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Geys, B. (2017). Do voluntary associations show their bright or dark side under adverse societal shocks? Evidence from 9/11. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 46(6), 1189-1208 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0899764017718634>

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Do Voluntary Associations Show their Bright or Dark Side under Adverse Societal Shocks? Evidence from 9/11*

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Abstract

In this article, we re-assess the relation between association membership and individuals' feelings about immigrants, thereby focusing on possible shifts in this relation in the wake of negative societal shocks (i.e. the 9/11 terrorist attacks). That is, do such events tighten or loosen the connection between association membership and immigrant-intolerance? Using repeated survey data from Flanders (Belgium), our results indicate that there is at best a weak overall connection between association membership and immigrant-intolerance. The exception lies with members of socially embedded (or 'connected') associations, which tend to be significantly more tolerant towards immigrants. Interestingly, we find *no* significant change in the relationship between voluntary association membership and immigrant-intolerance in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. This suggests that negative societal shocks have little direct impact on the membership-attitudes relation. The analysis contributes to discussions on the potential 'bright' and 'dark' sides of civic engagement.

Keywords: Voluntary Associations, Civic engagement, 9/11, Tolerance, Immigrants.

Word count: 7021 words (main text)

* Address correspondence to Benny Geys; email: Benny.Geys@bi.no. I gratefully acknowledge excellent suggestions from three anonymous referees, Donna Bahry, Gianmarco Daniele, Yoshiko Herrera, Joshua Holm, Marc Hutchison, Zuzana Murdoch, Susan Pharr, Salmal Qari, Katherine Stovel, and Jurgen Willems. I'm also grateful to FWO Vlaanderen for financial support (grant no. G.0022.12). The dataset and Stata14 codes allowing replication of the results are available from the author.

1. Introduction

Community life and civic participation have been in the political spotlight over the past 20 years. Policymakers in different West-European countries – such as Tony Blair and David Cameron in the UK, Bill Clinton in the US, and Gerhard Schroeder in Germany – have put significant emphasis on the (re-)construction of civic participation, community life and ‘social capital’. These policy efforts were fuelled by an abundance of scientific studies – mainly appearing after Putnam et al.’s (1993) “Making Democracy Work” – suggesting that civic engagement plays a central role for the development and maintenance of socially desirable sentiments and attitudes (Putnam, 2000; Terriquez, 2011; Achbari, 2015).ⁱ This vast body of academic work incited a strong belief in the value of civic engagement – for instance via voluntary associations.

From a theoretical perspective, however, at least two arguments can cast doubt on the empirical validity of a consistent positive relation between voluntary organisation memberships and civic attitudes (irrespective of the amply debated causal direction of this membership-attitudes relation; Sønderskov, 2010). First, interpersonal relations tend to form predominantly between individuals with similar social characteristics (the homophily principle: Blau, 1977; McPherson *et al.*, 2001), and individuals atypical of a social network have a higher probability of leaving (the niche edge effect: McPherson *et al.*, 1992; Popielarz and McPherson, 1995). Such tendencies towards homogeneity – which Putnam (2000) refers to as ‘bonding’ rather than ‘bridging’ networks – inhibit wide-ranging social integration through association memberships, and the attitudinal benefits expected from such integration.ⁱⁱ

Second, whether association memberships display a positive or negative association to socially valued attitudes is likely to depend on the institutional and socio-political context within which such engagement takes place (Geys, 2012; Wollebaek and Selle, 2012). The underlying idea is that socialisation processes within voluntary associations – and social networks more generally – do not necessarily develop ‘new’ sentiments and attitudes in individuals. Rather, they may simply re-enforce already existing attitudes (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Hooghe, 2003) via so-called echo-chamber effects (Sunstein, 2001). The associational sphere then becomes “a potential transmission belt” for attitudinal changes arising in society (Riley, 2005, 290).

In this article, we re-assess the relation between association membership and individuals’ feelings about immigrants, and specifically focus on possible shifts in this relation in the wake of negative societal shocks (i.e. the attacks of 11 September 2001 on the New York World Trade Centre and the Pentagon; henceforth, 9/11). That is, do such events tighten or loosen the connection between association membership and immigrant-intolerance? As we arguably prefer associational memberships to show their best side particularly under adverse societal shocks, this question bears substantial importance from both a theoretical and policy perspective. In the empirical analysis, we focus on 9/11 because it provides us with an unexpected adverse shock, and because this event was highly mediatised (such that we can accept very broad awareness of the shock). The dataset consists of annually repeated surveys in Flanders (period 2001 to 2008). This choice is driven largely by practical considerations, since the Flemish data allow studying a set of surveys that are fielded in a consistent fashion across time, and cover the period before and after 9/11.

Our results indicate that there is at best a weak overall connection between association membership and immigrant-intolerance. The exception lies with members of socially strongly embedded (or ‘connected’) associations (measured via the extent to members’ multiple memberships; see also Paxton 2002, 2007; Coffé and Geys, 2008), which tend to be significantly more tolerant towards immigrants. Furthermore, and crucially, we find *no* significant change in the relationship between voluntary association membership and immigrant-intolerance in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. This conclusion holds similarly across associations with high or low levels of organizational embeddedness. Overall, therefore, this suggests that negative societal shocks appear to have little direct impact on the membership-attitudes relation, which may require us to reassess the way we think about the role of voluntary associations and their (possible) impact on attitudes.

2. Theoretical Framework

Two arguments have been brought forward to connect individuals’ membership in voluntary associations and their civic attitudes. The first rests on a *self-selection* argument stating that people with sufficiently ‘pro-social’ attitudes are more likely to become engaged compared to people lacking such attitudes (Sønderskov 2010; Achbari, 2015). The second view involves a *socialisation* argument, and states that association membership induces a process of appropriating norms, attitudes, values and roles (Putnam, 2000; Sønderskov 2010). Both elements may also work simultaneously. Such ‘selection and adaptation’ models maintain that “actors self-select into specific associations, and (...) subsequently adapt to the prevailing attitudes within that interaction context” (Hooghe and Quintelier, 2013, 290).

Surprisingly, these various lines of argument abstract from the broader context within which the individual and the association exist. This is especially injudicious since context has been

shown to matter for individuals' integration processes in a variety of social settings (Beyers, 2010; Murdoch, 2015), and plays a key role for peer effects in group interactions (Evan, 1963). Consequently, self-selection and socialisation processes are unlikely to be unconditional, but rather will depend on, and be influenced by, the broader environment. This argument directly implies that shocks to the socio-political and institutional environment might affect the membership-attitudes relation observed at any point in time by influencing *both* self-selection *and* socialisation processes (Geys, 2012; Wollebaek and Selle, 2012).

More specifically, such shocks – including wars, terrorist attacks or natural disasters – can function as critical junctures (Collier and Collier, 1991; Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007) that instigate a search for “new strategies for action” (Swidler, 1986, 278). As such, “the occurrence of new environmental cues” has the potential to induce shifts in individuals' (and groups') values and attitudes over time (Bardi and Goodwin, 2011, 278; see also Peffley *et al.*, 2015). Importantly, these individual-level changes can easily reverberate into the relation between association memberships and individuals' attitudes *even when* the ‘same’ individuals remain embedded in the ‘same’ association.ⁱⁱⁱ That is, although individual A may (but need not) remain in association Z, changes in the composition of, and/or the socialisation experience within, the organisation induce a transformation of the observed membership-attitudes relation. The mechanisms behind the above reasoning are broadly applicable, and relate to the roles of both self-selection (which changes the composition of social networks) and socialisation (which affects individuals' experience within social networks).

First, people with higher levels of social trust and civic attitudes are more likely to participate in organizational activity (Sønderskov, 2010; Achbari, 2015). The reason behind such *self-selection* effects is that trusting individuals tend to have a more open and social disposition,

and are less apprehensive about the possibility of negative experiences during social interactions. Consequently, their probability of joining *any* organisation is higher (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005; Sønderskov, 2010). Such more liberal, open-minded people might, however, have more downward potential in their attitudes (for instance, towards immigrants, or social trust) than non-members. Such a ‘floor effect’ limits the potential for further declines among non-members, and suggests that attitudinal changes induced by negative societal shocks (such as 9/11) may be stronger for association members.

Second, socialisation within associations may not develop ‘new’ attitudes, but might rather reinforce already existing ones (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Hooghe, 2003). It indeed appears unlikely that, for instance, extreme-right skinheads joining a right-wing militia would suddenly develop radically different attitudes from the involvement within their association. Intensification of pre-existing attitudes is driven by the homophily principle (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954; Blau, 1977; McPherson *et al.*, 2001), which implies that the “argument pool in a group with some initial disposition will be strongly skewed in the direction of that disposition” (Sunstein, 2001, 8). This entrenches individual members’ attitudes and beliefs. Moreover, group polarization theory in social psychology advocates that the outcome of group deliberations within such ‘gated communities’ “tends to be a more extreme version of the initial predisposition of group members” (Sunstein, 2001, 7). While such group polarization does not emerge in just any group, it provides an additional theoretical argument behind the idea that attitudinal changes induced by negative societal shocks (such as 9/11) might resonate particularly within social networks – such as voluntary associations. This naturally implies that voluntary association memberships need not always propagate positive attitudes (as also acknowledged in the bridging-bonding distinction; Stolle and Rochon, 1998;

Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 2002, 2007; Firat and Glanville, 2016; Glanville, 2016), and may weaken the membership–attitude relation particularly under negative societal developments.

We can, however, take this prediction one step further. As mentioned, association memberships may have diverging effects depending on the variety of acquaintances it allows people to encounter (Stolle and Rochon, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 2002, 2007). The more encompassing the social network one’s civic engagement directly or indirectly generates, so the argument goes, the stronger the effects on social values and attitudes are likely to be. Following this line of argument, the societal changes in the aftermath of 9/11 may have had a different impact depending on the “organizational embeddedness” of the voluntary associations individuals are engaged in (Cornwell and Harrison, 2004: 863). Specifically, organizational embeddedness might work to heighten association members’ exposure to the increasingly negative attitudes developing in the wider society. Consequently, citizens in strongly socially embedded organisations would be *most* likely to reflect any societal developments towards negative social attitudes (compared to citizens in less socially embedded organisations).

Before turning to the empirical verification of these predictions, we should note that our discussion highlights two *direct* pathways linking the socio-political context to the membership-attitudes relation. Evidently, more indirect pathways may also be imagined. For instance, context might shape the actual causal processes that alter individuals’ attitudes, affect organisational practices, governance structures, funding bases, and (connections to) political discourses. Such indirect effects are left aside here, but should be viewed as important avenues for further research.

3. Empirical analysis

3.1. Case selection and data

While several large-scale terrorist attacks have taken place in recent years, we focus on 9/11 because no previous attack of similar magnitude or meaning acted as a forewarning. This allows us to treat it as an unexpected and fully exogenous event. The 9/11 events also invoked a very forceful public policy response: i.e. governments and security agencies reacted to it via a substantial adjustment of their expectations about the threat of terrorism (Hoffman, 2002), as well as via the announcement – and implementation – of a global ‘War on Terror’ (Howell and Lind, 2009). Subsequent attacks did not trigger similar shifts in public policy, nor in public awareness of, and media attention to, terrorist groups and activities. 9/11 thus most directly qualifies as a critical juncture in the sense of Collier and Collier (1991) and Capoccia and Kelemen (2007).

We employ data from Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium). Flanders has a very active associational life. While a majority of people is member of at least one voluntary organisation (see also below), it has been estimated that 13% of Flemish inhabitants regularly volunteer, mostly in organisations for sports and cultural activities. Volunteering is most common among young people (20-25 years) and then gradually declines with age before picking up again around 55 years. In terms of membership, labour unions in Flanders (and Belgium more generally) also remain a large player. As such, one could argue that the voluntary sector in Flanders is dominated by the unions, sports and cultural organisations (Elchardus et al., 2001; Tayart de Borms, 2015). It is also important to point out here that Flanders has traditionally been – and to a large extent still remains – a relatively conservative society. Particularly at the local level, the political landscape was long dominated by the centre-right Christian-Democratic party (currently called CD&V). This party held an absolute

majority in the local councils of no less than 44% of Flemish municipalities in 1976, and remains a very strong political force at the local level even today (Buelens and Deschouwer, 1996; Wille and Deschouwer, 2012).

The dataset used in the analysis below is obtained from four regionally representative surveys on “Culturele Verschuivingen in Vlaanderen [*Cultural Shifts in Flanders*]” conducted by the Administration Planning and Statistics of the Flemish government in 2001, 2002, 2004, and 2008 (N=5065 respondents). Even though we lack a panel structure in the data (as a different representative sample is surveyed during each wave), three elements make the data particularly valuable. First, survey waves were fielded between April and July each year before and after 9/11. Hence, the 2001 survey had finished a few months before 9/11, while the 2002 wave was fielded within six months after 9/11. Second, during each wave of the survey, respondents are asked a range of relevant attitudinal questions (i.e. intolerance towards immigrants; defined in detail below) as well as about their engagement in a wide variety of association types. Finally, random respondent selection during each survey wave implies that the year in which respondents were selected is random, which makes 9/11 exogenous to the surveys analysed.

Data collection for all surveys occurred in a consistent fashion across time. This holds both in terms of timing (i.e. April-July), and format (telephone survey). For each survey, all relevant questions also reappear in almost the exact same form throughout the time period analysed. Furthermore, the share of respondents with immigrant backgrounds included in the samples remains broadly comparable over time, and is particularly stable around 9/11: i.e. 5.7% and 6.2% in the last pre-9/11 and first post-9/11 surveys, respectively. These elements make

comparison over time a feasible objective, and mitigate concerns that any effects observed around 9/11 derive from time-specific features of the data or surveys themselves.

3.2. Empirical approach

We estimate the following regression model:

$$Y_{i,t} = a_t \text{Time}_t + b \text{Controls}_{i,t} + c_t \text{Membership}_{i,t} * \text{Time}_t + e_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

Our dependent variable $Y_{i,t}$ measures intolerance towards immigrants for individual i at time t (with higher values reflecting less tolerant opinions). We thereby combine individuals' responses on a number of related questions to construct a composite indicator through principal component analysis (details in Appendix A). As people usually have varying concerns regarding different groups of immigrants, it is important that many of the statements included in our composite indicator explicitly refer to immigrants' different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Moreover, the term 'immigrant' in Flanders immediately triggers associations with individuals of Turkish/Moroccan origin as well as Muslims, since these groups traditionally lie at the heart of (anti-)immigrant discourse in Flanders. In fact, under influence of the extreme-right party Vlaams Blok, "the social construction of the 'immigrant problem' (...) was reduced to a problem with Muslims" (Detant, 2005, 186). $Y_{i,t}$ reflects the principal component scores of the resulting composite indicator. In figure A.1 in appendix A, we display the annual development of the dependent variable (both in general, and depending on individuals' voluntary association memberships). This provides an initial sense of what is happening attitudinally in Flemish society around the 9/11 (more details below).

We measure individuals' voluntary association memberships via an indicator variable equal to 1 when a respondent professes memberships in at least one associational type. Unfortunately, no information is available in the survey on the active/passive nature of memberships. Moreover, the data are limited to associational types, and do not provide data on individual organisations. While similar data have been used extensively throughout the literature (Stolle and Rochon, 1998; Paxton, 2002, 2007; Coffé and Geys, 2007; Geys and Murdoch 2008, 2010), this is clearly less than ideal (e.g., Firat and Glanville, 2016). Still, data at the level of the individual associations is, to the best of our knowledge, not available on a sufficiently encompassing level. Moreover, while counting memberships based on association types would ignore multiple memberships within one type (and thus under-estimate the true *number* of memberships), our indicator variable is less likely to be severely biased by the absence of association-level data. The reason is that individuals still portray their engagement, or lack thereof.

To measure voluntary associations' organizational embeddedness, we follow Paxton (2002, 2007) in differentiating between memberships in 'connected' and 'isolated' associations by looking at members' multiple memberships. Such individuals act "as bridge between these groups and thereby embed them into the broader organizational structure of society" (Coffé and Geys, 2008, 359), increasing the social integration of the network (Paxton, 2002, 2007; Cornwell and Harrison, 2004). We follow Coffé and Geys (2008) in calculating the connected/isolated nature of each association type taking into account their relative sizes (this is important since multiple memberships are by definition symmetric, and will appear more important for small groups relative to large groups; Blau, 1977). Then, we generate three indicator variables equal to one only if a given respondent professes memberships in isolated (i.e., the four least-connected associations), connected (i.e., the four most-connected

associations) and intermediate (i.e., a group that is neither extremely connected, nor isolated) voluntary associations. Table 1 provides an overview of the association types included in the analysis and their distribution over the three connectedness categories.^{iv}

Table 1 about here

The central variables of interest are captured in a vector of interaction terms between the membership variable(s) and a set of time-specific dummy variables ($\text{Membership}_{i,t} * \text{Time}_t$). This allows us to estimate a separate membership effect for each year in the sample. Specifically, the coefficient of each interaction term indicates the difference between members and non-members in terms of the outcome variable after adjusting for the control variables.^v Note that we also include a full set of year effects (Time_t) to account for time-specific shocks *unrelated* to the membership effect we are interested in (such as, for instance, economic up- or downturns or the changing appeal of far-right parties). While we also replicated the analysis estimating the coefficient of interest (c_t) separately for each year with qualitatively similar results, the inclusion of all available data in one estimation has the benefit of allowing a simple test of the statistical significance of any trends in the membership-attitudes relation over time (by testing linear constraints stating that the membership coefficients of any two or more years are the same).

Our control variables ($\text{Controls}_{i,t}$) are largely determined by data availability, and include respondents' gender, age (as well as its squared value), education level, marital status, religious affiliation and practice (Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006). Unfortunately, we lack information about individuals' ideology (or party preference) and social trust, which may be

relevant determinants of anti-immigrant sentiments. We return to this limitation in our concluding discussion. Summary statistics for all variables are given in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

4. Results

4.1. Main results

The central findings are presented graphically in Figure 1 (full results in Appendix B). Throughout the analysis, we cluster standard errors by province to account for the fact that observations from the same region might not be fully independent (though using White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors does not affect our inferences). The estimated marginal effect of having memberships in voluntary associations – versus not having such memberships – can be read on the vertical axis, while the horizontal axis reflects the time period of the analysis. We add 95% confidence intervals to indicate the statistical significance of the effects depicted.

Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 shows that there is a weak negative relation between association membership and intolerance towards immigrants both before and immediately after 9/11 – implying that association members on average express marginally *less* intolerant attitudes. We can thereby firmly reject that the membership-attitude relation differs across all years ($p > 0.10$), which is also confirmed in year-by-year tests ($p > 0.10$ in all cases). Looking more closely at the underlying data on intolerance towards immigrants, we find that there is little variation over time for both individuals with and without at least one membership (see figure A.1 in

appendix A). Specifically, the mean position of association members equals -0.096 in 2001, -0.028 in 2002, -0.044 in 2004 and -0.069 in 2008, while non-members had a value of 0.223 in 2001, 0.225 in 2002, 0.170 in 2004 and 0.210 in 2008. While association members thus appear to have become somewhat less tolerant towards immigrants following 9/11 – and thereby drive the limited increase in immigrant intolerance in the total sample after 9/11 observed in the left-hand side of Figure A.1 in Appendix A (for a similar observation using different data, see Billiet and Swyngedouw, 2009) – none of the differences between pairs of years is statistically different from 0 at conventional levels.^{vi}

Naturally, it is important to establish that no other (possibly countervailing) shocks occurred in Flanders between 9/11 and the 2002 survey. To the best of our knowledge, this is indeed the case. For instance, no elections took place between the 2000 municipal elections and the 2003 federal elections, and we could find no evidence of immigrant-related conflicts in the first half of 2002. The only major incident relevant to our analysis occurred in November 2002, when a race-related murder triggered violent unrest among the immigrant population in a suburb of Antwerp (the largest city in Flanders). This, however, is well after data collection on the 2002 wave had been completed.

Overall, these results strongly suggest that 9/11 did not affect the relationship between voluntary association membership and immigrant-intolerance. This suggests that negative societal shocks appear to have little direct impact on the membership-attitudes relation, nor induce a (stronger) shift towards intolerance among individuals engaged in voluntary associations. The latter observations goes against predictions from a view in which the associational sphere acts as a re-enforcer of the changing attitudes permeating society (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Sunstein, 2001).

4.2. *The role of associations' societal embeddedness*

In Figure 2 we separate individuals' memberships into connected and isolated voluntary associations (following Paxton, 2002, 2007; Coffé and Geys, 2008). The regression model is equivalent to that employed before, except that the $Membership_{i,t}$ variable now consists of a series of dummy variables indicating at least one membership in isolated, connected or intermediate voluntary associations, respectively. Detailed regression results are provided in table B2 in appendix B.

Figure 2 about here

The results in figure 2 (and appendix B) illustrate that the relation between association membership and intolerance towards immigrants tends to be positive for members of isolated associations and negative for intermediate associations – although these associations are never statistically significant at conventional levels. In contrast, we observe a statistically significant negative relation between intolerance towards immigrants and association membership in connected associations ($p < 0.01$). Hence, in line with previous studies highlighting connected associations as the particularly 'bright side' of civic engagement (Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 2002, 2007; Cornwell and Harrison, 2004; Griesshaber and Geys, 2012), members in such associations on average express *less* intolerant attitudes. Interestingly, however, this negative relation again does not appear to be affected by 9/11. As before, we cannot find any evidence that the coefficient estimate for 2002 is significantly different from all other years for any set of associations ($p > 0.10$ in all cases). One potential explanation might be that these 'connected' groups are arguably the only types that tend to make immigrants and immigration salient (with the possible exception of aid organizations and unions), and this internal issue

salience may not be affected by external shocks such as 9/11. Further research would be required to assess the broader validity of this – admittedly tentative – reasoning.

4.3. Self-selection effects?

Before concluding, one may worry that the types of people involved in voluntary organizations changed following 9/11 (Sander and Putnam, 2010), which may invalidate our inferences. Three observations can be brought forward to (at least partially) allay this concern.

First, individuals' memberships are usually long-term decisions. For instance, McPherson *et al.* (1992) find that average membership duration equals 69.5 months for membership spells completely observed in their sample period (i.e., 1974 to 1989). Taking into account memberships spells ongoing at the start or end of this observation period, Popielarz and McPherson (1995) estimate that average membership duration may even be as high as 140 months. There appears little reason to expect a strongly diverging pattern in Flanders. Hence, *abrupt* changes in the membership-attitudes connection due to self-selection would probably have a relatively low likelihood.^{vii}

Second, membership rates (i.e., the share of respondents with at least one membership) in our dataset are fairly stable throughout the period under observation. Specifically, they rise somewhat from 73% in 2001 to 77% in 2002, but then remain at 78% (2004) and 77% (2008). Similarly limited changes are observed when looking separately at 'isolated' and 'connected' associations (or, indeed, at each membership type presented to respondents in the surveys): i.e. membership rates in isolated (connected) associations stand at 18% (19%) in 2001, 19% (19%) in 2002, 17% (19%) in 2004, and 20% (19%) in 2008.^{viii} Even though this is indirect

evidence in the absence of explicit panel data, it does indicate that there is no sign of a sizeable shift in memberships.

Finally, as politically motivated self-selection may be especially likely in political parties, we also assessed data on Flemish political party's official membership numbers. Again, any observed changes in memberships are very marginal (for detailed information, see Quintelier and Hooghe, 2010).

5. Conclusion and discussion

Voluntary associations have often been viewed as places where individuals develop and/or maintain socially valued sentiments and attitudes (e.g., generalised trust and tolerance). However, they can also have a 'dark side' (van Deth and Zmerli, 2010), and entail substantial risks when allowance is made for the possibility that 'negative' attitudes (e.g., intolerance towards immigrants) are transmitted within social networks (Berman, 1997; Kaufman, 2003; Riley, 2005; Satyanath *et al.*, 2016). In this article, we analyse individuals' short-term attitudinal reactions to adverse shocks depending on their membership(s) in voluntary associations using the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The main findings illustrate that there is *no* significant change in the relationship between voluntary association membership and immigrant-intolerance in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. From this perspective, our findings suggest that sudden exogenous shocks do not appear to create a strong perturbation in the membership-intolerance relation. This indicates that the previously built-up association is quite durable – at least to the type of shock experienced under 9/11. It should thereby be noted that our central empirical focus concerned the stability of the membership-intolerance relationship over time in the face of negative external shocks, rather than the level of

(in)tolerance among members and non-members (or the extent of changes in such (in)tolerance).

Even so, the question about the prevalence and strength of association memberships' attitudinal effects remains a pertinent one. Our results indeed highlight that knowing a person's membership status does give some clue about his/her views on immigrants – particularly for members in connected associations. Since this clue turns out to be no more or less informative in certain years (given that the membership-attitudes relation appears quite stable in our analysis), future research may want to award more attention to what goes on *within* associations to further clarify the way we think about voluntary associations' (possible) impact on attitudes. For instance, what determines the salience of immigrants and immigration during group activities? How does this salience change depending on the external context? Why might this salience shift – or not – during negative societal shocks? Answering these questions would require delving into the cultural, political and organizational characteristics of specific associations (rather than more macro-level analysis of association types), and learning more about the interactions of individuals within them.

There are, of course, limitations to the present study, which signal a number of additional avenues for further research. The first of these concerns our focus on intolerance towards immigrants. While this choice reflects the direct relevance of such attitudes to the shock under study (i.e. 9/11), future work should extend our analysis to different types of attitudes. This would allow a rigorous evaluation of whether the content or type of norm that is being transmitted matters. The second limitation lies in the focus on 9/11. It would be useful for future research to develop a more nuanced and encompassing theory about the effects of terrorism on the membership-attitudes relation depending on the nature of the event. For

instance, to what extent does it matter that the 9/11 attacks were perpetrated by ‘outsiders’, while Anders Behring Breivik (who killed 77 people in Norway on 22 July 2011) was a Norwegian with an extreme right-wing world-view. The third limitation relates to data availability. Unfortunately, our Flemish dataset lacks information about individuals’ ideology (or party preference) and social trust. As these might be relevant determinants of anti-immigrant sentiment, the unavailability of this information could induce biased inferences to the extent that these variables show different responses to 9/11 depending on (the type of) individuals’ organisational memberships. Although this appears intuitively unlikely, future research should employ alternative datasets to verify whether our results are robust to the inclusion of controls for such variables.

Finally, existing data-sources – including the one employed here – generally only provide information about individuals’ membership in a limited number of association *types*, rather than record their actual memberships (or involvement in other social networks). This restricts our analysis to a comparison of individuals with and without associational involvement, and cannot evaluate the importance of the *extent* or *degree* of such engagement. It also inhibits an assessment of the role of social networks beyond voluntary associations. Yet, one might reasonably wonder about the role of other social networks – such as friendship ties, family bonds, or the work environment. The rising importance of social networking websites may create interesting opportunities in this respect (though the fluidity of social networks in cyberspace may evidently induce other empirical concerns).

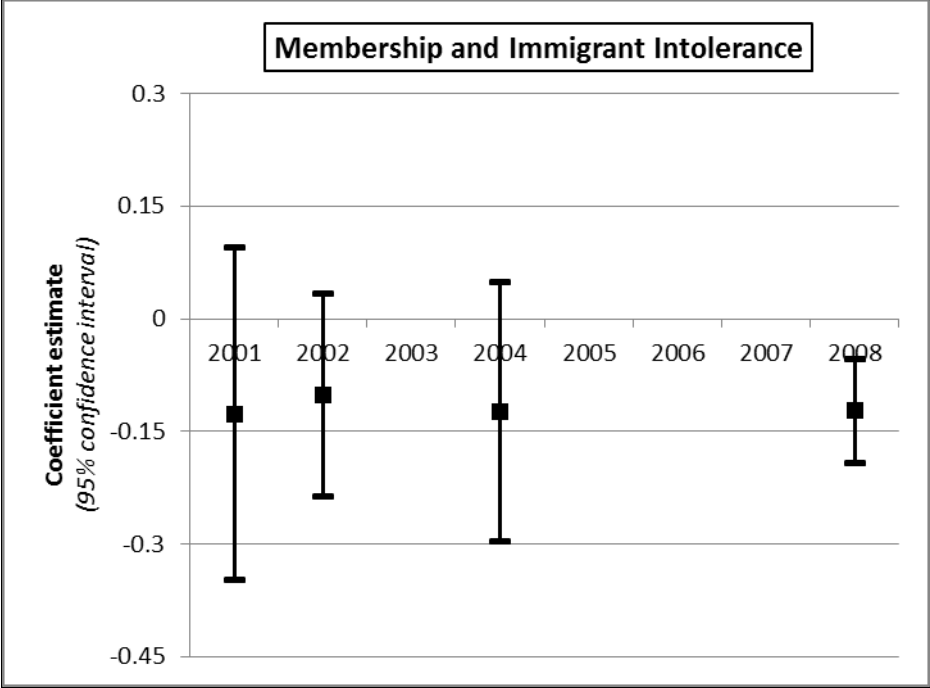
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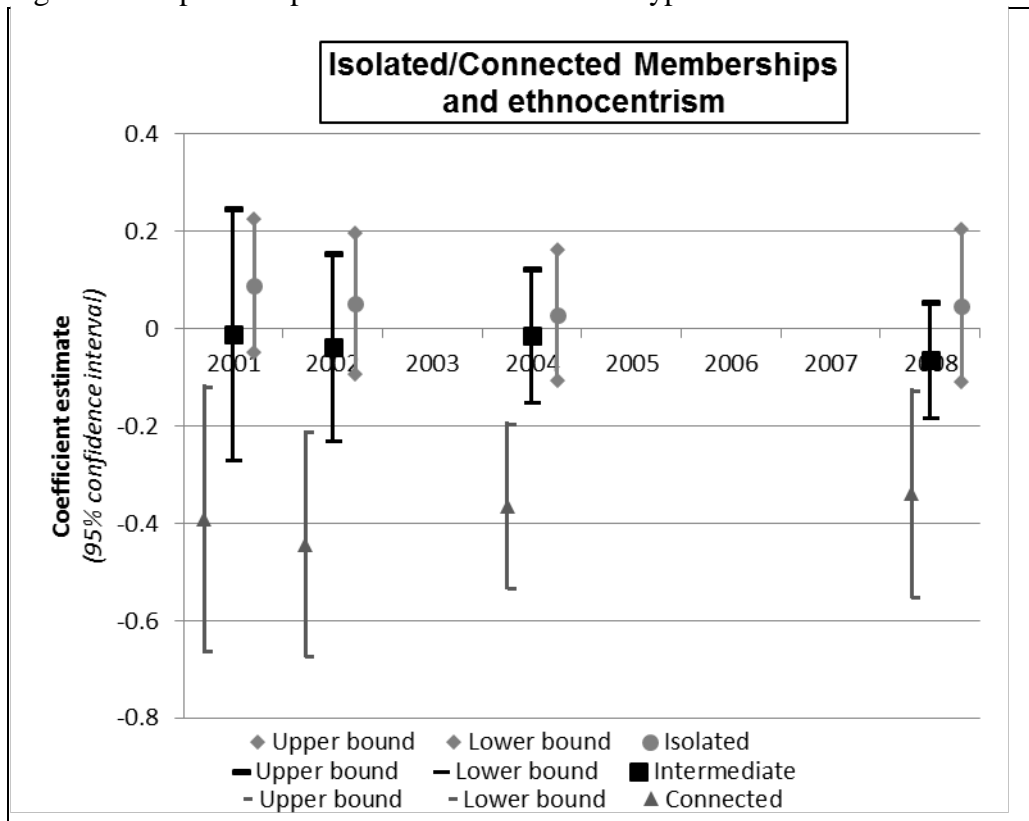
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Figure 1: Graphical representation of estimation results



Note: Dependent variable is intolerance towards immigrants (with higher values reflecting less tolerant opinions). Point estimates of interaction between Membership dummy ($Membership_{i,t}$) and year dummies ($Time_t$) from OLS regressions, with 95% confidence intervals reflected in the upper and lower bounds (adjusted for clustering at province level). Detailed results in Appendix B.

Figure 2: Graphical representation of association type results



Note: Dependent variable is intolerance towards immigrants (with higher values reflecting less tolerant opinions). Point estimates of interaction between Membership type dummies and year dummies from OLS regressions, with 95% confidence intervals reflected in the upper and lower bounds (adjusted for clustering at province level). Detailed results in Appendix B.

Table 1: Association types and categorization

Association type	Category
Religious groups	Connected
Local community advisory and school council	Connected
Socio-cultural associations	Connected
Third world development and international peace	Connected
Environmental and nature associations	Intermediate
Organizations providing aid to elderly, handicapped or deprived people	Intermediate
Arts activities (literature, dance, theatre, music)	Intermediate
Women's groups	Intermediate
Sports associations	Intermediate
Neighbourhood committee	Intermediate
Family organizations	Intermediate
Self-help groups	Intermediate
Hobby club	Intermediate
Unions	Intermediate
Associations linked to local pub	Isolated
Associations for retired people	Isolated
Fan club	Isolated
Youth associations	Isolated

Table 2: Summary statistics

Variable	Number of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Intolerance towards immigrants	5065	0.000	1.000	-2.841	2.790
Memberships	5065	0.780	0.414	0	1
Connected Memberships	5049	0.196	0.397	0	1
Intermediate Memberships	5000	0.719	0.450	0	1
Isolated memberships	5039	0.192	0.394	0	1
Gender	5065	0.515	0.500	0	1
Age	5065	46.466	17.058	18	85
Married	5055	0.605	0.489	0	1
TV-time	3666	2.340	1.676	0	15
Non-practising Christian	5063	0.459	0.498	0	1
Christian practising less than once a month	5063	0.402	0.490	0	1
Christian practising once a month or more	5063	0.139	0.346	0	1
Lower secondary education	5024	0.213	0.410	0	1
Higher secondary education	5024	0.344	0.475	0	1
Higher education (college/university)	5024	0.304	0.460	0	1

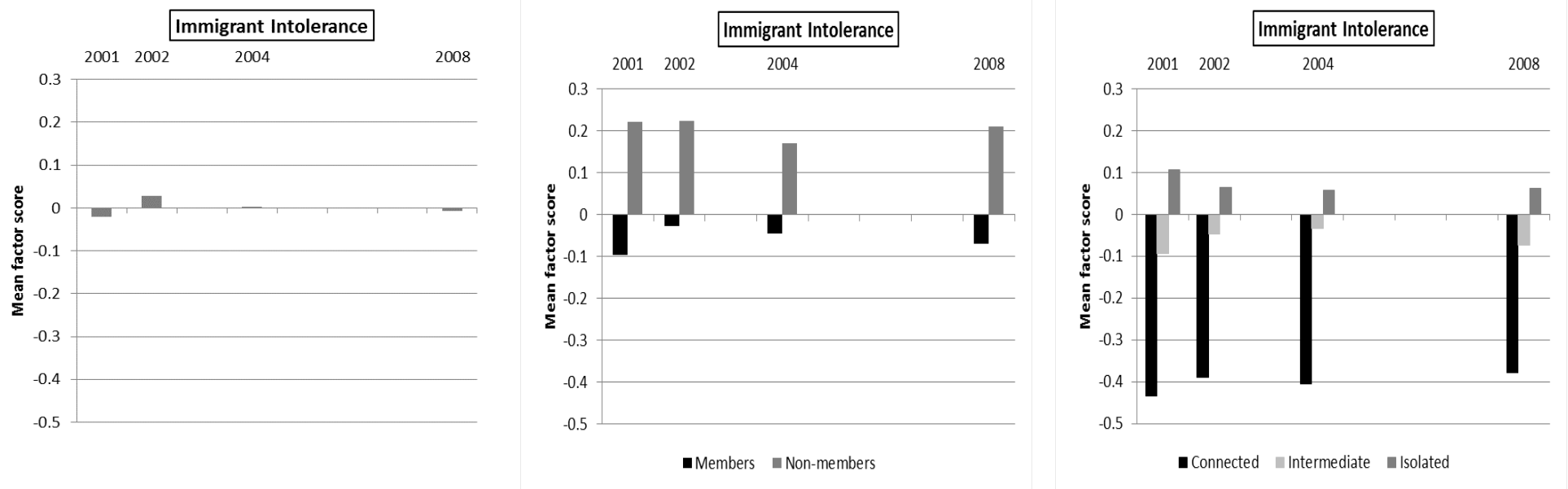
APPENDIX A

We operationalize our measure for immigrant intolerance through a principal component analysis (PCA) using answers to a number of related statements on five-point Likert-type scales. Below, we present the statements involved. We derive the first factor from the PCA analysis, and employ the factor scores as dependent variable in the analysis. Note that we run the PCA on the pooled set of data, such that the index scores are comparable across years.

Intolerance towards immigrants: ten statements (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.876$; variance explained = 48.1%)

Question wording	Component score
Immigrants contribute to the welfare of our country	-0.720
In general, immigrants cannot be trusted	0.757
Immigrants come here to take advantage of our social welfare system	0.796
Muslims are a threat to our culture and traditions	0.736
The presence of various cultures enriches our society	-0.715
If the number of jobs decreases, immigrants should be sent back to their own countries	0.772
We should welcome foreigners establishing themselves in Belgium	-0.653
People from ethnic minorities should marry within their group	0.566
Immigrants should adjust themselves to our culture and traditions	0.526
Turkish and Moroccans are nice once you get to know them	-0.641

Figure A.1: Intolerance towards immigrants in Flanders (2001-2008)



Note: For each year in the dataset, the figure depicts the average factor score reflecting intolerant opinions about immigrants. In the left-hand panel, we include all observations. In the middle-hand panel, respondents are separated based on either membership or non-membership in voluntary associations. In the right-hand panel, the association members are further differentiated depending on the connected, intermediate or isolated character of the associations in which they are a member. While not depicted, it should be noted that within-type variation far exceeds across-type variation in the factor scores of intolerance towards immigrants.

APPENDIX B

Table B.1: Full estimation results (figure 1)

Variable	Intolerance towards immigrants
Gender (1 = Male)	-0.088 * (0.039)
Age	0.006 * (0.002)
Age ²	0.000 (0.000)
Lower secondary education	-0.167 ** (0.044)
Higher secondary education	-0.370 *** (0.029)
Higher education (college/university)	-0.860 *** (0.058)
Married	0.093 (0.058)
Christian practising less than once a month	0.016 (0.044)
Christian more than once a month	-0.173 ** (0.059)
Memberships * 2001	-0.126 (0.113)
Memberships * 2002	-0.101 (0.067)
Memberships * 2004	-0.123 (0.088)
Memberships * 2008	-0.122 ** (0.035)
Year fixed effects	Yes
N	5012
(pseudo) R ²	16.02

Note: Dependent variables are such that higher values reflect less tolerant opinions about immigrants. In all cases, standard errors adjusted for clustering at level of province between brackets: ***, ** and * indicate significance as 1%, 5% and 10%, respectively. Bold-face entries in the table reflect the first survey *after* 9/11: observe that given the timing of the surveys, the first survey following 9/11 is the 2002 wave. Note also that no coefficient for association membership as such is reported since we include the full set of membership-time interactions (which makes for a perfectly collinear relation with such an overall membership dummy).

Table B.2: Full estimation results (figure 2)

Variable	Intolerance towards immigrants
Connected Memberships * 2001	-0.390 ** (0.105)
Connected Memberships * 2002	-0.442 *** (0.089)
Connected Memberships * 2004	-0.364 *** (0.065)
Connected Memberships * 2008	-0.338 *** (0.082)
Intermediate Memberships * 2001	-0.011 (0.100)
Intermediate Memberships * 2002	-0.037 (0.075)
Intermediate Memberships * 2004	-0.014 (0.053)
Intermediate Memberships * 2008	-0.064 (0.046)
Isolated Memberships * 2001	0.082 (0.054)
Isolated Memberships * 2002	0.045 (0.057)
Isolated Memberships * 2004	0.021 (0.053)
Isolated Memberships * 2008	0.040 (0.062)
Year fixed effects	Yes
Controls	Yes
N	4930
(pseudo) R ²	17.97

Note: Dependent variables are such that higher values reflect less tolerant opinions about immigrants. In all cases, standard errors adjusted for clustering at level of province between brackets: ***, ** and * indicate significance as 1%, 5% and 10%, respectively. Bold-face entries in the table reflect the first survey *after* 9/11: observe that given the timing of the surveys, the first survey following 9/11 is the 2002 wave. Note also that no coefficient for association membership as such is reported since we include the full set of membership-time interactions (which makes for a perfectly collinear relation with such an overall membership dummy).

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ While often linked to the work of Alexis de Tocqueville (1961), the relationship between associational membership and democratic *attitudes* is better designated as neo-Tocquevillian. The classic Tocquevillian argument is *not* primarily about attitudes, but about structures. That is, ‘civil society’ promotes democracy because it structurally counterbalances the state, *not* because it changes the way people think (Riley, 2005).
- ⁱⁱ Several authors build on the distinction between bridging and bonding networks to present a more differentiated perspective on the relationship between civic engagement and civic outcomes (Stolle and Rochon, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 2002, 2007; Firat and Glanville, 2016; Glanville, 2016). Bridging associations are viewed as particularly likely to induce a positive effect on civic attitudes, whereas bonding associations are acknowledged to represent a potential ‘dark side’ of civic engagement (van Deth and Zmerli, 2010). We return to this in our theoretical framework, since it suggests *type-specific* hypotheses membership-attitudes relation in the wake of the negative societal shocks.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Our use of apostrophes denotes that although individual A may still be in association Z, changes in the socio-political environment can have led to changes in individual A as well as association Z (for a similar argument in a different setting, see Hacker, 2004).
- ^{iv} Robustness checks designating three or five associations at the extremes of the scale as most connected/isolated associations were also performed. This did not affect any of the findings discussed below. The same holds when operationalising membership as the number of memberships a respondent professes in associations of a given type (respondents on average hold 1.82 memberships).
- ^v Alternatively, one might consider including a baseline membership variable, and exclude the interaction term with year 1. In such specification, the coefficient of each interaction

term indicates the difference in the membership/non-membership gap in each year relative to that same gap in the baseline year.

- vi Due to data constraints, Billiet and Swyngedouw (2009) use a slightly different measure of intolerance towards immigrants, which builds on four of the ten statements used in our analysis (i.e. statements 2, 3, 4 and 5 in the table in Appendix A). Restricting our analysis to these four statements does not affect our results, with one exception. The small increase in immigrant intolerance among association members between 2001 (-0.103) and 2002 (-0.028) now becomes statistically significant at the 90% confidence level ($t=1.646$; $p<0.10$).
- vii With the advent of social networking websites – which allow individuals to set-up/disband and join/leave groups at low cost – one could imagine that group memberships have become more fluid. Such effects are, however, not captured in our dataset, which only covers traditional forms of engagement – much like the McPherson *et al.* (1992) and Popielarz and McPherson (1995) dataset.
- viii We should also note that the isolated/connected typology is able to differentiate between groups of memberships since only 5% of respondents professes to have memberships in *both* isolated *and* connected associations. The large majority of respondents thus has *either* isolated *or* connected association memberships – rather than both. We are grateful to Katherine Stovel for highlighting this issue.