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Hochman, Oshrat; Hercowitz-Amir, Adi

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(Dis)agreement with the Implementation of Humanitarian Policy Measures Towards Asylum Seekers in Israel: Does the Frame Matter?

Oshrat Hochman^{1,2}, Adi Hercowitz-Amir³

Abstract This study investigates emerging public attitudes about the implementation of humanitarian policy measures towards asylum seekers among the Jewish population in Israel. It specifically asks whether the way asylum seekers in Israel are framed informs the process of attitude formation in the Jewish Israeli public. To answer this question, we measure the extent to which the frame “infiltrators” as opposed to the frame “asylum seekers” positively predicts the rejection of humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers. Following framing theory, we also propose that the framing effect depends on the respondents’ perceived levels of threat by asylum seekers, and on their political identification. In line with our hypothesis, the findings indicate that the effect of the framing on the rejection of humanitarian policy measures decreases with increasing levels of threat. Although the framing effect on the rejection of humanitarian policy measures towards asylum seekers is somewhat weaker among respondents with a right-wing political identification, the differences between these and other respondents are not significant.

Keywords Asylum seekers, Israel, Framing, Perceived threat, Humanitarian policy, Attitudes

Oshrat Hochman
Oshrat.Hochman@gesis.org

Adi Hercowitz-Amir
ahercowi@campus.haifa.ac.il

¹ Ruppin Academic Center, Ruppin, Emek Hefer 4025000, Israel

² GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, 68159 Mannheim, Germany

³ Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa, 199 Aba Khoushy Ave, Mount Carmel, Haifa 3498838, Israel

Introduction

Due to lengthy armed conflicts, persecution and human rights violations across various troubled regions, claiming asylum has recently become a common form of migration from the world's periphery to Europe, North America, and Australia (Statham 2003). In 2015 alone, a record number of 2.0 million persons predominantly nationals of Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia applied for asylum around the world (UNHCR 2016). As a result, considerable shifts have taken place, in the political, legal, bureaucratic, and social circumstances asylum seekers meet once arriving in their receiving countries (Hatton 2012; Crawley 2005; Goot and Sowerbutts 2004; Yoo and Woo-Koo 2014; Zimmermann 2011; Verkuyten 2004). Of particular importance in this regard are the circumstances conditioning the entry of asylum seekers, and those associated with their accommodation in the receiving countries. This study focuses on the circumstances of accommodation of asylum seekers in Israel, and specifically, on the views of the Jewish Israeli public about the implementation of humanitarian policy measures securing the well-being of African asylum seekers residing in the country.

According to the mainstream political and public discourse in Israel, there are no asylum seekers as such in the country. The dominant discourse maintains rather that Israel is facing an uncontrolled flow of unauthorized migrants labeled "infiltrators", posing a threat to state and society. The construction of asylum seekers in Israel as unauthorized infiltrators relies on three pillars: first, African asylum seekers enter Israel unlawfully and clandestinely through the Israeli-Egyptian land border; second, most of the African asylum seekers are "bogus" refugees looking for job opportunities and do not genuinely fear persecution; and third, the uncontrolled flow of migration from Africa will undermine the Jewish majority in Israel and consequentially its existence as a Jewish state (Kalir 2014). Framing the asylum seekers issue in this manner, policy makers paved the way for the legitimization of their exclusion: if asylum seekers are bogus, they do not deserve any humanitarian rights. However, even if they are genuine, given the threat they pose to state and society, Israel cannot afford to accommodate them.

Every (2008) argues that humanitarianism is built upon an opposing binary between "costs to self" (individualism) and "duty to others" (universalism). She claims that the responsibility to care for others less fortunate, i.e., to be humanitarian, is limited by the degree to which this moral duty might lead to costs to one's interests. From this point of view, the framing of asylum seekers in Israel as a threat is predicted to cue respondents' pre-existing threat perceptions regarding the entry of foreigners into Israel, and increase their exclusionist views toward them.

Framing theory proposes that the main mechanism determining a framing effect is the applicability of a given frame. It is thus worthwhile to ask who is more likely to be affected by the framing of asylum seekers in Israel, and why? Applicability differs between individuals based on their ability to weigh different considerations, and their motivation to do so (Price and Tewksbury 1997). To test these dimensions of applicability, we first varied the considerations individuals can apply in forming their attitudes by randomly exposing part of the participants in our survey to the dominant terminological frame "infiltrators", and the rest to a competing frame namely, "asylum seekers".

Second, we investigated the role of motivation in determining whether considerations implied by an "asylum seekers" frame, which proposes an alternative to the dominant "infiltrators" frame, are applied. We expect motivation to be shaped first by

the levels of perceived threat respondents demonstrate: higher levels of threat will decrease the respondents' motivation to consider new arguments when forming their attitudes. Motivation is additionally predicted to be a function of the political identification of the respondents: Right-wing and religious party voters are predicted to show lower sensitivity to our frame manipulation, due to their predispositions, or because of their need to adhere to the norms of their political in-group.

This study proposes two main contributions: first, it is among the first to study the attitudes of the Israeli public towards asylum seekers (see Ariely 2016; Canetti et al. 2016; Hochman 2015). And second, it is the first study we know of, that investigates the role of framing in emerging public attitudes about the implementation of humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers in Israel. In the next section, we discuss Israel's policy toward asylum seekers and the discourse on the issue. We then lay out the theoretical background for our hypotheses followed by the description of the data and methods used to test the hypotheses. Finally, we present and discuss the findings and their implications.

The Setting: Israel and its Asylum Policy

Israel's asylum policy must be understood within the framework of its self-definition as a Jewish-democratic state, embodied in the Law of Return. This law secures the right of all Jews around the world to become Israeli nationals and at the same time, defines Israeli nationality as an ethnic good, preserved exclusively for Jews. Immigration policy in Israel is thus exclusionary toward non-Jews whose presence is understood to challenge the ethno-national definition of the Israeli state (Rajzman et al. 2008). This key trait of the Israeli society has a major role in the formation of policy and attitudes towards non-Jewish migrants to the country, labor migrants as well as asylum seekers (Kritzman-Amir 2015).

Israel is a newcomer to the community of countries receiving asylum seekers. During the mid 2000s, Israel became a destination for a significant number of migrants from African states, one that resembles the flow of African asylum seekers arriving into Europe, the USA, and Australia. These asylum seekers arrived mostly through the border between Israel and Egypt, having crossed the Sinai Peninsula in their journey mainly from Sudan and Eritrea. Between 2003 and 2006, the number of African asylum seekers arriving into Israel was estimated at about 1500 a year. A dramatic increase in the numbers of entries occurred in 2007 with some 5000 African asylum seekers entering during that year. Flows reached their peak between the years 2010-2012 with some 10,000 individuals arriving during 2010 and some 17,000 individuals arriving during 2011 (Population and Immigration Authority 2016). From 2012 onwards, the flow of asylum seekers into Israel came virtually to a halt and the number of individuals entering since is estimated at less than a few dozen a year.¹ Currently, Israel hosts some 41,000 African asylum seekers which are a very small minority accounting for 0.6 % of the Israeli population (Population and Immigration Authority 2016).

¹ The dramatic decrease in entries is presumed to be associated with the erection of a wall on the Israeli-Egyptian border by the Israeli government and the highly restrictive asylum legislation passed by the Israeli parliament. It might also have to do with Egypt's military interventions in the Sinai Peninsula.

Israel's asylum policy has undergone several changes over the years. Caught unprepared for the inflow of asylum seekers from Africa, Israeli policymakers reacted to it, in the early years, in a chaotic (Afeef 2009) and ambivalent (Paz 2011) way. One decision made in these early years was to grant African asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea a temporary group protection status (TGP), which they still hold to date. This status provides asylum seekers with immunity against deportation, in line with the principle of non-refoulement endorsed by the Refugee Convention of 1951 Israel has signed, yet it does not offer any socio-economic rights.² Several such rights were secured during 2007 and 2008 with a few gestures of good will, which never crystalized into a coherent policy. These gestures were instead postulated as exceptional humanitarian actions taken by the authorities. For example, in 2007, some 2000 Eritrean asylum seekers were granted temporary working visas (Yaron et al. 2013) based solely on their date of entrance to Israel. During the same year, following a multi-party petition signed by Israeli MPs opposing the deportation of Darfuris, the Israeli prime-minister Ehud Olmert granted asylum to 498 Darfuris without an individual screening process (Duman 2015). Calls for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers were also voiced by military reserve soldiers who often made the first contact with the African asylum seekers at the border (Bereshkovsky 2007).

With the dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving at the Israeli border with Egypt, the ambiguities in Israel's asylum policy disappeared and a strict exclusionist policy emerged. Thus, in 2010, a government directive was initiated initiating the construction of a fence at the border and a detention facility which will accommodate asylum seekers upon their arrival into Israel, as well as asylum seekers already residing in the country.

Israel's exclusionist policy toward asylum seekers is best exemplified through the very low rates of recognized refugees it holds namely, less than 1 % (Kritzman-Amir 2015). These exceptionally low recognition rates can be accounted for by the fact that until 2013, most persons protected by a TGP status in Israel were not permitted to submit individual asylum applications. Therefore, almost 90 % of asylum seekers in Israel have not had their individual cases heard, nor have they gone through the Refugee Status Determination process (RSD) by this time (Berman 2012; Natan 2012).³ Due to the fact that de-facto, the refugee status exists in Israel to a very minor extent, the UNHCR (United Nations Human Rights Commission) considers most of the African asylum seekers in Israel to be "individuals in a refugee like situation" (UNHCR 2014).

The exclusionist asylum seekers policy in Israel was sustained in 2012 with the amendment of the infiltration prevention law. The infiltration prevention law was passed during the 1950s, to secure Israel's right to protect itself and take severe measures against individuals from enemy states entering Israel unlawfully in order to commit terrorist attacks (Yaron et al. 2013). The amendment of the law authorized the

² In the case of the Sudanese, the protection was given based on the fact that these individuals arrived from an enemy state and could not be returned home due to lack of diplomatic relations.

³ This reality of low recognition rates in Israel serves as a basis for contrasting claim-making: those who argue that the low rates confirm the applicants' weak grounds for requesting refugee status, and those who contend that the low rates are mere proof of the unfairness of the RSD procedure in Israel (Berman 2012).

state to treat asylum seekers as infiltrators, and above all, to detain them for lengthy periods without a clear cause.⁴

The discourse on asylum seekers in Israel took the same path as the policy (Paz 2011). It is currently governed by the spread of fear from threats they pose to state and society (e.g., Goldstein 2010; Kalir 2014). In this study, we aim to test whether the exclusionist policy and discourse on infiltrators in Israel can be challenged by means of exposure to a competing frame namely, that of asylum seekers seeking refuge from political persecution and war. Specifically, we seek to understand whether exposure to the competing frame undermines the general tendency of the Jewish Israeli public to exclude asylum seekers and reject the position that Israel is responsible for their wellbeing.

Humanitarianism and Asylum Policy

Humanitarianism is relevant for the current study both from a macro-political and from a micro-individual perspective. At the policy level, humanitarianism represents one of two logics on which asylum policies typically rely. The other logic is one of state-sovereignty (Joppke 1997). The relations between the humanitarian and the state-sovereignty logics are considered in the literature to be highly unbalanced. Pickering (2001) for example argues that the language of humanitarianism tends to present asylum seekers and refugees as submissive objects, and that humanitarian principles are understood by host states as a form of “charity-giving” (see also Grove and Zwi 2006; Dauvergne 1999) and not a standard of obligation. These and other authors maintain that this construction of humanitarianism places the host state in the privileged position of the benefactor and the asylum seeker in the disadvantaged position of the beneficiary (Dauvergne 1999, 2000, 2005; Taylor 2001).

Gibney (2004) proposes that this imbalance between the humanitarian and the state-sovereignty logics, positively establishes asylum policies as “realistic” in setting a minimal yet clear standard for liberal states' responsibilities towards asylum seekers and refugees. He claims that humanitarianism is attentive to the modern state's agency to ensure citizens' welfare and security, is flexible enough to apply in different states, and is cautious in the demands it makes of states, requiring them to accept new entrants to the point where certain (minor) costs are incurred (Gibney 2004).⁵

More central for the context of our current study is however the individual meaning of humanitarianism that aims to explain its role in public attitudes towards the allocation of resources to others. In this context, the literature proposes to view humanitarianism as a personal value and, as such, consider its role in the formation of attitudes (Feldman and Steenbergen-Marco 2001; Pantoja 2006). Psychologists

⁴ Originally, the Infiltration Prevention law stated that asylum seekers are to be detained for at least 36 months. Since then, the law was amended three times by the Knesset, following human rights organizations' appeals to the Israeli Supreme Court. As of August 2015, the detention period was reduced by the court to 20 months.

⁵ Importantly, Gibney (2004) additionally maintains that states have the duty not just to accept refugees when the costs of doing so are low, but also to reshape the political space in a way that the amount of protection provided for refugees at low cost will be maximized. This is achieved by restructuring public policy, participating in burden sharing initiatives between states, and dealing with the original causes of forced migration (see also Dauvergne 1999, 2000, 2005; Taylor 2001; Every 2008).

consider humanitarianism to be one variant of moral values, tapping to prosocial orientations (Schwartz 2007; Staub 1989). As such, humanitarianism implies a sense of responsibility for others, and a need to be personally involved in solving the problems of others (Feldman and Steenbergen-Marco 2001). Humanitarianism is associated with a sense of compassion (Nussbaum 1996), and is based on civic humanism, social responsibility, and similar philanthropic and humane codes of conduct (Berkowitz and Lutterman 1968; Bobo 1991; Herzog 2009).

Supporting these characteristics of humanitarianism, empirical findings indicate that humanitarian attitudes are associated with positive feelings towards immigrants and low support for exclusion (see e.g., Oyamoto et al. 2012; Pantoja 2006). In the current study, we wish to investigate whether or not the Israeli public supports the current policy toward asylum seekers, and rejects a more humanitarian policy. More specifically, we examine whether framing asylum seekers as “infiltrators” fosters support in the current policy, and whether the rejection of humanitarian policy measures can be reduced by referring to these individuals as “asylum seekers” instead.

Framing and Public Attitudes

The words, images, phrases, and presentation styles elites use to construct specific issues in the public discourse represent “frames” which take part in the formation of individual attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Schuck 2006; Zaller 1992). The effect of frames on the formation of individual attitudes is known in the literature as a “framing effect.” Framing effects do not change individuals' values or beliefs. Instead, they determine which considerations individuals reflect on when forming an attitude. Specifically, framing an issue in a particular way cues preexisting cognitions individuals hold, and, if successful makes these cognitions relevant for individuals in considering a specific issue and their attitudes regarding it. A framing effect emerges when some considerations regarding the issue at hand are made available, accessible, and applicable (Chong and Druckman 2007).

Price and Tewksbury (1997) explain that availability depends on the ability of individuals to understand the meaning of a specific consideration and its significance. Availability increases as exposure to the consideration increases. Accessibility also depends on the frequency with which the consideration is brought into mind or in other words, on the frequency of exposure to frames which are linked with this consideration. Applicability depends on subjective evaluations of individuals about the relevance and importance of the consideration for the issue compared with other available considerations (Price and Tewksbury 1997). Gamson (1992) points out in this regard that not all individuals exposed to a frame respond to it in the same way (see also Brewer 2001; Knoll et al. 2011).

Whether a consideration is applicable or not, depends on different factors. Price and Tewksbury (1997) stress the importance of ability and motivation. In terms of ability, the main question is whether individuals can counter the dominant frame with their own interpretation of the issue at hand. This ability depends on knowledge and political involvement but also on individuals' momentary level of concentration or distraction. In terms of motivation, the main question is whether individuals are motivated to engage in this evaluation process or not.

Research indicates that framing effects are especially successful if adhering to “news values”, that is, issues that are of particular interest for the press like group conflict, drama, and personalities (Wolfsfeld et al. 2000). Immigration perfectly matches such “news values” because of the attractiveness of a group conflict frame to describe it (Augoustinos and Quinn 2003; Knoll et al. 2011). Framed in this way, immigration is thus a very popular news story. Framing immigrants as out-group members, the media as well as other elites invoke in-group identifications in the public. According to the social identity perspective (Tajfel and Turner 1986), once in-group identifications are salient, in-group favoritism and out-group exclusion as well as positive (in-group) and negative (out-group) stereotyping will follow.

Reflecting on the Israeli setting, the group conflict frame appears to be applicable. Using the label “infiltrators”, politicians and the media successfully framed the African asylum seekers as an out-group posing a major security threat (Kritzman-Amir and Shumacher 2012; Tsurkov 2012) and produced specific stereotypes to apply on members of this group. Interestingly, alternative frames which were also voiced in the Israeli political and public discourse like refugees, or asylum seekers, were rejected. For policy makers, these latter frames were counterproductive in their efforts to implement a highly exclusionist policy. For the media, these frames represented a deviation from the group conflict frame.

Exposed to the frame “asylum seekers”, some of the respondents in our study are likely to have higher ability to process alternative considerations when forming their attitudes on policy issues related to this group. Due to the fact that this frame too is voiced in the public discourse, we assume that the considerations associated with it are available and accessible for these respondents. As mentioned before, applicability depends not only on ability, but also on motivation. To test the motivation argument and its role in the applicability of the frames, we refer to the respondents' levels of perceived threat and to their political identification.

Costs to Self: Perceived Threat and Support for Humanitarian Policy Practices

A substantial number of studies examined the sources of xenophobia, hostility, prejudice, and discriminatory attitudes towards migrants and ethnic minorities (e.g., Ariely 2011; Hochman 2015; Murray and Marx 2013; Semyonov et al. 2006). Two of the

most popular explanations for the formation and level of anti-immigrant sentiment are the competition or realistic group threat perspective, and the symbolic threat perspective. The former stresses the impact of material competition on ethnic antagonism (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Levine and Campbell 1972; Quillian 1995; Rajzman and Semyonov 2004; Scheepers et al. 2002) the latter suggests that the roots of hostility are linked to symbolic (cultural, national) preferences (e.g., Esses et al. 2001; McLaren and Johnson 2007; Scheepers et al. 2002). Both explanations imply a commitment to protect the particularistic interests of the in-group.

The literature proposes two ways to conceptualize the relations between the competition, or conflict perspective and the symbolic threat perspective. One is the integrated threat theory (Stephan and Stephan 2000) that suggests to view each perspective as a separate dimension within a higher order concept of threat. The other is the ethnic

competition perspective according to which perceived threat (or competition) intensifies processes of social identification or counter-identification that lead to the emergence of negative attitudes towards out-groups (Savelkoul et al. 2010). This latter perspective also proposes that material competition and symbolic threat should be understood as one and the same mechanism (Scheepers et al. 2002). In the current paper, we adopt the latter of these two perspectives.

Framing and Political Identification: A Social Identity Perspective

Political identification is also predicted to affect the respondents' motivation to apply alternative considerations (e.g., Knoll et al. 2011). The association between right-wing political identification and the applicability of the dominant frame regarding asylum seekers in Israel is particularly relevant given the fact that the exclusionist policy was initiated and implemented by a center-right government (Duman 2014). Theoretically, the association between political identification and attitudes relies on assertions made within the social identity perspective. Specifically, Hogg and Reid (2006) maintain that individuals need to demonstrate in-group prototypical behavior in order to sustain their in-group identification. This implies that people in salient groups pay close attention to information delineating the prototypical behavior of their group members. We therefore contend that respondents holding a right-wing political identification will be more motivated to adopt the dominant frame and less willing to engage in alternative considerations compared with individuals holding a different political identification. Based on the theoretical discussion above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H₁ Rejection of humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers will be weaker among respondents exposed to the frame "asylum seekers"

H₂ Perceived (socio-economic and symbolic) threat will increase rejection of humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers

H₃ Rejection of humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers will be higher among individuals holding a right-wing political identification

H₄ The effect of the frame "asylum seekers" on rejection of humanitarian policy measures will decrease with increasing levels of perceived (socio-economic and symbolic) threat

H₅ The effect of the frame "asylum seekers" on rejection of humanitarian policy measures will be weaker among respondents holding a right-wing political identification

Data and Method

The current study is based on data we collected during the spring of 2013 among a representative stratified sample of the adult Jewish population in Israel (N =801). We used fully structured telephone-based interviews that included several attitudinal batteries commonly found in international surveys such as the ESS (European Social Survey)-ERIC and the ISSP (International Social Survey Program), as well as standard socio-demographic items relevant to the Israeli setting. Sampling was based on place of

residence (community) of the respondents, and respondents were drawn from a phone registry (mostly landline and a small number of cellular phone numbers) owned by Uniseker center, at the University of Haifa, who conducted the field work.⁶

Respondents were randomly allocated into one of two questionnaires that were identical in all respects but the opening sentence and the reference group mentioned across all the attitudinal batteries. The first version began with the following sentence: "in recent years, people from various African countries have entered Israel via the Egyptian border, and asked for asylum for reasons of political persecution or civil war..." (N= 500). The opening sentence of the second version of the questionnaire was: "in recent years, people from various African countries have infiltrated Israel through the Egyptian border without any visa or permit, thus breaking the law." (N = 301). These two questionnaire versions allow us to test the role of framing effects in the attitude formation process of the respondents (see e.g., Augoustinos and Quinn 2003; Kinder and Sanders 1990). The response rate was 50 %.⁷ The two samples were very similar in terms of socio-demographic characteristics allowing us to assume random assignment (see Table 1).

To test our hypotheses, we applied OLS regression models (STATA 14.0[®]). The dependent variable in our study is disagreement with or rejection of humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers. It is composed of four items referring to policy measures that Israel should or should not implement toward asylum seekers. The items were "Israel should offer protection to individuals in trouble"; "asylum seekers/infiltrators should be allowed to work while their refugee application is being processed"; "Israel should provide asylum seekers/infiltrators financial assistance"; and "Government should be generous in accepting refugee applications". Answers ranged from 1 "completely disagree" to 7 "completely agree." Items were recoded so that the higher the value, the higher the disagreement with these policy measures. To test the content validity of this index, we first ran an exploratory factor analysis (principal component factoring) confirming that all four items load well on the theoretical construct with standardized factor loadings above 0.50. We then also ran a multiple group confirmatory factor analysis in AMOS 23.0[®], to test the measurement invariance of the factors across the two framing subsamples (see standardized factor loadings in Appendix 1). As disclosed in Appendix 2, findings indicated a good fit of the independent model and scalar invariance (Chen 2007) which implies comparable structures of the latent variables (Milfont and Fischer 2010).

Based on previous literature, we predicted that variation in responses to this battery of items would be positively correlated with perceived threat, referring both to competition and symbolic threat. In a second step we therefore constructed a measure for perceived threat (socio-economic and symbolic) including seven items referring to possible threats posed by asylum seekers. Sample items include "asylum seekers/infiltrators in Israel are a burden on the welfare services provided by the state to all residents"; "asylum seekers/infiltrators in Israel raise crime levels"; "asylum seekers/infiltrators take jobs away from Israelis"; and "asylum seekers/infiltrators pose a threat to my own or my family's safety". Answers ranged from 1 "completely disagree" to 7 "completely agree." All seven items

⁶ Comparing our own data to information published by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, we found a significant over-representation of highly educated individuals in our sample.

⁷ Non-response refers to individuals who refused to participate (384), those who postponed the interview several times (149), individuals who had difficulty answering the questions (232), and interviews that were not completed (24).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the sample (only cases included in the analysis are included)

	Infiltrators	Asylum seekers
Perceived threat		
Burden welfare system	5.62 (1.91)	5.68 (1.84)
<i>Burden education system</i>	<i>4.59 (2.24)</i>	<i>4.86 (2.17)</i>
<i>Take jobs</i>	<i>4.18 (2.27)</i>	<i>4.59 (2.24)</i>
Lower wages	4.16 (2.16)	4.37 (2.18)
<i>Increases crime</i>	<i>5.47 (2.02)</i>	<i>5.74 (1.74)</i>
<i>Threat to public health</i>	<i>4.59 (2.21)</i>	<i>4.84 (2.09)</i>
Threat to me and/or my family	4.27 (2.42)	4.46 (2.33)
Exclusion from humanitarian rights		
Protect people in need	3.48 (2.17)	3.56 (2.11)
Allow work while asylum in process	4.43 (2.41)	4.23 (2.38)
Government generous in granting asylum	5.29 (1.89)	5.01 (2.00)
Government provides financial assistance	5.31 (1.91)	5.11 (2.00)
Controls		
Female	54.20	52.29
Male	45.80	47.71
Right/religious political identification	38.17	35.42
Center	12.98	15.18
Left	12.98	14.46
Other	3.05	2.41
No party	27.10	21.93
Missing	5.34	9.88
Israeli	22.52	22.17
Mizrahi	31.68	33.25
Ashkenazi	27.10	29.16
FSU	17.18	13.01
Mixed second generation	1.53	2.41
No academic education	52.67	49.16
Academic education	47.33	50.85
Religious	52.67	50.84
Secular	47.33	49.16
Not employed	20.23	19.52
Not employed and searching for a job	1.91	4.58
Employed	77.86	75.90
Native	66.41	72.05
Immigrant	33.59	27.95
<i>Does not encounter in everyday life</i>	<i>28.24</i>	<i>38.07</i>
Encounter in everyday life	71.76	61.93
Age	45.60 (14.18)	46.53 (14.59)
N	262	415

Differences significant at the 0.05 level are marked in italics

load well on one factor with all standardized factor loadings higher than 0.50 (see Appendix 2). Given that the scalar invariance reported above also applies for this factor we built a mean index composed of all seven items which we shall use in our OLS regression models.

Political identification is determined according to respondents' self-reports on the party which best represents their political views. The parties were grouped according to right-wing, left-wing, center parties, and religious parties.⁸ To these groups, we added two additional categories: one for individuals who voted for parties that do not fall

within the "left-right" scale (other) and another for individuals who reported that no party represents their political view (no party). The relatively high share of respondents (over 20 %) reporting to have no party which represents their political views is similar to that reported in the 2012 Israeli Democracy Index (Herman et al. 2012).

Our model additionally controls for several sociodemographic properties of the respondents. We first included in the model information on the respondents' socio-economic position. Specifically, we control for their educational level (academic or not), and their employment status (employed, not employed or not employed and looking for a job).

The respondents' religious affiliation was measured by the respondents' self-definition as ultra-orthodox, orthodox, traditional, or secular. Specifically we compared secular respondents with the rest. Ethnic group membership within the Jewish majority was measured with the usual categories: respondents born in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, or who were born in Israel to a father born in these regions were coded "Mizrachi"; respondents born in Europe, the Americas or Oceania, or who were born in Israel to a father born in these regions were coded "Ashkenazi"; respondents who immigrated from the Former Soviet Union since 1989 were coded "FSU"; and respondents who were Israeli born to Israeli born parents were coded "Israeli". Israeli born respondents to one parent born in Israel and another abroad were coded "mixed". We also included a distinction between Israeli born respondents (0) and immigrants (1).

Age was calculated from respondents' year of birth. Males (1) were differentiated from female respondents (0). In addition to these control variables and given that asylum seekers in Israel are not spread equally across different regions and cities, we control for whether or not respondents come across asylum seekers in their daily lives (come across = 1).

Our hypotheses imply two moderation processes: one for the role of perceived threat in the relations between framing and rejection of humanitarian policy measures, and another for the role of right-wing political identification in these relations. We thus estimated additional models including first a two-way interaction between perceived threat and framing and second, a two-way interaction between right-wing political identification and framing.

Findings

Table 1 presents mean levels (standard deviations) of the indicators used to form the different constructs of perceived threat, and disagreement with humanitarian policy measures. The table indicates that our respondents feel threatened by asylum seekers.

⁸ Center parties were: Yesh Atid, Hatnua and Kadima, Left parties were: Avoda, Meretz and Hadash, Right parties were: Halikud, Habait Hayehudi, and Israel Beiteinu, Religious parties were: Shas and Yahadut Hatora

The mean levels of perceived threat among respondents exposed to the “asylum seekers” frame range between 4.37 for the lowering wages item and 5.74 for the crime related item (the scale ranges between 1 and 7, where 7 means strongly agree). Looking at the “infiltrators” subgroup, the mean levels of perceived threat range from 4.16 for the lowering wages item, to 5.62 for the welfare threat item. Importantly, not all differences observed in the mean levels of perceived threat were statistically significant. Notably, respondents exposed to the “asylum seekers” frame reported significantly higher levels of perceived threat compared to those exposed to the “infiltrators” frame on four items: asylum seekers increase crime levels, asylum seekers threaten public health, asylum seekers take jobs away from Israelis and asylum seekers are a burden on the education system.

The respondents' mean levels of disagreement with humanitarian policy practices range between 3.56 (asylum seekers subgroup) and 3.48 (infiltrators subgroup) for the protection item and 5.11 (asylum seekers subgroup) and 5.31 (infiltrators subgroup) for the financial assistance item (identical scaling to the items measuring perceived threat). In the case of disagreement with humanitarian policy measures, the differences between the two frame subgroups were not statistically significant.

The results of our estimated OLS regression models are presented in Table 2. Model 1 includes the framing manipulation (asylum seekers). Model 2 includes in addition our construct for perceived threat. Model 3 also includes a two-way interaction between perceived threat and the framing manipulation. Model 4 includes the two-way interaction between framing, and right-wing political identification. Unlike the previous models, here, the rest of the political identifications were grouped into one reference category.

As indicated in Model 1, the framing manipulation was not statistically significant. The findings also indicate that individuals with a center or left political identification show lower levels of rejection of humanitarian policy measures compared with rightwing voters ($b = -0.75$ and -1.38 , respectively, for center and left). Considering the long lasting cooperation between right-wing and religious parties in Israel, it is not surprising that no differences were found between respondents with a right-wing political identification and those identifying with religious parties. In model 4, we therefore included religious parties' voters under our definition of “right-wing” political identification.⁹

Model 1 additionally conveyed that secular respondents show lower disagreement with humanitarian policy measures compared with traditional or orthodox as well as ultra-orthodox respondents ($b = -0.35$). We found no indication for any association between socio-economic status and attitudes toward humanitarian policy measures. The same is also true for ethnic background, and immigration background. Model 1 explains some 18 % of the explained variance in the observed levels of rejection of humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers.

Model 2 conveys that net of perceived threat, the effect of religious level is no longer significant. Perceived threat thus mediates the effect of religiosity. The regression coefficients for political identification are now smaller in size, but they still significantly

⁹ Differences between right-wing voters and the “other” category were also not significant, however this is a very small control category we would not like to over interpret.

Table 2 OLS regression coefficients (SE) predicting rejection of humanitarian policy measures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Age	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)
Male	0.03 (0.11)	0.08 (0.11)	0.07 (0.11)	0.08 (0.11)
Secular	-0.35** (0.13)	-0.17 (0.13)	-0.18 (0.13)	-0.28* (0.12)
Center party	-0.75*** (0.19)	-0.54** (0.18)	-0.53** (0.18)	
Left party	-1.38*** (0.20)	-0.86*** (0.19)	-0.83*** (0.19)	
Religious party	0.38 (0.23)	0.38 (0.22)	0.38 (0.22)	
Other party	0.07 (0.36)	0.07 (0.34)	0.09 (0.33)	
No party	-0.40* (0.16)	-0.30* (0.15)	-0.28 (0.15)	
Missing on political identification	-0.48* (0.22)	-0.35 (0.21)	-0.34 (0.21)	
Not employed	-0.15 (0.15)	-0.14 (0.14)	-0.13 (0.14)	-0.11 (0.14)
Not employed and looking for a job	-0.01 (0.30)	-0.15 (0.28)	-0.18 (0.28)	-0.10 (0.29)
Academic degree	-0.14 (0.12)	-0.04 (0.11)	-0.04 (0.11)	-0.07 (0.11)
Immigrant	0.02 (0.15)	0.00 (0.14)	0.00 (0.14)	0.02 (0.14)
Ashkenazi	-0.23 (0.17)	-0.18 (0.16)	-0.17 (0.16)	-0.21 (0.16)
Mizrachi	0.16 (0.16)	0.09 (0.15)	0.09 (0.15)	0.06 (0.15)
FSU 1989+	0.01 (0.23)	-0.11 (0.21)	-0.11 (0.21)	-0.08 (0.21)
Mixed Israeli	-0.18 (0.40)	-0.21 (0.38)	-0.22 (0.38)	-0.24 (0.38)
Contact	0.15 (0.12)	0.13 (0.12)	0.13 (0.11)	0.14 (0.12)
Asylum seekers	-0.06 (0.11)	-0.17 (0.11)	-0.81* (0.33)	-0.27 (0.14)
Perceived SE threat		0.34*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.05)	0.38*** (0.03)
Asylum seekers # perceived SE threat			0.13*	

Table 2 (continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
			(0.06)	
Right-wing/religious political id				0.36*
				(0.18)
Asylum seekers# right-wing/religious political id				0.19
				(0.22)
_cons	5.43***	3.66***	4.05***	3.27***
	(0.27)	(0.31)	(0.36)	(0.31)
R ²	0.18	0.28	0.29	0.27
N	677	677	677	677

Standard errors in parentheses * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Reference categories: female; traditional, orthodox, or ultra orthodox; right-wing parties; employed; no academic degree; native born; Israeli; no contact; "infiltrators"

account for differences in the respondents' attitudes regarding humanitarian policy measures (b = -0.54 and -0.86 for center and left, respectively). Another consequence of the insertion of perceived threat into the model is the increase in the strength of the framing coefficient that remains nonetheless insignificant (b = -0.17). This change in the framing coefficient is in line with our expectation that perceived threat interacts with the framing indicator, a possibility we test in the next model. The coefficient of the perceived threat index is positive and significant implying, as expected, that perceived threat increases the respondents' disagreement with humanitarian policy measures (b = 0.34). The explained variance in model 2 rose to 28 %, indicating the important role of perceived threat, or costs to self, in the formation of attitudes regarding humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers.

Model 3 tested the hypothesis that the framing effect will decrease as levels of perceived threat increase. In order to test this hypothesis we inserted an interaction term between the frame ("asylum seekers" = 1) and perceived threat. The findings of the model support our assumption that the frame and perceived threat interact with each other. First, the coefficient of the interaction term is significant and positive (b = 0.13). Second, looking at the coefficients for the "asylum seekers" frame (b = -0.81) and for perceived threat (b = 0.26), we can conclude that in line with our hypothesis, the framing effect decreases with increasing levels of perceived threat. As demonstrated in Fig. 1, the framing effect is relatively large and significant when values of perceived threat are below 4 (the middle category).

Model 4 included the two-way interaction between the "asylum seekers" frame and political identification (1 = right-wing or religious political identification and 0 = all the rest). The findings presented in column 4 demonstrate that here, our hypothesis is only partially supported by the data. The coefficient of the interaction term was not significant at the 0.05 level, and the coefficient of the framing effect was only marginally significant. Yet, the direction of these coefficients indicates that the negative effect of the frame "asylum seekers" on rejection of humanitarian policy measures, decreases for respondents holding a right-wing political identification. As demonstrated in Fig. 2, the marginal effect of the "asylum seekers" frame for individuals with a right-

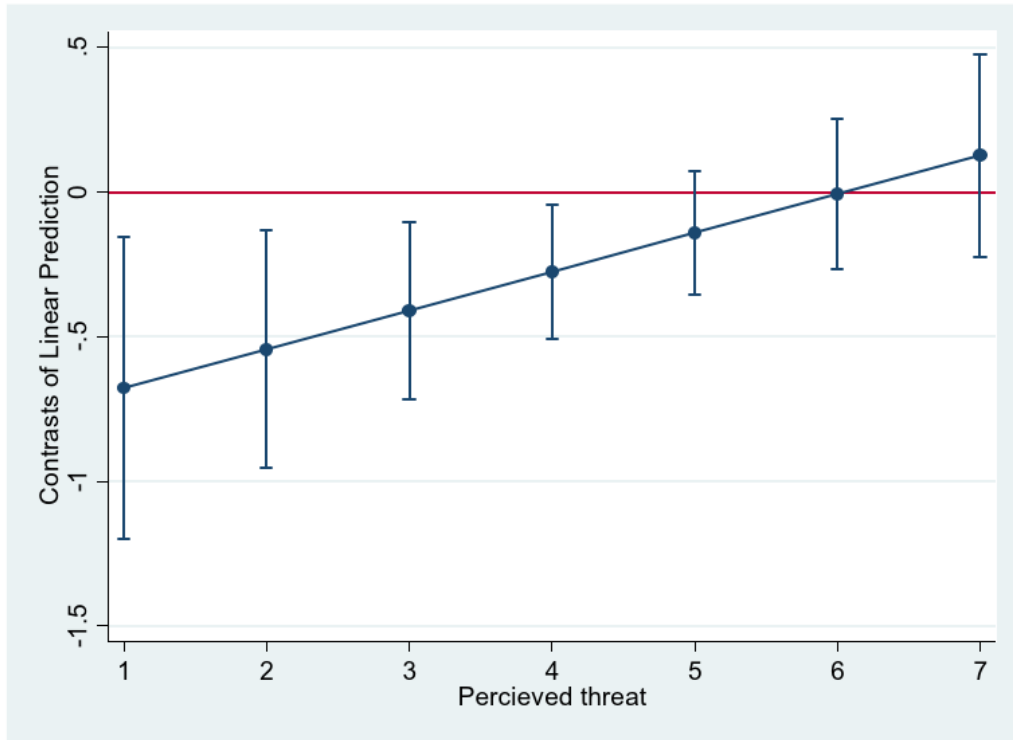


Fig. 1 Contrasts of predictive margins of asylum seekers with 95 % CIs

religious political identification on rejection of humanitarian policy measures is not significant. The effect of the asylum seekers frame for other respondents is borderline significant and larger. Both the effect of perceived threat and of right-wing political identification were significant and in the expected direction ($b = 0.38$ and 0.36 , respectively, for perceived threat and for right-wing or religious political identification).

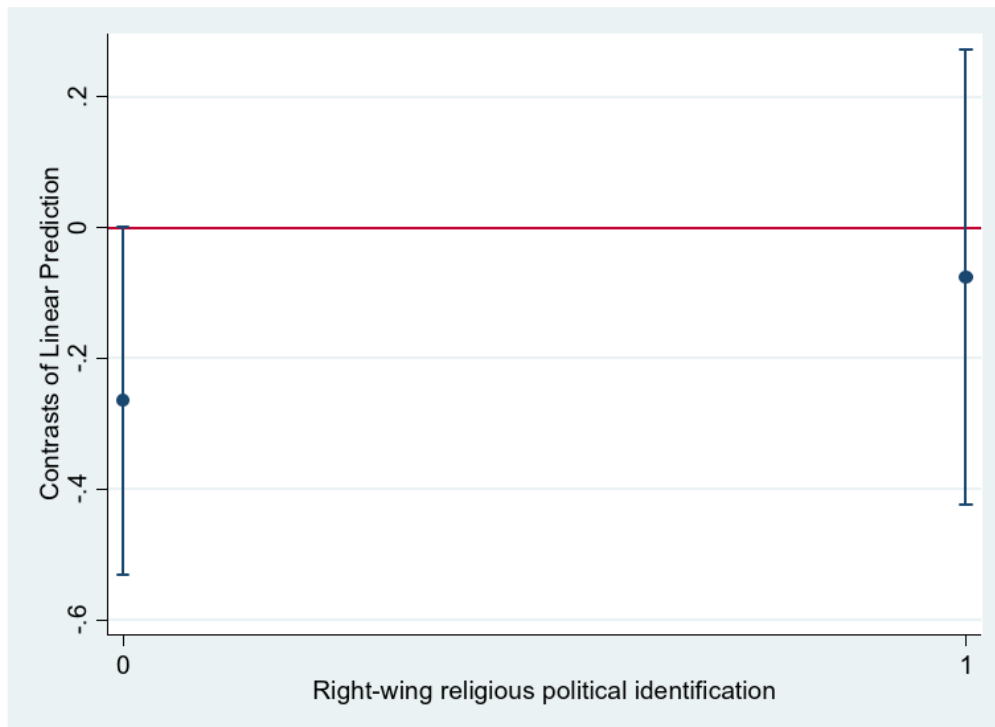


Fig. 2 Contrasts of predictive margins of asylum seekers with 95 % CIs

Conclusions

This study investigated attitudes toward asylum seekers in Israel, where asylum seekers are framed in the public discourse as “infiltrators”, a negatively loaded definition previously used in the context of persons suspected of committing acts of terror. We specifically investigated the extent to which the Jewish Israeli public agrees with the current policy toward asylum seekers and thus disagrees with implementing humanitarian policy measures towards them. Our hypotheses were first, that respondents exposed to the “asylum seekers” frame will show weaker disagreement with humanitarian policy measures due to the considerations this frame implies. Second, we predicted that disagreement with humanitarian policy measures will be positively correlated with perceived threat and with a right-wing political identification. We further hypothesized that the framing effect will be moderated by these two factors that are associated with the respondents' motivation to take into account new considerations associated with the “asylum seekers” frame when forming their policy-related attitudes.

Our first hypothesis, which assumed a direct framing effect, was refuted. Mean levels of (dis)agreement with items referring to the implementation of humanitarian policy measures toward asylum seekers were very similar between the two framing subgroups. In our first regression model (model 1), the effect of framing was also insignificant. Our findings do imply that perceived threat intervenes in the relations between the frame, and the respondents' attitudes on humanitarian policy measures. In line with our hypothesis, we find that the effect of the frame on rejection of humanitarian policy measures weakens as levels of perceived threat increase.

This latter finding supports the assumption regarding the existence of a tension between humanitarian attitudes and self-interests or costs. As levels of perceived threat increase, the sensitivity of the respondents to the circumstances associated with the arrival of asylum seekers decreases. The findings thus imply that a change of the frame may elicit change in public attitudes; however, for this change to occur action must be taken to reduce levels of perceived threat associated with asylum seekers in Israel.

Our hypothesis regarding the moderating role of political identification in the relations between framing and the rejection of humanitarian policy measures was only partially supported. Although the findings are in the expected direction, they do not reach statistical significance. With the necessary caution, we can conclude that our study provides support for the idea that individuals need to demonstrate their in-group prototypical behavior. This need expresses itself in the “blind” acceptance of the frame adopted by prototypical ingroup members (in this case political representatives). In comparison to individuals whose in-group prototypical behavior does not imply exclusion of asylum seekers, those who identify with the political right in Israel were less sensitive to the alternative frame they were offered and the alternative considerations it implies.

There are a few directions further research could follow to learn more about the processes discussed here: first, different frames should be tested. It is possible that the weak evidence we found for the framing effect derives from our use of the term “asylum seekers” which is a complex legal term. An alternative frame would be “refugees”. In the Israeli case one needs to be aware of the fact that this word implies other complexities associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and with the Holocaust. Future studies could try to disentangle this issue. Second, the tension between humanitarian attitudes and self- or group interests should be tested inter-culturally in order to gain more validity.

Future studies will also gain from the integration of better measures of humanitarian attitudes, and particularly, humanitarian values (e.g., Schwartz 2007). The same holds for perceived threat. Finally, our conclusions are based on a model which does not cover the entire scope of mechanisms explaining the exclusion of foreigners. For example, we did not inquire about the role of psychological traits, or of values. In this study, we show that presenting asylum seekers in a humanitarian light, emphasizing their flight and fear of persecution in their countries of origin (the frame “asylum seekers”) does not dramatically change public perceptions regarding the way the state should treat them. The findings are in line with the literature suggesting that the asylum seekers discourse in host states is one characterized by a costs-responsibility nexus. Our case study indicates that the attitudes of the Israeli public are shaped mostly by the former.

Appendix 1

Table 3 Standardized factor loadings from the MGCFA

	Infiltrators	Asylum seekers
Perceived threat indicators		
Burden Social Security system	0.66	0.68
Burden Education system	0.66	0.71
Take jobs away	0.60	0.62
Lower wages	0.57	0.59
Increase crime	0.66	0.71
Threat to public health	0.69	0.70
Threat to personal security	0.56	0.60
Policy attitudes		
Israel should protect individuals in need	0.54	0.56
Asylum seekers/infiltrators should be allowed to work while their application is considered	0.71	0.71
Government should be generous in granting refugee status	0.78	0.82
Government should provide financial assistance	0.53	0.53

Appendix 2

Table 4 Fit measures

	Unconstrained model	Measurement weights model	Measurement intercepts model
R ² /DF	2.48	2.41	2.46
CFI	0.98	0.98	0.97
RMSEA	0.035	0.034	0.035

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