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Propinquity & Perturbation:

Addressing Cross-National Variation in the Size of the Urban-Rural Divide Regarding Attitudes Towards Immigrants

A Thesis in the Màster Universitari en Ciència Política in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's degree at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

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Abstract

European attitudes towards immigrants are geographically clustered, with the residents of urban areas tending to view immigrants more favourably than their rural counterparts. This study employs a novel approach to understanding anti-immigration sentiment by addressing cross-national variation in the size of the urban-rural divide of attitudes towards immigrants. By drawing from threat theories, contact theories and social identity perspectives, theoretical mechanisms are proposed to explain how higher national income inequality, native-born unemployment, actual immigrant populations and *perceived* immigrant populations act distinctly on native urban and rural populations. Using data from Rounds 8 and 9 of the European Social Survey, Eurostat, the *Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of immigrants in the European Union* and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for twelve Western European nations, it was first demonstrated that attitudes towards immigrants indeed differ between rural and urban populations and that these differences vary between countries. Thereupon, it was shown that income inequality and native-born unemployment moderate the influence of urban and rural settings on attitudes towards immigrants. Higher perceived immigrant populations were also found to interact with residential settings, although not as expected. Higher national income inequality, native-born unemployment and *perceived* immigrant populations are all associated with smaller urban-rural gaps regarding attitudes towards immigrants. By controlling for individual-level demographic variables, these findings offer empirical support for the contextual effects hypothesis. Moreover, these findings translate into strategies that policy makers can employ to mitigate divergent urban and rural attitudes towards immigrants.

KEY WORDS

Attitudes towards immigrants, urban-rural divide, winners and losers of globalization, economic threat theories, cultural threat theories, contact theories, compositional effects, contextual effects, income inequality, unemployment, social identity, national identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

While a rich body of literature from various disciplines has examined racial and ethnic prejudice, the ramifications recent European immigration has had on the rise of the far-right, democratic backsliding and the stability of the European Union have newly piqued the interests of political scientists (Williams, 1947; Allport, 1954; Blumer, 1958; Bonacich, 1972; Ratković, 2017; Podobnik *et al.,* 2017; Anna Vachudova, 2020). Even so, comparatively few studies have sought to explain immigration attitudes by addressing differences *within* and *between* countries (Quillian, 1995; Ceobanu, 2004; Howard, 2006; Teney *et al*., 2014; Maxwell, 2019). Accordingly, this study contributes to the literature by combining these two approaches to ascertain what factors contribute to cross-national variations in the size of the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants.

This study relies on a generated scale for gauging attitudes towards immigrants that incorporates three items from the European Social Survey that tap into opinions about immigrants in order to examine whether national touchstones—including income inequality and unemployment, along with actual and perceived immigrant populations—can moderate the influence urban-rural settings exert on attitudes towards immigrants. Drawing upon and expanding existing constructs from contact, threat and social identity theories, explanations are provided for how each macro trend might differentially influence the perception of immigrants held by urban and rural populations.

It is argued that times of economic hardship provoke anxiety in both the affluent and the poor, leading to adversarial relations and societal fracturing (Jay *et al.*, 2019). To alleviate this psychosocial discomfort, people turn to groups they identify with (Billig, 1995; Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). Amongst the simplest to identify with is the national group, which ordinarily frames immigrants as cultural opponents—thus deteriorating attitudes towards immigrants. However, urban populations are exposed to greater extremes of income inequality, while rural populations have become habituated to economic hardship (Binelli & Loveless, 2016; Gimpel & Karnes, 2016). As a result, attitudes towards immigrants in urban centers are expected to deteriorate relative to those in rural environments when income inequality and unemployment are high—thus attenuating urban rural divergence.

On the other hand, larger actual immigrant populations are expected to preferentially improve attitudes towards immigrants in urban settings, while larger *perceived* immigrant populations are expected to disproportionately deteriorate them in rural areas, as immigrants tend to be clustered in urban centers (Benassi, 2020). Thus the positive potential of contact is considered more likely to manifest itself in urban areas, while larger perceived immigrant populations become threatening in rural areas where negative stereotypes flourish. Therefore, larger actual and perceived immigrant populations are hypothesized to exacerbate the urban-rural differences in attitudes towards immigrants. These arguments are further elaborated in the theoretical framework.

The results support the notion that income inequality and unemployment moderate the role that residential (i.e., urban-rural) settings have on attitudes towards immigrants—thereby reducing their divide. Conversely, insufficient evidence was found for actual immigrant populations to act as moderators. Lastly, perceived immigrant populations were found to interact with residential settings, although not as had been expected. Possible methodological shortcomings are then discussed, given that complex contact processes might work exclusively at the individual level. The study concludes with recommendations for future research and a discussion of policy implications.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the 1980s, European immigration became an ‘issue’ in the eyes of the local populace, as evidenced by incidences of aggression against foreign-born populations and increasing support for newly revived far-right political parties (Entzinger, 1985; Hargreaves, 1991; Ogden,1985). Consequently, many European governments adopted restrictive labour-migration policies. Nevertheless, immigration was still permitted within the context of family reunification (Hammar, 1985; Ogden, 1991). In addition, expulsion was relatively rare, meaning that—despite more restrictive immigration policies—immigrant populations remained relatively stable, or even increased, during this time (McLaren, 2003). Meanwhile, the countries of Southern Europe had steadily been developing economically, in turn, transitioning from labour-emigration countries to labour-immigration countries (Lianos, 1993; Rosoli, 1993; Rocha-Trinidade, 1993). Moreover, many immigrants from Northern Africa who had initially

planned on passing through Southern European 'transit' countries ultimately remained in these countries—a trend that would become particularly important in the twenty-first century due, in large part, to the Dublin Convention (McLaren, 2003).

Debates concerning immigration once again rose to prominence following the 'migrant crisis' of 2015, when 1.2 million immigrants arrived in Europe—an influx that had not been witnessed in decades (*Eurostat,* 2016). Many of these immigrants had fled from political turmoil and armed conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, meaning that they came from culturally distinct Muslim-majority countries (Geddes & Scholten, 2016; Hangartner *et al*., 2019). These cultural differences stoked fears of an eventual disintegration of domestic culture and national identity (Koopmans, 2005; Sniderman *et al*., 2004). Immigration stance has now become an ideological schism that not only defines political party competition, but has also divided the people of Europe (Hangartner *et al.*, 2019; De Vries, 2018; Hooghe & Marks, 2018).

2.1 Urban-Rural Divisions: Residential Settings & Attitudes Towards Immigrants

In finding that departments in France with larger immigrant populations displayed lower levels of xenophobia, Jolly and DiGiusto (2014) drew attention to sub-national variation in attitudes towards immigrants that had previously been overlooked. Subsequent research has confirmed the geographic clustering of immigration attitudes: the inhabitants of cosmopolitan cities tend to view immigration favourably, while rural residents tend to oppose it (Brownstein, 2016; Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Gest, 2016; Alba & Foner, 2017).

One approach to making sense of urban-rural cleavages is to look at their origins. Teney *et al*. (2014) describe a synonymous cosmopolitan-communitarian divide emerging from globalization-centred conflicts, with the cosmopolitan 'winners' of globalization supporting migration and the communitarian 'losers' opposing it. However, globalization might have only exacerbated an existing cleavage amongst the local citizenry. Others have claimed that a silent counter-revolution accompanied Inglehart's (1971, 1977) renowned silent revolution. While a portion of the populace transcended material concerns related to survival and embraced post-materialist values such as environmental protection, freedom of speech and self-actualization, another portion—holding conservative or traditionalist attitudes towards religion, abortion, family structures, and immigration—rejected them (Ignazi, 2016; Jay *et al*., 2019).

Alternative postulations might offer insight into the perpetuation of urban-rural divisions. The contextual effects hypothesis posits that living in a particular environment causes people to share political attitudes such as voting behaviour (Johnston & Pattie, 2006; Ethington & McDaniel, 2007; Cinalli & Giugni, 2011). Likewise, residential settings may also influence attitudes towards immigration. On the other hand, the composition effects hypothesis posits that people are not randomly distributed across a country (McAllister & Studlar, 1992). Instead, less educated, manual workers might move to the countryside because they find large cities overwhelmingly competitive and prohibitively expensive (Oberti & Préteceille, 2016; Cunningham & Savage, 2017). Conversely, well-educated and highly skilled professionals might move to cities for better work opportunities (Castells, 1989; Sassen, 2001). Moreover, people who value multiculturalism and hold liberal views might self-select into cosmopolitan cities (Florida, 2005; Favell, 2011). Maxwell (2019) found evidence for compositional effects, particularly those related to demographic (e.g., occupational and educational) sorting. Interestingly, while conducting robustness checks, Maxwell found that the size of the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants differs between countries. For instance, the urban-rural gaps regarding attitudes towards immigrants of Switzerland and France appeared to be larger than those of Germany and Spain.

The compositional effects hypothesis would appear to offer a straightforward explanation for the size of the urban-rural divide of attitudes towards immigrants: more demographic sorting results in larger divides. However, this premise offers little in the way of explaining why countries differ in the degree to which they experience demographic sorting. In this regard, demographic sorting appears to be a secondary phenomenon that manifests itself further down in the causal chain. Besides, demographic sorting is—in essence—internal migration. One way of potentially reconciling seemingly conflicting compositional and contextual arguments is by appreciating that they disproportionately operate at different levels. While compositional effects might be more apparent at the subnational level, contextual effects might play a more critical role at the national level. To further extend this argument: state-level contextual characteristics might influence demographic sorting from the top-down, thereby preceding intrastate-level compositional effects in the causal chain.

Therefore, to address cross-national differences in the size of the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants, it might be worth considering how national-level

processes interact with one's place of residence. Major forces such as industrialization, urbanization and globalization might have set in motion the bifurcation of urban and rural cohorts; nevertheless, these are long-term processes that might not differ all that much between similarly developed nations. Instead, economic and contact forces might serve as short-term determinants of the degree to which urban-rural bifurcation manifests itself within a given nation. Before examining the influence of such forces, however, it is necessary to demonstrate the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants, along with cross-national differences in the size of this divide, as any subsequent investigation presupposes their existence.

Hypothesis 1: Urban residents view immigrants more favourably than their rural counterparts.

Hypothesis 2 : The size of the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants differs between countries.

2.2 Threat Theories: Economic Conditions & Attitudes Towards Immigrants

While early research on prejudice focused primarily on psychological processes within the individual,[1] Blumer (1958) argued that a prejudiced individual must necessarily identify with a racial group and view other racial groups as occupying an inferior social position. More specifically, four conditions must be present in order for prejudice to manifest itself in society: (1) a given racial group must feel that they are in one way or another superior to another group; (2) members of the subordinate group must be viewed as intrinsically different or alien; (3) the self-proclaimed 'superior' group must believe that they have certain rights, privileges and prerogatives that the other group does not and (4) they must feel anxious or suspicious of the subordinate group's aspirations of laying claim to those very rights, privileges and prerogatives. While it is not the absolute social positioning of groups that is of primary concern to the 'dominant' group, it is their *relative* positioning vis-à-vis the subordinate group. Stated otherwise: a prejudiced group is preoccupied primarily with maintaining the existing racial status quo. Although Blumer's (1958) theoretical framework was constructed to explain racial prejudice between White and African American populations in the US, it seems readily applicable to ethnic prejudice in European nations on the part of the national majority towards immigrant minorities.

[1]See Morse's *The psychology of prejudice* (1907) for an excellent example.

Bonacich (1972) expanded the scope of research hitherto conducted by encapsulating racial prejudice within the broader notion of ethnic antagonism (e.g., consisting of beliefs, behaviours and institutions) by considering historical examples from around the world. Bonacich was initially intrigued by the coexistence of seemingly contradictory forms of ethnic antagonism: the exclusionary approach in which certain ethnic groups are shut out from society and the caste approach, in which the very survival of society depends on the contributions of lower-class ethnic groups. Bonacich argued that ethnic antagonism emerges when the local labour market becomes split along ethnic lines. A three-way dynamic emerges between business, expensive labour (e.g., White Americans), and cheap labour (e.g., Chinese immigrants). Given the capitalistic principles that govern business, it is in the employer's interest to pay as little as possible for labour. This, in turn, pits expensive labour against cheap labour, as the latter directly threatens the former's livelihood. Exclusionary practices and the caste system can thus be viewed as strategies employed by expensive labour to protect its livelihood, either by excluding certain ethnicities from accessing the labour market altogether, or by relegating them to lower employment echelons. Bonacich's split labour-market theory was critical because it presented competition between ethnic groups over limited resources as a zero-sum game. Moreover, it is consistent with the central premise of realistic group threat theory: the subordinate group presents an objective threat to the limited resources to which a dominant group lays a preferential claim.

The split labour-market theory, along with other comparable economic threat theories, is based on the central tenets of self-interest theory and rational choice theory: human beings are rational agents who make decisions by sensibly weighing costs and benefits and behave in ways that will maximize their well being. This is perhaps not surprising given that the concept of utility maximization is central to the study of economics—or at least has been since the emergence of marginalism. However, following the civil rights movement in the US, some researchers began to question the adequacy of economic threat theories in justifying why individuals adopt prejudiced positions on issues that have no apparent relevance to them. This idea was underscored by a paradox that had emerged in the literature at the time: while White Americans tended to support general notions of integration and equality, they opposed specific policies aimed at achieving them, such as busing and affirmative action (Kelley, 1974; Taylor *et al*., 1978; Lipset & Schneider, 1978). For instance, while racial segregation in schools had been

declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1954, schools in the US still experienced *de facto* segregation several decades later due to racial housing inequality (Formisano, 2004). Busing was a practice to overcome this segregation by commuting students to schools in neighbouring districts that differed in racial composition. What was particularly difficult to explain using notions of rational choice and self-interest was why some White Americans opposed busing when they did not have school-aged children (Kelley, 1974). Sears *et al.* (1979) put forth the symbolic racism theory in order to address this phenomenon. In essence, the theory claims that although White Americans have come to reject blatant racism, they still harbour a subtle intolerance towards African Americans due to early childhood socialization (a notion that echoes early physiological research on prejudice). Certain political symbols trigger this intolerance, which then emerges in debates regarding racial policies—regardless of whether or not a given individual has a stake in such debates. Similarly, Sears *et al.* (1980) found symbolic attitudes to be strong predictors for policy preferences and voting behaviour.

Other researchers were not convinced. Bobo (1983) argued that self-interest had been defined too narrowly as dependent on direct competition between individuals. By re-analysing the data used by Sears *et al.* (1979, 1980), Bobo demonstrated that symbolic racism could result from the dominant group's perception of policies as potential threats to the current status quo (consistent with Blumer's fourth condition). Bobo (1983, 1988) thus combined the notions of competition proposed by individual-level self-interest theories with Blumer's group-level perspective and refined the notion of indirect perceived threats. These arguments are equally relevant to the debates surrounding affirmative action.[2]

Quillian (1995), in turn, applied a modified version of Blumer's and Bobo's arguments to anti-immigration sentiment in Europe. Quillian argued that individual-level theories fail to explain cross-national variation in average anti-immigration sentiment. Instead, variables that contribute to competition between the local and immigrant population must be addressed. Using mixed multilevel models that combined individual-level survey data with aggregate national demographic statistics, Quillian found that the host country's economic conditions influenced group competition.

While this study draws on Quillian's (1995) reasoning and methodology, additional attention is afforded to the use of economic touchstones. For instance, Gross Domestic Product

[2]See Chemerinsky (1996); Guiner (1998); Park and Liu (2014); and Kidder (2000) for more on the debates surrounding affirmative action.

(GDP) per capita might be misleading in that it masks the actual distribution of income, while inflation underweights the emotional toll of joblessness (Di Tella *et al*., 2000). For instance, in 2015, 25 hedge fund managers earned more than every kindergarten teacher in the US—combined (World Bank 2016, Jay *et al*., 2019). While the wealth generated by these hedge fund managers was a significant contribution to America's GDP that year, it is unlikely that this national wealth benefited the economic security of any one of the 500 000 individuals working as kindergarten teachers in the US at the time. Instead, national assessments of income inequality and unemployment rates might be more accurate indicators of the overall economic security of a populace, particularly in the short term.

Urban Inequality

Income inequality has been linked to the development of negative emotions such as fear and anxiety amongst both lower- and higher-income cohorts (Layte & Whelan, 2014; Jetten *et al.*, 2017). In the former, income inequality fuels frustration over systemic injustice, while in the latter, it serves as a stark reminder of what awaits when fortune fades (Jay *et al*. (2019). As such, inequality promotes the prominence of wealth as an individual's defining characteristic, thereby leading to society splitting along socioeconomic brackets (Durante *et al*., 2013; Jetten, Wang *et al*., 2017). Jay *et al*. (2019) propose a mechanism in which inequality leads to reduced social cohesion, mutual animosity, and increased threat perceptions. Kinnvall (2004) suggests that threatening contexts (e.g., increased income inequality) drive individuals towards identities that provide them with a sense of security. Schmid and Muldoon (2015) found that social identification (i.e., the sense of belonging to a social group) leads to improved psychological well being. Of all potential group identities, a nation—along with the cultural characteristics that accompany it—serves as the most welcoming refuge for anxious and threatened citizens (Davidson & Saull, 2016). Consistently, Shayo (2009) finds that greater income inequality is associated with more robust national identification. Interestingly, national identification neutralizes and homogenizes disparate groups (Billig, 1995; Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). This means that the process brought about by income inequality that originally fractured society along economic strata ends in the reunification of a culturally homogenous national citizenry—allied against immigrants who represent cultural threats. Consequently, economic threats could be interpreted as the underlying basis for cultural threats. Indeed, Jetten *et al*. (2015) found that

when income inequality is high, opposition to immigration is stronger among high-income and low-income groups, thus worsening attitudes toward immigrants.

Lastly, income inequality seems to only negatively influence the inequality perceptions of urban residents because they are directly exposed to a broader income spectrum—along with the discomforting extremes that lie on either end (Binelli and Loveless, 2016). Conversely, while rural residents might have lower incomes, they are likely less exposed to severe income inequality. As such, rural residents are somewhat sheltered from the anxiety induced by the juxtaposition of extreme poverty and wealth. In sum, higher national income inequality is expected to deteriorate attitudes towards immigrants to a greater degree in urban centers than in rural areas, thus diminishing the urban-rural gap regarding attitudes towards immigrants.

Hypothesis 3: Larger income inequality is associated with smaller urban-rural gaps regarding attitudes towards immigrants.

Rural Unemployment

The idea of 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization discussed previously implies that rural inhabitants get left behind by a rapidly changing world for which they are ill-equipped to handle (Teney *et al*., 2014). However, this idea might paint a misleadingly reductionist picture of the rural inhabitant. For example, Frank (2004) blames the credulity of rural Americans in explaining their seemingly counterintuitive Republican support. The argument goes that the business elites of the GOP were able to deftly side-step economic issues by focusing on symbolic moral and religious issues. While rural citizens are relatively conservative concerning religion, abortion and family structures (Ignazi, 2016; Jay *et al*., 2019), this does not imply that they were deceived into supporting Republican candidates. Several studies have demonstrated that rural residents report higher job and life satisfaction than their urban counterparts (Drury & Tweeten 1997; Martinson & Wilkening 1984; Rodgers, 1980). Gimpel and Karnes (2016) argue that this is due to an entrepreneurial legacy of self-employment and high property ownership rates. These provide the rural citizen with more fulfilling work and greater economic independence than the urban "on-the-clock wage slave" who is obliged to tolerate unsatisfactory employment since the exorbitant cost of rent renders them reliant on regular paychecks (Gimpel & Karnes, 2016, p.469). In this regard, rural inhabitants are relatively resilient since they have learned to adapt to harsher labour market conditions (Gimpel & Karnes, 2016). This resilience of character is likely

reflected in stable attitudes and beliefs. More specifically, while rural inhabitants might view immigration less favourably than their urban counterparts, their stance is likely to remain as stable as their position on abortion or same-sex marriage.

Admittedly, this account only presents part of the story: economic decline in rural areas has been accompanied by steady population loss (Mckenzie, 1994; Goetz & Debertin, 1996). Many of these internal migrants move to urban centers in search of employment (Lyu *et al*., 2019). This finding infers a fundamental psychological antecedent: these people would not have moved unless they genuinely believed that their economic circumstances would improve by relocating. While some might find what they had sought in an urban environment, others likely end up discovering little more than disappointment. On the contrary, urban populations continue increasing despite their economic decline and concentration of poverty (Marshall, 2007; Orfield, 1999). In this sense, urban centers can be thought of as a last resort for struggling rural residents. Importantly, immigrants tend to be clustered in urban areas (Benassi, 2020). As such, native-born rural emigrants that come to cities to look for work might suddenly find themselves in direct competition with immigrants. Consistent with economic threat theories, these individuals are the most likely to feel threatened by immigrants and develop stronger anti-immigration sentiment. Most importantly, when these individuals are surveyed, they are registered as urban citizens—thereby somewhat artificially decreasing average urban attitudes towards immigrants.

In sum, the notion of urban 'winners' and rural 'losers' of globalization might be overly simplistic. Instead, rural populations likely consist of three groups. The first contains those who willingly relocate to urban centers (consistent with the compositional effects hypothesis). A second group consists of people that can persevere through the harsh economic conditions of rural environments. The third group includes those who somewhat reluctantly move to the city in search of employment and better economic conditions. However, while one segment of this third group might find employment, the other continues to struggle with the hardships of unemployment. Hence, these struggling rural emigrants are the only ones who can be considered 'losers' of globalization. Consequently, unemployment is more likely to affect these individuals, decrease average urban attitudes towards immigrants, and decrease the urban-rural gap.

Hypothesis 4: Higher unemployment amongst the native-born population is associated with smaller urban-rural gaps regarding attitudes towards immigrants.

2. 3 Contact Conjectures: Immigrant Populations & Attitudes Towards Immigrants

Contact theories can be considered the opposing force to threat theories, particularly regarding the impact of larger immigrant populations. The central premise of contact conjectures is that the simultaneous existence of different racial or ethnic groups within a given environment need not always result in more prejudice. Indeed, early research suggested that intergroup contact can improve racial or ethnic relations—the desegregation of the US Merchant Marine being amongst the first examples. Brophy (1946) found that racial attitudes amongst White and Black sailors improved as a function of the number of voyages they had undergone together. Similarly, Kephart (1957) found that White police officers were more tolerant if they had belonged to racially mixed squads. The desegregation of housing in America offered additional opportunities for examining the implications of intergroup contact. Deutsch and Collins (1951) found housing projects similar in most regards, but that differed in whether or not they were racially segregated.[3] They interviewed homemakers from each housing project and found that those who lived in the desegregated housing projects held significantly more positive racial attitudes.

Williams (1947) had a few years prior put forth what is now considered the contact theory by arguing that members of different groups might develop positive attitudes towards each other when cooperating in certain situations. In turn, Sherif and Sherif (1953) argued that the nature of contact must be specified. Allport (1954), in his seminal work *The Nature of Prejudice*, argued that the positive potential of intergroup contact could only be realized if specific conditions were met: (1) the groups in question must have equal status; (2) these groups must share common goals; (3) they must cooperate amongst themselves and (4) local authorities, laws, norms and customs must support each group individually, along with their mutual integration in general. Others have suggested additional conditions such as the opportunity to disconfirm detrimental stereotypes, develop positive perceptions of the other group, and experience pleasant or rewarding relations when intermingling (Amir, 1976; Ben-Ari & Amir, 1986). While contact diminishes prejudice when all of the defined conditions are met (Cook, 1984), it appears most are unnecessary or play a minor role (Pettigrew, 1998; Smith, 1994). Several authors argue that the most important form of contact is intimate or amicable (Cook, 1962; Pettigrew, 1998; Amir, 1976; Brewer & Miller, 1984).

[3]According to Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), the design of this study would later be dubbed the ‘quasi-experiment’ by Campbell and Stanley (1963).

Eventually, other researchers began investigating contact theory within the context of European migration. However, contradictory findings led Amir (1969, 1976) to stress that unfavourable conditions can deteriorate intergroup relations, while the specificity of each type of contact is such that it precludes generalizations to entire groups. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) and Pettigrew *et al.* (2011) conducted large-scale meta-analyses consisting of over 500 studies, ultimately concluding that intergroup contact does reduce prejudice—regardless of the conditions. Nonetheless, while such findings seem to reconcile inconsistencies within the contact theory camp, they directly oppose the implications put forth by the economic threat camp, namely that larger immigrant populations represent larger threats and deteriorate attitudes towards immigrants.

It may be possible to reconcile the contradictory implications of economic threat and contact theories by making an important distinction between the actual number of immigrants and the *perceived* number of immigrants. While the former might improve attitudes towards immigrants by providing opportunities for contact between local and immigrant populations, the latter might increase threat perceptions amongst the local populace. Since immigrants tend to be concentrated in urban areas (Benassi, 2020), contact processes likely preferentially manifest themselves in urban environments and improve migration sentiment, while having little effect on rural populations. Conversely, higher *perceived* immigrant populations, which are consistently higher than actual immigrant populations (European Commission, 2018), might affect attitudes towards immigrants negatively—particularly in rural environments where there are fewer immigrants to disconfirm detrimental stereotypes. As Podobnik *et al.* (2017) find, support for far-right populist parties is higher when national-immigrant inflows are higher in a given country *and* when EU-immigration is higher in general. Even though immigrants in one country do not pose a direct threat to the natives of another country, they might be perceived as indirect threats that jeopardize the existing status quo. Similarly, if the perceived number of immigrants is exceptionally high—perhaps due to disproportionate media coverage or ominous forewarnings made by far-right politicians—rural inhabitants might disproportionately experience the anxiety and perception of threats that deteriorate attitudes towards immigrants. Furthermore, rural inhabitants are less likely to experience regular contact with immigrants that could neutralize such anxiety and threat perceptions. On the other hand, as urban residents are already

accustomed to living amid a relatively large number of immigrants, higher perceived immigrant populations might not have as large an impact on their attitudes.

Hypothesis 5:Larger actual immigrant populations are associated with larger urban-rural gaps regarding attitudes towards immigrants.

Hypothesis 6: Larger perceived immigrant populations are associated with larger urban-rural gaps regarding attitudes towards immigrants.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Data

This study relies on a database consisting of four constituent databases. Two larger or 'master' databases come from the European Social Survey (henceforth the ESS). The ESS is a biennial survey that measures attitudes, beliefs and behaviours across European nations. Launched in 2002 by the European Science Foundation, the ESS was initially developed to address a perceived lack of cross-national attitudinal surveys conducted with sufficient methodological precision and rigour to allow for subsequent scientific investigation. To date, the ESS has conducted nine rounds and surveyed thirty countries. This study will conduct quantitative analyses using data derived from ESS rounds 8 (2016) and 9 (2018).

The two secondary or 'supplementary' databases consist of macro-level national statistics. These databases were manually created using statistics from three sources: Eurostat,[4] the *Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of immigrants in the European Union*[5] and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)[6]. Data was collected for 2015 and 2017 because the ESS conducts fieldwork (i.e., surveys) one year before publishing databases. As such, the use of macro-level indicators corresponding to the years in which the surveys were conducted seems like a more accurate methodological approach. For example, if one were asked to rate their subjective satisfaction with the national economy, it is more logical to look at the objective state of the national economy at the moment they provided their answer than that of the following year when their response was published. Thereupon, the 2015 supplementary database was merged with the 2016 ESS database, while the 2017 supplementary

[4]See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/ for the full database.
[5]See European Commission (2018) for more information.
[6] See https://www.oecd.org/ for the full database.

database was merged with the 2018 ESS database. The two resulting databases were then upended into a single 'final' database.

One exception to the temporal character of the supplementary data ought to be mentioned: data from the *Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of immigrants in the European Union* is only available for the year 2018 (based on fieldwork conducted in 2017). Consequently, the same data from the *Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of immigrants in the European Union* were used for the 2015 and 2017 supplementary databases. The justification for this decision is two-fold: from a methodological standpoint, data from the *Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of immigrants in the European Union* cannot be found elsewhere and happens to be integral to this study. From a theoretical perspective, it would seem reasonable to claim that indicators such as perceived immigrant populations are unlikely to change significantly from year to year unless a significant event had occurred within that period, such as a nation suddenly and dramatically reforming its migration policy. Having reviewed aggregate statistics pertaining to the number of immigrants living in a given country between 2015 and 2017, it does not appear as though such an event had occurred.

The following countries will be examined: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Finland, France, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden. Countries in Eastern Europe have purposefully been omitted because they have experienced unique migration patterns resulting from wars and altering state borders (Maxwell, 2019). Norway and Switzerland were omitted because certain indicators were unavailable for these countries. Lastly, all of the countries mentioned above were surveyed in the 8th and the 9th rounds of the ESS.

3.2 Operationalization of Variables

Of primary importance to this study is finding a reliable measure of attitudes towards immigrants. Such attitudes may be challenging to gauge given that anti-immigration attitudes are closely related to socially taboo subjects such as xenophobia and racism. Fortunately, the ESS has several items that have been designed to measure attitudes towards immigrants. While a social desirability bias might undermine the authenticity of a participant's responses, the anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed by the administrators of the ESS ought to offset this happening to a certain degree. Any remaining censorship might represent a shortcoming inherent to large-scale surveys and the investigation of sensitive issues. In an attempt to capture attitudes

towards immigrants as accurately as possible, an additive 10-point scale was generated that incorporates three items from the ESS (one that asks if immigrants make the country a worse place to live, another that asks if immigrants undermine the local culture and one that asks if immigrants undermine the local economy). This new scale yields a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.8, indicating that the scale is quite reliable. Higher values on the generated *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale indicate more positive attitudes. The *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale will serve as the dependent variable of this study.

Of equal importance are urban and rural settings. Regarding this concept, the anonymity and confidentiality that allow anti-immigration sentiment to be evaluated significantly hamper the accuracy with which urban-rural settings can be defined. While divulging the addresses of respondents is strictly forbidden by the ESS, there is an item in the survey where respondents select the nature of their place of residence from amongst the following options: 'A big city,' 'Suburbs or outskirts of big city,' 'Town or small city,' 'Country village' and 'Farm or home in countryside.' The latter three categories have been collapsed into a *Rural* category (coded as '0'), while the former two have been collapsed into an *Urban* category (coded as '1')—thus generating a dummy variable (Traunmüller & Ackermann, 2019; García del Horno *et al.,* 2019). The urban-rural dummy variable will serve as the main independent variable. However, it is worth noting that the difference in average attitudes towards immigrants expressed by urban and rural residents is the phenomenon of interest that this study will attempt to address.

The moderators that will be evaluated in this study come in two varieties: economic and contact. Economic variables include *GINI* and *Native Unemployment*. The GINI coefficient is calculated by comparing the populations' cumulative proportions against the income they receive. A GINI coefficient of '0' represents perfect income equality, while '1' represents perfect inequality. *Native Unemployment* represents the share of unemployed native-born persons aged 15-64 in the total native-born labour force of the same age range (the sum of employed and unemployed native-born persons). Both economic indicators were collected from the OECD.

Contact indicators include *Relative Non-EU Population* and *Perceived Relative Immigrant Populations*. *Relative Non-EU Population* was calculated by dividing the number of immigrants arriving from a country other than the 28-EU countries (as defined between 2013 and 2020) by the total population of a given country. Citizens of other EU countries were not included as they might not be considered immigrants to the same degree as those arriving from

elsewhere (Quillian, 1995). Raw data regarding absolute non-EU populations was collected from Eurostat. *Perceived Relative Immigrant Populations* represents the average response provided by all respondents in a given country to the following question: "To your knowledge, what is the proportion of immigrants in the total population in (*our country*)?" This question is interesting because the definition of an 'immigrant' is left vague, allowing the respondents to apply their subjective interpretations. Data for this indicator was collected from the *Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of immigrants in the European Union.*

Controls include age, education and gender, as these have been shown to influence attitudes towards immigrants (Adorno *et al*., 1950; Maykovich, 1975). Furthermore, accounting for such individual-level demographic variables controls for the compositional effects that have been demonstrated to influence the urban-rural divide of attitudes towards immigrants (Maxwell, 2019). *Age* is measured in years, *Education* is measured in years of full-time education completed and *Female* is coded '0' for males and '1' for females. When evaluating economic variables, GDP per capita will also be included as a control, in order to avoid potential confounding between the economy, income inequality and unemployment.

3.3 Methods

In order to empirically test the defined hypotheses, statistical analyses will be conducted in three segments. The first will be a set of univariate analyses conducted to better understand attitudes towards immigrants by providing descriptive statistics.

The second segment will consist of bivariate analyses that will first demonstrate the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants in Western Europe. Thereupon, the urban-rural gap will be presented for each country. These bivariate analyses aim to provide empirical evidence—along with a general context—for the phenomenon this study aims to address. As such, the bivariate analyses set the stage for the multivariate analyses that follow.

The third segment will contain several multivariate analyses. Firstly, five mixed multilevel (otherwise known as hierarchical) models will be presented. These models will include country random intercepts in order to control for all unobserved country differences. The first model will present the average urban-rural gap in Europe. The second model will present the urban-rural gap while controlling for individual-level variables. The third and fourth will build

on the second model by adding national economic and contact indicators. Lastly, the fifth and final model will constitute a complete model that contains all indicators and controls.

Two additional sets of mixed multilevel models will examine potential interactions between national indicators and the urban-rural divide of attitudes towards immigrants: one for economic indicators and the other for contact indicators. Each of the four interactions will then be plotted for visual interpretation.

4. RESULTS

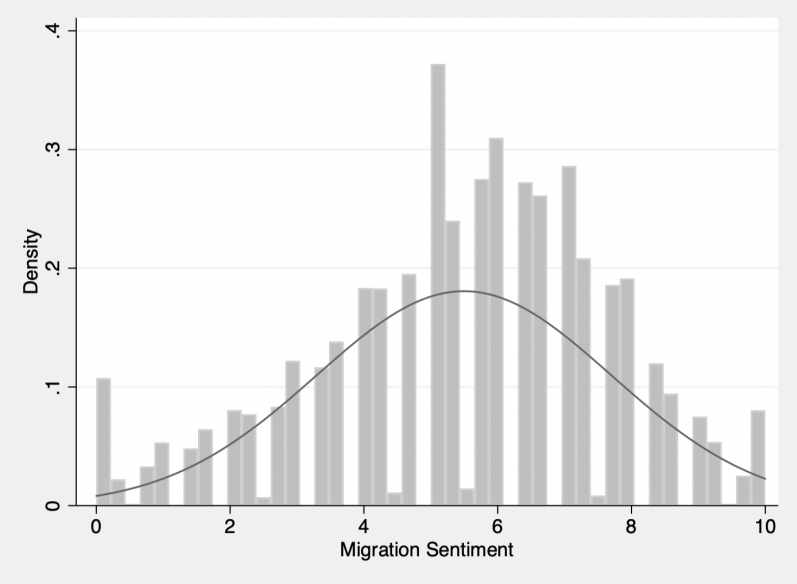
4.1 Univariate

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for the *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale. The sample consists of 47,683 observations. The lowest possible score is '0,' while the highest possible score is '10.' The mean is 5.50, with a standard deviation of 2.21. The median value is 5.6 and the interquartile range is 2.67. As displayed in the histogram in Figure 1, the distribution of responses is practically normal. With a skewness of -0.41, the distribution exhibits only a mild negative skew. Kurtosis is thus barely leptokurtic.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Average Attitudes Towards Immigrants for Western European Countries

Attitudes Towards Immigrants	
Mean	5.50
SD	2.21
Min	0
Max	10
1st Quartile	4.33
2nd Quartile	5.67
3rd Quartile	7
Interquartile Range	2.67
Skewness	-0.41
Kurtosis	2.88
N (Observations)	47,683

Figure 1: Histogram of Average Attitudes Towards Immigrants for Western European Countries



4.2 Bivariate

Continuing to the bivariate section, Figure 2 demonstrates the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants in Western Europe. More specifically, the confidence interval plot contains the mean *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scores of urban and rural residents.[7] While a lack of overlapping error bars is often used to deduce statistical significance, several researchers discourage this practise[8] (Schenker & Gentleman, 2001; Knoll et al., 2011). As such, Table A in the appendix contains the results of a t-test that confirms that, on average, the attitudes urban residents hold towards immigrants is statistically higher than that of rural residents, at the 99% confidence level—thus providing support for *Hypothesis 1*. Even so, Bernardi *et al.* (2017) bring up an important point: statistical significance does not imply *substantive* significance. In other words, it is worth considering just how significant is the effect of urban-rural settings on attitudes towards immigrants in reality. One approach to doing so is to consider the difference between the upper limit (i.e., taking into consideration the standard errors) of the rural mean and the lower limit of the urban mean (i.e., taking into consideration the standard errors), which amounts to 0.56 points on the 10-point *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale. Considering that the standard deviation of the *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale is 2.21 (see Table 1), urban-rural settings

[7] See Figure B in the appendix for a confidence interval plot that displays attitudes towards immigrants per origin ESS item categories.
[8] This point is discussed in greater detail when commenting on the final bivariate analysis.

account for less than a quarter of the variation due to standard deviation. In this regard, the substantive significance of the influence of residential settings on attitudes towards immigrants could be considered moderate.

To conclude the bivariate section, Figure 3 shows the size of the urban-rural divide of attitudes towards immigrants for each Western European country considered in this study. Here, the urban-rural gap is calculated by subtracting the average score of rural residents (on the *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale) from that of urban residents. Thus, Figure 3 allows for a visualization of cross-national variation in the size of the rural-urban gap concerning attitudes towards immigrants. As mentioned previously, it is vital to keep in mind that overlapping error bars, which represent 95% confidence intervals in this case, do not necessarily imply that the differences between the corresponding means are statistically insignificant. The reason being that such an approach overcompensates for type I errors due to the inaccurate error propagation that results when error measurements are not added in quadrature (Schenker & Gentleman, 2001; *Snapshot*., n.d.). Figure A in the appendix contains pairwise comparisons of differences between urban and rural scores (on the *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale) between countries. The error bar for the difference in the size of the urban-rural gap in attitudes towards immigrants between France and Spain crosses the '0' threshold, meaning that one cannot claim that this difference is statistically significant. Conversely, those of Great Britain and Ireland; Sweden and Finland; and Germany and the Netherlands do not cross the '0' threshold, meaning that differences in the size of the urban-rural gap in attitudes towards immigrants between these countries are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level—even though their error bars overlap in Figure 3. These examples also show that the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants can differ between neighbouring countries that one would assume to be fairly similar in many respects. These findings provide support for *Hypothesis 2*. Nevertheless, heeding the distinction between statistical and substantive significance, the largest difference in the size of the urban-rural gap is between Italy and Finland and equates to 4.6% of the standard deviation of the *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale. In sum, while there are statistical differences between countries in the size of their urban-rural gap concerning attitudes towards immigrants, the substantive significance of these differences is modest.

Figure 2: The Urban-Rural Divide of Attitudes Towards Immigrants in Western European Countries

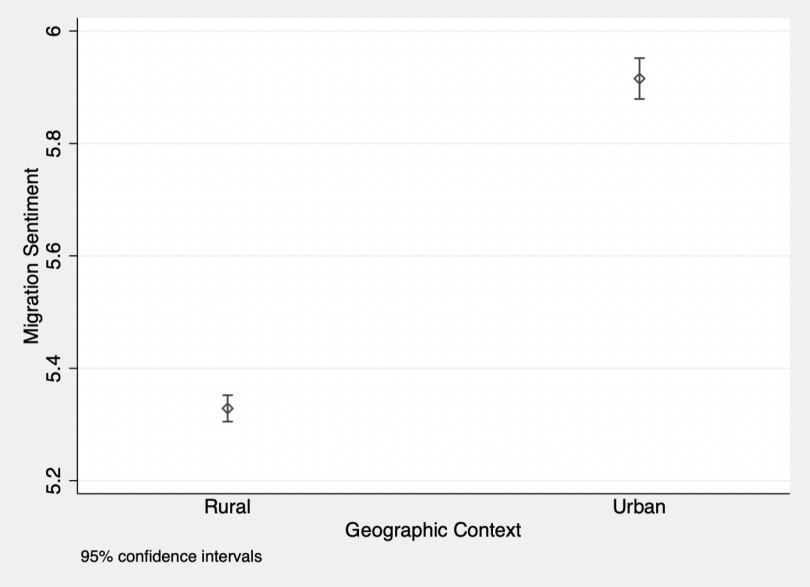
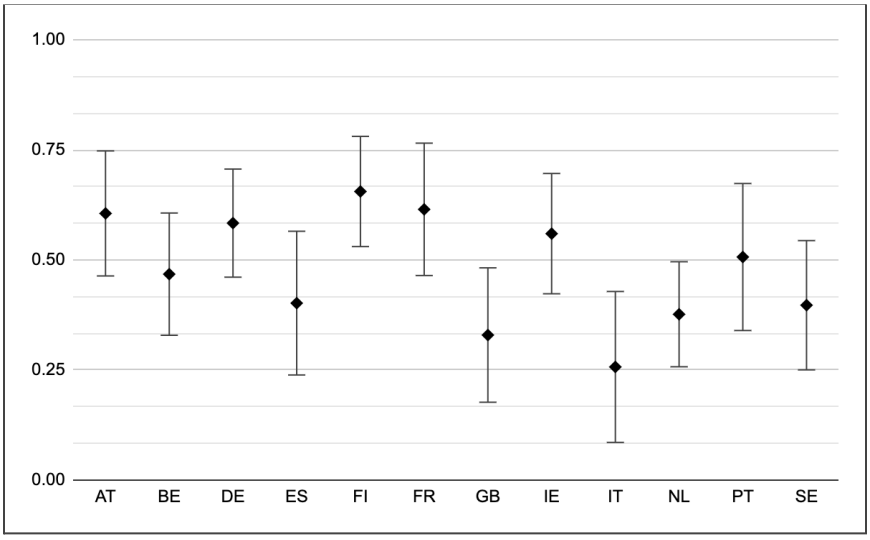


Figure 3: Differences in the Size of the Urban-Rural Divide of Attitudes Towards Immigrants Across Western European Countries[9]



95% confidence intervals

[9]See Table B in the appendix for codes corresponding to each country.

4.3 Multivariate

Table 2 contains five models that incorporate the variables that will later be evaluated in terms of their capacity to moderate the influence urban-rural settings have on attitudes towards immigrants. Model (1) contains the variable *Urban* on its own. This is a dummy variable that represents the influence residential settings have on attitudes towards immigrants. *Rural* is coded as '0' while *Urban* is coded as '1' A one-unit increase in *Urban* (i.e., the difference between rural and urban environments) results in a 0.485-point increase on the 10-point *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale. Furthermore, the role of urban-rural settings is significant at the 99% confidence level. Model (2) incorporates individual-level variables, thus controlling for the compositional effects that have been found to contribute to the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants (Maxwell, 2019). While the *Urban* coefficient drops to 0.328 after controlling for age, education and gender, it remains significant at the 99% confidence level. When holding the differences between urban and rural areas constant, age negatively influences attitudes towards immigrants, while education positively influences attitudes towards immigrants (each at the 99% confidence level). These findings are consistent with the literature (Maykovich, 1975). However, gender (coded below as *Female*, for which '0' represents males and '1' represents females) is not statistically significant—thus standing at odds with previous findings that suggest that males are more likely to be authoritarian and thus more likely to express prejudice (Adorno *et al*., 1950).

Before continuing with the rest of the models in Table 2, it is worth addressing the substantive significance urban-rural settings have on attitudes towards immigrants by using an alternative approach. There is a consensus in the literature that education is amongst the strongest factors in explaining attitudes towards immigrants (Stouffer, 1955; Maykovich, 1975; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Maxwell, 2019). While the exact relationship between education and attitudes towards immigrants lies beyond the scope of this paper,[10] Bernardi *et al*. (2017) suggest benchmarking as a means of assessing the substantive significance of a given explanatory variable. Table C in the appendix contains linear regression models that compare the influence education and residential settings have on attitudes towards immigrants. A one-unit increase in *Education* results in a 0.14-unit increase on the *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale, while a one-unit increase in *Urban* (i.e., the difference between rural and urban) results in a

[10]See Lancee & Sarrasin (2015) and Cavaillé & Marshall (2019) for more on the relationship between education and attitudes towards immigrants.

0.56-unit increase—controlling for age and gender. To offer a more illustrative interpretation: the difference between living in a rural environment (which includes the countryside, villages and towns) compared to living in an urban environment (which includes cities and suburbs) when it comes to explaining attitudes towards immigrants is statistically comparable to the difference between having completed secondary school and having completed a 4-year Bachelor's degree. In sum, while the *absolute* substantive significance of residential settings is moderate, the *relative* substantive significance is quite strong.

Returning to Table 2, models (3) and (4) incorporate economic and contact indicators to model (2), respectively. A word of caution before advancing: the following models assess the influence of national-level indicators on attitudes towards immigrants while holding individual characteristics such as rural-urban residence, age, education and gender constant. The primary focus of this paper is to evaluate the potential of national-level indicators to moderate the effect of residential settings on attitudes towards immigrants. Moderators, by definition, affect the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. Potential interactions will be assessed in the multivariate sections that follow; nonetheless, it is worth considering how potential explanatory variables influence attitudes towards immigrants when urban-rural differences are held constant.

Model (3) incorporates *GINI* and *Native Unemployment*, both of which are significant at the 99% confidence level—all else held equal, including *GDP Per Capita* and urban-rural settings. Interestingly, while higher *GINI* scores (i.e., income inequality) leads to negative attitudes towards immigrants, higher *Negative Unemployment* is linked to positive opinions about immigrants. Model (4), in turn, incorporates *Relative Non-EU Population* and *Perceived Relative Immigrant Population*: only the former is significant (at the 99% confidence level), positively influencing attitudes towards immigrants. Finally, model (5) incorporates all relevant variables. *Native Unemployment*, *GINI*, *Relative Non-EU Population* and *Perceived Relative Immigrant Population* are all significant at the 99% confidence level—all else held equal. Only *Perceived Relative Immigrant Population* has a negative influence on attitudes towards immigrants, while all other variables have a positive influence. Although it seems counterintuitive that higher income inequality and unemployment should result in positive attitudes towards immigrants, it is necessary to consider how these variables interact with urban-rural settings to better understand their influence.

Table 2: Influence of Economic Factors and Contact Indicators on Attitudes Towards Immigrants

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Urban	0.485***	0.328***	0.333***	0.326***	0.329***
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
GINI			-0.081**		0.238***
			(0.029)		(0.054)
Native Unemployment			0.056***		0.035***
			(0.009)		(0.009)
Relative Non-EU Population				0.057**	0.138***
				(0.019)	(0.025)
Perceived Relative Immigrant Population				0.008	-0.148***
				(0.006)	(0.031)
GDP Per Capita			0.000***		0.000***
			(0.000)		(0.000)
Age		-0.006***	-0.006***	-0.006***	-0.006***
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education		0.121***	0.120***	0.121***	0.121***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Female		-0.005	-0.002	-0.005	-0.000
		(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Constant	5.429***	4.211***	5.148***	3.828***	-1.846
	(0.138)	(0.137)	(0.798)	(0.208)	(1.087)
N	47,639	46,915	46,915	46,915	46,915

Standard errors in parentheses
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 3: Influence of Economic Factors on Urban-Rural Divide of Attitudes Toward Immigrants

	(1)	(2)
Urban	0.909***	0.454***
	(0.219)	(0.045)
GINI	0.086***	
	(0.012)	
Urban x GINI	-0.020**	
	(0.007)	
Native Unemployment		0.037***
		(0.004)
Urban x Native Unemployment		-0.016**
		(0.005)
GDP Per Capita	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Age	-0.006***	-0.006***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education	0.121***	0.120***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Female	-0.004	-0.002
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Constant	0.922*	2.976***
	(0.421)	(0.187)
N	46,915	46,915

Standard errors in parentheses
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Moving to potential moderators, Table 3 assesses the capacity of national-level economic indicators to moderate the influence of residential settings—thereby affecting the size of the urban-rural gap. The role of urban-rural setting (see the variable *Urban*) in model (1) is significant at the 99% confidence level, with a positive coefficient of 0.909. Even after accounting for individual-level indicators, including *Age*, *Education* and *Female* (i.e., gender), along with *GDP Per Capita*, the interaction between the *GINI* coefficient and urban-rural settings (see *Urban x GINI* above) is significant at the 99% confidence level, with a negative coefficient of 0.02. Therefore, income inequality interacts with residential settings in influencing attitudes towards immigrants. Figure 4 provides a graphical representation of this interaction: as *GINI* increases, the difference in attitudes towards immigrants held by urban and rural residents decreases. In other words, as income inequality increases, the size of the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants decreases. This relationship suggests that high income inequality is experienced differently by urban and rural residents in terms of the changes that it brings about in attitudes towards immigrants. If this were not the case, both urban and rural populations would experience equally improved or deteriorated attitudes towards immigrants, in turn leaving the size of the gap intact. Moreover, if income inequality reaches a certain point, the urban-rural gap of attitudes toward immigrants ceases to exist. It would appear as though when income inequality is particularly high, most people view immigrants the same. These findings support *Hypothesis 3*, with the probability of erroneously coming to such a conclusion being 1% (i.e., committing a Type I error).

Continuing to model (2), while the role of urban-rural settings (see the variable *Urban* above) remains positive and significant at the 99% confidence level, the coefficient drops to 0.454. Native-born unemployment (see *Urban x Native Unemployment* above) is significant at the 99% confidence level and acts negatively on attitudes towards immigrants. The interaction produces a positive coefficient of 0.016 at the 99% confidence level. Therefore, native-born unemployment interacts with residential settings in influencing attitudes towards immigrants, although not as much as income unemployment. Figure 5 provides a graphical representation of this interaction: as *Native Unemployment* increases, the difference in attitudes towards immigrants held by urban and rural residents decreases. In other words, as the unemployment rate of the local populace increases, the size of the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants decreases. This relationship suggests that high native-born unemployment is

experienced differently by urban and rural residents in terms of the changes that it brings about in attitudes towards immigrants. If this were not the case, the size of the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants would remain intact. In addition, if native-born unemployment reaches a certain point, the urban-rural gap of attitudes toward immigrants ceases to exist. It would appear as though when most people are out of work, they view immigrants the same. These findings support *Hypothesis 4*, with the probability of erroneously coming to such a conclusion being 1% (i.e., committing a Type I error).

Figure 4: Influence of GINI Index on Size of Urban-Rural Divide of Attitudes Towards Immigrants

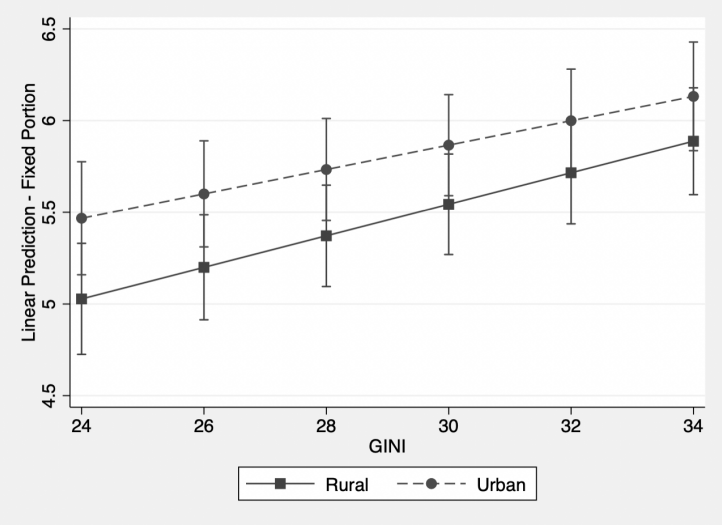
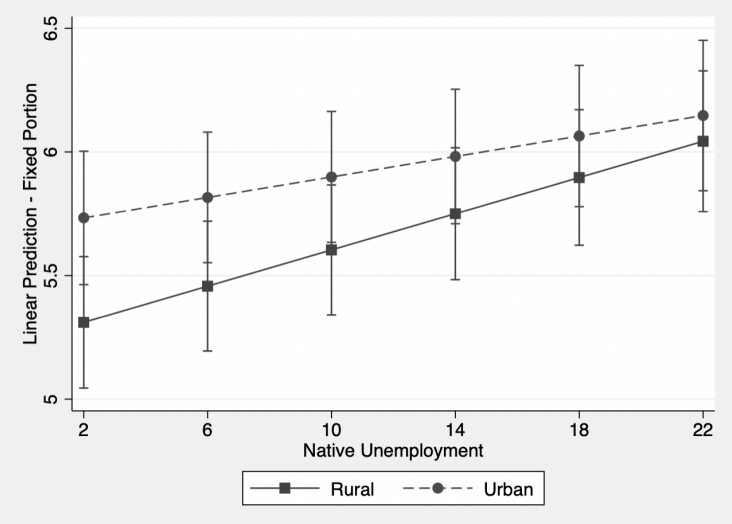


Figure 5: Influence of Native Unemployment on Size of Urban-Rural Divide of Attitudes Towards Immigrants



Carrying on with potential moderators, Table 4 assesses the capacity of national contact indicators to interact with residential settings—thereby affecting the size of the urban-rural gap. The role of urban-rural settings (see the variable *Urban*) in model (1) is significant at the 99% confidence level, with a coefficient of 0.313. After accounting for individual-level indicators, which include *Age*, *Education* and *Female* (i.e., gender), the interaction between residential settings and the relative population of non-EU immigrants (see *Urban x Relative Non-EU Population* below) is not significant. Nonetheless, Figure 6 provides a graphical representation of the interaction between residential settings and actual immigrant populations. These findings do not provide adequate support for *Hypothesis 5*.

The role of residential settings (see the variable *Urban* below) in model (2) is significant at the 99% confidence level, with a coefficient of 0.488. Having accounted for *Age*, *Education* and *Female* (i.e., gender), the interaction between residential settings and the perceived relative immigrant population in a given country (see *Urban x Perceived Relative Immigrant Population*) is significant at the 95% confidence level, with a negative coefficient of 0.009. Therefore, perceived relative immigrant populations interact with residential settings in influencing attitudes towards immigrants, although not as much as income inequality or native-born unemployment. Figure 7 provides a graphical representation of this interaction: as *Perceived Relative Immigrant Population* increases, the difference in attitudes towards immigrants held by urban and rural residents decreases. In other words, as the perceived relative immigrant population increases, the size of the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants decreases. This relationship suggests that high perceived immigrant populations are experienced differently by urban and rural residents in terms of the changes that it brings about in attitudes towards immigrants. If this were not the case, both urban and rural populations would experience equally improved or deteriorated attitudes towards immigrants, in turn leaving the size of the gap intact. In addition, if perceived immigrant populations reach a certain point, the urban-rural gap of attitudes toward immigrants ceases to exist. It would appear as though when people believe many immigrants live in their country, they come to view immigrants the same. However, this effect contradicts expectations. Therefore, these findings do not support *Hypothesis 6*.

Table 4: Influence of Contact Indicators on Urban-Rural Divide of Attitudes Toward Immigrants

	(1)	(2)
Urban	0.313***	0.488***
	(0.062)	(0.077)
Relative Non-EU Population	0.052**	
	(0.019)	
Urban x Relative Non-EU Population	0.003	
	(0.013)	
Perceived Relative Immigrant Population		0.008
		(0.006)
Urban x Perceived Relative Immigrant Population		-0.009*
		(0.004)
Age	-0.006***	-0.006***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education	0.121***	0.121***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Female	-0.005	-0.006
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Constant	3.998***	4.074***
	(0.168)	(0.176)
N	46,915	46,915

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 6: Influence of Relative Non-EU Population on Size of Urban-Rural Divide of Attitudes Towards Immigrants

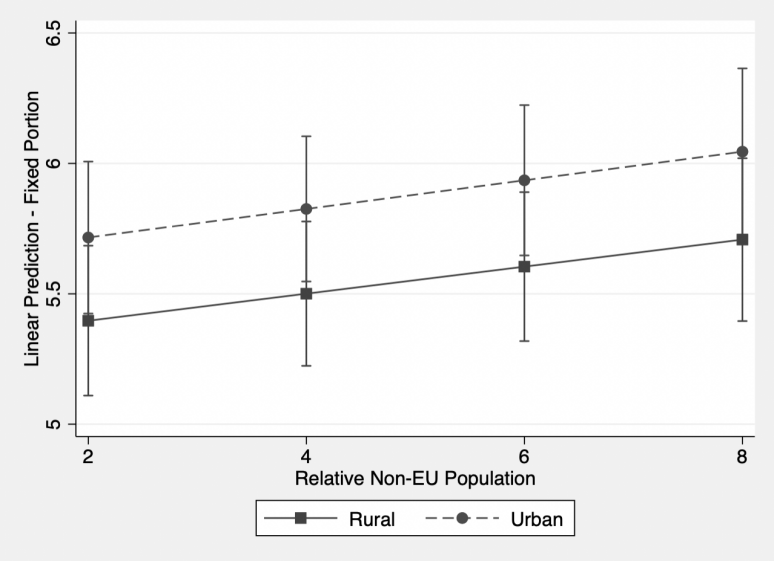
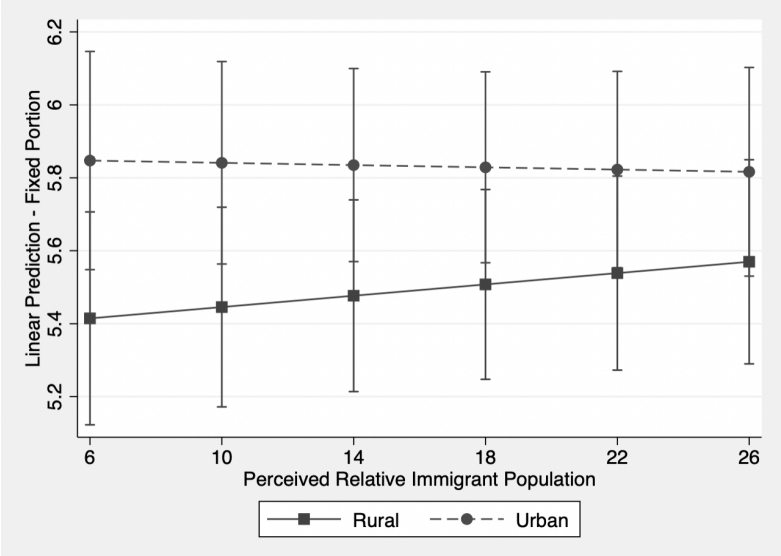


Figure 7: Influence of Perceived Relative Immigrant Population on Size of Urban-Rural Divide of Attitudes Towards Immigrants



5. DISCUSSIONS

This study has sought to identify factors that contribute to cross-national variation in the size of the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants by examining data from twelve Western European nations. In doing so, the capacity of national markers to moderate the influence of urban-rural settings on attitudes towards immigrants was evaluated. The specific macro-level indicators used were inspired by insights provided by the two main camps in the literature on racial prejudice and ethnic antagonism: threat theories and contact conjectures.

Firstly, it was demonstrated that urban populations score higher on the generated *Attitudes Towards Immigrants* scale (i.e., have more positive attitudes towards immigrants) than their rural counterparts. Although the absolute substantive significance of living in an urban setting compared to a rural environment when explaining attitudes towards immigrants is moderate, it is statistically comparable to having completed four additional years of full-time education. Furthermore, differences in the size of the urban-rural divide between Western European countries were found to be statistically significant (albeit substantively modest). Next, empirical support was found for the claim that high national income inequality and unemployment rates interact with urban-rural settings to influence attitudes towards immigrants—thereby decreasing the size of the urban-rural divide of attitudes towards immigrants. By controlling for individual-level demographic variables, these findings provide support for contextual effect. Given opposing findings in the literature (Maxwell, 2019), an attempt was made to theoretically reconcile conflicting compositional and contextual effects by suggesting that the former work at the sub-national level as a response to the former's manifestation at the national level. By drawing on and developing arguments in the literature, a theoretical mechanism was provided to explain how high income inequality disproportionately leads to the consolidation of national identities and the deterioration of attitudes towards immigrants in urban environments. The proposed mechanism regarding the impact of unemployment on a specific sub-group of rural populations suggests that the concept of winners and losers of globalization might require refining. Unfortunately, given the research design of this study, it is not possible to conclude whether these findings are due to the proposed mechanisms or some other set of processes. Hence, the findings of this article might serve as a springboard for future research. One possible approach would be to use longitudinal data to

compare how income inequality and unemployment differentially influence attitudes towards immigrants in urban and rural populations over time—particularly before and after a significant economic turn such as the Great Recession.

On the other hand, there was insufficient support for the postulation that actual relative immigrant populations increase the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants. In addition, perceived immigrant populations were found to moderate the role of urban-rural settings, although the effect of this interaction contradicted expectations. Higher perceived immigrant populations decrease the size of the urban-rural gap of attitudes towards immigrants. While these findings likely reveal methodological shortcomings inherent to this study, they might also shed light on the root of contradictory findings in the literature. For example, larger immigrant populations might only provide for the opportunity of contact to improve attitudes towards immigrants if contact is positive. Presumably, it is rather difficult to distinguish between positive and negative contact using broad measurements. This notion highlights another aspect that ought to be kept in mind: the unit of analysis. Forbes (1997) argues that contact might lower prejudice at the individual level of analysis but not at the group level. Others have criticized this claim by arguing that any generalizable mechanism that acts upon the individual will inevitably manifest at the group level (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Nonetheless, some confusion might arise from comparing findings from studies that drastically differ in their research designs. It would seem reasonable to posit that studies that adequately operationalize positive contact, focus on the individual and employ longitudinal approaches are more likely to find support for the contact theory than studies that operationalize contact crudely, focus on macro-level variables and employ a cross-sectional approach. Given the complexities of contact processes, future research might employ a mixed-methods approach that incorporates qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews to accurately gauge the degree to which larger immigrant populations facilitate positive contact and affect attitudes towards immigrants. Future research might also address the moderating role of perceived immigrant populations on the urban-rural divide of attitudes towards migration. If perceived immigrant populations decrease the size of the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants, it is presumably because perceived immigrant populations deteriorate these attitudes in urban areas to a greater degree than in rural areas, improve such attitudes in rural areas more than in urban areas or simultaneously deteriorate attitudes towards immigrants in urban areas while improving them in rural areas. That

increased perceived immigrant populations should improve attitudes towards immigrants in rural areas seems unlikely given the arguments put forth by threat and contact theories. Therefore, the first of the three options seems the most probable. Perhaps when perceived immigrant populations pass a certain threshold, they outpace the positive potential of contact brought about by actual immigrant populations and autochthonous urban populations begin feeling wary about immigration. Perhaps native populations only condone immigration to a certain point. Urban inhabitants might have a higher threshold, but even they might begin experiencing anxiety about a large number of immigrants threatening the existing status quo. At any rate, this unexpected uncovering merits further investigation.

The findings of this research also have interesting policy implications. Maxwell (2019) found that the size of the urban-rural divide regarding attitudes towards immigrants is increasing. This trend is likely due to major forces such as urbanization, globalization and rapid technological advancement exacerbating existing cleavages in the national populace. It is, therefore, worthwhile understanding how to slow or even reverse this trend. Governments that wish to promote a more cohesive society ought to perhaps focus on lowering income inequality and unemployment rather than on boosting GDP.

Recent events in Afghanistan have already led to a spike in European immigration ("Record Number of Migrants Cross Channel in a Day," 2021). It is becoming increasingly apparent that migration is unlikely to stop any time soon. If anything, it is only likely to increase with the spread of a whole new type of migration brought about by climate change. Coupling this notion with the reported entanglement migration has with the rise of far-right populism, democratic backsliding, and the stability of the EU, the study of migration sentiment ought to be further pursued as it is likely one of the most important topics in political science—or at least it soon will be.

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APPENDIX

Table A: Average Urban & Rural Attitudes Towards Immigrants

	Observations	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	95% Conf.	Interval
Rural	33,982	5.329	0.012	2.203	5.305	5.352
Urban	13,657	5.915	0.019	2.165	5.879	5.952
Difference		-0.587	0.022		-0.630	-0.543

Diff = mean (Rural) - mean(Urban) t -26.421

Ho: diff = 0 Ha: diff < 0 Degrees of freedom 47637

Pr(T < t) = 0.0000

Table B: Country Codes

Abbreviation	Country	Abbreviation	Country
AT	Austria	GB	Great Britain
BE	Belgium	IE	Ireland
DE	Germany	IT	Italy
ES	Spain	NL	The Netherlands
FI	Finland	PT	Portugal
FR	France	SE	Sweden

Figure A: Pairwise Country Comparisons of Differences Between Average Urban and Rural Attitudes Towards Immigrants

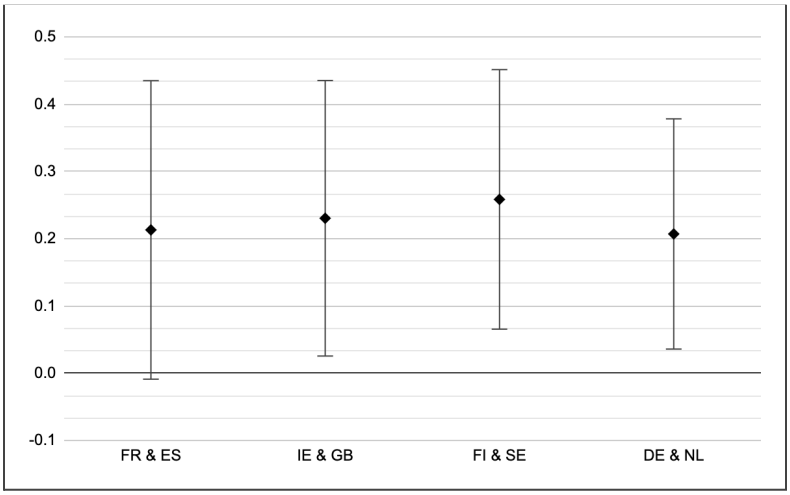

Figure B: Attitudes Towards Immigrants per Original ESS Item Categories

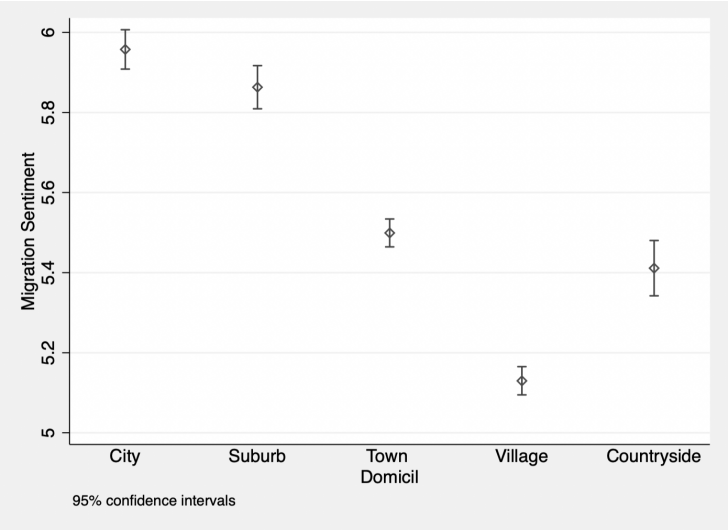

Table C: Influence of Education and Residential Setting on Attitudes Towards Immigrants

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Urban	0.560***		0.408***
	(0.022)		(0.022)
Education		0.140***	0.135***
		(0.003)	(0.003)
Age	-0.013***	-0.005***	-0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female	-0.026	-0.013	-0.012
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)
Constant	5.985***	3.895***	3.845***
	(0.031)	(0.052)	(0.052)
R^2	0.0257	0.0811	0.0879
N	47,433	46,939	46915

Standard errors in parentheses
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001