



Subnational Context and Radical Right Support in Europe

SUB-NATIONAL CONTEXT AND RADICAL RIGHT SUPPORT IN EUROPE

POLICY BRIEF

France (University of Nice Sophia Antipolis)

Germany (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz)

The Netherlands (University of Amsterdam)

United Kingdom (University of Leeds)

<https://score.uni-mainz.de>

INTRODUCTION

The SCoRE project focuses on **explaining regional differences in support for populist radical right parties**. More specifically, it examines how developments in citizens' immediate environment - what one would commonly call the 'neighbourhood' or 'community' level - affect their attitudes towards immigrants and political elites and thereby their support for populist radical right parties. The project focuses on the impact of developments that manifest themselves very differently in urban and rural areas, such as the settlement of immigrants in cities and the exodus of young citizens and the decline in public services in rural areas.

The project is **comparative in nature** and looks at the impact of these developments in four countries: **United Kingdom** (excluding Northern Ireland and Scotland), **France, Germany, and the Netherlands**. These countries are characterized by different historical trajectories with respect to, for example, urban-rural relations, immigration patterns, and support for populist radical right parties.

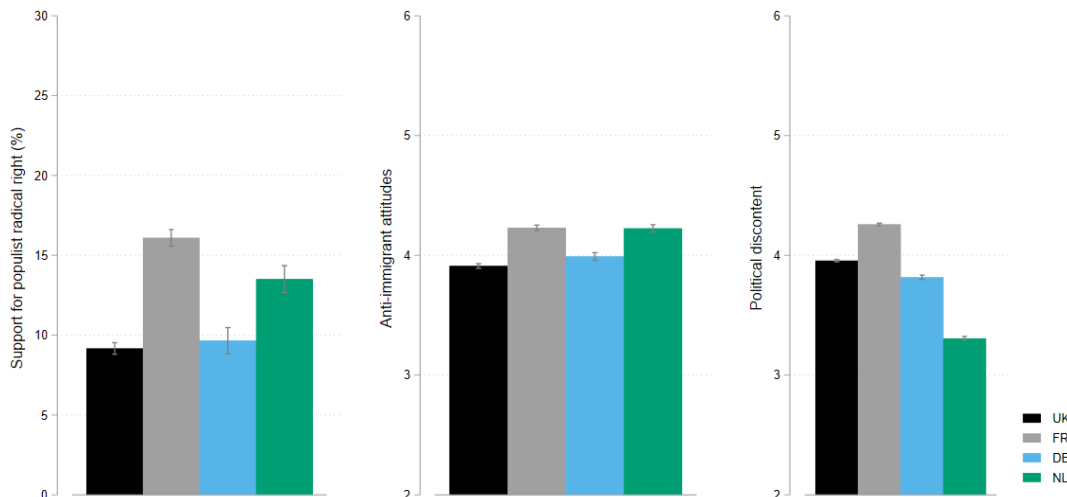
In the countries under study, **large-scale representative surveys** have been conducted, with proper representation of citizens with different background characteristics (e.g. also including the less educated and politically alienated) and from different kinds of municipalities and neighbourhoods. The survey data, consisting of the same core set of questions in each country, have been connected to **statistical data on developments at the community level**, embedding the surveyed respondents in the characteristics of their neighbourhood.

On the basis of these data we have investigated how citizens' attitudes – especially nativist attitudes (the feeling that countries should be populated primarily by natives, and that non-natives are a vital threat to the nation-state) and political discontent (the feeling that political elites are not taking the people and their interests seriously) – are influenced by their daily environment (the environment in which they live), as well as by their broader environment (the environment that they might visit on a regular basis, or read about in the local media). Hence, the impact of developments in the surrounding neighbourhoods on citizens' opinions and political behaviour has also been examined.

MAIN FINDINGS

1) The support for populist radical right parties differs between countries, with higher levels of support in the Netherlands and France than in Germany and especially the United Kingdom. Anti-immigration attitudes (on a scale from 1 to 7, higher scores indicate more opposition) are prevalent in the four countries, at roughly the same level. Political discontent (on a scale from 1 to 5, higher scores indicate more discontent) is highest in France and lowest in the Netherlands.

Figure 1 *The level of populist radical right support (%), anti-immigration attitudes (1-7), and political discontent (1-5) in the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands*



2) The existence of nativism and political discontent, and the ensuing support for populist radical right parties are **neither a typically urban nor mainly a rural phenomenon**. With the exception of France, the variation within urban and rural areas in anti-immigration attitudes and political discontent, and in support for populist radical right parties, is much larger than the variation between these areas. The rise of the populist radical right should therefore not be interpreted as simply an urban clash between ethnic and or cultural groups, nor should it just be seen as a rural revolt against cosmopolitanism.

Figure 2a The level of anti-immigration attitudes (1-7) in urban and rural areas

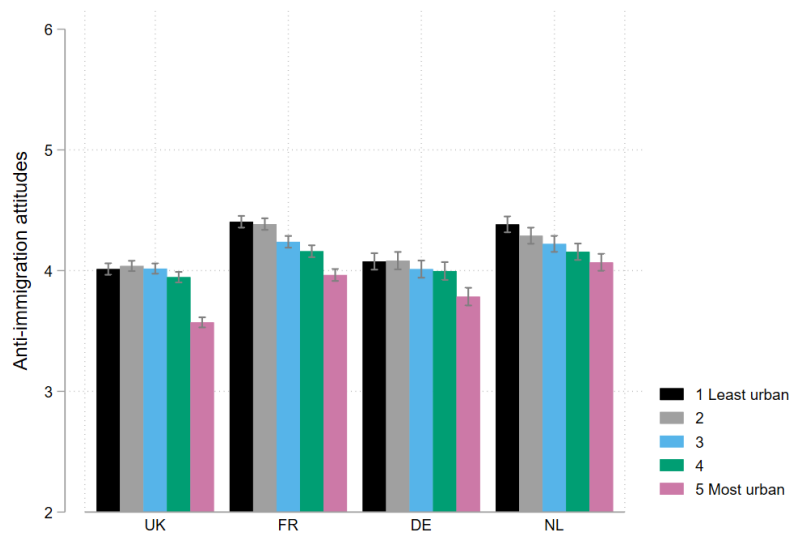


Figure 2b The level of political discontent (1-5) in urban and rural areas

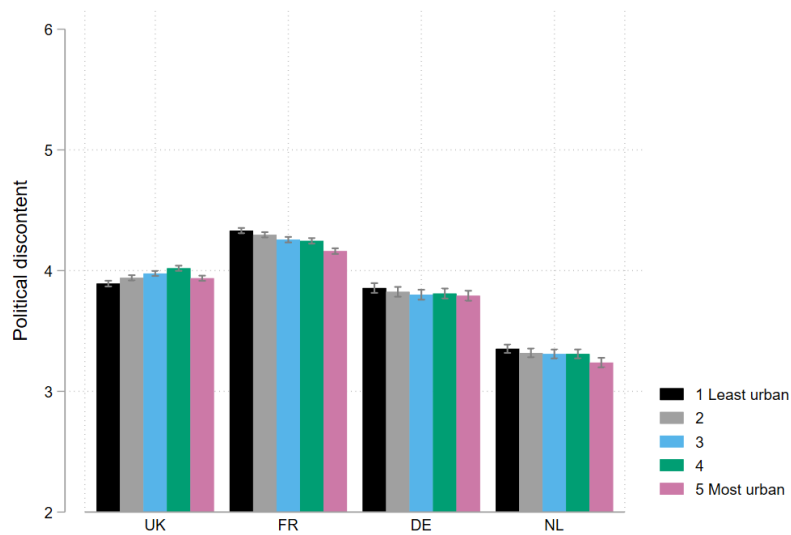
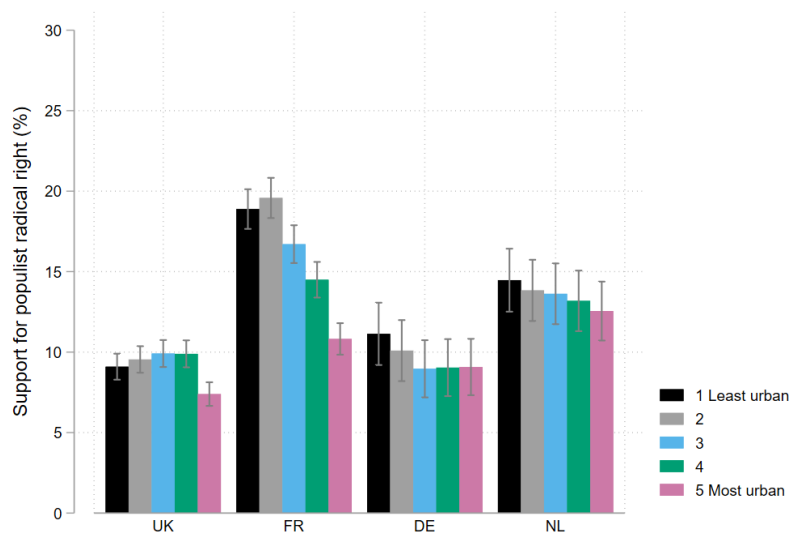
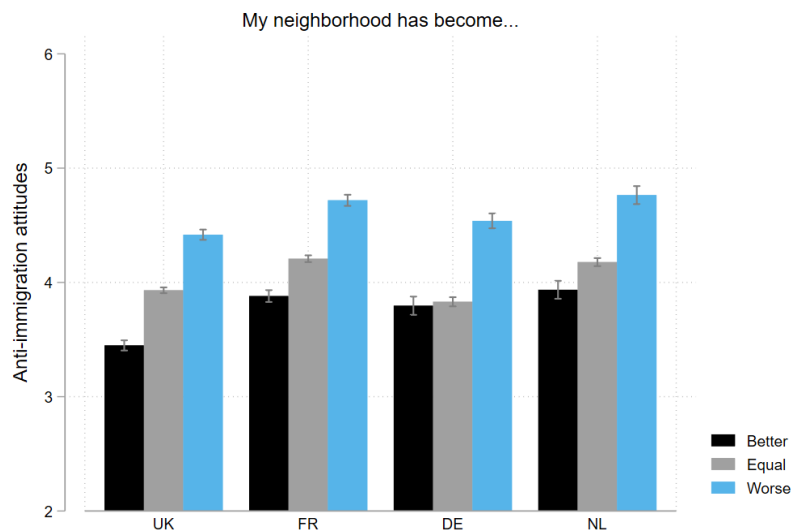


Figure 2c The level of support for populist radical right parties (%) in urban and rural areas



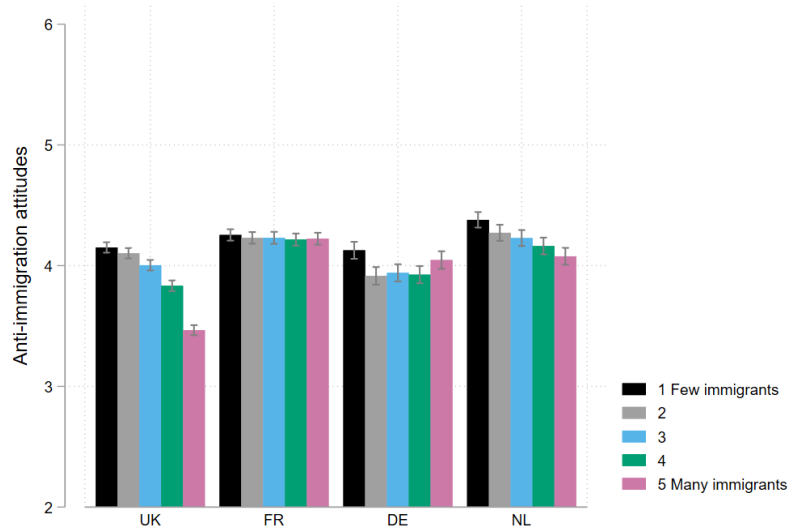
3) The context in which citizens live influences their attitudes and behaviour. Their political views depend on their evaluation of their immediate environment (neighbourhood or community). Those who feel their **environment is deteriorating** are more likely to oppose immigration and the establishment and to support a populist radical right party.

Figure 3 *The relationship between evaluation of the neighbourhood change and anti-immigration attitudes (1-7)*



4) **The actual number of immigrants** in citizens' immediate surroundings does not predict anti-immigrant sentiments in a straightforward way. In France and Germany, anti-immigration attitudes are at similar levels in communities irrespective of whether respondents live in the presence of immigrants or not. In the Netherlands and the UK, anti-immigrant sentiments are stronger in areas with fewer immigrants, contrary to what often is assumed.

Figure 4 *The relationship between the number of immigrants in a neighbourhood (%) and the level of anti-immigration sentiments (1-7)*



5) However, these findings are partly the result of the fact that neighbourhoods with many immigrants are sometimes populated by many highly educated citizens with favourable attitudes towards immigrants. Moreover, in rural areas with few immigrants other factors fuel anti-immigrant attitudes, such as the exodus of young citizens and economic decline.

Figure 5a *The relationship between the level of unemployment (%) and the level of anti-immigration attitudes (1-7)*

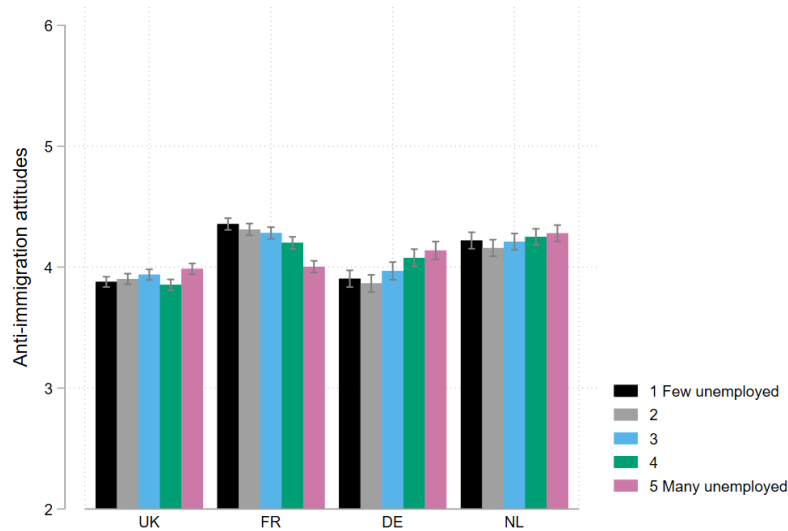
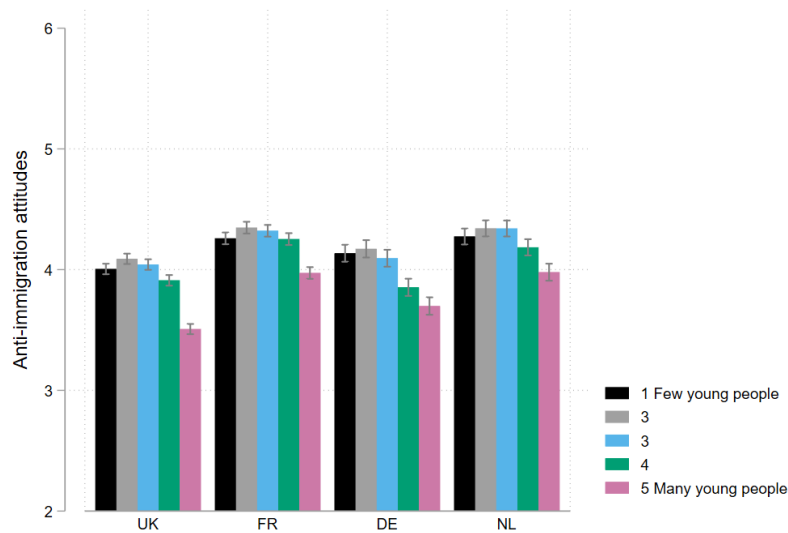


Figure 5b *The relationship between the presence of young citizens (%) and the level of anti-immigration attitudes (1-7)*



6) When these factors are taken into consideration, the presence of, and especially increases in immigrants in citizens' direct environment, do generally lead to stronger anti-immigrant sentiments.

TWO PARADOXES

The first paradox

Strong opposition to immigration exists in many rural areas, where neighbourhoods are usually populated by few immigrants. While anti-immigrant backlash is often due to anxiety over immigration, it is sometimes also due to anxiety over other rapid social changes, such as socio-demographic decline, or unemployment. These changes are often blamed on immigrants, even when they are not physically present. Some of these societal changes are more prevalent in rural areas than in urban ones.

The second paradox

Strong support for immigration among non-immigrants exists in some urban areas, whereas in other areas this support is very low. The variation between neighbourhoods with large immigrant populations can be explained by the fact that the higher educated with pro-immigration views tend to live among immigrants. Among the higher educated, those living among many migrants are actually more positive about migrants than those living among few immigrants. However, a rapid change in the ethnic composition of a neighbourhood seems to be a stronger predictor of anti-immigration backlash than a high share of immigrants per se.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Take into consideration *variation on the local level* when thinking about policy making.
- ❖ Be aware that differences *within* urban and rural areas are as important as differences *between* urban and rural areas.
- ❖ Target groups not only regionally, but also focus on particular groups of citizens within regions and neighbourhoods. Some citizens are more likely to be influenced by their environment than others, and might thus have to be targeted specifically in policy making.
- ❖ Anti-immigrant sentiments are not only fostered by the presence of immigrants (in urban areas), they are also fostered by socio-demographic decline (in rural areas). The policy domains that should be involved in addressing anti-immigrant sentiments thus differ between areas.
- ❖ Anti-immigrant sentiments seem more strongly affected by rapid changes in immigrant presence than by immigrants' long-term stable presence. Policy makers should thus be particularly alert when a large influx of immigrants in an area is expected.
- ❖ The delivery of public services is sometimes framed as a zero-sum game between disadvantaged groups. Our research suggests that it is important for policy makers to focus on the social, economic, and political problems of left-behind regions and neighbourhoods.
- ❖ Objective living conditions are only partly responsible for perceptions of citizens' neighbourhood. However, by supporting social communities their perceptions can be positively influenced.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The survey data were collected in the four countries between March and May 2017 by ICM (UK), BVA (FR), Infratest (DE), and GfK (NL) using population-representative samples. The effective sample sizes were 24415 (UK, excluding Northern Ireland and Scotland because of very low support for UKIP), 19408 (FR), 6883 (DE) and 8013 (NL). The data on respondents' immediate environment were derived from the latest public and official sources. Anti-immigration attitudes were measured by a battery of four questions relating to perceived cultural and economic threat of migrants, such as "Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?". Political discontent was measured by five questions relating to the role of politicians, such as "Elected officials talk too much and take too little action". For graphing purposes, the context variables – urbanity (population density), immigrant presence, the level of unemployment, and the presence of young residents (below 44) – were divided in five categories of equal size in each country. All conclusions presented here have been tested using multilevel regression and/or structural equation models with controls for respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, but are presented here using bivariate graphs for descriptive purposes. For a full methodological report, see score.uni-mainz.de/policybrief.