PROPORTION OF FOREIGNERS NEGATIVELY PREDICTS THE PREVALENCE OF XENOPHOBIC HATE CRIMES WITHIN GERMAN DISTRICTS

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Abstract

Statistics show that the increase in the number of refugees to Germany since 2015 was accompanied by an increase in xenophobic hate crimes. We deduced rivaling predictions from intergroup contact and integrated threat theories that could explain the occurrence of xenophobic hate crimes. By combining structural data of the 402 German districts with the 2015 police crime statistics, we found evidence supporting our predictions in line with intergroup contact theory: The higher the proportion of foreigners in a district, the lower the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes. Our analyses further show that the prevalence of xenophobic hate crime attacks was positively related to the total prevalence of offences in a district and higher in East German districts.

Keywords: Hate Crime, Immigrant Proportion, Intergroup Contact, Intergroup Threat, Xenophobia, East-West Germany

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Hate crimes against outgroup members are among the harshest expressions of outgroup rejection. In accordance with the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, the American Psychological Association (2018) defines hate crime as "a criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or gender identity" (for an operational definition of hate crime see the method section below). Although Germany witnessed hate crimes against ethnic minorities and immigrants for decades, the number of xenophobic hate crimes increased substantially from a total of 512 in 2014 to 918 in 2015 and 1,190 in 2016 (Statista 2018a). This stark increase co-occurred with a substantial growth in the number of immigrants to Germany in 2015, when more than 2 million people crossed the border to Germany (Statista 2018a), and the "refugee crisis" became the primary topic of public, political, and media debates in Germany and Europe. Given this stark increase, the German case may be used to answer the question how xenophobic hate crimes might be explained both from a perspective of theoretical interest of from a point of view of practical relevance

When the number of people arriving in Germany increased in summer 2015, the German administration fell short of delivering the needed support. The support from the German civil society impressively filled this gap in capacity (Deutschland will helfen 2015). Simultaneously, however, protests against the "immigration wave" accelerated, accompanied by the described rise in xenophobic hate crimes. Particularly, malicious arson attacks on housing facilities for refugees reached a peak: Whereas the police registered six arson attacks against reception centers and accommodations for refugees in 2014, the number increased to 94 in 2015 and 74 in 2016 (Bundesministerium des Innern 2016a).

In addition to the observed co-variation of the share of refugees and hate crime attacks, it seems that in some regions in Germany, the number of xenophobic hate crimes has been higher than in other regions (see e.g., Jäckle and König 2017). There is, for example, a substantially higher number of xenophobic hate crimes in the former East- compared to West-Germany (Pro Asyl 2017). Therefore, the question is: Which social psychological mechanisms may account for such regional differences in xenophobic hate crimes? Here, we will test the assumption that the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes is related to the proportion of immigrants in a geographic region.

IMMIGRATION TO GERMANY

Germany has always been a state of immigration (see e.g., Bade 1992). With the recreation of the economy in West-Germany after World War II in the 1950s and 1960s, "guest workers" from Southern Europe were hired – with the expectation of them returning to their home countries after some time. However, many of these guest workers stayed. And, due to German law, many of this and the following generations of immigrants, especially with Turkish origin, did not acquire German citizenship, even if they were born in Germany. Foreign workers, e.g. from Poland and Italy, who come to Germany based on the agreement of freedom of movement for employees within the EU, supplement this part of the foreign population in Germany. Even though Germany has always been a refugee-receiving country, the number of refugees increased substantially in 2015 due to crises in different parts of the world. The total number of people of foreign nationality arriving in Germany increased from 1.46 million in 2014 to 2.16 million in 2015 (Statista 2018b) of which nearly 1.01 million were refugees, who fled from wars, civil wars and poverty, mainly in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and some states in South East Europe (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2016). Thus, we can differentiate three groups in the present-day German population: People of German citizenship and two immigrant groups:

foreigners living in Germany in their first, second, or even higher generation (mostly from Turkey, Poland, and Italy), and recently arrived refugees (mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq). In 2015, the number of foreigners in Germany totaled to 9.12 million (Statistica 2018c), i.e., about 11 percent of the population.

The immigrant population is not distributed equally across Germany. There are strong differences between districts and between the former East- and West-Germany. In 2014, in the West, about 12% of the population were foreigners, whereas the percentages in the East was 4.2% (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2018). These differences between districts and between East- and West-Germany are rooted in different economic and industrial developments and recruitment policies in the 1960s and 70s (see Bade 1992). Moreover, lower numbers of refugees are being assigned to East compared to West Germany (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019). Thus, one can ask: Is there a co-variation between xenophobic hate crimes in a district and the share of immigrants living in a district?

MINORITY PROPORTION, INTERGROUP CONTACT AND INTERGROUP THREAT

We know of no research that has investigated the link between immigrant proportions and the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes in a geographical area. However, research showed that prejudice against immigrants – that can be conceptualized as an important predictor of xenophobic hate crimes (see also Wagner and Christ 2007) – is related to the number of immigrants relative to the size of the autochthonous population in a geographic region. Two major theories are under discussion in this context: Intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2011) and integrated threat theory (Stephan and Stephan 2000).

Intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011) predicts that a greater proportion of immigrants in a geographic region is associated with more intergroup contact opportunities, and that positive contact experiences lead to a reduction of prejudice – and given their interrelation,

possibly even xenophobic hate crimes (as an example for the relation between intergroup contact and violence, see, e.g., Oliner and Oliner 1988). In accordance with this hypothesis, studies showed that prejudice against immigrants is higher in East- than in West Germany, and that this regional difference is related to the lower proportion of immigrants in East- compared to West-Germany (Wagner et al. 2003; Weins 2011). Moreover, these studies empirically demonstrated via mediation analyses that differences in the frequency of intergroup contact experiences can explain the East-West difference. A similar pattern can be observed on the level of small geographical units: Germany is divided into 402 districts (sizes varying between 35,700 and 3,383,200 inhabitants), i.e., administration units composed of a city or a rural region. Wagner et al. (2006) showed that a lower proportion of immigrants in a district allows less intergroup contact with immigrants, which in turn explains the higher levels of prejudice. Thus, one can assume that, in accordance with intergroup contact theory, a greater proportion of immigrants in a geographic region increases intergroup contact, which reduces the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes.

Intergroup threat theory (Blumer 1957; Riek, Mania, and Gaertner 2006; Stephan 2014) delivers the second theoretical perspective that is of relevance in the context of effects of minority proportions on hate crimes against minorities. According to this approach, higher proportions of ethnic minority members in a geographic region evoke feelings of threat to the economic status, relevant values and norms in the majority. Threat, in turn, elicits outgroup rejection and eventually even discriminatory behaviour (of which hate crimes can be conceptualized as an extreme sub-form). Semyonov et al. (2004) delivered evidence based on German data showing that perceived intergroup threat is related to prejudice against immigrants. Thus, from the perspective of threat theory, one can propose that a higher proportion of immigrants in a geographic region leads to an increased prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes

(see also Stacey, Cabone-Lopez, and Rosenfeld 2011, for US data). In sum, both theoretical and empirical considerations allow for rivaling predictions regarding how proportions of immigrants may relate to the prevalence of hate crimes against immigrants in a given area.

THE PRESENT STUDY

We assume that the prevalence of hate crimes against immigrants are related to the ethnic composition of the area in which individuals navigate. We deem two components of ethnic composition crucial in the present-day context in Germany: The proportion of newcomers, that is, the proportion of newly arriving refugees in the district, primarily since 2015; and the proportion of foreigners who have already lived in this area for a longer time. We base our assumptions on two conflicting, and empirically supported theoretical postulations, that lead to opposing predictions: If intergroup contact with refugees and/or foreigners is the (more) effective mechanism, the proportion of refugees and/or foreigners in a geographic region should be associated with a *lower prevalence* of xenophobic hate crimes. If, however, threat is the (more) effective mechanism, higher proportions of refugees and/or foreigners should be associated with a *higher prevalence* of hate crimes. We will test the relation between the proportion of refugees and share of longer-present foreigners on the one hand and occurrence rates of hate crimes against immigrants on the other hand based on structural information and data provided by the German authorities on the district-level.

Besides the postulated population composition effects, there are, of course, further influences that might affect the rate of occurrence of hate crimes. Higher rates of xenophobic hate crimes in a district might emerge because

1. the district is located in East-Germany (see the higher rejection of immigrants in the East compared to the West; Wagner et al. 2003 and Weins 2011);

2. of a negative economic development in a district;
3. the district suffers from unemployment. Both an insufficient economic development and unemployment can be seen as indicators of economic deprivation which is associated with higher minority rejection (Esses, Jackson, and Armstrong 1998; Hovland and Sears 1940), especially if it is combined with societal narratives that link immigration to economic disadvantages for the autochthonous population (Wagner and Christ 2007);
4. the district suffers from selective emigration of autochthones –because of its economic decline, increases of the immigrant population or any other reason – which might leave the more biased people behind (Kaufmann and Harris 2015);
5. inhabitants of a district tend to be older, since age is positively related to outgroup rejection (Franssen, Dhont, and van Hiel 2013);
6. the district is of a low population density, assuming that minority rejection tends to be higher in rural compared to urban regions (Tuch 1987);
7. immigrants commit more criminal offences, which induces majority members to retaliate (McDevitt, Levin, and Bennett 2002);
8. the general rate of criminal offences is high, thus offering social models for any kind of deviant behavior (e.g., Fagan, Wilkinson, and Davies 2007).

In order to avoid bias that may emerge if these alternative explanations remain unaccounted for, we will use these district indictors as control variables in our analyses.

METHODS

Germany consists of $N = 402$ districts. The prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes in each of these districts was measured with the respective indicator (“Fremdenfeindliche Straftaten”, i.e. number of hate crimes per district relative to the number of inhabitants) from the official national police statistics in 2015 (Bundesministerium des Innern 2016b). These statistics were kindly

provided per district for the purpose of the present study by the Ministries of Interior Affairs of the different German states. In accordance with the APA definition mentioned above, the German police[1] registers a crime as xenophobically motivated if it fulfills the following requirements:

> Xenophobic crimes are crimes that address persons whom the perpetrator (due to an intolerant attitude) denies the right to stay in his or her social environment, or in Germany in general, due to the victim's nationality, ethnicity, race, color of skin, religion, ideology, origin, or because of his or her outer appearance. This includes particularly crimes against asylum seekers and other foreigners, or Germans who are considered foreigners, and/or crimes against property as well as objects and facilities which are connected therewith (Klink 1992:274, translation by the authors[2]).

Proportions of foreigners in districts in 2014 were taken from the INCAR-indicators (see Bundesinstitut für Bauwesen und Raumordnung 2017). We used the governmental statistics of the share of refugees within districts in 2016, since no reliable information was available for 2015 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017). The different reference times of the proportion of foreigners in general and the proportion of refugees allowed us to at least partially disentangle these two indicators: Since the proportion of refugees experienced a large shift starting in 2015, the statistics regarding the share of foreigners in 2014 were not confounded with the number of the recently immigrated refugees.

We combined the indicators of proportions of foreigners and refugees with further INCAR structural indicators measuring the control variables as predictors of number of xenophobic hate crimes per 100,000 inhabitants. Based on the rationale above, all these structural indicators were taken for the year 2014, to ensure that the indicators were unaffected by the increase in number of refugees in 2015.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 delivers the correlation coefficients[3] and standardized results of a regression analysis (conducted with SPSS Version 22¸ IBM Corporation 2016), in which all predictors mentioned above were entered simultaneously. Our regression analyses[4] showed that the variables used were able to predict nearly 50% of the variance in xenophobic hate crimes (R^2 = .49). The prevalence of hate crimes in a district was significantly *negatively* related to (9[5]) the proportion of foreigners in the district (β = -.17, p = .02). That means that, even after controlling for all the possible confounds, a larger proportion of foreigners in a district was associated with a lower prevalence of hate crimes. This finding is in line with research and theory on intergroup contact and prejudice, and extends it to hostile intergroup behavior: Living in a district with a larger proportion of non-Germans reduces the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes, likely by improving contact opportunities with immigrants for autochthonous Germans (Wagner et al. 2003, 2006), and increasing the amount of positive intergroup contact (Wagner et al. 2003, 2006).

Surprisingly, the prevalence of hate crimes was not significantly related to (10) the proportion of refugees in the districts (β = .01, p = .77). One explanation for the finding that proportions of foreigners did systematically explain variance in the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes, and proportions of refugees did not, is that foreigners have been present in a given district for a longer time period, and their presence is thus more relevant for intergroup behavior. With time, contact opportunities with foreigners likely lead to intergroup contact (Wagner et al. 2003, 2006), contributing to the creation of a norm of acceptance of immigrant groups in general (Christ et al. 2014; Pettigrew, 2009), thereby mitigating the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes. Contrary to that, the short presence of refugees may not have been long enough for positive intergroup contact to occur and to influence district norms to shape intergroup behavior (see also Ramos, Bennett, Massey, and Hewstone 2019). Quite the opposite, intergroup contact

opportunities of the majority population with refugees were largely reduced, given the often highly segregated accommodation in large reception centers of 1,000 or more inhabitants. Thus, for refugees, their presence, and thus proportion in districts might not be associated with the realization of intergroup contact. This is in line with survey-based research that demonstrated intergroup contact between German citizens and refugees to be remarkably rare (Schmidt, Weick, and Gloris 2019).

Importantly, neither the effects of the proportion of foreigners, nor of the proportion of refugees, were in line with the rival predictions deduced from integrated threat theory. Significant positive correlations between the prevalence of hate crimes and the proportions of foreigners or refugees would have supported these predictions, which we could not observe.

Please insert Table 1 about here

Among the control variables, only (1) the location of a district in East- vs. West-Germany and (8) the general district crime rate showed significant effects. Even though not part of our primary research interests, we offer some speculations about their significance.

The strongest predictor of the number of xenophobic hate crimes was (1) the location of a district in East- or West-Germany (β = -.42, p = .00). The predictor remained significant even after controlling for all other included variables. This implies that none of the other predictors could explain the regional differences. One explanatory factor we did not control for could be a specific regional rejection climate against immigrants. This is for instance indicated by the results of the national elections of the German Bundestag in 2017, which found much stronger support for the right-wing political party *Alternative für Deutschland* in East- than in West Germany.

The second significant control variable was (8) the general number of offences registered for the districts in 2014 (β = .24, p = .004) per 100,000 inhabitants. This co-variation of general prevalence of offences with hate crimes might indicate an imitation effect: General higher crime

prevalence in a district might emanate to a higher hate crime prevalence against immigrants. Another explanation would be systematic differences between the districts in registering crimes: The official criminal statistics were compiled of individual reports from local police departments. Systematic variations between the departments in registering an offence or not may influence both the registered number of crimes in general and xenophobic hate crimes specifically, and would thereby artificially produce the positive correlation between both indicators. A related explanation would be that the sensitivity in the population to recognize or report criminal offences varied between districts, which may again result in a positive association between registered general crime and hate crime levels.

Limitations

We derived our predictions regarding the nature of the association between immigrant proportions and hate crime attacks from intergroup contact and integrated threat theory. However, the data we based our analyses on did not include indicators of intergroup contact and threat. Further research could build on our findings by including empirical indicators of intergroup contact and threat as potential mediators of the relationship between immigrant proportions and hate crime prevalence.

Although we used data from different years to test our predictions, our data structure remained cross-sectional. This implies that we cannot establish causality. For instance, it may be the case that the association of proportion of foreigners and prevalence of hate crimes emerged because there were fewer natives to be prejudiced and commit hate crimes in districts with higher shares of foreigners, as we propose here, or that those districts with higher shares of foreigners invested more in the prevention of hate crimes. Future research could provide a deeper understanding of the causal and mediating processes by basing their analyses on longitudinal data.

Finally, our data focus on the specific German situation during a phase of strong immigration. As all case studies, they need replications in other regions and during other historical times.

Practical Implication

The proportion of foreigners in a district negatively predicted the prevalence of xenophobic hate crimes. This new insight in line with intergroup contact theory speaks against the idea derived from intergroup threat theory that a higher share of immigrants is generally associated with negative consequences for civil society. Our results are relevant for practical interventions and policies. One implication would be to support a policy which promotes distribution of foreigners all over the country and equally between the districts. A balanced distribution would provide equal opportunities to establish intergroup contact with immigrants, and possibly help reducing the number of hate crimes against newcomers in the long-term – which might be helpful not only in the presence of newly arriving refugees.

NOTES

[1] There exist no uniform definition of indicators of hate crime in Europe which also makes it impossible to compare incidence rates between different European states.

[2] In German: "Fremdenfeindliche Straftaten sind Straftaten, die in der Zielrichtung gegen Personen begangen werden, denen der Täter (aus intoleranter Haltung heraus) aufgrund ihrer Nationalität, Volkszugehörigkeit, Rasse, Hautfarbe, Religion, Weltanschauung, Herkunft oder aufgrund ihres äußeren Erscheinungsbildes ein Bleibe- oder Aufenthaltsrecht in seiner Wohnumgebung oder in der gesamten Bunderepublik bestreitet. Es handelt sich insbesondere um Straftaten gegen Asylbewerber und sonstige Ausländer oder Deutsche, die aufgrund ihres äußeren Erscheinungsbildes für Ausländer gehalten werden und/oder Straftaten gegen deren Besitz sowie Objekte und Einrichtungen, die damit in Zusammenhang stehen".

[3] We additionally calculated Spearman's rank correlations for the correlations of the predictors and the prevalence of hate crimes. This is because Spearman's rank correlations do not rely on any assumption regarding the distribution of data and are thus robust against extreme peaks, whereas Pearson's correlations may be affected by outliers that may be present in our population data. We found no substantial differences between Pearson's and Spearman's correlations in our data which speaks against biases due to outliers.

[4] We additionally tested for potential interactions between proportion of foreigners and proportion of refugees, as well as for interactions between both proportion variables and any of the control variables on the prevalence of hate crimes. None of them were significant.

[5] Numbers in parentheses refer to the corresponding variables listed in Table 1.

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Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, Bivariate Correlations, and Beta Coefficients from a Simultaneous Regression to Predict Xenophobic Hate Crimes (*N *= 402 Districts)*

			Correlations										Regression β
	M	SD	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	
1. east (0) vs. west (1)	-	-	.27**	-.53**	.27**	-.61**	.14**	.07	-.24**	.50**	.19**	-.60**	-.42**
2. GNP in 1,000 € (2014)	33.47	14.60		-.09	.26**	-.45**	.51**	.33**	.35**	.61**	.40**	-.02	.10
3. % unemployment (2014)	6.28	2.89			-.20**	.44**	.36**	.14**	.72**	-.08	.29**	.54**	.13
4. in-out migration (2014)	6.22	4.21				-.47**	.24**	.13*	.10*	.44**	.15**	-.09	.08
5. age in district (2014)	44.38	1.87					-.38**	-.22**	.02	-.64**	-.17**	.37**	-.04
6. population density (2014)	520.12	682.29						.40**	.67**	.70**	.46**	.13*	.01
7. offences by refugees (2014)	.82	.72							.46**	.30**	.36**	.15**	.06
8. offences (2014)	61.99	25.83								.49**	.29**	.47**	.24**
9. % foreigners (2014)	7.65	4.72									.36**	-.23**	-.17*
10. % refugees (2016)	1.90	.90										.09	.01
11. hate crimes (2015)	10.20	8.56											R^2=.49

Notes: standardized results; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$, two-tailed. Ad 2.: Gross national product in 1,000 Euros in district; ad 4.: The number of people immigrating into the district minus the number of people emigrating/1,000 inhabitants; ad 6.: population density per square kilometer; ad 7. and 8.: without transgressions against the immigration law; ad 7., 8., 11.: per 100,000 inhabitants