

# **The containment strategy of extreme-right wing parties : a failure ?**

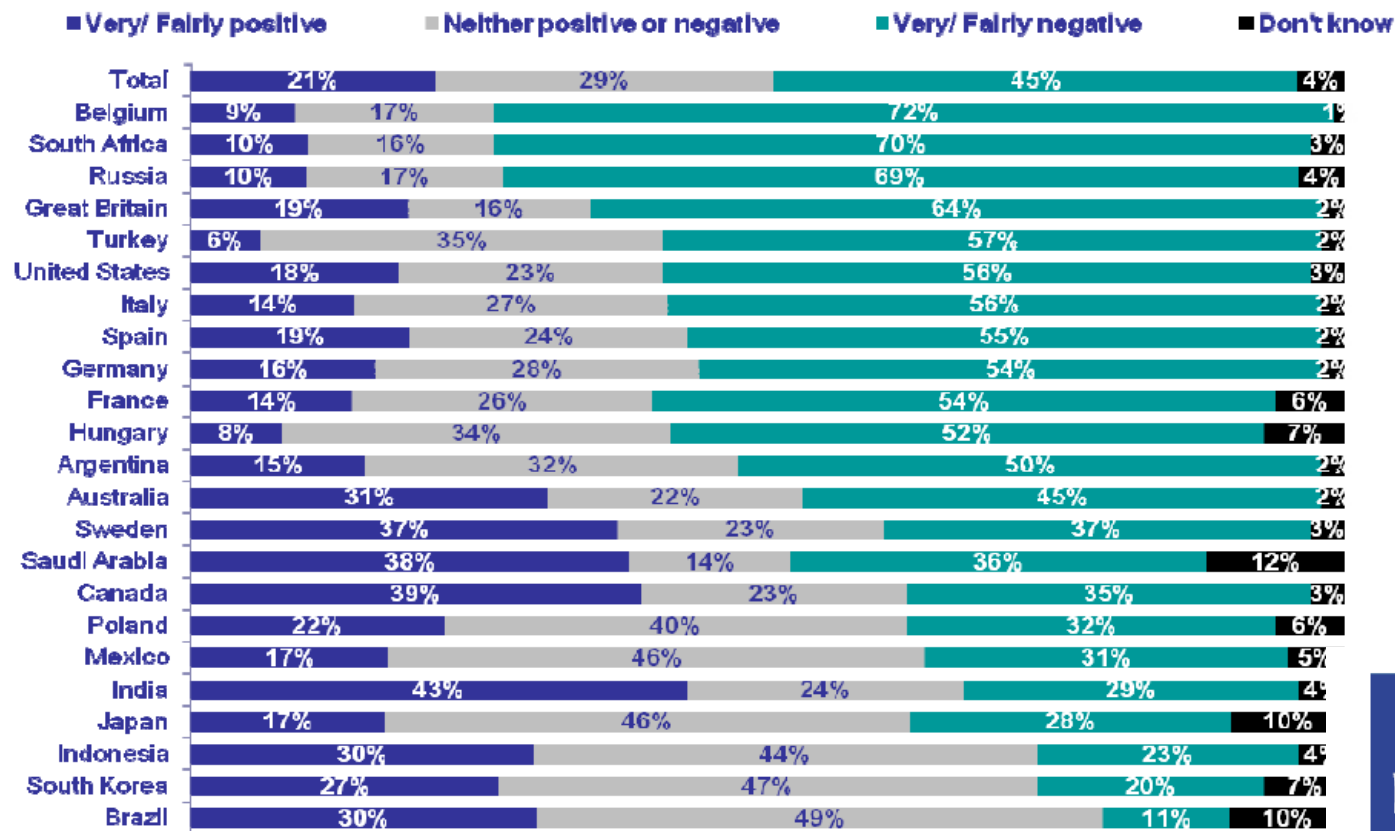
**From theory to measurement : some  
disappointment**

**Patrick Italiano ESS NC BE(F)  
Jérôme Pieters  
Sébastien Fontaine  
Petar Kovincic  
Marc Jacquemain Pr. Dr.**

- In Belgium:
  - Flanders has high level of extreme right vote
  - Wallonia very low extreme right
- In France:
  - FN scores high since decades
  - Last presidential campaign showed UMP moving rightwards
- Other countries (Italy, Austria, Netherlands) allowed some government participation
- Xenophobe opinions spreading on social networks, in the media and among mainstream politicians.
- Public debate issues such as « Polish plumber », ROMs, muslim scarf

## The background

## WOULD YOU SAY THAT IMMIGRATION HAS GENERALLY HAD A POSTIVE OR NEGATIVE IMPACT ON [COUNTRY]?



# The background

Online panel n=17,601

- In Flanders and France a « containment strategy » has been adopted : no governmental participation for extreme-right parties
- At the other end, extreme right parties went into government in The Netherlands, Italy, Austria
- Our hypothesis :
  - it does not prevent diffusion of xenophobe attitudes within the general population once an xenophobe political offer is present
- If true, we should observe
  - 1. That attitudes toward migrants depend on the presence of an explicit xenophobe political party
  - 2. That the evolution of those attitudes does not depend of the presence of a containment strategy.
- If hypothesis is confirmed, it should be an interesting heuristic background for more detailed national studies

## The general hypothesis

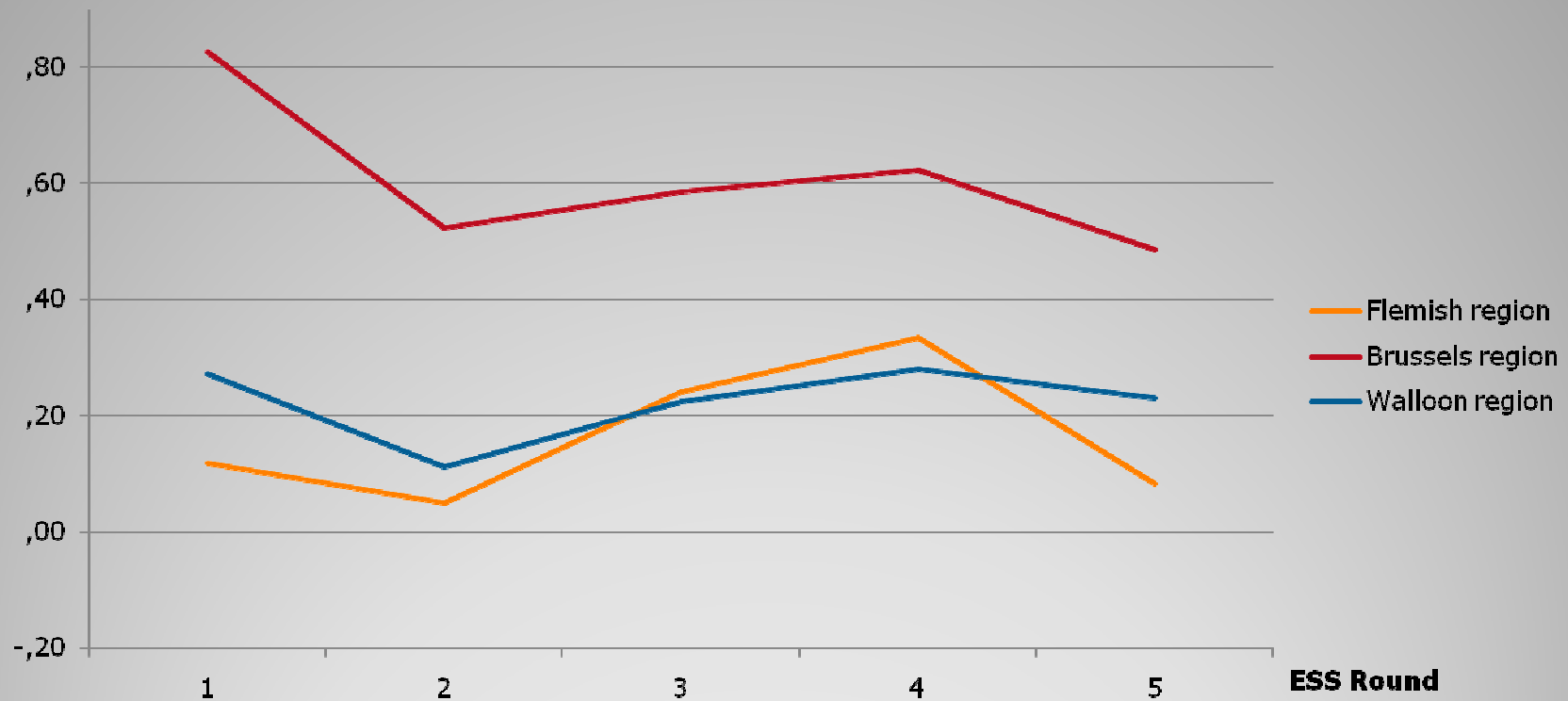
- Unfortunately, ESS doesn't provide longitudinal data for Italy and Austria
- First possible strategy:
  - Hypothesis: the **difference in measured attitude** toward immigrants between **extreme-right voters** and **others** should **decline** where containment strategy is applied
- Obstacles:
  - 1. Too few extreme right voters in the sample
  - 2. Strong underestimation of them even in countries where extreme right parties are quite strong
- Second strategy:
  - Compare over time the **evolution** of attitude toward immigrants among a selection of countries

## The operationalization

- Our measurement from ESS data:
  - An index (**opinion scale**) that sums up answers to three items :
    - Immigration bad or good for country's **economy**
    - Country's **cultural life** undermined or enriched by immigrants
    - Immigrants make country worse or better **place to live**
  - An index (**attitude scale**) that sums up answers to three items :
    - Allow many/few immigrants of **same ethnic** group as majority
    - Allow many/few immigrants of **different ethnic group** from majority
    - Allow many/few immigrants **from poorer countries** outside Europe
  - Both indexes range **from -2** (neg. toward immigrants) **to +2** (pos. toward immigrants)

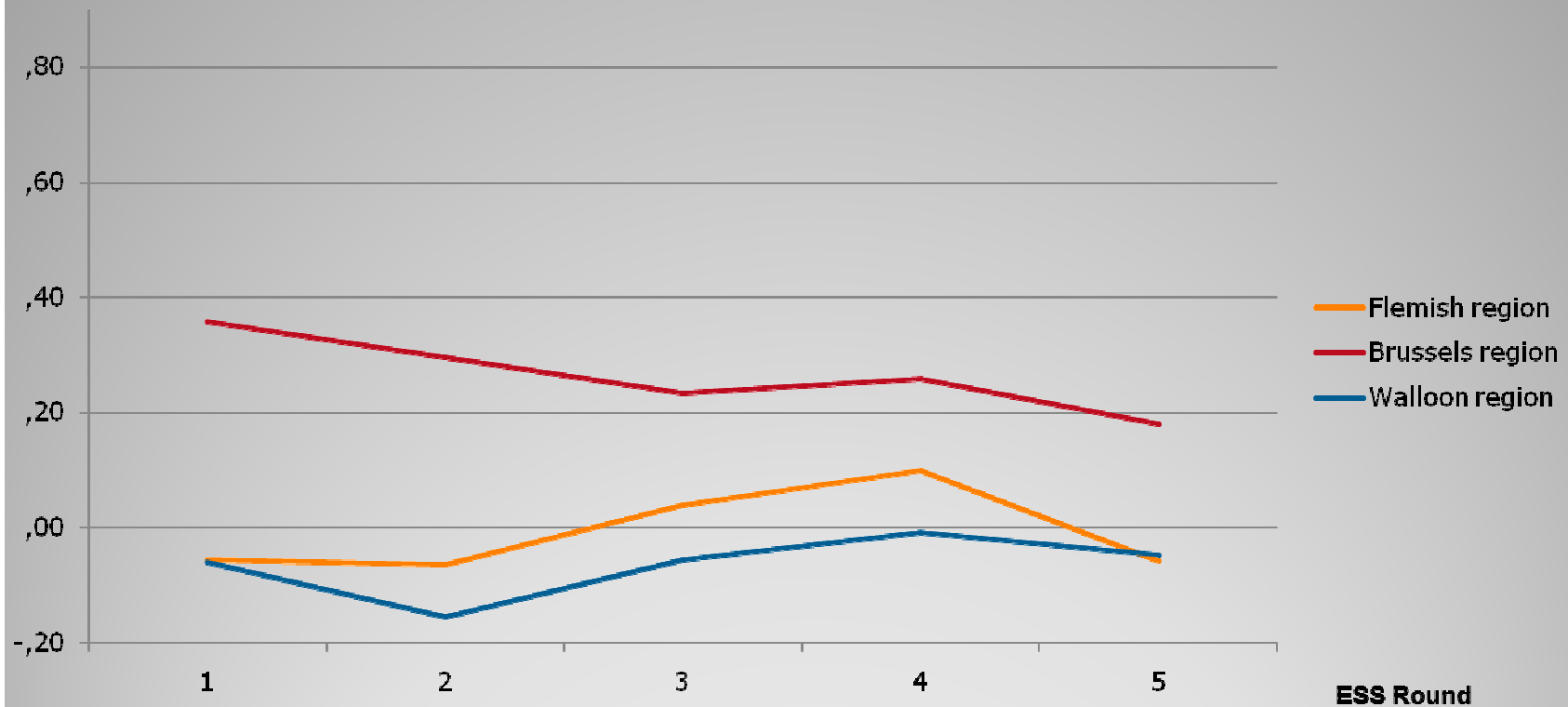
## Simple measurement tools

## Attitude Scale



**A focus on Belgium (1)**

## Opinion Scale



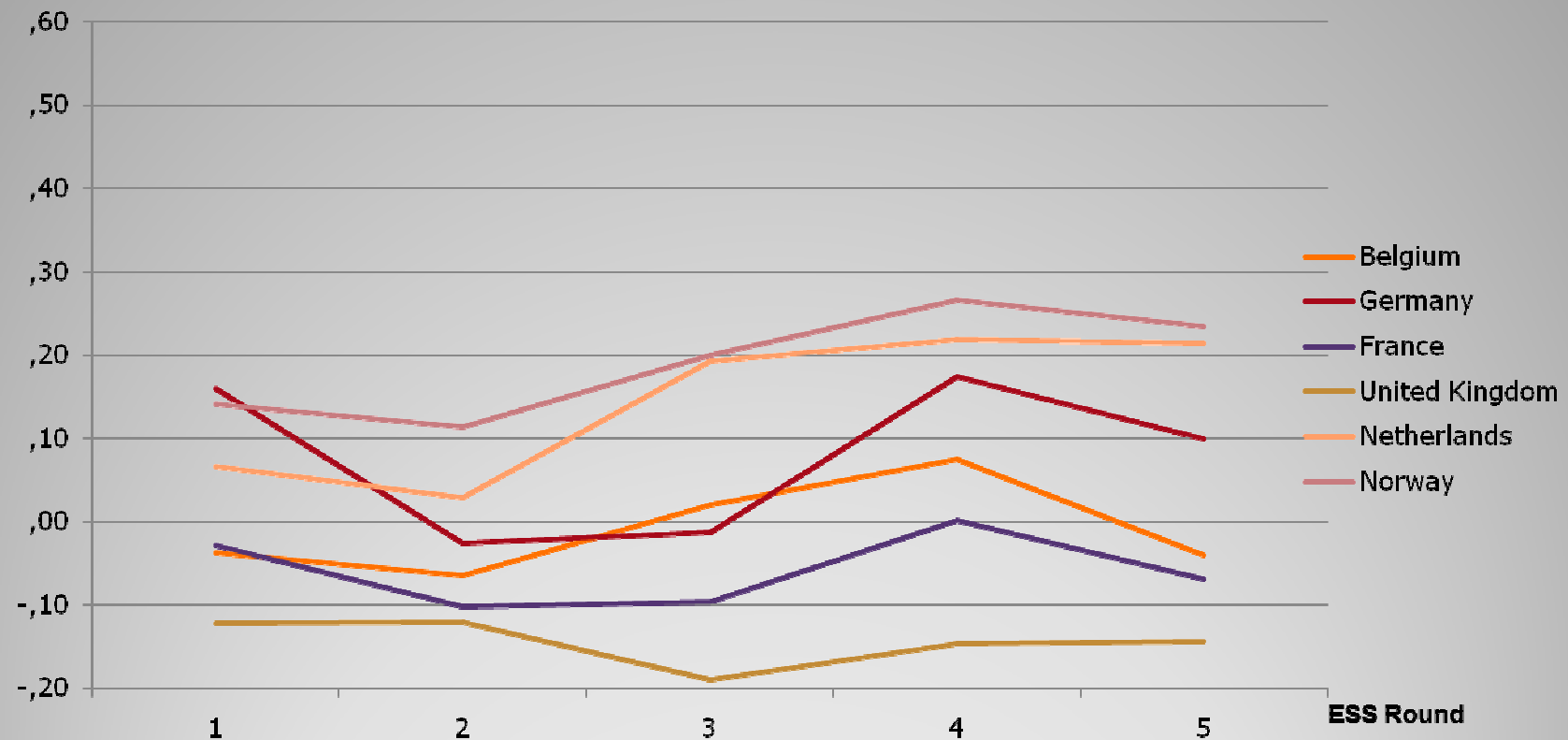
**A focus on Belgium (2)**



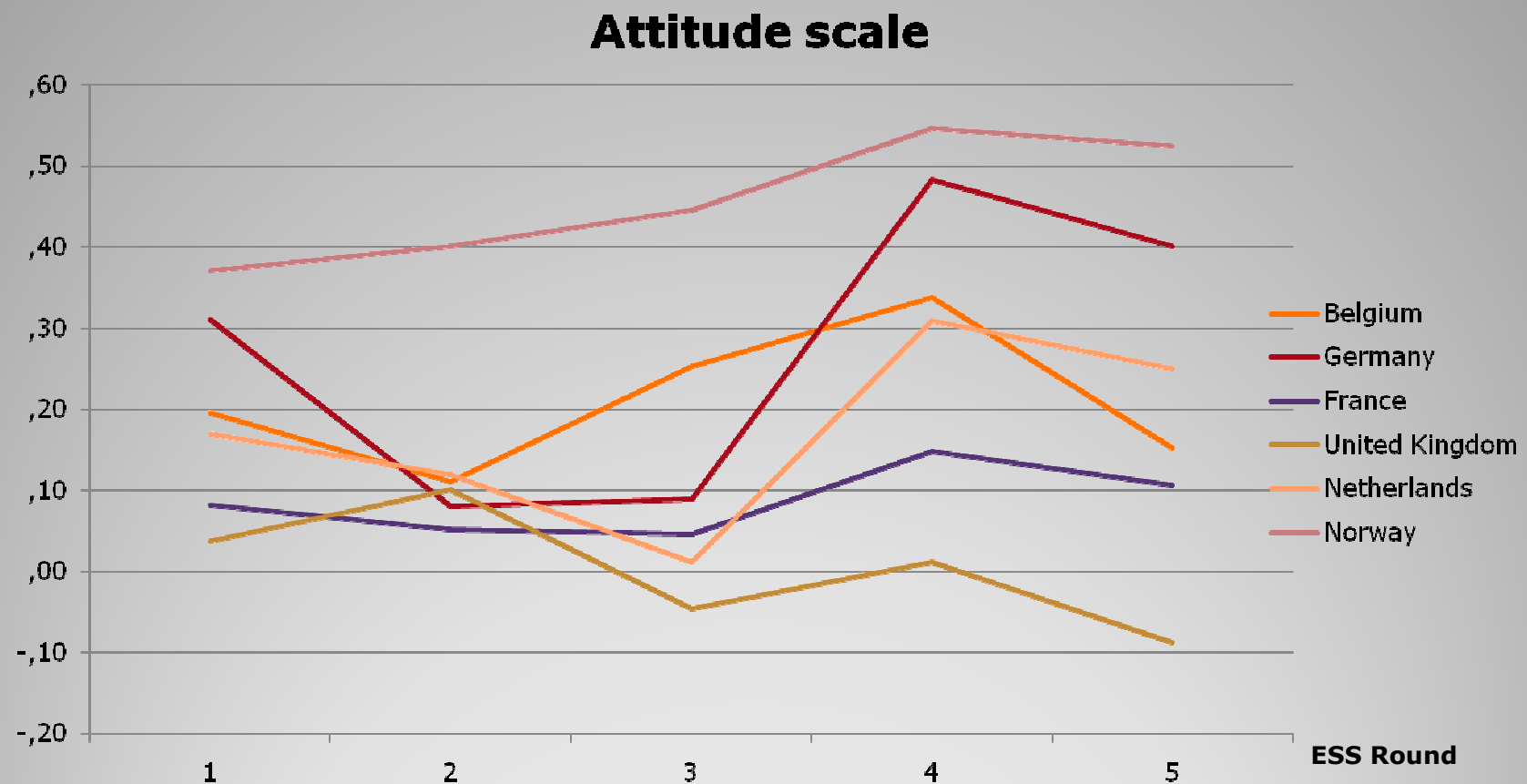
- Perplexity:
  - On both scales, the differences between regions are very small excepted for Brussels
  - On the Opinion Scale, the Walloon region shows slightly more xenophobe feelings
  - Evolution over time is very limited.
- Globally, the margin of variation looks very narrow and not clearly linked with the strength of extreme right-wing parties
- Belgian case seems to conclude against our hypothesis

**A focus on Belgium (3)**

## Opinion scale



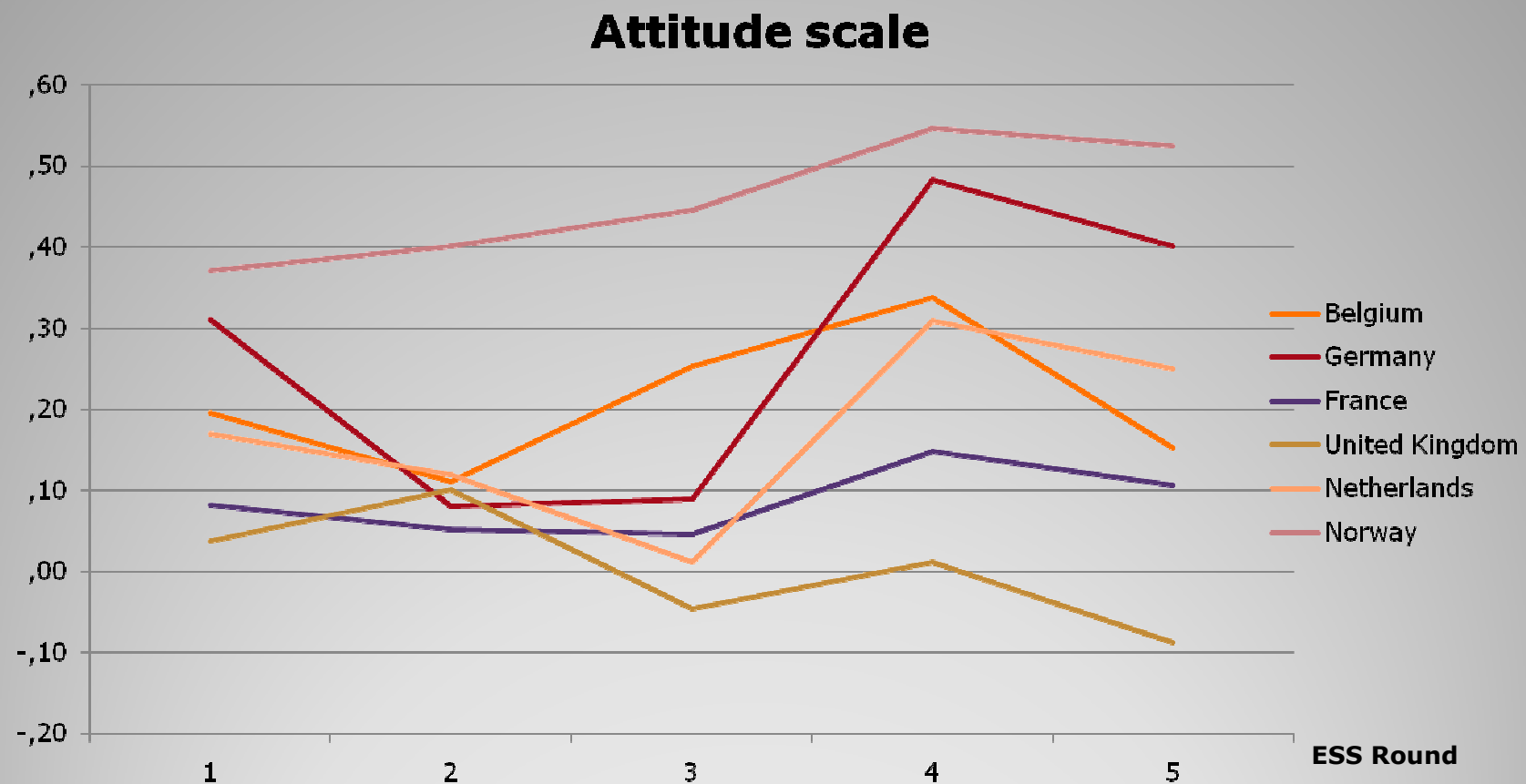
**A glance at some typical countries (1)**



**A glance at some typical countries (2)**

- Differences **between countries** are significant while remaining in a rather **small range of variation**
- Differences between countries do **not** go **in the expected direction** :
  - country with the biggest extreme-right party (Norway) is constantly **less** xenophobe than others
  - Xenophobe feelings in UK are constantly **higher** than in all other countries while there is no important extreme-right party in this country

**A glance at some typical countries (3)**

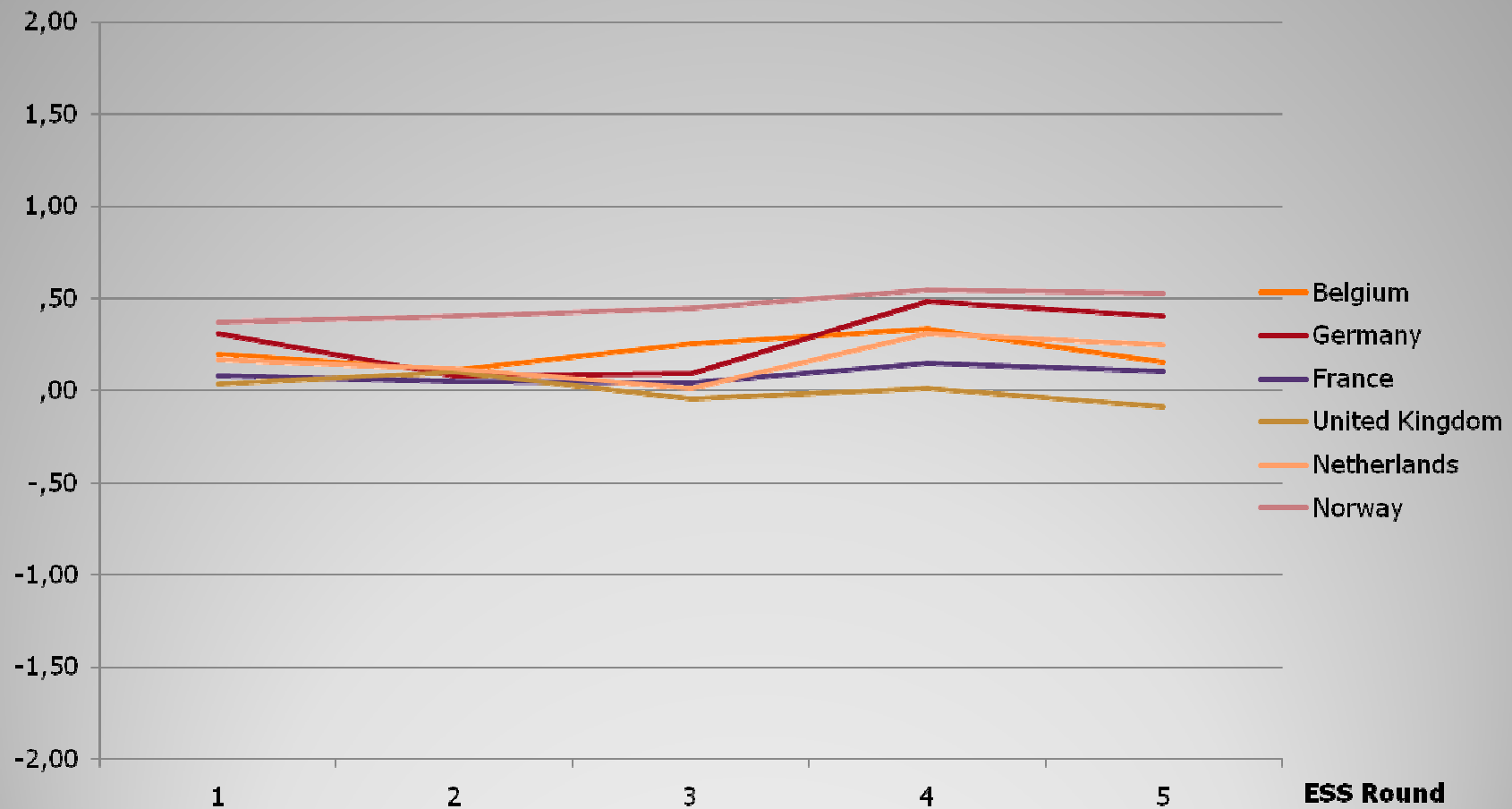


**A glance at some typical countries (2)**

- Longitudinal evolution shows that
  - If we except Germany with some « erratic » profile, the difference between rounds for each country are small
  - Differences between the most « migrant friendly » and the less « migrant friendly » national opinions tend to slightly increase over time
  - The mean for each country is around the neutral point of the scale

**A glance at some typical countries (4)**

## Attitude scale



**A glance at some typical countries (5)**

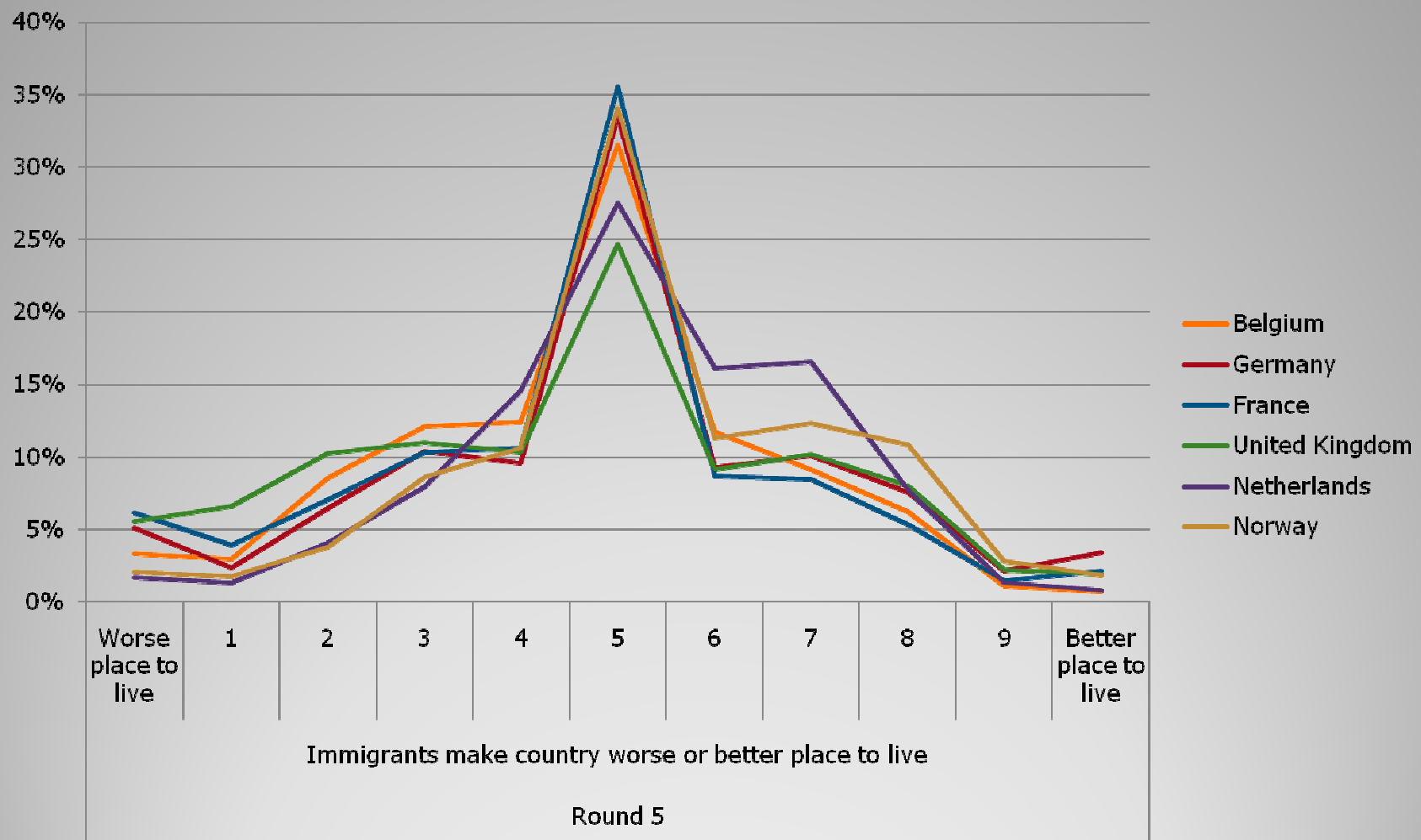
- On the whole, we see that **regardless of the presence of an extreme-right political offer**, evolution is **marginal** over time :
- for all countries the difference between round 1 and round 5 is maximum **0,3** on a scale ranging from **-2** to **+2**
  - Does it make sense to try and explain such small variations with sophisticated analyses?

**A glance at some typical countries (6)**

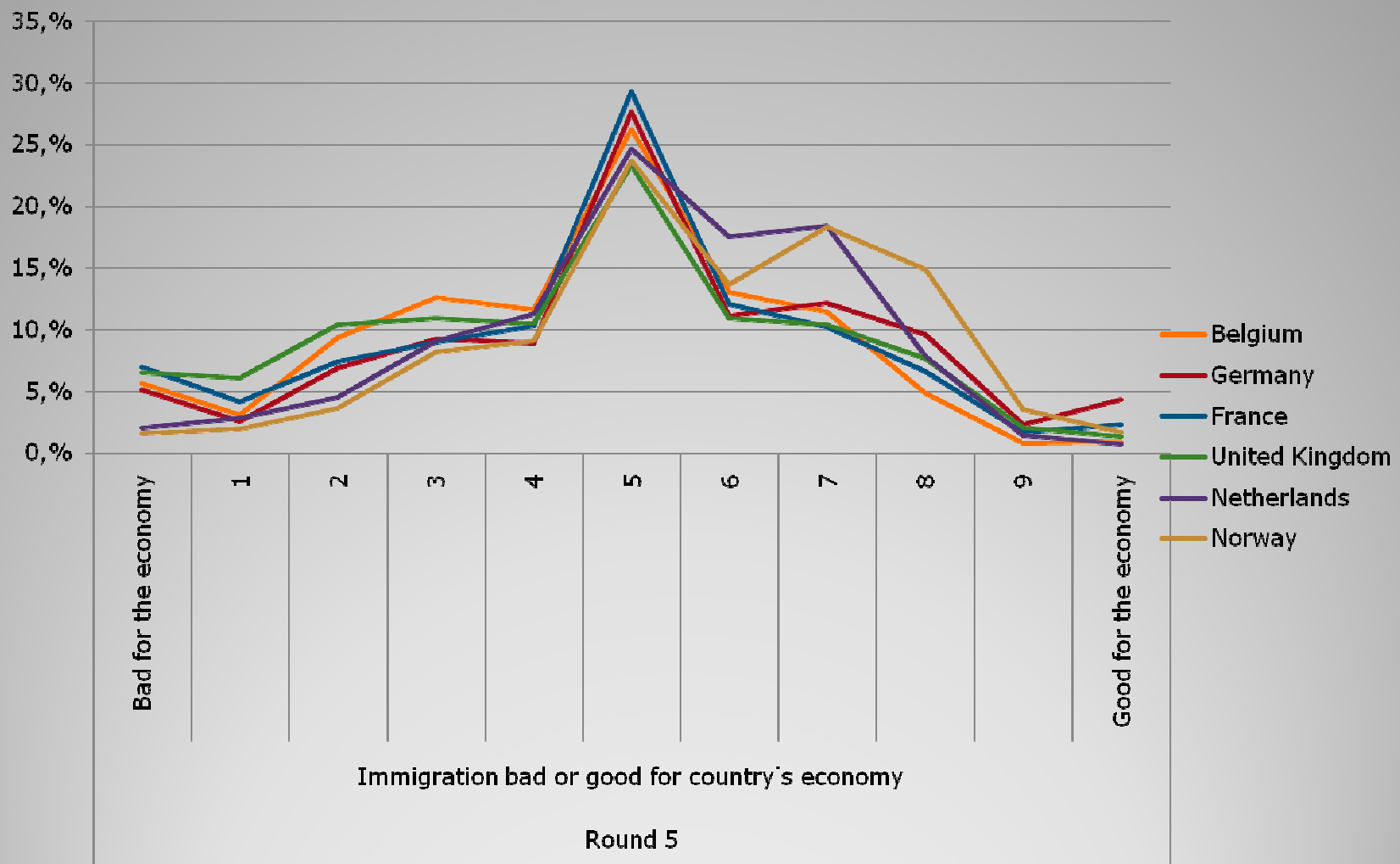


- Empiric results from ESS show that:
  - Our first hypothesis does not match the data
  - The data do not seem compatible with the rather widely spread vision of a xenophobe evolution across Europe.
- Some explanatory hypotheses :
  - The xenophobe trend is present but it is framed by the religious question (islam) and not the migrant question
  - The xenophobe trend is overestimated because of the dramatic impact of marginal electoral recomposition
  - The xenophobe trend is emerging but has not yet been consistently measured.

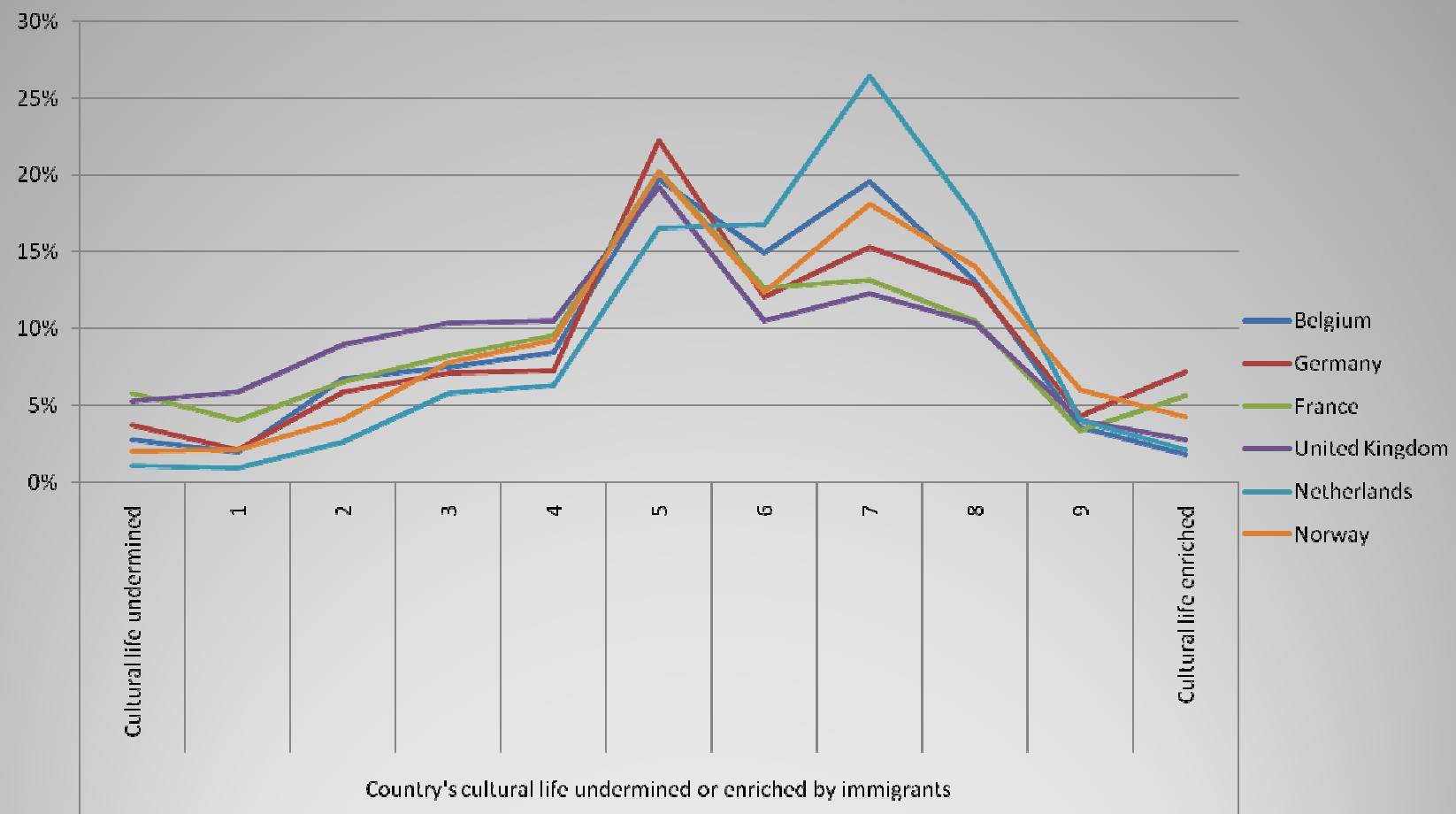
**A glance at some typical countries (6)**



## The hypothesis of framing (1)



## The hypothesis of framing (2)



## The hypothesis of framing (3)

- What can we see from the distribution for the various questions ?
  - For countries considered, the answers to « *a better/worse place to live* » correspond to an almost perfect centered **bell curve** which means that there is probably no « strong » opinion on that matter
  - For the same countries, the curve is slightly bimodal with a second peak around 7 when it is question of economy or culture
  - The shape of the curve for the three questions remains the same across time.

## The hypothesis of framing (4)

- What can be concluded from the distribution for the various questions ?
  - Except for very few respondents, immigration would be a **consensual**, or **irrelevant** topic?
  - The survey **fails to capture** the way the topic is actually grasped among the population?

**An attempt of conclusion (1)**

- What can be concluded about our research question?
  - Are political analysts overinterpreting slight changes in voting behaviour?
    - « *Myth of underlying trend?* »
  - Is attitude toward immigrants only marginally linked to the vote for extreme right?
    - *Is xenophobia only a secondary dimension of the extreme-right vote?*

**An attempt of conclusion (2)**