

# **FLYING THE FLAG FOR EUROPE? THE EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO THE EU FLAG ON PUBLIC ATTITUDES**

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# European Parliament Information Office

‘You cannot imagine how much time is spent arguing about the EU flag here at Europe House’

(10 May 2011)

## **Number 10 shuns EU flag tradition**

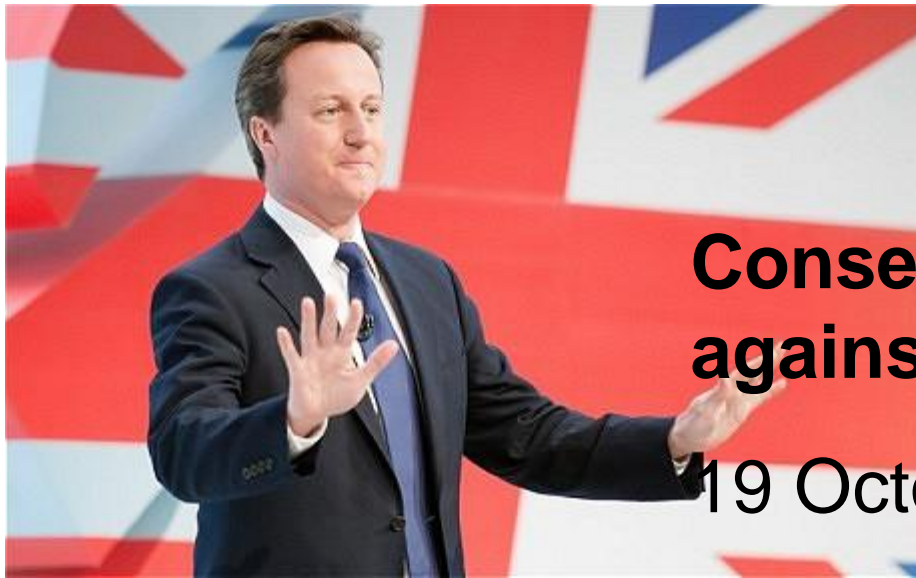
7 May 2011 BBC News



## **Downing Street won't fly EU flag as Cameron snubs Europe Day**

**...LibDems WILL hoist banner**

9 May 2011 Daily Mail



**Conservatives ordered to vote  
against EU referendum**

19 October 2011 The Telegraph

# Aim

To explore empirical links that connect:

1. Exposure to implicit visual cues
2. EU support
3. EU attachment/identity

# Theoretical Framework

- National identity: function and sentiment, primordial v contingent and contextual
- Nation building: symbols and ‘flaggings’
- Political behaviour: implicit cues

# Banal Europeanism

- EU identity as underpinned by a process which is banal, contingent and contextual:
  - low-level, everyday, practical
  - unconscious and implicit
  - ‘cool’ and dispassionate

# EU 'Identity in Formation'

- Functional v Symbolic
- Instrumental v Affective
- National identification v EU identification
- Threat Context 'When Push comes To Shove'



# Flying the Flag For Europe?



**Project Part-Financed  
by the European Union**

**European Regional  
Development Fund**

# 1. This Project

- Online survey, April 2011 (2010/2011 pilots)
- Design: adapts existing research on impact of national flags
- Implicit visual triggers & questionnaire:
  - Treatment: exposure to EU flag (priming)
  - Control: exposure to yellow flag
- 5 identity groups: ENG, SCO, BRIT, WEL, IR

# Triggers/Primes

-Two types of EU trigger: symbolic

*Treatment*

*Control*



# Triggers/Primes

-Two types of EU trigger: functional

*Treatment*

*Control*



# Sample

Random assignment from the 5 groups into conditions:

<b>Sample</b>	<b><i>Symbolic trigger (flag)</i></b>		<b>Functional trigger (airport)</b>	
	<i>Control</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>EU</i>
<b>English</b>	213	237	225	268
<b>Scottish</b>	222	237	243	220
<b>British</b>	235	204	228	217
<b>Welsh</b>	194	197	212	207
<b>Irish</b>	214	190	183	204

# Hypotheses

**-H1.** Functional stimuli have a stronger impact than symbolic ones

**-H2.** The visual cue activates (depends on) existing predispositions: the cue will activate pro-EU responses among those strongly attached to the EU; it will activate anti-EU responses among those not attached to the EU

**-H3.** The above will vary across countries, because the EU plays a different role in national debates.

# Method

## Dependent variables (5-points):

- Affective: “...does the EU conjure up for you a very positive...very negative image?”
- Instrumental: “...would you say that [country] benefits / does not benefit from being in the EU?”

**Method:** 2 (priming: control vs. flag) × 2 (attachment: high vs. low) ANOVA, across 5 groups

# Key Results

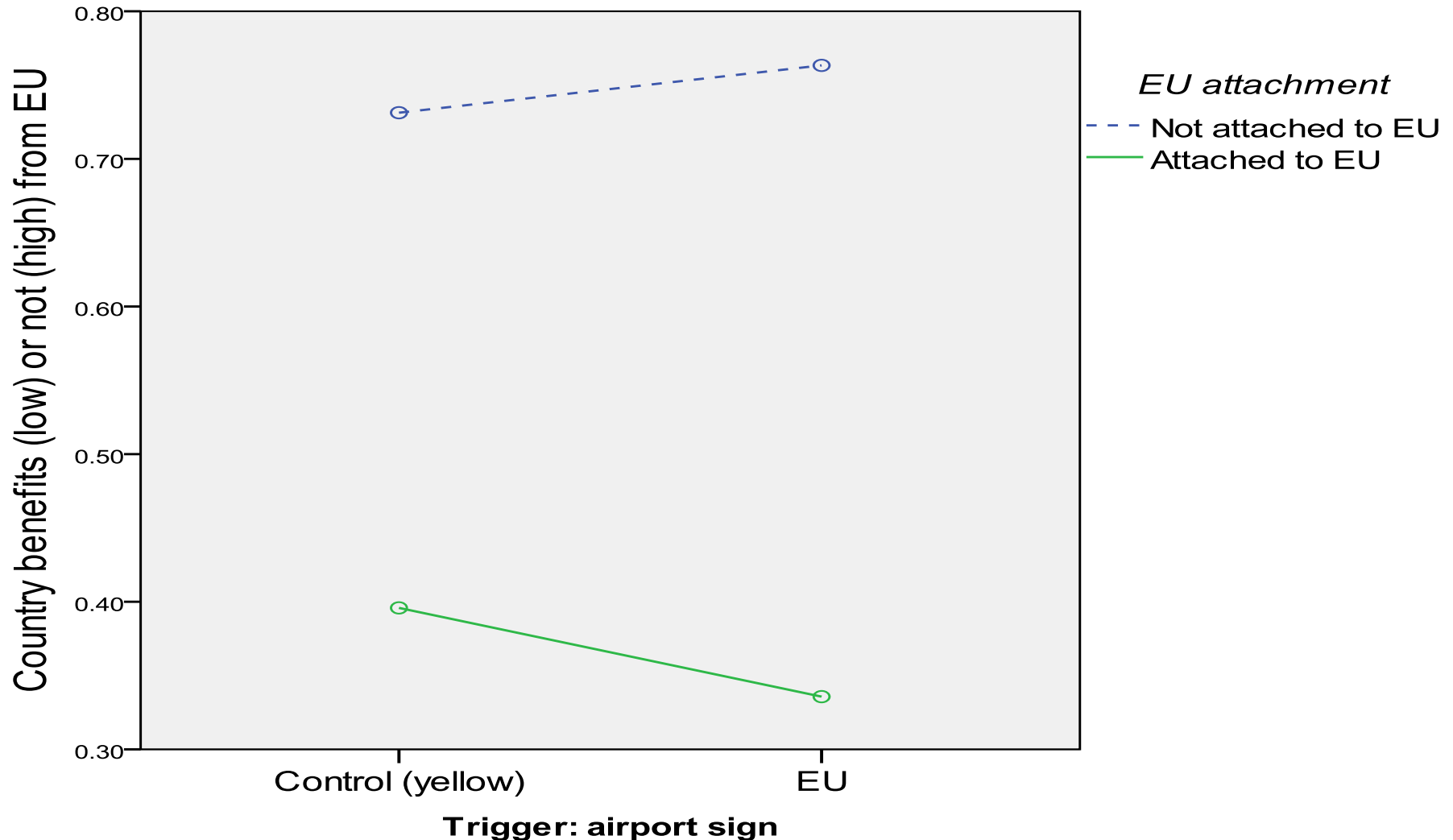
- Exposure to (symbolic) flag on public building  
=> **no effect**
  
- Exposure to airport (functional) trigger  
=> **sig. effect**
  - Trigger leads to more pro-EU responses (if attached to EU)
  - It leads to more anti-EU responses (if not attached to EU)

# Key Results (cont.)

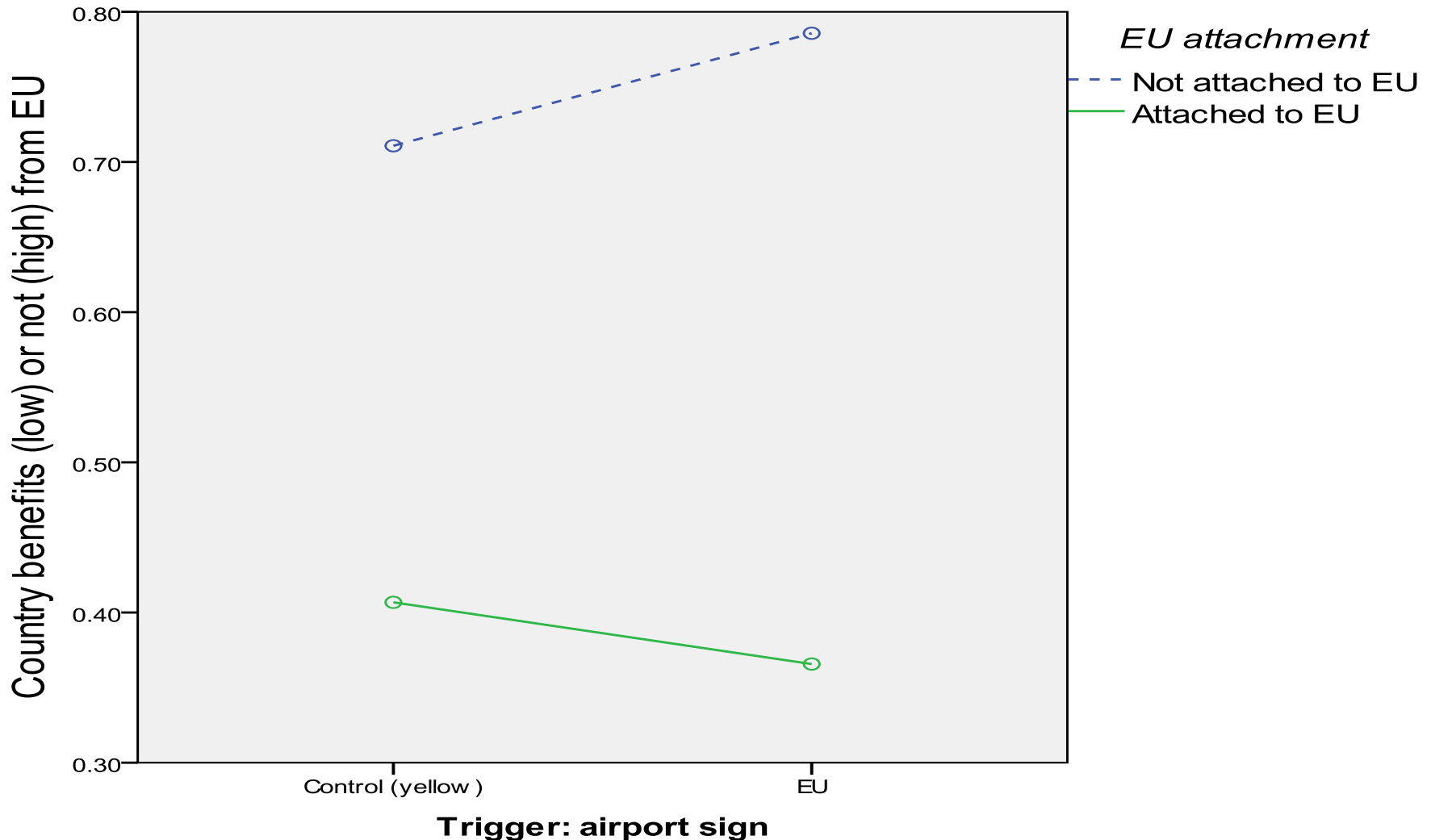
- This polarization effect only applies to Scottish...  
-(interaction “airport\_EU symbol \* EU\_attachment”,  $p=0.03$ )
  
- ...and Welsh identity samples  
-(interaction “airport\_EU symbol \* EU\_attachment”,  $p=0.02$ )



# Scottish: Functional trigger moderated by EU attachment



# Welsh: Functional trigger moderated by EU attachment



## 2. England: a closer look

Stratification of “English” into two groups

(source: Gomez and Burch 2002)

**<Group A>Receive high EU struct. funds 2000-06:**

N. West; Yorkshire/Humb; W. Midlands; N. East (N= 713)

**<Group B>Receive lower EU struct. funds 2000-06:**

S. West; E.Midlands; London; S. East; E. of England (N= 1134)

# Method

## **Dependent variable** (instrumental scale):

- *Safer because UK in EU*
- *We are more stable economically because UK in EU*
- *we are more stable politically because UK in EU*
- *UK interests well taken into account in EU*

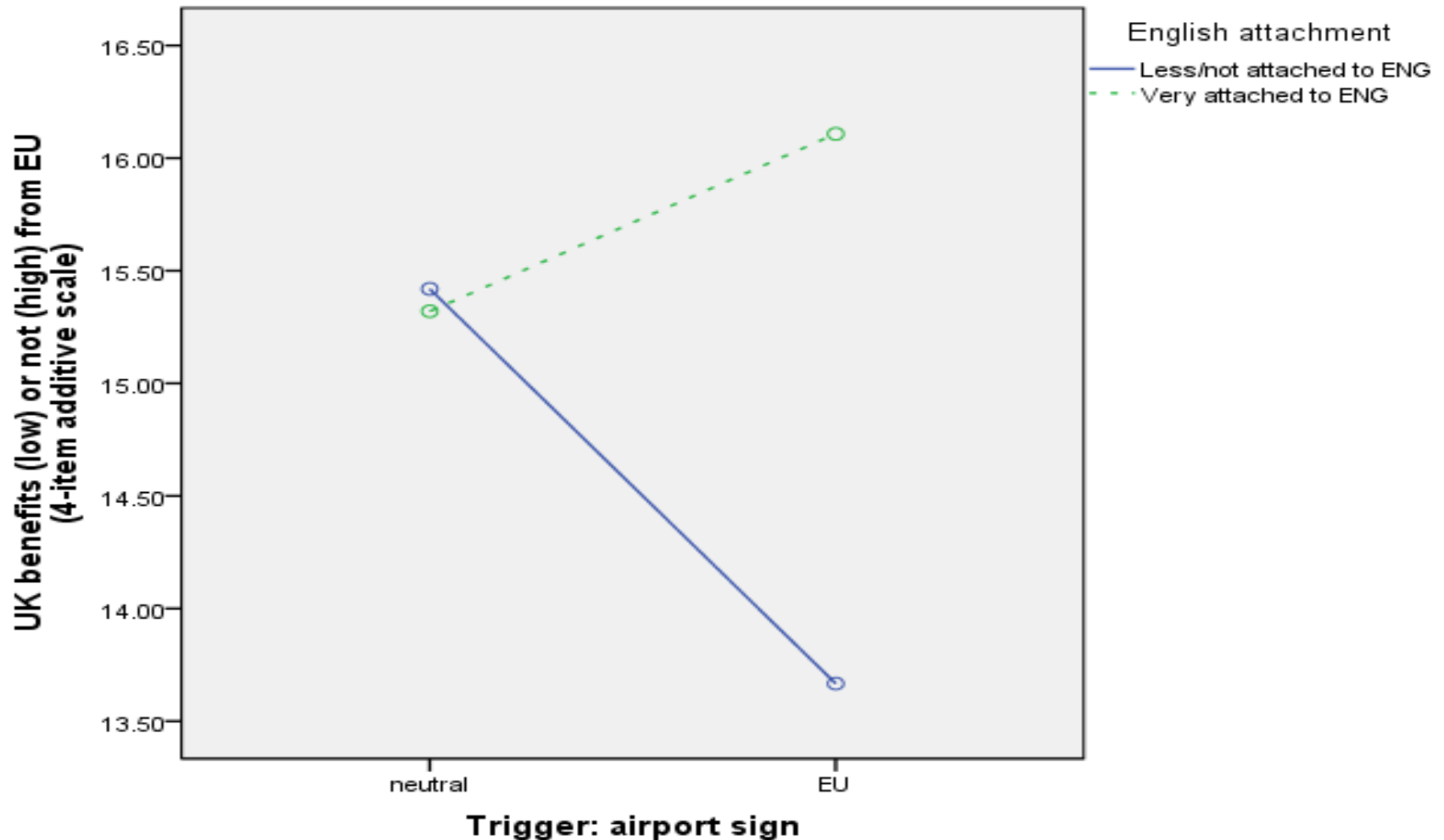
[Likert items. High scores = disagreement=anti-EU]

**Method:** 2 (priming: control v flag) × 2 (*national* attachment: high v low) ANOVA, across 2 English groups

# Key Results

- Exposure to (symbolic) flag on public building  
=> **no effect**
  
- Exposure to airport (functional) trigger  
=> **sig. effect**
  - Visual cue leads to pro-EU responses (if less attached to England)
  - Visual cue leads to anti-EU responses (if attached to England)

# England (high funds): Functional cue by “Englishness”



# Key Results (cont.)

- Polarization effect only applies to English regions that receive high funding...
  - (interaction EU symbol \* English\_attachment,  $p=0.04$ )
- Interaction with national attachment (Englishness “immunizes” you from pro-EU aim of symbol)
- Once again, functional cue affects instrumental dependent variable (4-item additive scale)

# 3. Scotland: a closer look

Student pilot (printed, self-completion) survey

[Jan 2011. N=136; N=93 “Scottish”]

- Visual cue: functional airport cue (EU vs. control)
- Text framing: implicit headline (threatening vs. neutral)

**Method:** 2 (priming: control v flag) × 2 (framing: neutral v threat) ANOVA

**Aim:** To establish if implicit threat moderates impact of visual cue



# AIRPORT REFURBISHMENT COMPLETE



## **NEW LOOK LOUNGES**

**Authorities 'delighted with new image'**

Travellers enjoy the facilities following the recent airport refurbishment. New decor and seating were welcomed by holiday-makers and business travellers setting off on their journeys. Public authorities stated, 'we are delighted with our new image'.



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# TERROR THREATS DISRUPT TRAVEL PLANS



## **HIGH ALERT STATUS CONTINUES**

**Authorities 'safety of our citizens is paramount'**

Passengers reported continued concern about disruption to travel plans. Heightened security measures remain in place and a series of new measures are under consideration. Public authorities state that the alert status of airports is kept under constant review. 'Our primary concern is the safety of our citizens'.



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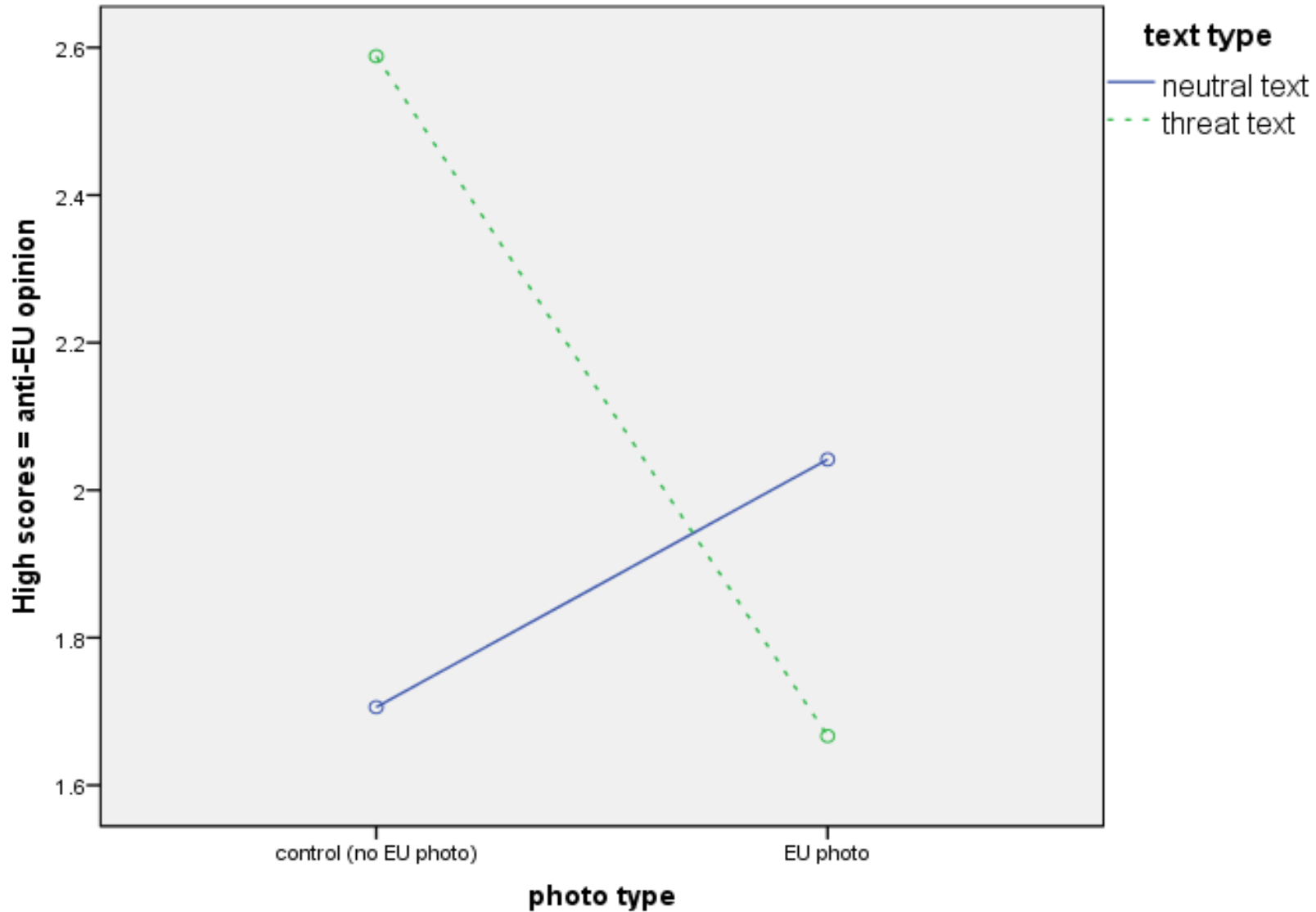


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# Scottish: Functional cue by threat framing (*summary* result)



# Key Results

- Effect applies to a range of EU-related attitudes
- Interaction between visual cue and text
    - When EU symbol (photo) is presented under implicit threat (text), respondents more likely to give pro-EU responses.
    - Anti-EU responses more likely when EU symbol is presented under neutral frame

# Conclusions

- Exposure to implicit triggers confirmed:
- Banal nature of identification with the European Union – functional/instrumental rather than affective/sentimental
- Highly contextual (national context, threat) nature of shifting (contingent) territorial allegiances.