



Hadler, M., & Flesken, A. (2018). Political rhetoric and attitudes towards nationhood: A time-comparative and cross-national analysis of 39 countries. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 59(5-6), 362-382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715218810331>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1177/0020715218810331](https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715218810331)

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Political rhetoric and attitudes towards nationhood:

A time-comparative and cross-national analysis of 39 countries

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Article accepted for publication in the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*.

Abstract

Research on the relationship between nationhood and individual attitudes prominently focuses on whether — and how — the distinction between ethnic and civic conceptions may be drawn in mass public opinion. We depart from this literature to explain the effects of party rhetoric on shaping more restrictive conceptions of nationhood, which previous research refers to as “ethnic”, “objective”, or “ascriptive” views on nationhood. We do so in three parts: we examine whether political rhetoric, in terms of party manifestos, and individual-level conceptions of nationhood are linked; whether the relationship depends on the ideological alignment between political parties and respondents; and whether political rhetoric and individual predisposition act in combination. We analyze three waves of survey data from the International Social Survey Programme’s National Identity module from 1995, 2003 and 2013, covering 58,498 respondents from 39 countries. We find that political rhetoric influences respondents’ conceptions of nationhood. This effect, however, is not as straightforward as initially expected. While the overall political climate does not have a direct effect at the societal level, it does affect the way in which a specific party’s political messages influence the attitudes of their individual recipients. Once the political climate is more ethnocentric, conceptions of nationhood tend to be more restrictive across the board, even among respondents aligned with parties that do not emphasize ethnic conceptions.

Introduction

Nations are social constructs or, in the words of Anderson (1983), “imagined communities.” However, nations are imagined in different ways. Some are seen as sharply delineated in relation to other nations, such that individuals may not easily cross the national boundary and be accepted by others as fellow members of the nation. Boundaries of other nations may be more permeable, such that boundary crossing is more easily achieved (Lamont and Molnar, 2002; Wimmer, 2008). The literature often distinguishes between two ideal-typical conceptions of nationhood: ethnic and civic (Brubaker, 1992; Kohn, 1944; but see Brubaker, 1999; Kuzio, 2002). Ethnic citizenship implies that ancestry determines who is accepted as a full member of the nation. Civic citizenship, in contrast, implies inclusiveness, as membership is not linked to ascriptive but to voluntarist attributes, such as adherence to legal norms.

Following these theoretical considerations, research on how nationhood is thought of by individuals prominently focuses on whether — and how — the distinction between ethnic and civic citizenship is reflected in mass public opinion. Some studies find two broad types of normative conceptions that parallel the ethnic–civic distinction (e.g. Jones and Smith, 2001a; Kunovich, 2009; Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010). Other studies, however, cannot identify any evidence for a dichotomy and find the ethnic–civic distinction to be invalid (e.g. Diez-Medrano, 2005; Haller and Ressler, 2006). This discrepancy in findings is partly due to conceptual ambiguities, as there is no consensus on which indicators signal an ethnic conception and which signal a civic one (see also Jayet, 2012). Moreover, ethnic and civic conceptions are often theorized to be mutually exclusive, even though they are shown to overlap or even to be mutually reinforcing (e.g. Diez-Medrano, 2005; Jayet, 2012; Wright et al., 2012).

While the present paper also examines how the concept of nationhood is reflected in individual attitudes, it departs from this literature on such typologies of nationhood and citizenship in mass public opinion. Rather, we aim to explain the relationship between the rhetoric surrounding nationhood advanced by

specific political parties as well as the political climate at the societal level and how the nation is imagined by individuals: do they see it in inclusive, civic terms, open to newcomers as long as they respect legal norms and want to belong? Or do they imagine the nation in more exclusive terms, only encompassing those long rooted in the country? Our dependent variable focuses on the latter, that is, on the extent to which individuals hold a more restrictive definition of who belongs to the nation. As we will describe in the methods section, we derive the concept of preference for restrictive nationhood inductively from the available survey data. Here suffice it to say that it describes the extent to which individuals think it is important to have been born in the country, to having lived there for most of one's life and to belonging to the country's dominant religion.¹

The relationship between political climate and rhetoric and conceptions of nationhood has recently come into focus as political parties with explicitly exclusive rhetoric gained electoral ground over the last decade in countries such as Austria, Germany, France, Hungary, Poland and the United States. As the terms political climate and rhetoric can be used differently, we need to define them at this point: "Rhetoric", in our case, refers to the party's positions as expressed in pre-election manifestos. This rhetoric, then, informs two different concepts: "Political climate" – the aggregated sum of party positions in a given society, and "preferred party's rhetoric" – the position of the respondents' preferred party. Thus, when using the term "rhetoric" we consider both concepts, while we use political climate or preferred party rhetoric when referring only to a single concept.

We find that political rhetoric influences respondents' conceptions of nationhood. This effect, however, is not as straightforward as initially expected. While political climate does not have a direct effect, it alters the way in which a specific party's political messages affect the attitudes of their individual recipients. Parties with stronger ethnic rhetoric have a larger effect on party followers in societies that are characterized by a political climate generally low in ethnic rhetoric, as a single party position matters more when most other parties call for the opposite. Conversely, however, if the overall political climate is more

ethnocentric, conceptions of nationhood tend to be more restrictive across the board, even among respondents aligned with parties that do not emphasize ethnic conceptions.

Our study improves existing research in various ways. We go beyond previous studies by examining more closely the role of political rhetoric in explaining normative conceptions of nationhood at the individual level. We also emphasize the importance of considering not only political rhetoric as such but also its interaction with individual-level factors. In terms of research methods, we employ a novel cross-sectional and time-series design, which goes beyond the simple cross-sectional design of studies such as Helbling et al. (2016). Yet, we are aware of the causality problem: rather than political rhetoric affecting individuals' conception of nationhood, it may well be that parties respond to changing conceptions among voters and adapt their program accordingly; or that factors that are not yet accounted for affect both parties and individuals equally. While we are not able to resolve this problem in the present paper, we use a setup that aligns with the idea of rhetoric influencing public opinion by considering the party positions of the election before our survey data was collected in each of the three waves.

The following first provides a theoretical background on the conceptions of nationhood and the factors that contribute to such conceptions in the minds of citizens. It then outlines the importance of political rhetoric, the importance of who the sender is and the interaction of societal and individual-level conceptions of nationhood. We test the hypotheses using several multi-level models. The conclusion discusses alternative explanations and the implications of our findings.

Theoretical background

Various studies on mass public opinion examine how different normative conceptions of nationhood may be explained. At the individual level, older, less educated, economically worse off and politically right-wing respondents are found to exhibit more restrictive conceptions of nationhood. This is often thought to result from their increased perceptions of both economic and cultural threat from outsiders (Citrin and

Sides, 2008; Schildkraut, 2007; Wright, 2011a). Similarly, macro-level factors such as lower levels of economic prosperity or higher levels of immigration are linked to more restrictive conceptions of nationhood, as these also increase perceptions of threat in society (Jones and Smith, 2001a; Kunovich, 2009; Wright, 2011a).²

The analysis of macro-political predictors of normative conceptions of national identity, however, is limited. Some studies examine the effect of multiculturalist policies in citizenship regimes (Weldon, 2006; Wright, 2011b), and argue that citizenship regimes influence the way individual citizens perceive the social boundaries of their nation by emphasizing and institutionalizing such social boundaries. Restrictive institutional environments encourage citizens to view ethnic diversity as a problem and hence to hold a more restrictive definition of their nation. More open institutional environments, on the other hand, may make civic citizenship more acceptable (Zamora-Kapoor et al., 2013).

However, the same argument may be made with regard to shorter-term political factors such as elite rhetoric. Political actors may increase the salience of ethnic or civic conceptions of nationhood by, for example, emphasizing either traditions and ancestry or ideas of equality and respect for norms and values (Helbling et al., 2016; Wimmer, 2008). Thus, political rhetoric may serve a priming role by increasing the cognitive accessibility of different conceptions of nationhood (e.g. Valentino et al., 2002) and hence affects what is perceived to be common knowledge. Few studies examine the effect of political rhetoric on conceptions of national boundaries directly, but we may find some indications for the validity of the hypothesis in research on phenomena related to national identity more generally, such as nationalist sentiments, attitudes towards immigrants or general social trust. The evidence is ambiguous. Some studies do not find evidence for a link between rhetoric and attitudes and suggest it may be wrong to overestimate the “constructionist power” of political elite rhetoric (Boonen and Hooghe, 2014: 56; see also Dunn and Singh, 2011; Hjerm and Schnabel, 2010). Others, in contrast, find that party rhetoric has a deteriorating effect on ethnic relations, and not only when the rhetoric is negative (Sprague-Jones, 2011):

the mere mention of ethnic diversity suffices, as it increases the salience of differences in society (Helbling et al., 2013; Hopkins, 2010).

Building on studies that examine the role of political rhetoric in shaping national relations across boundaries, we seek to determine the effect of political rhetoric on the conception of such boundaries. First, we examine whether rhetoric and such conceptions are linked. Working as a primer, political rhetoric may affect normative conceptions in three ways (Bohmann, 2011): it may reinforce or mitigate symbolic boundaries arising from longer-standing institutional frameworks or exogenous processes such as economic prosperity; it may increase the visibility of diversity; and it may bring more restrictive definitions of national membership into the sphere of acceptance. That is, we expect that individuals in countries with higher levels of ethnic political climates tend to define nationhood in more restrictive terms, whereas the opposite should be the case in societies with civic political climates.

Second, we examine whether this relationship holds across the board or depends on the alignment between the ideological position of the party sending the message and that of the receiver. According to the literature on elite cues (Lupia, 1994; Zaller, 1992), individuals specifically consider the information provided by trusted elites when forming their political opinions. With regard to anti-immigrant attitudes, previous studies show that individuals are more likely to share the views of their favored party (Bohmann, 2011; McLaren, 2001). Accordingly, we hypothesize that respondents tend to be more restrictive in their conceptions of nationhood if they prefer a party that supports an ethnic conception of nationhood, and less restrictive if they prefer a party that supports a civic conception.

Third, we examine whether conceptions of nationhood at the societal level interact with ideological predispositions of respondents in explaining their view of the nation. With regard to anti-immigrant attitudes, Semyonov et al. (2006) argue that ideological differences between people become more pronounced in right-wing political climates. In contrast, both Sniderman et al. (2004) and van Assche et

al. (2016) observe a mobilizing effect across the board; that is, the effect of respondents' own ideological positions is weaker in right-wing political climates than in more liberal climates. The political climate influences social norms such that individual deviations from the norms are less pronounced. Accordingly, we expect that in political climates that are generally low in ethnic rhetoric, only people who support parties that do express ethnic rhetoric prefer more restrictive membership criteria, while in political climates in which ethnic rhetoric is common, almost all individuals (also those who support parties with civic rhetoric) may show more restrictive attitudes due to conservative norm setting. The opposite should hold in countries with low and high civic rhetoric, respectively.

Alternative views

As mentioned in the beginning of the previous section, several strands of theory consider determinants of subjective conceptualizations of nationhood and related topics that need to be considered as controls. First, studies on normative conceptions of national symbolic boundaries as well as related phenomena, such as attitudes towards immigrants, are strongly influenced by theories of group threat (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Kunovich, 2009; Wright, 2011a). Overall, these approaches suggest that more immigration leads to stronger ethnocentric conceptions of the national community, specifically among members of the in-group who are vulnerable to out-group competition, such as the less educated or unemployed. Alternatively, contact theory (Gundelach, 2014) argues that everyday encounters with out-group members may result in a learning process about the out-group and hence decrease, rather than increase, prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Further, at the societal level, threat may be mediated through higher levels of development (Jones and Smith, 2001b; Kunovich, 2009).

Second, the general political context may influence the way individual citizens perceive the social boundaries of their nation. Restrictive institutional environments encourage citizens to view ethnic and cultural diversity as a problem, whereas more open institutional environments may make civic nationhood

more acceptable (Zamora-Kapoor et al., 2013). In the long run, as pointed out with regard to political tolerance and the positive effects of observing democratic bargaining processes (Peffley and Rohrschneider, 2003), such exposure can result in learning effects and attitudinal change. Yet, the legacy of previous political systems may still influence current attitudes, given that research shows clear differences between Western and post-communist countries in Europe as far as the conceptualization of nationhood is concerned (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Haller and Ressler, 2006; Shulman, 2002).

Third, influences can also come from the international environment. World-society theory asserts that global cultural models influence local actors and shape their perceptions and attitudes (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2005; Meyer et al., 1997). A core element of this international regime is human rights and citizenship rights (Meyer, 2007; Tsutsui and Wotipka, 2004), with a historical trajectory of increasingly extending membership rights to individuals beyond traditional national groups. Thus, a more inclusive definition of citizenship has become the dominant global cultural model (Ramirez and Meyer, 2012), resulting in a diminished differentiation between citizens and non-citizens (Soysal, 1994).

Data and Methods

The empirical analysis is based on public opinion data collected by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) in 1995, 2003 and 2013 (ISSP Research Group, 1998; 2012; 2015). The surveys are random samples and representative of the adult population of each country. We limited our sample to countries for which political rhetoric data was available for an election before the fieldwork, and to respondents who reported their party affiliation. Furthermore, East and West Germany were considered separately, as we wanted to test a hypothesis regarding the influence of a communist past on the conception of nationhood.³ This selection resulted in a total of 39 countries, 77 wave/country time points and a sample size of 58,498 respondents (see Table 1a for an overview). Due to the diverse nature of the

countries, we also re-ran our final models using EU-member countries only. The findings (available upon request) were quite similar; thus, we decided to use the full set of countries to maximize statistical power.

Dependent variable

We derived the dependent variable from a question battery originally developed by the ISSP group to distinguish between “ethnic” and “civic” traits of nationhood. Respondents were asked the following: “Some people say that the following things are important for being truly [NATIONALITY]. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is ...” The items that the respondents could select were as follows: a) to have been born in [country]; b) to have the [country] citizenship; c) to have lived in [country] for most of one’s life; d) to be able to speak the [country] language; e) to be [religion]; f) to respect the [country’s] political institutions and laws and g) to feel [country nationality]. The terms in [parenthesis] were replaced by the respective country names and, in case of e, its dominant religion. For each item, respondents were asked if they consider that item very important, fairly important, not very important or not important at all.

This question battery has been used extensively in research to identify dimensions in the perception of nationhood among the public. The consensus among researchers is that these items are imperfect measures of an ethnic versus civic dichotomy, with some researchers even doubting the existence of a two dimensionality (Haller and Ressler, 2006). To complicate things further, those researchers identifying two dimensions use a different terminology to describe the same dimensions, such as “ethnic” versus a “civic” dimension (Helbling et al., 2016) or an “ascribed/objective” versus a “civic/voluntarist” dimension (Jones and Smith, 2001a).

Given that we are considering more waves and more countries than previous research, we decided to ascertain the comparability of our dependent variable across countries and time by conducting explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses for the entire sample and for each country/wave

observation. The exploratory examination of the factor structure indicated that only the items “to be born in the country,” “having lived there for most of one’s life” and “belonging to a particular religion” load consistently on the same dimension. Subsequent confirmatory factor analyses for each country/wave observation confirmed this single factor (CFI > .90, RMSEA < .05). While the loading of the other items is less consistent across countries and supports the view that there is no consistent two-dimensional solution (Haller and Ressler, 2006), our single factor composed of three core items is comparable across countries and waves.

These three consistent items – “to be born in the country,” “having lived there for most of one’s life” and “belonging to a particular religion” – are also part of the ethnic dimension (Helbling et al., 2016) and the ascribed/objective dimension (Jones and Smith, 2001a) described in other research. Objections may be had against either of these terms as, for example, both living in a country or belonging to a religion may be, to some degree, the result of personal choice rather than “ethnic” or “ascribed”. Yet all three items describe characteristics that are not easily obtained by outsiders; access to nationhood is hence restricted. We thus decided to name our dependent variable “preference for restrictive nationhood” and calculated the mean value of a respondent’s valid answers across these three items.⁴

Measurement of political rhetoric

To measure *political rhetoric*, we used data on political party manifestos collected by the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP, Volkens et al., 2015). The CMP routinely conducts content analyses of parties’ electoral programs across many post-World War II elections in most Western democracies and is hence well suited for the comparative analysis of party positions. Party manifesto content are shown to approximate politicians’ statements in public, and public opinion data on party positions aligns more closely with manifesto content than, for example, with media coverage (Helbling and Tresch, 2011). Thus, manifesto content may act as a suitable proxy measurement for party rhetoric more generally.

The CMP codes manifestos' quasi-sentences for 56 different issue domains and provides the share of space devoted to each issue domain as a measure of their salience. A number of these domains may be used to operationalize the salience of issues concerning national identity in elite-level rhetoric (see also e.g. Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012; Helbling et al., 2016; Hjerm and Schnabel, 2010). To measure a more restrictive *ethnic rhetoric* regarding nationhood, we combined "favourable mentions of the manifesto country's nation, history, and general appeals" (national way of life: positive, 601) and "favourable mentions of traditional and/or religious moral values" (traditional morality: positive, 603) with negative references to multiculturalism (608), defined as "the enforcement or encouragement of cultural integration" and "appeals for cultural homogeneity in society." To measure a more inclusive *civic rhetoric*, we combine the shares of manifestos' positive references to equality (category 503), defined as "concept of social justice and the need for fair treatment of all people"; civic mindedness (606), that is, "appeals for national solidarity and the need for society to see itself as united"; and multiculturalism (607), referring to "favourable mentions of cultural diversity and cultural plurality within domestic societies." While the latter domain includes mention of culture as well, it does so in a positive light that does not express a preference for the majority culture and is hence contrary to what is expressed in ethnic rhetoric.⁵

We include these measures of political rhetoric in our models in two ways. First, for the political climate at the societal level, we calculated the average salience of both civic and ethnic rhetoric per country (the average score across all parties in a given country) for the respective elections before or in 1995, 2003 and 2013.⁶ The political climate is thus reflected in two macro-level variables: "societal civic climate" and "societal ethnic climate."

Second, to distinguish specific party messages from the overall political climate in a society, we also included ethnic and civic rhetoric at the individual level, replacing the respondents' recorded party preference with the rhetoric scores of this specific party. The resulting two individual-level variables are "preferred party's civic rhetoric" and "preferred party's ethnic rhetoric."

Control variables

We tested our hypotheses with the variables described in the previous section. As pointed out in the alternative views section, we also needed to control for additional variables. Following prior studies on determinants of normative conceptions of nationhood, we included several indicators that are associated with economic or cultural threat, characteristics of the political system and the international ties of a country. At the individual level, these include work status, income, education, age, residence, political ideology and minority status. We captured economic insecurity with *work status*, which was categorized into working for pay, unemployed, disabled, in training or mandatory services, retired, housemaker and other. For *income*, we used household income, as it was reported by more respondents than personal income. Because income was collected in the different national currencies, we standardized it by dividing the reported income by the national mean. Further, we used the logarithm of this measure so that a value of zero stood for an average income, negative values for an income below the national average and positive values for an income above average.

Education was measured by the number of years spent in the educational system; *age* was measured in years; and *residence* was captured by the three categories: large city, smaller city and rural area. *Gender* was captured as a categorical variable, with female being coded as 1, and male being coded as 0. The respondent's *political ideology* was measured by the ISSP 5-point left–right scale. This left–right scale was based on the ISSP data and thus independent from the CMP left–right classification, which arose from the manifesto coding and was assigned to respondents. The correlation between the ISSP left–right scale and civic rhetoric was -0.29, and that between the left–right scale and ethnic rhetoric was 0.42 (and -0.05 between civic and ethnic), which shows that rhetoric does not map perfectly on the left–right scale and thus allows us to use all three variables in a single regression. Finally, because members of ethnic or religious *minorities* are likely less inclined to prefer restrictive conceptions of nationhood, we control for

the respondent's status as a member of an ethnic or religious minority as well as their migration background, as indicated by their parents' citizenship status.

At the country level, we controlled for the level of prosperity and the size of the immigrant population. *National prosperity* was captured by GDP (in 1,000 Euros), which was drawn from the World Bank (2016). *Immigration numbers* were based on UN collected data at the time or shortly before the ISSP surveys were conducted (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). We measured immigration levels as the proportion of immigrants in each country's population. We also controlled for three further macro-political factors that may affect conceptions of nationhood. First, given different conceptions of nationhood in post-communist countries, we included a *post-communism* dummy in our models. Second, we measured *multicultural policies* with the Multiculturalism Policy Index (MCP) developed by Banting and Kymlicka (2013). We chose MCP over other indices because, while it focuses on multiculturalist policy, the indicators address some of the same concepts as conceptions of nationhood. Finally, we also considered a country's *ties to world society*, which were measured by "the number of organizations of which a country or territory is a member, whether directly or through the presence of members in that country" (Union of International Associations, 2014: 45).⁷ In particular, we included the number of International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs), taken from the Yearbook of International Organizations (Union of International Associations, various years).

Analysis strategy

Our research design aimed to capture several aspects: variation across countries, changes over time and individual-level influences. The ISSP data is well suited for this purpose; however, there was a concern that countries took part in different numbers of waves — either in one, in two or in all three waves — and that respondents varied between samples. Such an unbalanced design can be analyzed using multilevel models in which cross-country variance is calculated based on all available countries in a given wave and

over-time variation is calculated based on countries that are available for at least two waves (Deeming and Jones, 2015; see Fairbrother, 2014).

This design allows for distinguishing the cross-sectional and longitudinal effects of a variable such as societal wealth. In terms of model set-up, level three included country-invariant characteristics, such as post-communist status; level two included country characteristics that change over time, such as the number of immigrants at a given wave; and level one included respondents' answers. For this purpose, we included a macro-level variable's mean value across all three waves for each country as the level-three variable and the growth variable (macro-level variable at a given wave minus the country average across all three waves) at level two.

Results

Restrictive conceptions of nationhood: Magnitude and trends over time

Table 1a provides an overview of the average preferences for more restrictive nationhood in all countries and time-points considered in our analyses. The scores are based on the answers to the items to be born in the country, to have lived there most of one's life and to belong to a particular religion. The values can range from 1 to 4, with the former indicating "not important at all" and the latter indicating "very important." A higher value thus represents a stronger preference for restrictive nationhood. Countries are sorted from high to low, according to the latest data available. Preferences for restrictive conceptions of nationhood are very strong in South Africa, Turkey and Russia and comparably weak in Sweden, the Netherlands and Estonia.

< About here TABLE 1a and TABLE 1b >

Table 1b, in addition, shows the changes in nationhood conceptions over time for those countries that took part in at least two waves. Change is based on the difference between the latest and the earliest

data available. With an almost even split between increase and decrease, these numbers do not indicate any dominant pattern of change. However, post-communist countries can be found predominantly in the group of countries with an increasing preference for more restrictive conceptions, which points to possible influences of the political history but also to differences due to societal affluence. However, this interpretation is based only on descriptive findings and aggregate values. The next section presents multilevel results that consider both the influence of individual-level and contextual characteristics on individual conceptualizations of nationhood.

Determinants of preferences for restrictive conceptions of nationhood: Multilevel analysis

Table 2 shows the results of four multilevel regressions that follow a specific research logic. Model 1 shows a basic model that includes the two political climate variables: for each, a variable capturing the time effect and a variable capturing the interaction between climate and time. Model 2 adds the individual reception of specific party rhetoric by including the positions of the respondent's preferred party. Model 3 in addition includes interactions between the individual reception and the overall political climate in a society. Model 4, finally, tests if the effects of these substantive variables remain significant once controls are included.

< About here TABLE 2 >

Model 1, considering macro-level variables only, does not indicate significant main effects of the two political climate variables. The civic dimension, however, interacts significantly with the time variable (see Figure 1, which depicts this relationship for a later model). Preferences for restrictive conceptions of nationhood thus increase significantly over time in societies with a low civic political climate, whereas such preferences decline over time in societies with a strong civic climate. The changes over time are thus dependent on the overall political climate.

Model 2 shows that the position of the preferred party matters as well: the stronger the civic position of the preferred party, the lower respondents' preference for restrictive conceptions of nationhood, and the stronger the ethnic position of the preferred party, the stronger this preference. We thus can add that party-specific rhetoric matters in addition to the overall political climate and that individual preferences for nationhood criteria align with those articulated by their preferred party.

Model 1 and Model 2 ignore that the effects of specific party positions and their reception can be influenced by the overall political climate. Model 3 thus connects the positions of the preferred party with the overall political climate by adding cross-level interactions. These interactions show that i) civic rhetoric of the preferred party has a stronger effect in societies with a low civic political climate; ii) civic party rhetoric is more effective when the overall climate is ethnocentric; and iii) ethnic party rhetoric is less effective in societies with an overall strong ethnic political climate in affecting preference for restrictive nationhood. Further, the interaction between civic political climate and change over time is still significant, as depicted in Figure 1, yet controlling for individual characteristics in the subsequent model renders this effect insignificant.

Model 4 controls these findings for various context and individual variables. It shows that the interaction between societal civic political climate and the civic rhetoric of the preferred party as well as the interaction between time and societal civic political climate lose their significance, whereas the other effects remain more or less unchanged.⁸ The interaction between societal ethnic political climate and the ethnic rhetoric of the preferred party is still significant, as depicted in Figure 2. The figure shows that a party's extent of ethnic rhetoric is more strongly associated with preferences for restrictive nationhood in countries with generally low levels of ethnic political climate: the differences between respondents with different party preferences are larger than those in countries with overall higher levels of ethnic political climate. In countries with strong ethnic climates, preferences for restrictive nationhood are high across the board, even among respondents who prefer parties with civic rhetoric.

< About here FIGURE 1 and FIGURE 2 >

As for the macro-level controls, Model 4 shows that the preference for restrictive nationhood is less pronounced in more affluent societies and in societies with a communist legacy. The indicators for ties to world society and for multicultural policies, however, become insignificant when combined with these variables and are thus excluded (see Table A2 for detailed information).

For the individual-level controls, the findings suggest that individuals with a preference for the political right, women, older respondents and individuals who live in a rural area have a stronger preference for restrictive conceptions of nationhood, whereas this preference declines with increasing education, residence in a large city and family income. Regarding work status, individuals who are in training have the lowest preference for restrictiveness, followed by the reference group of those individuals who work for pay, while unemployed, retired individuals, disabled persons and homemakers have a stronger preference for restrictive nationhood. As for minority status, respondents who do not belong to a religious or ethnic majority as well as respondents with at least one non-citizen parent have, unsurprisingly, lower preference for restrictive nationhood.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of our paper was to examine the relationship between political rhetoric surrounding nationhood and how the nation is imagined by citizens. In doing so, we departed from much of the previous literature, which focused on the identification of the ethnic–civic distinction in mass public opinion (e.g. Jones and Smith, 2001a; Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010), and instead examined whether preferences for more restrictive nationhood resonate with the conceptions put forward in a specific party’s political rhetoric and the related political climate in a society. We advanced three hypotheses as to how rhetoric may affect individual-level conceptions: through a direct mobilizing effect of the societal political climate generally; through elite cues in which individuals’ views are affected only by that party with which they align

themselves more generally; and through a combination of both societal climate and norms and party-specific messages.

After summarizing the main findings in the previous section, what can be said regarding our three hypotheses? Hypothesis 1 stated that individuals in countries with higher levels of ethnic political climate tend to define citizenship in more restrictive terms and increasingly favor restrictive conceptions over time due to the priming and socializing role of political rhetoric, whereas the opposite should be the case in societies with civic political climates. The data supports the second half of our claim: over time, the trend towards preferences for restrictive nationhood is lower (or even reversed) in civic political climates. However, the data does not support the claim regarding the overall differences between countries, given that the main effects of political rhetoric were not significant. This finding departs from that of Helbling et al. (2016), the most closely related analysis, which finds that exclusive — or ethnic — rhetoric overlaps with heightened expressions of restrictive views of nationhood. One reason for the difference in findings may be due to coverage: our analysis covers not only the countries included in the 2003 ISSP survey but also those in the 1995 and 2013 waves.

Hypothesis 2 stated that respondents tend to be more restrictive in their conceptions of nationhood if they share the political ideology of parties doing the articulation in ethnic terms and less restrictive if they share that of parties supporting a civic conception, as their political opinions are particularly influenced by cues provided by trusted elites. Our data clearly shows the significant impact of the preferred party's rhetoric, with ethnic rhetoric having a positive impact on preferences for restrictive nationhood, and civic rhetoric having a negative impact. Hypothesis 2 is thus confirmed, which suggests that elite cues affect not only general policy issues (e.g. Lupia, 1994; Zaller, 1992) but also national identity more generally (e.g. Bohmann, 2011; McLaren, 2001). Alternatively, respondents could align themselves with those parties with whose conceptions of nationhood they identify, but we would argue that party choice is unlikely to

be driven by this issue alone in countries that are not deeply divided along ethnic lines, such as those considered in this paper.

Finally, hypothesis 3 added that in political climates that are generally low in ethnic rhetoric, only people affiliated with parties that stress ethnic rhetoric would prefer restrictive nationhood, whereas in generally high ethnic climates, almost all individuals (also those affiliated with parties that do not stress ethnic rhetoric) may show stronger preferences for restrictive nationhood due to conservative norm setting. Considering the interaction effects, which show only small differences in societies with high ethnic climate and large differences in societies with low ethnic climate (see Figure 2), this hypothesis is also supported. The findings align with those of a limited number of prior studies on the link between wider social norms and anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g. Sniderman et al., 2004; van Assche et al., 2016), thus indicating the importance of considering social norms in analyses of ethnic relations more generally.

Overall, the empirical findings support our idea that political rhetoric influences respondents' preferences for more restrictive conceptions of nationhood. The constructivist view that symbolic boundaries are constantly renegotiated (e.g. Chandra, 2012) seems to apply in our case, as political rhetoric does have "constructivist power." Its effects, however, are not as straightforward as initially expected. While the societal political climate of party positions does not have a direct overall effect, the models suggest indirect effects such as different trends in preferences for restrictive nationhood depending on the level of societal civic climate and the way in which a specific party's rhetoric affects the attitudes of their individual recipients. As for the latter, ethnic rhetoric causes larger differences in societies that are characterized by low overall ethnic climate.

This effect can be interpreted in two ways. First, in line with the idea of political party rhetoric influencing attitudes — by acting as primers and norm-setters, as outlined in our hypotheses — we can conclude that parties emphasizing ethnic issues can shape attitudes toward nationhood. Second, one can argue that

ethnocentric voters are attracted to ethnocentric parties. However, considering Figure 2, such a law of attraction applies only in societies in which ethnic rhetoric is rather scarce (far-left graph in Fig. 2). Once ethnic rhetoric is more present, even respondents who prefer parties that do not stress ethnic issues hold more restrictive views of nationhood (far-right graph in Fig. 2). Such an overall shift goes well with the recent political developments in Europe and other countries and may explain why there is little resistance to right-wing politics in contemporary Europe. Once many parties stress ethnic conceptions of nationhood, even more liberal voters hold strong preferences for restrictive nationhood.

These interpretations assume that the causal arrow runs from political rhetoric to mass opinion, rather than *vice versa*. This assumption is supported by the aforementioned literature on elites as cue-givers and voters as cue-takers. In addition, our approach to the data sought to consider causality by measuring rhetoric advanced during the elections that were held prior to when the survey data was collected and by explicitly including changes over time into our models. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the possibility that political elites may adapt their rhetoric to appeal to a pre-existing constituency or that party and mass conceptions may develop conjointly. Future research may examine the direction of causality in more depth by using long-running longitudinal studies, for example.

Apart from our main goal, considering several control variables also led to valuable insights. First, at the macro-level, indicators of material factors such as economic prosperity and post-communist legacy were more important than the level of immigration, thus suggesting that “threat” by increasing immigration alone does not result in more preference for restrictive and closed definitions of societies. At the micro-level, the control variables showed that migration background and minority status result in lower preference for restrictive nationhood, and this effect also holds true for higher social status and better economic circumstances. In addition, educated respondents, younger individuals and urban (compared to rural) dwellers express less preference for restrictive nationhood, whereas conservative political views further foster such preferences. Future research may be particularly interested in the way in which

education mitigates political rhetoric, as it was this individual-level factor that rendered other findings in previous models insignificant.

Notes

¹ Other studies have termed this latent concept “preference for ascriptive features,” “ethnic” dimension of nationhood, and “ascribed/objective” dimension (see data and methods section for more detail).

² Though note that, in the long term, immigration may also increase tolerance and trust (Gundelach, 2014; Putnam, 2007) and hence lead to less restrictive conceptions.

³ A reviewer pointed out that countries such as Belgium, Spain and Great Britain could be split into smaller units as well due to strong regional identities and groups. We agree with the reviewer but refrained from doing so, as it was impossible to have a clear division between homogenous and heterogeneous societies, and we did not develop any specific hypotheses in this regard.

⁴ Respondents are included if they have at least one valid answer across these three items. This procedure limits the loss of respondents due to missing cases in the dependent variable to 1359 cases (instead of 7307 cases in a list-wise deletion when considering the total sample.) Considerable numbers of missing cases in the independent individual-level variables, on the other hand, are treated as embedded variables. This embedded variable procedure ((Hardy and Reynolds, 2004) results in two regression coefficients: the first one indicates the effect of the variable of interest (e.g. income) on the dependent variable, and the second one indicates the difference between respondents (e.g. income reported) and non-respondents (e.g. income not reported) with regard to the dependent variable. Thus, we could gauge the effects of the independent variable and the difference between respondents and non-respondents.

⁵ In contrast to Helbling and colleagues (2013; 2016), we do not include the following categories into civic rhetoric because these, although directly opposite to the categories mentioned for ethnic rhetoric, in our view do not signify civic rhetoric: “unfavourable mentions of the manifesto country’s nation and history” (national way of life: negative, 602) and “opposition to traditional and/or religious moral values” (traditional morality: negative, 604). Note that the individual indices are only correlated at 0.3 and have different effects, wherefore we decided to use the separate indices.

⁶ We also calculated weighted indices based on the party’s strength in the election. These weighted measures resulted in similar outcomes and thus were not reported (detailed codes and variables can be requested from the authors).

⁷ We also considered more formal ties in the form of International Governmental Organizations, which are established by international treaties and agreements between governments. The number of IGOs, however, is not significant and thus not reported in this paper.

⁸ Checking for specific variables shows that the inclusion of education renders the interaction insignificant.

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Table 1a. Preference for restrictive nationhood (countries ranked according to latest available wave)

	1995	2003	2013
South Africa (ZA)			3.56
Turkey (TR)			3.44
Russia (RU)		3.21	3.35
Bulgaria (BG)	3.30		
Georgia (GE)			3.29
Poland (PL)	2.85	3.24	
Mexico (MX)			3.20
Slovak Republic (SK)	2.68	2.71	3.11
Austria (AT)	2.98	3.02	
Hungary (HU)	2.72	2.82	2.99
Canada (CA)	2.34	2.97	
Italy (I)	2.96		
South Korea (KR)		2.90	2.94
Ireland (IE)	3.21	3.15	2.91
Czech Republic (CZ)	2.63	2.80	2.91
Belgium (BE)			2.91
Lithuania (LT)			2.90
United States (US)	2.94	3.22	2.83
Israel (IL)		3.13	
Great Britain (GB)	2.88	2.83	2.83
Spain (ES)	2.97	2.92	2.81
Croatia (HR)			2.81
New Zealand (NZ)	2.67	2.77	
Latvia (LV)		2.70	2.75
Japan (JP)	2.84	2.92	2.73
Australia (AU)	2.53	2.73	
Portugal (PT)		3.09	2.71
Switzerland (CH)		2.58	
Norway (NO)	2.62	2.60	
Germany-West (DE-W)	2.48	2.62	2.58
Denmark (DK)		2.75	2.54
Iceland (IS)			2.50
France (FR)		2.45	2.49
Finland (FI)		2.60	2.47
Germany-East (DE-E)	2.53	2.43	2.46
Slovenia (SI)	2.82	2.68	2.45
Estonia (EE)			2.33
Netherlands (NL)	2.24		
Sweden (SE)	2.35	2.26	2.11

Source: ISSP 1995, 2003 and 2013. Country mean values of scale based on items being in the country, having lived there almost the entire life and belonging to a certain denomination. Unweighted data. Limited to countries and time points where individual party preferences and pre-survey wave manifesto data are available. N=58,498.

Table 1b. Changes in preferences for restrictive nationhood

	Increase		Decrease
Canada (CA)	.63	Norway (NO)	-.02
Slovak Republic (SK)	.43	Great Britain (GB)	-.05
Poland (PL)	.39	Germany-East (DE-E)	-.07
Czech Republic (CZ)	.28	United States (US)	-.11
Hungary (HU)	.27	Japan (JP)	-.11
Australia (AU)	.20	Finland (FI)	-.13
Russia (RU)	.14	Spain (ES)	-.16
New Zealand (NZ)	.10	Denmark (DK)	-.21
Germany-West (DE-W)	.10	Sweden (SE)	-.24
Latvia (LV)	.05	Ireland (IE)	-.30
Austria (AT)	.04	Slovenia (SI)	-.37
South Korea (KR)	.04	Portugal (PT)	-.38
France (FR)	.04		

Based on the difference between the most recent and the earliest data available for each country, as shown in Table 1a. Source: ISSP 1995, 2003 and 2013.

Table 2. Determinants of a preference for restrictive nationhood (hierarchical regression[^])

Variable	M1		M2		M3		M4	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig
Constant	2.78	**	2.85	**	2.9	**	6.33	**
Wave	.164	+	.148	+	.148	+	.155	*
<i>Individual level</i>								
Preferred party's civic rhetoric			-.009	**	-.022	**	-.008	**
Preferred party's ethnic rhetoric			.017	**	.023	**	.009	**
Party affiliation (left-right)							.048	**
Female							.025	**
Age (years)							.006	**
Education (years)							-.034	**
Residence (small city = ref)								
Large city							-.016	*
Rural area							.045	**
Household income (low–high)							-.060	**
Ethnic minority							-.027	**
Religious minority							-.246	**
Parent(s) non-citizen							-.254	**
Work Status (for pay=ref)								
Unemployed							.029	*
In training							-.051	**
Retired							.076	**
Disabled							.093	**
Homemaker							.053	**
Other							.008	
<i>Societal level</i>								
Political climate - civic	.007		.004		-.007		-.000	
Political climate - ethnic	-.010		-.024		-.017		.010	
GDP							-.352	**
Post-communist society							-.190	**
<i>Crosslevel interactions</i>								
Soc. Pol. Cli. Civic * Time	-.026	*	-.023	*	-.022	*a)	-.015	
Soc. Pol. Cli. Ethnic * Time	.012		.010		.010		.001	
Soc. Pol. Cli. Civic*Pref Party - Civic					.001	**	.000	
Soc. Pol. Cli. Civic*Pref Party - Ethnic					.001	**	.001	**
Soc. Pol. Cli. Ethnic*Pref Party - Civic					-.000		.000	
Soc. Pol. Cli. Ethnic*Pref Party - Ethnic					-.002	**	-.001	**b)
-2loglikelihood value	126,003		125,180		125,025		116,876	

[^] Linear hierarchical regression; 3 levels with 39 country and 77 wave-country observations, and 55,769 respondents. The difference to the total sample of 58,498 occurs due to missing cases in some independent variables. RIGLS estimation with robust sandwich estimators. Also included but not shown in Table 2: embedded variables for missing answers in income, residence and ethnicity. Unstandardized coefficients, ** p = .01, * p=.05, +p = .01, interactions a) and b) are depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively.

Figure 1. Changes in preferences for restrictive nationhood over time in societies with different degrees of civic political climate (interaction a, Table 2)

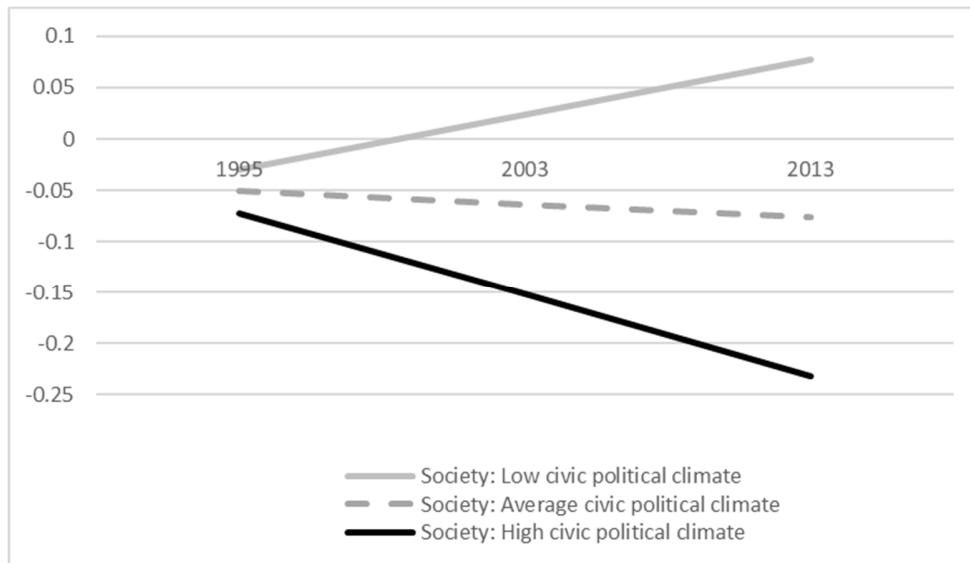
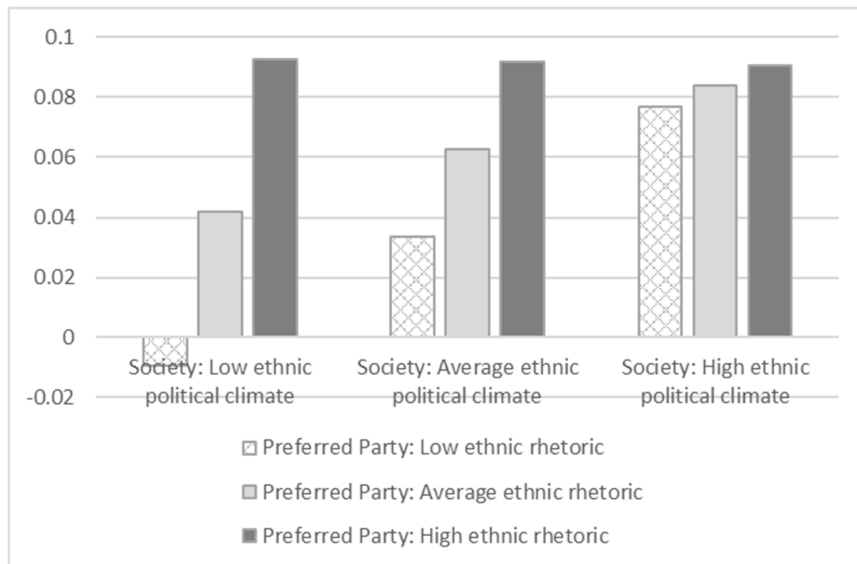


Figure 2. Effects of preferred party's ethnic rhetoric in societies with different degrees of ethnic political climate (interaction b, Table 2)



APPENDIX

Table A1. Overview of country-level characteristics*

Year	Country	GDP per capita	Immigrants %	INGO	Multi-cultural	Ethnic political climate	Civic political climate	
1995	1 Australia (AU)	21035	22.9	1851	5	5.2	2.6	
	2 Germany-West (DE-W)	23066	9.1	2974	0	1.9	5.8	
	3 Germany-East (DE-E)	23066	9.1	2974	0	1.9	5.8	
	4 Great Britain (GB)	21032	7.2	2846	2.5	3.4	4.8	
	6 United States (US)	28782	10.7	2273	3	8.11	7.71	
	7 Austria (AT)	23688	11.2	2243	0	2.4	12.2	
	8 Hungary (HU)	9098	3.1	1617		3.5	4.9	
	9 Italy (I)	21934	3.1	2791	0	3.6	7.1	
	10 Ireland (IE)	18386	6.2	1637	1	2.7	10.1	
	11 Netherlands (NL)	22856	8.7	2741	2.5	1.2	5.4	
	12 Norway (NO)	23565	5.4	2248	0	6.2	6.9	
	13 Sweden (SE)	22734	10.6	2545	3	2.9	17.9	
	14 Czech Republic (CZ)	13795	1.6	609		3.8	8.3	
	15 Slovenia (SI)	13217	8.8	528		4.4	6.8	
	16 Poland (PL)	7432	2.5	1626		0.3	2.8	
	17 Bulgaria (BG)	5543	0.4	1009		1.4	8.1	
	19 New Zealand (NZ)	17748	16.0	1274	2.5	1.7	7.9	
	20 Canada (CA)	23192	16.6	2043	5	4.9	6.1	
	24 Japan (JP)	22945	1.1	1863	0	0.0	1.9	
	25 Spain (ES)	16405	2.6	2626	0	0.8	4.5	
	27 Slovak Republic (SK)	8463	1.3	462		3.9	9.9	
	2003	1 Australia (AU)	29781	23.0	6167	8	11.8	11.4
		2 Germany-West (DE-W)	29285	11.0	10207	2	3.7	9.6
		3 Germany-East (DE-E)	29285	11.0	10207	2	3.7	9.6
		4 Great Britain (GB)	31152	8.0	10139	5.5	3.2	6.8
		6 United States (US)	39677	12.3	8640	3	6.69	4.07
		7 Austria (AT)	32161	12.4	6688	1	1.1	7.4
8 Hungary (HU)		15573	2.9	4925		6.2	6.1	
10 Ireland (IE)		35745	9.1	5431	1.5	0.3	9.9	
12 Norway (NO)		38287	6.5	6427	0	2.3	6.6	
13 Sweden (SE)		32024	11.3	7827	5	3.1	9.7	
14 Czech Republic (CZ)		19584	2.2	4512		7.2	3.6	
15 Slovenia (SI)		20919	8.6	2805		4.3	10.3	
16 Poland (PL)		12030	2.1	5225		4.7	2.3	
18 Russia (RU)		9254	8.1	4463		5.4	7.4	
19 New Zealand (NZ)		23717	17.6	4034	5	8.6	6.4	
20 Canada (CA)		32032	18.0	7073	7.5	1.1	4.1	
22 Israel (IL)		22268	30.8	4284		17.13	17.01	
24 Japan (JP)		27944	1.3	5756	0	1.02	6.07	
25 Spain (ES)		25305	4.1	8483	1	0.6	7.4	
26 Latvia (LV)		10812	18.1	1867		5.4	6.2	
27 Slovak Republic (SK)		13912	2.2	2840		4.3	3.2	
28 France (FR)		28058	10.6	10653	2	4.6	10.6	
30 Portugal (PT)		19798	6.3	5908	2	2.2	7.4	
32 Denmark (DK)		31229	7.0	7263	0.5	14.1	10.6	
33 Switzerland (CH)		36372	21.9	7808	1	15.2	10.9	

	37 Finland (FI)	28779	2.6	6652	1.5	4.4	5.5
	42 South Korea (KR)	21340	0.5	3233		0.6	3.4
2013	2 Germany-West (DE-W)	44469	14.4	11386	2.5	3.1	11.3
	3 Germany-East (DE-E)	44469	14.4	11386	2.5	3.1	11.3
	4 Great Britain (GB)	38452	12.1	11213	5.5	5.5	3.3
	6 United States (US)	53041	14.3	9520	3	7.3	6.1
	8 Hungary (HU)	23482	4.4	5707		5.1	10.4
	10 Ireland (IE)	46140	15.8	5955	3	1.1	3.9
	13 Sweden (SE)	45148	14.8	8616	7	4.7	11.6
	14 Czech Republic (CZ)	28224	3.8	5305		2.4	4.9
	15 Slovenia (SI)	28996	12.4	3561		2.0	6.3
	18 Russia (RU)	24114	7.8	5187		11.7	8.1
	24 Japan (JP)	36450	1.7	6260	0	1.07	5.78
	25 Spain (ES)	32925	13.5	9602	3.5	0.4	8.3
	26 Latvia (LV)	22560	15.0	2522		14.32	8.61
	27 Slovak Republic (SK)	26642	2.7	3488		4.0	8.4
	28 France (FR)	37872	11.4	11754	2	3.3	6.4
	30 Portugal (PT)	26759	7.2	6587	3.5	0.1	6.5
	32 Denmark (DK)	43445	9.2	7925	0	5.9	9.4
	37 Finland (FI)	39812	4.6	7327	6	4.9	11.2
	40 South Africa (ZA)	3959	3.8	4788		5.1	8.7
	42 South Korea (KR)	33140	1.9	3866		0.1	4.3
	44 Croatia (HR)	21366	13.3	3362		1.3	7.4
	45 Estonia (EE)	25452	16.4	2836		7.7	6.2
	46 Georgia (GE)	7176	4.3	1287		3.3	6.6
	47 Iceland (IS)	41939	11.0	2681		0.9	14.8
	49 Lithuania (LT)	25467	5.1	2772		5.8	6.3
	50 Mexico (MX)	16463	0.8	4981		0.3	3.3
	51 Turkey (TR)	19020	1.9	4282		2.1	4.7
	52 Belgium (BE)	41663	9.6	9718	5.5	3.0	8.3

*blank cells indicate missing data; for sources and coding see data and methods section

Table A2. Testing the effect of macro-level variables, when entered singly in addition to micro-level variables

Model	Variable	Level of Effect		-2LL value
		Country	Wave	
1	Micro-level model			116,872
2	Wave ⁻¹⁾	Random variance: 012 ⁺	.067**	116,862
3	GDP ⁻²⁾	-.271**	.116*	116,853
4	Post-communist society ⁻³⁾	.037	--	116,872
5	Immigrants (%)	-.011 ⁺	.003	116,869
6	INGO ⁻⁴⁾	-.126	.034*	116,865
7	Multiculturalism ⁻⁵⁾	-.010	-.008	
	Multiculturalism missing	.421*	--	116,855
8	Societal political climate - ethnic	-.002	-.001	116,872
9	Societal political climate - civic ⁻⁶⁾	-.021	.003	116,870

Each model includes the named macro-level variable plus all micro-level variables presented in Table 2 (that is Model 4 in Table 2 minus the societal variables and interactions). Linear hierarchal regression, 3 levels with 39 country observations, 77 wave-country observations, and 55769 respondents, RIGLS estimation with robust sandwich estimators. Unstandardized coefficients, ** p = .01, * p=.05, +p = .01

- 1 The wave effect was allowed to vary across countries. The slope variance is significant at .1 level. There is no significant covariation between the slope and the intercept variance.
- 2 Including an interaction between GDP (country) and GDP (wave) is significant and renders the variance of the wave slope insignificant.
- 3 The variable post-communism does not vary over time. In order to test for different trajectories, an interaction between wave and post-communism was tested. Neither the main effects nor the interaction turned out to be significant. Post-communism, however, becomes significant when combined with other macro-variables.
- 4 The over-time effect of INGO loses its significance when the wave variable is included.
- 5 This index was available only for a small subset of our countries. An interaction for missing cases was thus included. See endnote 4, methods section, on embedded variables. The low -2LL value is driven by the additional embedded variable and does not indicate a substantive effect of multiculturalism.
- 6 Including the wave variable results in a significance of p=.1 of the civic dimension at country level.