

# Anti-immigrant party discourse and discriminatory attitudes in Western European countries

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# The starting point



- **Starting point:** Political discourse aims at convincing people and at changing attitudes by interpreting reality
- **Then,** does it influence attitudes towards immigrants?
- Some findings: anti-immigrant discourse positively correlated with anti-immigrant attitudes
- But is this true across all anti-immigrant attitudes?  
→ different effects on different attitudes
- people react to cues that fit preexisting opinions, and reject those that oppose preexisting opinions.  
→ different interaction effects (or absence of effects) with individual characteristics.

# The question



- To what extent are discriminatory attitudes of Europeans influenced by the presence of an anti-foreigner party discourse?
- 2 discriminatory attitudes:
  - Labour market discrimination
  - Social discrimination

# Theoretical pinpoints

- Prejudice (discrimination) result from contact and (perceived) competition
- **Ethnic competition theory:** personal economic position (unemployed, blue collar) and perceived group competition (between poor natives and immigrants)
  - More competition, more discriminatory attitudes
  - (Schlueter/Scheepers 2010, Savekoul et al. 2011)
- **Contact theory:** immigrant friends, living in immigrant neighbourhood, avoidance of immigrants
  - Less contact, more discriminatory attitudes
  - (Allport 1954, Savekoul et al. 2011, Pettigrew and Tropp 2006)

# Theoretical pinpoints - discourse

- Effects of discourse researched in other contexts, party cues often found as determinants of a great deal of attitudes and opinions
- Differentiated effects: some individuals more sensitive to cues than others (not dwelled upon)
- Cognitive dissonance theory - links held values and beliefs to individuals' receptivity to party discourses and explains both the presence and the absence of effects

# Theoretical pinpoints - discourse

- **Anti-immigrant discourse** is more visible as it is taken over also by mainstream parties: legitimizing effect, larger audience, us/them categorisations
  - can exacerbate the competition perception
  - can exacerbate the distance between groups
  - (Bochman 2011, Spies/Schmidt 2013)
- Anti-immigrant discourse moderates the relationships between natives' characteristics and their propensity to approve or undertake discriminatory behaviour, but according to cognitive dissonance theory, moderating effects are expected to take different directions, in function of individuals held beliefs and positions.

# Hypotheses

## Labour market discrimination

Discourse*unemployed	-
Discourse*manual worker	-
Discourse*perceived competition	-
Discourse*immigrant friends	0
Discourse*social distance	0
Discourse*casual contact	-

## Social discrimination

Discourse*unemployed	-
Discourse*manual worker	-
Discourse*perceived competition	-
Discourse*immigrant friends	0
Discourse*social distance	0
Discourse*casual contact	-

# Data method variables

- **Data:** ESS 2002, excluded: Eastern Europe, Israel, France (no income)
- 16 Western European countries
- **Method:** logit regressions, country fixed effects, std errors clustered by country
- **Variables:**
  - **dependent:** approval of labour market discrimination, social discrimination (ordinal, low end indicates discriminatory attitudes)
  - **independent:** party discourse (Comparative Manifesto Project, % of statements):
    - for each party: discourse  $P = [(nationalist + anti-multiculturalism) - (non-nationalist + pro-multiculturalist)] * \% \text{ votes in elections before 2002}$
    - at country level: SUM discourse  $P, P = \text{all parties from country A}$
    - Final positive values indicate salience of the anti-immigration discourse in each country for the election preceding 2002/2003 – recoded 1 (negative values recoded 0)
  - **independent:** competition and contact
- Controls

# Results: Direct effects

- **Contact and competition** theories – confirmed, but with nuances
- Labour market discrimination – supported by those who **perceive competition**, opposed by those with immigrant friends and those open to foreigners.
- Social discrimination - supported by those who perceive competition, opposed by those with **immigrant friends and those open to foreigners**

# Results: Interaction effects – Labour market discrimination

Discourse*unemployed	-
Discourse*manual worker	-
Discourse*perceived competition	-
Discourse*immigrant friends	0
Discourse*social distance	0
Discourse*casual contact	-

# Results: Interaction effects – Labour market discrimination

Party*unemployed	-	0.065 (0.307)
Party*manual worker	-	-0.050 (0.085)
Party*perceived competition	-	-0.072 (0.077)
Party*immigrant friends	0	-0.046 (0.067)
Party*social distance	0	-0.058 (0.191)
Party*casual contact	-	0.018 (0.065)

# Results: Interaction effects – Social discrimination

Discourse*unemployed	-
Discourse*manual worker	-
Discourse*perceived competition	-
Discourse*immigrant friends	0
Discourse*social distance	0
Discourse*casual contact	-

# Results: Interaction effects – Social discrimination

Discourse*unemployed	-	-0.167 (0.155)
Discourse*manual worker	-	-0.051 (0.065)
Discourse*perceived competition	-	0.044 (0.053)
<b>Discourse*immigrant friends</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.142*</b> <b>(0.064)</b>
Discourse*social distance	0	-0.059 (0.109)
<b>Discourse*casual contact</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-0.156*</b> <b>(0.062)</b>

# Conclusions

- Contact and competition theories – confirmed, with nuances
- Caveat – discriminatory attitudes – social desirability
- Anti-immigrant party discourse – little effect
  - good news: it does not sway easily Western European publics in direction of discrimination
  - but it affects private behaviour of individuals (preferences for family formation): distinguishes between friends and foes
- Policy implications? Integration policies should not engage immigrants only, but also natives.