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Economic Attitudes in the Age of Migration

A Comparative Study of the Relationship Between Immigration-Caused Diversity and Perceptions of Social Conflict

Abstract:

In the age of migration, a rapid influx of immigrants has generated mounting concerns about its potential challenges to social cohesion in recipient societies. It has long been argued that immigration-caused ethnic diversity may erode the common social foundations in democratic welfare systems, and increase perceived domestic social conflicts. This pessimistic view of immigration, diversity, and cohesion has its root in the realist group conflict theory and economic self-interests. We join in this critical scholarly discussion on diversity and solidarity by probing the link between immigration-caused diversity and perceptions of social conflict in a cross-national comparative setup. Using the 2009 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) survey on social equity, we analyze whether perceived social conflict and downward social mobility are more expressed in ethnically heterogeneous societies by comparing 24 industrialized democracies. We develop a multilevel design to infer how varying ethnic diversity at the national level shapes individual level perceptions on social cohesion. Our cross-national analysis finds confirmation to the multiculturalism perspective that diversity is associated with more positive evaluation of social cohesion.

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1. Introduction

Immigration has changed the face of advanced industrialized societies (Hooghe et al., 2008). A recent spate of scholarship has been occupied to qualify the social consequences of an ever-diversifying European landscape (for an overview, see Harell & Stolle, 2010). Whereas the impact of immigration-caused diversity on community cohesion is still debated (see van der Meer & Tolsma, 2011) – some studies suggesting a negative impact of diversity on social bonds (Putnam, 2007) while others point to null findings (Hooghe et al., 2009; Gesthuizen et al., 2009) – studies on public opinion are more consistent in showing that concern over immigration has risen over the last decades (Quillian, 1995; Semyonov et al., 2008; Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010).

A popular explanation that has been invoked to explain how immigration erodes the social fabric and fosters negative out-group attitudes is the realistic group conflict theory (Blumer, 1958; Quillian, 1995). In its basic form, this model argues that the salience of a competitive out-group combined with socioeconomic resource stress provides fertile soil for inter-group competition to flourish (Esses et al., 2001). Although recent studies suggest that the sources of tensions are mainly symbolical, e.g. the fear of a loss of national culture and status (Sides & Citrin, 2007; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007; Paxton & Mughan, 2006), the scientific interest to disentangle the relationship between diversity and socioeconomic interests has not faded (Schneider, 2008; Semyonov et al., 2008; Meuleman et al., 2009).

As at present symbolic threats outweigh socioeconomic interests as explanations for out-group prejudice, the aim of this paper is to focus on a largely neglected aspect of the realistic group conflict argument, namely whether immigration-caused diversity fosters depressed perceptions of social conflict. While early studies on prejudice involved experimental designs to disentangle the causal mechanisms of how diversity leads to inter-group tensions (Sherif et al., 1961), the derived arguments that diversity augments the conflict for "scarce resources" (Turner, 1975), have been applied to sociological studies that are interested in not only documenting whether public opinion on immigration has shifted due to immigrant influx (for a review, see Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010), but also whether increasing foreigner diversity disrupts social ties (see Putnam, 2007).[1] The shift from socio-psychological experiments to cross-national survey research has caused a theoretical leap with the proposed causal reasoning as they assume that a heightened out-group prejudice in diverse communities originates from an increased social and economic competition.

In this study, we would therefore like to qualify existing causal flaws, namely that diversity fosters socioeconomic tensions,[2] by responding to the question whether immigration diversity affects perceived social conflict, and more precisely leads to perceptions of downward social mobility and produces negative perceptions of class conflict. As s According to realistic group

[1] As has been theoretically recalled by Putnam (2007, p. 142), it may not be forgotten that the logic behind group threat arguments is that diversity "fosters out-group distrust and in-group solidarity". Yet, as the outcome of our study is not social solidarity between or across groups, but perceptions of social conflict different arguments hold.
[2] Invoking the Thomas theorem (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572, cited in Merton, 1995, p. 380), we don't look at whether diversity has suppressed economic conditions, but whether people perceive that socioeconomic conditions are bad in their country.

conflict theory, the presence of a sizeable immigrant population and socioeconomic stress would increase tensions over the access to socioeconomic resources, like for instance jobs and welfare benefits, which would create out-group hostility, implying that there more negative opinions on social conflict are more common in diverse societies. In order to respond to this research question, we analyze the 2009 Social Inequality wave of the International Social Survey Programme. In the ISSP Social Inequality Survey, respondents in 24 industrialized democracies were asked about their own and their family's social position as well as opinions on social competition, enabling a comparative analysis into perceptions of social mobility.

2. Immigration, Diversity, and Solidarity: Theories and Hypotheses

The contemporary literature on the social consequences gives the impression that immigration, as a new form of globalizing force, has changed the face of industrialized democracies and reshaped citizens' perceptions of domestic social conflict (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; van Oorschot & Uunk, 2007; Meuleman et al., 2009). Despite the extensive literature, however, scholars have not reached to a consensus on how immigration affects perceptions of social conflict. Scholarly views on the relationship between immigration and social conflict are sharply divided: some argue that immigration leads to immigrant-native confrontations, exacerbates group competition, and triggers resentment (Brader et al., 2004; Dancygier, 2010; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010; McLaren & Johnson 2007; Sniderman et al., 2004), whereas others argue that immigration produces a favorable impression of ethnic diversity, breeds into multiculturalism, and cultivates positive feelings about social mobility (Kymlicka, 2003; van Oorschot, 2008). Putnam (2007) furthermore exacerbates this opposition by saying that while diversity has negative social consequences in the short run, its long-term consequences cannot be understated. Consequently, the existing literature produces competing theoretical expectations on how immigration-caused diversity affects perceptions on social conflict.

2.1. Expectations for a Negative Finding

Scholars, who predict a negative link between immigration-caused diversity and perceived downward social mobility, substantiate two underlying mechanisms. Firstly, the influx of foreign-born populations and their access to domestic job markets, education programs, as well as other social safety net programs undermine the common social community in immigrants-recipient states (Putnam, 2007). Students of political economy contend that immigrants, especially low-skill immigrants are likely to press domestic job markets and welfare programs (Borjas, 1994; Wildasin, 1991, 2000), thus trigger anti-immigration sentiment. This argument is empirically evidenced by the fact that socially or economically disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are particularly prone out-group prejudice (Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Quillian, 1995).

Secondly, the realistic group theory attributes perceived group conflict and anti-immigration attitude to resource scarcity and self-interests. The realistic group theory, more specifically, argues that resource constraints will justify in-group favoritism and out-group

prejudice (Brewer, 1999; Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Campbell, 1965; Jackson, 1993). Immigrants who are not assimilated into the mainstream society in their recipient country, thus, are likely to be perceived as threats to challenge the in-groups and lead to perceived group conflicts (Esses et al., 2001). In sum, theories of realistic group conflict predict that increased ethnic diversity, caused by immigration, will deteriorate domestic citizens' socioeconomic status, which in turn will trigger negative feelings about inter-group relationships and decline perceptions on social mobility.

A third argument for why diversity would depress perceptions of social conflict is the fact that diversity represents differences in norms and values, religious convictions, and language proficiency, making socioeconomic externalities less likely to occur. Economic productivity, for instance, depends upon reductions in transaction costs and the flow of information. On the one hand, transaction costs are associated with the ability to predict others' behavior, which is more problematic in diverse societies where different norms and values are present (Messick & Kramer, 2001). On the other hand, economic progress is also more common when information can flow easily. One specific barrier making this less likely is language differences present across different ethnocultural groups. Combined, research for instance has shown that in diverse project teams, social control is lower and communication is more difficult in more diverse product teams (O'Reilly et al., 1997, in Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005).

In sum, a number of arguments have been proposed for why it can be expected that diversity makes economic progress less likely to occur, making it also more likely that people are more depressed about social conflict. This leads to the hypothesis that perceptions of social conflict are more common in more diverse societies.

2.2. Expectations for a Positive Finding

Conversely, scholars have argued that social and cultural homogeneity is not a necessary condition of social cohesion (Crepaz, 2008; Tolsma et al., 2009). Crepaz (2008) find that out-group solidarity can exist in ethnically diverse societies. Revisiting Putnam's (2000, 2007) influential studies on diversity and social trust, Letki (2007) and Gijsberts et al. (2012) find very limited evidence that immigration-caused diversity affect social cohesion. Similarly, Hooghe et al. (2009) do not find confirmation of Putnam's "hunkering down" hypothesis that ethnic diversity erodes generalized trust in domestic societies across multiple European countries. The bourgeoning literature on ethnocultural diversity and social cohesion points toward a more careful examination on the link between ethnicity, immigration, and the roots of communitarianism (Portes & Vickstrom, 2011). Proponents of multiculturalism, furthermore, contend that ethnic minorities from a long run are expected to adapt to the mainstream social and cultural setup in their recipient countries (Banting & Kymlicka, 2006). Through assimilation, the distinct social values and cultures brought by immigrants are not necessarily lead to inter-group conflict. The multiculturalist perspective, in addition, is consistent with the inter-group contact theory (Pettigrew 1998) because they both suggest the bridging effect of diversity on the in- and out-group distinctions. Likewise, perceived inter-group tension may be decreased by

ethnic diversity. Empirical studies based on various country contexts largely provide supportive evidence that learning through intergroup contact and mutual behavior adjustment in diverse setups can reduce negative inter-group evaluations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). Meanwhile, social scholars find that positive intergroup evaluations and emotions can be aroused by optimal intergroup contact in diverse social contexts (Hodson, 2011). If the multiculturalism perspective were correct, we would not expect to see a negative relationship between immigration-caused diversity and perceived social conflict.

Scholars also found that immigrants do not necessarily deteriorate the domestic economic conditions in a host country. The reason being is that, as Alesina and La Ferrara (2005) call it, "diversity may enter the production function". Diversity represent variation not only in norms and values, but also in skills. A review of studies suggests that heterogeneity brings about a variety in skills that are brings about more prosperity than no skill differentiation (Lazear, 1999a, 1999b). In explaining gdp per capita growth, Alesina and La Ferrara (2005) found limited evidence that diversity depresses economic development in advanced industrialized societies: only in undeveloped societies, ethnocultural heterogeneity has negative consequences on growth. Friedburg and Hunt (1995) find no empirical evidence to support the claim that immigrants have some adverse effects on wages and labor market opportunities on native-born workers in the host country. Instead, the increase of domestic worker's income growth significantly depends on the human capital brought by immigration. Longhi et al. (2005) conduct a meta-analysis of 18 studies and 348 estimates with respect to the effect of immigration on domestic economy. They conclude that most empirical studies of industrialized democracies find near zero effect of immigration on domestic wages.[3] Focusing on EU member states, Kahanec and Zimmermann (2010) find a robust positive relationship between immigration, especially post-enlargement immigration, and the growth aspect of EU.

This brief review of the literature on immigration and domestic economy generally conclude that immigration has no negative consequences on the economic prospects of advanced industrialized societies, rather the contrary. In other words, if peoples' economic prospects were positively related to immigration, then immigration should improve individuals' perceptions of social mobility and class conflict, leading to the expectation that diversity leads to less negative perceptions of social conflict.

3. Data and Methodology

To disentangle whether perceptions of social conflict are more expressed in diverse societies, we will analyze the 2009 "Social Inequality IV" data of the International Social Survey Programme. Whereas this fourth ISSP wave on social inequality has been surveyed in almost 40 countries, we restrict the sample to the 24 most industrialized societies that are either member of the EU or the

[3] Countries included in the Longhi et al. (2005) meta-analysis are: Australia, Austria, Germany, France, Israel, Netherlands, and United States.

OECD in order to avoid conceptual traveling (Collier & Mahon, 1993).[4] The sample adds up to 27,785 respondents, which averages to approximately 1,158 respondents per country.

Dependent Variable

In this paper, perceptions of social conflict serves as the dependent variable, which is measured by two ISSP survey items, namely *subjective class mobility* and *perceptions of class conflict*, variables that have a tradition[5] in research on perceptions of social conflict (Kelley & Evans, 1995).

The first survey item concerns *subjective social mobility* and is measured by comparing the individual assessment of one's current socioeconomic position and the class position of the family in which the respondent grew up. In the ISSP questionnaire, the individual class position was surveyed using the question "*In our society there are groups which tend to be towards the top and groups which tend to be towards the bottom. Below is a scale that runs from top to bottom. Where would you put yourself now on this scale?"* and was offered with a response scale ranging from 1 ("bottom") to 10 ("top"). The subsequent question was "And if you think of the family that you grew up in, where did they fit in then?" offered with the same 1-10 "bottom" to "top" response scale. To measure subjective social mobility, the perception of the family's position is subtracted from the assessment of respondent's own position, which produces a variable ranging from -9 (complete downward social mobility), to 9 (complete upward social mobility). As previous ISSP waves did not include perceptions of the class position of the family, it is the first cross-national research strategy that takes this scale into account.

The second indicator for perceived social conflict is a means scale measuring *perceptions of class conflict* comprising four indicators that asked respondents about the extent that in the country they live in there are conflicts between (1) poor people and rich people, (2) the working class and the middle class, (3) management and workers, and (4) people at the top of the society and people at the bottom. All four items have been offered with four response categories, ranging from "there are no conflicts" to "very strong conflicts". Scaling analysis, which can be retrieved in Appendix Table 1, shows that the scale meets the statistical criteria for reliability.

Independent variables

Since we are looking at the impact of ethnocultural diversity on perceived social conflict, we employ harmonized data on the proportion of each country's population that is foreign-born, obtained from United Nations Population Division Statistics (2010). Though the preference in some other studies on national level diversity has been for OECD measures (Hooghe et al., 2009; Gesthuizen et al., 2009), for which information on a substantial number of countries in our

[4] These countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.

[5] The difference with previous studies is that we look at subjective social *mobility* over subjective social *class*, for the reason being that in present ISSP wave, respondents have for the first time been asked to rank the social class of the family they grew up in, which enables for a more refined analysis of the extent to which upward or downward social mobility has taken place in the specific country.

sample is unavailable, UN and OECD estimates are highly correlated among common countries, and other studies have fruitfully employed the UN figures we use here (Kesler & Bloemraad, 2010; Reeskens & Wright, forthcoming; Wright, 2011). To qualify whether the *presence* of immigrants affects perceptions of social conflict, we will in the first place make use of data on the *share* of foreign-born population. Because UN estimates are available for every five years only, and not for 2009 (the year the ISSP Social Inequality IV survey was fielded), we analyze the data closest to 2009, namely 2010. In addition, as we would like to analyze whether the *influx* of immigrants are related to perceived social conflict, we also calculated the *change* in foreign-born residents between 2005 and 2010 proportionate to the share of foreign-born residents in 2005.[6] The estimates employed are listed in Appendix Table A4.

Control Variables

To analyze the relation between ethnocultural diversity and perceived social conflict, a number of relevant individual and country level are controlled for. At the respondent level, the limited ISSP questionnaire (compared to other cross-national survey projects like the World Values Study and European Social Survey) does not allow for a wide selection of controls. As our measures for perceived social conflict and subjective social mobility have not been analyzed profoundly,[7] the selection of controls is based on research on perceived socioeconomic insecurity (for a review, see Mau, Mewes & Schoneck, 2012).

At the individual level, we first of all control for the curvilinear effect of age, as it can be expected to affect social perceptions via two different mechanisms. As for generational effects, it can be expected that especially the post-Second World War generation will be most positive about social mobility and less aware of class conflicts. In addition, the younger and older age cohorts take up most vulnerable positions on the labor market, making them more susceptible for depressed perceptions of social conflicts. With regard to gender, as women are vulnerable groups at the labor market, we can expect that they have encountered more deprivation compared to men (reference group). As we hypothesize that perceptions of social conflict are a function of the socioeconomic position of the respondent, we control for levels of education (Hainmuerller & Hiscox, 2007), work status, and type of employment sector (Mayda, 2006). Achieved educational levels run from 0 ("no formal qualification") to 5 ("university degree completed"). The expectation is that socio-economic and labor-market conditions affect perceptions on social mobility and conflict. We expect that respondents with high-level of

[6] This measure gives more weight to those homogenous countries that recently encountered a sharp influx of immigrants. For instance, Australia and Belgium had an increase in the share foreign-born residents with 0.6 percent between 2005 and 2006. Yet, because Australia had in 2005 approximately 21.3 percent of foreign-born residents on its territory, while in Belgium there were only 8.5 foreign-born residents in 2005, the impact of the same increase in diversity is expected to be more sizeable in Belgium than in Australia. The influx coefficient points to 2.82 for Australia and 7.06 for Belgium.

[7] As aforementioned, the *subjective social mobility* variable is based on new variables in the ISSP questionnaire; previous studies have looked only at subjective social class (Evans & Kelley, 2004), discarding the comparison with family social class. The *perceived class conflict* has been subject of cross-national studies, but more in comparative analysis using aggregate scores than in multilevel analysis controlling for individual variables to parcel out compositional differences between countries (Kelley & Evans, 1995).

education attainment may have more sympathetic attitudes toward immigrants and positive perceptions about their social mobility than those who have low-level of education (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010). Work status has been categorized into having paid work (reference), being unemployed, being a student, being retired or another status. Among all work-status categories, the unemployed is expected to perceive strong perceptions of conflict. Sector, additionally, is categorized into working for government (reference), publicly owned firm, private firm, self-employed, other sector, and not applicable. The expectation is that respondents in more stable types of employment (public sector) will have less strong perceptions of social conflict, while those in a more vulnerable category (especially the self-employed) will have more depressed opinions.

At the country level, the first control variable is income inequality, operationalized by the Gini coefficient. The data as for 2009 have been obtained from the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (Solt, 2009). The expectation is that people in societies characterized by large income disparities will have more depressed opinions of social conflict, i.e. stronger perceptions of downward mobility and class conflict. The second control variable is economic prosperity, operationalized by growth in GDP per capita for the year 2009. The data have been obtained from the World Bank (2012). Prior studies indicate a positive association between national prosperity and subjective individual social mobility (Evans & Kelley, 2004).

Methodology

The assumption that perceived social conflict is explained simultaneously by individual and country characteristics (Evans & Kelley, 2004) requires the use of multilevel modeling (Gelman & Hill, 2007; Hox, 2010). This technique accounts for the clustered nature of the ISSP data – individuals nested within countries – and enables estimating national-level effects such as ethnocultural diversity on individual outcomes.

As for the analysis, we proceed as follows. First we discuss some basic descriptives. In the second step we will briefly model individual level controls. In the third step we analyze the effect of the *presence* of immigrants on perceptions of social conflict, before we turn to the effect of the *influx* of immigrants in a fourth step. In a fifth and final step we estimate an integrated model.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptives

Before we proceed with a formal test of how ethnocultural diversity and perceived social conflict are related, we first of all present some descriptive cross-national distribution of the two dependent variables of interest in Table 1. Separate tests (not shown) support the notion that the two variables measure distinct dimensions of perceived social conflict: at the individual level, the correlation is -.08 (implying that people who perceive upward social mobility have lower

perceptions of class conflict) while the correlation coefficient at the aggregate level is -.32 (indicating that countries in which citizens generally perceive upward social mobility, perceptions of class conflict are lower).

Table 1. Cross-National Distribution of the Variables of Interest

		Subjective Social Mobility		Perceptions of Class Conflict		Share of	Change in
Country	**N**	**Mean**	**St. Dev.**	**Mean**	**St. Dev.**	**F-Born**	**F-born**
Australia	1,485	0.56	1.73	2.26	0.58	21.9	2.82
Austria	976	0.48	1.66	2.21	0.59	15.6	11.43
Belgium	1,045	0.23	1.47	2.25	0.50	9.1	7.06
Bulgaria	831	-0.75	1.67	2.11	0.83	1.4	7.69
Cyprus	938	0.75	1.41	1.44	0.53	17.5	25.90
Czech Rep	1,167	0.22	1.52	2.21	0.65	4.4	0
Denmark	1,419	0.53	1.73	1.94	0.53	8.8	12.82
Estonia	958	-0.10	2.01	2.18	0.65	13.6	-9.33
Finland	809	0.65	1.74	2.33	0.53	4.2	27.27
France	2,708	0.56	1.76	2.59	0.59	10.7	0.94
Germany	1,290	0.37	1.88	2.52	0.55	13.1	1.55
Hungary	995	-0.65	1.83	3.18	0.55	3.7	12.12
Japan	1,085	-0.03	1.68	2.41	0.65	1.7	6.25
Latvia	976	-0.79	2.16	2.19	0.72	15.0	-9.64
Norway	1,378	0.65	1.68	2.12	0.47	10.0	25.00
Poland	1,190	0.22	1.70	2.34	0.65	2.2	0.00
Portugal	931	0.40	1.71	2.79	0.73	8.6	19.44
Slovak Rep	1,067	0.15	1.34	2.19	0.72	2.4	4.35
Slovenia	966	0.32	1.67	2.49	0.64	8.1	-3.57
Spain	1,137	0.24	1.52	2.29	0.82	14.1	31.76
Sweden	1,044	0.48	1.67	2.35	0.51	14.1	14.63
Switzerland	1,172	0.53	1.87	2.17	0.52	23.2	4.04
U Kingdom	841	0.30	1.66	2.42	0.56	10.4	7.22
U States	1,491	-0.26	1.91	2.61	0.58	13.5	3.85
ISSP average	27,785	0.24	1.77	2.33	0.68	10.30	8.48

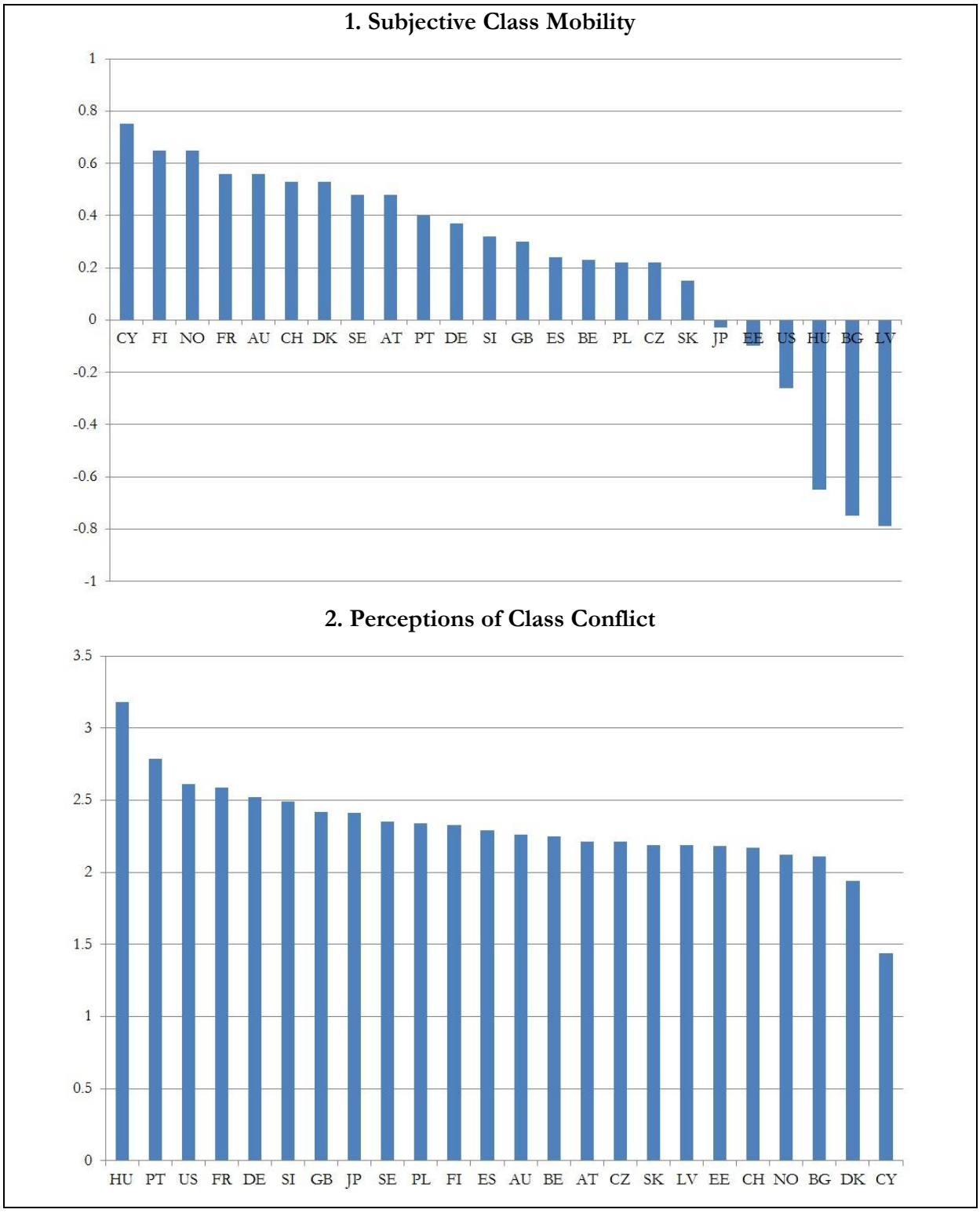
Note: Entries represent country averages on the perceived social mobility and perceived class conflicts scale.

The ISSP averages of *subjective social mobility* show that across the 24 countries in our study, respondents indicate that they have experienced limited social mobility. A comparison between their own class position and the socioeconomic position of family they grew up in reveals a modest upward mobility of only one quarter of a step on the social ladder on a scale that runs from -9 to 9. When looking at the cross-national distribution of subjective social mobility (Table 1 and Figure 1), variation runs from -0.8 to 0.8, with Cypriots expressing highest upward mobility, together with a number of Nordic societies and Australia, France, Switzerland and Austria. Countries in which perceptions of *downward* social mobility are more common are the Eastern European countries of Latvia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Estonia, as well as the United States and Japan. Because of large standard deviations in this variable (see Table 1), cross-national variation in subjective social mobility is rather limited: for instance the intraclass correlation[8] of 5.98 shows that approximately 6 percent of the variation in subjective social mobility can be explained by country characteristics. Eyeballing the relation between subjective social mobility and the two diversity indicators is not straightforward, as both Eastern Europe and Nordic societies are known to be rather ethnocultural homogenous (e.g. Delhey & Newton, 2005), meaning that more advanced multivariate techniques need to be deployed.

As for *perceived class conflict*, then, Table 1 shows that Europeans have rather low perceptions of class conflict: on a 1-4 scale, the average across the pooled ISSP countries is just below the scale mean, namely 2.33. The second pane of Figure 1 shows that perceptions of class conflict are most common in Hungary, whereas they are also high in Portugal, the US, France and Germany. Class conflict perceptions are rather low in Cyprus, with also low country means for Denmark, Bulgaria, Norway and Switzerland. Between country-variation is rather high, with an intraclass correlation of 21.09 percent, which is partially attributable to extreme minimum score of Cyprus and high maximum score of Hungary. A first glimpse of whether these country-differences can be explained by diversity indicators lead to no consistent findings.

[8] Calculated by dividing the country-level variance by the sum of the individual-level and country-level variances.

Figure 1. Cross-National Distribution of the Dependent Variables



4.2. Individual-Level Model

As we would like to control for composition effects – the fact that between-country variation in perceived social conflict can be explained by cross-national differences with regard to the socioeconomic profile of the respondents – individual level models are estimated in this first

step. The explained variance (R^2) at the country-level already indicates that between 5 and 10 percent of the cross-national variation is explained by respondent characteristics.

First of all, concerning subjective social mobility, Table 1 shows that age is in a curvilinear relationship, indicating that perceptions of upward social mobility increases with age, yet, from the age of 73, perceptions become slightly more depressed. Young age cohorts are thus more of the opinion that their position on the social ladder is worse compared to those of the family they grew up in. Women have more depressed perceptions of social mobility compared to men, which can be explained to their more vulnerable socioeconomic position. Obtained educational degree is positively associated with subjective social mobility: those respondents with a completed university degree have a scale score of .45 higher than those respondents without formal qualifications. Regarding work status, the unemployed are more depressed about social mobility, whereas students and retired respondents are slightly more negative about social mobility than the employed. Those employed in government are, as expected, more optimistic about upward social mobility compared to those employed in publicly owned enterprises and private firms. Contrary to our expectations, the self-employed do not differ significantly from civil servants. Summarized, put in predicted values, the person who is most of the opinion that one's current position is better than those of the family he grow up in, is a man of 73 years old with a university degree (with the expectation of being retired), who has a predicted scale score of 2.27, indicating a perceived upward mobility by more than 2 steps on the social ladder. On the other hand, the most depressed about social mobility is an 18 year old unemployed woman with no formal qualifications,[9] i.e. a scale score of -1.16, which indicates that this woman perceives that she took one step back on the social ladder compared to her parents.

Patterns are largely similar for perceptions of class conflicts. Yet, in contrast with subjective social mobility, the substantive effect of age on perceived intra-class conflict is neglectable. Women, more likely than men, are of the opinion that class conflicts are present in the country they live in. In line with subjective social mobility, the less-educated are more likely to perceive class conflicts than the more-educated, which also is the case for the unemployed and the retired. As for the type of sector, the self-employed and those employed in a private firm perceive less class conflicts compared to those working for the government. Thus, despite some noteworthy exceptions, the general conclusion is that the most vulnerable social groups are more depressed with regard to social mobility compared to resourceful respondents.

[9] As is evident, work status and the type of sector are of less relevance for those who are unemployed or for those who are 73 and expected to be retired.

Table 2. Individual-Level Models for Explaining Perceptions of Social Conflict

	Model 1: Perceptions of Upward Social Mobility		Model 2: Perceptions of Class Conflict	
Fixed Effects	**Parameter**	**T-Value**	**Parameter**	**T-Value**
Intercept	-0.79***	-5.92	2.56***	35.17
Age	0.03***	8.14	-0.00*	-2.09
Age squared	-0.00***	-5.41	0.00	0.07
Woman	-0.14***	-6.45	0.07***	9.79
Educational degree	0.09***	11.12	-0.04***	-16.59
Work status (Ref: Employed)				
- Unemployed	-0.74***	-15.74	0.10***	5.93
- Student	-0.14*	-2.39	-0.01	-0.40
- Retired	-0.08*	-2.10	0.05**	3.36
- Other	-0.23***	-5.68	0.06***	4.13
Sector type (Ref: Government)				
- Public owned firm	-0.10*	-2.28	-0.01	-0.60
- Private firm	-0.08**	-2.60	-0.03**	-3.25
- Self-employed	-0.07	-1.62	-0.06***	-4.54
- Other	-0.44***	-3.62	0.06	1.36
- Not applicable	-0.05	-1.03	-0.02	-1.19
Random Effects	**Parameter**	**Z-Value**	**Parameter**	**Z-Value**
Individual-level variance	2.87***	117.79	0.37***	117.79
Country-level variance	0.18**	3.34	0.10**	3.38
R^2 Individual-level	3.01%		2.01%	
R^2 Country-level	4.49%		9.54%	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$; *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed test. Entries represent the results of two separate multilevel models explaining respectively perceived upward social mobility, and perceived social class conflicts.

4.3. National-Level Diversity Effects

After accounting for compositional effects by estimating individual-level models in Table 2, in this second step we aim at responding to the research question whether perceptions of social conflict are more depressed when confronted with a sizeable presence of immigrants or a rapid influx of immigrants.

Before elaborating on the effects of ethnocultural diversity on perceptions of social conflict, we briefly review the relationship between the control variables and our outcomes (Table 3). Analysis without the presence of ethnocultural diversity shows that income inequality is negatively associated with perceptions of social mobility, whereas economic growth is in a positive relation. People have thus more depressed views on social mobility in countries with large income disparities, while they are more optimistic in times of economic progress. We find neither income inequality nor growth in per capita GDP influence opinions about the presence of social conflicts within the countries.

4.3.1. Presence of Foreign-Born Residents

In order to assess whether perceptions of social conflict are more depressed in more diverse societies, in the first step we analyze whether these perceptions are different in the face of a more sizeable immigrant population, i.e. we look at the *static* share of foreign-born residents for the year 2010. The results, presented in Table 3, show that the answer to this question is quite complex. With respect to bivariate relationships, holding constant for the individual-level variables of Table 2, ethnocultural diversity is unrelated to perceptions of social conflict. People are thus not of the opinion that their position has decreased, and neither do people perceive more class conflicts in ethnically diverse societies.

Table 3. The Relation between National-Level Share of Foreign-Born Residents and Perceptions of Social Mobility

	Model 1: Perceptions of Upward Social Mobility				**Model 2: Perceptions of Class Conflict**			
	Diversity Only		**Plus Controls**		**Diversity Only**		**Plus Controls**	
Fixed Part	**Param**	**T**	**Param**	**T**	**Param**	**T**	**Param**	**T**
Intercept	-0.79***	-6.01	-0.79***	-6.65	2.56***	35.60	2.56***	34.64
Share foreigner-born	0.02	1.57	0.03**	2.85	-0.01	-1.32	-0.02	-1.41
Gini coefficient			-0.05**	-3.13			0.01	0.68
GDP/capita growth			0.05*	2.82			0.00	0.03
Random Effects	**Param**	**Z**	**Param**	**Z**	**Param**	**Z**	**Param**	**Z**
Individ-level variance	2.87***	117.79	2.87***	117.79	0.37***	117.79	0.37***	117.79
Country-level variance	0.17***	3.26	0.09***	3.06	0.09**	3.30	0.10**	3.15

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$; *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed test. Entries represent the results of four separate multilevel models explaining respectively perceived upward social mobility, and perceived social class conflicts. Models are controlled for the individual-level variables of Table 2.

When adding the controls of income inequality and economic growth to the equation, however, the effect parameters become more pronounced and even significant in the case of perceptions of upward social mobility. People living in diverse societies lean towards less outspoken perceptions of class conflict (although this effect is not significant), while they are more of the opinion that their social status has increased compared to their parents' position. If we recall the predicted values of Table 2 (Model 1) for government working, a less-educated man of 32 years old with no educational qualifications and living in an average diverse country has expressed no mobility at all (predicted value of 0). However, when this person would live in a society with 15 percent of foreign-born residents, his predicted mobility would be 0.21, while this would fall back to -0.21 if he would live in an almost homogenous society with 1 percent immigrants, implying that there is a difference in almost one step of the ladder when comparing perceptions in predominantly homogenous vs. mixed societies. It needs to be emphasized that such predicted values are obtained from a multivariate tests that accounts for income inequality and economic

growth.[10] Income inequality thus suppresses the effect of ethnocultural diversity on subjective social mobility: income inequality accounts for variation in perceptions of social mobility that clarifies the otherwise unobserved association with ethnocultural diversity.

4.3.2. Increase in Foreign-Born Population

In a second step, we are interested to see whether perceptions of social conflict are more depressed in societies characterized by a rapid *influx* of immigrants, i.e. the *dynamic* measure for an increase in foreign-born residents between 2005 and 2010. Following the same explanatory strategy as in previous step, patterns comparable to the *share* of foreign-born population appear in the case of perceptions of class conflict: perceptions of class conflict are unrelated, neither bivariately nor multivariately, to a rapid influx of foreign-born residents. The effect of influx of foreign-born residents on subjective social mobility is nevertheless opposite to the one coming from the *static* share of foreigners. More precisely, at the bivariate level, there are more positive perceptions of upward social mobility in those countries, which recently have encountered a sharp increase in their foreign-born population proportionate to the existing stock of foreigners. However, when adding the relevant controls of income inequality and economic growth, this association fades, implying that the bivariate finding that people have higher perceptions of upward social mobility in societies that recently welcomed a sizeable group of immigrants is mainly been sapped by income inequality and economic growth.

Table 4. The Relation between National-Level Share of Foreign-Born Residents and Perceptions of Social Mobility

	Model 1: Perceptions of Upward Social Mobility				**Model 2: Perceptions of Class Conflict**			
	Diversity Only		**Plus Controls**		**Diversity Only**		**Plus Controls**	
Fixed Part	**Param**	**T**	**Param**	**T**	**Param**	**T**	**Param**	**T**
Intercept	-0.79***	-6.13	-0.79***	-6.65	2.56***	34.90	2.56***	33.70
Immigrant influx	0.02*	2.31	0.01	1.31	-0.00	-0.73	-0.00	-0.68
Gini coefficient			-0.03°	-1.88			0.00	0.18
GDP/capita growth			0.04°	1.95			0.00	0.22
Random Effects	**Param**	**Z**	**Param**	**Z**	**Param**	**Z**	**Param**	**Z**
Individ-level variance	2.87***	117.79	2.87***	117.79	0.37***	117.79	0.37***	117.79
Country-level variance	0.15***	3.25	0.12***	3.08	0.10**	3.30	0.11**	3.15

° $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$; *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed test. Entries represent the results of two separate multilevel models explaining respectively perceived upward social mobility, and perceived social class conflicts. Models are controlled for the individual-level variables of Table 2.

[10] Separate analyses (available upon request) have shown that only Gini drives the effect of the share of foreign-born residents on perceptions of social mobility.

5. Conclusion

The starting point of this paper was a recurrent claim present in the literature of realistic group conflict theory, and often repeated by present studies that look at the social consequences of the ever-diversifying populations of advanced industrialized societies, namely that immigration induces socioeconomic tensions, leading increased out-group prejudice. Whereas previous studies (see Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005) has focused on structural indicators, this study approached this question from the Thomas theorem and looked at whether social conflict is perceived by the general population. An analysis of the 2009 Social Inequality wave of the International Social Survey Programme suggests there is no evidence that diversity is associated with heightened feelings of social conflict. Neither the presence nor the change in of foreign-born residents relates to feelings of downward social mobility or strong perceptions of social conflict. The oft-repeated claim that perceptions over scarce resources are more depressed due to diversity therefore does not seem to have empirical grounds based on a cross-national comparison.

Instead of a negative association between diversity and perceptions of social mobility, we found indications of a positive relationship, which means that in ethnoculturally mixed societies, people are more of the opinion that they have made progress on the social ladder compared to the family they grew up in. The importance of this substantive finding for subjective social mobility, combined with the absence of an effect on perceptions on social conflict, cannot be understated. On the one hand, it shows that the perceptions of inter-group conflict are not necessarily more salient in diverse societies, whereas perceptions of individual struggles over resources are precisely more common in homogenous societies. This distinction is important, as perceptions over individual upward social mobility are conceptually different from assessments of class tensions in wider society. The fact that diversity and perceptions of upward social mobility are positively related to each other, provides additional evidence that realistic group conflict theory has lost its significant even more.

Alternatively, considering the causal mechanisms, the results suggest that perceptions of upward mobility are, ceteris paribus, the consequences of the long-term positive externalities that immigration brings about (see e.g. Schneider, 2008). Despite the fact that certain countries are newly becoming net- immigrant-receiving countries, like Spain or Sweden, the ethnocultural mix of European countries is largely an imprint of a historical legacy that in many country can be traced back to guest-worker migration, or migration from former colonial countries. The weight of this interpretation is additionally confirmed by controlling for recent immigration influxes (which accounts for the new settler societies) nevertheless indicate that the presence of immigrants drives these perceptions. So, an explanation for the positive effects of the share of foreign-born residents on perceptions of upward social mobility is that diversity has characterized the labor-market in such an influential way, that it has created many socioeconomic opportunities for all residents, and increasing the perceptions that social mobility has increased.

Present research finding thus adds empirical evidence to ongoing scholarship examining the social consequences of immigration and ethnic diversity. Our findings suggest that immigration and ethnic diversity can coexist with positive socioeconomic evaluations, linked to

the increasing level of international migration are the multiple ties connecting people cross national borders and the emergence of transnationalism as well as multicultural communities. The massive scale of contemporary international migration not only affects the economic prospects but also reshape the social landscapes in host countries. Disentangling how native residents may alter the perceptions on their own social positions in accordance with immigration and ethnic diversity, thus becomes imperative to understand the popular demand on various immigration related policies in these diverse industrialized societies.

Our findings can be further qualified in several respects. First of all, in disentangling why diversity is associated with more positive perceptions of social mobility, present strategy should go beyond plain correlation and try to look for causation. One way is to look more into historical figures of diversity and related figures about the creativity and composition of the labor market. If present trends about upward social mobility are the result of how immigrants have contributed to the economy, then historical traces of immigration might account for perceptions, too, whereas the presence of immigrants in the labor market, as well as how the economy makes use of immigrants, might be of relevance, too. Second, critical voices might raise comments about reversed causality, namely that immigrants might go to countries where perceptions of social mobility are already high. Yet, the empirics prove that this comment regarding causality is of less relevance, as influx of foreign-born residents show to be unrelated to perceptions of social conflicts whereas they tend to be related to the share of foreign-born residents; as aforementioned, the present composition of foreign-born residents is the result of a long process of immigrant influx that has taken different paths in different countries. An additional point of concern is the fact that diversity might affect perceptions of social mobility different for different social groups, i.e. it is plausible that the highest social strata might perceive more positive consequences of diversity compared to the lowest socioeconomic groups. Future research should disentangle this proposition.

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Appendix

Table 1. Exploratory Factor Analysis on the Perceptions of Class Conflict Variable

"In all countries, there are differences or even conflicts between different social groups. In your opinion, in <country> how much conflict is there between …"	**Factor Loading**
… poor people and rich people?	0.82
… the working class and the middle class?	0.66
… management and workers?	0.73
… people at the top of society and people at the bottom?	0.80

Cronbach's alpha: 0.84

Table A2. Descriptive Statistics of the Continuous Variables

Variable	**Scale**	**Mean**	**Std Dev**
Perceptions of social mobility	-9 to 9	0.24	1.77
Perceptions of class conflict	1 to 4	2.33	0.68
Age	15 to 98	48.61	17.02
Levels of education	0 to 5	2.94	1.41

Tables A3. Descriptive Statistics of the Categorical Variables

Variable	**Category**	**Percentage**
Gender	Man	45.9
	Woman	54.1
Work status	Employed	56.6
	Unemployed	5.4
	Student	5.7
	Retired	23.7
	Other status	8.6
Sector of work	Government	19.3
	Public owned firm	9.4
	Private firm	48.0
	Self-employed	10.4
	Other	0.7
	Not applicable	12.2

Table A4. Across-Country Distribution of the Dependent and Independent Variables

Country	Share of Foreign-Born 2010	Influx of Immigrants 2005-2010	Gini Coefficient for Income Inequality 2009	GDP per Capita Growth 2009
Australia	21.9	2.82	33.48	-0.6
Austria	15.6	11.43	27.11	-4.1
Belgium	9.1	7.06	24.73	-3.6
Bulgaria	1.4	7.69	35.17	-5.0
Cyprus	17.5	25.90	29.34	-2.5
Czech Republic	4.4	0	24.85	-5.3
Denmark	8.8	12.82	26.47	-6.3
Estonia	13.6	-9.33	31.10	-14.2
Finland	4.2	27.27	25.36	-8.8
France	10.7	0.94	25.36	-3.7
Germany	13.1	1.55	30.24	-4.9
Hungary	3.7	12.12	26.11	-6.7
Japan	1.7	6.25	30.71	-5.4
Latvia	15.0	-9.64	36.49	-17.5
Norway	10.0	25.00	22.26	-2.9
Poland	2.2	0.00	29.37	1.6
Portugal	8.6	19.44	34.03	-3.0
Slovakia	2.4	4.35	23.44	-5.1
Slovenia	8.1	-3.57	23.42	-8.8
Spain	14.1	31.76	32.09	-4.5
Sweden	14.1	14.63	22.48	-5.8
Switzerland	23.2	4.04	30.20	-3.1
United Kingdom	10.4	7.22	35.74	-5.0
United States	13.5	3.85	35.74	-4.4

Note: Data on the share of foreign born residents for 2010 and the influx of immigrants between 2005 and 2010 are obtained from UN Population Statistics. Gini coefficients are obtained from the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (Solt, 2009). GDP per capita growth figures are obtained from the World Bank (2012).