

Attitudes towards Migrants in the Context of Intensified Migration in Bulgaria: Moral Panic and Personal Relevance

Lyuba Spasova^{1 a}, Anna Mantarova^a, Rafal Smoczynski^b

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria^a

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland^b

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Date of submission: 05-06-2020

Date of acceptance: 29-06-2020

JEL Classification:

J10

J15

J17

Keywords:

Immigrants

Attitudes

Moral panics

Personal relevance

Social distancing

ABSTRACT

Influenced mainly from a sociology of deviance perspective, the article explores perceptions and attitudes towards immigrants in Bulgaria in the context of the intensified migration processes to Europe. Drawing on data from a set of representative surveys, the article aims to reconstruct the social distance specifics, fears and threat perceptions, radicalization and victimization associated with immigrants and to study the way they are affected by spatial and psychological proximity and personal relevance.

1. Introduction

Significant number of people from the Middle East and Africa have come to Europe over the last eight years in an attempt to escape dangers of war, repressions, poverty or other unfavorable conditions. Bulgaria was not excluded from the intensified migration mostly because of the country's location – it lies on one of the main migration routes. Further, although Bulgaria is not among the desired destination countries, there was a considerable - around 20 times - increase in the number of people filing for

¹. Email: lyuba_spasova@abv.bg

asylum. In 2010 1025 foreigners file for a refugee asylum, in 2012 - 1387 and at the peak in 2015 the number is 20391.

The massive migration caused changes in the overall attitudes towards immigrants and even stirred moral panics. According to the ESS data, in the 2012 beginning of the migration wave, most often Bulgarians were willing to accept some immigrants of different race/ethnic origin from majority (36%) and from poorer countries outside Europe (29%), whereas in 2018 the most common answer to both topics was “allow none” (resp. 37% and 40%).

The article aims to deepen the understanding of the changes by analyzing in detail the perceptions and attitudes towards immigrants in Bulgaria in the context of the intensified migration processes to Europe. Using the concept of personal relevance and anti-immigrant moral panic, the article explores the social distance, fears and threat perceptions, radicalization and victimization associated with immigrants. The analysis is based on the data from a representative survey, which is a part of a broader interdisciplinary study focused on social deviations in the context of the current migration processes.

The article is structured as follows: the first part introduces the main theoretical notions and concepts; after that the second and the third part present the methodology of the empirical study and the analysis of the data; finally, the last part concludes with an overview of the most important findings and offers some notes on the possible future research.

2. Theoretical framework

The influence of personal significance and involvement on attitudes related to social problems have long been a subject of research interest (Schwarz, Bohner 2001; Liberman, Chaiken 1996; Harton, Latane 1997; Henderson, Fujita, Trope, Liberman 2006). The most important effects of personal significance are the strength and extremity of attitudes (Liberman, Chaiken 1996; Harton, Latane 1997), the impact on moral judgments (Eyal, Liberman, Trope 2008; Napier, Luguri 2013; Agerström, Björklund 2009), reflection through intragroup dynamics (Ledgerwood, Chaiken 2007; Liviatan, Trope, Liberman 2008), risk and victimization perceptions (Tyler, Rasinski 1984; Solymosi, Bowers, Fujiyama 2015).

The present study builds on the idea of psychological distance connected to the personal involvement and physical closeness and its influence on the relationships and attitudes, developed within the theory of construal levels (Fujita, Henderson, Eng, Trope, Liberman 2006; Fujita 2008; Gouseti, Jackson 2015; Matthew, Matlock 2011; Trope, Liberman 2011). Psychological distance "refers to the perception of when an event occurs, where it occurs, to whom it occurs, and whether it occurs" (Trope, Liberman 2010: 442), i.e. psychological distance includes temporal, spatial and social proximity and probability assessment. The closer to the perceiving individual are the relevant parameters, the smaller the psychological distance, hence - a direct impact on the way the event is perceived and interpreted and on the attitude towards it (Fujita et al. 2006; Matthew, Matlock 2011; Trope, Liberman 2011; Williams, Bargh 2008; Trope et al. 2007; Ledgerwood, Trope, Liberman 2010). When the event is psychologically distant, it is more likely to be presented with a high level of abstraction and vice versa - the closer it is, the more contextualized and detailed is its presentation, which has a direct effect on judgments and decisions. A number of studies (e.g. Fujita et al. 2006, Williams, Bargh 2008; Matthew; Matlock 2011) have shown the importance of spatial proximity or remoteness for psychological distance and, respectively, for the ways of perceiving and interpreting events. The practical manifestations and effects of psychological closeness and distance on attitudes that are of greatest interest to the study are: the impact on perceptions of risk probability (Bonner, Newell 2008), the impact on fear of crime and perceptions of risk of victimization (Gouseti, Jackson 2015), the relationship with self-control (Fujita, Trope, Liberman, Levin-Sagi 2006), the impact on persistence and change of opinion (Ledgerwood et al. 2010), the impact on the tendency to conform to group norms (Ledgerwood, Callahan 2012).

Even though, this study does not draw directly on the moral panic scholarship (Cohen 1972; Goode, Ben-Yehuda 1994), nonetheless, it is relevant to note some parallels of the analyzed data with the recent findings on anti-migrant moral panics taking place particularly in Western European countries (Chan et al 2013; Robinson 2009; Spigelman 2013). Overall, moral panic studies are commonly located in the current of the sociology of social

control which explores societal reactions towards different categories of threats posed allegedly by folk devils (e.g. migrants) to moral frontiers of society. In order to detect moral panics, the conventional moral panic literature points out the necessity of the emergence of the following parameters: there must be an increase of the collective concern over certain social problem which might be detectable either in the mainstream media as well as in the social media, tendency of labeling certain folk devils as deviants (i.e. usually individuals who are attributed to pose a menace to common good), the emergence of the interest groups which produce moral panic articulations usually exposing the threat connected to folk devils, importantly, moral panic articulations contribute to the rise of perceived hostility towards folk devils. Finally, the literature emphasizes the fact of exaggeration which constitutes an inherent part of moral panic claims making, namely, the allegations about the threat towards societal values are usually unsubstantiated, sometimes made up or, most often, the menace which is denounced by moral panic proponents does not pose a serious threat for society (Goode, Ben-Yehuda 1994). The literature recently has demonstrated that the criterion of volatility is less frequently applicable, since the moral panics, particularly these related to anti-migrant resentments are open-ended (Mawby, Gisby 2009). The analyzed below data reveal the typical moral panic parameters and in line with the recent research on anti-migrant moral panics we see that similarly as it was with Eastern European migrants in the Western Europe also migrants who arrived in Bulgaria are consistently linked with the perceived rise of crime/terror threats and unemployment insecurities (Fitzgerald, Smoczynski 2015). Acknowledging these parallels might be interesting since there has been little knowledge produced on the anti-migrant moral panics in Eastern Europe, thus the present study might bring some flavor on societal reactions towards migration in a broader inter-European context. Most striking similarities refer to anti-migrant resentments which are driven primarily by the fear of crime/terror and employment insecurities appearing commonly among the indigenous population.

Building on previous results and research, the main hypothesis of the study is that spatial proximity through psychological proximity leads to lower levels of abstraction, which on the one hand enhances perceptions and

assessments of the likelihood of specific risks and, on the other hand, contributes to situational change of opinion and disregard for the role of normatively recognized morality.

3. Design of the empirical research

The analysis uses empirical data collected from a CAPI study conducted as a part of a broader interdisciplinary research on different types of social deviations in the context of the highly dynamic migration processes in the past eight years. Taking into consideration the importance of spatial and psychological proximity and distance (Lieberman, Chaiken 1996) the study design includes two parallel samples: 1) a two-stage nested sample of 800 individuals, representative of the adult population of Bulgaria; 2) a two-stage nested sample of 400 individuals in settlements located near centers for accommodation of migrants and refugees. The field survey is conducted in the period November - December 2017, as already mentioned - at a time of massive inflow of migrants from third countries. Data from the nationally representative sample is weighted by sex and age.

3.1. Data and results

Importance of the topic

Although the majority of Bulgarians are interested in the topic of immigrants to one extent or another, more than one third (35%) declare they are indifferent to the topic (Figure 1). There is a significant difference in this regard between the national survey and the one with people living close to accommodation centers as the latter predominantly answer they are interested, although not very much (47%). In the regions with accommodation centers 93% of the respondents are to some extent interested in the topic of immigrants, while in the rest of the country the respective percentage is 65%. There is also a clear difference in the extremity of opinions depending on proximity to accommodation centers in line with our hypothesis based on earlier research (Ledgerwood et al. 2010).

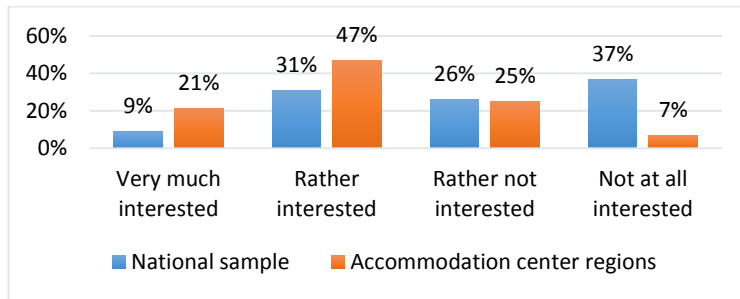


Figure 1. Interest in the topic of immigration (%)

Most people consider the arrival of immigrants and refugees to be a very serious problem for the country and this applies both for the national sample and for the accommodation centers sample. In this regard the influence of spatial proximity and personal relevance on the perceptions is seen in the differing importance (Gouseti, Jackson 2015) attached by the two groups. A much larger number of extreme assessments as given by people living closer to accommodation centers - 82% of them think that the arrival of refugees and immigrants poses a very serious or severe problem for the country, while for the rest of the country this opinion is shared by 65%.

Social distance

The increased rejection of migrants compared to other groups and previous studies is clearly visible from the results of the adapted version of the Bogardus social distance scale (Bogardus 1933) used in the study. As can be expected, from all tested positions the acceptance of immigrants as colleagues sharing the same room is the highest (36% for the country), and for a family member is the lowest (10% for the country) (Figure 2).

As an illustration of the context and keeping in mind possible remarks on the differing methodology, the data from an older representative study conducted by one of the authors show significantly lower social distance towards immigrants ten years ago. According to the data from 2007 81.9% of Bulgarians would accept an immigrant from the EU as a neighbor, 82.3% - as a colleague sharing the same room, 72.3% - as a close friend, and 50.7% as a family member (Mantarova, Zaharieva 2007). The comparison with the data

from 2007 is also unfavorable for an immigrant from a non-EU country, that would be accepted as a neighbor by 61.4% of the respondents, as a colleague in the same room - by 68.9%, as a close friend - by 53.6%. % and for a family member - from 28.7%. Despite the differences in the questions asked and especially the lack of distinction in the current study of immigrants according to their country of origin, the large difference in the results from two surveys indicates the serious impact of social processes related to the increased migration flows from the Middle East and Africa and one might argue – the effects of moral panic and the rise of hostility towards folk devils. However, we do not have enough data to pinpoint the exact time the changes emerged or whether they were gradual or more abrupt.

The differences in terms of social distance according to personal relevance are not so distinct or unambiguous. In fact, in two out of four tested types of relations the respondents living close to accommodation centers would allow greater closeness with the immigrants compared to the respondents in the rest of the country (Figure 2). While for the "family member" position the differences are within the statistical error, for the "colleague in the same room" position they are large enough - in regions with centers 43% would accept an immigrant as a colleague, and in the rest of the country 36% would.

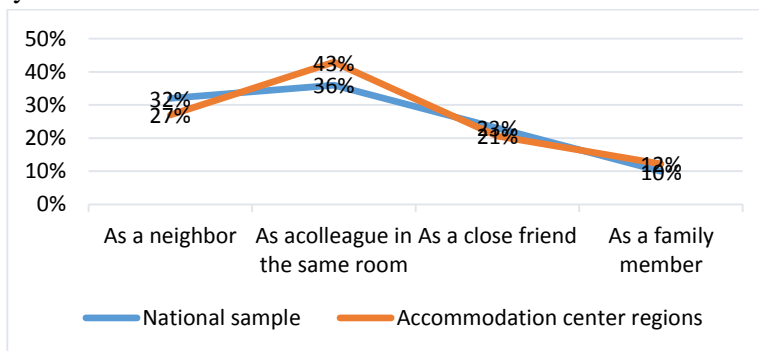


Figure 2. Acceptance of immigrants (%)

We can presume that this is probably due to another aspect of psychological closeness that we need to keep in mind - the influence of the likelihood of an occurrence of the specific event. It is the more probable

events, insofar as the characteristics of the current migration wave allow us to draw conclusions, that are assessed as more undesirable by people in regions with accommodation centers.

Fears and perceptions of threats

The study shows that in terms of fears connected to immigrants Bulgarians attach the greatest importance simultaneously to threats to security and to well-being and this is confirmed by data from both open and closed versions of the questions.

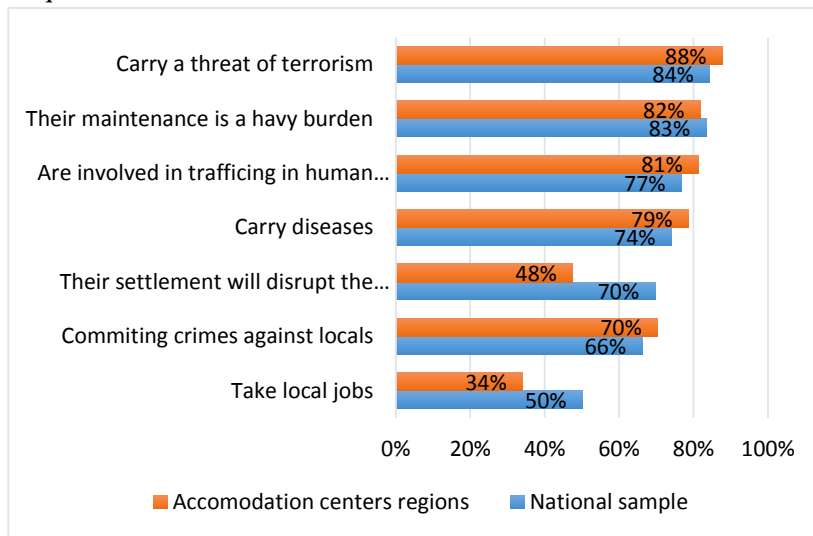


Figure 3. Perception of threats connected with the arrival and the presence of immigrants in the country (“completely agree” and “tend to agree”)

The comparison between the results of the national survey and the regions with accommodation centers shows significant statistical differences in the prevalence of some fears. People near the centers are more concerned that immigrants carry diseases and pose a threat of terrorism. In the country as a whole, fears of job-loss as a result of the competition from newcomers are more widespread, as well as fears of possible disruptions of the ethnic balance in the future in case of permanent settlement of the immigrants.

As in other countries with a massive influx of asylum seekers (Zorba 2016: 25, Berisha, Slavkovic, Barisic 2017: 74), in Bulgaria the fear of threats to security, and above all the fear of importing terrorism, is very common. 83.4% of the respondents agree to some extent with the statement that immigrants pose a threat of terrorism. In the regions with refugee centers such an answer is given by 87.8% of the respondents, as the difference in the categorical support - 63.7% against 50.1% in the national sample is particularly strong. Nationwide most often this statement is supported by those living in the capital Sofia (72.2%), young people between 18 and 29 years (62.7%), people living in settlements where the population is predominantly Christian (68.8%, as in settlements where the Christian and Muslim population is almost equal, the share of respondents is well below average - 36.9%) , those who assess the state of crime in the country as a very serious problem, dissatisfied with life, in a poor financial situation (60.3%).

It is also widely believed that refugees commit various crimes - theft, beatings, rapes, robberies, which is very much in line anti-immigrant moral panics claims in other EU countries and particularly those in West Europe against Bulgarians themselves (Fitzgerald, Smoczynski 2015; Smozinski, Spasova 2018). Our research shows that the presence of refugees in people's minds is definitely associated with a risk of an increase in various types of crime. The statistics on registered crimes, which for various objective and subjective reasons cannot be accepted unreservedly, do not contain information that would give sufficient grounds to support or reject such an assumption. Therefore, it is especially interesting to compare the data on the victimization in the regions with a concentration of refugees and the rest of the country. Indeed, the study refers to a period in which the presence of asylum seekers is no longer so massive, but for the year of the study there is no difference in the victimization of the two groups. Despite this fact, the claim that refugees commit crimes is quite common - 30.0% fully support it and another 36.2% - rather support it, without significant differences between the two samples. Those who fully agree are more often: young people (46.8%), people with primary education (39.8%), those dissatisfied with their

lives (43.9%), the ones living in poor financial situation (43.8%), those living in settlements with almost only Christian population, those who define the state of crime as a very serious problem in our society (41.2%), those who do not trust the police. It is interesting that people for whom the danger of becoming a victim of a crime is the most serious personal problem are more moderate in their position and are much more prone to give the moderate answer - "rather agree".

A specific aspect of security is the threat to health. As can be seen from both the open and the closed questions referring to fears and concerns, the claim that refugees carry diseases is quite common. This holds true especially in the regions with centers – people living there that completely agree with this are 60.9% compared to 45.0% in the rest of the country and rather agree - respectively 17.8% and 29.1%. Respondents supporting this statement are more often women (48.3%), young people – 18-29 years (57.3%), people with secondary education (50.0%), people living in Sofia (68.0%), people living in settlements with almost only the Christian population (66.1%), poor people (53.8%), people with low satisfaction with their lives in general and people for whom health is the worst personal problem (53.6%).

The vast majority of respondents share the opinion that the support of immigrants is too much of a financial burden for the Bulgarian society. Against the background of the fact that poverty is most often assessed as a very serious problem in our society - by 81.7% of the respondents, and the low income is the biggest personal problem for more than one third (37.1%), the emphasis on this aspect is not a surprise at all.

Looking at the profile of respondents, emphasizing the burden of financial costs (those who answered "strongly agree" - 46.2% of respondents in the regions with centers and 45.1% of respondents in the rest of the country), these are most often respondents between 18 and 29 (52.4%), with secondary education (50.3%), self-assessed as poor (56.8%), Christians, and slightly satisfied with their lives in general (54.6%).

Among those who definitely agree with the statement that refugees are a threat to a job security (22.9% of the people in the country and 9.0% in the regions with centers) most are young people (18-29 years - 35.7 %), the

inhabitants of the villages (33.8%), people with primary education (32.2%), the dissatisfied with their life (34.9%), the ones in poor financial situation, people for whom the low income is the most serious personal problem.

Although not a current problem, respondents identify another risk - a threat to the ethnic balance and national identity in the future, which one might argue is a typically Bulgarian or at the very least Balkan moral panics claim. There is a significant difference between the two samples - respondents in the country are much more concerned than those in the places with centers (Cramer's $V = 0.225$). Proponents of this statement are most often young people (35.7%), with primary education (39.1%), living in villages (39.5%), in settlements with equal Christian and Muslim population (36.4%), people dissatisfied with their lives, people with poor financial situation, people for whom ethnic relations and national security are a real problem. Concerns about preserving the identity are also clear from the opinion expressed by about three quarters of the respondents that immigrants will harm the culture in the country.

Spatial distance

The study shows a desire for keeping distance from immigrants as well in a purely spatial sense, which again one might argue is a consequence of the anti-immigrant moral panic. There are no statistically significant differences between the national and regional samples. On the question of the type of centers that asylum seekers should live, the opinion that they should be in closed centers (75.9%) definitely dominates. These views are most strongly influenced by security fear in its various aspects (Cramer's V is over 0.240).

With regard to cohabitation in the town/neighborhood of residence of the respondents, it can definitely be said that there is a discriminatory attitude. Only 20.7% of Bulgarians agree with this. Associations exist with the socio-demographic characteristics of religious affiliation (Cramer's $V = 0.253$), education (Cramer's $V = 0.207$), material status (Cramer's $V = 0.191$). As expected, Muslims are twice more likely (47.8%) to consent to cohabitation with immigrants. People with higher education (33.3%) and those in the age range of 30-50 are as well more likely to welcome immigrants in the neighborhood. There is a significant and strong association between the

opinion on the type of center for asylum seekers and the consent to have immigrants settled in the town/neighborhood of respondents.

The data show significant associations between the willingness to allow immigrants to settle near and the perceptions of threats and, in particular, security threats. The values of the association coefficients show the strongest connection with the perception of the threat of immigrants committing crimes against locals (Cramer's $V = 0.363$); getting involved in human trafficking, drugs, weapons (Cramer's $V = 0.329$); bringing diseases (Cramer's $V = 0.29$); bringing terrorism (Cramer's $V = 0.256$). As for the other types of material threats – the ones related to the entry of immigrants into the labor market and the necessary financial resources for their allowance, the dependence is weaker. The impact of symbolic threats is quite pronounced as well. For example, there is an association with the opinion on possible future threats to the ethnic balance (Cramer's $V = 0.267$). Respondents who fully agree with the possibility of this threat are much less likely than average to agree immigrants to settle in their towns or neighborhoods (9.1% compared to the national average of 20.6% and 52.6% among respondents who do not share this opinion).

Definitely negative are the attitudes towards building an accommodation center for refugees near the place of residence of the respondents - only 16.3% of the respondents give a positive answer, again without differences between the national sample and the sample of residents near current refugee centers. The dependencies and associations established in the previously discussed topics are replicated here as well.

Opinions are polarized on where immigrant' children should study - in separate classes or with local children. 57.9% of the respondents are for isolation in separate classes. There are significant associations of this opinion and respondents' education (Cramer's $V = 0.272$), place of residence (Cramer's $V = 0.212$), religion (Cramer's $V = 0.187$), age (Cramer's $V = 0.157$). In short, the strongest supporters of isolation are respondents with primary and secondary education, living in district cities and young people (18-29 years). In contrast, respondents with higher education, living in Sofia, Muslims, respondents between 30 and 39 years of age are mostly for joint training. The data show the strongest association is with the perception of a

symbolic threat, namely that the settlement of immigrants in the future will upset the ethnic balance (Cramer's $V = 0.355$). Among those who fully agree with this statement 77.7% are adherents of education in separate classes. There is also a quite strong association with opinions on security threats and foremost with the fear that immigrants will commit crimes against locals (Cramer's $V = 0.346$). Of those who fully support this statement, 79.2% are in favor of separating the children of immigrants in separate classes, while of those who do not agree to a strong degree only 44.0% are for separation. Although less pronounced, there is an association with other aspects of the security threat perceptions - participation of immigrants in organized crime (Cramer's $V = 0.246$), import of terrorism (Cramer's $V = 0.134$). A significant influence of the perceptions of purely economic threats is also observed (Cramer's V is between 0.233 and 0.217).

Resistance against the admission of immigrants

The data gathered shows that active personal participation in actions aimed at stopping the admission of immigrants is low. 3.6% joined petitions with such a request, 0.8% took part in peaceful actions, and 0.7% took part in self-organized citizen groups to stop immigrants and refugees from crossing the border. As expected, for a number of reasons, there are significant differences depending on the regions. The percentages of personal participation in such actions for people from regions with refugee centers are much higher - 11.4%, 8.3% and 3.8%, respectively. As for the approval of such actions, it is much more common. Petitions against admission of immigrants are approved by 36.6% of the residents of regions with accommodation centers and by 26.7% of the people living in the rest of the country. Peaceful protests meet the approval of 42.5% of the people in the regions with centers and of 31.0% of the country's population. The self-organization of civilians to stop the illegal crossing of the border is approved respectively by 44.7% and by 28.0%. Most often, petitions and actions against the presence of immigrants are approved by those who categorically assess them as a threat to personal security (57.6% and 49.8%, respectively) and those who assess them as a threat to the ethnic balance in the country (55.3% and 47.3%).

Hate speech and hate crimes, offending and victimization

Expressions of hatred and aggression towards immigrants are generally common, according to the respondents, and there is also a clear influence of spatial proximity and involvement. Only 4% of respondents in the regions with centers have never heard of hate speech towards immigrants, while in the rest of the country this percentage is 20%. Also, there is a difference in the frequency nationwide and in the regions with accommodation centers. In the regions with centers hate speech is present rather often according to 85%, and rather rarely – according to 11% and for the rest of the country the ratio is 61% to 19% (Figure 4).

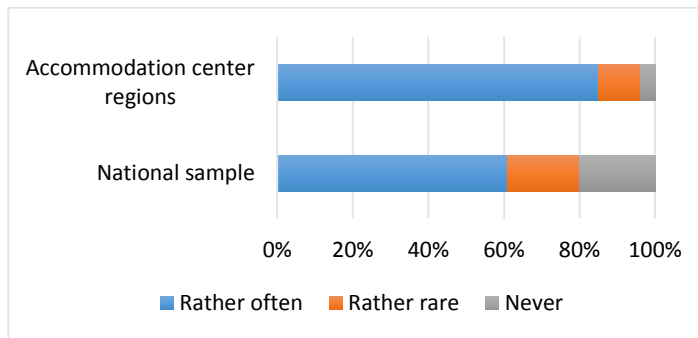


Figure 4. Hate speech against immigrants

Although the data on the hate crime offending and victimization do not cover only cases connected to immigrants, the differences between the national sample and the sample of people living close to refugee and immigrant accommodation centers allows for certain observations in this regard and especially on the effect of proximity and psychological distance.

The data suggest spatial and psychological proximity to immigration centers leads to higher levels of hate crimes offending and victimization. In the regions with accommodation centers 11% respondents report they had cases in which they offended another person because they considered her/him different, while the percentage for the rest of the country is 6%. Similarly, in regions with accommodation centers, 7% had a case in which they attacked someone verbally or physically because he/she was different from them, and in the rest of the country the percentage is 3%.

In the accommodation center regions' sample respondents have shared details about five cases of physical or verbal attacks motivated by anti-immigrant resentment, that is cases, connected to immigrants, in which respondents have verbally or physically attacked other people because they perceived them as different:

"In the park - very dark and impudent, it is not clear whether they are gypsies or refugees." - A man, 18-29 years old, student, satisfactory financial status, with personal contacts with immigrants.

"Yes - a German" - woman, 30-39 years, higher education, good financial status, with business contacts with immigrants.

"A paid journalist who works against Bulgarian interests with his words." - male, 40-49 years, secondary education, satisfactory financial status, with personal contacts with immigrants.

"Verbal attacks during the protests." - male, 18-29, secondary education, poor financial status, with personal contacts with immigrants.

"Black, bearded, smelly Arabs, with the veiled harem." - male, 18-29, secondary education, poor financial status, with personal contacts with immigrants.

The shared cases from the rest of the country are three:

"Arabs who behaved like kings in the center of Sofia." - male, 18-29, secondary education, satisfactory financial status, with personal contacts with immigrants.

"Immigrants in the neighborhood who look at and shout at young girls." - a man, 18-29 years old, student, satisfactory financial situation, has no contact with immigrants.

"Verbal insults when gypsies, Arabs behave impudently and insolently in the streets." - a man, 18-29

years old, student, satisfactory financial status, no contact with immigrants.

Similarly, we see the influence of spatial proximity on victimization in relation to hate speech and hate crimes. According to the results, 7.3% of respondents in the general population were verbally abused because some people thought they looked or behaved differently, and 1.6% were physically assaulted because some people thought they looked and behaved differently. In the regions with centers 10% of the respondents were subjected to verbal insults, and 2.8% were subjected to physical assault because some people think that they look or behave differently. It is noteworthy that a large proportion of respondents living in places with accommodation centers who share details about the situation do not belong to a minority group.

In the shared cases of victimization from people nationwide there is none related to migrants, and in the regions with accommodation centers there are three such cases:

"A paid journalist called me a xenophobe because of the fight against the aliens" - a man, 40-49 years old, secondary education, satisfactory financial status, with personal contacts with immigrants.

"I was attacked and robbed by three dark-skinned people - I could not understand gypsies or refugees" - a man, 18-25, a student, in poor financial condition, with personal contacts with immigrants.

"I was booed and insulted by a group of Arab-speaking men with newly learned cynical expressions in Bulgarian." - female, 40-49, higher education, good financial status, with personal contacts with immigrants.

Attention should be paid to the use of the term "aliens" - a clear sign of radicalization, as well as, again, to the parallel with the Roma referred to as the negatively connotated "gypsies".

It must be said that the data on victimization and on hate speech and hate crime acts are not objective, i.e. based on these the real rate of victimization and crime cannot be estimated. However, the higher number of reported cases of hate speech and hate crimes in the regions with centers and

especially the close results on questions about victimization and offending show a tendency of hate speech and hate crime normalization in the regions close to accommodation centers.

Radicalization

As for the assessment of whether the presence of immigrants causes radicalization and stimulates aggression against other risk groups, in both samples the respondents mostly believe that this is indeed the case. Although not revealing the actual effect on radicalization and normalization of aggression, the question reflects the respondents' perceptions and in a projective way reveals their own attitude. In the regions with accommodation centers, a slightly higher proportion of people tend to agree to one extent or another with this statement (78% compared to 76% in the rest of the country). Somewhat contrary to expectations, however, the differences are too small, especially considering they fall in the margin of the statistical error. In addition, it is not the extreme opinions that are higher, but the moderate ones. A possible explanation could be the higher degree of abstraction that the question suggests and possibly the opposite effect of spatial and psychological proximity that this would have.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Evident from the results of the study, non-acceptance and hostility towards immigrants are very high both in terms of social distance and of the desire for a higher special distance. The effect of spatial and psychological proximity and personal relevance on social distance towards migrants however is ambiguous.

There are significant differences caused by the spatial and psychological proximity and distance in the attitudes towards immigrants, in fears and perceived threats, in hate speech and hate crimes offending and victimization. As a whole the most common fears connected to immigrants are the same in the regions with accommodation centers and in the rest of the country and parallels can be drawn as well with other European countries. There are however certain differences in the distribution of fears and perceived threats connected to spatial and psychological distance and personal

relevance, indicating that the greater proximity leads to increased security fears – of terrorism, of transgressions and crime, of health threats.

Similarly as in other studies concerned with anti-migrant moral panics in Western Europe, the data collected in Bulgaria seem to confirm that security and economy insecurities related to the inflow of migrants also triggered a certain social unrest in Eastern Europe. Migrants, besides being conventionally accused of posing a criminal or terrorist threat to indigenous population are also labeled as folk devils who subvert employment safety of the Bulgarian population. These moral panic claims-making not necessarily should be conceptualized as irrational racist reactions, instead these might be related to broader structural social problems underpinning Bulgarian society such as issues connected with personal security, mistrust in institutions, labor market problems due to short-terms contracts and self-employment practices. These structural factors underpinning contemporary risk societies contribute to the permanent insecurities existing both in the core European countries as well as in newer EU countries.

Besides similarities of the anti-migrant imagery found in this study, clearly there are also local peculiarities of anti-migrant claims making, for example the perceived threats to ethnic balance, which would require further comparative research.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the project “Social Context and Deviations: Persistent Dependencies and Situational Influences (Social Deviations in the Light of Contemporary Migration Processes)”, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund under contract DN 05-12/15.12.2016 and of the project “Intensified migration processes in the UE– societal reactions to migrants in Poland and Bulgaria” funded by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences.

References

Agerström, J., Björklund, F. (2009). Temporal distance and moral concerns: Future morally questionable behavior is perceived as more wrong and

- evokes stronger prosocial intentions. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 31: 49–59
- Berisha H., R. Slavkovich, I. Barishich. (2017). Migrantska kriza i posleditse po bezbednost republike Srbije. In: L. Mitrovich (Ed.) *Stanovnishtvo jugoistodne srbje; globalni regionalniaspekti migrantske krize i drushtvene posleditse odliva mozgova po razvoj Srbije i Balkana*. Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Univerzitet u Nishu. 69-80.
- Berisha H., R. Slavkovich, I. Barishich. (2017). Migrant crisis and consequences for the security of the Republic of Serbia. In: L. Mitrovich (Ed.) *Stanovnishtvo jugoistodne srbje; global regional aspects of the migrant crisis and the social consequences of the brain drain on the development of Serbia and the Balkans*. Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, University of Nis. 69-80.
- Bogardus, E.S. (1933). A social distance scale. *Sociology and Social Research*, 17: 265-271.
- Bonner, C., Newell, B. R. (2008). How to make a risk seem riskier: The ratio bias versus construal level theory. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 3(5): 411.
- Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Chan, P., I. Fitzgerald and R. Smoczynski. (2013). ‘Anti-Polish Migrant Moral Panic and Trade Unions in the UK.’ Pp. 149–158 in *From Culture of Fear to Culture of Trust*, edited by J. Juhant and B. Zalec. Berlin: LIT Verlag.
- Eyal, T., Liberman, N., Trope, Y. (2008). Judging near and distant virtue and vice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44: 1204–1209.
- Fitzgerald, I, Smoczynski, R. (2015). “Societal Reactions towards Polish Labour Migrants in the UK after 2004: Rethinking employment Insecurities”, in: *Czech Sociological Review*, 51(3): 339-361.
- Fujita, K. (2008). Seeing the forest beyond the trees: A construal-level approach to self-control. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(3): 1475-1496.

- Fujita, K., Henderson, M. D., Eng, J., Trope, Y., Liberman, N. (2006). Spatial distance and mental construal of social events. *Psychological Science*, 17(4): 278-282.
- Fujita, K., Trope, Y., Liberman, N., Levin-Sagi, M. (2006b). Construal levels and self-control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90: 351-367.
- Goode, E. and N. Ben-Yehuda. (1994). *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gouseti, I., Jackson, J. (2015). Construal level theory and fear of crime. In D. Chadee (Ed.), *Psychology of fear, crime and the media: International perspectives*. Routledge.
- Harton, H. C., Latane, B. (1997). Information-and thought-induced polarization: The mediating role of involvement in making attitudes extreme. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 12(2): 271.
- Henderson, M. D., Fujita, K., Trope, Y., Liberman, N. (2006). Transcending the “here”: The effect of spatial distance on social judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91: 845–856.
- Ledgerwood, A., Callahan, S. P. (2012). The social side of abstraction: Psychological distance enhances conformity to group norms. *Psychological science*, 23(8): 907-913.
- Ledgerwood, A., Chaiken, S. (2007). Priming us and them: Automatic assimilation and contrast in group attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93: 940–956.
- Ledgerwood, A., Trope, Y., Liberman, N. (2010). Flexibility and consistency in evaluative responding: The function of construal level. In *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 43: 257-295
- Liberman, A., Chaiken, S. (1996). The direct effect of personal relevance on attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22: 269–279.
- Liviatan, I., Trope, Y., Liberman, N. (2008). Interpersonal similarity as a social distance dimension: Implications for perception of others’ actions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44: 1256–1269.
- Mantarova, A., Zaharieva, M. (2007). Etnicheskite otnoshenia: tolerantnost i distantsii. Mantarova, A., Zaharieva, M. (red.) *Evrointegratsia i ustoychivo razvitie*. Sofia: Iztok-Zapad [Mantarova, A., Zaharieva, M. (2007).

- Ethnical attitudes: tolerance and distance. Mantarova, A., Zaharieva, M. (ed) Euro integration and sustainable development. Sofia: Iztok-Zapad].
- Matthews, J. L., Matlock, T. (2011). Understanding the link between spatial distance and social distance. *Social Psychology*, 42(3), 185.
- Mawby, R. and W. Gisby. (2009). 'Crime, Media and Moral Panic in an Expanding European Union.' *The Howard Journal* 48 (1): 37–51.
- Napier, J. L., Luguri, J. B. (2013). Moral mind-sets: Abstract thinking increases a preference for “individualizing” over “binding” moral foundations. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4(6): 754-759.
- Robinson, D. (2009). 'New Immigrants and Migrants in Social Housing in Britain: Discursive Themes and Lived Realities.' *Policy and Politics* 38 (1): 57–77.
- Schwarz, N., Bohner, G. (2001). The construction of attitudes. In A. Tesser, N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Intraindividual processes*, 1: 436–457. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Smoczynski, R., Spasova, L. (2018). The scapegoating logic of British media reactions towards Bulgarian migrants. Petkovsek, R, Zalec, B. (eds.) *Sacrifice: From Origins and Culture to Contemporary Life Challenges*. LIT Verlag, 207-214.
- Solymosi, R., Bowers, K., Fujiyama, T. (2015). Mapping fear of crime as a context-dependent everyday experience that varies in space and time. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 20(2): 193-211.
- Spigelman, A. (2013). 'The Depiction of Polish Migrants in the United Kingdom by the British Press after Poland's Accession to the European Union.' *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 33 (1/2): 98–113.
- Trope, Y., Liberman, N. (2011). Construal level theory. *Handbook of theories of social psychology*, 1: 118-134.
- Tyler, T. R., Rasinski, K. (1984). Assessing the risk of victimisation: the intergration of personal victimization experience, and socially transmitted information. *Journal of Social Issues* 40: 27-38.

- Williams, L. E., Bargh, J. A. (2008). Keeping one's distance: The influence of spatial distance cues on affect and evaluation. *Psychological Science*, 19(3): 302-308.
- Zorba H. (2016). Turkish and European Perspectives on Syrian Migration Since 2011. Yildirim Beyazit University.