Explaining Variation in Attitudes to Immigration in Europe

JRC-SAS-INGSA Evidence and Policy Summer School
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What we’re going to do

• Hello!
• Attempt to answer some of the key questions about attitudes to immigration
• Consider the main trends in and theories about attitudes to immigration
• Incorporate some useful methodological techniques to make sense of complex information
How are we going to do it?

- Consider relevant questions in turn
- Look at a range of data sources related to those questions in groups
- Report back
- First country level
  - Then some theoretical and methodological considerations
  - Then individual level
  - Then consider how this relates to policy messaging
What do we mean by attitudes to immigration

• Not so simple!
  – Abstract favorability
  – Willingness to admit immigrants
  – Perceived effects of immigration
    • Egocentric or sociotropic
    – Which immigrants should be accepted
    – Perceived importance of immigration
What do we mean by ‘variation’?

- Again, not so simple

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Between</th>
<th>Within</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate</td>
<td>Country X v Country Y</td>
<td>Country X at time T v Country X at time T+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Person X v Person Y</td>
<td>Person X at time T v Person X at time T+1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key country-level questions

• Are Europeans turning against immigration?
• Would you say immigration to European countries has been similar or different?
• Are attitudes to immigration different or similar between European countries?
• What is the relationship between immigration, attitudes, salience and voting for anti-immigration parties over time?
Key country-level trends

• Attitudes to immigration are stable, becoming slightly more positive!
• Immigration doesn’t affect attitudes much. However, it seems to affect saliency (perceived importance) which then positively affects voting for the radical right
  – Latent, stable attitudes being activated
Perceived effect of immigration on the economy (source: ESS 2014)

![Bar chart showing perceived effect of immigration on economy between 2002 and 2015.](chart)

**Introduction**

**Country level**

**Individual level**

**Messaging**

**Conclusion**
Perceived effect of immigration on culture
(source: ESS 2014)

Introduction
Country level
Individual level
Messaging
Conclusion

Perceived effect of immigration on culture (source: ESS 2014)

- Very negative
- Negative
- Neither negative nor positive
- Positive
- Very positive

Comparison:
- 2002
- 2015

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Perceived effect of immigration on quality of life (source: ESS 2014)
Perceived effect of immigration on government accounts
(source: ESS 2014)
Perceived effect of immigration on crime (source: ESS 2014)

- **very negative**
- **negative**
- **neither negative nor positive**
- **positive**
- **very positive**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>very negative</th>
<th>negative</th>
<th>neither negative nor positive</th>
<th>positive</th>
<th>very positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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Individual-level

• Ok, so attitudes are stable, suggesting context doesn’t matter much.
• But there’s still significant variation. Then where does that variation come from? Why are some people anti and some pro?
• … a lot of work has gone into this …
First, some basics

- Scientists are interested in causality
  - *Why* are things as they are?
  - What is the effect of X on Y?
  - Or, more generally: what are *all* the effects of X ↔ what are *all* the causes of Y?
  - What causes variation in attitudes to immigration?

- **How do we answer these questions?**
  - Scientific method (hypothesis testing)
    - Question-> theory-> hypothesis-> method-> data -> analysis -> answer
  - The combination of theory and data
    - Neither is sufficient! We all know endless spurious correlations
    - Causation can never be proven with finality in any field (*phew!*)
    - Causation can only be postulated (theorised or suggested) and then supported through evidence (data, correlations)
Suggested theories for attitudes to immigration are vast!

At least four *categories* of theories that explain attitudes to immigration:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Socialisation</th>
<th>Attitudinal</th>
<th>Contextual</th>
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<td>Parent’s views</td>
<td>left-right positioning</td>
<td>Job sector</td>
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What are the causes of variation in attitudes to immigration?

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<td>Parent’s views</td>
<td>Left-right positioning</td>
<td>Neighborhood safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral foundation</td>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Contact with immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Early peer group</td>
<td>Libertarian-authoritarian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lived abroad</td>
<td>Anti-establishment sentiment</td>
<td>Local immigration rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of immigration levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban/rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Job sector</td>
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What to do with so many findings?

- There’s no reason to necessarily believe that not all of these are right
- Multiple causal mechanisms are related, and often indeed reliant, upon one another.
- All have direct and indirect effect
- Some are distal \((\text{big effects, hard to change})\)
- Some are proximal \((\text{small effects, easier to change})\)
Use ‘funnel of causality’ method

- Attitudes to immigration
- Proximal effects (weak & unstable)
- Distal effects (strong & stable)
Use ‘funnel of causality’ method

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- Psychological predisposition
  - Early life norm acquisition (parents, schooling, community)
- Personality type
  - Tertiary education
- Moral foundation
  - Lifestyle (family, children, living abroad, attachment to place)

Political attitudes
- Ideology (right-wing; fiscal / social conservatism)
- Political alienation

Contact (empathy / threat)
- Neighborhood safety / crime
- Party cues / media influence
- Economic competition

Proximal effects (weak & unstable)
Distal effects (strong & stable)

Explaining Attitudes to Immigration in Europe
Let’s look at how values affect attitudes

• What are values?
  – Broad motivational goals in life, guiding principles
  – Many ways to measure them. All ways suggest:
    • Values are stable, identifiable, drawn from specific set, vary a lot between individuals
    • Can predict attitudes and behaviours well
    • Rooted in upbringing and genetics
Correlations between values and willingness to accept immigrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bi-dimensional pole (and hypothesised direction of correlation)</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Variable (standardised)</th>
<th>Correlation (*** p&lt;0.001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-transcendence (+)</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
<td>Equal opportunities</td>
<td>0.216***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listen to people</td>
<td>0.187***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Care for nature</td>
<td>0.055***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Help people around her</td>
<td>0.093***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be loyal to friends</td>
<td>0.074***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation (-)</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Follow customs</td>
<td>-0.149***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be humble</td>
<td>-0.027***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>Behave properly</td>
<td>-0.105***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Follow rules</td>
<td>-0.129***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Live in secure surroundings</td>
<td>-0.164***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Government ensures safety</td>
<td>-0.150***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-enhancement (-)</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Get respect</td>
<td>-0.090***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be rich</td>
<td>-0.091***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Be very successful</td>
<td>-0.018***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Show abilities</td>
<td>-0.024***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-enhancement / Openness to change (-)</td>
<td>Hedonism</td>
<td>Spoil oneself</td>
<td>0.061***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have fun</td>
<td>0.034***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to change (+)</td>
<td>Stimulation</td>
<td>Looking for new things</td>
<td>0.069***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have adventures and risks</td>
<td>0.062***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Direction</td>
<td>Make own decisions</td>
<td>0.058***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being creative</td>
<td>0.113***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effects of values and willingness to accept immigrants
Only four values really matter

- Universalism, security, conformity, tradition
- These can predict 28% of variation in attitudes to immigration
- Values matter … a lot.
- With that in mind… How can we design a values-conscious policy communication strategy on immigration?
To conclude

- Attitudes to immigration are stable, becoming slightly more positive!
- Immigration doesn’t affect attitudes much. However, it seems to affect saliency (perceived importance) which then positively affects voting for the radical right
  – Latent, stable attitudes being activated
To conclude

• Europeans are divided on immigration.
• Most have an opinion, many are in the middle, few extremists
  – People recognise complexity
• There are swathes of evidence explaining why people vary
• It’s rarely put together … but it can and should be understood as linked
To conclude

- One strong predictor is values
- Four values matter for attitudes to immigration
- Policy makers would be wise to think about this when communicating!