

Status Inconsistency and Anti-Immigration Attitudes: Evidence from Austria and Germany

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The successful integration of migrants strongly hinges on their reception by the majority population. Past work has firmly established that immigration attitudes are strongly stratified by education or occupation. However, it remains unclear how immigration concerns are affected by mismatches between education and occupation – that is, inconsistencies in indicators of socioeconomic status. Here, we examine the association between status inconsistency and anti-immigration attitudes for Austria and Germany, two countries experiencing large inflows of migrants in recent decades. We use data from the German Socio-Economic Panel, the Austrian Socio-Economic Panel and the European Social Survey as well as a bounding approach to circumvent the problem of statistical identification due to collinearity among the effects of education, occupation, and their mismatch. We find that status consistency – a mismatch between education and occupation – is associated with higher anti-immigration attitudes. This effect is robust across the two countries, for several operationalization of mismatch as well as for conservative bounds for the estimates of education and occupation. Moreover, this association is particularly strong for men. This finding supports our theoretical expectation that people with status inconsistencies tend to adopt the more liberal attitudes of the higher status indicator. Simultaneously, we extend status competition theory by showing that individuals with consistent socio-economic positions appear to be more sensitive to perceived status challenges and hence more likely to oppose immigration.