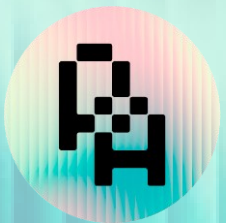


Procedural Justice and Legitimacy in Asylum Adjudication

The Role of Motivated Cognition

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Why legitimacy judgments may diverge

- Asylum decisions combine legal standards with credibility assessments under uncertainty
- Reliable estimates of wrongful acceptance and wrongful rejection are unavailable
- People may interpret this uncertainty differently based on their personal immigration attitudes
- Motivated cognition predicts opposite concerns about the same decision system

Restrictive immigration views

System seems too lenient
Applicants seem less credible

Lenient immigration views

System seems too restrictive
Applicants seem more credible



Motivated cognition and asylum beliefs

- Asylum decisions involve uncertainty, particularly in credibility assessment
- The actual rates of wrongful acceptance and wrongful rejection are unknown
- This leaves room for prior attitudes to shape interpretations of the same system
- Immigration attitudes should therefore predict contrasting beliefs about errors and credibility



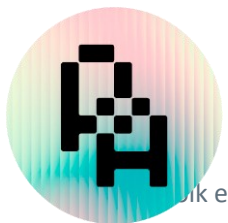
Study design

255

respondents living in Finland
128 women, 127 men

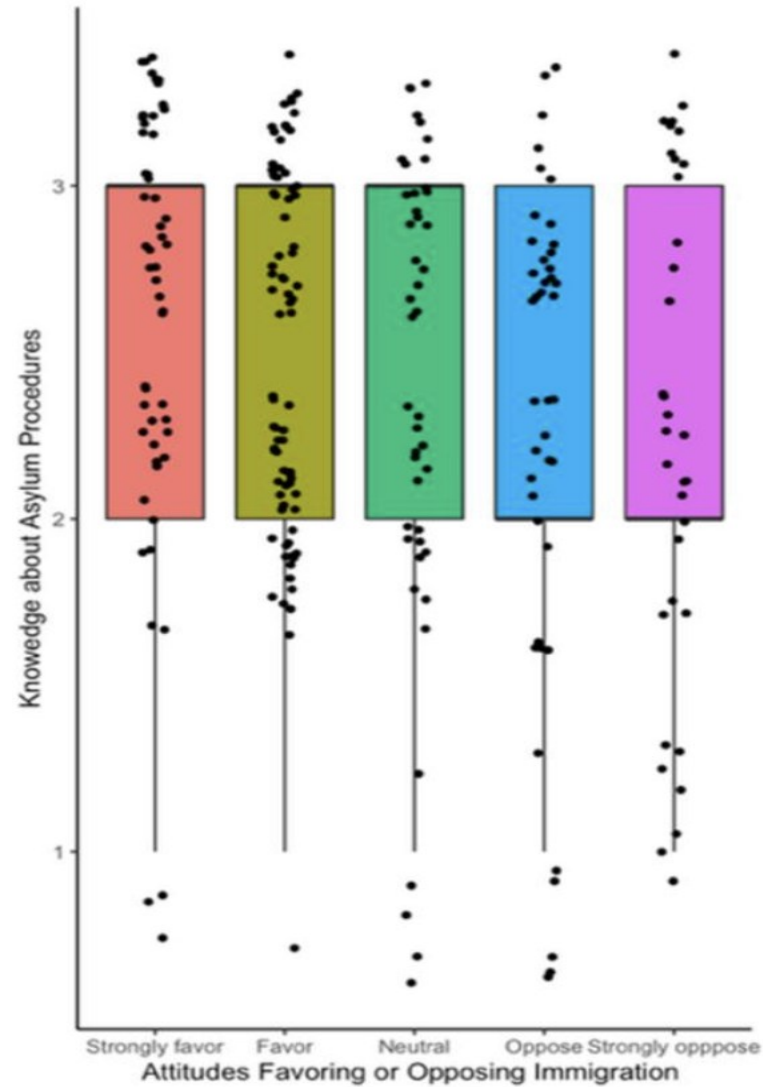
Open materials:
osf.io/jh5bq

- Online convenience sample collected 27 February to 10 April 2024
- Immigration attitude measured from strongly favor to strongly oppose
- Three true-or-false items assessed knowledge of asylum procedures
- Respondents beliefs regarding
 - % of applications that are accepted
 - % of wrongfully accepted applications
 - % of wrongfully rejected applications
 - % of applicants truthful about reasons to leave
 - % of applicants truthful about risk if returned



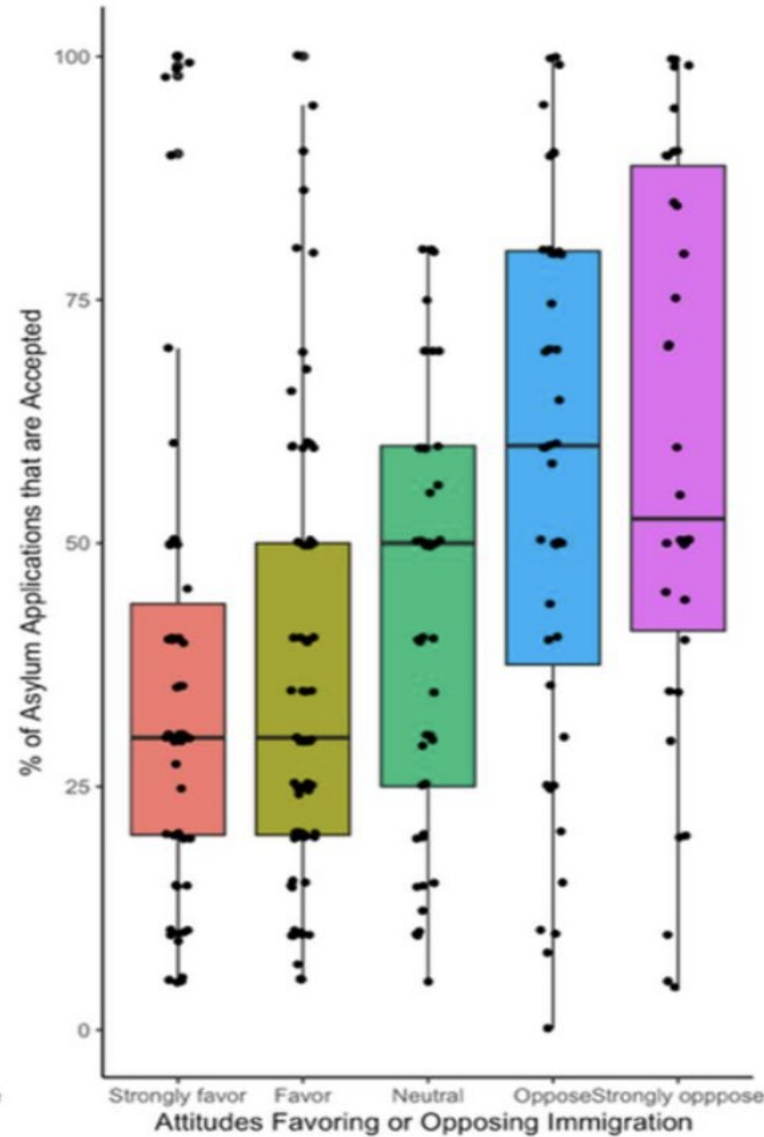
Knowledge about the asylum process

Effect Size:
 $\eta^2_H = .01, [-.01, .08]$



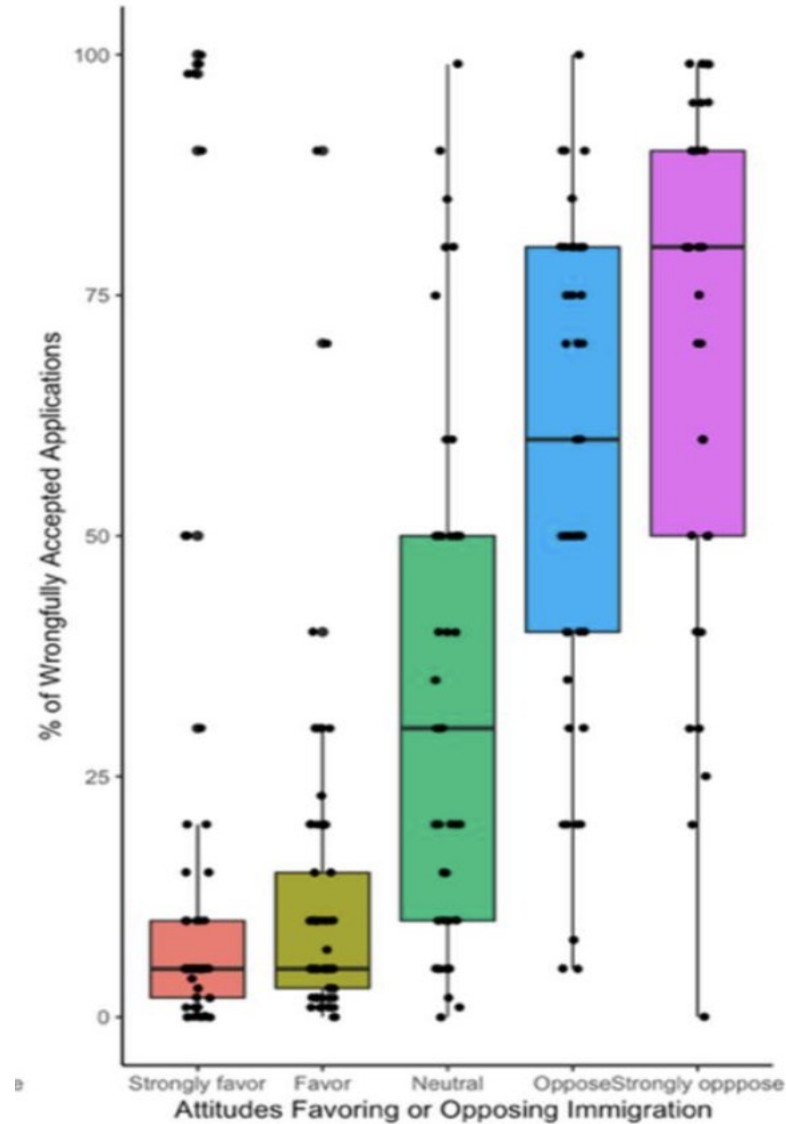
Belief 1: % of applications that are accepted

Effect Size:
 $\eta^2_H = .11, [.05, .21]$



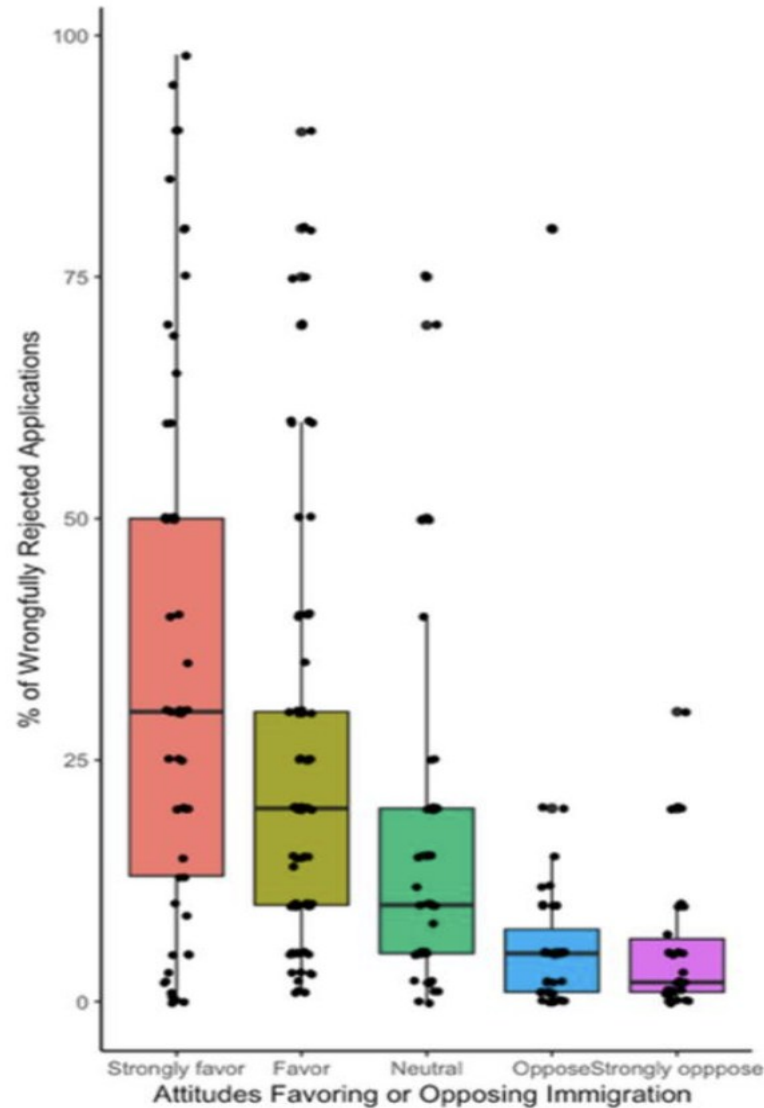
Belief 2: % of wrongfully accepted applications

Effect Size:
 $\eta^2_H = .44, [.33, .55]$



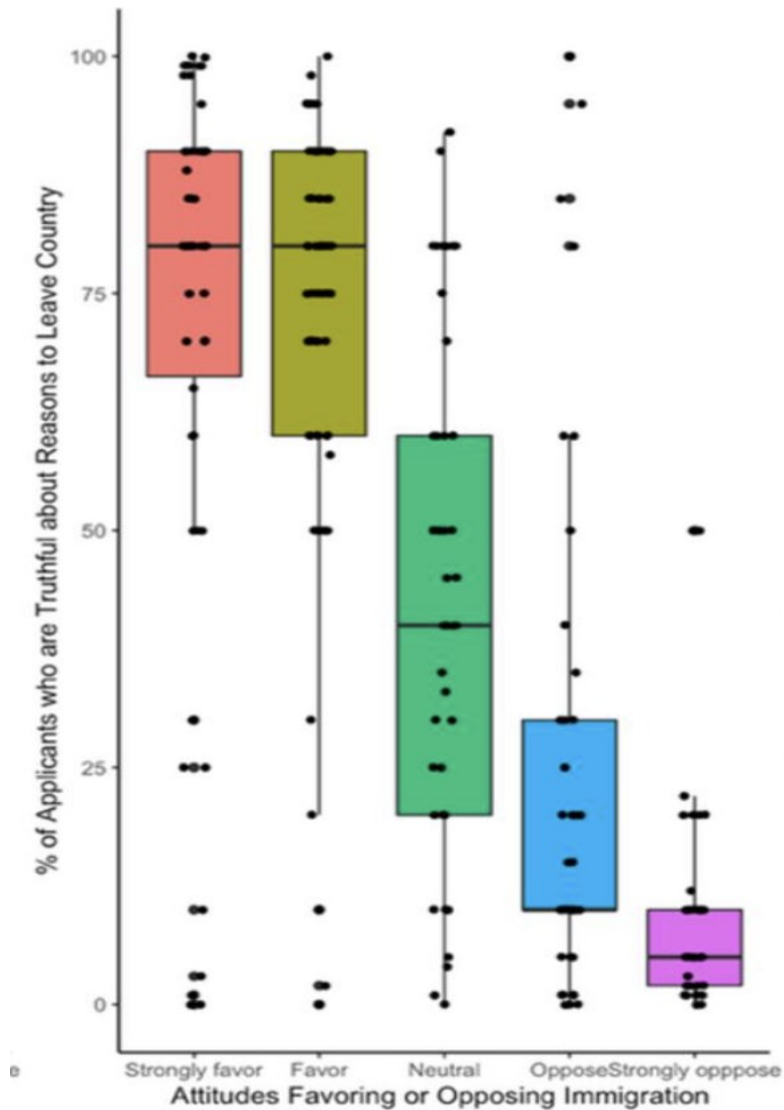
Belief 3: % of wrongfully rejected applications

Effect Size:
 $\eta^2_H = .29, [.20, .40]$



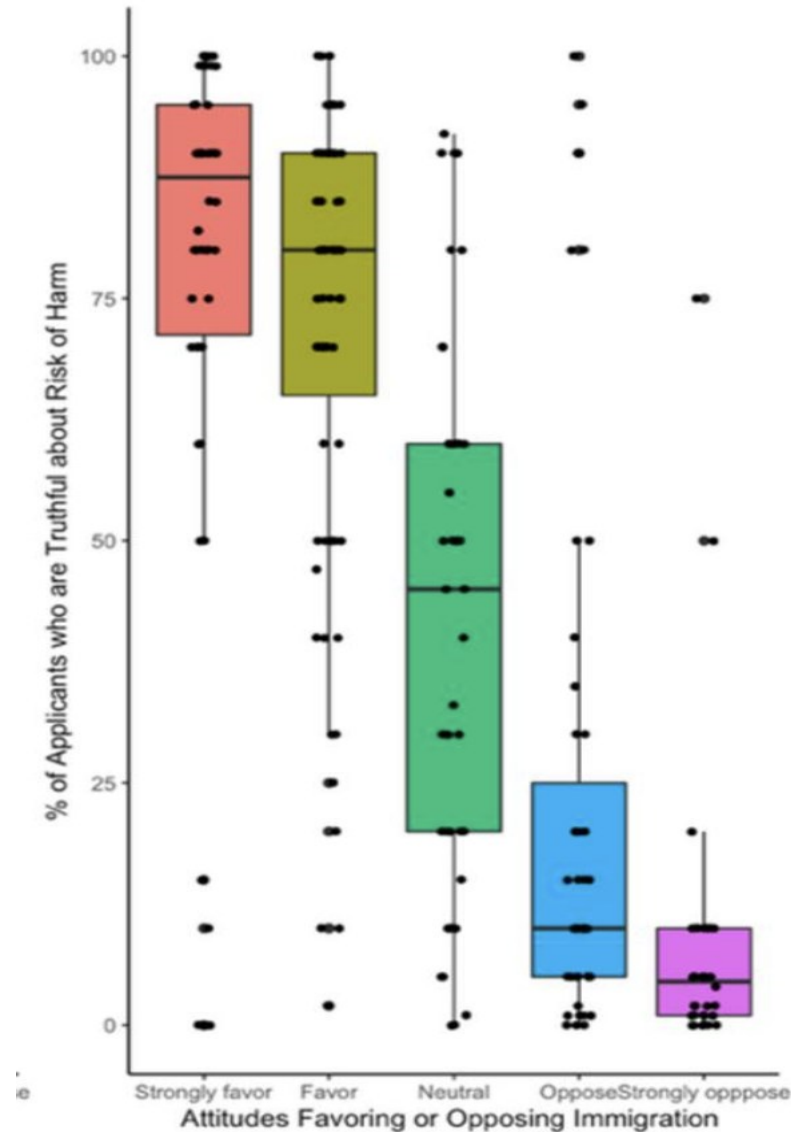
Belief 4: % of applicants truthful about reasons to leave

Effect Size:
 $\eta^2_H = .46, [.36, .58]$



Belief 5: % of applicants truthful about risk if returned

Effect Size:
 $\eta^2_H = .48, [.38, .59]$



The same system produced opposing error narratives

More lenient immigration attitudes

- Estimated fewer applications were accepted
- Estimated fewer wrongful acceptances
- Estimated more wrongful rejections
- Attributed greater truthfulness to applicants

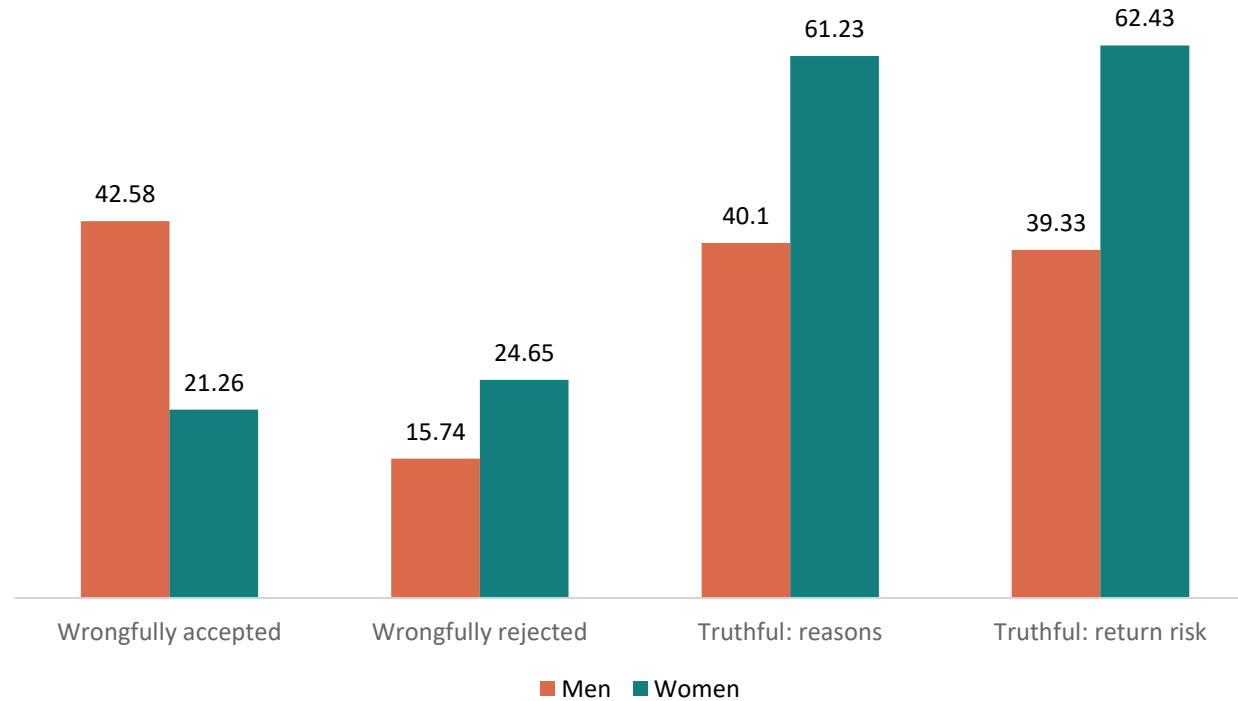
More restrictive immigration attitudes

- Estimated more applications were accepted
- Estimated more wrongful acceptances
- Estimated fewer wrongful rejections
- Attributed less truthfulness to applicants

Knowledge levels did not account for this polarization



Gender and age followed the same attitudinal divide



Gender

- Men estimated more wrongful acceptances
- Women estimated more wrongful rejections and greater applicant truthfulness

Age

- Respondents aged 18–24 reported more wrongful rejection and greater truthfulness than several older groups
- Age effects were smaller and not uniform across outcomes



Implications for procedural justice and legitimacy

Public judgments of fairness depend partly on which error people fear most.

- Factual information alone may not resolve disagreement when prior values guide interpretation
- Legitimacy may require visible safeguards for accuracy, consistency, and respectful treatment
- Asylum officials are likely to feel two simultaneous types of societal pressures
 - Their decision thresholds are viewed as both too lenient and too restrictive
- How do asylum officials experience these pressures and how such experiences affect their decision making?

