PB310 Independent Research Project

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Study Title: Migration Policy, Politics, and Governance: Investigating the Dynamics of Migrant Integration in the EU

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I. Introduction

This study investigates the relationship between (a)migration flows into the European Union (EU), (b) anti-immigrant rhetoric by ruling coalitions, and (c)public attitudes toward migrants. It examines ways in which political rhetoric influences public perceptions of migrants, and how integration policies interact with these perceptions. Ultimately the study aims to understand the dynamics between migration policy and politics, informing migration governance in the EU.

A "migrant," as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019), "...is an individual who moves across an international border or within a country... irrespective of legal status or the causes of migration". Every year, upwards of five million people immigrate into the EU, relying on integration policies, defined as, "the dynamic, two-way process in which migrants and host societies work to adapt to one another", to assimilate into their country of choice.

However, integration policies in the EU face persistent challenges. Some argue that inefficacy stems from poor policy design, with Cajvan (2020) noting that "the lack of a coherent understanding of integration undermines policy design, creating barriers to welcoming and assimilating newcomers." Others suggest that the sheer scale of migration places undue strain on socio-economic frameworks, reducing the efficacy of even well-designed policies in domains of public services, labour markets, and social cohesion (Malm, 2005; Solano, 2023; Caselli, 2024) . This debate highlights the need to disentangle whether integration outcomes are hindered more by policy design, migration volume, or a combination of both.

Complicating these challenges further is the role of political rhetoric. Far-right populism has risen across Europe, normalising narratives that position migrants as threats and reinforcing group divides. As Tajfel and Turner (1979) establish in their social identity theory, "the mere perception of belonging to different groups can trigger in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination." Kirchick (2019) similarly notes that "the failure to control external immigration and the inability to effectively integrate newcomers risk elevating into power parties that are not only nativist...[but] (in some cases) outright racist." Thus, group behaviour is seemingly catalysed by rhetoric, with potential to undermine the very policies meant to promote inclusion.

Much of recent research has focused on how political rhetoric shapes policy outcomes and public attitudes (Kirchick, 2019; Gruber & Rosenberger, 2021). The converse, however—whether policies can buffer the effects of harmful rhetoric on a cross-national level—remains comparatively underexplored. For example, Heath and Schneider (2021) highlight that inter-ethnic collaboration fostered by robust integration frameworks improves public attitudes toward migrants. Neureiter (2021) similarly found that policies grounded in fairness and equity reduced hostility, even amidst challenging political climates. These findings indicate that, under certain conditions, effective policies may counterbalance the societal impacts of harmful rhetoric. This study seeks to contribute to the discourse by investigating the relationships between migrant flow, political rhetoric, and integration policies, specifically focusing on the EU.

Thus, this study seeks to build on these insights by addressing two critical questions:

RQ₁. *How do migrant flows and integration policies interact to shape public attitudes and government (ruling party) rhetoric?*

RQ₂. *Can integration policies buffer against socio-political hostility toward migrants?*

II. Methods and Measures

Methodology

This study will use a quantitative, cross-country approach to investigate relationships between (a)migration flows, (b)government rhetoric, and (c)public attitudes, in the EU. Three interconnected studies make up the analysis [Figure 2]. Study 1 investigates the direct effects of migration flows on government rhetoric and public attitudes, as well as the influence of government rhetoric on public attitudes. Study 2 explores the moderating role of integration policies on these relationships, examining whether stronger policies buffer against negative rhetoric and attitudes. Study 3 explores whether governance typologies based on integration policies exist, testing to see if migration governance has similarities across European attitudes based on policy design. Together, these aim to provide an understanding of migration governance and its implications for policy design. Appendices B, C, D and E contain exploratory and initial results for Studies 1, 2 and 3. Appendix A contains downloadable raw data files to run the analysis script.
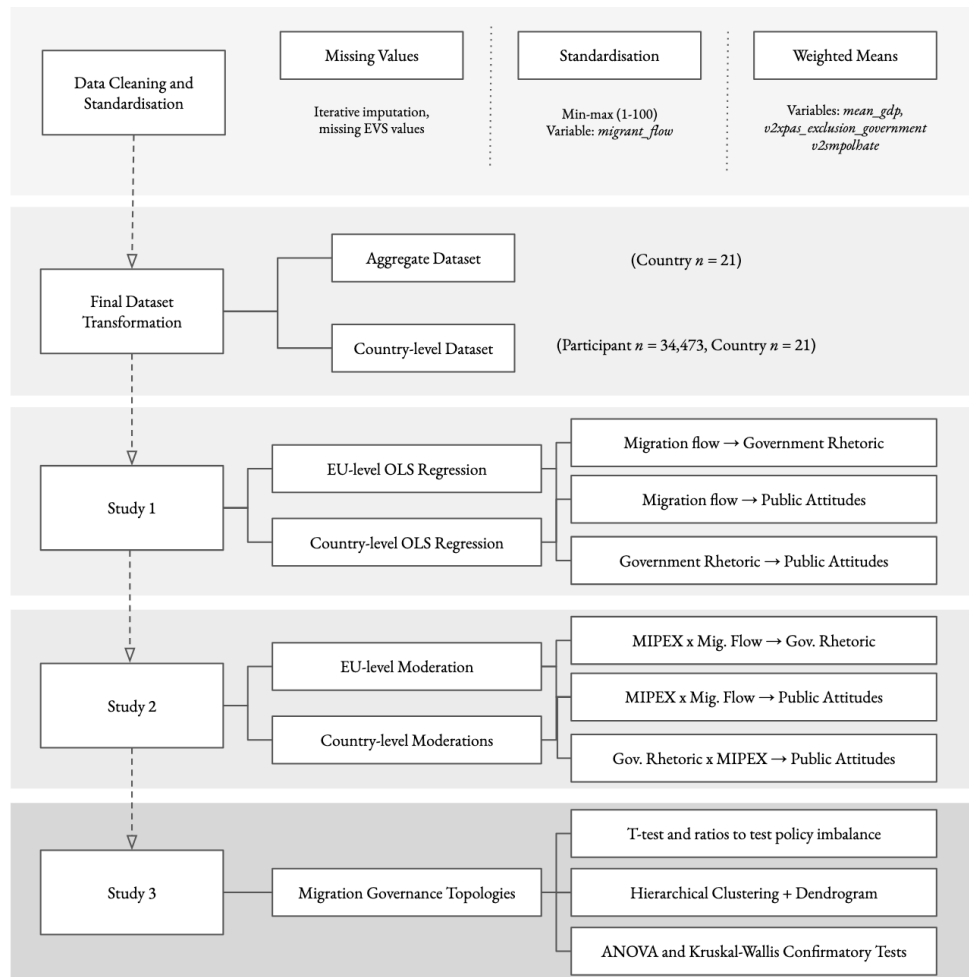

Figure 2. Study Design

Data Description

Five public datasets outlined below will be used for this study. The *Measures* section details the variables and manipulation methods used for analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

1. EVS

The EVS is a large-scale, cross-national, and repeated cross-sectional survey program conducted since 1980. Data collection involves standardised questionnaires administered to representative national samples. Primary mode of data collection is face-to-face interviews (although mixed-mode approaches were introduced in the recent wave). Probabilistic representative samples of residents aged 18 and older are collected, and sizes typically range from 1,200-1,500 respondents per country. While probabilistic samples circumvent biases in representativeness, challenges such as non-response and coverage errors can introduce additional biases.

EVS Wave 7 (2017) will be used for this study.

3. V-Dem

V-Dem is a large social science data collection program, involving over 3,000 country experts who provide subjective ratings on various indicators of democracy. Advanced statistical models, such as Item Response Theory (IRT), are used to aggregate these expert judgments into country-level estimates. While diverse experts enhance representativeness, individual coder biases can occur. By employing measurement models that account for potential biases and varying levels of expert reliability, V-Dem datasets account for these biases.

The Full V-Dem Dataset will be used for this study (Coppedge et al., 2024).

4. MIPEX

The MIPEX data collection involves expert assessments of integration policies across multiple dimensions, (such as labor market mobility, education, political participation, and anti-discrimination). These assessments are based on standardised questionnaires completed by country experts. As MIPEX relies on expert evaluations, the representativeness pertains to the selection of knowledgeable experts, and individual biases may impede data reliability. MIPEX mitigates this by employing multiple coders per country, and thoroughly cross-references findings to prevent errors.

MIPEX 2020 will be used for this study.

5. Eurostat

Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union, and publishes harmonised statistics by collaborating with the national statistical institutes of EU member-states. While detailed manuals and guidelines document these procedures, divergences in national data collection practices and response rates could introduce bias. While steps to mitigate biases appear to be nonexistent, Eurostat provides detailed sampling reference guidelines to address these cross-national challenges.

Eurostat's annual immigration per country values will be used for this study. Figure 3 illustrates data collection and the dataset creation approach.
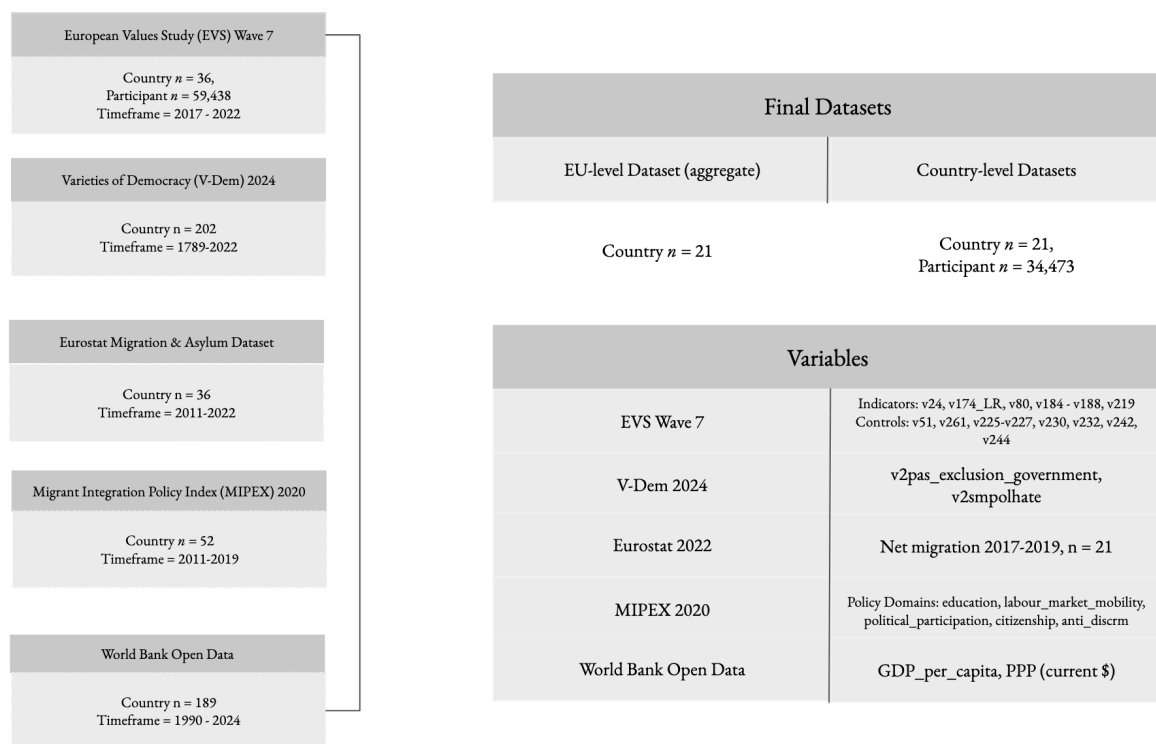

Figure 3. Data Transformation Process

Data Availability

All five datasets used in the study are authorised for public use, and codebooks and metadata are open to public download. With the exception of EVS, the remaining datasets are open to download without any restrictions. EVS requires a free account to be made before access is provided.

Data Access

The WB-GDP indicator can be downloaded from the [World Bank Open Data](#) platform.

Eurostat's immigration data can be selectively downloaded from the [Migration and Asylum](#) database.

The V-Dem website provides downloads of the full dataset, and variables cannot be selectively downloaded. Data can be obtained on the [V Dem Dataset](#) download webpage.

The MIPEX dataset is available for full download on [Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020](#) website. In the EVS Wave 7 dataset, variables cannot be selectively downloaded. After login, it can be accessed from the Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften's [GESIS Data Collection](#) platform.

With the exception of EVS, which is only available as a *Stata* or *SPSS* file, all datasets can be downloaded as an *xls*. file. [Appendix A].

Codebooks
The codebooks and metadata for all datasets are publicly available online.

1.European Values Study
The [EVS Codebook](#) is accessible without login on the EVS website. The final section on respondent details (Q51-Q82) have the pulled variable questions for education, employment, religiosity, income, lineage, age, and sex. Questions Q26, Q51, Q52 and Q24 relate to pulled variables on opinions related to migrants, including job security, crime, social welfare, national development, culture, and the labour market.

2.V-Dem
The [V-Dem codebook](#) contains information on the measures taken to create final democracy scores for all countries. Section 6.8. contains information for calculating the Government Coalition Party-System Exclusion Index (*v2xpas_exclusion_government*) and scoring scales (V-Dem Codebook Version 14, 2024).

3.MIPEX
The [MIPEX book](#) contains information on data collection measures and policy domains. The *Introduction* section contains key information on MIPEX methods and scoring. It is available for download on the MIPEX website.

4.Eurostat

Eurostat's [Migration and Asylum metadata](#) details how immigration values are calculated and obtained. *Section 4* (statistical indicator), *section 5* (frequency and timeliness of dissemination), and *section 6* (coverage and compatibility) detail how the values are calculated, when they are to be on the database, and countries covered under Eurostat.

5.World Bank Open Data

World Bank's [PPP-adjusted GDP metadata](#) details how values are calculated and when they are updated. The *statistical concept and methodology* section is most relevant to the study.

Measures

Measured Variables

Variables for this study are categorised into five key domains.

(a) European Sentiments on Migrants
(b) Anti Immigrant Rhetoric
(c) Migration Flows
(d) Migration Policy Effectiveness Scores
(e) Controls

This section details all variables collected within these domains.

1.European Sentiments on Migrants

Sentiments on migrants are measured using either a Likert Scale or binary coding. These variables are a subset from the EVS, and capture individual sentiments. These were then grouped into four socio-economic domains for the purposes of this study: (a) welfare, (b) development, (c) culture, and (d) labour market. Table 1 describes key variables, sub-questions and scoring scales for these questions.

Domain	Question	EVS Code	Scoring Scale	Final Code in Dataset
Welfare	Q52.3. Immigrants are a strain on this country's welfare	v187	1 - Yes to 10 - No 88, 99, and 00 are non-responses	immig_welfare
	Q52.2. Immigrants make crime worse	v186	1 - Yes to 10 - No 88, 99, and 00 are non-responses	immig_crime
	Q61.3. To what extent do you feel concerned about the living conditions of immigrants?	v219	1 - Very concerned to 5 - Not at all 8, 9 and 00 are non-responses	immig_concern
	Q6.C. Could you identify anyone you would not like to have as neighbours? [immigrants]	v24	1 - Mentioned. 0 - Not mentioned. 8 and 9 are non-responses	immig_neighbours
Development	Q51. How do immigrants impact development?	v184	1 - Bad. 2 - Good. 8, 9 and 00 are non-responses	immig_development
Culture	Q52.D. It is better if immigrants maintain their own customs	v188	1 - Yes to 10 - No. 8, 9 and 00 are non-responses	immig_culture
Labour Market	Q52.A. Immigrants take away jobs	v185	1 - Yes to 10 - No. 8, 9 and 00 are non-responses	immig_steal_jobs
	Q26. When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to nation's citizens over immigrants	v80	1 - Agree to 5 - Disagree	immig_job_priority

Table 1. EVS Sentiment Variables

2.Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric

Anti-immigrant government rhetoric is measured by V-Dem on a scale of 0-1 (low to high), and calculated by coders using other variables in the dataset. Two variables are taken from the dataset [Table 2; Appendix A]

Variable	Definition	Notes	Study manipulations
v2xpas_exclusion_government	To what extent do parties in the governing coalition reject cultural superiority and support immigration policies and the equal participation of women in the labor market?	Captures aggregated positions on exclusion for parties in the government during election-years.	For countries with regime changes between 2017-2019, the variable was aggregated using a time-weighted approach
v2smpolhate	How often do major political parties use hate speech as part of their rhetoric?	0: Extremely Often to 4: Never (high-low)	For countries with regime changes between 2017-2019, the variable was aggregated using a time-weighted approach

Table 2. V-Dem Government/Ruling Party Rhetoric Variables

3.Immigration Flows

Immigration flow refers to the total number of migrants entering a given (EU) country per year. Eurostat's immigration values from 2017-2019, aggregated by country over three years, is denoted by the variable *avg_migration_2017_2019.*

4. Migration Policy Effectiveness Scores

MIPEX contains an exhaustive list of policies with effectiveness scores (based on design and implementation) ranging from 0-100 (low to high). While the full dataset includes eight policy domains (see *Appendix 1*), only four were chosen for this study due to relevance and congruence with public sentiments. Domain averages are used for all primary analysis, while subdomain scores are used for exploratory analysis. The full list of policy variables can be found in Figure 3.
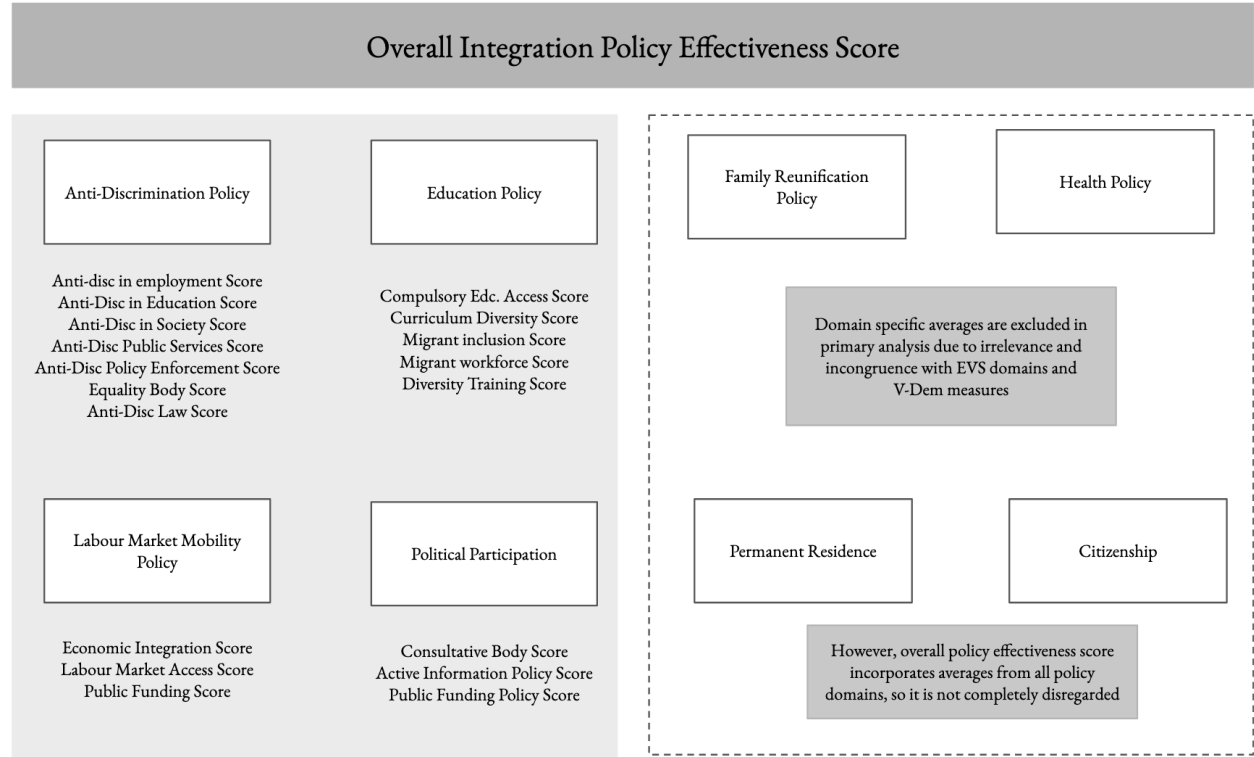

Overall Integration Policy Effectiveness Score

Anti-Discrimination Policy	Education Policy
Anti-disc in employment Score	Compulsory Edc. Access Score
Anti-Disc in Education Score	Curriculum Diversity Score
Anti-Disc in Society Score	Migrant inclusion Score
Anti-Disc Public Services Score	Migrant workforce Score
Anti-Disc Policy Enforcement Score	Diversity Training Score
Equality Body Score	
Anti-Disc Law Score	

Family Reunification Policy	Health Policy

Domain specific averages are excluded in primary analysis due to irrelevance and incongruence with EVS domains and V-Dem measures

Labour Market Mobility Policy	Political Participation
Economic Integration Score	Consultative Body Score
Labour Market Access Score	Active Information Policy Score
Public Funding Score	Public Funding Policy Score

Permanent Residence	Citizenship

However, overall policy effectiveness score incorporates averages from all policy domains, so it is not completely disregarded

Figure 3. MIPEX Policy Score Variables

5. Controls

Controls for the study were taken from the EVS dataset and the World Bank. Commonly used control variables were chosen based on meta-analytic review (Li, 2021; Nishimura, 2023), and literature cited in section 1 [see Introduction]. *Income, education, employment, religiosity, sex, and citizenship* were controls selected from the EVS. *GDP* (PPP-adjusted, USD) was selected from the World Bank.

Manipulated Variables

Manipulation of variables occurred in three cases: (a) to ensure variables were on comparable scales and timeframes, (b) to handle missing data, and (c) to facilitate *Study 3*.

Four variables were manually manipulated for use in this study. The outlines for each are listed below. The full process for variable manipulations can be found in *Section 2* of the *Preprocessing Script* and *Section 5* of the *Analysis Script*.

1.Migration Flow Variables

Eurostat's migration flow values were trimmed to include values from 2017-2019. The average of these values were taken for each country to form the *avg_immigration_2017_2019* variable. To facilitate comparability across countries and for use in statistical models, this variable was normalised using min-max normalisation, resulting in *avg_immigration_2017_2019_normalized*, scaled between 1 and 100.

2.GDP, PPP-adjusted (current $)

The GDP values from 2017-2019 were aggregated to create the *mean_GDP* variable. To facilitate comparability across countries and for use in statistical models, this variable was normalised using min-max normalisation, resulting in *mean_GDP_normalized*, scaled between 1 and 100.

3.Governance Indicators (V-Dem)

For countries with regime changes between 2017-2019, the *vs2xpas_exclusion_government, v2smpolhate* variables were aggregated using a time-weighted approach. This was done by calculating the proportion of overlap between the regime's term and the EVS timeframe [Equation 1]. Regime-specific governance scores were weighted by this proportion.

$$w_r = \frac{\text{Overlap Duration of Regime } r \text{ with EVS Period}}{\text{Total Duration of EVS Period}}$$

$$\text{Overlap Duration} = \max(\text{Start of Regime}, \text{Start of EVS}) - \min(\text{End of Regime}, \text{End of EVS})$$

The final *v2xpas_exclusion_government* variable values for countries with regime changes were calculated as follows:

$$G_c = \frac{\sum_{r=1}^{R} w_r \cdot G_r}{\sum_{r=1}^{R} w_r}$$

G_c = Governance score for regime r

w_r = Weight for regime r

R = Total number of regimes during the EVS timeframe

Equation 1. Weighted Average Score Calculation

For countries without regime changes during the EVS period, governance scores were taken directly into the final dataset.

4.Clustering Policy Domains

To identify distinct governance topologies, clustering methods were employed. The condensed MIPEX data matrix was used to calculate similarity levels between countries [see Analysis-Script] . This was done using Euclidean distance metrics, and hierarchical clustering was then used to iteratively group countries based on pairwise distances. This *cluster* variable categorised countries into different governance topologies and will be used for further analysis [see IV. Exploratory Analysis].

Unit of Analysis

The full Wave 7 of EVS contains 59, 438 participants across 36 countries. As non-EU countries are not the focus of this study, data was filtered to a final 21 countries, with a total of 34, 473 participants. 6 EU member-states were not included in the EVS dataset. Similarly, V-Dem, Eurostat and MIPEX datasets were trimmed to include values corresponding to the 21 EU member-states over the time period of the EVS, from 2017 - 2019 to ensure data overlap.

As the study looks at both intra-national and cross-national values, analysis will be conducted on individual respondents and country level aggregates that map overall country-specific sentiments. Country level indicators from the remaining datasets will be aggregated to produce mean values (V-Dem, MIPEX), while population flows will be normalised to produce final values.

Missing Data

No missing values were found in the V-Dem, MIPEX, Eurostat and World Bank datasets. However, the EVS dataset indicated cases of missing values: out of the final 34,473 participants, missing values were sparse in all variables except the *political_affiliation* and *party-support* controls. Missing values were imputed using the *iterative-imputer* library in the *scikit-learn* package on *Python* [Section 2 , Preprocessing script; Appendix D].

Variable	Missing Count	Missing Percent (%)	Variable	Missing Count	Missing Percent (%)
party_support	19093	32.122548	immig_development	2480	4.172415
political-spectrum	11715	19.709613	immig_steal_jobs	2049	3.44729
income	8740	14.704398	immig_concern	1059	1.781688
immig_culture	3732	6.278812	employment	822	1.382954
education	3411	5.738753	immig_job_priority	805	1.354352
immig_neighbours	2918	4.909317	religion	454	0.763821
immig_welfare	2860	4.811737	age	325	0.546788
immig_crime	2759	4.641812	citizen	71	0.119452
sex	0	0			

Figure 4. EVS Missing Values Pre-Imputation

III. Confirmatory Hypothesis and Analysis Plan

Statistical Models

Study 1

The goal of *Study 1* is to examine the direct effects of migration flows on ruling party rhetoric and public attitudes, and the direct effects of ruling party rhetoric on public sentiments. As such, there are two main hypothesis:

H$_1$. *An increase in migration flows is associated with more anti-immigrant ruling-party rhetoric and public attitudes toward migrants.*

$$\text{Attitudes}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{MigrationFlow}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{Controls}_i + \epsilon_i$$

$$\text{Rhetoric}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{MigrationFlow}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{Controls}_i + \epsilon_i$$

H₂. *Anti-immigrant government rhetoric is associated with more negative public attitudes toward migrants.*

$$\text{Attitudes}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Rhetoric}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{Controls}_i + \epsilon_i$$

H_1 and H_2 will be tested using multiple regression models to understand how, if at all, migrant influx influences politics, and how, if at all, political rhetoric influences public sentiments. Controls laid out in Section II will be implemented for all the regression models. The *Aggregated Final Dataset* will be used to study EU-level trends for H_1, while the *Individual Final Dataset* will be used to study country-level trends [Appendix 3].

Study 2

Study 2 is conducted to determine whether integration policies act as buffers, (a)moderating the impact of migration flows on rhetoric and public attitudes, and (b)moderating the impact of ruling party rhetoric on public attitudes.

H₃. *The relationship between migration flows and ruling party rhetoric is moderated by integration policies, such that stronger integration policies attenuate the association between migration flows and negative rhetoric.*

$$\text{Rhetoric}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{MigrationFlow}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{IntegrationPolicy}_i + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{MigrationFlow}_i \times \text{IntegrationPolicy}_i) + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Controls}_i + \epsilon_i$$
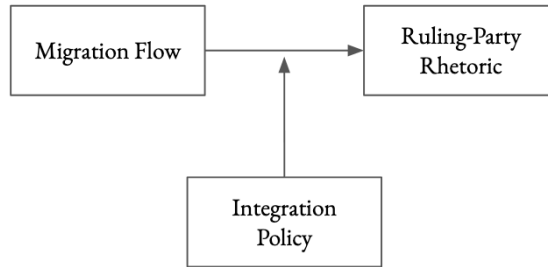
Figure 5. Confirmatory test for H3

H₄. *The relationship between migration flows and public attitudes is moderated by integration policies, such that stronger integration policies mitigate the association between migration flows and negative public attitudes.*

$$\text{Attitudes}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{MigrationFlow}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{IntegrationPolicy}_i + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{MigrationFlow}_i \times \text{IntegrationPolicy}_i) + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Controls}_i + \epsilon_i$$
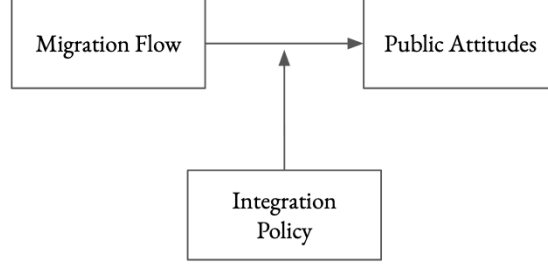
```
┌──────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
│  Migration Flow  │─────────────▶│ Public Attitudes │
└──────────────────┘              └──────────────────┘
                        ▲
              ┌──────────────────┐
              │   Integration    │
              │      Policy      │
              └──────────────────┘
```

Figure 6. Confirmatory test for H4

H₅. *The relationship between government rhetoric and public attitudes is moderated by integration policies, such that stronger integration policies reduce the effect of negative rhetoric on public attitudes.*

$$\text{Attitudes}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Rhetoric}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{IntegrationPolicy}_i + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{Rhetoric}_i \times \text{IntegrationPolicy}_i) + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Controls}_i + \epsilon_i$$
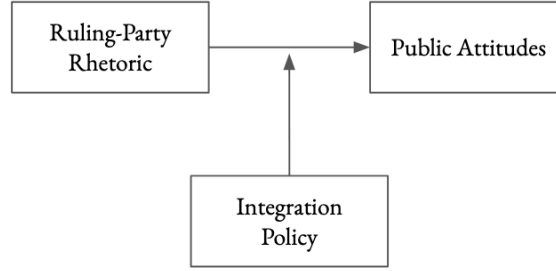
```
┌──────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
│   Ruling-Party   │─────────────▶│ Public Attitudes │
│     Rhetoric     │              └──────────────────┘
└──────────────────┘
                        ▲
              ┌──────────────────┐
              │   Integration    │
              │      Policy      │
              └──────────────────┘
```

Figure 7. Confirmatory test for H5

Identical to *Study 1*, H₃ and H₄ utilise aggregated data, while H₅ utilises country-level data. Initial results are in Appendix C.

Study 3

Study 3 is inherently exploratory in nature, and does not make any predictions on relationships between variables. It exists to test if EU countries, based on their integration policies and governance, have similarities or differences in migration governance.

As such, the hypothesis for Study 3 is as follows:

H6: Migration governance typologies derived through hierarchical clustering will reveal distinct groups of countries based on their integration policies, migration flows, and government rhetoric.

To explore this strand, clustering methods as outlined in *Section II* were employed. K-means clustering, an unsupervised learning algorithm, will be employed first, followed by hierarchical clustering . These are conducted between countries after the initial exploratory analysis investigating policy imbalance [see Section IV].

An initial K-means clustering will identify the optimal number of clusters through the elbow method [see *Appendix E* for initial tests], with countries assigned to clusters based on normalised MIPEX scores.

Hierarchical clustering with Ward's linkage complements the previous approach, and will substantiate initial exploratory findings.

The resulting clusters will then be mapped back to the aggregated and individual datasets, and topologies will be generated to test the assumption of whether or not countries with similar migration policy governance have similar political rhetoric and public sentiments [Appendix E].

The goal of *Study 3* is to serve as a useful launching pad for discussing findings while attempting to answer the overarching research question. As such, this study makes no explicit predictions on the nature of relationships between variables.

Robustness Testing

Study 1 and *2* will use non-parametric bootstrapping test robustness of results. Furthermore, power analysis for country-level regressions and moderations reveal a strong effect size in almost all regressions. [see *Analysis_Script*].

Study 3 will use a t-test for policy imbalance, and a one-way ANOVA and a Kruskal-Wallis test to confirm statistical significance of clustering [Appendix E].

IV. Exploratory Analyses

Akin to other similar studies outlined in Section II, central tendencies and dispersion of key variables are investigated [Appendix C]. Pearson's correlation analysis is conducted across country-level and aggregate variables to eliminate multicollinearity and explore correlations using heat maps. Key distributions are visualised to confirm whether data is fit for statistical analyses.

Interestingly, initial exploratory analyses (as described above) revealed policy effectiveness discrepancies across all eight policy domains. This is explored by using ratios to study whether unilateral imbalances exist across countries, with statistical significance of imbalance confirmed using a t-test [Appendix E].

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