

# Anti-immigrant attitudes in context: The role of rhetoric, religion and political representation

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PhD Thesis 2014

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ISBN:978-91-7601-052-5  
ISSN:1104-2508  
Cover by Alexandra Boman  
Elektronik version available at <http://umu.diva-portal.org/>  
Printed by: Print & Media, Umeå, Sweden 2014

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## List of original papers in the thesis

- I. Bohman, Andrea. 2011. Articulated antipathies: Political influence on anti-immigrant attitudes. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 52(6): 457-477.
- II. Bohman, Andrea. It's who you know. Political influence on anti-immigrant attitudes and the moderating role of intergroup contact.
- III. Bohman, Andrea and Hjerm, Mikael. In the wake of extreme right electoral success: A cross-country comparative study of anti-immigration attitudes over time.
- IV. Bohman, Andrea and Hjerm, Mikael. 2013. How the religious context affects the relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards immigration. *Ethnic and Racial studies*, DOI:10.1080/01419870.2012.748210.

# Abstract

**Background** This thesis directs attention to how attitudes towards immigrants evolve under different contextual circumstances. Unlike previous research that primarily focuses on contextual factors related to the availability of material resources, the included studies explore the influence of less tangible aspects of our surroundings, brought together under the term immaterial contexts. Three kinds of immaterial contexts are in focus: political representatives' use of nationalistic rhetoric, the parliamentary presence of the extreme right, and the religious context. The studies examine the direct effects of these contexts, but also how individuals' beliefs, loyalties, and experiences interact with the contextual factors to shape peoples' attitudes.

**Methods** The thesis takes a comparative approach where countries serve as the main contextual unit. Data on attitudes and other individual features are gathered from the European Social Survey 2002-2012. To be able to analyze these data in the same model as used for country-level data, the thesis applies multi-level models.

**Results** The findings support a theoretical expectation that immaterial contexts influence anti-immigrant attitudes. How people perceive immigrants and immigration can be traced to political and religious aspects of their surroundings. Also, it is found that individuals are not passive recipients of contextual influences as their reactions depend on their preferences and experiences. While political representatives influence anti-immigrant attitudes, these effects are strongly conditional both on features of the representatives themselves, and on characteristics and experiences of individuals. For example, individuals respond to political rhetoric by traditional political parties but are not influenced by the same kind of message if conveyed by a party belonging to the extreme right.

**Conclusion** The thesis is an attempt to widen the very notion of contexts in empirical research, and as such, it is a contribution to the literature on anti-immigrant attitudes. It shows that anti-immigrant attitudes depend not only on material circumstances, but also on immaterial circumstances tied to the political and religious arena. Further, the thesis demonstrates how combining the theoretical perspectives of group threat theory and framing theory implies greater possibilities to conceive of the link between contexts and attitudes, as well as improved theoretical tools to understand when and why such effects do not occur. It signals that research on immaterial contexts is necessary to further advance the comparative scholarship on anti-immigrant attitudes and reach a deeper understanding of how such attitudes emerge and evolve.



# Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped, supported and inspired me during the process of writing this thesis. First and foremost, I want to thank Mikael Hjern, for knowing exactly what it means to be a supportive advisor. During this process, you have delivered criticism when I could handle it and encouraged when needed. Your feedback is always spot-on and your competence, guidance and trust have been crucial for the completion of the thesis. I also owe a lot of gratitude to Annette Schnabel. As the other half of a dynamic duo you came with ideas that complicated things - in the best possible way! Your enthusiasm and challenging questions are very much appreciated.

Further, there are many people who have taken their time to read my work at different stages in the process. Pieter Bevelander, Maria Oskarson, Rickard Danell and Jonas Edlund, your comments and suggestions have been most helpful. I also want to thank the colleagues at the department of sociology for great support and many laughs. I especially want to thank my fellow PhD-students for the security that comes from knowing that we have each other's back, Barbro Hedlund, Gunilla Renström and Helene Risberg for your help with practical and administrative issues, Maureen A. Eger for inspiring discussions, Ida Öun for good advice and Annica Brännlund for sharing the experience of finalizing this kind of project. Thank you also to Arvid Lindh for being a firm friend I could trust in during recurrent therapy sessions throughout the PhD period.

Finally, I want to thank my friends for encouraging words and for looking good in hats, and my family for your love and continuous support. A special thanks to my sister Alexandra for taking on the challenge of illustrating "immaterial contexts", and for doing so with such precision. And Svante, thank you for always being there, for distracting, provoking, inspiring and supporting, and for running with me from the alpha ghosts. It means a lot to me.

*Umeå, April 2014  
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# Introduction

The migration landscape of Europe changed considerably during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Once a war-torn continent characterized by emigration and economic strain, Europe is now a major immigrant destination. How native Europeans react and respond to newcomers in society has, following this development, emerged as an important area of research. Through identifying the sources of anti-immigrant attitudes, scholars seek to understand why the idea of immigration evokes strong negative reactions in some individuals but not in others. How is it that some people perceive immigrant presence as largely unproblematic, while others oppose immigration and express dislike towards the immigrants already present?

Much early research sought the sources of anti-immigrant attitudes in individual characteristics and experiences (Allport 1958; Adorno 1950). Because of these studies, relatively much is known today about the individual characteristics, perceptions, and positions that predict negative dispositions towards immigrants. They teach us, for example, that people are more likely to be prejudiced if they are in a vulnerable position in the labor market (Scheve & Schlaugther 2001), if they identify with a conservative ideology (Espenshade & Hempstead 1996), if they have little education (Wagner & Zick 1995), or if they lack experiences of contact with immigrants (Pettigrew 1997). However, most early analyses were carried out in one particular place, at one particular point in time. As such, they were effective in identifying individual explanations, but could not say much about how and why attitudes diverge between different contexts. Indeed, individual characteristics provide only part of the story. This became clear when the analyses were eventually broadened to cover and compare attitudes in several different contexts. The finding that people are more or less likely to hold anti-immigrant attitudes depending on where they live triggered a growing interest in contextual explanations (see for example Quillian 1995; Meuleman et al. 2009; Hjerm 2009; Kunovich 2004).

While contextual studies since then have brought valuable knowledge about the sources of anti-immigrant attitudes, the focus has mainly been on contextual factors related to the availability of material resources. Both availability of scarce resources (for example available jobs) and competition for them have been explored as explanations as to why attitudes differ between different contexts. Studies confirm that anti-immigrant attitudes are stronger in settings where the economy is constrained, mainly in countries with low levels of GDP (Coenders et al. 2008; Semyonov et al.

2008), but also that the size of the immigrant population has some bearing on such attitudes (Quillian 1995; Semyonov et al. 2006).

Meanwhile, many recent developments in Europe concern other spheres of society besides the strictly material. For example, immigration from Muslim countries to Christian countries in Europe potentially evokes conflicts over things other than material resources. This is suggested by how the content and boundaries of national identity, including the role of religion, have increasingly become subject to public debate. Also, the electoral upsurge for the extreme right has brought changes to the political landscape. Following the electoral breakthrough of the Front National in France in the 1980s, the political scene in Europe opened up for extreme right parties. With political programs to reduce immigration and to protect, what they identify as, a national culture from outside threats, extreme right parties have influenced the political climate and the policies pursued in several European countries (Alonso & da Fonseca 2012; van Spanje 2010). These new circumstances highlight that there are other aspects of our surroundings, apart from the strictly material, that might have bearing on people's attitudes, but whose consequences we know little about. Although there are theories emphasizing the role of political, religious and historical contexts, previous research has largely overlooked such immaterial circumstances. The few studies that have looked beyond the strictly material suggest that less tangible contextual circumstances are important to peoples' attitudes. For example, a study by Dixon (2005) finds that the historical context and a culturally rooted racial hierarchy influence how the white majority in the US evaluates the presence of African Americans. In general however, there is limited knowledge of how prejudice in general, and anti-immigrant attitudes in particular, evolve under different immaterial circumstances.

The overall aim of this thesis is to examine the relationship between different immaterial contexts and anti-immigrant attitudes. The term immaterial contexts refers to circumstances that are not primarily related to competition over material resources. Instead, they capture less tangible aspects of our surroundings that are predicted by theory to influence attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. The studies focus on three different immaterial contexts: political representatives' use of nationalistic rhetoric, the parliamentary presence of the extreme right, and the religious context. Another important question in the thesis is how the effects of these contexts vary with individual characteristics. Thus, the interest goes beyond the direct effects of immaterial contexts to also explore how individuals' beliefs, loyalties, and experiences interact with the contextual factors to produce an attitudinal outcome.

The introduction is followed by a discussion of the theoretical approach. It provides a review of the main theoretical perspectives applied in the studies, and outlines the theoretical grounds for expecting that immaterial contexts matter for attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, and that certain individual characteristics moderate such relationships. The methods section outlines the advantages of the comparative approach and introduces the methodological tools used to handle clustered and hierarchically structured data. The way to measure attitudes towards immigrants and immigration is discussed in further detail, as are the main indicators of immaterial contexts. This is followed by a summary of the four studies in the thesis. The concluding section presents a more detailed discussion of this thesis' contribution to the research field.

## **Theoretical approach**

Throughout the thesis, two main theories are applied to understand the relationship between anti-immigrant attitudes and immaterial contexts. Group threat theory is a theory to explain negative attitudes towards out-groups, and sets the general framework for the studies. It provides the theoretical tools to understand the role of contextual circumstances and identify immaterial contexts important to anti-immigrant attitudes. Framing theory is applied to better conceive of the mechanism linking immaterial contexts to anti-immigrant attitudes, as well as to identify factors that may alter the contextual influence on peoples' attitudes. The following sections describe the two theories in more detail including how they are used together.

### **Group threat theory**

Group threat theory (Blumer 1958) sees anti-immigrant attitudes as a product of group competition and experiences of threat. People identify with groups in society whose interests they will seek to protect in competition with other groups. If members of a group experience that there are other groups who threaten their position and claim the same resources, they will develop negative attitudes towards the groups in question (cf. Sherif 1967). In this sense, group threat theory expects hostility towards immigrants to follow from perceptions that they threaten the native population, for example by taking jobs, challenging cultural values, or undermining the national system of welfare benefits.

The understanding of out-group attitudes as a group-level phenomenon first gained popularity in the 1950s. Before that, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination were primarily seen as rooted in individuals, as expressions

of personal frustration and dysfunctional personalities (Adorno 1950). With the advent of group threat theory, the focus was directed at the social fundamentals of such reactions. Blumer (1958) advocated that prejudice first and foremost exists as a sense of group position. Since such attitudes presuppose collective processes of group formation, they must be approached as a matter of relationships between groups, and not between individuals.

The basic idea in group threat theory is that individuals identify with a group, form images of other groups, and develop an understanding of the relationship between them – including perceptions of what societal resources the different groups are entitled to. When these processes are combined with experiences of threat, that is, the sense that other groups are claiming what people perceive to rightfully belong to their own group, this generates prejudicial attitudes (Blumer 1958). Competition breeds threat in the sense that one group's gain is believed to be another group's loss. Thus, when people perceive that members of another group are challenging the position or privileges of their own group, it will generate a defensive reaction expressed in increased hostility towards the out-group (Meuleman et al. 2009). An important part of the theory is how the threat is "collective" in the sense that people can feel threatened based on their identification with a group, regardless of their personal situation and experiences. Prejudice, in this sense, is primarily a response to experiences that another group threatens one's own group as a whole, not that it threatens individual group members (Bobo 1983).

### ***The groups in group threat theory***

Group threat theory was originally developed to understand whites' attitudes towards the African American minority in the US. Although the theory is formulated in general terms, this entails specific circumstances that in many ways differ from the ones surrounding the relationship between immigrants and native populations in contemporary Europe. Besides the particular historic context of racial laws and exploitation, the original focus on a racial majority/minority relationship implies groups that are relatively coherent and stable. For example, the relative share of whites and African Americans in the US population is likely to remain more or less the same over time, which is different from the relationship between native populations and immigrants. In the latter case, at least in theory, the immigrants can continuously increase their share of the population through further immigration. Moreover, in contrast to national minorities/majorities, immigrant status is not automatically transferred from one generation to the next. That group membership in this sense exhibits less continuity across generations implies greater heterogeneity within the groups "immigrants"

and “natives,” but also that the boundaries between them are less clear-cut than the boundaries between the groups in the context where the theory was originally formulated.

Despite these differences, group threat theory is extensively applied in research that seeks to understand reactions to immigrants and immigration (McLaren 2003; Scheepers et al. 2002; Meuleman et al. 2009; Hjerm & Nagayoshi 2011). Since Quillian (1995) demonstrated that attitudes towards immigrants, just like racial prejudice, can be traced to threats perceived by the dominant group, group threat theory has gained importance in studies of attitudes towards immigrants. That the experience of threat has emerged as a strong and consistent explanation for anti-immigrant attitudes (Ceobanu & Escandell 2010) suggests that the categories “immigrants” and “native population,” despite their internal heterogeneity, have analytical validity. Although there is no clear agreement over what it implies to be, for instance, Polish or Portuguese, most people seem to acknowledge that these groups exist and that there are boundaries to their memberships. Theories on nationalism teach us that each national in-group is held together as an *imagined community* (Anderson 2006) or a *socially constructed sameness* (Kunovich 2009, p. 574) that also necessitates boundaries towards outsiders. As Jones and Smith (2001) put it: “By definition, national communities consist of those who are included but surrounded (literally or metaphorically) by those who are excluded” (p. 45). Although immigrants in European countries constitute a highly heterogeneous category that includes people of varied origins, experiences, and cultures, they are brought together by the fact that they are not natives. As such, they constitute an important reference category to national in-groups in Europe, which makes it reasonable to talk about attitudes towards immigrants despite their internal heterogeneity.

### ***Putting the threat in context***

Experiences of threat may concern different aspects of life and different fundaments of group status. Two broad categories can be distinguished in the literature: economic threats (also described as tangible or material threats) and cultural threats (also described as symbolic or immaterial threats). The economic threats concern, for example, access to employment, housing, and welfare benefits, whereas cultural threats refer to perceptions that other groups are gradually undermining strongly held values, national symbols, or cultural traits. Although previous research has taken less interest in challenges to immaterial resources, recent studies suggest that these are as important as economic threats. Some even find that native Europeans’ resentment towards immigrants draws more on concerns over cultural

values and ideas of national identity than on issues of employment and economic status (McLaren 2003; Sides & Citrin 2007).

Regardless of whether the threat is primarily economic or cultural, it is contingent on the context in which the inter-group relations play out. Group threat theory sees the surrounding conditions as central to the emergence of anti-immigrant attitudes since contexts can function to either intensify or reduce feelings of threat, and hence, either increase or decrease anti-immigrant sentiments. For example, rising unemployment levels and economic recession imply tougher competition between immigrants and the native population. In such a context, anti-immigrant attitudes tend to increase as natives perceive an intensified threat to their economic well-being. While early studies concentrated on situations where there is a “real” conflict of interest (Bobo 1983), later applications stress that perceived conflicts of interest also have a bearing on people’s attitudes (Fetzer 2000). In this way, the context need not imply a threat in the objective sense, but it is enough if people in the native population perceive that immigrants are claiming their resources and threatening their position.

The context in group threat theory does not only concern material circumstances, even though this is what has primarily been tested in empirical research (see for example Quillian 1995; Scheepers et al. 2002; Schlueter & Wagner 2008). The theory also highlights how contexts are characterized by less tangible “symbolic” elements and how such immaterial circumstances can influence anti-immigrant attitudes (Blumer 1958; Dixon 2005; Hopkins 2010). This includes, for example, the role of religion in society, particular historical circumstances, and different kinds of political discourse.

Immaterial contexts, just like material contexts, may affect anti-immigrant attitudes through raised levels of threat – whether the threat is economic or cultural, based on real circumstances or mainly perceived. Group threat theory assumes that a large immigrant population will translate into a situation where the native population experiences high degrees of threat (Blalock 1957). Economic threats concern all immigrant groups that claim the same kinds of material resources as the native population. Cultural threats, on the other hand, are primarily expected in cases where immigrants display different cultural traits and traditions from those of the native population. Since it is difficult for individuals to accurately assess the size of the immigrant population, they need to somehow receive information about the extent of their presence, but they also need some guidance with regard to how their presence should be interpreted (cf. Hopkins 2010). As argued by Bobo (1999), threats are basically “a product of socially constructed

meaning” where the “...degree of correspondence with underlying objective conditions is a matter to be assessed rather than assumed” (p. 458). Although previous research shows that actual conditions do matter, it still requires that people – in one way or another – are made aware of these conditions. Taken together, this suggests that factors influencing how people perceive and understand their surroundings are crucial to experiences of threat.

What goes on in the political arena can affect the levels of threat by influencing the perceived size of the immigrant population. For example, if political representatives devote much time to issues of immigration and immigrant presence in their official political rhetoric, this entails a kind of priming that can generate higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes since it signals that immigration is a large-scale phenomenon. Regardless of whether the representatives express themselves in positive or negative terms, the attention as such can in this sense increase the perceived competition. If the political rhetoric simultaneously involves portrayals of immigrants as a threat, the levels of anti-immigrant attitudes are even more likely to rise. Hence, immaterial contexts can influence people’s attitudes both by conveying images of immigrants as a threat and by increasing the visibility of immigrants in society.

Immaterial contexts may also influence anti-immigrant attitudes by consolidating groups and group differences. Clear and distinct boundaries between different groups are central components in a group threat perspective on attitudes towards immigrants (Bobo & Hutchings 1996; Blumer 1958). Experiences of threat are more likely when there are limited grounds for common identification, and perceptions that the other group is fundamentally different. This implies that immaterial contexts with pronounced group differences and high barriers (actual and perceived) between immigrants and natives are likely to generate higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes. Greater resentment can, for example, be expected in contexts where the principles for inclusion in the national community are based on attributes that are not directly accessible to people coming from outside (cf. Weldon 2006; Wright 2011). If someone, in order to be counted as, for example, Swedish, Czech, or Irish, needs to be of a certain origin, have a certain skin color, or certain religious beliefs, outsiders are easier to identify. By extension, the characteristics used to separate nationals from non-nationals are important in identifying who constitutes a threat. If, for example, national unity is largely based on shared religious beliefs, this implies that immigrants who do not share those beliefs are more likely to be considered a threat.

### ***The interplay between attitudes and context***

The focus of this thesis is on how immaterial contexts influence anti-immigrant attitudes. However, attitudes are not only shaped by certain conditions, they are in many cases also part of the processes that shape and reshape these conditions. Unfortunately, none of the original writings in the group threat tradition provides an elaborate discussion of the causal flows running between attitudes and their context. While they do not deny that contexts can be shaped by attitudes, they provide no clues to how this occurs. In a later development of the theory, Esses et al. (2008) formulate a model that better accounts for the circular nature of the attitudes-context relationship. The model, which is labeled *The unified instrumental model of group conflict* (see also Esses et al. 2010), posits that individuals who experience threat often seek to reduce the competition, for example by discrediting the competing group in conversations with others or by denying out-group members access to central arenas. The strategies to reduce competition fall into three broad categories. First, in-group members resort to out-group derogation. They actively take part in discussions and voice their negative attitudes to convince others that the other group is not deserving with regard to the resources at stake. Second, they seek to reduce the competitiveness of the out-group by discrimination and/or political action. Third, they avoid contact with out-group members, if not to reduce the actual competition, then at least to reduce the saliency of the competition in their everyday lives. The model highlights how these different strategies can feed back into the contextual circumstances that triggered the threat in the first place. Voting in favor of restricting the rights of the feared group may indeed reduce their competitive strength. For example, in terms of real threats, immigrants will be less threatening if stricter immigration policies keep their numbers down, if less resources are put on integration programs and if restrictions are imposed on cultural and religious practices. However, voting in favor of such restrictions may also add to a hostile political climate that in the long term can increase rather than reduce inter-group tensions (cf. Hopkins 2010). Moreover, a strategy of out-group avoidance is likely to accelerate residential segregation. As a result, people's chances to form friendships and develop other kinds of close intergroup contacts that have been shown to reduce negative attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp 2011) are seriously hampered. Instead, contacts generally remain at a superficial and brief level, where they are more likely to trigger negative out-group attitudes (Oliver & Wong 2003).

The interplay between attitudes and contexts is perhaps best illustrated with reference to the political context. In representative democracies, citizens' preferences are important both as "system outputs" and as "system inputs" (Mettler & Soss 2004). What political representatives convey in their

rhetoric, and in the policies they enact, will impact the form and content of future politics via attitudes and capacities of the mass public, in processes generally referred to as “policy feedbacks” (Soss & Schram 2007; Campbell 2012). As for strategies to reduce intergroup competition, individuals may respond to a threatening political climate by voting for the party they believe will be most effective in reducing the competitive ability of the out-group. Indeed, research shows that natives who feel threatened by and dislike immigrants are markedly more likely to vote for parties with an anti-immigrant agenda, compared to those who do not feel threatened by immigrants (Van der Brug et al. 2000; Lubbers et al. 2002). In this way, their attitudes feed back into the political context by strengthening the position of the extreme right, with potential consequences for future policy as well as attitudinal outcomes. Meanwhile, the thermostatic model of opinion and policy (Soroka & Wlezien 2004; 2005), suggests that it is important that political parties do not go too far in their attempts to lead public opinion. If, for example, their rhetoric turns too extreme, people might react and reward less extreme alternatives, which brings new changes to the political climate. Thus, political parties and the public are mutually responding to each other in a “thermostatic” way (Wlezien 1995).

### ***Diverging effects***

It follows from group threat theory and the understanding of prejudice as a group-level phenomenon, that anti-immigrant attitudes can rise even if there is no direct threat to the individual. The main source of such antipathies is the perception that immigrants threaten the interests of the native population as a whole, not that they threaten the position of particular individuals (Bobo 1983). Put differently, there need not be an immediate risk that I will lose my job, or for that matter that I will reconsider my cultural values. Instead, it is enough if I perceive that my group is losing ground in these arenas. Meanwhile, the position of the individual is not unimportant in group threat theory. The fact that people can be more or less personally affected by, or personally concerned with, events that unfold around them implies that they often diverge in their reactions to contextual circumstances (Scheepers et al. 2002; McLaren 2003, 2001). Thus, contexts can have different effects depending on individual characteristics and experiences. For example, if a country enters a recession, anti-immigrant sentiments are more likely to rise among people who hold insecure labor market positions than among people with secure positions. The fact that the former category, in addition to their vulnerable position, also compete more with immigrants for jobs makes them more likely to react to economic downturns by turning against immigrants. In terms of immaterial contexts, the same principle suggests that the effect of a hostile political climate will vary with individuals’ political interest, and the effect of different kinds of national identities will

vary with how closely individuals identify with the nation state. Still, group threat theory provides no elaborate discussion on when and why these variations can be expected. It does not describe the individual characteristics that are likely to moderate the effects of different immaterial contexts, or for that matter, how such moderating influences come about.

### ***The mechanism?***

As discussed in the previous section, there is a theoretical vagueness in group threat theory regarding how contextual influences are moderated by individual characteristics. This, in turn, is closely related to how the theory is missing a proper discussion on the mechanisms behind the relationship between attitudes and immaterial contexts. When Blumer (1958) describes the processes leading to prejudicial attitudes, he emphasizes the importance of circumstances that are “immaterial” in character. He claims that the historical, social, and political setting are all influential with regard to the formation of prejudicial attitudes. Unfortunately, neither Blumer nor other group threat theorists offer elaborate explanations concerning how these kinds of contexts influence people’s attitudes. As far as realistic threats are concerned, competition caused by out-group presence is assumed to be directly observable, at least in smaller geographical areas such as municipalities or cities (Hjerm 2009; Oliver & Wong 2003). In such cases, people can assess the degree of threat based on their own experiences with the other group. A precondition, however, is that they perceive that there is “another group” and not just other individuals, and that this is a group to be wary of in competition over scarce resources. While Blumer (1958) describes such perceptions as shaped in historical, political, and social processes, he again does not specify how these influences occur. In a larger context, group threat theory is not clear about how individual group members become aware of different kinds of realistic threats or, for that matter, about how perceived threats are shaped by contextual circumstances. Due to the limited attention paid to these links, it is sometimes difficult to formulate precise expectations about reactions to immigrant presence (see for example Wagner et al. 2006). Not only do we know that perceptions of threat do not necessarily reflect real circumstances, there are also studies showing that a large immigrant population in fact may facilitate tolerance and solidarity rather than raise feelings of threat (Schlueter & Wagner, 2008). This suggests that we need to know more about what determines how native populations interpret immigrant presence. To address these limitations in group threat theory, and better conceive of the actual mechanisms linking immaterial contexts to anti-immigrant attitudes, this thesis combines group threat theory with framing theory. The next section introduces framing theory and how it is applied in the thesis.

## **Framing theory**

Framing theory highlights how political representatives offer interpretative models that provide meaning and help individuals make sense of their surroundings (Chong & Druckman 2007a). It suggests that, although natives are aware of the immigration to their country, it is not obvious how they will interpret the development. Different individuals will interpret it differently and draw different conclusions, largely because they will use different frames of thought to evaluate the phenomenon. Framing theory builds on Goffman's seminal work *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974). The book outlines "frames of thought" as models of interpretation that organize and structure people's experiences – as ways of making sense of the situation. Since its publication, frames and framing have developed into important themes in several scholarly traditions, for example in social movement studies (Benford & Snow 2000), communication studies (Borah 2011) and policy studies (Nelson & Kinder 1996). The main idea in framing theory is that frames of thought serve as guiding principles, suggesting how issues and occurrences should be thought about. As such, they are important to people when they evaluate and form opinions about what they encounter in their daily lives (Chong & Druckman 2007a). Immigration can, for example, be evaluated against the backdrop of a frame of international solidarity, a national security frame, or an economic frame stressing the economic gains or costs of immigration. What kind of frame takes precedence depends on factors such as ideological beliefs, personal experiences, political influence, or a combination of these, and will have consequences for how the individual comes to view immigration.

Much literature in the framing tradition centers on framing effects. Framing effects refer to processes where political actors influence individuals' frames of thought (Druckman 2001a). Knowing that frames are important in the formation of attitudes, political elites promote definitions and interpretations that benefit their own purposes. They present selective views on problems at hand, and associate those with certain values and particular effects to influence the frames of thought that people draw on when they evaluate a particular phenomenon. This strategy is generally labelled political framing. It goes beyond single arguments or issue positions in the sense that it is not primarily to convince and persuade, but to provide meaning and suggest how to understand issues and occurrences (Nelson & Kinder 1996). Framing effects can also occur through making certain attitudes legitimate, something that may be particularly relevant when considering anti-immigrant attitudes. The use of particular political frames may push stigmatized positions closer to a "mainstream view," and thereby reduce the risks of social sanctions. As incoherent beliefs tie in with more consistent frames and belief systems, the increased legitimization implies

that individuals become more prone to expressing their views in conversations with others (Rydgren 2003). Given the importance of interpersonal discussion for the development of public opinion (Walsh 2003), such ideas are then likely to spread further in society, in a process Hopkins (2011) refers to as the “sociological role” of political frames.

In terms of diverging effects of immaterial contexts, there are several recent writings in the framing tradition that seek to establish under what conditions framing is effective and under what conditions it is not (Matthes & Schemer 2012; Lecheler et al. 2009). Research shows that framing effects depend on characteristics of the individual exposed to the message (Nelson et al. 1997; Shen & Edwards 2005), on contextual circumstances (Chong & Druckman 2007b, 2013), and on the correspondence between characteristics of the elites framing an issue and the target population. Important for this thesis is how framing theory suggests that people only listen if they consider the framing part a legitimate actor. The one doing the framing, for example a political party or a politician, must be perceived as credible, in the sense of being knowledgeable and honest (Druckman 2001b); otherwise the conveyed frames are unlikely to influence people’s attitudes. Meanwhile, the question of who is legitimate is largely a matter of whom you ask. In a context of competing frames, people are more likely to adhere to frames conveyed by political elites that share their own ideological position (Zaller 1992). Thus, to understand when framing effects take place and when they do not, one also needs to consider how people relate to the elites doing the framing as well as acknowledge that ideological position and party loyalty often serve as guiding principles. Further, framing theory suggests that access to alternative frames – for example, via other political actors or via interpersonal contacts – can impact the influence of political framing (Hansen 2007; Chong & Druckman 2013). Individuals who engage in conversations that bring alternative information to the table are less likely to be influenced by political framing, that is, if the conversations have stimulated the development of predispositions that are at odds with the conveyed political message (Druckman & Nelson 2003). Just as ideological positions can be related to strong predispositions, access to alternative frames can lead to stable beliefs that are not easily altered by political framing.

In this thesis, theorizing on moderators of framing effects is useful in identifying factors that can alter the relationship between immaterial contexts and anti-immigrant attitudes. While group threat theory offers the theoretical tools to understand how anti-immigrant attitudes evolve in different contextual settings, framing theory provides the framework to better understand the actual processes where these contextual effects occur,

but also to understand how individuals may be more or less susceptible to such influences.

### **The religious and political context**

When considering immaterial contexts, it is possible to imagine a broad range of circumstances that may matter in regard to attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. For example, a closed national identity (that is, a national identity largely based on non-achievable factors such as shared ancestry or shared history) is likely to function in a more exclusionary way in relation to outsiders than a more open national identity since it implies more rigid groups and group differences. Institutional features can further affect attitudes both via levels of threat and consolidation of groups as in many respects they set the preconditions for group relations in society. Also, a hostile media climate that frames immigrants in a negative way and a history of strained relations and exploitation are other examples of immaterial contexts that are likely to increase anti-immigrant attitudes.

This thesis approaches immaterial circumstances primarily in the form of political contexts. It explores anti-immigrant attitudes in the context of political representatives' use of particular political frames and the parliamentary presence of the extreme right. Political actors have a prominent role in Blumer's (1958) account of the processes leading to the formation of negative attitudes towards other groups. Since political representatives have the public's attention and often a reputation of "standing, prestige, authority and power" (p. 6), they exercise a particularly strong influence in the interactions where out-group attitudes take form. According to the politicized places hypothesis (Hopkins 2010), political actors guide people in how to interpret developments in their surroundings. What conclusions natives draw from, for example, a sudden influx of immigrants in their local environment depends on how this influx is portrayed in broader rhetorical frames. Despite strong theoretical arguments linking attitudes to their political context, political circumstances' effects on anti-immigrant attitudes have traditionally attracted limited attention in comparative research on anti-immigrant attitudes. In the last couple of years, however, scholarly interest in the role of political factors has increased. Different studies indicate that political circumstances tied to the institutional make-up of countries (Weldon 2006), adopted policies (Hjerm 2007), and electoral outcomes for particular groups of parties (Semyonov et al. 2006) matter when it comes to anti-immigrant attitudes, but as Ceobanu and Escandell (2010) underscore, further research in this area is needed if we are to reach a better understanding of how anti-immigrant attitudes emerge and change.

In the final study in this thesis, the focus is widened to also examine the effects of another kind of immaterial context, namely the religious context. In previous studies of prejudice, religion is primarily approached as an individual feature. Depending on its character, religiosity at the individual level is found to either make or unmake prejudicial attitudes (Allport 1958; Donahue 1985; Hall, Matz & Wood 2010). However, religious belief and practice are also clearly collective and an important basis for group identification. As acknowledged already by Durkheim (2001), religion is an important component in the creation and sustainment of social cohesion. The religious context can refer to different aspects of religion's role in society, including state support and how different religious groups are positioned in relation to each other. From a group threat perspective, such factors may significantly influence the level of religious threat, in particular in countries where immigrants to a large extent adhere to religious traditions different from those of the native population. Despite this, there is a lack of research examining the impact of religious contextual factors on attitudes towards immigrants and immigration among the religious. An important exception is Scheepers et al. (2002), who study the relationship between religiosity and prejudice in Europe, finding that religious heterogeneity increases general prejudice. In general, however, very little is known about what the religious context implies in relation to anti-immigrant attitudes.

## **Methods and data**

### **Methods**

In this thesis, I use a comparative approach to study how immaterial features of countries influence anti-immigrant attitudes. The analyzed countries vary with regard to the key contextual features in the studies: the societal role of religion, the kind of political framing, and the political representation of the extreme right, which makes the comparative approach fruitful for understanding how anti-immigrant attitudes evolve under different immaterial circumstances. Moreover, immaterial circumstances are far from static, and some contextual features can change significantly in a relatively short period of time. This allows for comparisons, not only between countries but also between different time points, which in turn enables the study of how immaterial contexts impact the development of anti-immigrant attitudes over time.

The relationship between individuals and their context can be thought of as a hierarchical system where individuals are embedded or “nested” within different higher-level units, for example, within families, organizations, or different geographic divisions. Since individuals who belong to the same unit

often have similar experiences and share features such as a common history, they tend to be more like each other than like individuals from different units. While acknowledging that there are other units that are potentially relevant to the formation of individual attitudes towards immigrants, this thesis focuses on countries as the main contextual unit. The kinds of attitudes the studies set out to explain – attitudes towards immigrants and immigration – are based on notions of a national community and its boundaries. They touch upon questions such as: Who should be allowed to enter the country? And what are the implications of immigrant presence? Although immaterial circumstances simultaneously prevail at other levels – religious immigrant groups may, for example, be unevenly distributed between regions and the extreme right may be represented in local assemblies – the immaterial circumstances in focus are primarily linked to the country level. Immigration and integration policies are predominantly a concern for national parliaments. It is this arena, where laws are made and the debates take place, that attracts the most media attention. In addition, policies that regulate the relationship between the state and religious communities, and relationships between different religious communities, are national in character as they are generally adopted on a national level and apply to the entire country.

The clustered and hierarchically structured data require analytical tools that can incorporate information at both the individual and country levels, and that can control for the fact that individuals who live in the same country share a certain degree of attitudinal variance. Throughout the studies, these requirements are met through the application of multi-level models (Hox 2010; Steenbergen & Jones 2002). This methodological approach is useful in the study of research problems that concern the relationship between individuals and society, and is widely used in research on contextual determinants of anti-immigrant attitudes (Schleuter & Wagner 2008; Hello et al. 2002; McLaren 2003). It makes it possible to examine how particular immaterial circumstances relate to immigration and immigrant attitudes, while at the same time controlling for individual and contextual factors that are likely to interfere with the relationship of interest. It also enables the study of potential cross-level interactions – that is, the study of whether the effect of certain individual-level variables on anti-immigrant attitudes is moderated by the contextual circumstance or vice versa; and whether immaterial circumstances affect individuals' attitudes differently depending on their value on some other individual variable. To examine how particular immaterial contexts affect anti-immigrant attitudes over time, time is included as an additional higher-level unit in study 3. Individuals are then not only nested within countries but also in time within countries.

## **Attitudes towards immigrants and immigration**

In this thesis, I set out to explain attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. An attitude is generally understood as a tendency to evaluate a particular “attitude object” in terms of either positive or negative, good or bad (Eagly & Chaiken 1998; Ajzen 2001). The object in question may be a person, an idea, a policy, an event or some other phenomenon that functions as a stimulus in the sense that it stimulates a response in individuals. The focus on particular “objects” distinguishes attitudes from values, which are broader standards of how things ought to be, and their normative component distinguishes them from cognitive notions of how things are. The studies in the thesis take an interest in two “attitude objects”: immigration and immigrants. While they are related, there is a conceptual difference between attitudes towards immigration and attitudes towards immigrants. The former concerns a particular policy – whether and to what extent the country should accept further immigration – and the latter refers to evaluations of people who are already present in the country. Still, the two go together both in the sense that people who dislike immigrants often dislike immigration (and vice versa), and in the sense that the same theoretical models work to predict attitudes towards both “attitude objects” (cf. Ceobanu & Escandell 2010). Group threat theory, in particular, is a broad approach where the underlying assumption is that “... group threat relates to a general set of negative attitudes about minority groups, not that it relates to a specific set of beliefs” (Hjerm 2007, p. 1259). As such, it sets out to explain both attitudes towards out-groups and towards out-group related policies (see Wilson 2001, Bobo 1983, and Semyonov et al. 2006).

Being a “psychological tendency” or a “predisposition,” an attitude in itself is not directly observable. Instead, it is inferred from the way people respond to a particular object or “stimulus” (Rosenberg & Hovland 1960), commonly examined using survey questions. The extent to which individuals respond with favor or disfavor indicates their attitude towards the object in question. Thus, when the stimulus is “immigrants,” we expect those who hold anti-immigrant attitudes to respond with disfavor, for example by expressing negative feelings or by negatively evaluating immigrant presence.

Answering this thesis’ research questions does not only require survey data with indicators of attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, data must also be gathered in several countries with different immaterial circumstances. Fortunately, access to these kinds of data has improved in recent decades, and with it, the possibilities to measure and explain country variations in individual attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. This development, together with significant improvements in availability of data to describe countries, enables the comparative approach required to pursue

the aim of this thesis, that is, to examine how attitudes towards immigrants and immigration evolve under different immaterial contexts. The next sections introduce the main datasets and the indicators applied in the different studies.

### **Data on attitudes**

Data on attitudes towards immigrants/immigration as well as other individual characteristics are drawn from the European Social Survey (ESS). It is a comprehensive cross-sectional survey carried out every second year in up to 31 European countries. Each time, the questionnaire contains a core module of questions, as well as two or three rotating modules that are repeated with a few years' intervals. Indicators of attitudes towards immigration and immigrants are included in the core module, which implies that these data are available for all ESS rounds so far. This is made use of in study 4, where data from the first four rounds are compiled together to increase the number of countries, and in study 3, where data from all available rounds are used to model the relationship between extreme right parliamentary presence and anti-immigration attitudes during the period 2002-2012. The first study uses data from ESS round 2 (2004) as this best corresponds to the applied macro indicators, while study 2 uses data from the rotating module "Immigration," which is available for the first round of ESS (2002).

The research questions and the particular immaterial context examined in each study motivate their focus on either attitudes towards immigrants or attitudes towards immigration. Studies 1 and 2 examine anti-immigrant attitudes, operationalized by the following three questions in the ESS: 1) Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries? 2) Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries? 3) Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries? The focus on anti-immigrant attitudes is particularly important in the second study, where intergroup contact is introduced as a potential moderator of the contextual effect. This is because the consequences of contact are considered more theoretically relevant in relation to attitudes towards people than attitudes towards policy. Conversely, study 3 examines what the parliamentary presence of the extreme right has meant for immigration attitudes during the period 2002-2012. As extreme right mobilization in Europe largely centers around opposition towards immigration (Ivarsflaten 2008; Rydgren 2008), it is primarily people's attitudes towards immigration that are expected to change in response to their varying success. The following items from the ESS are used to measure attitudes towards

immigration: A) To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most [country] people to come and live here? B) How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people? C) How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe? In study 4, which examines how the religious context affects the relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards immigration, only two of these questions are used: B) How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people? C) How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe? The reason is that religious opposition is interesting primarily in regard to immigrant groups that diverge from the perceived social cohesion. Excluding attitudes towards immigration by people of the same race or ethnic group implies that the immigrants who are most likely to hold the same religious beliefs as the native population are taken out from the measurement. This generates a measurement that better captures attitudes towards immigration by people with religious beliefs other than those of the native population.

### **Data on political frames**

Indicators of immaterial contexts are gathered from several sources. One of the main contextual factors in this thesis is political frames. It is included in the analysis in three of the four studies. To capture political representatives' use of political frames, I use data from party manifestos, collected and coded within the framework of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). The possibilities of achieving a detailed measurement of actual political framing that is comparable across Europe and over time are rather limited. To answer the research questions in studies 1 to 3, therefore, I apply what the parties write in their manifestos as an indicator of broader party framing. Unlike statements made by individual representatives, manifestos are the result of negotiations between party members at an official party convention or congress (Klingemann et al., 2006). As members of the same political party, the participants are brought together by a common overarching goal and are therefore ready to commit to whatever is agreed upon (cf. Gilbert 1993, 2006). In this sense, the content of the manifestos serves as an indicator of the political issues and positions the party representatives will stress during the upcoming term. Therefore, manifesto data from CMP is widely used as measurements of policy positions and political articulation, with regard to both immigrant presence (Schmidt & Spies 2013; Hjerm & Schnabel 2012; Arzheimer & Carter 2006) and other political issues (Netjes & Binnema 2007; Svallfors et al. 2012).

Effects of political frames may be immediate, or it may take time before frames become strong enough to have an impact on people's attitudes. The CMP data are primarily useful in studying the influence of frames as they

contribute to a general political climate, which implies that it is long-term rather than immediate effects that are in focus in studies 1 and 2. Capturing immediate framing effects requires framing indicators from just before the attitudes are surveyed, but if this is to be comparable between countries, the time between the two points of measurement must be equally long in all studied countries. Given that European countries have elections in different years, with different intervals, it is not possible to achieve this with the available data.

The CMP data cover 56 categories that capture the parties' emphasis on different kinds of political issues. The theoretical underpinnings of the coding scheme are primarily drawn from saliency theory (Budge & Farlie 1983), where the basic idea is that party competition revolves around the saliency of different political issues. Each political party has certain policy areas that they "own," in the sense that they are perceived as particularly efficient and/or knowledgeable on those types of issues. To gain electoral success, the parties set out to increase the saliency of their own issues to convince voters that this is what they should consider when deciding whom to vote for. Meanwhile, the CMP datasets also provide opportunities to measure party positions, as a majority of the issue categories mark pro and con positions. This is important given how party competition also involves more confrontational aspects; in addition to selective issue emphasis, political parties also compete by taking different positions on the same issue (Laver 2001; Gemenis 2013). Most who study party competition today concur that saliency competition and position competition are two important aspects of party politics (Akkermann 2012; Green Pedersen 2007).

The fact that the CMP also incorporates pro and con positions enables the study of framing effects. It makes it possible to create a measurement that indicates the extent to which the party uses a particular kind of frame within a broader topic. The category most closely related to immigration and immigrant presence in the CMP dataset is "Positive references to the national way of life," which I use as an indicator of nationalistic framing. It marks appeals to patriotism and nationalism, support for established national ideas, and protection of the state from subversion. Although this category does not directly concern immigrant presence, it is relevant in regard to anti-immigrant attitudes as it marks the extent to which the political parties seek to differentiate the national in-group from those not defined as nationals. A con position is also categorized in the dataset, as negative references to the national way of life. However, while positive references imply attempts to consolidate national identity, negative references are more about regional autonomy and self-determination – visible, for example, in how regional and separatist parties stress this issue

more than others. As such, this category is less theoretically relevant in relation to attitudes towards immigrants and immigration.

An alternative to nationalistic frames is to use the CMP categories' positive or negative references to multiculturalism. Meanwhile, these categories are primarily focused on how to arrange the coexistence of different ethnic/language/religious groups within the nation state. While this issue may be relevant to immigrant presence in some countries, it is less relevant in countries with large or many different minority groups who are not immigrants but have a long history in the country. Nationalistic frames are more in line with this thesis' focus on attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, especially as previous research has identified immigrants as the typical negative reference category in such attempts to consolidate national identities in Europe (De Figueiredo & Elkins 2003).

Along with the actual message, the size of the political party also matters when considering its influence on people's attitudes. To not take party size into account implies an assumption that all parties have equal bearing on the political climate, regardless of whether the party is of marginal size or if it, in the election, manages to capture one-third of the seats in parliament. As large parties tend to attract more public attention, and have more people who regard them legitimate actors, I argue that this is not a reasonable assumption. How best to account for such differences in size, however, is not obvious, and different strategies are applied in the different studies. Both studies 1 and 2 take an interest in the consequences of political frames as they make up a general political climate, but while study 1 weights the framing measurement using each party's share of the total number of seats in parliament, study 2 uses their share of the votes in the last election. The advantage of using seats is that this directs the focus towards the parties that actually gain parliamentary representation and thus, a platform to convey their frames. The disadvantage is that this procedure in some contexts excludes political parties that, due to the electoral system, fail to win representation although they have considerable public support and are prominent actors in national debates. In this sense, using votes instead of seats generates a better indicator of the general political climate, in a way that is more comparable between countries. Thus, in the second study, the framing measurement is weighted based on votes instead of seats. Study 3, which examines the impact of extreme right parliamentary presence on attitudes towards immigration over time, also takes party size into consideration. The focus of this study, however, is not primarily on frames as they contribute to the general political climate, but on the implications of extreme right parliamentary presence for attitudes towards immigration.

Therefore, size is measured by the representational strength of the extreme right, calculated as the percentage of seats they hold in parliament.

## **Results: summary of the studies**

### ***Study I: Articulated antipathies: Political influence on anti-immigrant attitudes***

The first study explores the impact of immaterial circumstances associated with political framing. It examines how political articulation, understood as images and views conveyed by nationally elected political representatives, influences anti-immigrant attitudes in the native-born population. Three questions guide the analysis. The first asks how the general political climate in a country affects attitudes towards immigrants. The second addresses the possibility that people evaluate political messages differently depending on who the sender is. The third, and final, question asks whether characteristics of individual citizens affect how successful political parties are in influencing people's attitudes. The results show that political circumstances matter with respect to attitudes towards immigrants, but that these effects are less straightforward than group threat theory leads us to expect. While a hostile political climate indeed predicts higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes, the message is received differently depending on what kind of political party is behind the articulation. In particular, it seems to be traditional political parties that affect anti-immigrant attitudes. The same kind of political message conveyed by the extreme right has no visible effect on anti-immigrant attitudes, suggesting that legitimacy and credibility are important preconditions if political representatives are to succeed in influencing attitudes towards immigrants. The analyses further demonstrate that individuals' ideological position guides what political representatives they listen to. Parties increase anti-immigrant attitudes among individuals with similar ideological beliefs, particularly if the party is not traditionally associated with an anti-immigrant position. Articulation by the political left, a party group generally not associated with these kinds of issues, encourages left-leaning individuals to reassess their views and turn increasingly negative towards immigrants. However, the same kind of articulation by the political right has no additional effect on their electorate, potentially since these ideas are already in line with their voters' frames of thought. Even though the study does not explicitly use framing theory, the results clearly show that several of the moderating factors predicted by framing theory are relevant to political influences on anti-immigrant attitudes. The study demonstrates that the political arena, as a kind of immaterial context, is important to consider with regard to anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe.

***Study II: It's who you know. Political influence on anti-immigrant attitudes and the moderating role of intergroup contact***

The second study expands on the findings in study 1 to examine additional potential moderators of the relationship between political frames and anti-immigrant attitudes. More specifically, it explores whether the effect of political framing on anti-immigrant attitudes is different depending on personal experiences of intergroup contact. Given how contact decreases the social distance and provides access to alternative frames, I expect native-born individuals who know people with experiences of immigration to be less influenced when political representatives convey nationalistic frames. Two indicators of intergroup contact – immigrant friends and immigrant colleagues – are tested in the study to see whether they can counter the effect of nationalistic political framing. The analysis reveals a positive relationship between nationalistic frames and anti-immigrant attitudes that is moderated by experiences of intergroup contact. A hostile political climate generates higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes, but only among those with none or few intergroup contacts. This indicates that personal experiences of contact undermine nationalistic ideas conveyed by political representatives, or put differently, that extensive contact with immigrants can inoculate individuals against political influences. It is the case both with regard to friendships and contacts at the workplace, which is interesting given that people have far less influence as to who their colleagues are than who their friends are. In line with framing theory, intergroup contact seems to imply greater access to alternative frames, which in turn facilitates the development of strong predispositions at odds with the frames conveyed by political representatives. Taken together, the findings add to the understanding of the role of political contexts by further establishing the conditionality of political influences. They demonstrate that it is not only features related to the framing part or to the ideological orientation of the individual that matters, but that inter-personal interactions also affect how immaterial contexts influence anti-immigrant attitudes.

***Study III: In the wake of extreme right electoral success: A cross-country comparative study of anti-immigration attitudes over time***

*Co-written with Mikael Hjerm.*

The third study examines the relationship between political contextual factors and anti-immigration attitudes over time, concentrating on the role of one kind of political party: parties belonging to the extreme right. It analyzes the implications of changes tied to the political advancements of extreme right parties (ERPs) on anti-immigration attitudes during the

period 2002-2012. Drawing on insights from group threat theory and framing theory, this is done with a focus on three possible scenarios: people's attitudes about immigration have generally become more negative, opposition towards immigration has become more dependent on immigrants' ethnicity, and opposition towards immigration has become more polarized. Contrary to the expectations it is found that neither the presence per se, the representational strength, nor the nationalistic framing of the extreme right affect general opposition towards immigration over time. Nor do these aspects of extreme right representation predict a change in the character of anti-immigration attitudes or an increased polarization in such attitudes. Thus, the conclusion is that the ERPs' parliamentary presence at the national level, so far, has not driven anti-immigration attitudes in Europe. The results contribute to the knowledge of immaterial contexts' consequences for anti-immigration attitudes by demonstrating the limits of such influences. Although group threat theory clearly predicts that a threatening political context will generate more opposition towards immigration, it is found that extreme right parliamentary representation has no direct bearing on such attitudes. The incorporation of framing theory provides important clues as to why the political context in this case did not play out as expected, suggesting, for example, that most people still do not view ERPs as credible and legitimate sources.

***Study IV: How the religious context affects the relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards immigration***

*Co-written with Mikael Hjerm.*

The final study asks what role the religious context plays in regard to anti-immigration attitudes among religious individuals. In relation to the other studies in the thesis it broadens the perspective by exploring the impact of an immaterial context that is not primarily political. By studying the relationship between religion and anti-immigration attitudes in a comparative European perspective, it brings clarity to the role of religiosity under different religious contextual circumstances. The findings demonstrate that the religious context matters when it comes to religious opposition towards immigration. In Europe, there is a general pattern where religious individuals are less likely than non-religious individuals to oppose immigration, which is the reverse of the relationship that has been observed in previous research in the US. Meanwhile, there is also considerable heterogeneity between the studied countries, which is, at least partly, explained by differences in religious context. More specifically, it is explained by the degree of religious homogeneity, the state-religion relationship, and the dominant religious denomination. The study further

illustrates how group threat theory does not always posit clear predictions about the effects of certain immaterial circumstances. In particular, it does not suggest what should be expected if a particular circumstance simultaneously implies less competition and higher boundaries between groups. The analysis indicates that greater religious homogeneity increases the risk that religious people will regard immigrants as a threat, but group threat theory does not provide any explanations as to why this is the outcome, and not an opposite development where greater religious homogeneity reduces opposition towards immigration through reduced competition. Taken together, the findings suggest that a religious context, where social cohesion is largely based on a common religious belief, and where official policies on religion function to reinforce differences between majority and minority religions, produce higher levels of religious opposition towards immigration.

## **Conclusions**

The starting point of this thesis was the limited knowledge of how attitudes towards immigrants evolve under different immaterial circumstances. The overall aim was to examine how immaterial contexts tied to the political arena and to religion's role in society relate to anti-immigrant attitudes. This is a necessary step to further advance the comparative scholarship on anti-immigrant attitudes and reach a deeper understanding of how such attitudes emerge and evolve. When considering the current situation in Europe, it is clear that immigration is more than a matter of distribution of employment and welfare benefits. It is also a politicized issue where politicians use numbers, symbols, and feelings to either motivate or criticize the way immigration and immigrant presence is approached. Also, the increased religious heterogeneity induced by immigration alters the conditions for inter-religious relations, something that makes each country's religious arrangements potentially relevant to natives' attitudes. The research questions in this thesis address relationships that tap into these contextual circumstances. Being formulated with regard to gaps in previous research, they add to the knowledge of how attitudes evolve under circumstances largely overlooked in comparative studies on anti-immigrant attitudes.

The findings in this thesis support the theoretical claim that immaterial contexts influence anti-immigrant attitudes. How people perceive immigrants and immigration can be traced to aspects of their surroundings that do not primarily relate to the availability of material resources. The first three studies in the thesis focus on various aspects of the political context. Together they show that political representatives can influence how people

view immigrants, but also that these effects are strongly conditional both on features of the representatives themselves and on characteristics and experiences of individuals. In the fourth study, it is found that circumstances related to religion's role in society significantly influence the relationship between individual religiosity and anti-immigration attitudes. How opposition towards immigration unfolds among religious people depends on different aspects of their religious context.

While the thesis, in this sense, demonstrates that immaterial contexts matter with respect to anti-immigrant attitudes, an equally important finding is how individuals diverge in their reactions to particular circumstances. Individuals are not passive recipients of contextual influences. Instead, their reactions depend on their position, preferences, and experiences. In terms of political influences, the thesis supports a view of individuals as reasoning subjects capable of taking the source of the frame into account as well as evaluating what political representatives articulate against alternative information and personal experiences. Studies 1 and 2 suggest that when people already have developed predispositions, either in line or at odds with the conveyed message, it interferes with the effects of political framing. Depending on what they already think, they are more or less likely to be influenced by what political representatives tell them. These predispositions may be based on ideological beliefs (study 1) or develop as a result of access to alternative frames via intergroup contact (study 2). Further, the results from studies 1 and 3 indicate that political representatives are influential primarily if they are perceived as legitimate actors. Perceptions of threat are not automatically raised by a hostile political climate as individuals also consider who the sender is – whether or not it is someone they identify with and trust. Individuals respond to political framing by traditional political parties, but they are not influenced by the same kind of frames if conveyed by an extreme right party, which suggests that people in general make different assessments of these two types of parties. While the broader public has some confidence in what traditional parties say, they are still not readily convinced by the extreme right. Meanwhile, the limited impact of the extreme right does not exclude the possibility that their parliamentary presence may have had other effects on intergroup relations in Europe. The focus in this thesis is on anti-immigrant attitudes, but there are of course other possible consequences of extreme right presence. For example, their presence may have strengthened the inclination among people who hold such attitudes to act on their convictions, either through acts of discrimination, voting behavior, or individual involvement in extremist groups and manifestations. Examining these potential outcomes falls outside of the scope of this thesis, as does the ERPs' effect on politics and policies. It is nonetheless worth noting that previous research has found that extreme right presence has

increased the political saliency of immigrant and immigration issues, and shifted stances and rhetoric among traditional parties in a more negative direction (see for example Thränhardt,1995; van Spanje, 2010). Given the results from study 1, these observations suggest that the rise of the extreme right still may have an indirect impact on anti-immigrant attitudes, via political framing by traditional parties.

Moreover, the studies point to consolidation of the national in-group as an important way that immaterial contexts can influence attitudes towards immigrants. Study 4 reveals that religious natives are particularly concerned about immigration in contexts where religion is a defining feature of the national in-group. Where religion is important, religious people are more prone than the non-religious to oppose immigration, which suggests that they are more likely to interpret immigrants as a threat to national identity. That issues of identity are important is also suggested by the findings in studies 1 and 2. Although the use of nationalistic frames is largely motivated by data availability, the findings show that political representatives can increase anti-immigrant attitudes by framing “the national way of life” in a positive manner. Thus, aversion towards outsiders increases when political representatives emphasize good things about the national in-group. Also, the finding that contact can counter the effect of nationalistic frames can be interpreted as a result of a diminishing importance of group belonging. Previous research shows that intergroup contact can reduce in-group identification (Pettigrew 1997), which can also explain why friendly interactions with immigrants make people in the native population less likely to be influenced by nationalistic framing (study 2). An important task for future research is to establish to what extent different immaterial contexts influence anti-immigrant attitudes via intensified threat, and to what extent the influences occur via consolidation of groups.

In terms of theory, this thesis demonstrates the benefits of combining group threat theory with framing theory. As outlined in the theoretical section, group threat theory provides the theoretical basis for the thesis. It directs attention to immaterial contexts as potential explanations of attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. While group threat theory is helpful in explaining why immaterial contexts are likely to matter, it does not elaborate on *how* such influences occur. In order to reach a better understanding of the processes where immaterial contexts influence anti-immigrant attitudes, this thesis therefore uses framing theory together with group threat theory. This proves to be a valuable approach as it generates better possibilities to conceive of the link between immaterial contexts and attitudes, but also improved theoretical tools to understand when such effects do not occur. Taken together, the results from studies 1 to 3 show that

politics matter, but not always. The insights from these studies should be interesting also for scholars in other fields dealing with the relationship between politics and attitudes, not the least for scholarship on policy feedbacks. While the boundaries of policy feedbacks have attracted some interest in this literature, the focus has primarily been on moderating factors related to the policies themselves – how visible they are and how tangible their consequences are for people’s lives (Soss & Schram 2007; Pierson 1993) – and to some extent on the role of institutional translators (Edlund 2007). The results in this thesis suggest that features of political representatives and of individual citizens are additional factors that may limit the feedback effects, which may be interesting for future research.

The focus on immaterial contexts in general and political factors in particular brings questions of causality to the fore. Although causality is a concern for most studies on political influences, it is unfortunate that this thesis does not provide any opportunities to more fully establish the direction of the relationships between attitudes and contexts. In terms of political representatives, their parliamentary presence and framing are both influenced by and influencing public opinion. Their representation in parliament is to a large extent dependent on an overlap between their views and the public’s (although, of course, their stance on issues other than immigration can be more relevant to the electoral results), while what they do once they are in place in parliament will have consequences for subsequent developments in attitudes. If we are to better establish what is likely to be a complex interplay between attitudes and political contexts, it requires data that are comparable both between countries and over time. Ideally, data should also be longitudinal in the sense that the same individuals are tracked over time to see how they respond to changes in immaterial contextual factors. Hopefully, these types of data will become increasingly available in the future, enabling more detailed studies of the interplay between individuals and their immaterial circumstances. Already, there is improved availability of cross-sectional data that is longitudinal at the country level (although not at the individual level), something that is made use of in study 3. As access improves further, future research should concentrate on how anti-immigrant attitudes develop over time and on the role changes in immaterial contexts have in this development. The findings from the thesis stress the importance of further establishing the impact of different kinds of immaterial contexts. Since the work on this thesis started, scholarly interest in the political context has increased considerably in comparative research on anti-immigrant attitudes (for recent examples see Careja & Andreß 2013; Hopkins 2011). This is a positive development that contributes to the knowledge of contextual factors other than those related to material resources. Still, however, the results from study 4 demonstrate that

there are immaterial contexts beyond the political arena that are important to people's attitudes. Thereby, future research should also take other immaterial aspects of our surroundings into consideration to explore the consequences they might have for attitudes towards immigrants and immigration.

The thesis is an attempt to widen the very notion of contexts in empirical research, and as such, it makes a contribution to the literature on anti-immigrant attitudes. In sum, the theoretical advantages of the thesis lie in how it combines group threat theory and framing theory. While the analyses generate support for group threat theory in how immaterial contexts emerge as important to anti-immigrant attitudes, the studies also highlight its weaknesses when it comes to explaining the mechanisms by which these influences occur. Framing theory contributes more developed ideas on this matter, which provides better opportunities to capture and explain the conditionality of different kinds of immaterial circumstances. In a broader perspective, the studies provide important insights related to the role of political representatives. The focus on material contexts in previous research directs attention to factors largely beyond direct political control. An economic recession will increase anti-immigrant sentiments due to raised levels of threat, but it is obvious that politicians rarely desire an economic crisis. Based on what we know about economic factors, politicians who seek to decrease anti-immigrant attitudes should primarily seek to avoid intensified intergroup competition – and if an economic crisis does strike, take political measures to curb its negative consequences. This thesis' focus on immaterial contexts highlights how political representatives can have a much more direct role in shaping anti-immigrant attitudes. The findings indicate that politicians have a significant influence on how people understand and interpret their surroundings. How traditional parties approach issues related to immigration and immigrant presence seems to be particularly important for how anti-immigrant attitudes develop. Against the backdrop of the electoral success for extreme right parties in Europe, it signals that how traditional parties react to their presence in fact may be more important to people's attitudes than the presence per se.

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