‘To what extent does anti-immigrant sentiment influence support for European integration?’

abstract

Research Question

For my undergraduate degree in Politics and International Relations, I carried out a dissertation worth 40 credits. Following my second year Q-Step summer placement, I embarked on a quantitative project and was, surprisingly, the only one of my year to do so. Given the pertinence and salience of EU-related research in the current political climate, I decided to investigate the sources and antecedents of citizen support for the European integration process with a primary focus on the role of attitudes toward immigration. As such, the research question guiding my dissertation was: ‘To what extent does anti-immigrant sentiment influence support for European integration?’. In line with prevailing literature, explanatory factors considered alongside immigrant sentiment as predictors of EU support included: perceptions of one’s national government, authoritarianism, national identity.

Data Used

I used data from the 7th round of the European Social Survey (ESS), looking at 18 of the EU member states, both individually at the country level and aggregately at the macro-societal level. The reasoning for choosing the 18 member states rather than conducting a comparative analysis between one or two, was to observe the relationship between the variables as an over-arching feature of the EU as an entity, before exploring whether the findings of the research could be extrapolated to each individual country.

Methodology

Subsequent to operationalising the concepts, using the most relevant survey measures available, I produced a conceptual model to be tested, illustrating the interaction between previously suggested antecedents of support for EU integration. The ESS typically uses 10-point Likert scales to measure attitudes which I treated as interval level data for the purposes of the regression analysis. The variables deriving from non-Likert scale items were recoded as dummy variables. Initially, descriptive statistics and correlative tests were carried out to examine the nature of the variables and query the existence of a statistically significant association between attitudes toward immigration and support for EU integration.
I then applied a generalised linear model and stepwise, multiple linear regression model to the data, capturing the multi-dimensionality of EU attitudes while determining the strongest predictor of support for EU integration.

**Results**

On a rudimentary level, as hypothesised, the analysis at both EU and country level found that negative attitudes toward immigration were consistent with opposition to further European integration. At the macro-societal level, running the regression model found that when considered against other explanatory factors, anti-immigrant sentiment was the most significant predictor of support for the European integration process. When applied at individual country level, the model found immigrant sentiment was the strongest antecedent for all but 3 of the 18 EU member-states included. While the dissertation was only exploratory, it certainly warrants further investigation into the topic, particularly with regard to the countries that failed to conform to the over-arching trend of the rest of the EU and given the influence of anti-immigrant attitudes on support; if policy-makers are to continue driving the integration process, they must first address the root causes of an increasingly Eurosceptic electorate.

**Example of Graph**

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the estimated marginal means ($\hat{y}$) for each value of the independent variable (anti-immigrant attitudes) and confirms the significant positive relationship between support for EU integration and immigrant sentiment.
Fig 1: Estimated marginal means for each value on the 10 point Likert scale.