

A meta-analysis of attitudes to immigration: Cross-disciplinary insights

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Attitudes to immigration

- Attitudes to immigration becoming part of a new political cleavage in many Western countries (Kriesi et al. 2012; Hobolt 2016) ↔ explaining individual differences in attitudes to immigration has attracted increased scholarly interest
- Many different hypotheses have been proposed to explain individual and contextual differences in attitudes towards immigration ↔ difficult to align all evidence that the literature has produce so far

We propose a systematization of the empirical research on public attitudes towards immigration in the last decade in the social sciences

Research questions

- (1) What are the typical approaches scientists in different social sciences take when analyzing attitudes to immigration, and how do these differ across fields?
- (2) Within the broad social science literature, which individual and contextual indicators are consistently found to influence individual attitudes to immigration?

Data and methods

- Meta-analysis
 - Analysis of results from previous studies and summary of the findings via quantitative methods (Smets and van Ham 2013) → “an analysis of analyses” (Glass 1976, 3)
- Several social science disciplines (political science, sociology, economics, psychology and migration/ethnic/demography studies)
- Selected top 30 academic journals of the respective disciplines in the years 2009 – 2019
- Selected quantitative articles using attitudes to immigration as a dependent variable and providing information on factors affecting attitudes to immigration

Attitudes to immigration

- In the initial stage, we selected all the dependent variables based on a loose definition of attitudes to immigration (emotions felt towards immigrants, perception of the consequences of immigration, preferences towards immigration policy,...)
- The dependent variable must measure attitudes to immigration directly and express positive or negative opinions (as opposed to neutral statements towards immigrants or neutral policy preferences)
- Our initial inclusion criteria result in around 150 different types of attitudes to immigration that are used in the literature → we grouped them in 10 higher-ordered groups of dependent variables

Many of the attitudes to immigration are not directly comparable to each other

- we chose the two higher ordered groups of dependent variables with the highest frequency
- *attitudes and policy preferences on immigration flows and level*
 - attitudes such as "allow more or less (labour, illegal, etc.) immigrants" into the country which engage with policy debates about levels of immigration and entry criteria
- *contribution and consequences of immigration (e.g., economic, cultural, social, political)*
 - attitudes regarding the ex-post assessment of immigration's impact on society, and whether immigration is beneficial to the community, e.g., in terms of economy or culture

Independent variables of interest

- there is little agreement between researchers on which independent variables should be included in models explaining attitudes to immigration → the majority of independent variables offer little potential for our meta-analysis, as they will occur in too few analyses
- we focus on the literature's most widely used determinants of attitudes to immigration

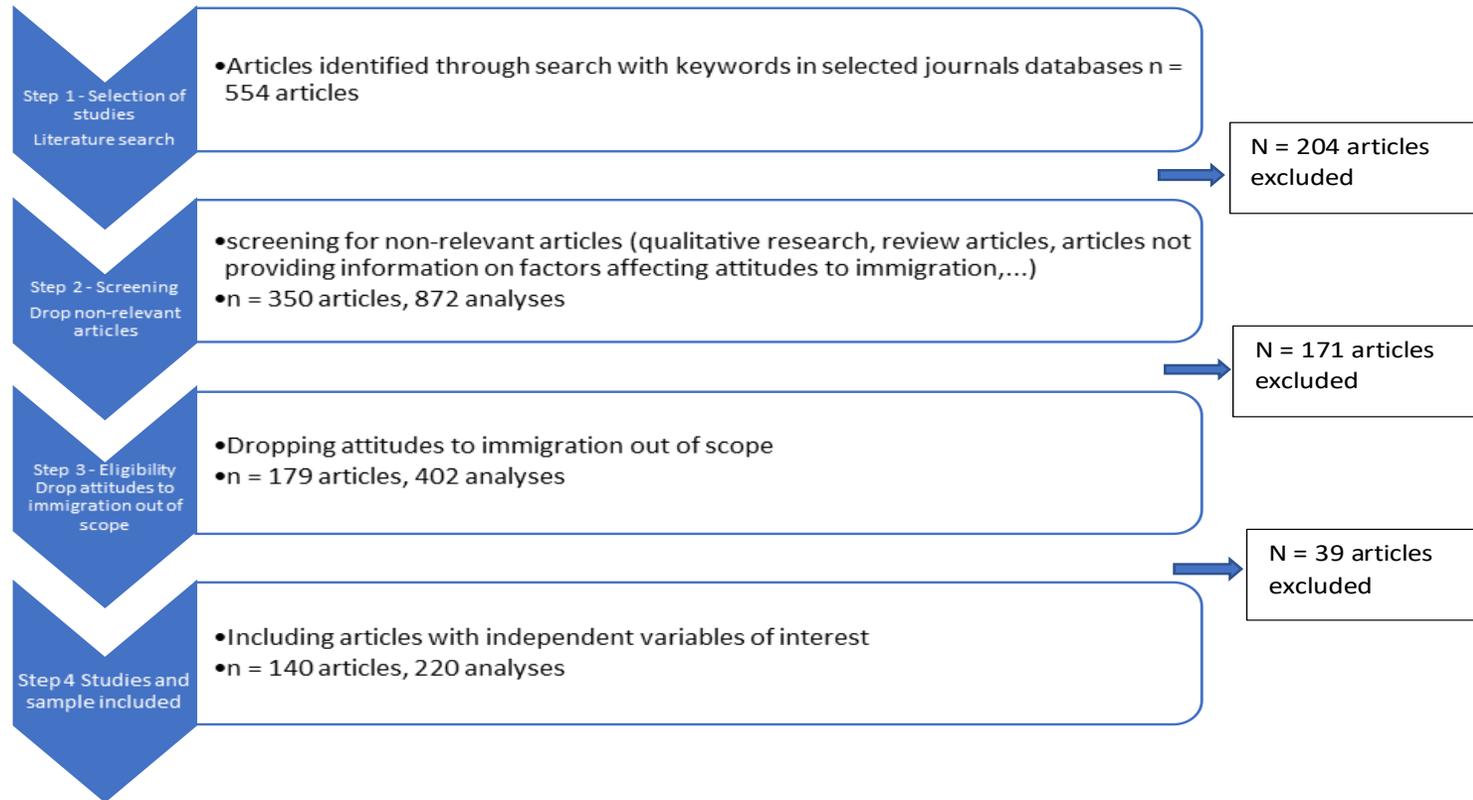
Individual-level characteristics and values

- Age, education, gender, residence, minority status, income, employment status, social class, occupational status, economic satisfaction, religiosity, left-right positioning, ideology, contact with minority, interpersonal trust

Contextual drivers

- Local/national GDP per capita, Local/national minority share, Local/national unemployment rate

Article identification process



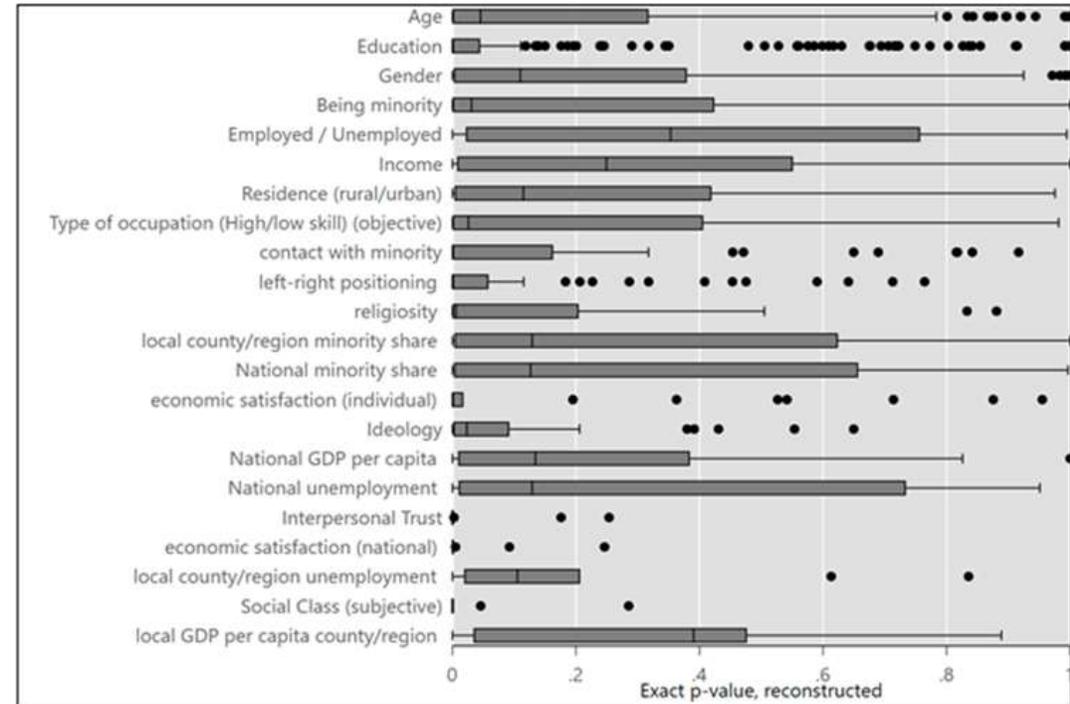
Our final working dataset yields 2096 effect sizes across 220 analyses

Table 1. Number of coded articles by discipline

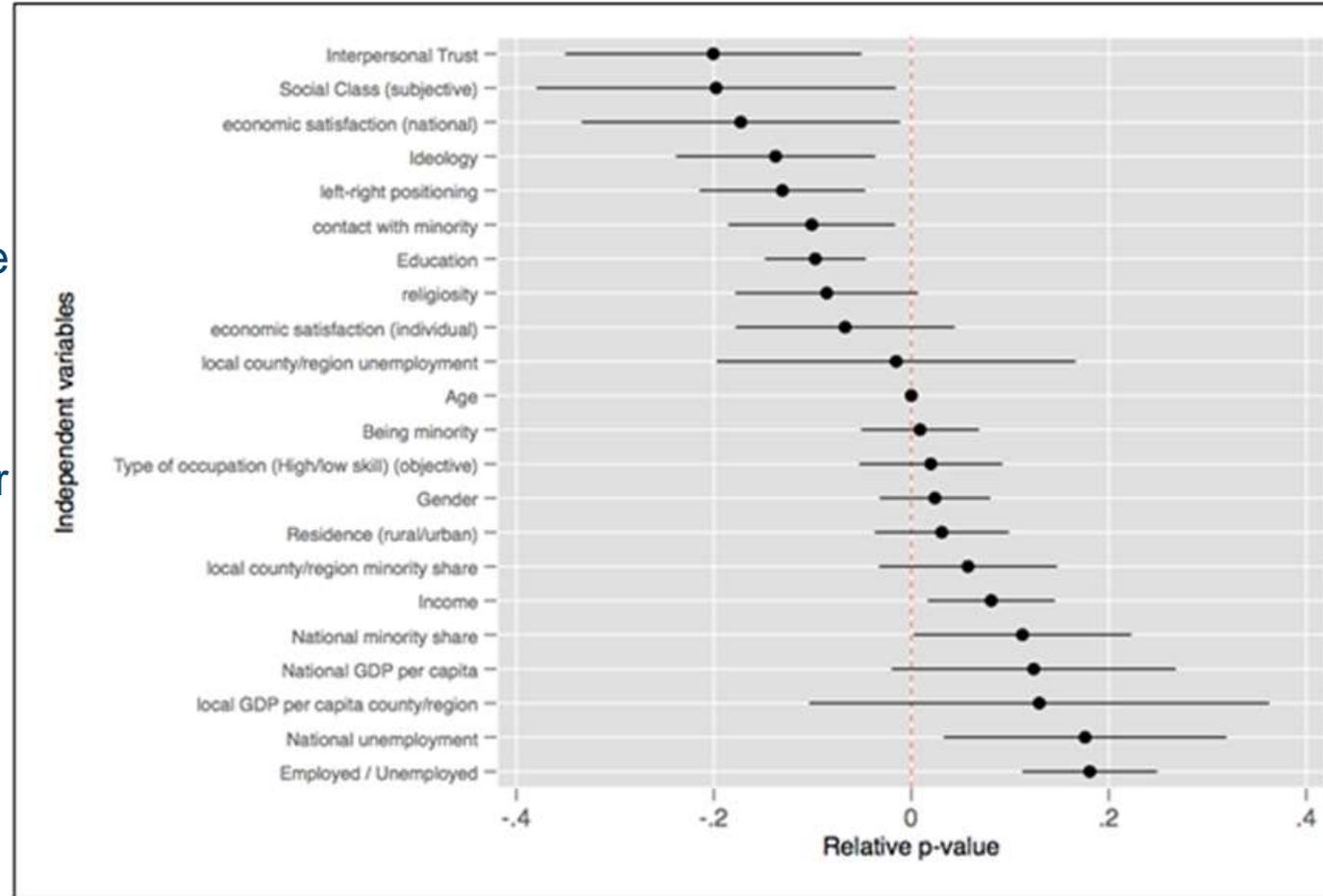
Field	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnic and migration studies	57	40.7
Political science	37	26.4
Sociology	23	16.4
Psychology	19	13.6
Economics	4	2.8
Total	140	100

What are the most influential drivers of attitudes to immigration?

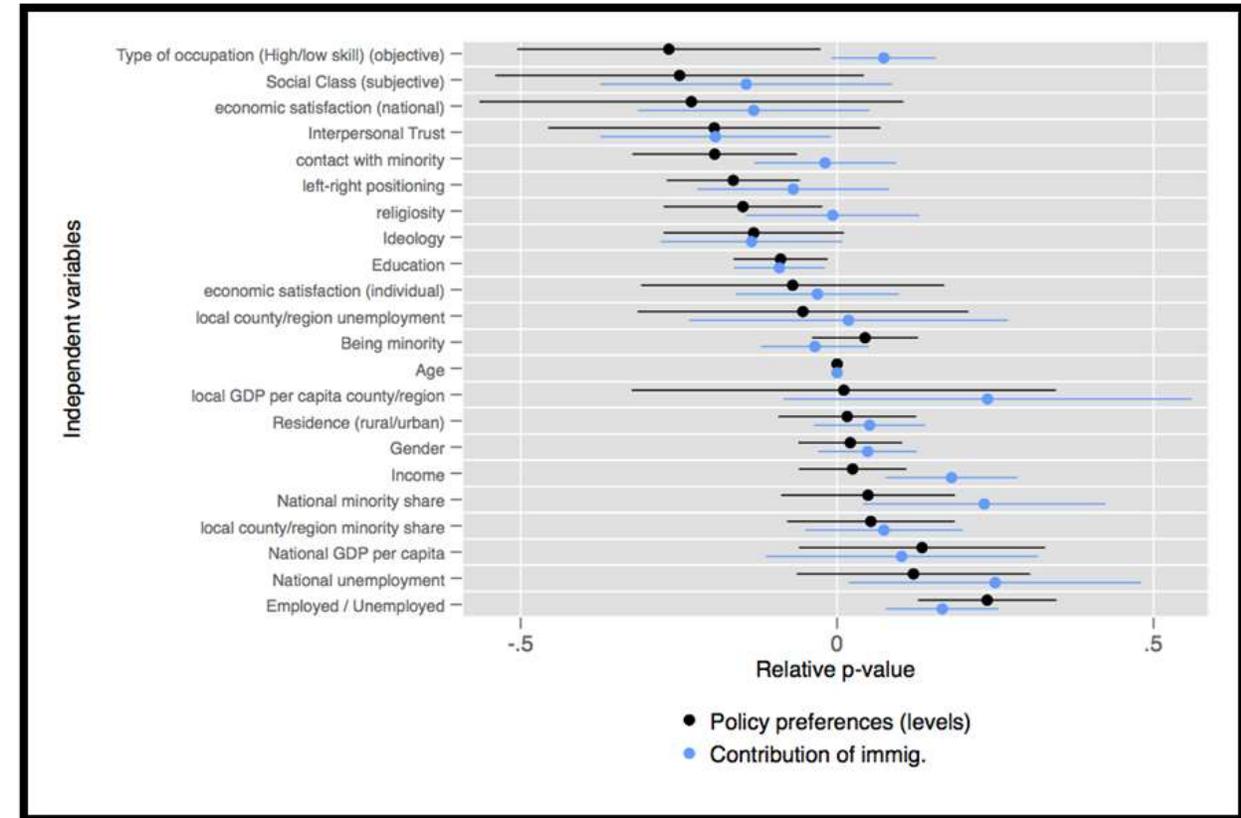
- distribution of reconstructed p-values for the coefficients associated with all independent variables in the study listed in descending order from the most to the least frequent
- age is the most frequently used independent variable (but plays a mixed role in explaining attitudes to immigration)
- **education, left-right positioning and economic satisfaction** are the independent variables that matter the most across the studies and samples included in our analysis
- findings are less conclusive for contextual-level variables → individual-level variables more consistent and significant drivers of attitudes to immigration



- We also control for sample size and number of regressors in each study
- interpersonal trust, self-perceived social status, and economic satisfaction are statistically significant more often than some regressors more commonly associated with public opinion to immigration, such as age and gender
- education is relatively more important in explaining attitudes to immigration than income or employment across study designs, i.e., after controlling for sample size



- for **income** and **occupational status**, we find large differences by type of attitude that is used as the outcome variable (more often statistically significant when used to study policy preferences than when predicting individuals' assessment of immigrants' contribution to the country)
- This highlights the importance of considering what kind of attitudes are used in a given piece of research since the relevance of the same determinant can differ markedly



Thank you for your attention!

- Questions?