

# Feelings of Country Inferiority: Investigating a Novel Predictor of Negative Immigration Attitudes in the Nordic Countries

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This article analyses the predictors of negative immigration attitudes in the Nordic countries, drawing on theoretical work on populist, radical-right parties. It uses quantitative methods to analyse data from over 4,500 people, collected by the YouGov-Cambridge Centre for Public Opinion Research in 2016. In a novel contribution to the literature, the article finds a statistically significant association between feelings of country *inferiority* and anti-immigration attitudes in Sweden, but no such relationship in the other Nordic countries. Based on these findings, the article suggests that the link between nationalism and societal pessimism—established in the literature on radical-right parties—needs to be taken into account in the literature on immigration attitudes. Moreover, the article suggests that the relatively high levels of immigration to Sweden in recent years might play a mediating role in the relationship between feelings of country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes, whilst acknowledging that more research is needed to draw substantial conclusions.

## INTRODUCTION

There are unprecedented levels of migration in the world today and simultaneously widespread public discontent towards it, causing conflict and political contention (United Nations 2020). The Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden—are no exception.<sup>1</sup> They have all had considerable immigration in recent decades, but Sweden stands out, due to its (now former) liberal asylum rules (Pettersen and Østby 2013). During the peak of the Migrant Crisis in 2015, Sweden received 1,600 asylum applications per 100,000 people, compared to Norway and Finland with 590 and Denmark with 390. By comparison, the EU average was 250 per 100,000, and the UK received only 60 per 100 000 (Connor 2016). Sweden processed over 200,000 asylum applications between 2015 and 2017, whilst Denmark, Norway, and Finland each processed around 30,000 (Eurostat 2023). Each of these countries also have prominent populist, radical right (PRR) parties who espouse nationalistic, anti-globalisation values and firmly oppose immigration (Ausserladscheider 2019; Nardelli and Arnett 2015).

In Sweden—the country which is the main focus of this article—immigration has been sharply criticised by the Sweden Democrats, a PRR party that received a fifth of the national vote in 2022. The Sweden Democrats present themselves as the party ‘*för alla som gillar Sverige*’ [for everyone who loves Sweden] (Sverigedemokraterna 2023). But they nevertheless portray Sweden in deeply pessimistic terms as a country characterised by shootings, terrorism, sexual violence and ‘hate crimes’ against Swedes (Sverigedemokraterna 2017). As the leader of the party Jimmie Åkesson claims, ‘*Massinvandringen har förstört vårt land*’ [Mass immigration has ruined our country] (Åkesson 2021). To legitimise this view, the Sweden Democrats often draw upon international rankings, comparing Sweden to other countries. For instance, they have pointed out that Sweden currently has the second highest number of deadly shootings per capita in Europe (Selin 2021; BRÅ 2021). Sticking to empirical truth is not always important, though; for example, in 2018 they falsely claimed that Sweden had the longest waiting times for healthcare in Europe (Kudo 2018). Overall, the Sweden Democrats frequently emphasise Sweden performing worse than other countries.

The aim of this article is to empirically investigate whether a variable it terms ‘feelings of country inferiority’ influences immigration attitudes in Sweden, and whether the effect of this variable differs between other Nordic countries. This variable is measured based on

<sup>1</sup> Iceland is also a Nordic country, but is not included in this analysis due to a lack of data.

individual responses to a question asking how people feel about their country, compared to other countries. In particular, the article examines whether there is a statistically significant relationship between feelings of country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes in Sweden and its neighbours, when controlling for established explanatory variables.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The statistical relationship between feelings towards one's country and immigration attitudes is an understudied area of research, as Jeong (2013) points out. There are, however, certain established concepts and empirical findings in the literature. A distinction is typically made between feelings of patriotism and nationalism. On this account, nationalism is defined as the feeling that one's country is superior to other countries and often involves an ethnic element. Patriotism, on the other hand, is understood as feelings of pride towards one's country, including its democratic institutions, but does not involve devaluing other countries. Notably for the purpose of this article, the literature to date has repeatedly shown that nationalism is related to negative immigration attitudes, whilst the effect of patriotism is not significant or linked to positive attitudes (De Figueiredo and Elkins 2003; Green et al 2011; Jeong 2013). For instance, in a study of the link between national feelings and immigration attitudes among American citizens, Jeong (2013) finds a significant positive association between levels of nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments. In the study, nationalism is defined as the 'belief in the superiority of one's nation,' and the measurement of the nationalism variable includes the level of agreement to the statement: 'America is a better country than most others' (Jeong 2013, 1467).

A link between feeling that one's country is *worse* than other countries and negative immigration attitudes has not been studied. Indeed, based on earlier literature, such a link would appear both counterintuitive and implausible. However, the existing literature on country feelings and immigration attitudes struggles to explain why an anti-immigration party such as the Sweden Democrats would invoke feelings of country inferiority so strongly. The growing literature on supporters of populist radical right (PRR) parties is more useful for explaining this phenomenon and can be used to theorise a potential link between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes. This literature suggests that nationalism and negative immigration attitudes are not incompatible with negative evaluations of one's own country. Indeed, there is considerable evidence showing that nationalistic PRR supporters feel dissatisfied with the current state of their countries, often due to immigration concerns (Inglehart and Norris 2016). For instance, Hochschild (2016) has shown that Tea Party voters in America feel they are 'strangers in their own land,' in part because of recent immigration, and are thus convinced by the slogan 'Make America Great *Again*'. This kind of negative evaluation of one's country is also expressed by the Sweden Democrat slogan: '*Sverige ska bli bra igen*' [Sweden shall become good again] (Sverigedemokraterna 2023). Relatedly, Steenvoorden and Hartevelde (2018) show that high levels of individual 'societal pessimism' is a significant predictor of PRR support in Europe. In their measure of societal pessimism, Steenvoorden and Hartevelde (2018, 35) include responses to the statement 'For most people in this country, life is getting worse.' Although lacking a comparative dimension, feelings of country inferiority have many similarities with societal pessimism. Hence, it is plausible that a relationship similar to that between societal pessimism and PRR support exists between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes in Sweden.

Steenvoorden and Hartevelde's (2018) work is also useful for theorising how the strength of a potential relationship between feelings of country inferiority and immigration attitudes might vary between the Nordic countries. Steenvoorden and Hartevelde (2018, 44) find that societal pessimism has a larger predicting impact on PRR support in the Nordic countries than in other European countries and theorise that this may reflect the level of 'actual institutionalisation' of change in the Nordic countries. The example Steenvoorden and Hartevelde give is the higher degree of institutionalisation of gender equality in the Nordic countries than in other European countries. This more visible change, they suggest, can incite greater feelings of societal pessimism among people opposed to gender equality, who tend to vote for PRR parties.

Relatedly, Steenvoorden and Harteveld (2018, 44) suggest that the actual institutionalisation 'creates more space for political actors to mobilise on nostalgia against such developments.' This theory can be used to hypothesise differences between the Nordic countries in the predictive power of country inferiority on immigration attitudes. It suggests that countries with more visible immigration will have a stronger relationship between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes, because people who dislike immigration become more pessimistic about their country as they witness immigration occurring. This hypothesis is also supported by studies showing that the larger the size of the immigrant group within a country, the more that immigrants will be perceived as a threat by natives (Quillian 1996). Hence, it is likely that the relationship between feelings of country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes will be stronger in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries, as the former has experienced greater immigration in recent years.

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Two hypotheses, alluded to in the section above, are investigated in this article. Firstly, based on the literature demonstrating a link between societal pessimism and PRR support, it is hypothesised that:

**H1a:** There will be a significant positive association between feelings of country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes in Sweden, independent of other explanatory variables.

Secondly, based on theories on the effect of visible change in strengthening the association between societal pessimism and PRR support, and on the effect of the size of immigration on perceptions of threat, it is hypothesised that:

**H2a:** The association between feelings of country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes will be stronger in Sweden than in Denmark, Finland, and Norway, independent of other explanatory variables.

### DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The data used in this article is drawn from a survey on attitudes towards globalisation conducted in October 2016 by The YouGov-Cambridge Centre for Public Opinion Research. It surveyed over 20,000 people across 19 countries, including over 4,500 respondents in the Nordic countries: Sweden with 1,519 responses, Denmark with 1,013, Finland with 1,007 and Norway with 1,005 (Smith 2016). Data on Iceland was not collected in the survey, hence the term 'Nordic countries' used in this article refers only to Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The survey is suitable as it includes questions on immigration attitudes and feelings of country inferiority, as well as a variety of other variables considered key predictors of immigration attitudes in the literature. The data is also considered credible and with low risk of sampling bias, due to the expertise of the collaborating institutions orchestrating the survey.

The method of data analysis is binary logistic regressions, done separately for each of the Nordic countries. This method is suitable due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable and the individual-level data being studied, clustered across a small number of countries. Each of the four regression tables contains three models, the first including the variable of interest, and the latter adding demographic characteristics and social and economic beliefs as controls. The models present coefficients in the forms of odds ratios, standard errors, statistical significance at a <0.05 level and a goodness of fit for each model using Nagelkerke pseudo-*R*-squared. All values are rounded to three decimals.

The dependent variable of the study is individual attitudes towards immigration. This variable is constructed based on the survey question: Overall, do you think immigrants from other countries into (country) have a positive or negative effect on the country? As the article is interested in predicting negative attitudes, responses are recoded into a dichotomous variable, with 'Positive or neutral' = 0 and 'Negative' = 1. Measuring immigration attitudes in this

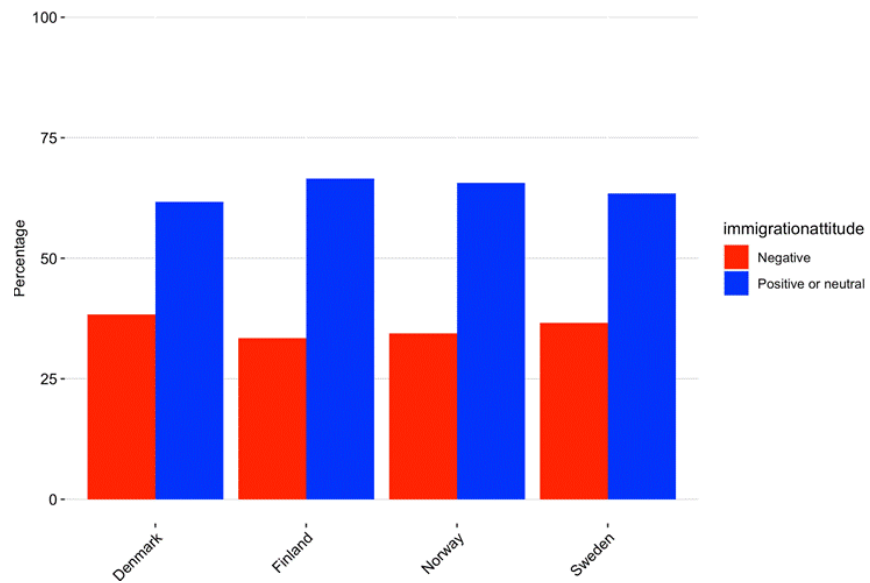
way—based on the perceived effect of immigration—is one of the most common methods in the literature on immigration attitudes and is therefore deemed suitable (Dražanová et al 2022).

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The variable of interest concerns feelings towards one’s country and is labelled ‘country-feeling’. The survey used is useful in constructing this variable, as it contains the question *Which ONE of the following best describes the way you feel about (country)?*, with the response categories including feelings that one’s country is ‘the best in the world,’ ‘better than most other countries,’ ‘as good as most other countries,’ ‘not as good as most other countries’ and ‘the worst country in the world.’ These categories are recoded into three categories, to measure feelings of country inferiority: ‘Worst in the world,’ ‘Worse than most,’ and the reference category ‘As good as most or better.’ This coding allows for an examination of whether the degree of country inferiority impacts its predictive power. A problem with the category ‘Worse than most,’ however, is that very few people expressed these feelings: in the Norway sample only five people, in Finland six and in Denmark only two. Only Sweden had more responses, at twenty-eight. Caution in the interpretation of this category is therefore important. Moreover, some caution is also necessary with interpretations of the ‘Worse than most’ category, with only seventeen responses in Norway, forty in Denmark, seventy-two in Finland and one hundred and forty-five in Sweden.

The regressions models include control variables, to avoid omitted variable bias and allow for a more precise understanding of the relationship between country inferiority and immigration attitudes. In models 2 and 3, the demographic characteristics gender, income, employment, age, and education are added. Male gender, low income, unemployment, older age, and lack of university education have all been associated with negative immigration attitudes and are therefore included (Markaki and Longhi 2013; Dražanová et al 2022). When preparing the data for analysis, variables for each country are coded in the same way. Age is treated as continuous, measured in years. Gender and education are coded as dummy variables, measuring male/female and whether a person attended university. However, the income variable in the Norway data was constructed differently from the other countries, with only three income brackets compared to the other countries with eleven brackets each. As a result, the Norway income variable is made into a dummy variable with ‘Less than NOK 300,000’ as the reference category, whereas income is treated as continuous in the other countries. The employment variable was also constructed differently in Norway. It lacked the categories ‘Unemployed,’ ‘Retired’ and ‘At home’ included in the other datasets, combining them all in the blanket category ‘Not employed.’ ‘Retired’ and ‘At home’ are combined into the category ‘Not employed’ in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, but this category is crucially different from that in Norway because it does not include unemployed people. Hence, ‘Not employed’ is used as the reference category in Norway (including unemployed people) whereas the other countries have the reference category ‘Unemployed.’ Another issue with the employment variable across all countries is that it combines unskilled and skilled workers in one category, thereby not allowing for different attitudes towards immigration between the two: differences that have been recorded in the literature (Markaki and Longhi 2013).

Studies have also shown that social and economic beliefs can predict immigration attitudes, and these are therefore added as controls in model 3. The model includes variables on beliefs about foreign direct investment (FDI), the effects of globalisation, protectionism, and the importance of shared culture, which have all been linked to immigration attitudes (O’Rourke and Sinnott 2006; Karakas, Kim and Mitra 2021). The variables ‘FDI’ and ‘Trade’ are dummy variables, measuring whether a person thinks FDI is acceptable or unacceptable and if countries should meet their own needs or if it is fine that they rely on imports, respectively.



**Figure 1** | Attitudes towards immigration by country.

The variables ‘Inequality’ and ‘Shared culture’ are based on the Likert scale, and treated as continuous, with 5 recoded as representing strongly agree and 1 as strongly disagree in all countries. ‘Inequality’ measures levels of agreement that globalisation has mainly benefitted the wealthy and ‘Shared culture’ measures levels of agreement that having a shared culture makes a country stronger. Finally, across all variables in all the countries, ‘Don’t know’ and missing responses are coded as non-applicable.

### ASSUMPTIONS

The data is checked for the assumptions of binary logistic regression analysis. Firstly, it is confirmed that the dependent variable is binary. Logistic regressions also assume a linear relationship between continuous predictors and the log odds of the dependent variable. This is checked in R, using `ggplot2`, for all continuous variables: income, age, shared culture, and inequality were checked for each country. The line of best appeared linear in all cases, confirming the assumption of linearity. Furthermore, as the data does not include higher-level units such as region and the only meaningful clustering—country—is taken into account by analysing each country separately, it fulfils the independence assumption. Finally, all explanatory variables are tested for multicollinearity and show a VIF less than 5, meaning multicollinearity is judged not to be an issue.

### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

**Figures 1** and **2** show the distribution of the dependent variable and the variable of interest in each of the Nordic countries. The Swedish sample has similar levels of negative immigration attitudes to the other Nordic country samples but a noticeably larger proportion who express feelings of country inferiority. Moreover, only small sections within each country sample express feelings of country inferiority, compared to the proportions who express negative immigration attitudes.

To examine whether feelings of country inferiority and immigration attitudes are related in Sweden and if this relationship differs from other Nordic countries, the variables are cross tabulated in **Table 1**. **Table 1** shows that among those who express feelings of country inferiority in Sweden, large majorities have negative immigration attitudes. For instance, 68.1% of those who think Sweden is worse than most countries express negative attitudes to immigration; a proportion that rises to 78.6% among Swedish respondents who expressed that Sweden is the worst country in the world. Similar relationships between feelings of country inferiority

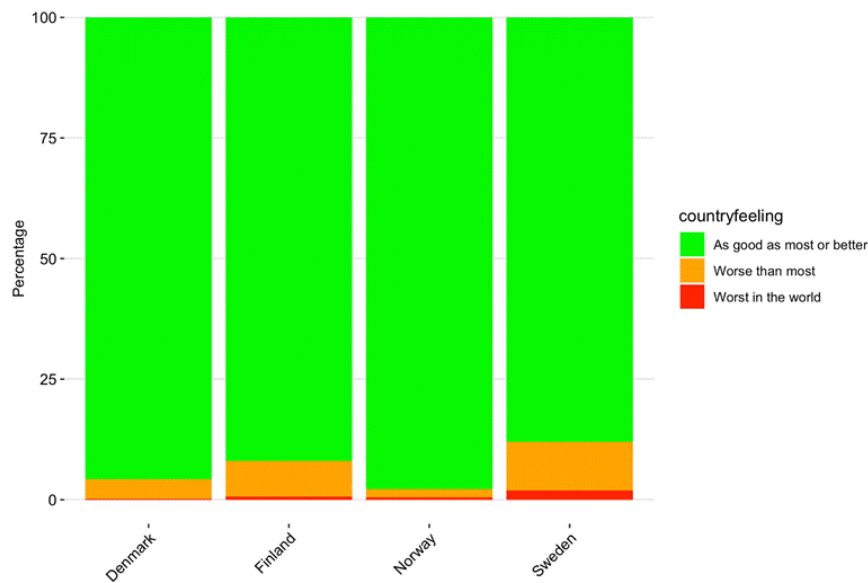


Figure 2 | Feelings of country inferiority by country.

and anti-immigration attitudes also hold true in Norway, but not in Denmark or Finland. Nonetheless, **Table 1** does not say anything about the statistical significance of these relationships—in other words, if they can be reliably generalised to a larger population—or if they arose due to other explanatory factors. For these purposes, inferential statistics are necessary.

### INFERENCE STATISTICS

Beginning with the main country of interest, **Table 2** shows that the variables measuring feelings of country inferiority are positive and highly statistically significant, at a  $<0.001$  level, across all three models in Sweden. Stronger feelings of country inferiority also have a stronger positive effect. Notably, model (3) in **Table 2** shows that the odds of having negative attitudes towards immigration are approximately 3.5 times higher if a person feels that Sweden is worse than most countries and 8.5 times higher if they feel that Sweden is the worst country in the world—compared to people who think Sweden is as good as most countries or better—controlling for demographic characteristics and social and economic beliefs. Overall, the relationship between feelings of country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes is highly significant, positive and cannot be accounted for by the explanatory variables, thus strongly confirming **H1a**.

To assess **H2a**, the regression on the Swedish data is compared with the other Nordic countries in **Tables 3, 4, and 5**. Crucially, these all show that the variable feelings of country inferiority do not gain statistical significance when controls are added in any of these countries. The category ‘Worse than most’ is significant and positive in model (1) in both Finland and Norway, at a  $<0.05$  level and 0.01 level, respectively, but not in Denmark. In Finland, this feeling is associated with 84.5% higher odds of holding negative immigration attitudes and in Norway this rises to 5(4.769) times higher odds. But these relationships can be accounted for by demographic factors and social and economic beliefs and their significance therefore disappears in models 2 and 3. However, it should be emphasised that the lack of data on feelings of country inferiority makes it difficult to draw conclusions. With regards to the ‘Worst in the world’ category in Denmark and Norway, the standard errors in models (2) and (3) are non-existent or extremely high, respectively, reflecting the lack of responses. Overall, though, the lack of significance of any of the country inferiority variables when controlling for other factors in **Tables 3, 4 and 5** makes it clear that the relationship between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes is stronger in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries. Accordingly, **H2a** is supported.

	Positive or neutral	Negative
Sweden: worse than most	31.9	68.1
Sweden: worst in the world	21.4	78.6
Norway: worse than most	29.4	70.6
Norway: worst in the world	40.0	60.0
Denmark: worse than most	51.4	48.6
Denmark: worst in the world	50.0	50.0
Finland: worse than most	53.6	46.4
Finland: worst in the world	40.0	60.0

**Table 1** | Relationship between country inferiority and immigration attitudes

There are many other notable findings in the data, although not directly related to the hypothesis. For instance, Sweden stands out because income is significantly positively correlated with negative immigration attitudes, controlling for other variables. Sweden is also the only country where the variables ‘Trade’ and ‘Inequality’ are significant, at a  $<0.05$  and  $<0.001$  level, respectively. Furthermore, controlling for other variables, being male is a significant predictor of negative immigration attitudes in Sweden and Denmark, at a  $<0.001$  level of confidence, but not significant in Finland or Norway. Denmark also stands out as the only country where age is significantly associated with negative immigration attitudes. Several types of employment categories are also statistically significant in both Denmark and Norway, but direct comparison between them is difficult as the variables are coded differently based on the survey design. In terms of similarities, the variables ‘FDI’ and ‘Shared culture’ are highly significant and positive in all countries. University education is highly significant in model 2 across all countries, but this significance disappears in all countries when social and economic beliefs are taken into account in model 3. Finally, model 3 for each country accounts for between a low 21.3% of the variation in the dependent variable, in Norway, to a high 32.7% in Finland. Whilst not negligible, this suggests that there is nevertheless considerable variation left unexplained by the models.

## DISCUSSION

The findings in this article add to research on the predictors of negative immigration attitudes in the Nordic countries. Indeed, many of the differences noted above are particularly interesting and merit further studies. For instance, one such further research question is why gender is a highly significant predictor of anti-immigration attitudes in Sweden and Denmark, but not in Finland or Norway. Nonetheless, the discussion below is concerned with the findings related to the specific hypotheses of the article.

The confirmation of **H1a**—the demonstration that feelings of country inferiority are significantly associated with negative immigration attitudes in Sweden—presents an original contribution to the literature on immigration attitudes. A similar relationship has not been directly theorised or demonstrated before. Nonetheless, the finding is consistent with the literature on PRR supporters, a group typically opposed to immigration, who often harbour feelings of unease and dissatisfaction with the state of their countries (Steenvoorden and Harteveld 2018). Indeed, the finding can add to this literature by showing that pessimism among people opposed to immigration can involve a comparative element, involving the feeling that one’s country is worse than other countries.

The confirmation of **H1a** also presents a challenge to the earlier literature on the relationship between national feelings and immigration attitudes. It disputes the established finding within this literature that nationalism—defined as feelings of country *superiority*—is

Explanatory variables	Sweden: Immigration attitude		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Country feelings</b>			
Country: Worse than most	4.717*** (0.191)	5.266*** (0.220)	3.473*** (0.259)
Country: Worst in the world	8.107*** (0.465)	7.096*** (0.571)	8.650*** (0.696)
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>			
Gender: Male		1.881*** (0.138)	1.933*** (0.173)
Income		1.016 (0.028)	1.084* (0.035)
Employment: Not employed		0.907 (0.403)	0.640 (0.496)
Employment: Student / apprentice / trainee		0.434 (0.454)	0.462 (0.558)
Employment: Office worker		0.758 (0.391)	0.487 (0.482)
Employment: Skilled / unskilled worker		0.893 (0.383)	0.537 (0.478)
Employment: Self-employed or Other		1.317 (0.418)	0.773 (0.519)
Age		0.991 (0.006)	0.999 (0.007)
Education: University		0.575*** (0.144)	0.744 (0.170)
<b>Social and economic beliefs</b>			
FDI: Unacceptable			2.005*** (0.195)
Inequality			1.335*** (0.067)
Trade: Open			0.692* (0.177)
Shared culture			1.298*** (0.062)
Constant	0.452*** (0.063)	0.637 (0.438)	0.060*** (0.655)
Observations(n)	1,341	1,116	852
Nagelkerke pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.092	0.161	0.258

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

**Table 2 | Logistic Regression, Sweden**

Explanatory variables	Denmark: Immigration attitude		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Country feelings</b>			
Country: Worse than most	1.536 (0.336)	1.880 (0.405)	1.456 (0.544)
Country: Worst in the world	1.622 (1.416)	0.00000 (535.411)	0.00000 (535.411)
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>			
Gender: Male		1.391* (0.158)	1.519* (0.211)
Income		0.992 (0.034)	0.983 (0.043)
Employment: Not employed		0.694 (0.367)	0.336* (0.477)
Employment: Student / apprentice / trainee		0.589 (0.387)	0.456 (0.512)
Employment: Office worker		0.635 (0.348)	0.487 (0.448)
Employment: Skilled / unskilled worker		0.813 (0.372)	0.617 (0.485)
Employment: Self-employed or Other		0.244** (0.504)	0.148** (0.603)
Age		1.019* (0.008)	1.020* (0.010)
Education: University		0.602** (0.168)	0.689 (0.212)
<b>Social and economic beliefs</b>			
FDI: Unacceptable			2.388*** (0.230)
Inequality			1.010 (0.099)
Trade: Open			0.941 (0.304)
Shared culture			2.064*** (0.112)
Constant	0.617*** (0.069)	0.421 (0.448)	0.025*** (0.823)
Observations(n)	933	760	560
Nagelkerke pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.003	0.082	0.236

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

**Table 3 | Logistic Regression, Denmark**

necessarily related to negative immigration attitudes (De Figueiredo and Elkins 2003; Green et al 2011; Jeong 2013). However, the confirmation of H1a merely challenges the claim that nationalism defined in this way is always related to negative immigration attitudes. For one, the lack of significance of the country inferiority variables in Denmark, Finland and Norway means that a link between nationalism—defined as feelings of country superiority—and anti-immigration attitudes in these countries is not implausible, although conclusions cannot be drawn from this study. More importantly, the finding that feelings of country inferiority predict negative immigration attitudes in Sweden does not mean that nationalism is not at play. Rather, it suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the intersections of nationalism, pessimism and country inferiority is warranted. Instead of assuming that nationalism is inherently associated with positive feelings towards one’s country, it would be useful for future studies to take into account the negative emotive aspects of nationalism, including feelings that one’s country has been damaged or betrayed. For example, it is plausible that a Sweden Democrat voter could believe that Swedish people and traditions are superior and therefore oppose immigration, yet simultaneously feel that Sweden is inferior to other countries due to the level of recent immigration to Sweden.

The confirmation of H2a—the finding that country inferiority is not significant in Denmark, Finland, and Norway—is an equally important result. It shows that feelings of country inferiority only predict negative immigration attitudes in certain contexts, and relatedly, that there may be particular characteristics or trends in Sweden that explain why the relationship exists there. A plausible explanation might be the fact that Sweden has witnessed more visible immigration changes in recent years than the other Nordic countries. As Steenvoorden and Hartevelde (2018) suggest, this visible change likely makes it easier for PRR parties such as the Sweden Democrats to spread the narrative that immigration has effectively ‘ruined’ the country. If this explanation is correct, there is a case of reverse causality between the dependent variable and the variable of interest in the study—in other



Explanatory variables	Finland: Immigration attitude		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Country feelings</b>			
Country: Worse than most	1.845* (0.253)	1.629 (0.284)	1.553 (0.358)
Country: Worst in the world	3.280 (0.916)	2.178 (1.047)	3.193 (1.338)
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>			
Gender: Male		1.186 (0.166)	0.984 (0.211)
Income		0.998 (0.047)	0.973 (0.057)
Employment: Not employed		0.923 (0.296)	1.019 (0.389)
Employment: Student / apprentice / trainee		0.393* (0.431)	0.612 (0.563)
Employment: Office worker		0.482* (0.359)	0.471 (0.449)
Employment: Skilled / unskilled worker		1.141 (0.287)	1.367 (0.382)
Employment: Self-employed or Other		0.955 (0.400)	1.802 (0.515)
Age		0.988 (0.007)	0.985 (0.009)
Education: University		0.454*** (0.227)	0.592 (0.275)
<b>Social and economic beliefs</b>			
FDI: Unacceptable			1.773** (0.217)
Inequality			1.117 (0.100)
Trade: Open			0.885 (0.232)
Shared culture			2.487*** (0.121)
Constant	0.469*** (0.075)	1.050 (0.394)	0.021*** (0.727)
Observations(n)	898	746	609
Nagelkerke pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.011	0.091	0.327

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

**Table 4 | Logistic Regression, Finland**

Explanatory variables	Norway: Immigration attitude		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Country feelings</b>			
Country: Worse than most	4.768** (0.537)	2.856 (0.628)	1.612 (0.660)
Country: Worst in the world	2.980 (0.916)	3,541,237.000 (484.922)	3,420,777.000 (473.301)
<b>Demographic characteristics</b>			
Gender: Male		1.151 (0.166)	1.413 (0.209)
Income(NOK): 300.000 – 699.999		1.337 (0.283)	1.205 (0.351)
Income(NOK): 700.000 or more		1.460 (0.296)	1.648 (0.371)
Employment: Student / apprentice / trainee		0.139** (0.671)	0.151* (0.843)
Employment: Office worker		0.501** (0.249)	0.476* (0.307)
Employment: Skilled / unskilled worker		0.730 (0.247)	0.745 (0.307)
Employment: Self-employed or Other		0.800 (0.299)	0.911 (0.356)
Age		1.001 (0.007)	0.999 (0.009)
Education: University		0.573** (0.171)	0.806 (0.214)
<b>Social and economic beliefs</b>			
FDI: Unacceptable			2.497*** (0.227)
Inequality			1.118 (0.096)
Trade: Open			0.975 (0.223)
Shared culture			1.481*** (0.092)
Constant	0.503*** (0.071)	0.667 (0.440)	0.049*** (0.780)
Observations(n)	921	722	528
Nagelkerke pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.016	0.097	0.213

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

**Table 5 | Logistic Regression, Norway**

words, feelings of country inferiority are caused by people holding negative attitudes towards immigrants—with the necessary condition for the relationship to hold being high levels of visible immigration to a country. In other words, immigration levels might be playing an intermediary role in the relationship observed in the Sweden dataset.

Future research could usefully explore these findings in more depth and investigate potential causal mechanisms. For instance, to statistically test whether the size of recent immigration impacts the relationship between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes, multilevel regression models would be suitable. With a larger sample of countries, research could test whether group-level characteristics, such as immigration size, impact the relationship between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes. Drawing on longitudinal surveys conducted before and after a period of significant immigration to an area would also be useful. Furthermore, alternative hypotheses explaining the relationship between feelings of country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes could be explored. For instance, perhaps it is not the level of immigration as such that matters, but rather the framing of immigration within a country. Regardless of the actual number of immigrants within a country, the idea that immigrants have ruined the country—for instance, through terrorism, stealing resources, corrupting morals and so on—can be more or less widespread. To test this theory, one could examine the particular narratives surrounding immigration in different countries, whilst controlling for the size of immigration.

Another potential explanation for the findings is that people who feel that their country is worse than other countries are more likely to be negative towards any political decisions in their countries. Hence, people who dislike Sweden are more likely to dislike its policies which allow for relatively high levels of immigration, whereas in countries with more restrictive immigration policies such as Denmark, Finland and Norway, people who dislike their country are less likely to also dislike immigration. To assess this hypothesis, it would be necessary to include controls on people’s views about their country’s political decisions.

Moreover, this explanation is linked to another possibility, namely that the relationship between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes reflects a group of highly pessimistic people who share these views. Individuals with high levels of pessimism might pick the most negative response to any question, expressing both country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes. Personal pessimism may thus work as a confounding factor, causing a false association between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes to arise. However, the fact that only Sweden has a significant association between country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes works against this explanation, as it is unlikely that Sweden has particularly pessimistic people. Nevertheless, controlling for personal pessimism in the study would have increased the reliability of the results and reduced the risk of omitted variable bias. Indeed, in measuring the link between societal pessimism and PRR support, Steenvoorden and Hartevelde (2018) make sure to include controls on life satisfaction to stop personal pessimism from influencing the results.

The article has some limitations. A limitation related to the data is that the respondents may not have answered truthfully, as immigration views are a highly sensitive topic. Data on relevant control variables such as personal pessimism and views on domestic politics were also not included in the survey but would have made the results more reliable. Neither were measures of a person's ethnicity, potential immigration background, or data on frequency of interactions with immigrants, all of which would have been useful to add as controls. Furthermore, the small number of people overall who expressed feelings of country inferiority in the Nordic countries made the statistical inferences less reliable than would have been ideal. Finally, it could be argued that this small sample size is in itself reflective of the relative insignificance of the issue of feelings of country inferiority as a phenomenon. But the fact that these feelings are expressed by a minority does not mean that they cannot have a political impact, or that they are not expressed by influential politicians. Moreover, feelings of country inferiority are more widespread in other countries, with for example 21% of people expressing these feelings in France and 37% of respondents in Vietnam, which points to the broader significance of studying feelings of country inferiority (Smith 2016).

## CONCLUSION

This article has furthered research on the predictors of negative immigration attitudes in the Nordic countries, analysing survey data of over 4,500 people. In a novel contribution to the literature, the article theorised and tested a relationship between feelings of country *inferiority* and negative attitudes towards immigration, drawing on research on populist radical-right supporters and societal pessimism. Through binary logistic regressions it was shown that feelings of country inferiority are significantly positively associated with negative immigration attitudes in Sweden, independent of other explanatory variables. This finding challenged the established relationship between nationalism—measured as feelings of country *superiority*—and negative immigration attitudes in existing literature. Relatedly, the article emphasised the importance of a more nuanced understanding of nationalism, including its intersections with feelings of pessimism and inferiority. However, a significant relationship between feelings of country inferiority and negative immigration attitudes was not found in Denmark, Finland, or Norway when controlling for other explanatory variables. This suggests that conditions found in Sweden, but not in the other Nordic countries, can explain this relationship. It was proposed, among other potential explanations, that the level of immigration to Sweden might play a mediating role. Finally, areas for further research were suggested.

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