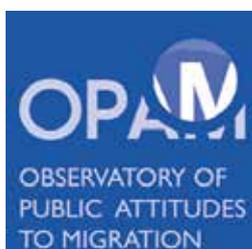




Immigration narratives in the Euro-Mediterranean region:
what people believe and why

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- ❖ Narratives are increasingly cited by international organisations, NGOs and governments as one of the most important topics in migration policymaking today.
- ❖ Narratives are assumed to strongly affect public opinion and behaviour.
- ❖ However, the concept of narratives is typically underspecified, with relatively little known about why some narratives become popular and what narratives people actually believe.
- ❖ This report draws on recent scholarly advances to better specify what narratives are and to explain variation in their popularity before considering how their effects on immigration policy preferences varies.
- ❖ Narratives are defined as: selective depictions of reality across at least two points in time that include a causal claim. Furthermore, narratives are:
 - Necessary for humans to make sense of and give meaning to complex reality;
 - Generalisable and applicable to multiple situations, unlike specific stories;
 - Distinct from related concepts such as frames and discourses;
 - Implicitly or explicitly normative, in terms of efficacy or justice
 - Essentially limitless in number, but with few gaining widespread popularity
- ❖ A novel theoretical framework is then offered to explain why some narratives become popular:



- ❧ The report then considers the popularity of eight simple migration narratives in eight countries across the Euro-Mediterranean region today using recent World Values Survey data. These eight narratives—four positive, four negative—are that immigration has respectively had the following effects on respondents' countries:
 1. "Filled important job vacancies"
 2. "Strengthened cultural diversity"
 3. "Offered people from poor countries a better living"
 4. "Given asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere"
 5. "Increased the crime rate"
 6. "Increased the risk of terrorism"
 7. "Increased unemployment"
 8. "Lead to social conflict"

- ❧ While all eight of these tend to be believed by respondents, there are important, and perhaps surprising, national and regional differences in the extent.

- ❧ Finally, the extent to which belief in each of these narratives affects one's preferred immigration policy is tested. With some national exceptions, five of the narratives are particularly impactful—one positive: that immigration has "strengthened cultural diversity"—and three negative: that immigration has "increased terrorism", "increased the crime rate", "lead to social conflict"; "increased unemployment. The other three—on helping people from poorer countries, filling jobs and asylum—are less associated with policy preferences.



The group of countries participating in the ICMPD's EuroMed Migration V programme, including the European Union and the "Southern Partner Countries" of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the State of Israel, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Republic of Lebanon, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Palestinian Territories, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Republic of Tunisia

It is therefore recommended that:

1. 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 both understood and believed.
2. As demand for understanding an issue increases, multiple, competing narratives may simultaneously become popular. As such, the popularity of narratives must be used as a gauge of public opinion with extreme caution.
3. 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 and broader resonance—do matter.
4. However, other factors matter too: communicators and policymakers must 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.
5. Individuals across the Euro-Mediterranean are likely to agree with most plausible positive and negative narratives on migration simultaneously. However, only some narratives change preferences: from this preliminary evidence emphasising or debunking the five selected narratives is probably the quickest way to change policy preferences.
6. Future research should robustly test these effects and those of other narratives on political attitudes and behaviour (including emigration preferences and behaviour), such as via the use of experiments or with more complex narratives and storytelling.

This report on immigration narratives builds on several previous ICMPD reports on attitudes to immigration that have overviewed the available data across the region and the central theories of attitudinal formation (Dennison and Dražanová, 2018), looked at how attitudes to immigration affect immigration politics in both Europe (Dennison, 2019a) and the Southern Partner Countries (Dennison and Nasr, 2020), how migration communicators can use values to affect attitudes (Dennison, 2020a) and how policymakers can measure the impact of interventions, including those aiming to affect public attitudes (Dennison, 2020b).



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Narratives are regularly cited by migration policymakers and communicators as some of the most important determinants of public attitudes and behaviour regarding migration and a particularly powerful source of our perceptions and misperceptions. Typically, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2020) argues that migration narratives are important as guarantors or potential threats to human rights: ‘How we perceive and speak about migrants and migration – the narrative – plays a fundamental role in guaranteeing equality and the human rights of migrants.’ The same office argues that inaccurate and nefarious migration narratives are on the rise: ‘Harmful and dehumanising narratives on migration have increasingly permeated political movements, media and other forms of public discourse in many countries. Such narratives have used migrants as scapegoats for deep-rooted societal problems and fears, often for political or financial gain.’ Accordingly, based on these observations and following earlier meetings that the Office convened—namely “Building partnerships to counter anti-migrant narratives” in 2017 and “Changing the public narrative on migration: promoting tolerance and confronting xenophobia against migrants” in 2016—the office has produced an extensive ‘Reframing Narratives on Migration’ campaign and toolbox for how to speak about migration.

A range of other international organisations take a similar line: in short, that there are increasingly prominent anti-immigration public narratives that are insidious and dangerous. A recent UNHCR (2020: 1) document aimed at young people tells them ‘There are powerful voices around the world that are determined to denigrate refugees and turn them into objects of fear and loathing. This is very often the result of narratives and sentiments centred on a phobia of the outsider ... and can lead to violence and persecution.’ As elsewhere, the UNHCR argues that a different narrative must be spread to counteract ones like the above. It recommends, amongst other things, spreading alternative, ‘stories in the media showing the human side of refugees – as unique individuals whose lives have been overturned by conflict or persecution’ in order to counter ‘the “invasion of hostile aliens” narrative.’ Similarly, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has criticised the ‘toxic narrative’ that portrays aid groups as colluding with smugglers (McVeigh, 2018). Ironically, though inescapably, the above arguments are themselves narratives.

However, whereas it is clear that narratives currently hold a significant place in the imagination and workload of migration policymakers and communicators, policy work dealing with narratives often conceptualises narratives, the causes for their relative popularity and their effects on little more than assumption. Understandably, policymakers have rarely given pause to robustly consider what narratives are; how they are formed; what explains variation in their popularity; what effects they have on attitudes and behaviour and why; which migration narratives are actually the most prevalent; and how policymakers and communicators can be more effective when dealing with narratives. This report considers each of the above questions by drawing on existing academic evidence before considering the popularity and distribution of migration narratives today in both Europe and among the ICMPD EuroMed V programme’s Southern Partner Countries.

The increased prevalence of narratives is not limited to the world of policymaking. The word “narrative” was the Global Language Monitor’s number two “Word of the Year” in 2017. Furthermore, across most disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, the study of “narratives” has become increasingly common in recent decades ‘as the conviction that humans have a natural tendency to think in narrative form has grown (Shenhav, 2006: 245).’ In particular, psychologists have increasingly claimed that humans use narratives as a way to consider, imagine and, ultimately, make moral decisions. It is argued that narratives are a way of understanding the world and have an ‘important role in shaping and expressing political identity, perspective, and ideology’ including in the ‘formulation and maintenance of worldviews’ (Shenhav, 2006: 245, 246; Cornog, 2004), while scholars have argued that the fundamental position of narratives in the human mind derives from their evolutionary use as a way to transfer knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Indeed, the pervasiveness of narratives is summed up by Hardy (1987: 1) who claims that ‘We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative.’ Despite these rather grandiose claims, ‘the study of political narratives is still at a rather basic stage’ (Shenhav, 2005: 316).



Although there are important differences in academic definitions of narratives, and the logical conclusions that can be made from them, there are typically a number of similarities. In short, according to almost all definitions, narratives are selective depictions of reality across at least two points in time that (according to most definitions) include one or more causal claims. Furthermore, many studies claim that: (1) the formation and selection of narratives is necessary, inescapable and universal to all humans; (2) narratives are generalisable and can be applied to multiple situations, as opposed to specific stories; (3) narratives are distinct from other, related concepts such as frames and discourses; (4) narratives contain some form of implicit or explicit normative—e.g. in terms of efficacy or justice—claims or “lessons”; (5) the potential number of narratives is essentially limitless but only a small number gain popularity, for reasons expanded upon in the next section.

More specifically, political narratives and policy narratives have an additional component that can be characterised as an explicit “so what”: the future policies or political changes that should be made once the narrative is accepted as accurate. As such, political and policy narratives often have three points in time: the two points from which a causal claim is made—typically with the former in the past and the latter in the present—and a third point in which the hypothetical future result of the policy change is described.

However, already the core definition of narratives as selective depictions of reality across at least two points in time includes multiple components with theoretical consequences. Perhaps the most important of these is their selective nature. Ricoeur (1984, x) states that a narrative ‘groups together and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events’. The selective nature of these depictions is a reflection of the limited cognitive capacity of humans and the near infinite complexity of reality. This makes selection, and thus prioritisation, of what is included in the narrative both necessary and subjective, according to the importance given to various facets of reality by those constructing the narrative. Such selection should in theory improve one’s understanding of the world—at least compared to pure randomness—both in terms of the causal claim of the narrative and by, implicitly, stating what is important in terms of the ‘events, characters, backgrounds’ from which the narrative are constructed (Shenhav, 2006: 251). Overall, all ‘people weave perceptions of social situations and observable facts together through narratives in order to make sense of reality’ (Scuzzarello, 2015: 58) yet these narratives are necessarily limited in the extent to which they reflect reality.



Indeed, one of the more powerful roles of narratives is not only in what they explicitly argue but in the implicit assumptions behind their selection of content, 'establishing and fixing the assumptions for decision-making under conditions of high ambiguity' (Dudley, 2013; Roe 1994: 36–7). As such, the choices over their set-up and what is and is not included in them often carries the most important (and potentially misleading) theoretical assumptions: 'narratives, even when they do seem to simply describe states of affairs, are also vehicles of implicit normative presupposition' (Sconfienza, 2017: 22). Thereafter, their content may be strictly correct and certainly internally plausible and logical, 'paint[ing] a picture of moving through logical steps from a problematic past, through a transforming present, towards a better future' (Dudley, 2013: 1142). The power of narratives is therefore to a significant extent their power to "set the terms of the debate" about what is desirable in normative terms, either regarding efficacy or justice and often in terms of heroes, villains and victims (Jones, 2010). Research into narratives has therefore been 'useful to understand how certain policies come to be adopted while others are discarded without there sometimes being even a reasoned and principled political debate' (Sconfienza, 2017: 22).

Because narratives are by definition selective, they are also inevitably subjective. 'One of narrative's defining features is that it is necessarily the product of particular perspective' (Shenhav, 2006: 248). Moreover, the complexity of the world means that even if a genuinely full account of the world were possible, humans would not have cognitive capacity to comprehend it all. As such, selectiveness in depictions of reality are necessary and so narratives are inevitable—there is no "correct" narrative, though some narratives—particularly those that are most modest in the extent of their claims—are more verifiable than others. Moreover, the number of potential narratives is essentially limitless. Politically, 'the narrative paints a limited and severely distorted picture of the confluence of causal factors that produced the targeted narrative actions. What is more, the repeated exclusion of perfectly legitimate causes—political causes, for example—may yield grounds for misgivings about the worldview that governed the choice of admissible explanations ... [yet] ... Selection in narrative is unavoidable, and the selective discriminations in a particular history, fictional or non-fictional, may be altogether sound and proper' (Wilson, 2005: 12).

Because narratives are necessarily selective, they are often assumed to have relativistic tendencies. Politically, this has given observers additional cause for concern in case the potentially relativistic nature of narratives is used to undermine the certainty and absoluteness of fundamental rights or values (Shenhav, 2006). This fear became, arguably, more pertinent as observers (e.g. Lyotard, 1984) argued that, from the mid 20th century onwards, mankind entered a "postmodern" age in which a single, overriding narrative of human history in western societies, arguably, split and frayed into multiple narratives and, thus, depictions and perceptions of reality. This arguably left the individual with greater freedom to pursue life as they see fit but in a context of less certainty and greater angst and vulnerability to manipulation as the nature of reality becomes increasingly contested with multiple narratives to choose from. That said, as pointed out by Shanahan et al (2011; 540) the fact that narratives must be generalisable means that—although a narrative never truly disappears—its overall validity can be tested and is thereby constrained by external reality.

The depiction of two or more points in time is also widely argued to be fundamental to narratives, which are ‘the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate reference’ (Ricoeur, 1980: 169). Within these two points of time there must be two or more phenomena that, at least to some extent, should be independent objects: ‘narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other’ (Prince, 1982:4). This is closely linked to the causal claim component of a narrative, which theoretically links together two otherwise at least partially independent phenomena and from which much of a narrative’s use—and persuasive power—lies. This is because one of the criteria of causality—an intuitively simple concept but the identification of which always remains contested and allusive—is temporal ordering; i.e. the proposed cause must take place before the effect. And it is this causal component that most scholars argue to be at the heart of narratives, defined variously as:

- ‘frameworks that allow humans to connect apparently unconnected phenomena around some causal transformation’ (Miskimmon et al, 2013: 5).
- ‘knowledge claims that include empirical claims about the causes and dynamics of the phenomena in question’ (Boswell et al, 2011: 2; citing Stone 1988; Roe 1994; Radaelli 1995; Banerjee 1998).
- ‘causal models that map actions to consequences ... such that the narrative does not describe a single historical episode. Instead, it addresses numerous historical episodes, alerting the public’s attention to long-run correlations between adjacent variables along the causal chain and offering a particular causal interpretation of these correlations’ (Eliaz and Spiegler, 2020: 3787).
- ‘A narrative, in its most basic form, requires at least three elements: an original state of affairs, an action or an event, and the consequent state of affairs’ (Czarniawska, 1998:

In this sense, narratives are different from discourses, frames or paradigms, in that, first, they have ‘a strong factual or cognitive element’ (Dudley, 2013: 1143) and, second, unlike frames, which are concerned only with the present, they have a dynamic element. Furthermore, whereas narratives link two phenomena causally, a discourse is broader and defined as ‘an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena’ so that a discourse separates what is normal from what is not (Hajer and Versteeg, 2006: 175). Narratives are an increasing part of the current discourse on politics and migration.

As mentioned above, political and policy narratives have a further component beyond other narratives in that they describe what, as a result of the inner logic of the narrative, should be done in the real-world, in terms of, for example, policy changes. ‘In the political context, narrative forms of thought and expression, which are based on stringing events together into chains, carry another advantage: they are consistent with the political logic of trying to shape the present [or perhaps more accurately, the future] in light of [causal] lessons learned from the past’ (Shenhav, 2006: 246).

Boswell et al (2011: 4) delineate between three types of policy narratives. First, there are those that narrate the nature of a policy problem. For example, the “problem” of irregular immigration could be narrated as “unscrupulous traffickers exploiting victims” or, on the other hand, “economic migrants exploiting loopholes”. Both of these focus on irregular migration, conceptualise it as a problem and do so in normative terms, though tell a very different story comprised of different characterisations (see also Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Second, there are those that narrate about the causes of a problem, often with broader “lessons” for future action. For example, the “problem” of non-integration of migrants could be explained as the result of “persisting cultural differences”. Third, there are those that focus on the effects of (extant or proposed) policy interventions or solutions, for example, claiming that “restricting benefits for asylum seekers has led to a reduction in the numbers of asylum applications”.

Overall, narratives—selective depictions of reality across at least two points in time that include a causal claim—are used by all humans to understand an effectively infinitely complex reality. These depictions select various objects within that reality—people, events, phenomena, etc.—and make claims about how they relate to each other. We all construct such depictions in our mind using our imagination and evaluate those that are told to us. Because causality in reality is highly complex, such claims are usually simplistic, even when true. Therefore, whereas X may indeed have caused Y to some extent (as a narrative might argue), reality may be more complicated: other factors may also have caused Y (potentially overshadowing the importance of X); the effect of X may be contingent on some other factors, such as Z; and Y may also partially explain X in a form of reverse causality, etc. These various causal paths—potential narratives in their own right—are indeed effectively infinite. Some may be true and some may be false, or at least unverifiable, while some may be exaggerated or downplayed or only applicable in certain circumstances. In the next section, we consider why some narratives become popular and some do not.



This section outlines the key explanations for variation in the popularity of narratives, both over time and relative to each other. It is argued that, whereas narratives vary over time according to the need to make sense of a phenomenon and the narrative's external, empirical support, they vary according to each other more according to their internal logical coherence, material interests, psychological traits of the receiver of the narrative and the way in which the narrative is presented.

◆ Necessity

People rarely bother to consider and form narratives about an issue unless making sense of an issue is deemed necessary. Sociologists have argued that the increasing pervasiveness of narratives in policymaking is a reflection of greater preoccupation with risk that results from a more interconnected, complex and, thus, unpredictable world (Luhmann 1991; Beck 1992, 1998; Giddens 1994; Boswell et al, 2011). According to this view, narratives arise when they are necessary to make sense of this complexity because a narrative stabilises 'the assumptions needed for decision making in the face of what is genuinely uncertain and complex. They can be representationally inaccurate—and recognizably so—but still persist, indeed thrive' (Roe, 1994: 51). This is more fundamentally reflective of the human need to make order out of chaos: 'we typically impose an order on discontinuity and change, so that the search for understanding ends by reducing a complex multiplicity of narratives to a monolithic entity (Bevir and Rhodes 2003: 107).'

As such it is possible—even likely—that multiple, competing narratives will grow in popularity simultaneously, as the necessity for some narrative grows due to (1) the growing salience of an issue and (2) a concurrent growing demand for some way to make sense of that issue, particularly if it is (3) novel, complex and not widely understood (see Dennison, 2019b; 2020c; Dennison and Geddes, 2019). Moreover, the longer an issue spends on the political agenda, the more likely it is that politicians and policymakers will have to justify their own actions to the public and media, which they will often do in the form of narratives (Boswell et al, 2011: 12).

That said, although necessity and salience can explain variation in the popularity of narratives over time, they do not explain why some narratives are more popular than others. In short, not all narratives are created equal in terms of their potential or actual popularity—the extent to which the public believes that the narrative accurately represents reality—at a specific time and place. A number of factors have been theorised—and less commonly, tested—to explain the popularity of one narrative relative to others.

A wide range of theoretical approaches focus on the role of interests in explaining the popularity of narratives. For rational choice theorists, the actual interests of the individual determine the narratives that they choose to believe in (Nordlinger 1981; Pfeffer 1981, 1984; Amara et al. 2004). However, this view has the theoretical shortcoming that individuals have only a limited ability to measure their own interests, their measurements are affected by biases and the empirical shortcoming that there is significant variation in the narratives that individuals with similar interests believe. On the other hand, critical theorists—inspired by Gramsci and Foucault (see Boswell et al, 2011, for review)—argue that the interests of the “ruling class” or similar dictate the popularity of narratives, which the former propagate and “the masses” internalise as their own interests. Boswell et al (2011: 5) argue that this conceptualisation is overly simplistic because it fails to ‘to attribute any power to ideas in their own right, precluding the possibility that they can shape beliefs or interests ... a better way of conceptualising the relationship might be to understand the two as mutually constitutive.’ Moreover, the reliance on interests to explain narratives overlooks the sense of self-worth and broader forms of utility that humans derive from personal deduction rather than simply advancing their own interests or uncritically adopting external narratives.

◆ Plausibility

The aforementioned use of deduction by humans when assessing narratives brings us to the next important determinant of a narrative’s popularity: its plausibility. A narrative’s plausibility is determined by its congruence, both internally—the extent to which it makes sense theoretically—and externally—the extent to which its claims align with available information about the real-world (Lodge & Taber, 2005; Taber & Lodge, 2006) Notably, the internal plausibility of a narrative is relatively fixed over time, whereas its external plausibility can quickly change according to available information about the world. Boswell et al (2011: 6) group ‘consistency, coherence and plausibility’ together, though we may see the former two as determining the latter. A further determinant of its plausibility may be the credibility of the messenger of the narrative, again both internally—the extent to which, theoretically, the messenger seems like a reliable source—and externally—the extent to which, empirically, the messenger has been a reliable source in the past (see Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Olson, 2003). This plausibility, however, goes beyond simply objective criteria.



Narratives are more likely to be believed when they activate one's imagination, the 'cognitive process where the mind uses previously acquired information to simulate what is or what might be (Oatley, 1995)' ... that people rely on ... 'to learn about, and make sense of, the social world and picture what will happen if they take certain actions (Strauss, 1959)' (Mclaughlin and Valez, 2019: 24). Because the human mind 'constantly gathers, stores, and organizes incoming information to create cognitive representations of the world', resulting in imagination, the latter is more likely to be activated when the narrative at least partially aligns with the individual's pre-existing conception of the world, thereby maintaining cognitive consonance. If the narrative does not do so, the individual will have a harder time cognitively simulating—"imagining"—the narrative and is more likely to feel dissatisfaction or distrust—emotions typical following cognitive dissonance—afterwards. That said, as mentioned, individuals are not closed to new information and, indeed, are constantly updating their understanding of the world based on new information that they deem to be accurate.

Furthermore, when narratives affirm, rather than threaten, one's self-identity and meta-cognition moreover (their sense of themselves), they are more likely to be successful (Shanahan, et al, 2011). For example, Krebs (2015) argues that American foreign policy narratives are derived from the self-understanding of "American exceptionalism" that sees the United States as a heroic champion of democracy in a world of tyrannical governments. From these two key elements, endless narratives can be easily derived that make sense of a vast array of foreign policy issues. Similarly, the extent to which a narrative aligns with one's personal values affects the extent to which someone is predisposed to believing that narrative (Dennison, 2020d).

The ability of a narrative to engage an individual's imagination and emotions is also reliant on the quality of the specific storytelling in which the narrative is used; narrators must avoid breaking the "suspension of disbelief"—typically unnatural or jarring reminders that the narrative and reality are by no means the same, for example clichés or overly-transparent attempts at persuasion—and instead must 'execute the normative leap in such a way as to make it seem graceful, compelling, even obvious' (Dudley, 2013: 1142). The process of reaching this "suspension of disbelief" has been termed by academics "transportation", the process by which 'all of the person's mental systems and capacities become focused on the events occurring in the narrative' (Green & Brock, 2002: 324) and, even, they envisage themselves within the story as the protagonist, leading to empathy (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2008) .

When this transportation is achieved, individuals are more likely to believe additional premises of the narrative and more likely to view the events and outcomes in the narrative as personally relevant (McLaughlin and Valez, 2019). Moreover, individuals are also more likely to be 'transported' into the narrative when its initial assumptions align with their own beliefs, attitudes, experiences and worldviews and when they view it as personally relevant. Recent research has shown that citizens may become entirely immersed in a political narrative but the predisposition for citizens to be 'transported' in this manner varies considerably, moderating their susceptibility to the persuasive power of narratives (McLaughlin and Valez, 2019; Wojcieszak & Kim, 2016; Lee and Shin, 2014).

Overall, the extent to which a narrative is widely accepted is defined by the extent to which a narrative: (1) needed to make sense of an issue, defined by the issue's novelty, complexity, risk, uncertainty and salience (this means that competing narratives may become popular simultaneously); (2) aligns with individual interests; (3) is plausible, both in terms of its internal logic and the extent to which external evidence supports the narrative, as well as the credibility of the messenger; (4) engages one's emotions and imagination; a function of cognitive consonance, self-identity and meta-cognition, personal relevance and the quality of storytelling, which can "transport" receivers of the narrative in a way that makes them accept the selective inclusion of objects and the claims about relationships between them as legitimate. These criteria are summarised in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework for variation in narrative success



◆ The popularity and distribution of migration narratives today across – 17 the Euro-Mediterranean

In this section we consider what are the most widely held narratives on immigration in the Euro-Mediterranean region today. Already there has been important work looking at migration narratives. For example, organisations such as the Overseas Development Institute have produced a number of country studies that identify the popularity of certain migration narratives in Kenya, Sweden, Uganda, the UK and the US (e.g. ODI, 2019). Similarly, the ICMPD (2017)'s analysis provides an overview of how the media report migration in 17 Euro-Mediterranean countries as well as the broader journalistic environment and major narratives. However, useful as these and related studies are, they either (1) do not consider the Euro-Mediterranean region, (2) essentially conceptualise narratives fairly simply as either positive or negative perceptions of immigration without specifying the key qualitative claims of the narratives, or (3) they identify key narratives but do not measure their actual popularity making claims about their importance less reliable. As such, in this section, we provide an overview of the popularity of migration narratives across the region.

Whereas narratives on the causes of migration are usually in the normative terms of justice or fairness, narratives on the effects of migration are more often in terms of efficacy. In terms of the latter, narratives can be roughly grouped into four categories, effects of migration on: (1) jobs and the economy; (2) crime and terrorism; (3) asylum and humanitarian objectives; and (4) social conflict and culture.

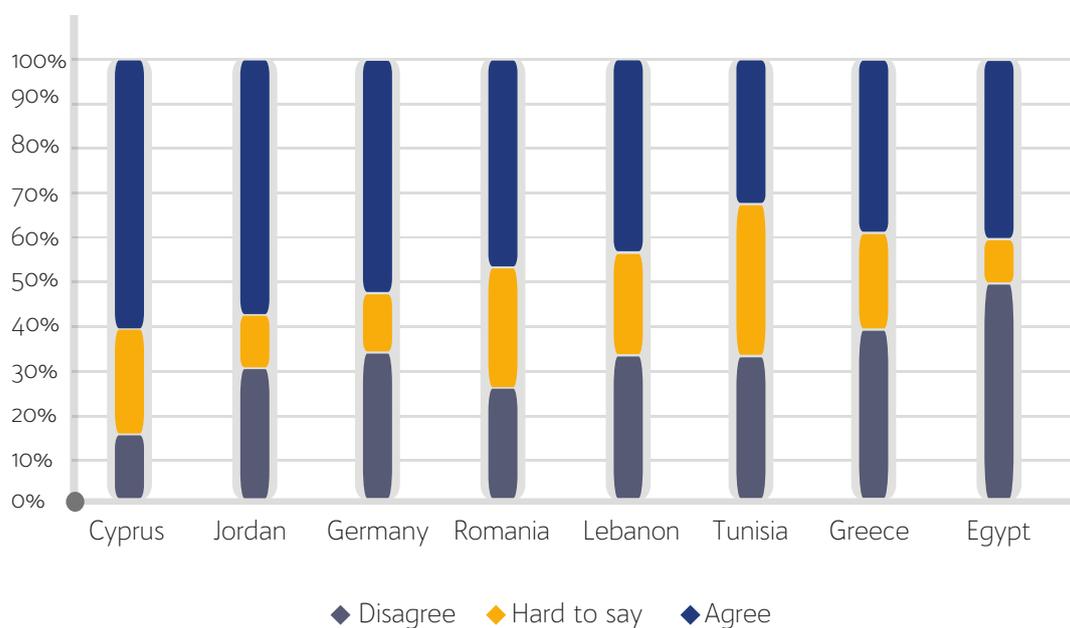
The 2017-2020 World Values Survey (WVS; Haerpfer et al, 2020), for the first time, includes questions on the belief in each of these narratives. The 2017-2020 WVS is the 7th wave of the survey, which goes back to the 1980s. For this wave, 49 countries and territories were surveyed worldwide between early 2017 and mid-2020. All countries employed random probability representative samples of the adult population and the vast majority were conducted with face-to-face interviews. Of these 49 initial countries, eight are part of the ICMPD's Euro-Mediterranean region: Cyprus, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Jordan, Lebanon, Romania, Tunisia.

The WVS asks respondents: "From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [this country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please, tell me whether you agree or disagree with it." Interviewers were instructed to not read a third "hard to say" option and only to code that as the response if respondents actively give that as their option. The eight effects—four positive and four negative—of migration on the development of their country that respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with were:

1. “Filled important job vacancies”
2. “Strengthened cultural diversity”
3. “Offered people from poor countries a better living”
4. “Given asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere”
5. “Increased the crime rate”
6. “Increased the risk of terrorism”
7. “Increased unemployment”
8. “Lead to social conflict”

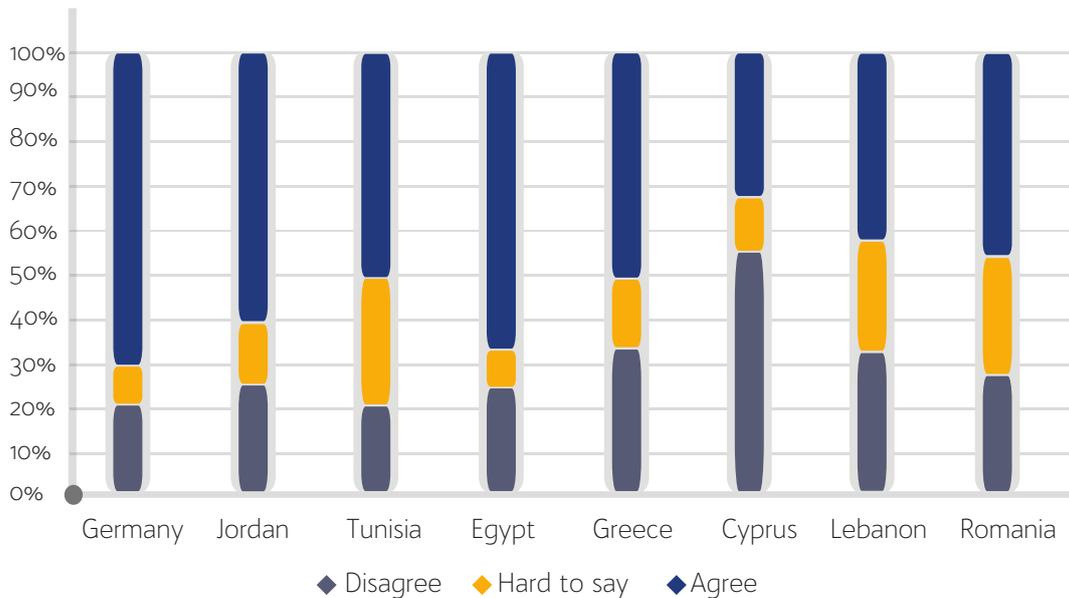
In Figure 2, we see the proportion of each of the eight countries that agrees that immigration has had the effect of filling important job vacancies—part of a broader “good for the economy” narrative. There are considerable differences between countries regarding the popularity of this narrative. In Cyprus, Jordan, Germany, Romania and Lebanon, citizens are far more likely to agree than disagree; Tunisia and Greece are roughly evenly split; whereas in Egypt individuals are relatively unlikely to agree with the narrative. There is no obvious difference between Europe and the Southern Partner Countries (SPCs) in terms of this narrative.

Figure 2. Agreement that immigration has had the effect of “filling important job vacancies” in one’s country. Source: WVS, 2017-2020



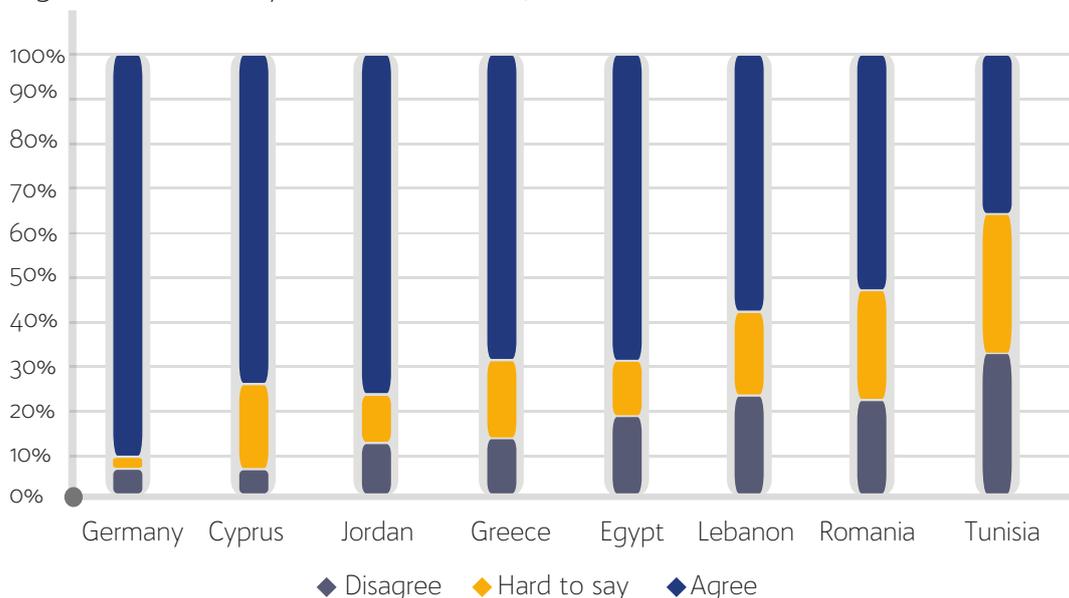
In Figure 3, we see the extent to which citizens agree that immigration has had the effect of strengthening cultural diversity in each country. This narrative is particularly popular across the Euro-Mediterranean: in all eight of the countries surveyed, individuals are more likely to agree than disagree with the statement, with overwhelming outright majorities in Germany and Jordan. Of the countries considered, in no countries were respondents more likely to disagree than agree with the “strengthening cultural diversity” narrative.

Figure 3. Agreement that immigration has had the effect of “strengthening cultural diversity” in one’s country. Source: WVS, 2017-2020



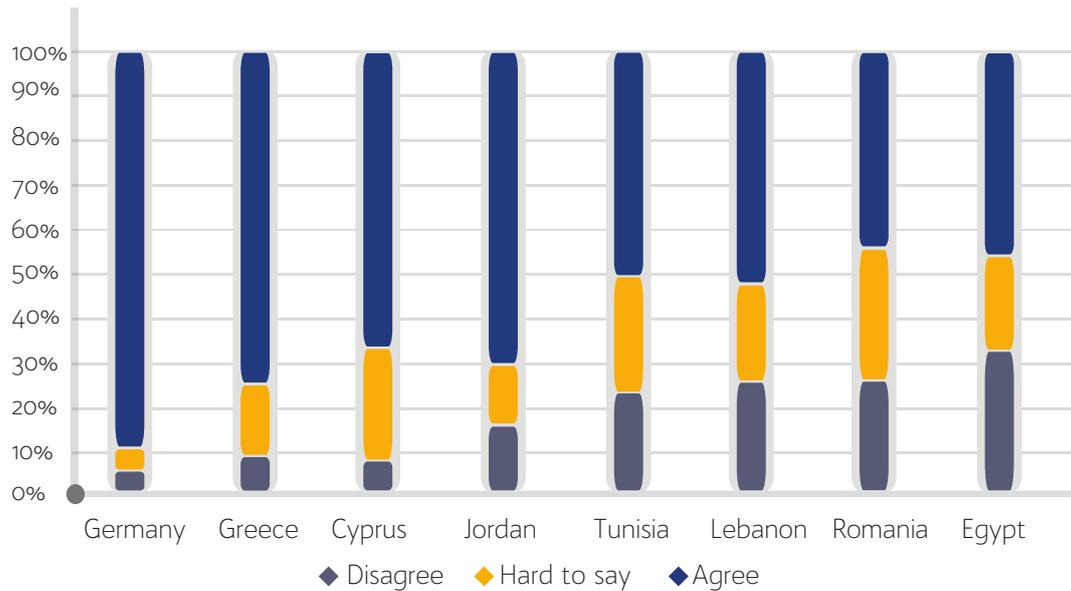
In Figure 4 we see the proportion of each country that agrees that immigration to their country has had the effect of “offering people from poor countries a better living”. This, again, is an extremely popular narrative, with individuals being more likely to agree with it than disagree with it in all eight of the countries considered. In seven out of the eight of the countries, the percentage agreeing with this “giving poor people a better life” narrative was more than 20 per cent higher than the percentage disagreeing with it.

Figure 4. Agreement that immigration has had the effect of “offering people from poor countries a better living” in one’s country. Source: WVS, 2017-2020



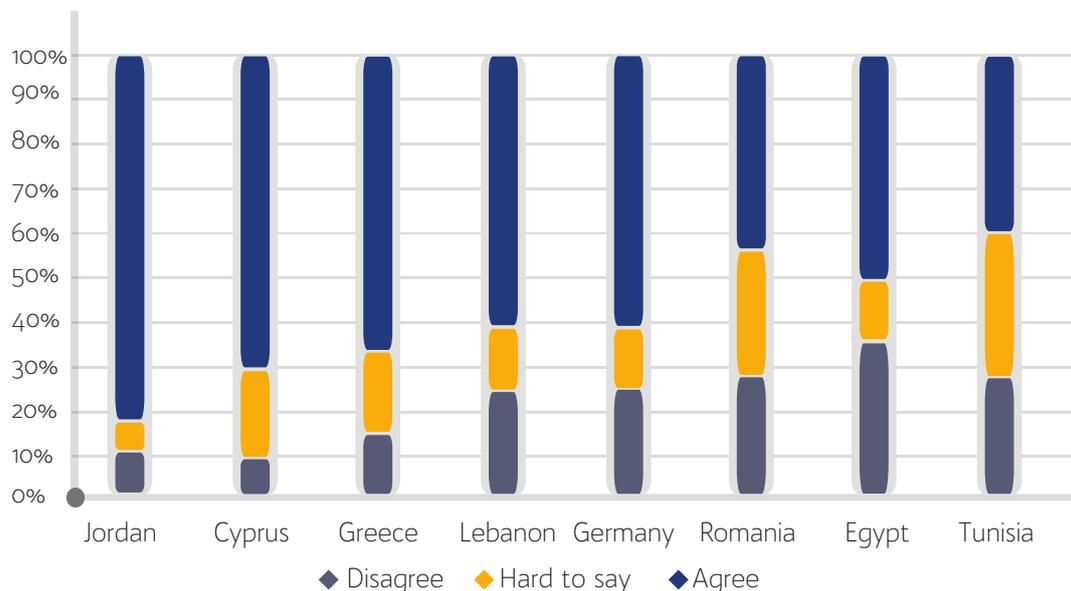
Responses to the final of the four positive narratives—that immigration has had the effect of “giving asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere”—are shown in Figure 4, below. Like the narrative on “helping poor people” this, more political, “asylum” narrative enjoys widespread popularity across the region, with individuals more like to agree than disagree in all eight of the countries considered.

Figure 5. Agreement that immigration has had the effect of “giving asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere” in one’s country. Source: WVS, 2017–2020



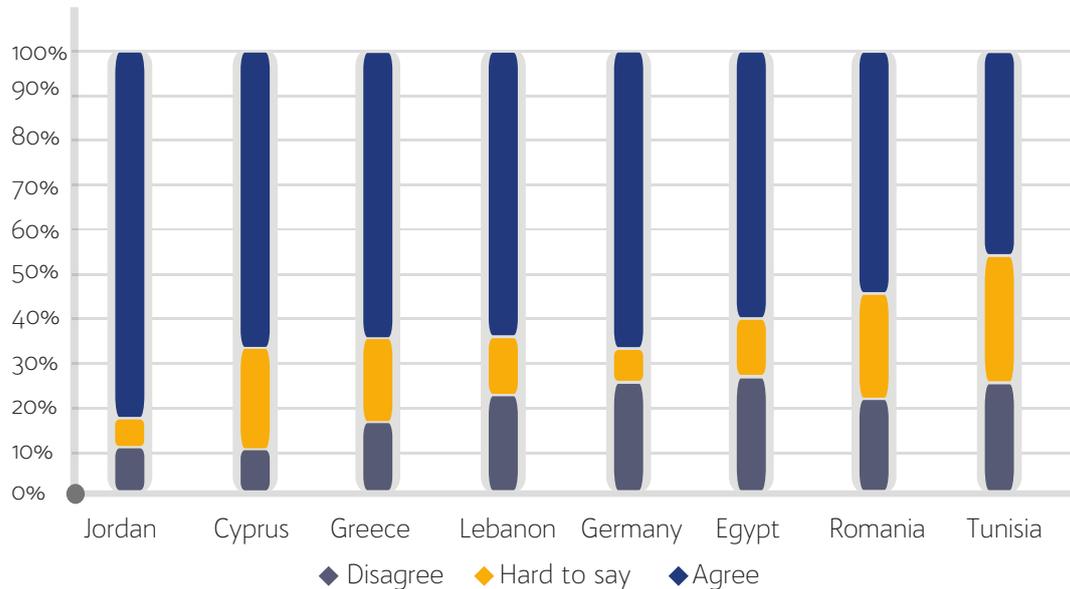
Onto more negative narratives, in Figure 6, below, we see that in all eight countries under consideration, individuals are more likely to agree than disagree that immigration has had the effect of “increasing the crime rate” in their country.

Figure 6. Agreement that immigration has had the effect of “increasing the crime rate” in one’s country. Source: WVS, 2017–2020



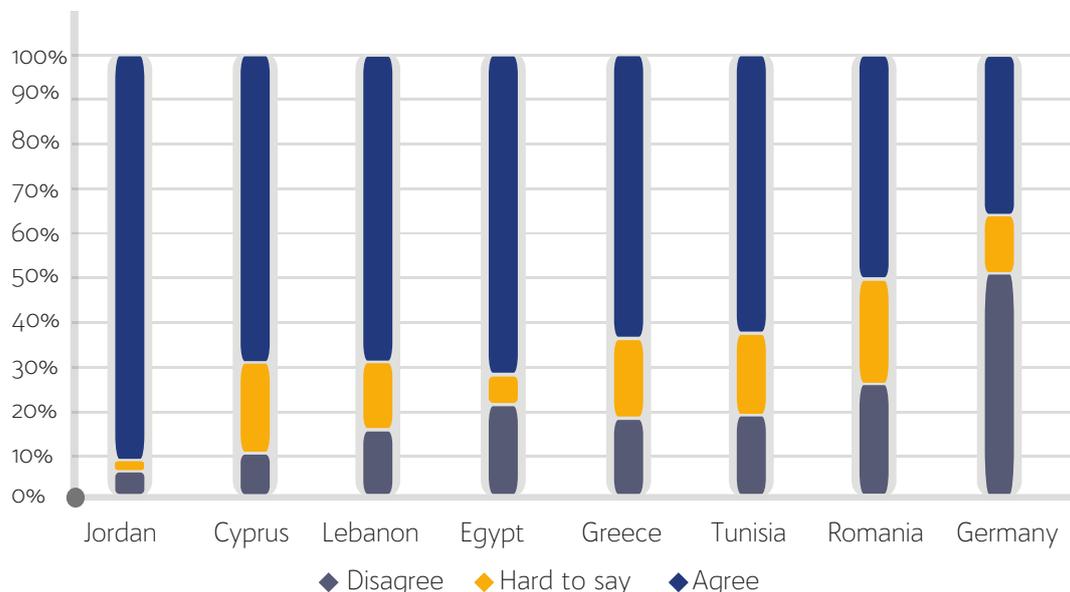
Similarly, as shown in Figure 7, individuals are more likely to agree than disagree that immigration has had the effect of “increasing the risk of terrorism” in all eight countries considered

Figure 7. Agreement that immigration has had the effect of “increasing the risk of terrorism” in one’s country. Source: WVS, 2017-2020



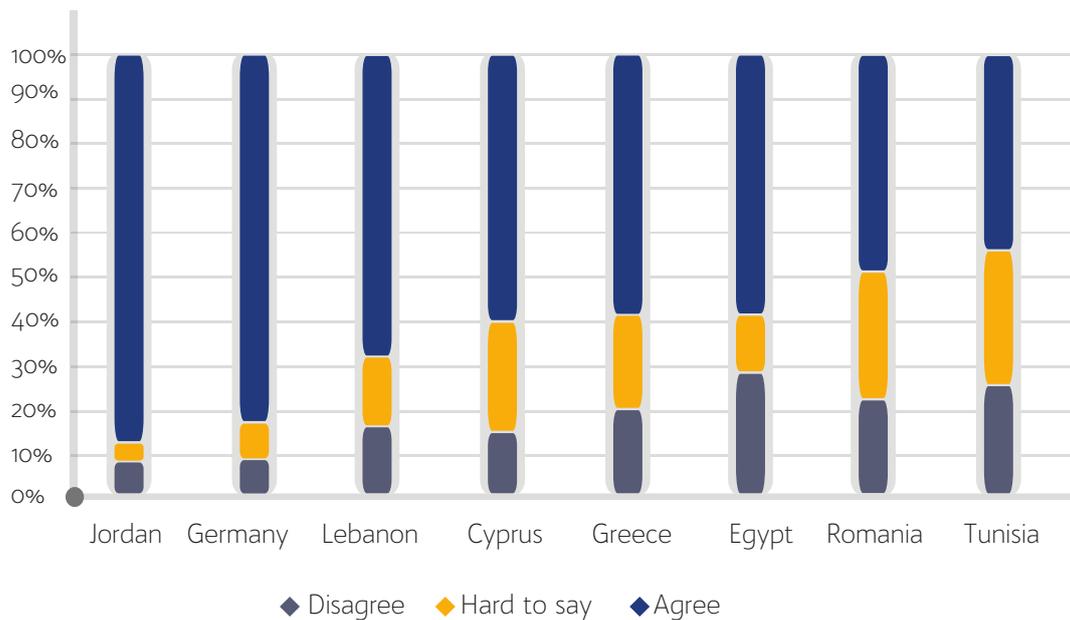
On the effect of immigration on increasing unemployment, as shown in Figure 8, in all but one country—Germany—individuals are more likely to agree than disagree with the narrative. Notably, in four of the countries in which individuals were more likely to agree that immigration increased unemployment (Cyprus, Jordan, Romania and Lebanon), individuals were also more likely to agree than disagree that immigration filled important jobs vacancies, as shown in Figure 2. This supports the notion that (1) the framing of a narrative affects the extent to which individuals agree with it and (2) that individuals are capable of holding nuanced views and thus agreeing with seemingly competing narratives on a single issue.

Figure 8. Agreement that immigration has had the effect of “increasing unemployment” in one’s country. Source: WVS, 2017-2020



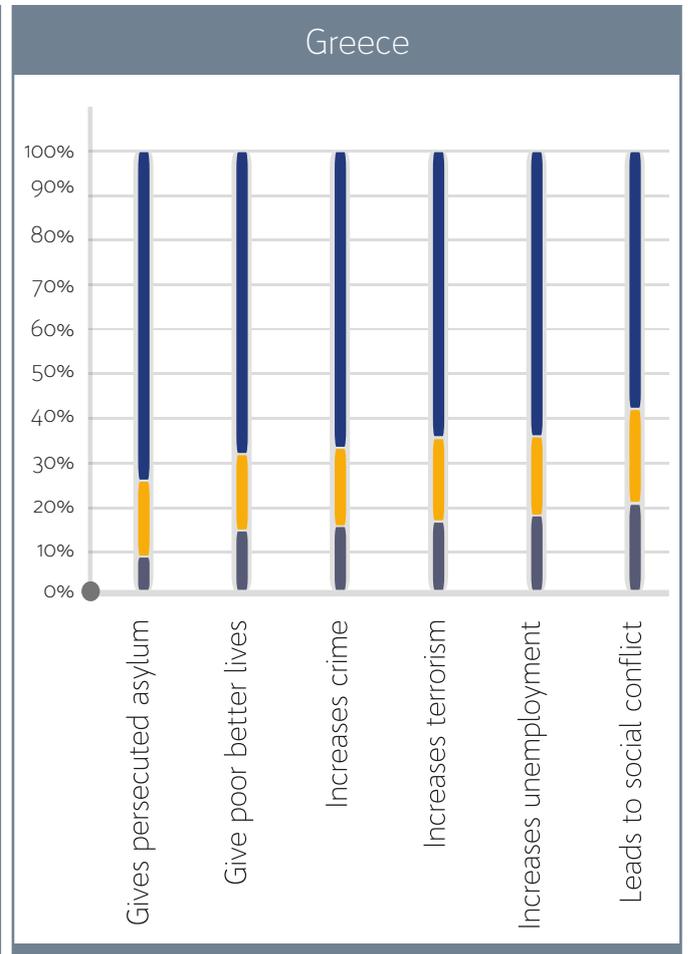
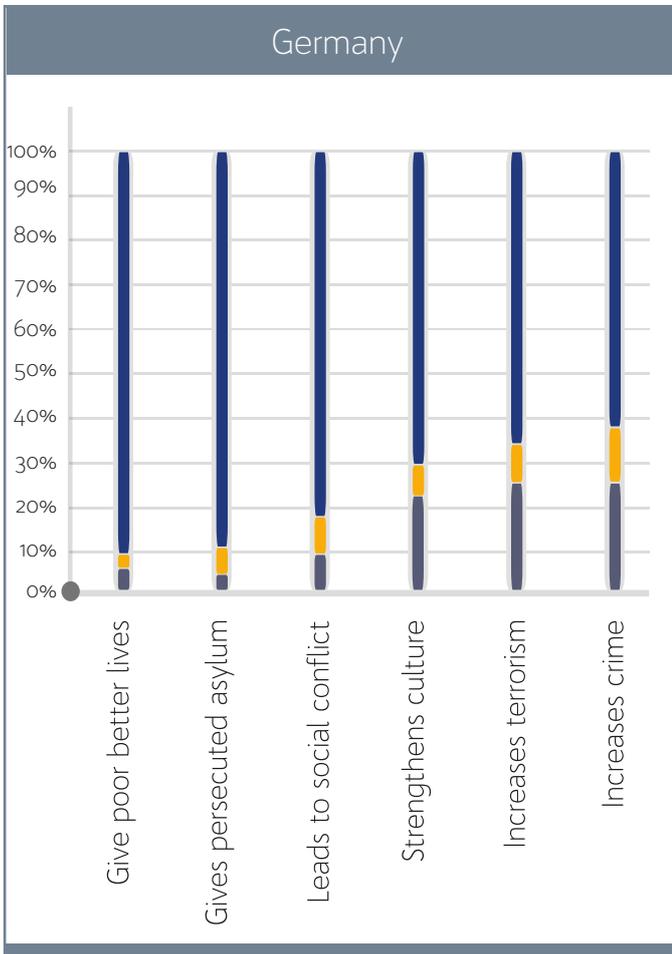
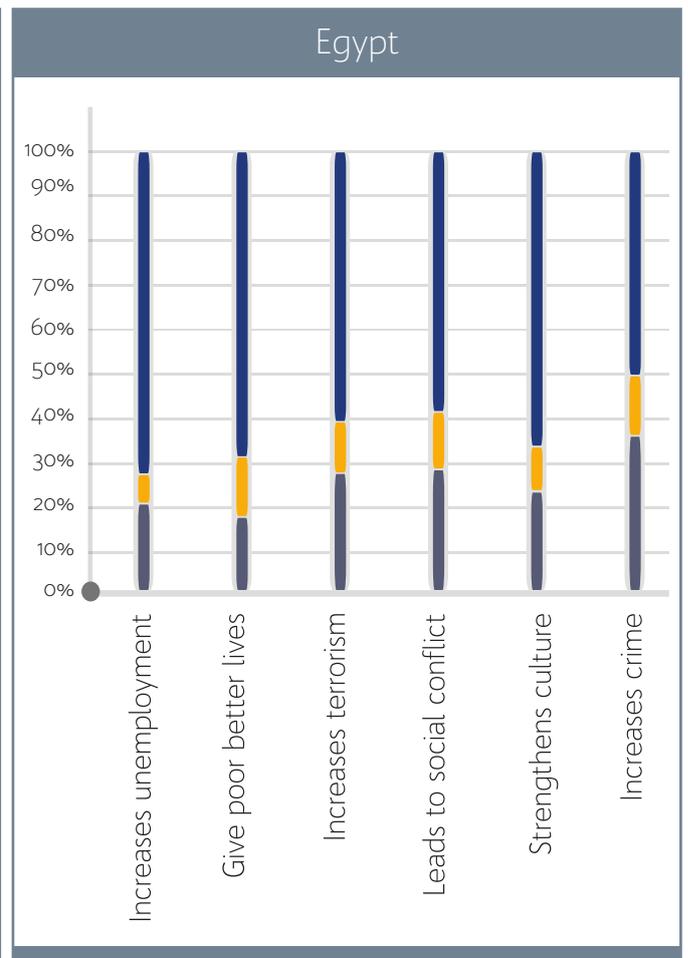
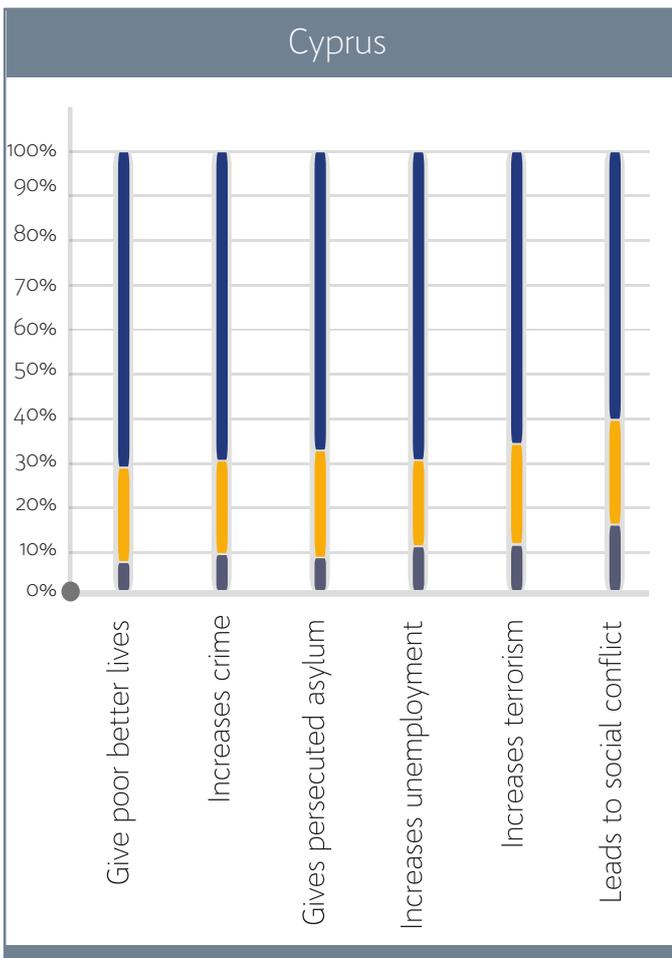
Finally, in Figure 9, we see agreement across the eight countries that immigration leads to social conflict in their country. Although individuals are more likely to agree than disagree in every country, the exact differences vary considerably. In Jordan and Germany, more than 80 per cent of citizens believe that immigration has led to social conflict in their country, compared to just 44 per cent in Tunisia.

Figure 9. Agreement that immigration has had the effect of “leading to social conflict” in one’s country. Source: WVS, 2017-2020

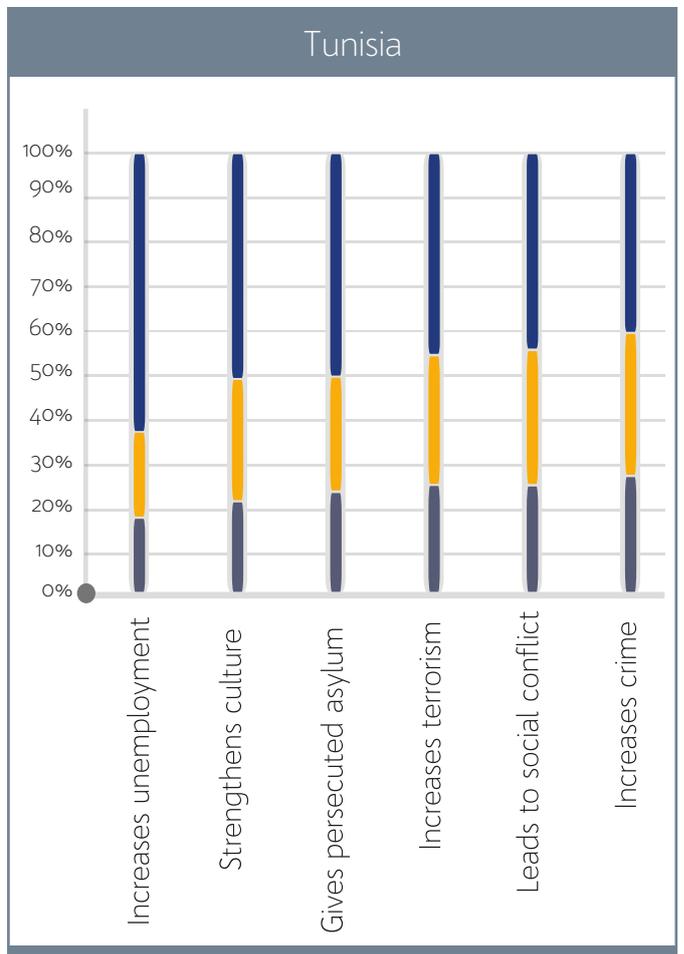
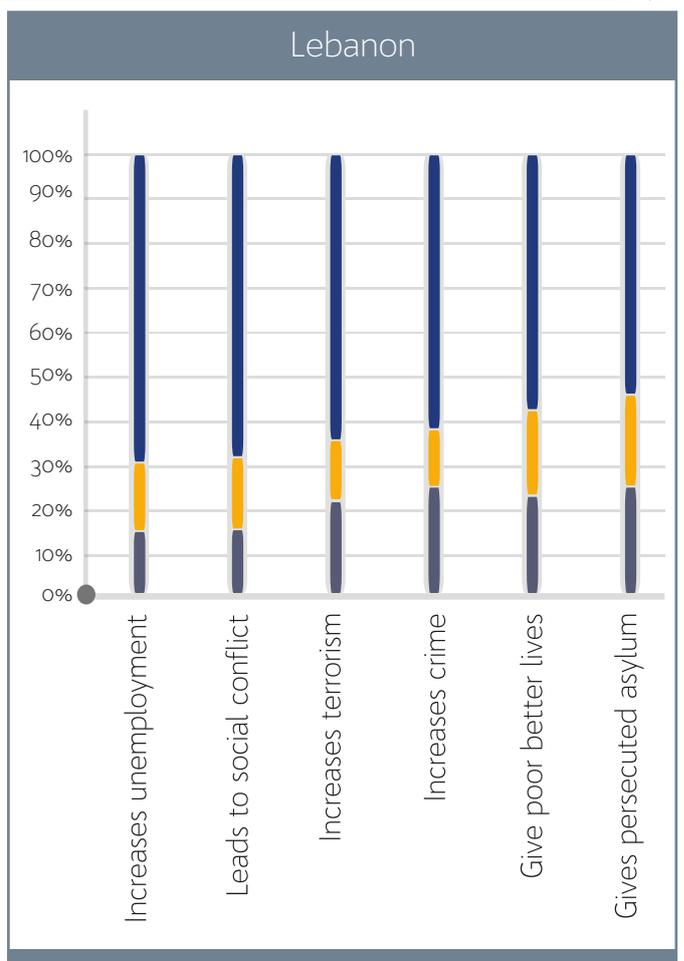
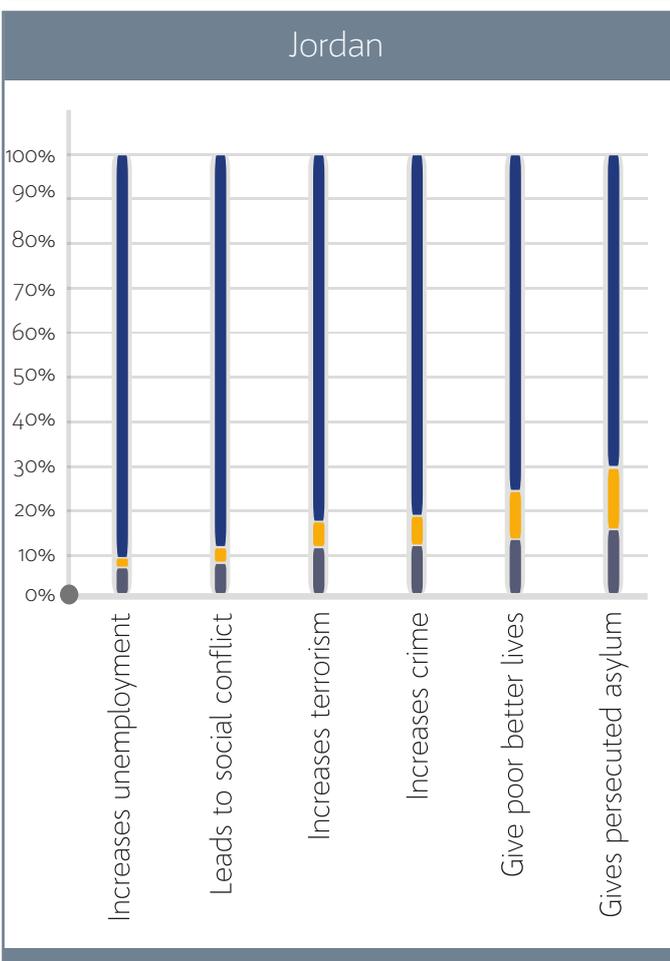


Agreement with each of the above eight migration narratives is shown on a country-by-country basis in Figure 10 below, in order of net agreement (percentage agreeing minus percentage disagreeing).

Figure 10. Agreement with migration narratives by country. Source: WVS 2017-2020



◆ Disagree ◆ Hard to say ◆ Agree



◆ The effects of narratives : 25 how belief in narratives affects policy preferences

The effect of narratives on public attitudes and behaviours remains less explored in the academic literature than their roles in organisations and policy-making circles, as well as their effect on policy outcomes. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s scholars (Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Berman 2001; Bleich 2002; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004) increasingly turned to the role of narratives in explaining policy outcomes as a part of a broader—and possibly insufficiently critically considered—acceptance that neither “facts” nor “interests” can sufficiently explain variation in decisions by policymakers (Boswell et al, 2011). This led to the theoretical advancements of Narrative Policy Framework (Jones and McBeth, 2010), designed to capture and describe policy narratives as well as their effects. In terms of public attitudes, Jones (2010) shows that narrative structure, in terms of affect for characters, affects public opinion, using an experiment on attitudes to climate change. Moreover, psychological studies have repeatedly shown that narratives are more persuasive than bare facts or technical information (Ricketts, 2007; Golding et al, 1992) while climate change narratives based on individual responsibility, efficiency, and good business are more convincing than those based on thinking globally. As such, in this section we consider how narratives about migration affect migration policy preferences.

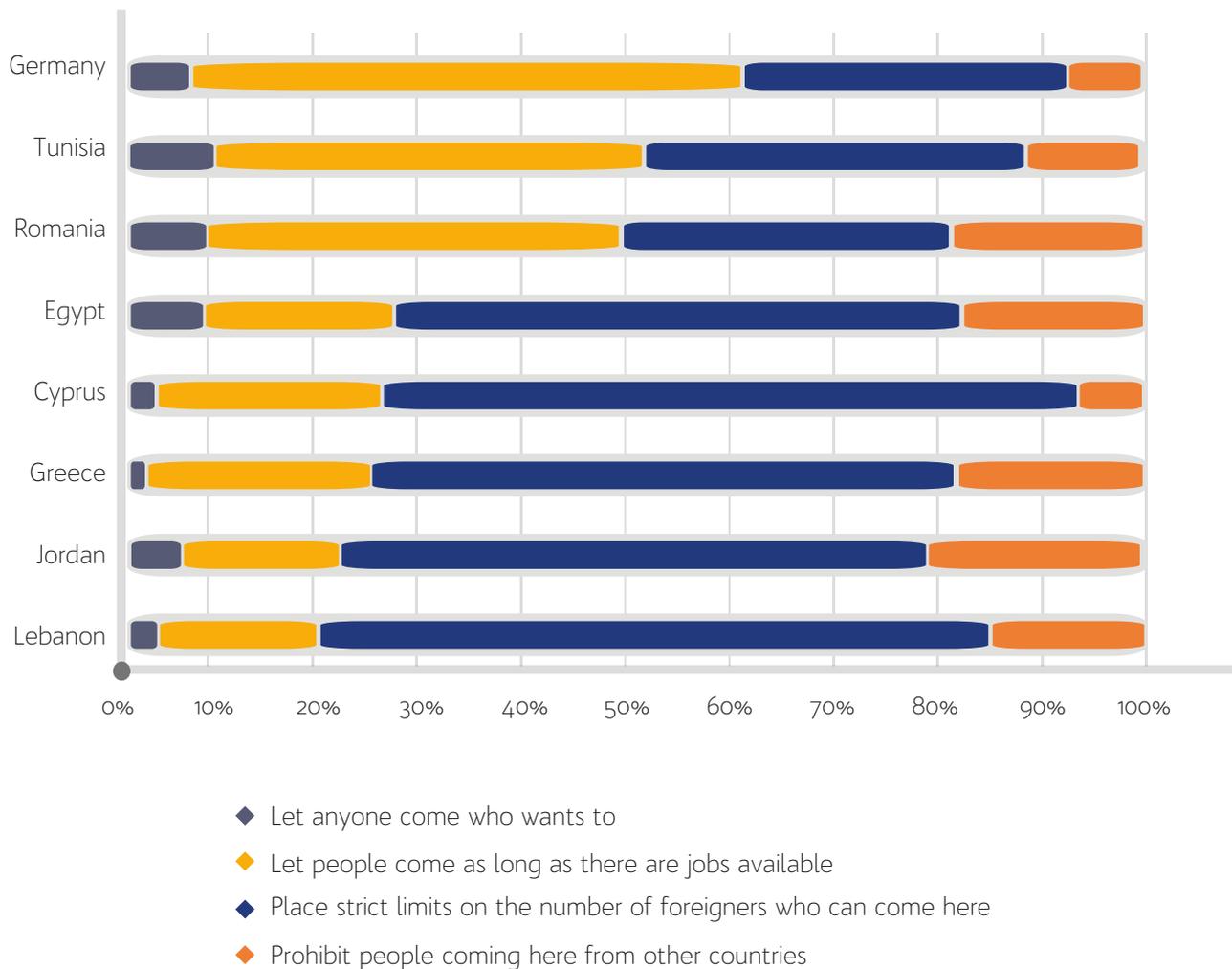
The same WVS survey as used above also asks respondents about their preferred immigration policy, asking them ‘How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do?’

1. Let anyone come who wants to
2. Let people come as long as there are jobs available
3. Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here
4. Prohibit people coming here from other countries



Responses are shown in Figure 11, in order of favourability to an open immigration policy, defined for the purposes of this graph as the sum of those responding either ‘Let anyone come who wants to’ and ‘Let people come as long as there are jobs available’, given that the question specifies that the people are coming here to work. As we can see, German respondents are the most favourable to a more open immigration policy while Lebanese respondents are least favourable.

Figure 11. Preferred immigration policy by country. Source: WVS, 2017-2020



With this information—and the theoretical presupposition, justified by the discussion above, that beliefs in narratives affect political preferences—we can consider the extent to which each narrative is likely to affect immigration policy preferences by considering the pairwise correlations between belief in narratives and immigration policy preferences. Although it is highly likely that at least some of the relationship is due to unobserved confounding variables and reverse causality, the high theoretical plausibility that perceptions about the effects of immigration partially lead to one’s preferred migration policy mean that such correlations offer a useful first consideration of the relationship between narratives and policy preferences. Future research should test these relationships to robustly infer causality.

In Table 1, the pairwise correlations between each of the narratives (operationalised as: 0=disagree; 1=hard to say; 2=agree) and the preferred immigration policy (operationalised as 1-4, based on responses listed above) are displayed by country, as well as the average across the region. As shown, five of the narratives stand out as particularly impactful on immigration policy preferences. One of these is positive: the narrative that immigration has “strengthened cultural diversity”. Four are negative: that immigration has “increased terrorism”, “increased the crime rate”, “lead to social conflict”; “increased unemployment. The three remaining narratives: it has “filled important job vacancies”; “offered people from poor countries a better living” and “given asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere” are each considerably less predictive of immigration attitudes. Although there are some country differences, variation in the ability of these narratives to predict immigration policy preferences across the region is fairly consistent. This suggests that emphasising (or debunking) the five selected narratives are most likely to affect immigration policy preferences, negatively or positively depending on the narrative chosen.

Table 1. Pairwise correlations between agreement with narratives and immigration policy preferences, by Euro-Mediterranean country. Source: WVS 2017-2020.

	Cyprus	Egypt	Germany	Greece	Jordan	Lebanon	Romania	Tunisia	Average
Fills vacant jobs	-0.17*	-0.10*	-0.26*	-0.26*	-0.05*	-0.17*	0.01	-0.05*	-0.12*
Strengthens culture	-0.22*	-0.12*	-0.29*	-0.33*	-0.05	-0.25*	-0.05	-0.24*	-0.21*
Helps poor people	-0.06	-0.02	-0.06*	-0.22*	0.05	-0.02	-0.03	0.18*	-0.07*
Gives asylum	-0.06	-0.12*	-0.08*	0.12*	0.02	-0.05	-0.00	-0.14*	-0.08*
Increases crime	0.21*	0.27*	0.30*	0.40*	0.15*	0.11*	0.31*	0.29*	0.28*
Increases terrorism	0.28*	0.34*	0.34*	-0.35*	0.19*	0.08*	0.25*	0.26*	0.27*
Increases unemployment	0.23*	0.28*	0.26*	0.34*	0.17*	-0.03	0.19*	0.24*	0.27*
Leads to social conflict	0.21*	0.26*	0.21*	0.30*	0.20*	0.10*	0.26*	0.24*	0.21*

Notes: * signifies pairwise correlation is statistically significant at the 95% level.

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