# Intergenerational transmission of attitudes toward immigrants across 12 countries

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## 1.Topic

Migration, together with fertility and mortality, is one of the three central dynamics for population studies. In the last three decades, it has however also become central in social sciences (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014): attitudes towards immigrants are crucial to determine citizens' socio-political positions on the so-called 'second dimension' of politics, the 'sociocultural' (Dassonneville, Hooghe, and Marks, 2023) axis. Indeed, despite numerous empirical evidence on the positive effects of international mobility on the demographic and social wellbeing of the country, foreign immigration continues to be perceived as a problem (AISP, 2021). The integration of migrants represents still a topical issue of difficult resolution across several countries. Therefore, understanding how attitudes towards migrants are formed is a central undertaking in contemporary social and demographic research (Gereke, Schaub, and Baldassarri, 2022).

## 2. Review of the literature and research hypotheses

The literature focusing on explaining attitudes towards migrants has so far paid relatively scarce attention to a key demographic pattern: that of the intergenerational transmission of those attitudes. In the socialization literature, parental attitudes are considered as powerfully influential in shaping those of children (Jennings and Niemi, 2014). Research shows how behavior, as partisan orientations (Jennings and Niemi, 2014), as well as electoral abstention (Jeannet, 2022), can be transmitted from grandparents, to parents, to children. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no paper has relied on the intergenerational perspective to assess the degree to which (if any) parents' attitudes towards migrants influence those of their children.

With this study, we intend to enrich the social-scientific debate at hand by providing new analyses on the intergenerational transmission of attitudes towards immigrants in a comparative setting. By relying on a demographic lens to understand the formation of socio-political attitudes regarding a key demographic phenomenon, this proposal joins the nascent body of research in political demography (Goerres and Vanhuysse, 2021).

More specifically, we address the following research question: are attitudes toward immigrants passed on across generations? Conventional socialization approach states that parents are the most important agents of children's socialization (e.g., Bandura, 1969). Within this research stream, the parental role should be crucial in the intergenerational transmission of attitudes – i.e., attitudes towards immigrants. Embracing this perspective, one should expect a high likelihood of attitudinal homogamy between parents and children (H1: attitudinal homogamy is prevalent). On the contrary, the framework of individual agency stresses the role of other factors (i.e., individual preferences and cohort-wide processes, Ryder 1985; Braungart and Braungart, 1986) for the formation of individual orientations. According to this approach, one should expect the children 'resist' to the classical transmission path and form their own attitudinal orientations (i.e. toward immigrants) throughout their individual experience - e.g., Elder, 1997 (H2: homogamy is lower).

## 3. Data, variables and methods

Our analysis builds on the most recent data gathered from Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every 3 years. The 2018 PISA release provides the opportunity to investigate the topic of intergenerational transmission of attitudes towards immigrants, because the same set of questions on orientation toward immigrants is asked to students as well to their parents (https://www.oecd.org/pisa/). More specifically, parents and children (students) have to express their

level of agreement with four different statements addressing aspects of immigrants' integration. One above all refers to immigrants' full political rights, that is allowing immigrants voting in political election. Other aspects refer to the respondents' agreement for the equality of educational opportunity between natives and immigrants as well as for the tolerance related to immigrants' own customs and life-style. We will focus here on agreement for the immigrants' political rights, that polarizes more the respondents. In particular, this orientation represents the strongest indicator for citizens' inclinations towards migrants, as the right to vote in the national elections is considered in the literature as the core right that activates all other rights (Lijphart, 1997). Agreeing that migrants should have the opportunity to vote is tantamount to extending them full citizenship, as exercising the right to vote leads to greater influence on elected officials (Lijphart, 1997) and therefore on policymaking, including welfare regimes (Lijphart, 1997). Indeed, the key Radical Right tenet of 'welfare chauvinism' (Rydgren, 2007) holds that migrants' welfare access should be restricted, which would be next to impossible if migrants had the opportunity to vote.

Our analytical sample includes 12 countries/areas placed in different geographical areas: South America, Brazil (5763 valid parent–child respondent pairs) and Chile (4,962 pairs); Centre America, Mexico (4,289 pairs) ; Europe, Croatia (4,916 pairs), Germany (1,502 pairs), Ireland (4,314 pairs), Italy (7,606 pairs), Malta (2,334 pairs) and Portugal (4,604 pairs); East Asia, Hong Kong (5,041 pairs), Korea (6,450 pairs) and Macao (3,594 pairs). All other participating countries to PISA either have a remarkable number of pairwise missing values or opted out of attitudes toward immigrants. Thus, they are not considered in the present study.

Our key dependent variable (*children's attitude*) is the extent to which the students respondents agree that immigrants who live in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections: it takes value one whether the student agrees or strongly agrees, zero otherwise (disagrees or strongly disagrees).

In parallel the key explanatory variable is the *parental attitude* toward immigrants and the answers are categorized as the dependent variable: value one whether the parent agrees or strongly agrees, zero otherwise.
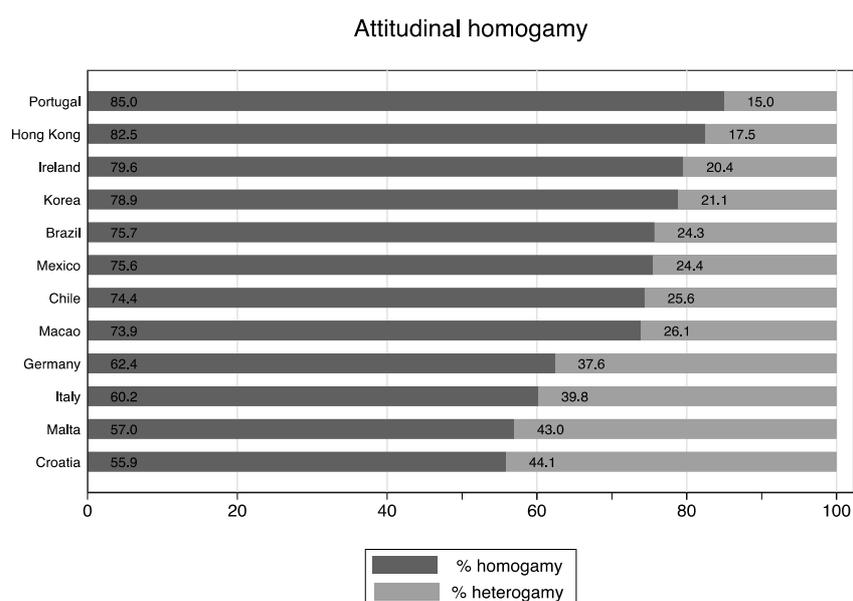
PISA data allows us to control for a wide range of potential confounding individual, family and school factors in examining the extent of agreement/disagreement. Thus, in all the statistical models, we account for country, children's (gender, repetition of grade and citizenship), parental (mother and father's level of education, family ESCS), and school's characteristics (whether private or public). The survey allows us to control for another crucial aspect of parent-child interaction, that is the frequency of political debate within the household.

Logistic regression models with socio-demographic controls and country fixed effects were employed to estimate adjusted associations between parents' and children's pro-immigrants attitudes. The advantage of the country fixed effects is to control for time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity at the country level, making analyses across countries more comparable.

## 4. Preliminary Results

**Fig. 1** displays the proportion of homogamous (children and parents share the same attitudes on immigrants) versus heterogamous pairs, ranked by country. In other words, we graphically report the percentage of children (students) showing the same attitudes as those of parents versus not. As we can observe, there is a strong heterogeneity across countries: homogamy varies between about 85% in Portugal to about 56% in Croatia.

**Fig. 1 -** Attitudinal homogamy by country.

Attitudinal homogamy



| | % homogamy | % heterogamy |
|---|---|---|
| Portugal | 85.0 | 15.0 |
| Hong Kong | 82.5 | 17.5 |
| Ireland | 79.6 | 20.4 |
| Korea | 78.9 | 21.1 |
| Brazil | 75.7 | 24.3 |
| Mexico | 75.6 | 24.4 |
| Chile | 74.4 | 25.6 |
| Macao | 73.9 | 26.1 |
| Germany | 62.4 | 37.6 |
| Italy | 60.2 | 39.8 |
| Malta | 57.0 | 43.0 |
| Croatia | 55.9 | 44.1 |

Then we estimate the association between parental and children's orientation toward immigrants using logistic regression modelling. This model includes all variables listed above. To examine the substantive importance of the estimated association, we report in **Fig. 2** *(next page)* the average marginal effects (AMEs) of parents support toward immigrants' political rights on children's support. In our case, the AMEs are the difference between the predicted probability of children's support immigrants' right by parental orientation (whether parent support pro-immigrants' attitudes or not). Thus, positive AMEs, as those reported in **Fig. 2**, indicate that children of parents with pro-immigrants attitudes have a higher probability of embracing pro-immigrants attitudes than children of parents without pro- immigrants attitudes. This empirical finding gives rise to the hypothesis of the intergenerational transmission of attitudes. We can observe, however, the transmission of these attitudes from parents to children is stronger in some countries and weaker in others. As such, it seems that the thesis of the individual agency framework can partly explain the heterogeneity of the results we obtain. We convey that younger cohorts may be more open to less conservative orientations toward immigrants.

## Future steps

By the start of EPC, we will detect whether parenting style might represent a device that counteracts or strengthens the transmission of attitudes from parents to children. Given the high-quality of PISA data, including exceptionally rich information on the time spent together by children and parents and the type of activities they engage together, we are able to dig into the black box of socialization. Moreover, we will analyze whether homo-lineal process (a stronger cultural transmission through same sex parent-child dyad than through opposite sex) identifies another relevant channel of transmission. Finally, we will try to explain the cross-country heterogeneity of the attitudinal homogamy shown in **Fig. 2.**

**Fig. 2** - AMEs of parental attitudes in favour of migrants' political rights on children's attitudes in favour of migrants' political rights controlling for children and parental characteristics.
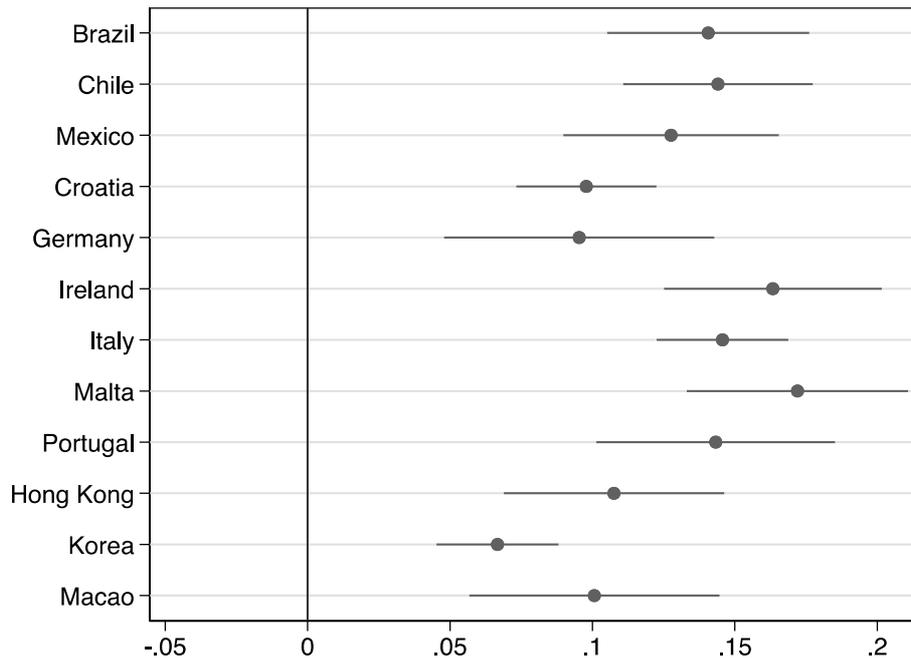
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