United in Victory, Divided in Defeat? Football Performance, Team Diversity, and Immigration Attitudes in Europe*

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Abstract

We study how shared experiences that make immigration salient impact public attitudes toward immigration. Combining 11 waves of the *European Social Survey* (2002-2023) with data on European national football team performance in major international competitions and team diversity, we exploit quasi-random variation in match timing relative to survey interviews to identify shifts in immigration attitudes. We develop two measures of diversity: a surname-based ancestry index and a racial classification based on visible markers using machine learning tools. We find that following defeats, respondents in countries with a more diverse national team perceive immigrants to have a worse impact on their country. Victories, in contrast, lead to higher desired levels of immigration. These effects are strongest following unexpected or close defeats and victories. In addition, defeats tend to boost support for far-right parties when team diversity is high. Our results are robust to alternative specifications in the case of defeats, suggesting a scapegoating mechanism that is translated from (perceived) out-group players onto the out-group as a whole. Our findings showcase that shared experiences such as international sporting competitions that make diversity salient generate strong emotional responses that may translate into temporary important attitude and preference shifts towards diversity.

Keywords: Immigration attitudes, Football, Diversity, Migration

JEL Codes: F22, J15, O15, O52, Z20

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1 Introduction

[...]

When things were going well, I was reading newspapers articles and they were calling me Romelu Lukaku, the Belgian striker. When things weren't going well, they were calling me Romelu Lukaku, the Belgian striker of Congolese descent. [...] I'm Belgian. We're all Belgian. That's what makes this country cool, right? I don't know why some people in my own country want to see me fail. I really don't.

[...]

- Romelu Lukaku, *I've got some things to say* (The Players' Tribune)

Few events capture collective emotion and national sentiment as powerfully as international sports. Victories and defeats are moments of shared joy or collective disappointment that reach across social boundaries, especially when diversity is salient. France's 1998 FIFA World Cup victory, for instance, gave rise to the Black-Blanc-Beur (Black-White-North African) slogan, a wordplay on *bleu-blanc-rouge* (blue, white and red – the colours of the French flag), celebrating the multicultural composition of the team and the nation it represented. The team's achievements momentarily expanded prevailing notions of what it meant to be French and who could belong. Yet, systematic evidence on whether shared experiences showcasing diversity such as national sporting events shape public attitudes toward diversity remains limited.

We address this question by examining how the performance and ethnic composition of national football teams affect immigration attitudes across Europe. Exploiting variation in national teams' performances and diversity, we identify the conditions under which collective emotions shape attitudes toward immigration. Football provides an ideal setting as a prominent marker of national identity and a powerful source of collective emotion (Depetris-Chauvin et al., 2020; Bertoli, 2017). Europe in particular provides a relevant context for this analysis since football is the most popular sport on the continent[1] and national football teams in Europe increasingly feature players with an immigrant background. Moreover, debates over immigration and belonging are among the most important and politically divisive issues in Europe today (Alesina and Tabellini, 2024). In this context, we find evidence consistent with the idea that collective emotional shocks created by sporting events affect public attitudes towards immigration. Victories by more diverse national teams are followed by more favorable attitudes toward immigration, while defeats generate an opposite and stronger pattern, indicating that while diversity may be embraced in success, it becomes a fault line in failure.

[1] See https://nielsensports.com/trends2018/.

We match data from 11 waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) spanning from 2002 to 2023 with information on 674 official competitive matches involving European national teams, including their lineups, covering 93,792 respondents across 33 countries. Our identification method exploits exogenous variations in the timing of survey interviews relative to the match dates. We compare self-reported attitudes between individuals interviewed in the days immediately before a match of their national team and individuals in the same country interviewed immediately after the same match. In our main set of results, we use a time window of ± 7 days around the match date to allow for enough observations whilst limiting the risk for unobservables to bias the analysis.

Using data on the player lineups for each match, we create our first measure of diversity using the onograph API to match the surname of every player to their predicted country of origin. Next, we use pictures of the football players and machine learning tools to match each player to a predicted race based on visual cues, such as skin color. In our baseline specification, we measure the level of diversity within a football team by constructing a simple measure of the share of predicted extra-European players at the team level for the surname measure, and of "non-native" players for the racial measure of diversity.

We find that individuals interviewed after victories by more diverse national teams — measured using surname diversity — express a higher desired level of migration from poorer countries outside of Europe into their country, increasing by 0.026 standard deviations when moving from a completely homogeneous to a fully diverse team[2]. Defeats do not significantly alter their responses to this question. On the other hand, when asked whether they think immigrants make their country a better place, post-defeat respondents provide significantly less favorable views for both the racial classification and surname diversity measures, with a gap of 0.042 and 0.043 standard deviations between fully homogenous and diverse teams, respectively; this effect is supported by both racial classification and surname diversity measures. This pattern suggests that (perceived) immigrant-background players are embraced as part of the national success story but become the scapegoat in the case of losses. Furthermore, the fact that games shift attitudes to immigrants as a whole confirms the well-documented parasocial contact hypothesis, laid out by Schiappa et al. (2005), which posits that mediated contact with individuals of an out-group can shape perceptions of the out-group as whole. We use alternative measures of diversity and find that the most consistent results relate to the negative effects of defeat.

Several additional results shed light on the mechanisms behind these key findings. Firstly, we use pre-game betting odds to calibrate whether the result of a game was expected or not to investigate whether unexpected results trigger different reactions in respondents. We find that the effects of national team

[2]This corresponds to about 33% of respondents shifting their responses by 1 point on a 1-4 scale for 5 extra-European players.

performance are driven by unexpected and close victories or defeats, suggesting that the effect is triggered by strong emotional responses. The impact of close and unexpected defeats is strong, significant, and negative for both the surname-based and racial measures of diversity. Secondly, we run an analysis including data on goal scorers and show that defeats have a smaller negative effect when a goal is scored by an immigrant-origin player, suggesting that this provokes positive emotions toward the out-group and may offset the negative response. Additionally, an event study analysis uncovers that the effect of interest is quite intense and short-lived as it spikes drastically after the game and tends to last for 3 to 6 days. Unexpected negative results cause larger and longer-lasting effects, suggesting that losses are felt more intensely than victories. Importantly, despite their seemingly short-term effects, wins and losses also impact political preferences. In fact, we use information on respondents' preferred political parties to explore whether these attitudinal changes could translate into concrete political shifts to – or away from – populist, far-left, and far-right parties. The results suggest that defeats incurred by highly diverse national teams (when more than half of the team is classified as extra-European) trigger significant increases in respondents' expressed proximity to populist, and more specifically far-right, political groups.

Taken together, these findings suggest that shared emotional experiences that make diversity salient can shape public attitudes towards immigration. Moments of national disappointment, driven by strong emotional reactions, can act as a catalyst for scapegoating, despite evidence documenting the positive impact of ethnic diversity on national football team performance (Beine et al., 2023). This pattern is consistent with the idea that diverse teams increase the *salience* of immigration, which can heighten misperceptions and activate stereotypes (Bordalo et al., 2021; Gagliarducci and Tabellini, 2022; Higham, 1955; Spiro, 2009), and that failure is externalized (Miller and Ross, 1975; Wann and Dolan, 1994). However, any positive emotions created by an immigrant-origin player during the match, such as scoring a goal, can slightly offset this effect. The difference in effects depending on the question asked may be explained by differences in attitudes vs. beliefs. On the one hand, the desired level of immigration reflects boundaries of national belonging, which may be more malleable and thus also reactive to positive experiences. On the other hand, responses to the impact of immigrants on the country may instead reflect long-run beliefs and stereotypes about immigrants. Prior work shows such beliefs are deeply rooted and resistant to factual correction (Barrera et al., 2020; Alesina and Tabellini, 2024; Hopkins et al., 2019). Thus, success in sport may not generalize to beliefs about immigrants' economic or cultural contributions, while defeats reinforce existing misperceptions.

Our empirical setting revolves around sport, but the mechanisms we identify may extend to other emotionally charged experiences, such as cultural events or national tragedies, highlighting the broader role of collective emotion in shaping attitudes and preferences. Populist movements, aware of this psychology, may exploit these emotions by emphasizing scapegoats and inflating the perceived social costs of immigration

(Alesina and Tabellini, 2024; Glaeser, 2005; Murphy and Shleifer, 2004). The salience of immigration, especially when amplified by political framing or (social) media, can strengthen stereotypes and shift voters toward parties with stronger anti-immigration policies (Barrera et al., 2020; Giavazzi et al., 2024). Moreover, recent evidence documents that changes in group visibility making immigrants more noticeable can trigger intergroup hostility (Cikara et al., 2022) and even fuel hate crimes against out-groups by natives (Müller and Schwarz, 2023). These patterns underscore how national narratives as a consequence of large sporting or other emotionally charged events can influence not only attitudes but also voting patterns and behavior towards minorities. However, the fact that goalscorers can counteract the negative effect of defeats gives us an important insight; showcasing an out-group member in a positive light around a negative experience could dampen their effects.

Lastly, we show that collective joy resulting from victories has the potential to expand the boundaries of national belonging, which may create a unique opportunity to design integration and social cohesion policies that harness shared pride in terms of positive emotional experiences, including religious or cultural events, rather than division. Depetris-Chauvin et al. (2021) show how collective experiences such as national sporting events can foster national unity, illustrating how policies that favor positive emotional responses could be used as a tool for bringing people of different backgrounds together. This could thus serve as an interesting tool to include within policies when attempting to dampen the effect of negative emotional experiences.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the related literature. Section 3 describes the data and methodology, and Section 4 details the identification strategy. Section 5 reports the main results, while Section 6 offers discussions and concluding remarks.

2 Literature Review

The rationale of this paper is based on the parasocial contact hypothesis. This theory, introduced by Schiappa et al. (2005) is an extension of the traditional contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954). The contact hypothesis posits that interaction between social groups can reduce prejudice and negative stereotypes, but only when certain criteria are fulfilled, namely common goals, inter-group cooperation, equality of status, and institutional support. In the absence of these conditions, however, inter-group contact may instead reinforce bias, stereotypes, and discrimination (Pettigrew, 1998). The parasocial contact hypothesis introduces the notion of mediated contact between groups. Individuals from different ethnic groups may not directly interact, but be confronted to one another through mediated experiences such as mass media, sports, or entertainment. In this context, Schiappa et al. (2005) predict that perceptions of out-group

members may be affected, conditional on repeated exposure, positive (or negative) experience, and salient out-group identity. However, not all forms of exposure to out-groups generate positive effects. According to Group Threat Theory (Blalock, 1967; Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010), increases in the size or visibility of out-groups may trigger anxiety and defensive reactions among members of the in-group, particularly in contexts of economic scarcity or competition (Sherif and Sherif, 1953; Campbell, 1967; Esses et al., 2001). Scholars have provided empirical evidence supporting the validity of the parasocial contact hypothesis in specific contexts and their potential to extend to tangible behavioral outcomes such as violence (Alrababa'h et al., 2021; Lago and Lago-Peñas, 2021; Pinto, 2025). To our knowledge, this paper is the first to examine this mechanism at a broad cross-national scale, providing systematic evidence of its effects across European countries.

This paper also relates to the literature exploring how seemingly unrelated events influence socio-economic outcomes. A growing body of research shows that collective experiences such as sports events, weather fluctuations, or unexpected shocks can shape behavior, preferences, and even political choices. Specifically on the impact of sports events, scholars have found local teams' performances to affect electoral support for incumbent politicians (Healy et al., 2010), domestic violence rates (Card and Dahl, 2011), attitudes towards immigrants in specific countries (Pinto, 2025; Lago and Lago-Peñas, 2021) as well as the strength of national identity and social unrest (Depetris-Chauvin et al., 2020; Kikuta and Uesugi, 2023). These findings highlight how events that may appear economically irrelevant can have powerful short-term effects on attitudes and decision-making. Our paper contributes to this literature by focusing on how national sporting outcomes—particularly when diversity is salient—affect attitudes toward immigrants, a domain where emotional and identity-driven mechanisms play a key role.

We also add to the growing economic research on the determinants of immigration attitudes and social cohesion (Card et al., 2012; Dustmann and Preston, 2019; Alesina et al., 2023). Existing work emphasizes the role of economic concerns, cultural aspects, exposure to immigrants, and information in shaping these preferences. We highlight a complementary mechanism: collective emotional experiences that temporarily alter the salience of diversity and, in turn, perceptions of diversity. Our findings relate to recent work showing that exposure to immigrants can increase both tolerance and backlash, depending on context (Steinmayr, 2021; Dustmann and Preston, 2019; Bursztyn et al., 2024). We extend this literature by showing that shared national experiences that make diversity visible can shift attitudes toward immigrants in systematic ways. These results resonate with recent evidence that increases in immigrant prominence through events such as Ramadan (Colussi et al., 2021) or terrorist attacks (Giavazzi et al., 2024) amplify misperceptions and anti-immigrant sentiment. Since such shifts in perception can influence electoral preferences and support for populist parties (Alesina and Tabellini, 2024; Glaeser, 2005; Murphy and Shleifer, 2004), as well as hostile

actions toward minorities (Müller and Schwarz, 2023; Cikara et al., 2022; Pinto, 2025), our results provide new evidence on how emotionally charged national experiences could potentially have broader social and political consequences.

A small but growing literature has examined football as a setting where diversity becomes highly salient. Alrababa'h et al. (2021) find that the arrival of Mohamed Salah, a visibly Muslim player, at Liverpool F.C. led to a 16% decline in anti-muslim hate crimes in the Liverpool area and a halving of anti-Muslim tweets compared to fans of other major clubs. Similarly, Lago and Lago-Peñas (2021) show that a larger share of foreign players in the winning team of the Spanish professional football league *La Liga* leads to more favourable views of immigrants within the region of this club in the same year. Pinto (2025) documents a shift in xenophobic behavior against immigrants within Germany depending on the performance of the German national football team: following a defeat, attacks against immigrants increase, whereas victories are associated with fewer attacks.

Relatedly, a growing body of research documents racial bias and discrimination based on skin color within football itself, underscoring how visible diversity shapes evaluations and perceptions. Kamel and Woo-Mora (2023), for example, find a skin-tone penalty in fan-driven markets, where darker-skinned players are systematically rated and valued lower. These findings align with broader evidence of "colorism" and racial biases (Hunter, 2007; Dixon and Telles, 2017; Hirschman, 2004).

We build on this evidence by providing the first systematic cross-national analysis of how football outcomes affect immigration attitudes across two decades and 33 European countries. Moreover, we show that the direction and magnitude of the effect depend on the ethnic composition of the team, offering new insight into how shared collective experiences interact with visible diversity to shape public sentiment.

3 Data and Methods

In this section, we describe the different sources of data retrieved and combined to create a novel dataset, as well as the methods used to obtain data on diversity using both surnames and images of the players.

3.1 Survey Data on Individual Attitudes

Migration attitudes

We use data from 11 waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) spanning from 2002 to 2023. The survey is administered to a representative sample for every country once every 2 years. Merging all rounds allows us to have a repeated cross-section of more than 500,000 individuals across 39 countries. The ESS has been widely

used in the economic literature to study all sorts of outcomes, including attitudes towards immigrants (Lago and Lago-Peñas, 2021; Peri et al., 2023; Pinto, 2025). The survey contains several questions consistently asked throughout all rounds that capture individual immigration attitudes (see Table 1). These variables can be classified into two categories. The first 3 questions relate to the willingness of respondents to allow many or few immigrants into their country, differing by characteristics of immigrants. The second group of variables focuses on how respondents assess the impact of immigration on various aspects of their country. Although the variables seem homogeneous within their categories, the slight differences in each question allow us to nuance our analysis and conclusions. We rely on two questions as outcomes for our baseline analysis. For clarity, we assign them codes that will be used to refer to them hereinafter:

- **ALLOW**: *Do you want to allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe?* on a scale of 1 to 4
- **IMPACT**: *Do immigrants make your country a worse or better place to live?* on a scale of 0 to 10.

In order to ease the interpretation of coefficients later, we standardize all dependent variables and reverse-code some of them such that a higher score translates into a more positive view of migrants across all variables.

Variable	Scale	Mean	N
Allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe	1 to 4	2.56	494,811
Allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority	1 to 4	2.48	495,183
Allow many/few immigrants of same race/ethnic group as majority	1 to 4	2.15	496,322
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	0 to 10	4.90	490,337
Immigration bad or good for country's economy	0 to 10	4.98	491,160
Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants	0 to 10	5.47	492,366

Table 1: Variables on Immigration Attitudes

Voting affiliation

As an additional exercise, we collect data from the ESS on respondents' self-expressed political preferences. The ESS includes a variable asking for the national party that the respondent feels closer to. By merging these data with the PopuList dataset (Rooduijn et al., 2024a), we are able to categorize the parties provided according to their (non-exclusive) type: populist, far-left, and far-right. Populist parties are classified as such when they convey the idea that society is split between two antagonistic groups: the pure people against the corrupt elite (Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn et al., 2024b). Far-left parties advocate for radical redistribution and fundamentally oppose the capitalist system (March, 2012). Finally, political groups are labelled as far-right

when they actively support a nativist[3] agenda, and present authoritarian characteristics (Rooduijn et al., 2024b). On the full sample, affiliation to populist parties averages 22.5%, far-left reaches 9.3%, and support for far-right parties amounts to 13.2% of observations.

3.2 Football data

Football results

The results of international football games are provided by Jürisoo (2025)[4] with information on the dates, places, competitions, and final scores of each game. We select a sub-sample containing all competitive games involving at least one European team from 1980 to today. Friendly games are discarded from our analysis as they involve no stake. Competitions include the FIFA World Cup and World cup qualifiers; UEFA Euros and Euro qualifiers; Nations' League and Confederations Cup. Additionally, the associated dataset contains information on who scored each goal in those games, which we use to refine our analysis later in the paper.

Lineups

For every game in our dataset, we use data from `www.worldfootball.net` to obtain information on the players who participated in each game. The composition of each team for each game played enables us to compute team-match level diversity indices. Although we have access to the entire squad for most games (11 starters and 12 players on the bench), we use only the 11 starting players in our baseline analysis.

Betting odds

We use betting odds to calibrate whether the result of a game was expected or not in order to investigate whether unexpected results trigger different reactions in respondents. We collect betting odds for the period 2005-2025 from Kaunitz et al. (2017)[5] and `https://www.oddsportal.com/football`.

Decimal odds are provided in the form of a number larger than one for each potential outcome: Team 1 wins, draw, team 2 wins. Taking the multiplicative inverse of each odd gives an estimation of the ex-ante chance of each result occurring (after adjusting for the bookmaker's margin). Thus, we obtain, for every match in our dataset, the probability that team 1 wins, that team 2 wins, and that they draw. Only 0.01% of football matches could not be matched to odds, we disregard them in our analysis. Additionally, we manually compare some football odds across different sources and find that there are no major differences in odds predictions, confirming that the odds we collected are reliable. After deriving the probability of each

[3]Nativism is defined as an the belief that the nation should be inhabited exclusively by natives and protected from non-native influence (Mudde, 2007).

[4]Data available at: `https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/martj42/international-football-results-from-1872-to-2017`

[5]Data available at: `https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/austro/beat-the-bookie-worldwide-football-dataset`

team winning, we classify all games into categories according to the distribution of ex-ante probabilities. Let P_i denote the probability that team i wins, P_j the probability that its opponent wins, and P_{draw} the probability of a draw, such that:

$$P_i + P_j + P_{\text{draw}} = 1.$$

We classify results according to the ex-ante likelihood of winning. A *win* is defined as *expected* if the team was more likely to win than not, that is $P_i > 0.5$. Conversely, a *win* is *unexpected* if $P_i < 0.5$, implying that winning was less likely than losing or drawing. We further define a *close win* as a case where both teams had ex-ante winning probabilities below 0.5 ($P_i < 0.5$ and $P_j < 0.5$). The same classification applies symmetrically to losses.

3.3 Diversity Data

Once data on historical football results and players involved in every game have been collected, we compute team-level diversity indices at the match level along different dimensions.

Surnames

Patronyms are widely used in the literature to estimate the ancestry of individuals in patrilineal societies. Papers published in several subfields of Economics have relied on surnames to establish all kinds of connections (Clark et al., 2015; Buonanno and Vanin, 2017; Kerr, 2018). More recently, Beine et al. (2023) have constructed surname-based diversity indices to link the ancestral diversity of football teams to their performances. We rely on a similar methodology to infer the origins of football players in our dataset. We use the Onograph API[6] that enables us to match the surname of every player to the top 3 countries where the name is the most prevalent ($country_1$, $country_2$, $country_3$)[7]. Using information on both the incidence (number of occurrences of the name in each country) and the frequency (ratio of people bearing the surname in each country), we map each name to one country of origin by maximising the variable: ($Incidence_i \times Frequency_i$, $i \in country_1, country_2, country_3$). This method, developed by Beine et al. (2023) prevents large countries from being disproportionately weighted, which would occur if we focused only on raw incidence. It also corrects for the bias toward smaller countries that arises when relying solely on frequency.

As a baseline, we construct a simple measure of the share of extra-European players at the match-team level, therefore discarding intra-European migration. In later stages, we incorporate more sophisticated

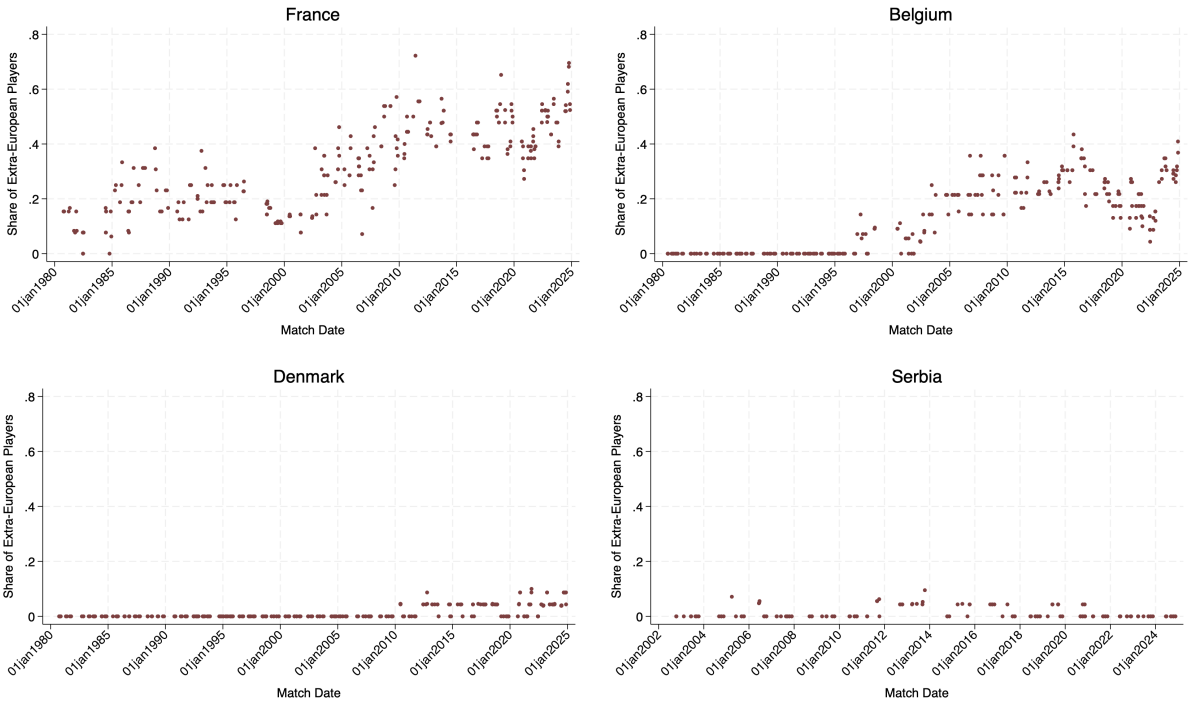
[6]Data comes from www.forebears.com and their dedicated API: OnoGraph.

[7]Footballers called by nicknames or mononyms, as is often the case in Iberian countries, are matched through their real surname.

measures of cultural and genetic distances in the analysis.

Figure 1 depicts the evolution of the share of players estimated to have extra-european ancestry through time across different national teams. There is significant heterogeneity in the trajectories of the selected countries since 1980. Notably, France already displayed a significant level of heterogeneity in the late 1980s and continued diversifying until seemingly hitting a plateau at around 60% of extra-european players. Belgium and Denmark also experienced slight increases in diversity although this trend started later than France. Both teams were remarkably homogenous before that (1995 for Belgium; 2010 for Denmark). Finally, Serbia is representative of most eastern European countries with a low overall level of diversity and no noticeable upward trend.

Figure 1: Surname diversity in selected countries



Racial Classification

Individuals face discrimination based on how they appear—their skin color, facial features, and overall phenotype—regardless of their actual origins, nationality, or immigrant status (Hunter, 2007; Dixon and Telles, 2017; Hirschman, 2004). This appearance-based discrimination has also been documented in football contexts (Kamel and Woo-Mora, 2023; Sonntag and Ranc, 2015).

As such, using visual appearance as an indicator of team-level diversity allows us to capture the type of diversity that triggers perception-based racism among supporters. Crucially, this approach identifies football

players who may be targets of racist abuse despite having native surnames or being born in the country they represent, or on overseas territories (e.g. Guadeloupe for France), simply because their physical appearance marks them as visibly different from the majority population[8]. Our racial classification method thus measures diversity as supporters would perceive it—based on what they see, not on players' actual ethnic backgrounds or family histories.

We construct a novel dataset with predicted race classifications based on image classification methods using machine learning. We collect approximately 70,000 images representing almost 16,000 players from https://www.national-football-teams.com/continent/1/Europe.html spanning 1980-2025 across all UEFA-eligible countries. Only 0.84% of images cannot be matched to football players in the lineups dataset.

Model training and validation. We employ a Vision Transformer (ViT) model (Dosovitskiy et al., 2021) for race classification, a state-of-the-art deep learning architecture for image classification[9]. We initialize the model with weights pre-trained on ImageNet-21k (Deng et al., 2009), a large-scale image classification dataset containing over 14 million images across approximately 21,000 categories. This pre-training provides the model with general visual feature recognition capabilities.

We employ a two-stage approach in order to categorize our players according to **perceived** race. First, we fine-tune the ViT model on 1,400 football player images manually labeled by three independent raters from different European backgrounds, adapting it specifically to our classification task. The finetuned ViT then classifies all 70,000 images. The model processes images as inputs and outputs probability scores for each of our three categories (White, Black, Mixed), along with a predicted category according to the highest probability score. An example of final classifications is depicted in Figure 2 for three different players.

Annotation procedure. The 1,400 training images were selected using stratified sampling to ensure representation across time periods and countries. Each player appears only once in the training set to avoid temporal duplicates. The sample includes 500 images labeled by all three raters to assess inter-rater reliability, plus 300 unique images per rater to increase coverage. We use three categories: White, Black, and

[8]For instance, English national team player Jude Bellingham has an English surname but may still be perceived as an "outsider" by some supporters based on his appearance, as anecdotal evidence of racism suggests.

[9]An alternative to race classification that has been used in the literature is measuring objective skin color using pixel-level color detection (Adukia et al., 2023; Kamel and Woo-Mora, 2023). This approach involves face detection, skin segmentation (removing eyes, nose, mouth, hair), and k-means clustering in CIELAB color space to extract a continuous skin tone measure (L^* value from 0-100). While this method provides an objective measure independent of cultural perceptions, we ultimately rely on the race classification approach as it better captures how players are perceived by supporters—the mechanism through which visual diversity might affect attitudes. Perception-based classification aligns more closely with our theoretical framework of how diversity exposure influences immigration attitudes. In addition, due to the wide range of years and countries in our dataset, and thus the inconsistency in pictures, skin color predictions are generally less accurate in our case. Heavy lighting and shadows heavily influence the results and thus this measure is less reliable in our context. The skin-tone approach may be valuable for future robustness checks.

(a) Black

(b) White

(c) White

Figure 2: Example pictures with their ViT classification.

Mixed, with the latter representing players of ambiguous or mixed-race appearance. Labels were determined by majority vote among the three raters.

Model performance. Our final model achieves 88.4% validation accuracy on a held-out test set of football player images (85/15 train-validation split), demonstrating strong performance for this three-category classification task and comparable to similar tasks in the applied machine learning literature[10].

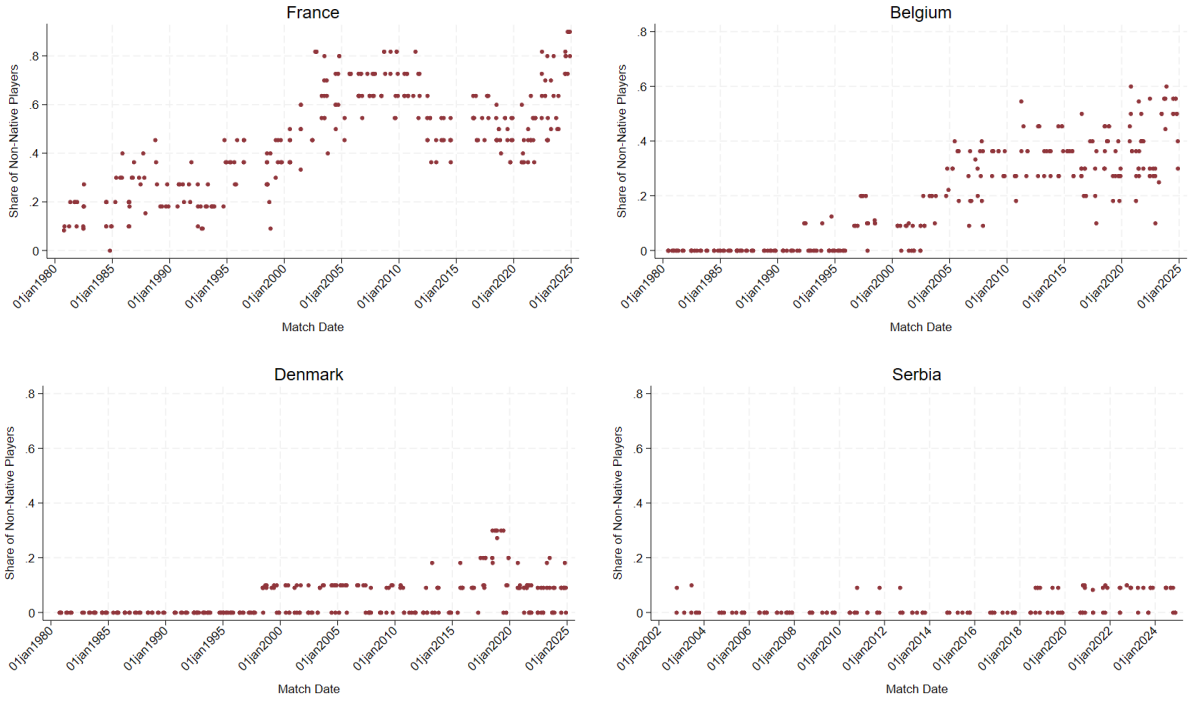
Diversity measurement. We measure team diversity using players' perceived origins based on visual appearance. Players classified as Black by the algorithm are categorized as "(perceived) non-native" (here on forth "non-native"), while players classified as White are categorized as "(perceived) native" (here on forth "native"). For Mixed-category players, we apply an additional surname-based refinement: players with native surnames (as classified by our method in the previous section) are recoded as "native," while those with non-native surnames are classified as "non-native"[11]. This approach captures the visual diversity that supporters would perceive when observing team lineups, regardless of players' actual nationality or heritage. Team-level diversity is measured as the share of players classified as "non-native" in each match. Note that the correlation between the diversity measure according to this racial classification and surname diversity is 0.37, motivating the introduction of this additional diversity measure. Figure 3 displays the measured shares of non-native players in selected countries from 1980 onwards. Interestingly, the trajectories across

[10]We tested an alternative approach using the FairFace dataset (Kärkkäinen and Joo, 2019), a published dataset of approximately 100,000 labeled face images with seven race categories (White, Black, East Asian, Southeast Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, Latino/Hispanic). Fine-tuning on FairFace achieved only 71.5% accuracy on our football player validation set. This lower performance stems from (1) FairFace's seven categories creating more classification complexity than our three-category system, and (2) FairFace images consisting primarily of portrait-style photographs that differ from football player images in terms of angles, lighting, and context. This comparison demonstrates that domain-specific training data substantially outperforms general-purpose datasets in our context, which is why we decided to employ this method for our main diversity measure, even when the general-purpose dataset is considerably larger and would have provided us with more heterogeneity in our racial classification.

[11]This combined approach (visual appearance + surname) captures context-dependent perceptions of diversity. For instance, German national team player İlkay Gündoğan is classified as Mixed by the algorithm and has a non-native (Turkish) surname, thus categorized as "non-native" when playing for Germany. However, if he played for Turkey, the same visual classification and surname would result in "native" status, as Turkish surnames are native in that context. In contrast, Antonio Rüdiger is classified as Black by the algorithm; for such clear visual classifications, the surname-based refinement does not apply, and he is categorized as "non-native" regardless of his German surname.

countries seem to be quite similar to the surname diversity measures. Absolute levels of diversity, however, are consistently higher for the racial classification measure. This likely reflects the fact that many players have native (European) surnames but facial features classified as non-native, whereas the reverse pattern is uncommon.

Figure 3: Diversity in selected countries based on racial classification.



4 Empirical Strategy

Our strategy exploits the fact that survey dates are plausibly uncorrelated to football games. Using our survey and football data sources, we are able compare hundreds of pre- and post-game survey outcomes by assuming that individuals do not systematically differ, except for the fact that a football match took place inbetween. Combining survey data with contextually irrelevant events has been widely used in the economics and political science literature as a way to credibly estimate short-term causal effects of specific events (Depetris-Chauvin et al., 2020; Kikuta and Uesugi, 2023; Peri et al., 2023; Pinto, 2025)[12]. The choice

[12]Note that one limitation of our set-up is that the timing of the ESS survey restricts the type of matches we are able to analyse. The World Cup and European Cup tournament stages always take place in June and July, during which the survey is rarely conducted. Furthermore, we ignore games that are close together (i.e. maximum 1 game per ±7 day period), which is often the case during the major tournaments. This means our final dataset contains mostly games from the qualification rounds or from the Nations League. We argue, however, that any effects we find here can only be amplified in a tournament setting where the stakes are higher. In addition, the qualification rounds and Nations League have more breadth since all countries participate in them.

of the time window before and after each game is key as larger windows allow for more observations but increase the risk of treatment and control groups being mixed across matches. In line with the associated literature, we opt for a baseline bandwidth of 7 days (pre and post). Observations that fall in both a treatment and control group are discarded from the dataset. Other time windows are investigated in robustness tests. Equation 1 displays our benchmark specification.

$$Y_{i,c,m,d,t} = \alpha + \beta_1 Post_{i,c,m,d,t} + \beta_2 (Post_{i,c,m,d,t} \times \mathbf{Diversity_{c,m}}) + \gamma' X_i + \theta_{c,m} + \lambda' \Lambda_d + \varepsilon_{i,c,m,d,t} \quad (1)$$

The outcome of our specification is the answer of respondent i in country c around match m on day d of year t. We exploit variation in a post-event dummy - the event can be a win or a loss - and interact it with the measured level of diversity of the national team of country c during match m. To ensure that the pre-post comparisons are done in the proximity of the same match, we incorporate match-country fixed effects. These fixed effects also enable us to control for all country-level political or economic confounders that may vary from one match to another. In addition we add day of the week, day of the month, and month of the year fixed effects. Finally, individual-level potential confounders are accounted for: gender, education (in years), age, age squared, unemployment dummy and a rural/urban dummy. Following Depetris-Chauvin et al. (2020), standard errors are adjusted for heteroskedasticity and clustered at the country-year level. This is a more conservative scale than the match-country level.

Although the identification strategy ensures that individuals in the pre- and post-game periods do not differ systematically, we check for potential imbalances in individual characteristics which could bias our estimates. Table 2 illustrates the differences between both samples in the case where the bandwidth chosen is 15 days. We observe that 3 variables significantly differ in the post-game sample compared to the pre-game sample (2 for the post-victory sample). The other covariates are well balanced. This means that respondents interviewed after a game are on average slightly younger, more educated, and more employed than their counterparts in the pre-game sample. Although this could potentially be a cause for concern, we argue that the magnitudes of the differences are limited: less than a year of age difference (1.9% of the mean and 0.049 standard deviations); fewer than two months of education difference (1.3% of the mean 0.040 standard deviations); and 0.28 percentage points lower unemployment rate (4.8% of the mean 0.019 standard deviations). Differences are consistently lower for the post-victory sample. In addition, we include these covariates in all of our specifications as control variables.

Table 2: Balance in covariates

			Post-game		**Post-victory**	
Covariate	Observations	Mean	Estimate	p-value	Estimate	p-value
Female	93,751	0.530	.0027	0.265	.0049	0.167
Age (years)	93 ,448	49.36	**-.9164**	0.000	**-.6530**	0.001
Years of Education	92,818	12.72	**.1628**	0.000	**.1424**	0.000
Unemployed (self-reported)	93,792	0.059	**-.0028**	0.002	-.0017	0.150
Urban	93,792	0.61	.0050	0.234	.0079	0.173
Hours spent watching TV	56,555	4.16	-.0186	0.249	-.0280	0.228
Born in Country	93,701	0.900	.0010	0.498	.0022	0.304
Both Parents Native	93,204	0.824	-.0013	0.475	-.0024	0.313

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–match level. We report point estimates and corresponding p-values from regressions of each covariate (listed on the left) on Post-game (=1 if the respondent was interviewed within 15 days following a match; 0 otherwise) and Post-victory (=1 if the interview took place within 15 days after a victory; 0 otherwise.) Estimates are obtained from OLS regressions including country–match fixed effects, ensuring that comparisons across covariates are made between respondents interviewed around the same game in the same country.

5 Results

Baseline

In Table 3, we test the empirical relationship between national team performance interacted with team diversity on the desired level of immigration into the respondent's country and the perceived impact of immigrants on the baseline sample of all respondents within ±7 days of one match. We include all calendar and country-match fixed effects, as well as individual controls across all specifications. All columns display the results for diversity as measured by surnames ("extra-european") in Panel A and by racial classification ("non-native") in Panel B.

In Panel A, column (1) shows that following a victory, more diverse national football teams are associated with higher desired levels of immigration in a country. In contrast, diversity reduces the desired level of immigration after a defeat, although the effect is only significant at the 10% level (column (2)). The magnitudes are similar in both directions. The coefficient on the interaction term captures, conditional on the match outcome, the impact of moving from a fully homogeneous to a fully diverse team on respondents' attitudes. Conditional on a victory, one additional extra-European player in the starting lineup (based on surname origin) is associated with an increase of 0.026 standard deviations in the desired level of immigration—equivalent to a 0.024-point increase on a 1-to-4 scale. This means that if just under half the team has extra-european ancestry (5 players), 33% of people shift their desired level of immigration by one full point upwards on the 1-4 scale relative to a fully native team. For defeats, it corresponds to 29% of respondents decreasing their desired level of immigration in the country by one point. While the marginal effects are modest, larger changes in team diversity could translate into meaningful shifts in public attitudes. These

results only hold when using the measure of diversity based on surnames; when using racial classifications in Panel B, we do not observe the same direction of change for victories, the magnitude is much lower, and the results are insignificant.

Table 3: Baseline results

VARIABLES	(1) ALLOW	(2) ALLOW	(3) IMPACT	(4) IMPACT
Panel A. Surname diversity				
post-victory	-0.0492**		-0.00946	
	(0.0246)		(0.0321)	
× extra-european	0.230**		-0.0894	
	(0.0999)		(0.141)	
post-defeat		0.0146		0.0407
		(0.0273)		(0.0262)
× extra-european		-0.208*		-0.394***
		(0.122)		(0.0660)
Constant	-0.795***	-0.811***	-0.426***	-0.452***
	(0.111)	(0.108)	(0.109)	(0.109)
Panel B. Visible diversity				
post-victory	0.00575		0.0333	
	(0.0274)		(0.0326)	
× non-native	-0.0651		-0.229**	
	(0.0779)		(0.113)	
post-defeat		0.0113		0.0327
		(0.0316)		(0.0284)
× non-native		-0.0804		-0.332**
		(0.134)		(0.162)
Constant	-0.139	-0.148	-0.699***	-0.700***
	(0.128)	(0.127)	(0.150)	(0.154)
Observations	54,711	54,711	54,121	54,121
R-squared	0.202	0.202	0.153	0.153
Calendar FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-match FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Panel A reports results using surname-based ancestry as a measure of diversity, while Panel B uses a measure based on visible racial classification. Each column presents OLS estimates of the interaction between national team performance and diversity on immigration attitudes. *Post-victory* equals 1 if the respondent was interviewed within 7 days after a victory, and *Post-defeat* equals 1 if interviewed within 7 days after a defeat. All models include calendar and country–match fixed effects, as well as individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

A different pattern emerges when, instead, the question addresses the perceived impact of migrants on a country. Columns (3) and (4) show that, after both a victory and a defeat, respondents in countries with a higher share of non-native players have a *worse* perception of the impact of migration on a country, with a much stronger effect for defeats. On average, one additional non-native player (as measured by image classification) leads to a decrease of 0.025 standard deviations in the perception of immigrants' impact on the country following a victory. This means that for just under half the team being non-native, a victory leads to 15% of people decreasing their response to this question by 2 points on the 1-to-10 scale (significant at the 5% level). For defeats, the percentage of people shifting their attitudes by 2 points downwards

corresponds to lies by 25% for the racial diversity measure and 26% for the surname-base measure, which corresponds to around a quarter of respondents. The absence of a positive effect in the case of a victory is particularly interesting in this case, as it suggests that the positive impact of immigrant-origin players cannot be translated to the broader out-group. Instead, the results indicate a form of scapegoating when the national team loses[13] and even when they win when it comes to visible diversity.

Conditioning on odds

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the potential mechanisms behind the different shifts in attitudes, we look at the difference in estimates for expected and unexpected wins or losses, as well as close matches. We apply our benchmark specification on subsets containing exclusively these types of games, as defined in section 3. Figures 4a and 4b show the results.

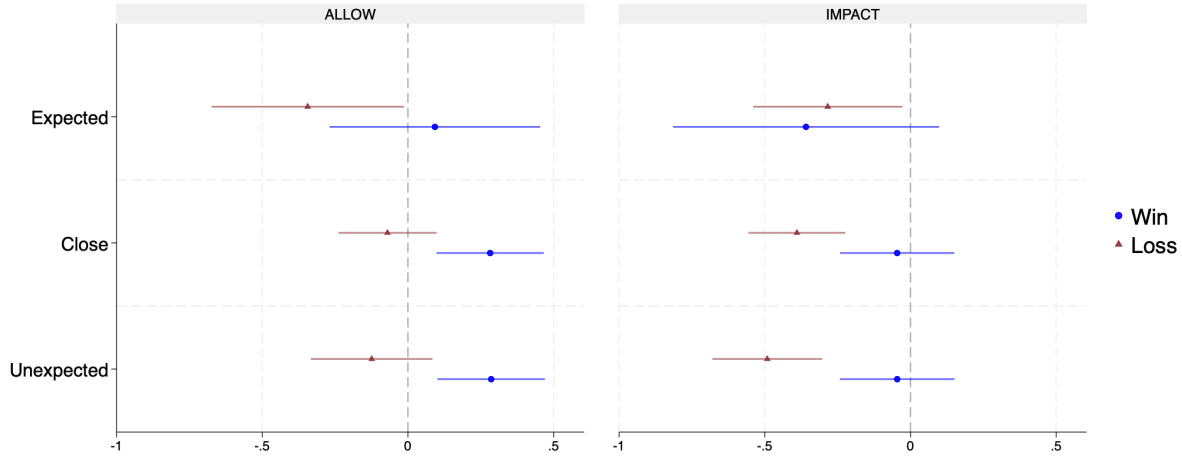
Across both measures of diversity, close and unexpected defeats generate more negative perceptions on the impact of migrants on the country. Furthermore, only expected wins drive the negative view of non-native players. Moreover, unexpected and close wins drive the positive effect of diversity on the desired level of immigrants in the case of our surname-based diversity measure. These findings highlight two mechanisms: (1) shifts in attitudes seem to be driven by strong emotional reactions since the strongest effects are seen for unexpected or close matches; (2) across both diversity measures, our results confirm the externalization of failure and parasocial contact hypothesis. More specifically, the fact that a higher share of (perceived) immigrant-origin individuals on the losing national team results in more negative views about the impact of the out-group as a whole strongly suggests that the failure is attributed to non-native players and non-natives more broadly.

Dynamics

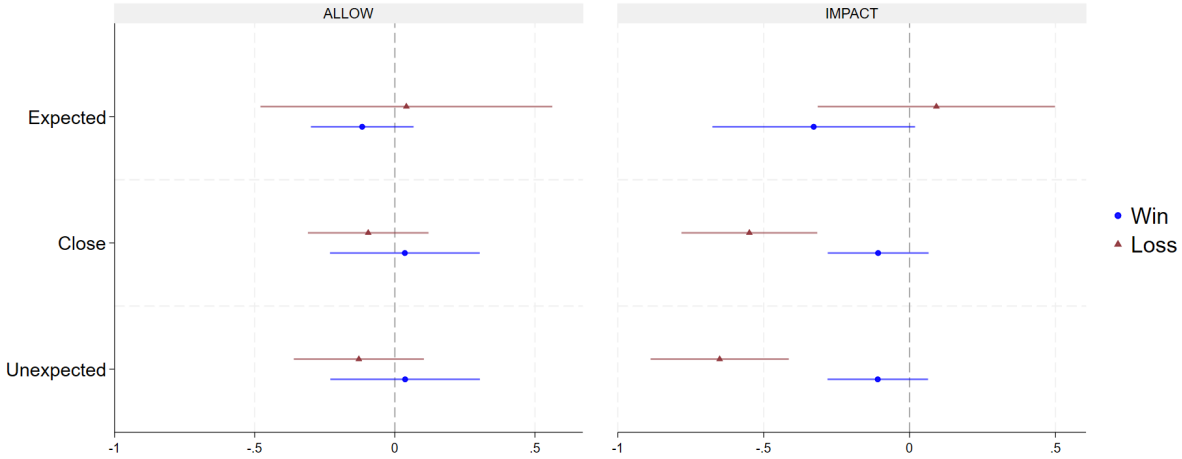
In the appendix, we display results for different time windows. Tables A1 and A2 show the results of the benchmark specification for time windows of 3 days and 15 days, respectively. Reassuringly, the directions of the effects remain consistent across bandwidths, but differences in magnitude and significance can be observed. Diversity based on racial classification (Panel B) affects attitudes more strongly (both in magnitude and significance) for the narrow 3-day bandwidth for the defeats for both the ALLOW and IMPACT variables, and completely dies out after 14 days. On the other hand, the effect for the surname-based diversity measure seems to last across the larger 14-day bandwidth for defeats.

[13]The social psychology literature documents this type of success/failure attributional bias (e.g. see Miller and Ross (1975)): individuals tend to internalize success but externalize failure. This type of bias among sports supporters has been well-documented (Wann and Dolan, 1994).

Figure 4: Results conditional on odds



(a) Surname diversity



(b) Visible diversity

Notes: Each point represents the estimated coefficient of the interaction between national team performance (win or loss) and team diversity on immigration attitudes. Horizontal bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. Results are shown separately for expected, close, and unexpected results, defined using pre-game betting odds. Panel (a) and Panel (b) use surname-based and racial–based measures of diversity, respectively. All regressions include country–match, calendar fixed effects and individual controls with robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level.

This prompts us to extend our specification to a dynamic setting in order to investigate both the persistence and the timing of the effect of interest over several days around football matches. The estimation replaces the single post-defeat indicator with a set of 3-day time bins covering a symmetric 28-day window centered on the match. Those surveyed 1–3 days before the match form the reference bin, while subsequent bins capture 3-day intervals before and after the event[14] (e.g., -14 to -13, -12 to -10, -9 to -7, ... , +13 to

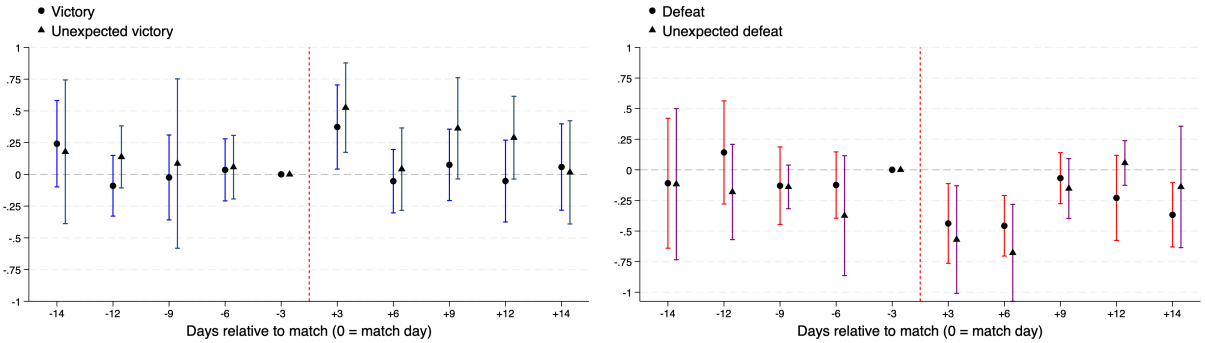
[14]The bins at both ends of the period only contain 2 days.

+14). This structure allows for flexible dynamics in attitudes both prior to and following the match while retaining sufficient observations per period. For conciseness, we display only the effects that we found to be most significant in the benchmark results for the skin-color measure, *i.e.* the positive effect of diversity on ALLOW during victories and negative effect on IMPACT during defeats.

Figure 5a displays the effect of surname diversity conditional on victories on the ALLOW variable. We observe a spike in the outcome in the 1-3 days after a game which disappears in the following days. The absence of noticeable pre-trends enables us to rule out anticipation behavior or other sources of endogeneity. Unexpected victories lead to a larger increase in the willingness of respondents to welcome migrants. This effect is larger in magnitude but also lasts longer than the short-lived effect found for all victories.

Figure 5b presents results conditional on defeats for the IMPACT question. The negative effect of defeats is longer lasting in this case (until 6 days after). Once again, the unexpected defeats cause a greater disruption in outcomes between respondents from countries with homogenous teams and those with more genetically diverse national squads. The effect shrinks after 6 days post-match and remains insignificant until the end of the period. These results indicate that an additional factor may be at play: loss aversion. Losses are felt more intensely and for a longer period of time than victories.

Figure 5: Event Study: Football Victories and Defeats



(a) Victory and *ALLOW*

(b) Defeat and *IMPACT*

Notes: Each panel plots coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from regressions interacting team diversity with 3-day time bins around national team performances. In Panel (a), the dependent variable is *ALLOW*—support for allowing immigrants to live in the country. In Panel (b), the dependent variable is *IMPACT*—whether respondents believe immigrants have a positive impact on the country. The baseline period (-3 to -1) is normalized to zero. Robust standard errors are clustered by country $\times$ year.

In the appendix, we display a similar dynamic analysis of the effect of defeats on the IMPACT variable for the diversity measure based on racial classification, focusing on unexpected and expected defeats. Figure A1 shows that unexpected defeats significantly worsen perceptions of respondents regarding the perceived impact of immigrants on their country for at least 6 days, whereas for expected defeats there is no comparable effect. The effect dies out after this initial period, similar to what we observe in Figure 5b.

Extra-European Goal Scorers

To test for the strength of the parasocial contact hypothesis, we analyze whether situations where a player of (predicted) immigrant background becomes more salient – in a positive manner – impacts our results. We use the data collected on goal scorers, providing us with the names of all scorers for every game. We define the variable "Immigrant Scorer" to be equal to 1 if a player estimated to be extra-European scored a goal for one's country's team during the match, and 0 if not. Table 4 shows the result of the alternative specification, where we interact our post-game outcome dummy with the level of diversity on the team *and* our Immigrant Scorer variable. The effect is most pronounced when conditioning on defeats and for the IMPACT variable. As before, the measure of diversity affects our IMPACT variable negatively. However, an extra-European player scoring a goal during a loss may counteract this effect: if a (predicted) immigrant-origin player scores during a defeat, respondents' views of immigrants are still negatively affected, but less so than in the case where no extra-European player scores. For low levels of team diversity, the net effect on attitudes is even positive. Despite losing, an extra-European player scoring for a low-diversity team will therefore improve attitudes towards immigrants as a whole in his country. This finding strengthens the possibility of a *salience* mechanism, as it shows that players with (perceived) immigrant roots being put forward positively in times of collective failure can compensate the effect of losing on attitudes toward immigrants.

Additional Attitudes on Immigrants

We also investigate how football matches affect other questions about migration that are systematically asked in the survey. In the appendix, Table A3 provides valuable insights on how respondents adjust their perception of the impact of migrants on their country. We observe a strong negative impact of defeats involving diverse teams on the perceived impact of migrants on the country's *economy* and *cultural life*. This negative effect is also validated with our measure based on visible racial classification for the economy question. Regarding questions about allowing migrants into the country, results are less robust and are only validated in the questions involving migrants of the same ethnic group (see Table A4).

Robustness

In order to test the sensitivity of our results to alternative specifications, we incorporate two more refined measures of team diversity. These measures draw on the bilateral matrix of genetic diversity developed by Spolaore and Wacziarg (2009), using data from Nei (1987) and Cavalli-Sforza et al. (1994). For each pair of countries, we obtain a genetic distance index capturing the level of genetic similarity between their populations. We then aggregate these bilateral distances at the team level by taking the average distance

Table 4: Extra-European Scorers

VARIABLES	(1) ALLOW	(2) ALLOW	(3) IMPACT	(4) IMPACT
Post-victory effects				
Post-victory	-0.0362		-0.0307	
	(0.0289)		(0.0380)	
× Extra-European share	0.0329		0.176	
	(0.151)		(0.259)	
× Immigrant scorer	-0.0193		0.0545	
	(0.0399)		(0.0647)	
× Immigrant scorer × Extra-European share	0.252		-0.393	
	(0.180)		(0.295)	
Post-defeat effects				
Post-defeat		0.0109		0.0401
		(0.0271)		(0.0267)
× Extra-European share		-0.123		-0.425***
		(0.112)		(0.0816)
× Immigrant scorer		-0.0513		0.153***
		(0.0845)		(0.0395)
× Immigrant scorer × Extra-European share		-0.197		-0.131
		(0.153)		(0.0925)
Constant	-0.0481	-0.0524	-0.275***	-0.282***
	(0.0347)	(0.0345)	(0.0399)	(0.0379)
Observations	54,684	54,684	54,092	54,092
R-squared	0.201	0.201	0.152	0.152
Calendar FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country–match FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Columns (1)–(4) use a generic indicator for whether an extra-European player scored (*Immigrant scorer*). Each column reports OLS estimates of the interaction between national team performance, team diversity, and scorer identity. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

between each player's inferred country of origin and the country for which they play. This provides us with a weighted average of genetic distances within each team. The two measures obtained – the F_{st} index and the nei index – are highly correlated but exhibit different theoretical properties (Spolaore and Wacziarg, 2009). This refinement allows us to grasp more subtle differences in the compositions of teams and reflect underlying genetic and cultural diversity within teams. As shown in Table A5, the negative effect of team diversity on the IMPACT variable during defeats remains robust to these alternative diversity measures. On the other hand, the positive association between diversity during victories on the ALLOW variable vanishes when considering F_{st} and Nei indices.

Despite a clear identification strategy, a number of concerns could challenge the causal interpetation of our findings. One concern is that the level of diversity of a national team is correlated with football popularity, performance, and viewership of games in the country. This is not unfounded since Beine et al. (2023) find team-level genetic diversity to affect positively their performance, which could in turn affect popularity and viewership. It would mean that the effect which we attribute to team diversity in shaping attitudes towards immigrants could be driven by the fact that more diverse teams are more broadly followed. Our estimated coefficients could hence reflect differences in exposure rather than the causal effect of diversity itself. To address this issue, we develop a standardized within-country diversity measure centered around each country-level mean over the whole period (2002-2024). This enables us to isolate cross-country heterogeneity in diversity levels in order to focus solely on within-country variation. A positive value of this variable means that the team is more diverse than usual, and conversely for a negative value. Columns (3) and (6) of Table A5 display the effect of the within-country estimator for the diversity measure based on surname-ancestry; while columns (4) and (8) relate to the visible diversity measure.While the positive effect of victories on the ALLOW variable loses its significance for both measures, the negative effect of defeats from diverse teams on the IMPACT variable remains for surname diversity. In other words, regardless of the absolute level of team diversity, a spike in the diversity level of a team associated with a defeat will worsen people's opinion about how immigrants affect their country in the days following this specific match.

Additionally, we check that the effect is not just a result of a more general feeling of euphoria. We thus run our baseline specification including an additional control for self-reported happiness. Table A6 shows that only defeats from diverse teams make individuals significantly less happy, whereas victories do not provoke equally positive reactions. The effect on immigration attitudes barely moves when introducing happiness as a control variable, which suggests that the respondents' shift in attitudes does not reflect a generally more positive or negative mood post game.

These additional tests reveal that the negative effects of losses are the most robust to alternative specifications and strongly supports the thesis that immigrants become scapegoats in times of collective disap-

pointment.

Political preferences

We now investigate whether the effects found on attitudes towards immigrants translate into deeper changes on electoral preferences. Notably, association with far-right parties, which by definition support nativist policies, could be affected by national team results. We rely on the same benchmark specification as shown in equation 1 and replace the outcome variable with indicators of respondents supporting, respectively, populist, far-left, or far-right parties.

Table 5: Voting preferences

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
VARIABLES	Populist	Populist	Far-left	Far-left	Far-right	Far-right
post-victory	0.0104		-0.00860		0.00676	
	(0.0124)		(0.0102)		(0.0115)	
× extra-European	0.0457		0.00969		0.0427	
	(0.0658)		(0.0777)		(0.0618)	
post-defeat		-0.0104		0.0107		-0.0269**
		(0.0149)		(0.00806)		(0.0122)
× extra-European		0.115**		-0.000920		0.131***
		(0.0541)		(0.0250)		(0.0486)
Constant	0.328***	0.333***	0.0499***	0.0462***	0.250***	0.256***
	(0.0239)	(0.0244)	(0.0152)	(0.0148)	(0.0205)	(0.0210)
Observations	24,466	24,466	24,466	24,466	24,466	24,466
R-squared	0.209	0.209	0.171	0.171	0.231	0.231
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Each column reports OLS estimates of the interaction between national team performance and team diversity on voting preferences. The dependent variable is a binary indicator equal to one if the respondent reports supporting a populist, far-left, or far-right party. Post-victory (Post-defeat) equals one if the respondent was interviewed within seven days following a victory (defeat). All specifications include calendar and country–match fixed effects, as well as individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 5 displays the results of our estimations using our diversity measure based on surname-ancestry. Columns (1)–(2) report effects on support for populist parties, columns (3)–(4) on far-left parties, and columns (5)–(6) on far-right parties. For each party family, odd columns correspond with post-victory effects and even columns with post-defeat effects, with interactions capturing heterogeneity by the share of extra-European players.

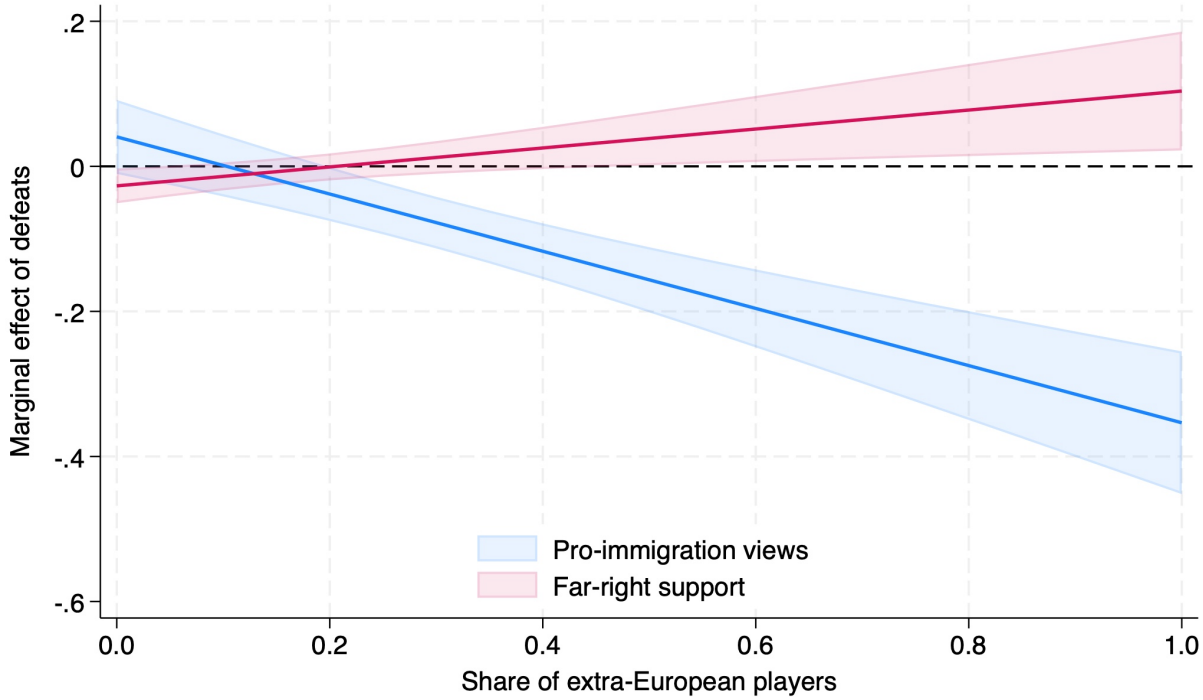
We find no evidence that national team victories affect electoral preferences across all types of populist parties. Coefficient estimates associated with post-victory outcomes are small and statistically insignificant for populist, far-left, and far-right parties, and show no systematic variation with team diversity. This suggests that positive national team performance does not translate into meaningful short-run shifts in voting intentions. By contrast, national team defeats exhibit significant effects for some party families.

For populist parties, the interaction between post-defeat and team diversity is positive and statistically significant, indicating that defeats for more diverse teams are associated with increased support for populist parties. No comparable effects are observed for far-left parties, for which neither the main post-defeat effect nor its interaction with diversity is statistically significant. The strongest and most robust effects emerge for far-right parties, which may indicate that the effect on populist parties is mainly driven by the far-right parties. Following a defeat, support for far-right parties slightly declines for fully native teams; however, this effect is significantly attenuated—and reversed—in contexts where national teams are more diverse. The positive and statistically significant interaction between post-defeat and extra-European player share implies that defeats involving more diverse teams are associated with higher far-right support. In numbers, one additional extra-European player in the starting 11 of a national team is expected to trigger, in case of a defeat, a 1.2 p.p increase in the level of support for far-right parties. This effect is sizable and indicates potential consequences for political outcomes at national levels. These findings are consistent with the idea that negative national outcomes can activate exclusionary political responses when salient minority representation is in play. Taken together, the results indicate that short-run political reactions to national team performance are concentrated on the far right and are driven by defeats rather than victories. Importantly, these effects mirror the earlier findings on immigration attitudes, suggesting that shifts in electoral preferences are plausibly mediated by changes in perceptions toward immigrants. Table A7 reports estimates of the analyses when accounting for attitudes towards immigration as control variables. The statistical significance of the effects found for affiliation to populist and far-right parties vanishes. This indicates that a large share of the variation in voting behavior is explained by differences in attitudes towards immigration.

Figure 6 plots the marginal effects of national team defeats along different levels of team diversity. It combines both the negative effect of defeats on the IMPACT attitude variable, and the positive effect on association with far-right parties. One can observe on this plot that the level of diversity needed to induce a significant shift in attitudes is much lower than the threshold above which political affiliation is affected. Above a share of 0.2 – 3 extra-European players in the starting 11 – immigration attitudes are expected to worsen significantly after a defeat. Such a statistically significant effect only occurs above a share of 0.5 – 6 starting players – for the case of far-right party affiliation. This suggests that attitudes are much more easily changed than preferences for political parties.

Figure A2 reports the same marginal effects for the racial classification measure. While the marginal effect of non-native players on pro-immigration attitudes remains, there is no clear effect of team composition on proximity to far-right parties. Additionally, Table A8 displays the results of the same specification as in Table 5, but for our visible diversity measure, confirming that there is indeed no shift towards populist

Figure 6: Marginal effects



Notes: The figure displays the estimated marginal effect of national team defeats on two outcomes—pro-immigration views and far-right support—across different values of the share of extra-European players in the starting lineup. Estimates are derived from the interaction between the defeat indicator and the diversity measure in the baseline regression specification. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals.

parties. This indicates that even though visible diversity can create shifts in attitudes, it does not induce comparable shifts in voting preferences. The result suggests that for more important preference shifts more factors involving ancestry can be at play, rather than just visible diversity markers, such as skin color.

6 Discussion & Conclusion

Our findings highlight how shared emotional events such as sporting events showcasing out-group members, and in particular international football, may shape perceptions of this group. In the context of Europe, the most consistent, persistent and robust results across diversity measures show that negative experiences (as proxied by defeats) involving members of the out-group may negatively impact perceptions of the impact of the group as a whole. That is, individuals interviewed after losses who's national football team is diverse consistently show less favorable attitudes towards immigrants than those interviewed in the week before. The overall effect accounts for a shift by 2 points on a 1-10 scale for a quarter of individuals for a team that has 5 immigrant-origin players, compared to none at all. This effect is driven by close and unexpected defeats, suggesting that strong emotional reactions are responsible for this change in attitudes. The robust results for

defeat interacted with team diversity suggests that the effects may be the result of scapegoating, *i.e.* finding someone to blame for the disappointment caused by an event that has the potential to shake national pride. This supports the literature in social psychology on the externalisation of failure. We further confirm this by estimating effects on political preferences. Defeats involving highly diverse teams increase support for far-right parties, who by definition support nativist policies. We find that this effect can only be overshadowed if immigrant-origin players become more salient in a positive way: by scoring goals. This suggests that scapegoating can be minimized if players with a (perceived) immigrant background simultaneously provoke positive emotional reactions.

Our findings highlight important implications beyond sports that are also relevant to policy; events triggering important negative emotional responses such as national tragedies (e.g. terrorist attacks) have the potential to create strong anti-immigrant sentiments in a context where immigrants become salient. Shifts in immigration attitudes and voting preferences may have important consequences, even if only short-lived. When amplified by media or political framing, increased immigration salience can shift voting behavior and foster hostility toward minorities (Giavazzi et al., 2024; Barrera et al., 2020; Pinto, 2024). However, showcasing immigrant-origin figures in a positive light during emotional experiences could counteract this effect. Policies should be chosen wisely around such events to prevent reinforcing negative stereotypes and instead provide a narrative of inclusiveness.

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Appendix

Table A1: Baseline results with 3-day window

VARIABLES	(1) Want more mig.	(2) Want more mig.	(3) Mig. good country	(4) Mig. good country
		Panel A. Surname diversity		
post-victory	-0.0559		-0.00186	
	(0.0420)		(0.0398)	
× extra-European	0.239		-0.162	
	(0.190)		(0.218)	
post-defeat		0.0565		0.0547
		(0.0377)		(0.0403)
× extra-European		-0.220		-0.393**
		(0.143)		(0.173)
Constant	0.0305	0.0359	-0.354***	-0.349***
	(0.0911)	(0.0953)	(0.102)	(0.0995)
		Panel B. Visible diversity		
post-victory	-0.00323		0.0372	
	(0.0446)		(0.0412)	
× non-native	-0.100		-0.304*	
	(0.143)		(0.156)	
post-defeat		0.0255		0.0222
		(0.0345)		(0.0373)
× non-native		-0.477***		-0.530**
		(0.145)		(0.210)
Constant	0.0239	-0.00292	-0.363***	-0.384***
	(0.0934)	(0.101)	(0.0993)	(0.110)
Observations	39,433	39,433	39,115	39,115
R-squared	0.224	0.224	0.169	0.169
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES

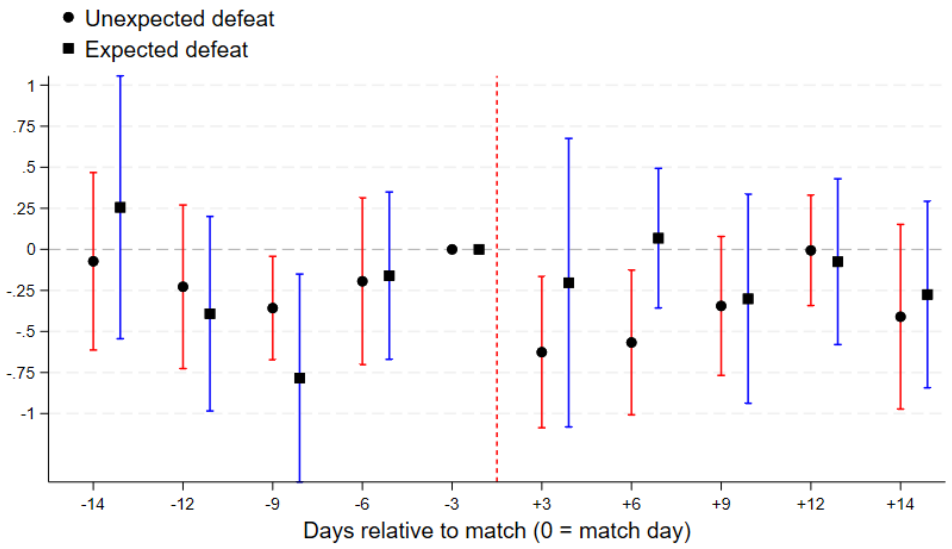
Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Panel A reports results using surname-based ancestry as a measure of diversity, while Panel B uses a racial classification–based measure. Each column presents OLS estimates of the interaction between national team performance and diversity on immigration attitudes. *Post-victory* equals 1 if the respondent was interviewed within 3 days after a victory, and *Post-defeat* equals 1 if interviewed within 3 days after a defeat. All models include calendar and country–match fixed effects, as well as individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A2: Baseline results with 14-day window

VARIABLES	(1) Want more mig.	(2) Want more mig.	(3) Mig. good country	(4) Mig. good country
		Panel A. Surname diversity		
post-victory	-0.0140		-0.00854	
	(0.0217)		(0.0253)	
× extra-European	0.0426		-0.0696	
	(0.111)		(0.121)	
post-defeat		-0.0145		0.00131
		(0.0200)		(0.0252)
× extra-European		-0.140**		-0.258***
		(0.0606)		(0.0952)
Constant	-0.117	-0.0816	0.148*	0.166*
	(0.0856)	(0.0851)	(0.0894)	(0.0954)
		Panel B. Visible diversity		
post-victory	0.00990		-0.00107	
	(0.0256)		(0.0296)	
× non-native	-0.0830		-0.0820	
	(0.0891)		(0.111)	
post-defeat		-0.0274		-0.0211
		(0.0243)		(0.0266)
× non-native		-0.0126		-0.0343
		(0.0735)		(0.0953)
Constant	-0.118	-0.0859	0.147	0.157
	(0.0859)	(0.0849)	(0.0895)	(0.0959)
Observations	87,518	87,518	86,667	86,667
R-squared	0.204	0.204	0.154	0.154
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES

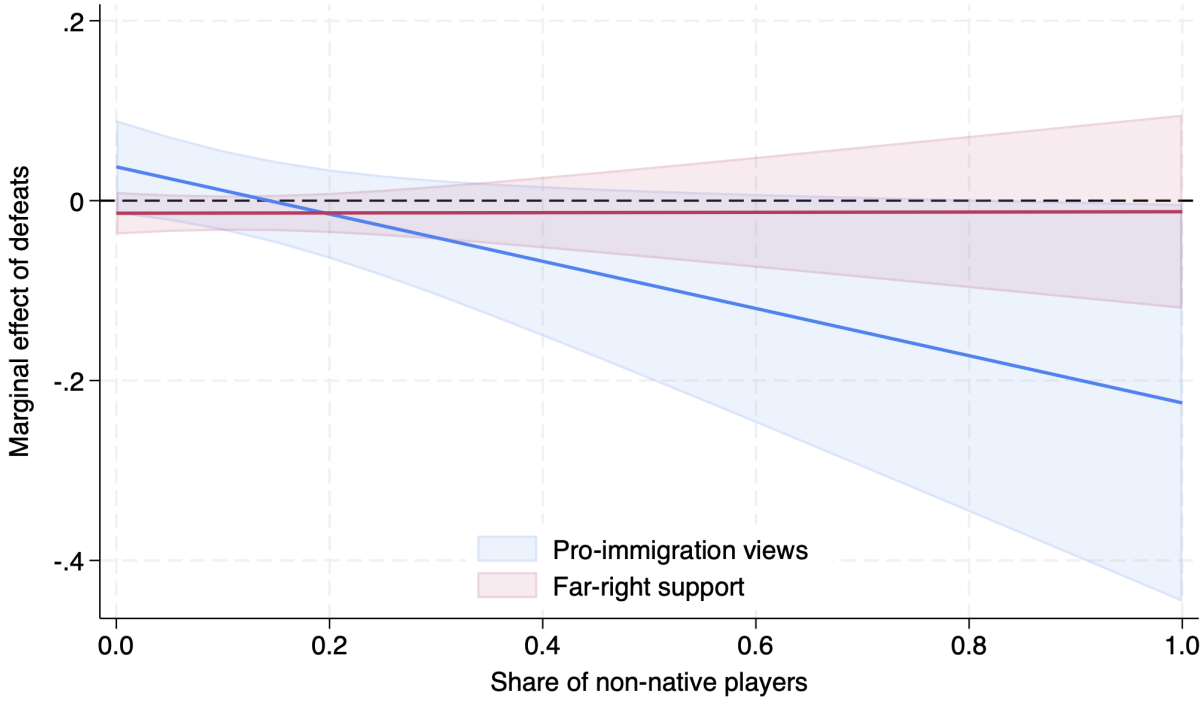
Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Panel A reports results using surname-based ancestry as a measure of diversity, while Panel B uses a racial classification–based measure. Each column presents OLS estimates of the interaction between national team performance and diversity on immigration attitudes. *Post-victory* equals 1 if the respondent was interviewed within 14 days after a victory, and *Post-defeat* equals 1 if interviewed within 14 days after a defeat. All models include calendar and country–match fixed effects, as well as individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Figure A1: Event Study: Unexpected vs. Expected Defeats



Notes: Plot of coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from regressions interacting team diversity (based on our visible diversity measure) with 3-day time bins around national team performances. The dependent variable is *IMPACT*—whether respondents believe immigrants have a positive impact on the country. The baseline period (−3 to −1) is normalized to zero. Robust standard errors are clustered by country × year.

Figure A2: Marginal effects - skin color diversity



Notes: The figure displays the estimated marginal effect of national team defeats on two outcomes—pro-immigration views and far-right support—across different values of the share of visibly non-native players in the starting lineup. Estimates are derived from the interaction between the defeat indicator and the diversity measure in the baseline regression specification. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals.

Table A3: Other outcomes - impact questions

VARIABLES	(1) Mig. good eco.	(2) Mig. good eco.	(3) Mig. good cult.	(4) Mig. good cult.
Panel A. Surname diversity				
post-victory	-0.006		-0.018	
	(0.025)		(0.031)	
× extra-European	-0.170**		-0.088	
	(0.069)		(0.122)	
post-defeat		0.031		0.064**
		(0.024)		(0.025)
× extra-European		-0.375***		-0.262***
		(0.119)		(0.088)
Constant	-0.558***	-0.586***	-0.829***	-0.890***
	(0.135)	(0.131)	(0.119)	(0.118)
Panel B. Visible diversity				
post-victory	-0.00161		-0.0164	
	(0.0255)		(0.0326)	
× non-native	-0.137**		-0.0648	
	(0.0620)		(0.111)	
post-defeat		0.0346		0.0443
		(0.0230)		(0.0292)
× non-native		-0.300***		-0.0469
		(0.0843)		(0.0881)
Constant	-0.555***	-0.588***	-0.827***	-0.890***
	(0.135)	(0.131)	(0.119)	(0.119)
Observations	54,288	54,288	54,478	54,478
R-squared	0.144	0.144	0.194	0.194
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Panel A reports results using surname-based ancestry as a measure of team diversity, while Panel B uses a racial classification–based measure. Each column presents OLS estimates of the interaction between national team performance and diversity on perceived effects of immigration on the country's economy ((1) and (2)) and cultural life ((3) and (4)). *Post-victory* equals 1 if the respondent was interviewed within 7 days after a victory, and *Post-defeat* equals 1 if interviewed within 7 days after a defeat. All models include calendar and country–match fixed effects, as well as individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A4: Other outcomes - allow questions

VARIABLES	(1) Want diff. ethn.	(2) Want diff. ethn.	(3) Want same ethn.	(4) Want same ethn.
		Panel A. Surname diversity		
post-victory	-0.074***		-0.054	
	(0.025)		(0.034)	
× extra-European	-0.0351		0.105	
	(0.0901)		(0.0808)	
post-defeat		0.021		0.016
		(0.033)		(0.033)
× extra-European		-0.212*		-0.078
		(0.113)		(0.098)
Constant	0.419***	0.356***	-0.186	-0.205
	(0.122)	(0.119)	(0.137)	(0.138)
		Panel B. Visible diversity		
post-victory	-0.0476		-0.0312	
	(0.0290)		(0.0320)	
× non-white	-0.072		0.065	
	(0.088)		(0.110)	
post-defeat		0.0161		0.0270
		(0.0365)		(0.0354)
× non-white		-0.114		-0.140
		(0.120)		(0.118)
Constant	0.418***	0.355***	-0.190	-0.206
	(0.122)	(0.119)	(0.136)	(0.138)
Observations	54,849	54,849	54,980	54,980
R-squared	0.208	0.208	0.160	0.160
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Panel A reports results using surname-based ancestry as a measure of team diversity, while Panel B uses a racial classification–based measure. Each column presents OLS estimates of the interaction between national team performance and diversity on willingness to allow migrants from different ethnic groups ((1) and (2)) and same ethnic groups ((3) and (4)). *Post-victory* equals 1 if the respondent was interviewed within 7 days after a victory, and *Post-defeat* equals 1 if interviewed within 7 days after a defeat. All models include calendar and country–match fixed effects, as well as individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A5: Robustness: Alternative Measures of Diversity

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	ALLOW				IMPACT			
	Genetic distance (Nei)	Genetic distance (F_{ST})	Within-country diversity (surname)	Within-country diversity (visible)	Genetic distance (Nei)	Genetic distance (F_{ST})	Within-country diversity (surname)	Within-country diversity (visible)
post-victory	-0.0271	-0.0271	-0.0169	-0.0168				
	(0.0261)	(0.0266)	(0.0216)	(0.0221)				
× diversity	0.000322	5.80e-05	0.00784	0.00268				
	(0.000403)	(7.58e-05)	(0.0138)	(0.00513)				
post-defeat					0.0538*	0.0528*	-0.00518	0.00540
					(0.0274)	(0.0303)	(0.0233)	(0.0249)
× diversity					-0.00143***	-0.000229**	-0.0369**	-0.000685
					(0.000333)	(9.76e-05)	(0.0174)	(0.0140)
Constant	0.0237	0.0236	0.0236	0.0203	-0.161***	-0.161***	-0.160***	-0.164***
	(0.0378)	(0.0378)	(0.0379)	(0.0378)	(0.0395)	(0.0395)	(0.0393)	(0.0394)
Observations	54,363	54,363	54,363	54,069	53,780	53,780	53,780	53,496
R-squared	0.204	0.204	0.204	0.203	0.161	0.161	0.161	0.162
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Each column reports OLS estimates interacting national team performance with an alternative measure of diversity: (1,5) *Nei* genetic diversity index, (2,6) F_{st} genetic diversity index, (3,7) the within-country standardized share of extra-European players, and (4,8) the within-country standardized share of players with visible non-European background. All models include calendar and country–match fixed effects and individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A6: Controlling for Happiness

VARIABLES	(1) Happiness	(2) Happiness	(3) ALLOW	(4) IMPACT
post-victory	-0.0645		-0.0443*	
	(0.0441)		(0.0242)	
× extra-European	0.139		0.202**	
	(0.142)		(0.0942)	
post-defeat		0.133***		0.0278
		(0.0483)		(0.0261)
× extra-European		-0.499**		-0.340***
		(0.217)		(0.0712)
Happiness			0.0403***	0.0820***
			(0.00302)	(0.00330)
Constant	7.772***	7.709***	-0.361***	-0.918***
	(0.0808)	(0.0878)	(0.0429)	(0.0448)
Observations	56,212	55,874	54,470	53,907
R-squared	0.159	0.159	0.207	0.174
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Columns (1)–(2) estimate the effect of national team performance and team diversity on self-reported happiness. Columns (3)–(4) add happiness as a control in the baseline specification on immigration attitudes (*ALLOW* and *IMPACT*). All regressions include calendar and country–match fixed effects and individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A7: Voting behavior mediated by attitudes

VARIABLES	(1) Populist	(2) Populist	(3) Far right	(4) Far right
Post-defeat	-0.0104	-0.00131	-0.0269**	-0.0183
	(0.0149)	(0.0140)	(0.0122)	(0.0124)
× extra-European	0.115**	0.0669	0.131***	0.0787*
	(0.0541)	(0.0514)	(0.0486)	(0.0473)
IMPACT		-0.0625***		-0.0703***
		(0.00614)		(0.00559)
Constant	0.333***	0.310***	0.256***	0.232***
	(0.0244)	(0.0233)	(0.0210)	(0.0198)
Observations	24,466	23,851	24,466	23,851
R-squared	0.209	0.225	0.231	0.262
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Columns (1)–(3) estimate the effect of national team defeats and team diversity on voting affiliation for populist and far-right parties. Columns (2)–(4) add the IMPACT variable as a control. All regressions include calendar and country–match fixed effects and individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A8: Voting Preferences

VARIABLES	(1) Populist	(2) Populist	(3) Far-left	(4) Far-left	(5) Far-right	(6) Far-right
post-victory	0.00341		-0.0174		0.00523	
	(0.0136)		(0.0120)		(0.0118)	
× non-native	0.0584		0.0445		0.0326	
	(0.0520)		(0.0618)		(0.0392)	
post-defeat		-0.00131		0.00628		-0.0140
		(0.0164)		(0.00871)		(0.0121)
× non-native		0.0172		0.0297		0.00169
		(0.0683)		(0.0290)		(0.0609)
Constant	0.329***	0.333***	0.0502***	0.0461***	0.250***	0.255***
	(0.0239)	(0.0244)	(0.0152)	(0.0148)	(0.0205)	(0.0210)
Observations	24,466	24,466	24,466	24,466	24,466	24,466
R-squared	0.210	0.209	0.171	0.171	0.231	0.231
Calendar FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Country-match FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Individual controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the country–year level are reported in parentheses. Each column reports OLS estimates of the interaction between national team performance and team diversity based on racial classification on voting preferences. The dependent variable is a binary indicator equal to one if the respondent reports supporting a populist, far-left, or far-right party. Post-victory (Post-defeat) equals one if the respondent was interviewed within seven days following a victory (defeat). All specifications include calendar and country–match fixed effects, as well as individual controls. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.