



Xenophobia and immigrant contact: French public attitudes toward immigration



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ABSTRACT

How does the presence of immigrants in a local community affect xenophobic attitudes? Does contact with immigrants ameliorate or exacerbate anti-immigrant attitudes among citizens? Synthesizing public opinion, economic, and demographic data from France, we test hypotheses concerning the relationship between the presence of immigrant populations and xenophobic sentiments. Supportive of the contact theory, we find that larger immigrant populations decrease xenophobic attitudes. This finding challenges much of the country-level research on immigrant concentration and xenophobia and offers some hope for those who are concerned about the rise of xenophobia and the radical right in the midst of diverse European polities.

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1. Introduction

More than 190 million around the world are international immigrants, and Europe is a prominent immigrant-receiving region (*Transatlantic Trends Immigration, 2008*). According to the 1999 census (*INSEE, 1999*), there were nearly 3 million immigrants in France from outside the European Union (4.7%). By 2008, nearly 6% of the French population was comprised of immigrants, amounting to a foreign-born population of more than 3.7 million. Of those immigrants, nearly 61% arrived from outside the EU-27, mostly from African home countries (*INSEE, 2008*).

Meanwhile, European publics (*Barber, 2007; Lahav, 2004a, 2004b*) and political elites (*Caldwell, 2009; Lahav, 2004a*) are suspicious of these growing immigrant populations. More people in Europe view immigration as a problem than an opportunity (*Transatlantic Trends*

Immigration, 2008, p. 5). Furthermore, in almost every European democracy there are political parties who espouse xenophobic or outright racist messages, while many European countries have fringe movements who express more extreme xenophobic attitudes, even advocating violence (*Economist, 2011*). In France, for instance, the National Front has built support based on xenophobic and anti-establishment rhetoric, framing the foreign-born population as a primary cause of rising unemployment, crime rates, and other social woes (*Mayer, 1995; Golder, 2003*). But even mainstream parties have shifted their political rhetoric. Before the 2005 riots outside Paris, French President Nicolas Sarkozy described the Parisian suburban young people, largely immigrant and minority, as “*racaille*” or rabble (*BBC News, 2012*). In 2012, Sarkozy appealed to far-right voters by arguing that France has too many foreigners on its territory, and that France is not capable of integrating them into society (*Samuel, 2012*).

This political reality poses a challenge for liberal democratic leaders as well as an opportunity for political parties to seize on voter insecurity to achieve electoral gains. However, the manner in which changing demographics

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affect European public attitudes toward immigrants and minority racial groups are not well understood. With its combination of a large immigrant population and thriving radical right political movement, France provides a useful arena to evaluate the effects of immigrant concentration on public attitudes in a sub-national framework not feasible in a larger multi-country study. In this paper, we therefore explore how demographics shape public opinion in France, using the contact and threat theories as the starting point for understanding the dynamics between increasing immigrant populations and public opinion.

According to a simplified version of Allport's contact theory (1954), increased contact with immigrants should undermine xenophobic sentiment. However, Allport and other contact theorists specify the particular conditions under which contact can improve or even exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions. Threat theory argues that intergroup contact intensifies conflict due to competition over scarce resources (cf. Hjerm, 2009; Hood & Morris, 1998; Kopstein & Wittenberg, 2009; Oliver & Wong, 2003; Quillian, 1995; Rink, Phalet, & Swyngedouw, 2009). From this perspective, in regions with larger immigrant populations, there is more of a perceived group threat, leading to more antipathy toward the out-group (Hjerm, 2009, p. 49). As Rink et al. (2009, p. 412) assert, minority group size can trigger group threat and increase prejudice regardless if the threat is real or simply perceived. This theory, therefore, offers a viable and testable alternative to contact theory.

Unfortunately, much of the research on the European context does not adequately test these theories, as it focuses on individuals nested in states as the unit of analysis, ignoring intra-national variation in immigrant concentration. Using public opinion data from the French Electoral Panel, 2002, economic data from Eurostat, and immigration figures from the 1999 French National Census, we use hierarchical linear models to evaluate the extent to which the presence of immigrant populations, measured at the department level,¹ shape public opinion and the expression of xenophobic attitudes. The immigrant population shares in French departments vary significantly, giving us significant leverage on the research question.

By using these various datasets and by focusing on only one country, we test the contact and threat theories against other arguments common in the literature, especially egocentric (pocket-book) and sociotropic (regional economic) factors (Lahav, 2004a). Identifying how contact with immigrant populations and political economic conditions shape public opinion, especially racist or xenophobic attitudes, is essential to understanding public attitudes to racial minorities and immigrants in France and elsewhere in Western Europe. To preview the findings, political economic conditions matter as expected, while the presence of large immigrant populations is associated with diminished local xenophobia. This finding challenges most of

the country-level research on immigrant concentration and xenophobia, and offers some hope for liberal multiculturalists who worry about the rise of the radical right in the midst of diverse European polities.

2. Contact and conflict theories

We follow a well-established research tradition that began with social psychologist Gordon Allport's study of what has come to be called contact theory. In *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), Allport outlines his theory that interaction among disparate groups in the pursuit of common goals undermines stereotypes and thereby fosters understanding, integration, and peaceable relations (Byman, 1998–1999, p. 720). According to the theory, interaction reveals inter-group similarities, overcoming the differences and skepticism that engender conflict and violence (Brown & Lopez, 2001, p. 281). A sizeable minority group, therefore, produces opportunities for interaction that can reduce distorted images or negative stereotypes (Ha, 2010). Subsequent development of the contact hypothesis focuses less on Allport's emphasis of groups' common humanity and more on their relative status and goals (Brown & Lopez, 2001, p. 282). According to the most common variants of the contact hypothesis (cf. Pettigrew, 1998), convergence among group status and objectives reduces conflict and promotes intergroup cooperation. Stein, Post and Rinden (2000, p. 289) simplify further, arguing that "any type of frequent non-negative contact between majority/minority groups will reduce prejudicial attitudes and policy positions irrespective of the setting or nature of the contact."

From a more skeptical view, contact at the group level increases rather than attenuates tension (Forbes, 1997; Brown & Lopez, 2001, p. 284). Allport himself was well aware of the chance that contact can have a negative effect on attitudes if the conditions are not optimal. For Forbes (1997, p. 146), contact theorists' optimistic conclusion overlooks the countervailing effects that cultural interaction might precipitate. Scholars dating back to V.O. Key have argued that contact with "the other" triggers threat perceptions and even contempt (Burns & Gimpel, 2000, p. 209).

Ha (2010, p. 30) offers the simplest articulation of this main alternative theory: "threat theory suggests that racial heterogeneity heightens racial tension: the larger the proportion of the racial minority group, the greater is the perceived competition among racial groups for jobs and other economic resources." Threat perception does not have to be objectively present; a subjective perception of vulnerability to people who are seen as different would be sufficient (Kopstein & Wittenberg, 2009, p. 415). Theoretically, this perceived competition can lead to increased animosity and prejudice, although the evidence is mixed (McClain et al., 2006, p. 575).

Empirically, Quillian (1995) notices the scarcity of studies testing the effects of size of minority group on levels of prejudice using individual and group-level variables simultaneously. In earlier studies, National Front support in France at the department level is positively correlated with the size of the foreign-born population. Such results con-

¹ France's administration is organized into 26 regions subdivided into 100 departments. Departments are further divided into arrondissements, then cantons, and then communes.

tradict the optimistic assertions of contact theory. In these same studies, however, the relationship between foreign-born residents and support for the radical right breaks down at lower levels of aggregation, offering support for contact theory (Kitschelt, 1995, p. 103; Mayer, 1995, p. 102). In Golder's review of more recent research (2003), he argues the empirical evidence linking local immigrant populations and radical right voting is still inconclusive. Debate remains open whether contact with immigrants encourages radical right voting.

Furthermore, Quillian (1995) argues that contact alone does not determine intergroup attitudes. Instead, the state of the economy, or sociotropic concerns, is a crucial intermediate variable between intergroup contact and the potential for conflict. According to his cross-national study, racial or ethnic prejudice arises when an individual perceives a threat – operationalized as contemporary economic conditions and the relative size of the migrant population – to his in-group (Quillian, 1995, p. 586; Weldon, 2006, p. 339 note 13). In her examination of the EU public's attitudes toward new members, and Turkey's candidacy in particular, McLaren (2007) repeats the importance of this sequence. She concludes contact with immigrant populations drives hostility toward Turkish and other candidates' accession to the EU (McLaren, 2007, p. 259).

In her individual-level analysis, however, McLaren presents a nuanced argument to explain the source of this hostility. Group threat perception generates hostility, regardless of objective vulnerability due to factors such as unemployment potential or dependence on social security (McLaren, 2007, pp. 258, and 272–273). Similarly, Lahav (2004b) contends that sociotropic motivations rather than pocketbook concerns drive policy preferences. For much of the literature, then, it is perceptions of collective threat that drive attitudes toward out-groups, not contact between individuals or their objective personal economic circumstances.

These findings suggest a number of hypotheses pertaining to contact theory and xenophobic attitudes, many of which we explore for the case of France. One limitation to both Quillian and McLaren's studies is their focus on the state as the level of analysis; therefore, their analyses overlooks the meaningful variation in immigrant populations and economic factors at the sub-state level. This distinction is important. Context, or the percentage of minority group members living in a locality, determines the probability of inter-group contact (Stein et al., 2000, p. 289). The country-level context is simply too large to represent a valid proxy for contact; while department or commune is not ideal, it is clearly better than the state. If the contact mechanism is at work, we may not find evidence at the national level of analysis, as immigrants are not distributed uniformly or randomly. In France, the average share of foreigners in French departments in our sample is 5.2%, with a minimum of 0.6% in Vendee and maximum of 18.7% in Seine Saint-Denis. According to Allport's contact theory, increased contact with immigrants ought to undermine xenophobic sentiment. We believe

that department-level immigrant population is a valid proxy for this contact.²

From the perspective of the threat theory, however, racial hostility increases when the size of the out-group increases because it threatens the economic and social privilege of the in-group (Oliver & Wong, 2003, p. 568). In other words, as the threat theory is usually articulated, threat, and therefore prejudice, increases as a function of the size of the out-group (Kinder & Sears, 1981, p. 415; Oliver & Wong, 2003, p. 569). A fair test of these hypotheses must account for the geographic variation within France; international comparisons are not sufficient.

3. Economic threat

Beyond the immigrant population context, we expect economic circumstances to affect attitudes toward immigrants. Quillian (1995), for instance, argues that contact alone does not determine intergroup attitudes. Rather, collective threat is a function of two factors: the size of the out-group and economic circumstances (Quillian, 1995, p. 587). According to his cross-national study, racial or ethnic prejudice arises when an individual perceives a threat—operationalized as contemporary economic conditions and the relative size of the migrant population—to her in-group (Quillian, 1995, p. 586; Weldon, 2006, p. 339 note 13). Furthermore, as Clark and Legge (1997, p. 904) explain, economic threat is most immediate for marginal workers, those with low education levels and poor labor market positions. However, scholars find that sociotropic motivations rather than pocketbook concerns drive policy preferences (Citrin, Green, Muste, & Wong, 1997, p. 874; Lahav, 2004b; McLaren & Johnson, 2007, p. 725); pessimism about the state of the national economy matters more than narrow self-interest. However, experimental evidence shows that economic self-interest affects immigration attitudes, even if many survey-based studies miss these egocentric effects (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004). Using a variety of individual and constituency-level variables, we test whether either egocentric and sociotropic motivations drive xenophobic attitudes in the 2002 French example.

4. Data

We compiled our dataset from three main sources: the first wave of the 2002 French Electoral Panel (CEVIPOF and CIDSP, 2002), the 1999 French National Census (INSEE, 1999), and the Eurostat Regio database (Eurostat, 2013). The French Electoral Panel, 2002, a panel survey conducted in three waves before and after the 2002 presidential and legislative elections, furnishes the public opinion data with which we construct indicators of xenophobia – our dependent variable – as well as various socioeconomic control variables. The survey polled 4,107 registered voters, drawing from a representative sample of gender, age,

² In a study of American ethnic attitudes, Stein et al. (2000, p. 294) find that the proportion of minorities in an American county is positively and significantly related to the amount of inter-ethnic contact, suggesting that the use of context as a proxy for contact has validity.

profession, and geographic region. We use the French Electoral Panel first wave, which questioned respondents in a series of face-to-face interviews during the two weeks leading up to the first round of the presidential election on 21 April 2002.

For two reasons, the 2002 French Electoral Panel is especially useful as a research domain. First, the timing of the election is close to the 1999 census, allowing us to match each respondent with the most accurate estimate of the region's diversity. Second, the survey asks multiple questions regarding attitudes toward immigrants and ethnic minorities. Each question has a different emphasis and allows for triangulation on the main theoretical concept of xenophobia.

5. Measuring xenophobia, contact and threat

Using the French Electoral Panel public opinion and demographic data, we construct instruments to measure political and social attitudes as well as a variety of demographic and socioeconomic control variables. To gauge xenophobia, we draw from questions about social attitudes that can be interpreted as attitudes toward immigrants. Six questions that tap into xenophobia or racism are: beliefs about whether presence of immigrants in France is a source of cultural enrichment, whether there are too many immigrants, whether some races are less talented than others, whether African immigrants living in France will one day be French like everyone else, whether Blacks and African immigrants are too often treated as second class citizens, and whether the respondent has a positive attitude about Islam. These variables are coded so that higher scores are more xenophobic. For the first variable, a higher score means that the respondent strongly agrees that immigrants are not a source of cultural enrichment; values range from one to four with significant variation within each variable.³ Given the norms against racism, what is surprising is how many French respondents are willing to assert that another race is inferior, though this finding is in line with data from Italy (Sniderman, Peri, de Figueiredo, & Piazza, 2000, p. 29).

Rather than use any individual question, each of which touches only on a small aspect of the latent concept, we created an additive xenophobia scale with higher values reflecting more xenophobic attitudes. Similar in construction to the symbolic racism (Kinder & Sears, 1981) and racial resentment scales (De Sante, 2013) used in American politics, the xenophobia scale measures whether French citizens believe the out-group members lack the ability to assimilate into French culture and whether immigrants suffer from discrimination. Unlike those scales, though, which are a function of “antiblack affect and traditional values” rather than “old-fashioned racism” (Sears, 1988, p. 56), several of the French survey questions have more overt

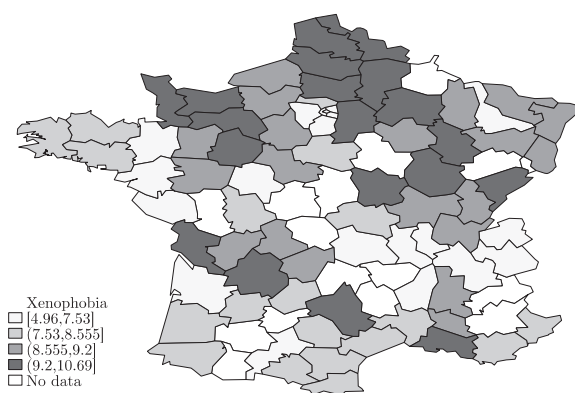


Fig. 1. Geographic variation in xenophobia.

racist and xenophobic tones. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.796, with a range of 0–18 and a mean of 8.3.⁴

Fig. 1 presents the geographic variation in the xenophobia scale.

Using GIS data collected from the European Union,⁵ we simply code every department with its mean score on the xenophobia scale. Darker shading refers to those regions with higher levels. The map shows concentrations of anti-immigrant attitudes in a few regions in east-central France and in northern France, but otherwise there is no obvious geographic pattern.

We also draw from the French Electoral Panel for a number of key independent variables. To ascertain general political attitudes, we incorporate the respondents' self-placement on a seven-point ideological spectrum. For control variables, we include data from the survey on respondents' age, gender, and whether they own a home. Apart from age, these controls are coded as dummy variables.

Beyond individual ideology, we incorporate a variable to capture political party rhetoric. As Forbes (1997) and Hopkins (2010), Hopkins (2011) argue, the role of elites cannot be ignored. Kaufman (2001) demonstrates the value of incorporating elite manipulation along with rational economic factors to explain ethnic animosity, while Hopkins (2010, p. 40) considers whether the politicization of the issue at the national level interacts with local levels of immigrants to create perceptions of threat and even hostility.

In 2002, especially, the National Front's electoral success provided Jean Marie Le Pen a prominent stage for his political message. Typical of radical right parties in western Europe, who tend to favor policies associated with cultural protectionism, such as repatriation of immigrants and

³ For reference, the wording of the survey questions, coding, and frequencies are included in Appendix 1.

⁴ To check the additive scale for robustness, we also conducted exploratory factor analysis, a technique Kinder and Sears (1981, p. 419) use to identify symbolic racism. We suspect these six variables may capture one underlying or latent concept. With principal-components factor analysis, one factor emerges. The six items loaded from 0.56 to 0.82 on this factor. The additive scale and the factor score are positively correlated at 0.9988, so we feel confident in using the simpler additive scale.

⁵ We collected the NUTS geo-datafiles from GISCO NUTS 2006, made available from Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>). We created the maps in Stata 12 using the `spmap` command.

economic protectionism (Norris, 2005, p. 24), xenophobia remains the key issue of the National Front (Safra, 1993, p. 34), with a particular emphasis on linking immigration and unemployment (Golder, 2003).

Yet, as Meguid (2008) makes clear, we cannot simply focus on niche parties and ignore the mainstream parties. The National Front's strident anti-immigrant message has changed the public discourse so mainstream parties are forced to clarify their positions or risk being portrayed as "conscious agents of a multiculturalism that undermines national cohesiveness" (Golder, 2003, p. 439). To test the effects of elite rhetoric generally, we evaluate whether a party's negative attitude toward multiculturalism is associated with more xenophobic sentiments among that party's partisans.

In earlier work on public opinion, Zaller argues that in a noisy environment, individuals would be more likely to follow the heuristics of elites they trust and with whom they share ideological predispositions (1992, p. 9).⁶ Using individual voters' preferred party from the French Electoral Panel, we construct a party cue variable from the Comparative Manifesto Project data (Klingemann et al., 2007),⁷ such that higher scores mean the party is negative toward multiculturalism. Party scores range from the most negative National Front's 1.92 to the Rally for the Republic's -0.94 or the Socialists' -1.44. We expect that higher levels of animosity toward multiculturalism at the elite level will correlate with xenophobia at the individual level.⁸

We use several variables to tap into objective egocentric concerns, including employment status, education level, and income, measured on a 9-point scale. But objective indicators may not tell the full story, so we include one subjective dummy variable, which measures whether the respondent thinks "people like you are living . . . worse than before?"

These measures allow us to test whether individual attitudes toward immigrants are driven by economic threat and insecurity. As Quillian (1995) explains, the self-interest theory postulates that citizens will be more anti-immigrant if they perceive immigrants as economic competition. In addition, we include the department level unemployment rate drawn from the Eurostat Regio database as a control for sociotropic economic concerns, along with the subjective pessimism measure. We expect respondents who live

⁶ Research on support for European integration suggests that party positions affect citizens' attitudes toward Europe in this manner (Brinegar & Jolly, 2005; Gabel & Scheve, 2007; Steenbergen, Edwards, & de Vries, 2007; Steenbergen & Jones, 2002).

⁷ Following common CMP practice for creating summary variables, we subtract the positive measure for Multiculturalism (per 607) from the negative (per 608). "Multiculturalism-Positive" is defined as: "Favourable mention of cultural diversity, communalism, cultural plurality, and pillarization; preservation of autonomy of religious, linguistic heritages within the country including special educational provisions." "Multiculturalism: Negative" is "Enforcement or encouragement of cultural integration; otherwise as 607 but negative" (Klingemann et al., 2007).

⁸ There is likely to be endogeneity at work in this relationship, as parties are likely to follow public opinion just as they cue voters themselves. Here, we simply include party cue as a control variable, as sorting out this tricky relationship is work for another article.

Table 1
Xenophobia and foreign population share, by department.

Department	Xenophobia scale (mean)	Department foreign population share
Largest foreign population depts.		
Seine Saint-Denis (93)	6.07	18.72%
Paris (75)	5.39	14.51%
Val de Marne (94)	6.69	11.82%
Hauts de Seine (92)	6.87	11.52%
Val d'Oise (95)	8.26	10.81%
Smallest foreign population depts.		
Finistere (29)	8.37	0.95%
Mayenne (53)	9.15	0.94%
Morbihan (56)	8.00	0.89%
Manche (50)	9.95	0.85%
Vendee (85)	6.66	0.61%
French average	8.38	4.65%

Sources: French Electoral Panel, 2002 and INSEE, Recensement de la population, Mars 1999.

Note: The departments listed are the five departments with the largest and smallest foreign population shares.

in regions with higher unemployment to be less accommodating to immigrants based on sociotropic concerns.

Finally, from the 1999 French National Census, we extract data on the foreign-born population in each department,⁹ the key variable for testing our hypothesis related to contact theory. As discussed above, immigrant population share is not a direct measure of contact with out-groups; however, there is some evidence that its use as a proxy is valid. Pettigrew (1998, p. 72) finds that people living in diverse neighborhoods are much more likely to have an out-group friend, which in turn significantly lowers prejudice measures. Further, the threat theory relies more clearly on simple concentration levels, as opposed to contact.

At the department level, the census data yields foreign population numbers, or *population étrangère*, from which we extract the share of foreigners. France's primary sub-national administrative unit is the *département*. We use the department-level foreign population share because this level offers a more direct test of the contact theory than higher levels of aggregation, such as country-level. There are 80 departments represented in the sample.¹⁰

Aggregating up to the department level, variation in the number of foreign residents and xenophobic attitudes exists among these regions. The department foreign population share in these data ranges from 0.61% to 18.72%, with a mean of 5.21%, providing variation for testing our main hypothesis. Table 1 presents the five departments with the

⁹ Unfortunately, French law precludes racial or ethnic identification questions in the census (Chrisafis, 2007), but the census does provide data on country of origin and French nationality.

¹⁰ France has a total of 100 departments, four of which are overseas possessions or territories; we exclude the latter from our sample. There were no survey respondents in sixteen of the 96 domestic departments in the 2002 FNES. The sixteen departments reporting no respondents in the 2002 FNES are Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, Ardennes, Cantal, Cher, Creuse, Deux-Sèvres, Gers, Haute-Loire, Haute-Saône, Hautes-Alpes, Hautes-Pyrénées, Indre, Lozère, Tarn-et-Garonne, Territoire de Belfort, and Yonne. The missing departments are a random sample and do not truncate the variation in our variables in any systematic way.

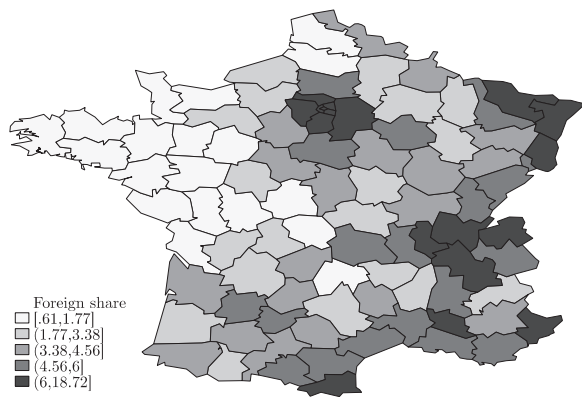


Fig. 2. Geographic variation in foreign population share.

highest percentage of foreign residents and the five departments with the lowest percentage, along with the average response on the xenophobia scale.

Comparing the two columns suggests that the most diverse departments tend to display less xenophobic attitudes. In Fig. 2, we present a map highlighting the department foreign population share. Darker shading represents greater shares of foreign-born population.

Fig. 2 shows that immigrants concentrate around Paris, the dark zone in north-central France, and along the Eastern borders, near Strasbourg in the north and near Lyon in southeast. But simply comparing Figs. 1 and 2 does not yield obvious conclusions. It is clearly not always the departments with large concentrations of immigrants that have higher degrees of xenophobia. Indeed, the correlation coefficient between the two variables is negative (-0.16) and statistically significant, as contact theory predicts. The next step is to evaluate the relationship in a multivariate model.

6. Analysis and results

Significantly, much of the research on xenophobic attitudes focuses on either individuals, ignoring context, or on aggregations at the state level, overlooking sub-state variation. Yet the contact theory predictions hinge on contact with the out-group. National aggregations simply cannot account for this spatial variation. Thus, whereas recent *FT/Harris* polls show that 86% of Germans and 61% of French citizens want immigrants to take citizenship and language courses (Barber, 2007), these aggregate numbers cannot differentiate between citizens with actual exposure to immigrants and those who are simply responding to fear, be it fear propagated by Radical Right politicians or fear of economic decline.

To evaluate the influence of immigrant population on attitudes toward immigrants, we use hierarchical linear models (Steenbergen & Jones, 2002). Much of the previous work relies on individual-level analysis with either country or, at best, region controls, which implicitly assume that each observation is independent. But a simple ANOVA model demonstrates that both variance components are statistically significant, suggesting that significant variation occurs at individual and department levels. The intra-class correlation ratio (ICC) is 7%, which means that

Table 2
Hierarchical linear model of xenophobia.

	Coefficient	Std error
Fixed effects		
Left/right ideology	0.498***	(0.039)
Party cue	1.126**	(0.054)
Age	0.041***	(0.004)
Female	0.284*	(0.116)
Muslim	-3.097***	(0.401)
Homeowner	0.013	(0.136)
Income	-0.100*	(0.042)
Education > high school	-2.126***	(0.133)
Economy worse than before	0.981**	(0.119)
Department foreign population Share	-0.087**	(0.027)
Department unemployment rate	0.062	(0.043)
Constant	6.313***	(0.501)
Random effects		
Individual level	10.473	(0.264)
Department level	0.356	(0.104)
Log likelihood		-8399.193
Number of observations		3226
Number of groups		78

Note: The xenophobia scale ranges from 0 to 18, with higher scores reflecting more distrust or resentment of immigrants and minorities.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

around 7% of the variance in xenophobic attitudes is due to differences across departments. Ignoring this nested structure could potentially lead to incorrect inferences (Steenbergen & Jones, 2002, p. 227).

Since the evidence supports a nested data structure, hierarchical linear models are appropriate. Table 2 reports the results. Comparisons of the log likelihood and Bayesian Information Criterion verify that this model is an improvement over both the simple ANOVA model and a model with only individual-level variables.

As expected, higher skilled or educated respondents, as measured by education, are consistently less xenophobic in their attitudes. The education variable is negative and highly significant. Given previous work (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010; Kessler & Freeman, 2005; Lahav, 2004b), this result is not surprising; lower skilled individuals are likely to oppose immigration just as economic models predict.

Consistent with a similar logic, poorer voters espouse more negative attitudes toward immigrants and racial out-groups, as the income variable is negative and significant. These findings are unsurprising and match our theoretical expectations.

In addition to the objective measures of economic threat, we include a subjective sociotropic measure, whether the respondent thinks the economy is worse than it was before. This subjective measure of pessimism affects attitudes toward immigrants, with more pessimistic respondents more likely to express anti-immigrant views. This result is consistent with Fetzer (2000), among others, who finds that subjective perceptions of economic threat affect attitudes toward immigrants.

For some readers, a surprising result might be the positive sign for the gender control variable. However, this result is consistent with earlier work. Hainmueller and

Hiscox (2007, p. 415–416), for instance, find that women are significantly more likely to oppose immigration, even from richer countries. These authors attribute part of the gender gap in xenophobia to lower skill levels on average. Similarly, Givens' work on the gender gap finds that women are more anti-immigrant than men, at least in France (2004, p. 48), even after controlling for various socioeconomic and political variables. A similar pattern holds for age, whereby older voters are more likely to think immigrants are not a source of cultural enrichment.

Next, we include Muslim to control for an intuitive and plausible alternative theory: less xenophobia in diverse districts has little to do with contact theory, but can simply be attributed to more immigrants taking the survey. While French surveys do not ask ethnicity questions, they do inquire about religion, including Muslim. We therefore include a control variable for whether the respondent is Muslim, and it is negative and significant as expected.¹¹

Consistently, those who identify themselves as politically right of center hold less positive attitudes toward immigrants and members of other racial groups. This variable is positive and strongly significant, thus echoing well-established findings in the literature on anti-immigration attitudes.

Similar to ideology, party cue is positive as predicted. When a voter's preferred party expresses positions measured anti-multiculturalism, the partisans are more xenophobic. This result is consistent with the politicization argument articulated by Hopkins (2010, 2011) in other contexts, such as the United States and United Kingdom. We find that elites play an important role. When elites oppose multiculturalism, their partisans also tend to be more xenophobic. If policy-makers desire amicable inter-ethnic relations or support for immigration liberalization, they must be wary of these types of appeals.

Beyond the individual-level factors, we test department-level unemployment rates alongside immigration shares. As expected, xenophobia is higher in departments with worse economic conditions, as measured by department-level unemployment rates; however, the effect is statistically insignificant.

In contrast, the department foreign population share coefficient is negative and significant, supporting the more optimistic contact theory. Our results correspond to Oliver and Wong (2003, p. 568) who find in the American context that those respondents who do not live among the

¹¹ Unfortunately, the surveys do not ask ethnic identity questions. Thus, we cannot simply include a question to control for the respondent's identity. Nevertheless, we remain confident that the results support the contact theory interpretation, as opposed to a simpler explanation that more immigrants are answering the survey in these ethnically diverse communes, for multiple reasons. First, the survey is directed only at citizens, excluding many recent immigrants. Second, in addition to the Muslim variable, we also use a variable that asks whether the respondent has family abroad; this variable does not have an effect on the other explanatory variables. Yet another potential confounding factor is self-selection effects, such as whether immigrants choose neighborhoods based on their relative friendliness to immigrants. However, previous studies that test for selection bias more directly find little support for that argument (Hopkins, 2010, 2011; Oliver & Wong, 2003; Rudolph & Popp, 2010).

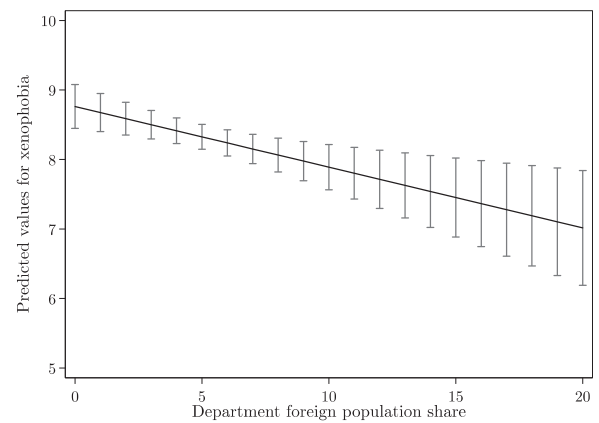


Fig. 3. The impact of department foreign population share on xenophobia.

out-group are more likely to hold negative views of the out-group and to perceive the out-group as economic competition. Importantly, though, this result contradicts much of the literature on immigrant populations and xenophobia in Europe and justifies the analysis at the level of the department instead of country.

Increasing department foreign population share from its minimum to maximum is associated with a decline in the xenophobia scale from about 8.8 to 7 on the 0–18 scale, a nearly 20% decline. This result, with its statistically significant negative sign, suggests that respondents in departments with large immigration populations are less likely to harbor xenophobic attitudes. Fig. 3 displays this relationship.

Fig. 3 demonstrates the effect of foreign population share from Table 2 with the predicted values and a 95% confidence interval. In departments with a larger local immigrant population, individuals are less likely to strongly agree that there are too many immigrants. Not only does this finding support the contact hypothesis, but it also suggests there may be some room for optimism in the intergroup dynamic literature.

To further test this result, though, we conducted several robustness tests.¹² First, we consider alternative dependent variables, running the same model as Table 2 for each individual dependent variable and the factor score (see footnote 4). The factor score results are consistent with Table 2, as expected, given that the correlation between the additive index and factor score is so high. For the individual variables, we find a negative and significant relationship in five of the six models, with only the second-class citizen variable as the exception. In that model, department foreign population share is insignificant. That particular question has the lowest factor loading and the smallest item-test correlation of the six index components. Given that the six variables together represent the theoretical concept, we feel confident the results are robust.

Second, Table 2 reports an additive model including the contact and threat variables separately, but the theories suggest that contact may have heterogeneous

¹² All robustness tests available upon request.

effects depending on the threat environment. Accordingly, we would expect contact to be associated with more xenophobia for those individuals under conditions of economic threat. To test this hypothesis directly, we interact department foreign population share with the subjective measure, the “Economy Worse than Before” question. In this model, contact has a negative relationship with xenophobia for both types of individuals.¹³ Obviously, this measure of economic threat is not perfect but suggests that the relationship between contact and diminished xenophobia is not contingent on economic threat.

Third, there may be a curvilinear effect of a local immigrant population, as [Schneider \(2008, p. 62\)](#) finds in a study on ethnic threat. At higher levels, the increasing share of immigrants may accelerate xenophobic attitudes. This theory is intuitively plausible, but when we include squared shares in ordered logit models, there is no statistical support for the curvilinear relationship, just a negative overall effect.

Finally, the department may be too large a level of aggregation. Using the same census data, we have commune-level immigration shares. The result is also negative and significant, suggesting that the result in [Table 2](#) is not simply an artifact of the aggregation.

This result offers a different view of the effect of immigration than several of the country-level results in Europe. For instance, [Lahav \(2004b\)](#) finds that as the number of non-EU foreigners in a country increases by just 1%, public attitudes shift remarkably, with 9.9% more respondents agreeing that immigration is a big problem. However, she clarifies that this relationship only holds at the national level. Individual-level analysis shows that respondents with greater exposure to diversity are no more inclined to xenophobic attitudes than anyone else ([Lahav, 2004b, p. 1172](#)). The results we presented suggest that greater levels of immigration may actually decrease inter-group hostility over time.

7. Discussion

We find that larger numbers of immigrants are associated with less xenophobic attitudes in France. Prior research typically uses the number of immigrants in a state as a determinant of individual preferences, finding that states with more immigrants tend to have more xenophobic citizens. Our analysis shows that intra-state variation matters in a way consistent with contact theory: larger immigrant populations at the department level actually dampens anti-immigrant attitudes. These results are theoretically consistent with [McLaren \(2003, p. 911\)](#)

who uses more detailed contact measures and finds that minority friendships lead to less exclusionary preferences.

Outside of contact theory proponents, many observers may find this result surprising. But as [Sexton \(2009\)](#) noted about the recent Swiss referendum on banning minarets, citizens were less likely to support the ban in cantons with more foreigners. In other words, in line with the research presented here, preliminary analysis of the Swiss referendum suggests this is not simply a French phenomenon.

In our view, context is crucial. Individual-level explanations cannot explain the extensive variation across regions and over time ([Quillian, 1995, p. 588](#)). A clear next step in the research is to combine our intra-state analysis with cross-national data to compare the effects of immigrant populations at different levels and reconcile our findings with previous research. The two opposing theories outlined in this paper may both be at work at different levels of aggregation. Whereas larger local immigrant populations may reduce xenophobia, as contact theory predicts, higher levels of immigration at the state level—especially if citizens live in homogeneous areas themselves—may actually exacerbate relations by increasing threat perceptions. Such cross-national comparative research will allow us to analyze the institutional and contextual factors that shape whether contact exacerbates inter-ethnic tension.

Finally, in a study of public attitudes, it is critical to ask whether public opinion matters. Fortunately, on the issues of xenophobia and immigration policy, the links have been well established. [Kessler and Freeman \(2005\)](#) demonstrate that attitudinal variables, such as prejudice or xenophobia, are more closely associated with attitudes toward immigration policy than other factors, while [Lahav \(2004a, 2004b\)](#) considers the link between public opinion and immigration policy. Finally, [Jennings \(2009\)](#) demonstrates that shifts in public policy directly affect changes in asylum policy in Britain. Thus, in order to understand immigration policy in Europe, we need to continue developing a better understanding of xenophobia.

Appendix 1.

Survey questions and variable coding for dependent variables. We would like to thank Shana Gadarian, Matt Cleary, Jon Hanson, Tom Ogorzalek, Quinn Mulroy and the editors and anonymous reviewers at the *Social Science Journal* for comments and criticism on earlier drafts. We would also like to thank the panels at the Politics of Change conference at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the American Political Science Association and the Midwest Political Science annual meetings for their helpful advice.

¹³ We also test this theoretical interaction with an objective measure: department unemployment rate. In the objective interactive model, the contact and unemployment rate interaction variable is insignificant.

Question	Question text	Responses (%)	Recoding ^a
Q39.2 (xq39.1)	Would you tell me if you absolutely agree, largely agree, largely disagree, or disagree completely? "There are too many immigrants in France."	0. No response (2.5%); 1. Absolutely agree (30.1%); 2. Largely agree (30.0%); 3. Largely disagree (21.7%); 4. Absolutely disagree (15.7%)	1 = Absolutely disagree; 2 = Largely disagree; 3 = Largely agree; 4 = Absolutely agree
Q39.6 (xq39.5)	Would you tell me if you absolutely agree, largely agree, largely disagree, or disagree completely? "The presence of immigrants in France is a source of cultural enrichment."	0. No response (3.6%); 1. Absolutely agree (21.8%); 2. Largely agree (41.6%); 3. Largely disagree (21.4%); 4. Absolutely disagree (15.3%)	No recode.
Q39.7 (xq39.6)	Would you tell me if you absolutely agree, largely agree, largely disagree, or disagree completely? "Some races are less talented than others."	0. No response (4.9%); 1. Absolutely agree (8.1%); 2. Largely agree (16.0%); 3. Largely disagree (19.2%); 4. Absolutely disagree (51.9%)	1 = Absolutely disagree; 2 = Largely disagree; 3 = Largely agree; 4 = Absolutely agree
Q62.2 (xq62.1)	Would you tell me if you absolutely agree, largely agree, largely disagree, or disagree completely? "African immigrants living in France will one day be French like everyone else."	0. No response (3.7%); 1. Absolutely agree (20.4%); 2. Largely agree (42.8%); 3. Largely disagree (20.4%); 4. Absolutely disagree (12.7%)	No recode.
Q62.9 (xq62.8)	Would you tell me if you absolutely agree, largely agree, largely disagree, or disagree completely? "Blacks and African immigrants are too often treated as second class citizens."	0. No response (4.1%); 1. Absolutely agree (18.7%); 2. Largely agree (47.8%); 3. Largely disagree (19.9%); 4. Absolutely disagree (9.5%)	No recode.
Q59.5 (xq59.4)	Could you tell me, for each of these words, if they evoke something very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative, or very negative? "5. Islam"	0. No response (11.4%); 1. Very positive (2.4%); 2. Fairly positive (20.3%); 3. Fairly negative (38.4%); 4. Very negative (27.5%)	No recode.

^a In the analysis reported in Table 2, non-responses are simply excluded.

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