure to misinformation by populist radical right leader Marine Le Pen had the effect of changing vote intentions in France, upon which fact-checking corrections had no countereffect. Swire et al (2017) and Nyhan et al (2017) reached similar conclusions regarding misinformation from Donald Trump, concluding that voters take fact-checking "literally but not seriously".

However, in terms of attitudes, Facchini et al (2016) carried out a large-scale experiment in Japan, showing that exposing individuals to new information on potential social and economic benefits reduced opposition to immigration, increased support for temporary visas and even increased willingness to petition politicians. Four pieces of new information were offered: (1) population shrinkage trends amongst native Japanese; (2) labour market shortages; (3) relatively low levels of immigration in Japan compared to other OECD countries; and (4) consequences of an aging society for (a) the sustainability of the pensions system; (b) the need for carers; and (c) funding the healthcare system. The authors showed that only around half of respondents were already aware of these problems. It was shown to make little difference whether the information was presented in statistical form or the form of a personal story. Effects were shown to persist 10-12 days later, albeit between one and two thirds smaller. Nakata (2017) further showed that the effects did not vary by age, gender, or education.

In the US, Haaland and Roth (2020) show that presenting research[5] about the labour market impact of the Mariel boatlift affects immigration policy preferences and willingness to sign petitions, as well as perceived wages and employment (but not fiscal or cultural) effects in that specific case. Effects on policy preferences for both low- and high-skilled immigration were still visible one week later. They (2020: 2) conclude that, contrary to previous studies that suggest that confirmation bias precludes the willingness of people to revise their political beliefs when faced with contrary information, 'Our results challenge this claim by showing that an information treatment based on research evidence can be effective in changing beliefs and policy views for Republicans and Democrats alike, even on a highly contested issue such as immigration.'

Similarly, Igarashi and Ono (2020) show that feelings of hostility toward immigrants decrease when individuals receive positive information about immigration, while exposure to negative information does not necessarily change their attitude. These effects are observed when the information regards jobs[6] , financial burden[7], culture[8], and physical safety[9] with impressive consistency.

Furthermore, Hameleers et al (2020) show that exposure to fact checking reduces attitudinal polarisation and belief in misinformation about immigration. Carnahan et al (2020, see also Grigorieff et al, 2016) show that repeated exposure to 500-600 word fact checking website articles on immigration had stronger and longer effects, observable after four weeks after the initial test. Keita et al (2021) use a natural experiment in Germany, in which some newspapers disclose the national origin of criminals, and some do not, to show that consistently doing so reduces self-reported concern about immigration, by providing a realistic overview of how many crimes are perpetrated by Germans and

non-Germans respectively. Theorin et al (2021) expose participants to a variety of fictional tweets—some with a negative message on immigration, some with a positive one, and some in 'episodic' (or narrative) format and some in thematic (or informative) format—showing that none of the four types have a statistically significant effect on attitudes to free movement.

2. Eliciting emotions

One of the more common recommendations by migration communication practitioners has been to focus on "emotions" instead of "facts" in order to persuade (Dennison, 2020). Lecheler et al (2015: 819) test emotional reaction in participants to four types of immigration frames both posed negatively and positively: emancipation ('obstacles to participation should be resolved through state policies and arrangements that help migrants in their integration and emancipation'); multicultural ('diversity as an asset that enhances the quality of society'); assimilation ('how (ethnic) minorities adopt the native society')' or victimization frame ('a dramaturgic technique that the media use to portray minorities in a situation that is due to a force that lies beyond their own actions and responsibility'). Each was expressed in a news article about a career event for immigrant women in Amsterdam: 'The multicultural frame was operationalized by arguments pertaining to multicultural society, diversity, respect, dialogue, or participation. The emancipation frame mainly stressed participation, integration, and emancipation. The victimization frame describes ethnic minorities by using arguments connected to inequality, disadvantage, foreigner, and victim. The assimilation frame emphasized elements of adaptation (to dominant culture), integration, social cohesion, unity, and naturalization.' Overall, all of the frames caused emotional reactions among participants—contentment, compassion, enthusiasm, hope, anger, fear, and sadness—but only some emotions went on to affect attitudes to immigration: most notably enthusiasm and anger. Theorin (2021; compare to Theorin et al, 2021, above, on null effects of information *and* emotion) shows that reading longer news articles has an effect, with emotions having a greater impact than perceptions.

Other studies have shown that emotions act as a mediating variable on the effect of providing information. Morisi and Wagner (2020) show that positive information about politics and politicians reduces populist attitudes (rather than attitudes to immigration) but that the effect disappears when voters are in an angry emotional state[10] and is lower when they are in a fearful state[11] Brader et al (2008) show that those citizens moved by negative and ethnic out-group based news stories about immigration are those with high self-reported emotional anxiety. Chkhaidze et al (2021) exposed participants to one of four versions of a passage about an increase in immigrants in one town. Each version included all identical facts and figures and differed in only a single word at the beginning of the passage, describing the increase in immigrant labor as either an "increase," a "boost," an "invasion," or a "flood." This change had a large effect on participants' attitudes to the increase in immigration and the predictions about its effects on the economy.

3. Appealing to self-interest and common interest

Most studies show that appeals to self-interest, either economically or otherwise, are ineffective. Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010) show using a survey experiment that both low-skilled and highly skilled natives strongly prefer highly skilled immigrants over low-skilled immigrants and that rich and poor natives are equally opposed to low-skilled immigration in general, undermining labour market competition theories of opposition to immigration and suggesting instead sociotropic considerations. Similarly, Schaub et al (2021) show that anti-immigration sentiment is unaffected by the presence of refugees in respondents' hometowns overall: on average, they record null effects for all outcomes, which they interpret as supporting a sociotropic perspective on immigration attitudes. However, part of this overall lack of effect is because right- and left-leaning individuals are both drawn to the centre following increased local presence of immigrants. Harell et al (2012) demonstrate that, in Canada and the US, income level has no effect on the extent to which citizens prefer immigrants with high skills. These results are in line with larger macro-economic studies suggesting that what worries citizens are the economic costs of unemployment and dependence on the welfare state more than direct competition from immigrants for jobs. In both countries, the skill level of the immigrant was far more important in determining whether individuals believed that they should be allowed in than ethnic background.

Offering a more nuanced take, Dancyfier and Donnelly (2013) show that individuals employed in growing industrial sectors are more likely to support immigration than are those employed in shrinking sectors, giving evidence towards the labour market competition thesis. Naumann et al (2018: 1009) use European data to show that 'rich natives prefer highly skilled over low-skilled migration more than low-income respondents do', which they argue suggests an economic concern over the fiscal burden of immigrants because 'these tax concerns among the wealthy are stronger if fiscal exposure to migration is high.' Moreover, Hix et al (2021) show that individuals are more willing to admit immigrants when restriction is shown to carry costs, with egocentric considerations more powerful than sociotropic ones. Jeannet (2018) takes an instrumental variable approach to show that retirement has no effect on attitudes to immigration and that retired individuals are more likely to have restrictive policy preferences when immigration is framed as unskilled, just as workers do. This undermines the labour market hypothesis that immigration policy preferences are driven by job competition fears and instead supports the notion of sociotropic determinants.

Indeed, the evidence in favour of the effectiveness of appeals to common interests—or "sociotropic" concerns—is overwhelming. Solodoch (2020) uses a survey experiment that asks both natives and immigrants of various origins to evaluate different profiles of visa applicants to the Netherlands, showing that opposition to immigration is primarily driven by sociotropic concerns and to a far lesser extent by the ethnic basis of the would-be immigrant, with those of immigrant origin no more favourable to profiles of visa applicants of their own ethnic background. Valentino et al (2019) offer similar results supporting a sociotropic economic thesis against a labour market competition thesis. It is also worth noting that most observational—as opposed to experimental studies—find similar evidence of the power of sociotropic determinants (see reviews listed above).

Kustov (2020) theorises that "parochial altruists"—citizens who are both nationalistic and altruistic, which he shows to be a high proportion of the population of the UK—fit their immigration policy preferences according to the effect that they perceive it to have on their fellow citizens. This study undermines the argument that anti-immigration sentiment is rooted in ethnic animus or selfishness but instead suggests that immigration will be positively received if citizens can be convinced that it is good for their countrymen, particularly those less well off.

4. Emphasising conformity or diversity

Whereas many strategic communication campaigns on migration have emphasised the positive aspects of diversity, others have sought to emphasise the similarity or conformity of migrants and migration within the host society. Hopkins et al (2014) use survey experiments to show that among native-born Americans who regularly hear the Spanish-language in day-to-day life, exposure to the language can induce anti-immigration attitudes, supporting the cultural threat theory of attitudes. Newman et al (2012) find a similar link between incidental exposure to Spanish and anti-immigrant sentiment and policy preferences. Hopkins (2015) present participants in an experiment with six manipulated news clips that include an immigrant stating: "I've worked hard, always paid my taxes. I'd really like the chance to be an American citizen", however, the immigrant is randomised according to language—fluent Spanish, fluent English, or accented English—and dark or light skin tone. Skin tone is shown to have no effect on support for a new legalisation policy for unauthorised immigrants, while accented English is shown to have the most positive effects, theoretically explained as demonstrating a willingness of migrants to learn English. Ostfeld (2017) took a similar approach, exposing participants to a story about a family of undocumented immigrants living in the United States who were at risk of deportation. Both cultural assimilation (language, food, and social integration)[12] and skin tone and physical features were shown to make a difference (see also Alarian and Neureiter, 2021).

Kaufmann (2019) similarly shows an 'assimilation prime'[13], which stresses continuity over change and reassures white respondents that immigration will leave the boundaries and size of the majority group unaffected leads to support for greater immigration while a 'diversity prime'[14], which stresses change and urges ethnic majority respondents to embrace it, accept their group's ethnic decline, and focus instead on the ethnically neutral civic nation-state as the embodiment of their collective identity leads to more negative policy preferences. These effects were particularly strong amongst working class participants and populist radical right UKIP voters. Sobolewska et al (2017) also show in the Netherlands and the UK that several social integration measures as well as the economic integration measures—having local friends, women working, voting, not being religious (in the UK), going to the pub or community centre, and cooking national food—increases the extent to which citizens view those immigrants as integrated.

5. Focussing on types of migrants

The last few years have seen many conjoint experiments, in which preferences of which *type* of immigrants according to various variables, are preferred by citizens are revealed by the choices they make when selecting between two hypothetical migrant profiles. Typically, these show that natives prefer migrants who are fleeing persecution or who have a job rather than simply coming for a better life, have legal migration status, have high education levels and language skills, and share the country of destination's religion.

Indeed, Bansak et al (2016) show across 15 European countries that asylum seekers who have higher employability, more consistent asylum testimonies and severe vulnerabilities, and are Christian rather than Muslim received the greatest public support. These results are similar to Iyengar et al (2013) who show that skill level is all-important when evaluating would-be immigrants, whereas cultural attributes—as measured by Middle Eastern nationality and Afrocentric appearance—have little effect (see Turper et al, 2015, and Valentino et al, 2019, for similar results). Strabac et al (2014) show that in Norway, Sweden, the UK and the US, Muslim immigrants are not viewed more negatively than immigrants in general. However, Ha et al (2016) use a survey experiment to show that South Koreans are more favourable to North Korean defectors than ethnic Korean Chinese or guest-workers from Indonesia. España-Nájera and Vera (2020) also use a survey experiment in California to demonstrate that favoritism for high-skilled immigrants drops when they add the Hispanic descriptor, but that legal status outweighs any possible anti-Hispanic sentiment.

More specifically, Czymara and Schmidt-Catran (2017) show that women in Germany were considerably more likely to prefer male immigrants to female immigrants prior to the 2015/16 New Year's Eve attacks in Cologne, though this preference disappeared afterwards, whereas men were more likely to discriminate by country of origin and did not discriminate by gender. Hellwig and Sinno (2017) show that, in the UK, the type of migrant affects the perceived threat felt by immigration: Eastern Europeans provoke economic and criminality threats whereas Muslims do not; Muslims provoke security and cultural threats whereas Eastern Europeans do not. Knoll et al (2011) show that labelling irregular immigrants as "illegal" versus "undocumented" has no effect on immigration policy preferences, but that, among Republicans and especially those for whom immigration is a "most important issue", the term "immigrants" elicits less opposition than Mexicans.

However, Wright et al (2016) show that attribute-based judgements—related to the characteristics of the immigrant(s)—pale in comparison to categorical judgements related to issues of justice and fairness that explain public opposition to irregular migration, given moral convictions about adherence to rules. Hedegaard (2021) uses a conjoint experiment to show that climate migrants are perceived to be less deserving of permanent residency than migrants who typically could qualify for asylum, but more deserving than economic migrants.

6. Emphasising common ground

Other communication strategies have sought to first emphasise areas of common ground—issues on which most people agree—between opponents and supporters of migration. Bonilla and Mo (2018) use a 'bridging frame' to create a connection between a previously defined issue—human trafficking, concern about which is high and bipartisan in the US—and immigration policy; they theorise that 'If individuals learn that human trafficking levels increase with strict immigration policies, tension can form between opinions on human trafficking and immigration for individuals who have negative attitudes toward immigrants. Highlighting this dissonance between anti-trafficking perspectives and anti-immigration attitudes should induce opinion change for individuals with negative opinions toward immigration for two reasons.' They use a survey experiment to show that treating participants with a 'bridging frame'[15] reduces opposition to immigration among Republicans in relation to a control frame[16] (about human trafficking but without any 'bridging'), and more consistently than an information-based 'learning frame'[17] or an American Dream-based 'values frame'[18], which has no effect. These findings are consistent with the power of narratives built on areas of consensus (Dennison, 2021). Similarly, Van Klingeren et al (2018) use survey experiments in the Netherlands to show that presenting politicians as divided and conflictual on an issue such as immigration exacerbates attitudinal polarisation.

7. Eliciting empathy

Appeals to empathy remain relatively understudied in the academic literature. Here, two studies looking at the use of a humanitarian message are overviewed. Though not the same as appealing to empathy, the two are likely to have some similar components, with the main difference that humanitarian values are abstract whereas eliciting genuine empathy means eliciting the feelings that another, for example, a migrant may have and imagining oneself in their position (see Dennison, 2021, for overview of empathy in the use of narratives). Newman et al (2015) show that appealing to humanitarian values[19] in White Americans elicits lower anti-immigration sentiment among participants who score high on empathy and that the power of a humanitarian frame outweighs that of a simultaneous threat frame[20], when presented together. Getmansky et al (2018) show that a humanitarian message focussing on saving innocent women and children affects Turkish perceptions of Syrian refugees to become more positive, whereas focus on their militant ties cause greater negativity; their messages on economic costs and the ethnic balance in Turkey have no effect.

Relatedly, Madrigal and Soroka (2021) show that presenting identical images of individual rather than a group of migrants reduces anti-immigration sentiment amongst those with high threat sensitivity. Heizler and Israeli (2021) use the natural experiment of the death of Alan Kurdi to show that the drowning of an identified individual lead to people becoming more positive about immigration, whereas the drowning of over a thousand unidentified immigrants in two consecutive events in April 2015 produced no observable change in public sentiment. This suggests that individual stories may be more powerful than statistical data.

8. Messenger effects

Although the effects of who is delivering the message have been regularly postulated by policymakers and NGOs (see Dennison, 2020), particularly in terms of using migrants as messengers, this study found no recent experimental tests of this. Instead, messenger effects have been tested in terms of authority figures. Donnelly et al (2020) show that there are no systematic differences in the effects of pro-immigration messaging when delivered by politicians, unions or businesses in a survey experiment in Canada, Germany and the UK. Margolis (2018) showed that a religiously-loaded radio message from an pro-immigration American evangelical organisation demobilised evangelical opponents of immigration, whereas an identical secular version, with no religious references, did not. The religious version included two pastors asking listeners to join a movement of Christians that supports immigration solutions rooted in biblical values. After listing the organisations goals for immigration reform—including a pathway to citizenship— the advertisement asked listeners to pray for their elected officials and tell their representatives that they support immigration reform. Relatedly, Wright and Citrin (2010) show in the US that hostility to immigration protesters decreases when they are shown waving U.S. flags as opposed to Mexican ones, but this effect does not translate to more moderate policy attitudes on immigration.

9. Appealing to identity

One's self-identity can be defined as the extent to which an individual sees membership of a group, either nationally, ethnically or religious (such as being Dutch, European, Arab, or Jewish), as integral to themselves or is attached to it. This concept has been applied to voting and political attitudes (Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Carl et al. 2019; Dennison et al, 2020). Sniderman and Gagendoorn (2007) show that when Dutch respondents are primed with a reminder of their national identity and group belonging, they give more negative attitudes to immigration. However, when Breton (2015) made the same prime—"people belong to different types of groups. One of the most important and essential of these groups is the nation to which you belong to. In your case, you belong to the Canadian nationality. Each nation is different'—it had no effect on immigration attitudes, nor did asking participants about the importance of their Canadian identity to them, which Breton theorises as the result of a different conception of national identity in Canada than in Europe.

Bloom et al (2015) prime survey participants—American Catholics, Turkish Muslims, and Israeli Jews—with their religious identity, which they show increases positivity to immigrants with a similar religious or ethnic background—particularly among conservatives—but increases opposition to other, distinct groups. Lazarev and Sharma (2017) make a similar finding regarding religious identity (both Muslim and Sunni) primes and Turkish attitudes and behaviour towards Syrian refugees. Wojcieszak and Garrett (2018) show that priming American participants with their national identity[21] leads to greater opposition to immigration among those already opposed, but has no effect on immigration supporters, and that this effect operates both directly and via the news media that they choose to consume.

Conclusion and recommendations

The need for strategic communications in migration policymaking is increasingly widely recognised, with a particular need to uphold legal- and rights-based migration governance regimes that may be threatened by polarisation, misinformation, and antagonism. Whereas until recently there was relatively little academic evidence on what forms of migration communication are effective, the past few years have seen a large amount of new experimental evidence based on the robust testing of several theories that are directly applicable to certain migration communication strategies. This report overviews 68 recent experimental studies on how communication interventions affect attitudes to immigration, the vast majority published since 2015 and a large proportion since 2020.

According to the extant evidence overviewed in this report, an *ineffective* strategic communications campaign on migration appeal to the self-interest of the recipient while emphasising diversity and/or correcting information about migration flows. By contrast, an *effective* campaign would appeal to the common interest in migration, emphasise conformity between migration and the host country and the common ground on immigration as an issue, while eliciting empathy. Fact-checking on the effects of migration and eliciting emotions may also be useful as additional strategies, as may appealing to identity where appropriate.

These findings point the way for future research. The effects of certain types of messengers and eliciting empathy have been relatively understudied, despite the emphasis placed upon them outside of academia. Other strategies emphasised outside of academia, that remain relatively under-tested include: focussing on personal (rather than political) values; focusing on hope, positivity, and solutions; avoiding repeating opposing ideas; and the use of storytelling (though some studies listed above have tangentially looked into this).

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Descriptive statistics of 68 studies

	Number of studies
Year of publication	
2004	1
2007	2
2008	1
2010	1
2011	1
2012	2
2013	2
2014	3
2015	7
2016	7
2017	7
2018	5
2019	3
2020	12
2021	13
Method	
Conjoint experiment	4
Lab experiment	1
Natural experiment	2
Quasi-natural experiment	2
Survey experiment	56

Country *(some studies tested multiple countries)*	
Austria	2
Australia	2
Belgium	2
Canada	5
Cyprus	1
Denmark	3
Estonia	1
Finland	1
France	3
Germany	8
Greece	1
Hungary	2
Ireland	2
Israel	1
Japan	4
Netherlands	8
Norway	5
Poland	2
Portugal	1
Romania	2
South Korea	3
Spain	5
Sweden	5
Switzerland	3
Turkey	3
UK	12
USA	32

Journal	
American Behavioral Scientist	1
American Journal of Political Science	2
American Political Science Review	3
Monograph	1
British Journal of Political Science	3
Canadian Journal of Political Science	2
Chapter in edited volume	1
Communication Quarterly	1
Communication Research	1
Comparative Political Studies	2
European Sociological Review	1
Human Communication Research	1
International Journal of Public Opinion Research	1
Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics	1
Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	6
Journal of European Social Policy	1
Journal of Experimental Political Science	3
Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies	1
Journal of Peace Research	1
Journal of Politics	3
Journal of Public Economics	1
Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly	2
Political Behavior	4
Political Psychology	1
Political Science Research and Methods	1
Political Studies	2
Politics, Groups, and Identities	1

Public Opinion Quarterly	2
Research & Politics	2
Scandinavian Political Studies	1
Science	1
Social Science Quarterly	1
The International Journal of Press/Politics	1
Thesis	1
Working paper	11
Type of attitude being tested *(some studies tested both)*	
Perceptions	34
Policy preferences	45
Prejudice	2

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2 See here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1SoLYX8OyE

3 The proportion of immigrants in the U.S., the proportion of illegal immigrants in the U.S., the unemployment rate of immigrants, their incarceration rate, and the proportion of immigrants who cannot speak English.

4 https://www.sophiacoop.it/web/content/progetto_confini_it.php

5 All participants received the following information: "In 1980, Cuba's then President, Fidel Castro, suddenly announced that Cubans wishing to emigrate to the United States were free to do so. This led to an unexpected mass immigration to Miami, Florida, where most of the Cuban immigrants arrived by boat. With the arrival of the new Cuban immigrants, Miami's workforce grew by 55,000, or 8 percent, almost at once. The new immigrants were mostly low-skilled, which meant that the low-skilled workforce increased by 20 percent. The large, unexpected addition of 55,000 new immigrants to the Miami workforce has allowed researchers to study the impact of immigration on the labor market. To do so, the researchers studied wage and unemployment changes in Miami after the mass immigration relative to other US cities that, because of geographic distance, were not affected by the mass immigration of Cubans." Only the treatment group received the following information: "The researchers who analyzed the short- and long-term effects of the mass immigration of Cubans to Miami concluded that, for both high-skilled and low-skilled workers, the mass immigration had virtually no effect on wages and virtually no effect on unemployment. According to the researchers, the mass immigration had virtually no effect on wages and unemployment because the new Cuban immigrants increased the overall demand for goods and services, which created more jobs."

6 Experimental stimuli: 'Immigrants [Take Americans' Jobs Away/Create New Jobs], Study Shows: A new study finds that the growing number of immigrants to the U.S. has [taken the jobs of Americans away / helped create new jobs], according to the American Immigrant Research Group. The findings are based on data from the American Immigrant Social Survey, collected biannually from 1945 to last year. The research finds that the growth of immigrants results in [the American's loss of jobs, with immigrants taking these positions instead / the creation of new jobs, which increases the employment of Americans]. The group leader of the research, Michael Miller, said "this finding is important for our current society, and we need to continue this kind of research to gain further understanding of the impact of sociodemographic changes on American society.'"

7 'Immigrants [Increase Welfare Burden/Decrease Welfare Burden], Study Shows A new study finds that the growing number of immigrants to the U.S. has [decreased the welfare burden on taxpayers / increased the welfare burden on taxpayers], according to the American Immigrant Research Group. The findings are based on data from the American Immigrant Social Survey, collected biannually from 1945 to last year. The research finds that [immigrants in the U.S. rely on welfare more than Americans do, and consequently the growth of immigrants results in an increased welfare burden for Americans / immigrants in the U.S. rely on welfare less than Americans do, and consequently the growth of immigrants results in a decreased welfare burden for Americans]. The group leader of the research, Michael Miller, said "this finding is important for our current society, and we need to continue this kind of research to gain further understanding of the impact of sociodemographic changes on American society."

8 'Immigrants [Undermine American Culture/Enrich American Culture], Study Shows A new study finds that the growing number of immigrants to the U.S. has [undermined the American cultures and values / enriched American cultures and values], according to the American Immigrant Research Group. The findings are based on data from the American Immigrant Social Survey, collected biannually from 1945 to last year. The research finds that [immigrants do not learn English, oppose American values, and weaken American culture / immigrants learn English, adopt American values, and strengthen American culture]. The group leader of the research, Michael Miller, said "this finding is important for our current society, and we need to continue this kind of research to gain further understanding of the impact of sociodemographic changes on American society.'"

9 'Immigrants [Increase Crime Rate/Decrease Crime Rate], Study shows A new study finds that the growing number of immigrants to the U.S. has [increased the crime rate / decreased the crime rate], according to the American Immigrant Research Group. The findings are based on data from the American Immigrant Social Survey, collected biannually from 1945 to last year. The research finds that [immigrants tend to commit crimes more frequently than Americans do, and consequently the growth of immigrants results in an increased crime rate in the U.S. / immigrants tend to maintain close family ties and create communities that bind people together, and consequently the growth of immigrants results in a decreased crime rate in the U.S.]. The group leader of the research, Michael Miller, said "this finding is important for our current society, and we need to continue this kind of research to gain further understanding of the impact of sociodemographic changes on American society."

10 Anger is elicited in respondents by asking: "Now think in general about Austrian politics and the Austrian politicians. When you think about politics and politicians, what makes you angry and upset? Please write down everything that comes to your mind."

11 Fear is elicited by asking: "Now think in general about Austrian politics and the Austrian politicians. When you think about politics and politicians, what makes you afraid and nervous? Please write down everything that comes to your mind."

12 In the *Unassimilated* conditions, the type of food that was being eaten at lunch included spicy goat meat, and the restaurant was said to be part of an ethnic food market. These details contrasted with a classically American platter of mozzarella sticks, onion rings, and buffalo wings being eaten at Roy's Diner in the *Assimilated* conditions. The *Unassimilated* conditions further specified that they were speaking in their native tongue and that they were discussing events taking place in their native country as opposed to speaking in English and discussing the local baseball team in the *Assimilated* condition.

13 Immigration has risen and fallen over time, but, like the English language, Britain's culture is only superficially affected by foreign influence. According to Professor Eric Kaufmann of the University of London, a large share of the children of European immigrants have become White British. Historians tell us that French, Irish, Jews and pre-war black immigrants largely melted into the white majority. Those of mixed race, who share common ancestors with White British people, are growing faster than all minority groups and 8 in 10 of them marry whites. In the long run, today's minorities will be absorbed into the majority and foreign identities will fade, as they have for public figures with immigrant ancestors like Boris Johnson or Peter Mandelson. Britain shapes its migrants, migration doesn't shape Britain.

14 Britain is changing, becoming increasingly diverse. The 2011 census shows that White British people are already a minority in four British cities, including London. Over a quarter of births in England and Wales are to foreign-born mothers. Young Britons are also much more diverse than older Britons. Just 4.5 percent of those older than 65 are nonwhite but more than 20 percent of those under 25 are. Minorities' younger average age, somewhat higher birth rate and continued immigration mean that late this century, according to Professor David Coleman of Oxford University, White British people will be in the minority nationwide. We should embrace our diversity, which gives Britain an advantage in the global economy. Together, we can build a stronger, more inclusive Britain.

15 "Human Trafficking: A Major Immigration Problem. Every year, millions of men, women, and children are trafficked in countries around the world. It is estimated that human trafficking is a $32 billion per year industry. Traffickers use force, fraud, or coercion to lure their victims and force them into labor or commercial sexual exploitation. They look for people who are vulnerable, including immigrants, who accept risky arrangements to escape violence, instability, and/or poverty in their home countries because strict immigration policy makes migration difficult. For instance, the recent global tightening of asylum admissions has increased trafficking by forcing many desperate people to turn to smugglers"

16 "Human Trafficking: A Major Problem Every year, millions of men, women, and children are trafficked in countries around the world. It is estimated that human trafficking is a $32 billion per year industry. Traffickers use force, fraud, or coercion to lure their victims and force them into labor or commercial sexual exploitation. They look for people who are vulnerable, including individuals looking to escape violence, instability, and/or poverty."

17 "Human Smuggling: A Major Immigration Issue. Every year, millions of men, women, and children look to migrate to different countries around the world. It is estimated that smuggling is a $35 billion per year industry. Many smugglers use force, fraud, or coercion to lure their potential victims and force vulnerable migrants into labor or commercial sexual exploitation. They look for people who are vulnerable, including immigrants, who will accept risky arrangements to escape violence, instability, and/or poverty in their home countries because strict immigration policy makes migration difficult. For instance, the recent global tightening of asylum admissions has increased the victimization of the asylum seekers by forcing many desperate people to turn to smugglers."

18 "Pursuing the American Dream: A Major Immigration Issue Millions of men, women and children have come to America to seek a better life. Immigrants are just like others who came to America in years past. The ancestors of many Americans came to this country to live the American dream. Today immigrants and refugees have chosen to come to America, so they too can live that same American dream. That dream is what this nation was founded on, it is what brought previous generations to this great land, and it is the great success story that these immigrants want to be a part of."

19 "Subjects assigned to the humanitarianism condition read that the purpose of the immigration plan was to help these Hondurans escape 'harsh and unsafe conditions in their home country' such as 'poverty', 'limited access to employment', and 'government repression'."

20 "In the threat condition, subjects read about a non-partisan report indicating that these new immigrants will 'require a wide range of tax-payer funded state services', likely 'increase competition for jobs', 'have limited English-language ability', and 'take some time to fully assimilate into the US'.

21 "Those in the national-identity condition received the following directions: "Before we continue, please take a few minutes to reflect on what it means to be American. That is, what do you have in common with other American people? It may be the fact that we all speak the same language, we were all born here, our parents are American, etc. Please take up to five minutes to write about one essential quality that you share with other Americans, something that unites us as a people."

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