

SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS

Global Outlook on Public Attitudes to Immigration: From Description to Explanation to Intervention

OVERVIEW

The Global Outlook on Public Attitudes to Immigration: from description to explanation to intervention asks what individuals across the world think about immigration, why they think what they do, and what communication is likely to affect what they think. It provides global data on what public attitudes to immigration are, brings up to date the rapidly developing scientific literature that explains attitudes to immigration, and provides guidance to communicators on what types of communication are likely to be effective, along with examples. This document summarizes 'the Outlook' for policymakers and is structured in four parts: context on narratives, findings, interventions, and the conclusion.

CONTEXT ON NARRATIVES

Narratives are selective depictions of reality across at least two points in time that include a causal claim. Narratives are important to policymakers and communicators because:

NARRATIVES

are an inescapable part of humanity's attempts to understand their own reality. As such, policymakers and communicators must prioritise the effective use of narratives in their work to be understood and believed.

COMPETING NARRATIVES

may simultaneously become popular as demand for understanding an issue increases. As such, the popularity of narratives must be used as a gauge of public opinion with extreme caution.

A NARRATIVE'S POPULARITY

is partially reliant on its plausibility: both in terms of being internally theoretically logical and supported externally with evidence. In short, facts—when combined with compelling logic—do matter.

NARRATIVES CONVEYED

by communicators and policymakers must be constructed around the recipients' own pre-existing cognitive pillars rather than trying to recreate them from scratch, or challenge them.

ONLY SOME NARRATIVES

effectively change preferences, despite the fact that individuals may be likely to agree with most plausible positive and negative narratives on immigration simultaneously.

FINDINGS

Across 63 countries and six continents globally, citizens' immigration policy preferences are shown to be far more moderate than radical and—in countries with a recent history of immigration—relatively stable over time. That said, important country differences exist. Outside of a few “western” countries, citizens prefer that nationals are prioritised over immigrants for jobs in every country. Prejudice against immigrants is usually held by a minority. Citizens across the world simultaneously believe both positive and negative narratives about immigration. Even in very pro-immigration countries, belief in immigration's negative effects is widespread. That said, immigration preferences seem to be informed by a complex mix of the extent to which immigration is seen as affecting unemployment, crime, terrorism, social conflict, but also filling jobs and enriching culture.

The perceived importance of immigration as an issue affecting one's country, compared to other political issues, is highly volatile and driven by episodic “crises” and news cycles. By contrast, the perceived importance of immigration to individuals' personal lives is consistently very low. Individual attitudes to immigration are shown as resulting from deeper, stable psychological predispositions and early-life socialisation which then affect the size and direction of more immediate factors, such as the economic situation, migratory context,

and messaging that they receive. Some narratives become popular and some do not, due to the predispositions of the audience but also the particular characteristics of the narrative, its effects, and the context in which it operates.

A range of guidelines are then overviewed on what constitutes effective communication on migration, with a particular focus on personal values and emotions. The below table summarises recommendations from a range of sources. In Figure 1, we see a summary of key recommendations from past best-practice guides for migration communication, including that of the GFMD. The most common recommendation is to focus on values-based messaging. The report builds on these findings to consider what values-based messaging is and what type of value-based messaging is likely to work regarding migration. It also goes into depth on how to use emotions and experimental evidence of immigration communication.

Figure 1. Summary of key recommendations from existing best-practice guides for migration communication.

Strategic Arrangements

- Research and target moveable audience, know their perceptions and prejudices
- Set up partnerships for communications/support others
- Develop a proactive communications strategy

Communications Content

- Focus on values
- Use storytelling
- Appeal to emotion
- Focus on hope, positivity, solutions, and/or vision
- Find common ground
- Avoid repeating opposing ideas, which increases their salience

Communications Delivery

- Use succinct, digestible, and focussed messaging
- Choose credible messengers, including migrants and moderates

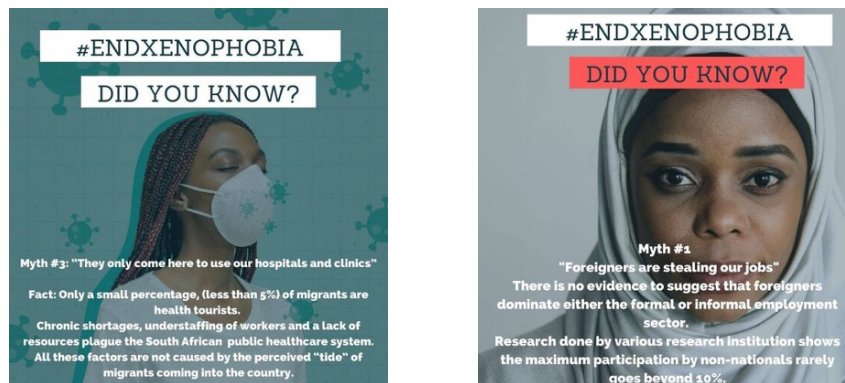
INTERVENTIONS

Six examples are used to better understand how such lessons – regarding the likes of emotions, identities, and values – can be used in practice.

The six campaigns include two global campaigns – the GFMD’s “It Takes A Community” and UNHCR’s “#Ibelong” – as well as campaigns in Greece (“We can give a lot to one another”), Austria (“We are Upper Austria”), Australia and Malaysia (“#StandUp4Migrants”), and South Africa (“#EndXenophobia”).

In Figure 2, we see examples of myth-busting communication and the use of common identity narratives to persuade, as taken from Adonis Musati Project's #EndXenophobia campaign. Its four objectives were to 'amplify the voices of migrants', 'increase exchange of credible information on migrants' rights', 'greater public awareness of migrants' rights, issues, and stories', and to 'increase dialogue through stories shared ... with non-national women and youth'. The campaign's primary method of meeting these objectives was via myth-busting regarding the job- and services-stealing narratives, along with use of national identity (the history-of-hosting-migrants narrative) and the use of common (African) identity.

Figure 2. Myth-busing messaging from Adonis Musati Project's #EndXenophobia campaign



CONCLUSION

Policymakers and communicators should prioritise the effective use of narratives in their work to be understood and believed because narratives are an inescapable part of humanity's attempts to understand their own reality. However, the popularity of narratives must be used as a gauge of public opinion with extreme caution because, as demand for understanding an issue increases, multiple, competing narratives may simultaneously become popular. A narrative's popularity is partially reliant on its plausibility: both in terms of being internally theoretically logical and supported externally with evidence. In short, facts—when combined with compelling emotions and motivation values—do matter.

Communicators and policymakers should construct their narratives and make their points around the recipients' own pre-existing cognitive pillars rather than challenge them or try to recreate them from scratch. Appealing to common interest rather than self-interest, appealing to conformity rather than diversity, emphasising common ground, and eliciting empathy are most consistently shown to be effective narrative frames. A range of less effective approaches are also highlighted in the Outlook. Emotions, when carefully selected, can be used in communication to make one's messages and narratives more resonant and impactful on both attitudes and behaviours, supporting policy objectives via persuasion.

Future research should now move beyond identifying individual and exemplary attributes of effective communication and towards formalising a framework across the full range of factors suggested in the Outlook.