

Context Matters: The Impact of Existing Immigrant Populations and National Political Parties on the Rise of Anti-Immigrant Attitudes in Europe..

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Abstract:

As anti-immigrant attitudes rose across Europe, social scientists began studying the phenomenon at two different levels. At the level of the individual, a number of characteristics were identified and shown to be associated with negative attitudes toward immigration and immigrant integration. Lower levels of education and income and a more conservative political orientation are among a number of characteristics which have been shown to be correlates of anti-immigrant attitudes. At the national level,, it has been shown that higher levels of immigration and the relative strength of anti-immigrant political parties are associated, on average, with more negative attitudes toward immigrants. While these studies have been useful first steps, we argue that a better approach to the study of anti-immigrant attitudes is within a hierarchical model. With these models, the unit of analysis will be the individual, but we will be able to control for factors at the national level. Since national factors will alter how individual characteristics are translated into attitudes, it is important to account for the national context. In the current analysis, we focus on two groups of contextual factors. The first is the level and speed at which non-EU immigrants are entering one's country while the second focuses on the policy position of the political parties within a country. Using a recent data set that ranks political parties on the issue of immigration and immigrant integration, we examine (1) the average position of each country on this pro-anti immigrant scale and (2) the degree to which the policy space within a country is fragmented by parties selecting divergent positions. Using data from the Eurobarometer (fall 2004) to measure individual attributes and attitudes, the OECD for immigrant flows and Benoit and Laver's "Policy Positions of European Parties," we estimate a hierarchical linear model to provide a more complete understanding of the determinants of the rise of anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe.