

Value Shift: Immigration Attitudes and the Sociocultural Divide

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Research Objectives

Substantive question:

- Do immigration attitudes fit into the sociocultural dimension of politics?

Methodological question:

- How can IRT be applied to panel data?

Introduction

- It is commonly assumed that political attitudes are two-dimensional—economic and sociocultural—and that each dimension has liberal and conservative poles.
- Conservative sociocultural attitudes were predicted to decline through cohort replacement (Inglehart 1977), and this has generally transpired (Caughey et al. 2019).
- However, opposition to immigration and multiculturalism is still prevalent in Western Europe, and these issues are more contentious than ever.
- Anti-immigrant politicians want to reduce immigration not for explicitly economic or racial reasons, but for cultural reasons. They argue that Muslims are too conservative for their progressive and tolerant countries.

Theoretical Expectations

- Among older cohorts, I expect the correlation between immigration attitudes and other sociocultural attitudes to be strong and positive.
- I expect younger cohorts, who were born and raised during the “post materialist” era, to exhibit a weaker correlation between these attitudes because progressive attitudes are now common...but so is skepticism of immigration.

Data and Methods

- Data source: LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences) Politics and Values Panel, an 11-wave survey of Dutch households, from 2008–2017. $N = 62,530$; $N_{individuals} = 13,140$ (unbalanced panel)
- Two-factor linear mixed effects graded response model, estimated via the Metropolis-Hastings Robbins-Monro (MH-HR) algorithm, implemented by the `mixedmirt()` function from the `mirt` package in R.
- The below equation represents the probability of choosing response x_j or higher, on item j , where θ is the ability parameter, α_j is the discrimination parameter for item j , and δ_{x_j} is the threshold location for x_j .

$$P_{x_j}(\theta) = \frac{\exp \alpha_j(\theta - \delta_{x_j})}{1 + \exp \alpha_j(\theta - \delta_{x_j})} \quad (1)$$

- For the latent regression extension, θ is a function of \mathbf{V} (fixed) and \mathbf{W} (random) effects, such that:

$$\theta = \mathbf{V}\boldsymbol{\Gamma} + \mathbf{W}\boldsymbol{\xi} + \epsilon \quad (2)$$

- 23 ordered items comprise gender factor, and immigration factor includes 9 ordered items
- Latent regression—random effect for individuals, fixed effects for panel wave, birth cohort, gender, education, marital status, employment status, income, religiosity, and left-right self-placement

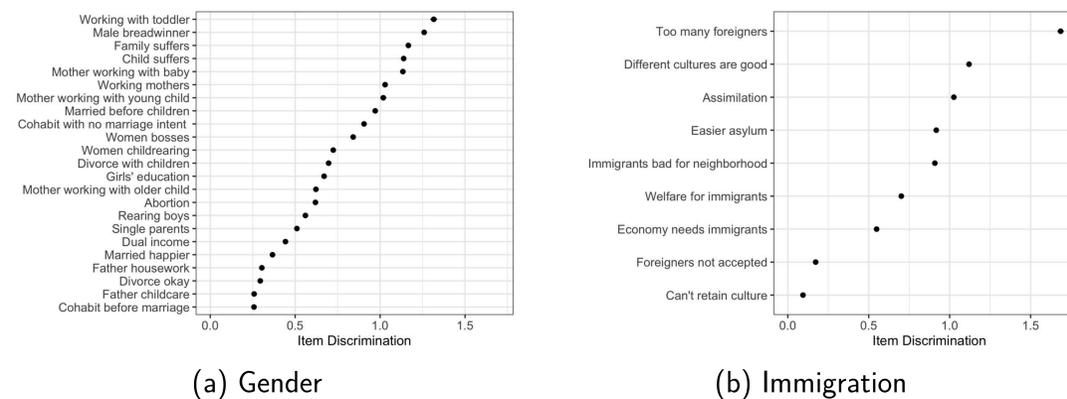


Figure 1: Discrimination Parameters

Results

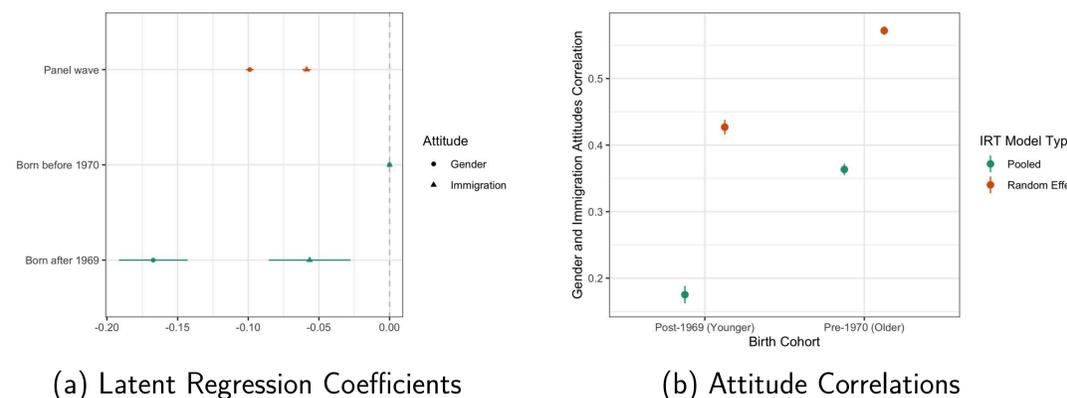


Figure 2: Main Results

Discussion

- Figure 2a presents coefficients from the latent regression, showing that indeed, younger cohorts have substantially more progressive gender attitudes, but only slightly more progressive immigration attitudes.
- Further, gender attitudes change more over the course of the panel
- As shown in Figure 2b, ability scores from a pooled model lead to strongly attenuated bivariate correlation estimates. The mixed effect model reduces measurement error and thus reduces attenuation bias.
- Theoretical expectations are supported—older individuals immigration attitudes are more strongly related to their other sociocultural attitudes, and vice versa for younger individuals

Next steps

- Mixed effects IRT can model both person and item characteristics. While I focused on person characteristics here, an open question is whether certain types of items are driving these results. For example, are items about multiculturalism more difficult for younger individuals?
- Cross-national extension—In other work, I find that the attitude configuration described here is present in only some West European countries. Why is this the case?

References

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